



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard 8 November 2000

ELECTRICITY INDUSTRY

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (6.25 p.m.): I rise to support the motion moved by my colleague the member for Callide condemning the failure of the Minister for Mines and Energy to provide a safe, reliable and economic supply of electricity to all Queenslanders.

Tonight the member for Kallangur mentioned hypocrisy. I would like to talk about the Labor Party's hypocrisy. He talked about the \$800m that the coalition took out of the fund—

Mr Hayward: 850.

Mr JOHNSON: He can call it whatever figure he likes, but that money was spent in Queensland for the betterment of the industry and for the betterment of Queenslanders.

I might also draw attention to the \$1.2 billion that the Goss Government pulled out to prop up the poor economic management of the Keating Government in Canberra. That was typical. That money was sent out of the State; there was no benefit whatsoever to Queensland. And he talks about hypocrisy! The Minister is the true icon of hypocrisy. There is no greater example of the failures of this Minister than his continued failure to address the provision of power to rural and remote Queensland. It is a fact that communities need that access to reliable and economical electricity if they are to participate in society today. Access to TV, radio and the Internet is essential if people are to be informed about current affairs or be educated. Those are things that most citizens take for granted today. But the members opposite forget that there are families in our State who must do without adequate light, refrigeration and communications, let alone the benefits of modern technology that people in the cities and other larger towns and centres throughout this State take for granted.

What the people of the west find particularly galling is that the Minister for Mines and Energy is a representative of the electorate of Mount Isa and he knows about the problems but he is continuing to let the people of the west suffer. The Minister is presiding over a power system that continues to separate Queensland into a State of the haves and the have-nots. Are we social outcasts for living in isolated, remote areas in the far west and the far north?

Mr McGrady: What did you do in your years?

Mr JOHNSON: I have to say that we started to put a program in place. Then the Minister came along and dismantled it.

Mr McGrady: You did not. I'll show you the figures. You did nothing at all.

Mr JOHNSON: In today's society the provision of secure, reliable and economical electricity services should be a core responsibility of any State Government and that is also applicable to this Labor Government. That certainly will be a fast-track item on the agenda of a coalition Government when the member for Callide, Jeff Seeney, becomes Minister next year. I reiterate that here tonight. We have seen this Minister ignore the fundamental rights of Queenslanders and pursue increasing profits from the energy suppliers. He then rips these profits off the service providers to prop up the failed Beattie Budget.

I saw the Treasurer here a while back but he has left the Chamber, unfortunately. This Government that pretends to represent the less fortunate in our society conveniently excludes the people of the north and the west from its agenda. That is where the real wealth and jobs of this State

and this nation are generated. In recent weeks the Minister has told the Burke Shire Council that its plan to extend mains power to Gregory was not likely to be reliable because of the storms in the wet season. That applies to the whole State. Perhaps the Minister could indicate where he does guarantee power for 365 days a year. As the chief executive of the Carpentaria Shire Council, Matthew McGoldrick, pointed out in the North West Star last week, the wet season is no reason to deny mains power to these people in need. Mr McGoldrick pointed out that mains power was extended to stations in the Carpentaria Shire from Normanton 10 years ago without major difficulties.

People can get by without mains power for a while during the wet season. Most of these station people have back-up power of their own. What the Minister is trying to do is deny mains power to rural and remote Queensland and force people into accepting remote area power— RAPS. That is still in the embryonic stage and is still a very expensive exercise. The Minister is promoting RAPS not because it is the best solution for people in the west but because he can pass the buck to the Federal Government.

The Minister is trying to save money by seeking funding from the Commonwealth Government's Greenhouse Office but, of course, in the long run RAPS will cost more to run and maintain. I am not denying that RAPS may be a short-term solution where there is now power, but the Minister must recognise the obligations of the Government to supply mains power to rural and remote Queensland where the majority of commodities in this State are produced for the benefit of people on the eastern seaboard. It is necessary to give these people quality of life and a chance to enjoy quality of life.

Time expired.
