



Speech by

JOHN MICKEL, MLA STATE MEMBER FOR LOGAN

Hansard 16 October 2001

MR M. JOHNSON

Mr MICKEL (Logan—ALP) (11.45 a.m.): In these troubled times, it is incumbent upon all those who hold or seek to hold public office and all who are charged with upholding the law by their professional pursuit to set the right example for the community to follow. It is dreadfully easy to whip up hysteria. It is even worse to invoke community fears of terrorism which have no basis in fact.

Nothing does more to undermine the work of the police than the failure to report serious crime. How can the police detect and stamp out crime if it is not reported? I draw to the House's attention an appalling failure on the part of one who seeks public office and one who is 'an officer of the court', that is, a barrister, to set the kind of example that the community expects and deserves.

A few weeks ago, the federal Liberal Party candidate for Ryan, the serial branch stacker Mr Michael Johnson, received favourable media coverage when he announced that he was organising a solidarity dinner in Ryan to support the families of victims of the US terrorist attacks and to raise funds for the Royal Brisbane Hospital burns unit. Even Mr Johnson's critics—and there are many in the western suburbs of the Liberal Party and in the media—thought that this was a noble gesture given the parlous state of Liberal Party finances.

However, after grabbing the favourable headline and getting the kudos, Mr Johnson suddenly announced in the *South West News* of 2 October that the dinner had been cancelled. The newspaper article states, 'Organiser Michael Johnson said the cancellation was forced after a fellow organiser received anonymous threats of protests and damage to property.' In these highly charged times, those are very serious allegations, especially when the community at large is on edge about international events. Even Mr Johnson said, 'It's really disturbing.'

So what was Mr Johnson's response? Rather than assist authorities to help piece together a response to this cowardly disruption to a charity fund-raising dinner, Mr Johnson said that the incidents had not been reported to the police. Because the newspaper covers much of the Ryan electorate and the publicity for the function came from within Ryan, Mr Johnson has allowed the people of Ryan to be smeared by the terrorist tag for threatening to disrupt a function. Surely in this environment serious allegations like those should be reported to the police. The Prime Minister should call on his candidate to come forward and give any information he has to the Federal Police.

Mr Johnson has form in being a headline seeker when it comes to the reporting of crime. Earlier this year Mr Johnson alleged that he was the victim of a break-in at his Milton office. The alleged break-in occurred just prior to the first Ryan preselection from which Mr Johnson was excluded because he held dual citizenship. On that occasion, he said that his computer, briefcase and computer disks were stolen and it became a 'massive distraction from my preselection efforts'.

Interestingly, Mr Johnson did not reveal the break-in when it occurred. He waited for about a month. He revealed the crime during the Ryan by-election at a time that would do maximum damage to the Liberal Party's by-election chances in Ryan, because it was an attempted smear on the Liberal Party candidate in Ryan. I am reliably informed that Mr Johnson did not even report the break-in to the Liberal Party, which is surprising because the alleged theft occurred days prior to the preselection and involved the theft of 'political material'. Nor did the theft interrupt Mr Johnson's plan some months later of rorting the preselection he ultimately won in Ryan when I understand scores of voters were admitted to the Centenary branch of the party under what are still the most corrupt preselection rules in the nation.

The break-in may not be suspicious, but the timing of its release to the media by Johnson most certainly is. The question persists: why did Mr Johnson wait over a month to report an incident of apparent or alleged political sabotage to the police, and why did he do so just days before the Ryan by-election? Why, oh, why has he never reported to the police the threats of terrorist interruption to a function?

Mr Howard likes to talk about the ticker of his opponents. The matters raised in the House today go to the question of character and whether a person has enough character to be suitable to represent the people of Ryan in the national parliament.

Time expired.
