



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

Hansard Wednesday, 18 August 2004

APPROPRIATION BILL; ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (12.50 p.m.) In Estimates Committee A, I found the performance of the Premier in particular to be absolutely appalling. He stands in this place and says that he is the most accountable Premier that this state has ever seen. Well, I can tell members that his words do not match his actions. It is a great pity that the honourable member for Nudgee did not reflect on that fact.

Let us look at some of the areas that Mr Beattie fell down on. Look at his failure to disclose the very important aspects of the Berri deal—this so-called accountable Premier who was supposed to release this information because the independent umpire, the Information Commissioner in Queensland, said that he should release information regarding that deal and that governments should not be routinely hiding behind this notion of commercial-in-confidence. Where was the member for Nudgee then? He certainly was not raising any particular concerns. What was the Premier's response? The Premier said that what he would do is take it to the Supreme Court because he did not believe that the people of Queensland had the right to access that information. The opposition would have had to defend that as the nominal defendant. The opposition would have had to defend the decision of the Information Commissioner when he made the decision for the opposition to have that document.

But, no, what the Premier did, as was exposed in Estimates Committee A, was to say that he was going to legislate to close down the right of the opposition and the right of the people of Queensland to have information regarding the grants which government makes available to big corporations to relocate to Queensland.

We know that has increased from \$4 million to \$64 million—\$4 million under us to \$64 million under this government. We simply say that the government has to give us the chance and the people of Queensland the opportunity to compare what the government is doing with the guidelines and the benchmarks that it set. Mr Beattie said that he was releasing all the information. He did not. He blacked it out. He blacked out crucial parts of that information. He went to that committee and said that the government had given about a quarter of a million dollars and he blacked out another bit. We went chasing that. We had to go back to the Information Commissioner, who basically said, 'You have to release that information, Mr Beattie.' Again there was more glibness from Mr Beattie. Lo and behold, there was indeed another \$500,000, which he blacked out on the document, which he disclosed during the course of the day.

Let us look at his use of the government aircraft. I have no problem whatsoever if Mr Beattie wants to fly around in the government jet to his heart's content. The Premier of Queensland should service Queensland. That is not an issue. But the Premier should not stand in this place and piously carry on about how he is going to direct his ministers and departmental heads to fly on Virgin or fly economy class. In actual fact, the Premier turned around and said that it would do him good to sit down the back to see what real people have to say. We asked the Premier how many times he had actually used Virgin or used economy in the time since he gave that edict. The Premier replied 'once', when he flew to Sydney on his own private business. Isn't that fantastic? When the Premier is paying he flies economy; when the taxpayers are paying he flies on the government jet.

I do not say that that is a problem, but we do not stand up in this place piously prancing around like the member for Glass House does and like the Premier did—

Mr SCHWARTEN: Point of order. I fly Virgin every Monday morning and I have flown economy class with Qantas for the last three years.

Mr SPRINGBORG: That is a personal explanation, Mr Chairman.

Mr Schwarten: You said we don't fly Virgin.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I said the Premier gave the edict to his ministers and the departmental heads. We simply asked how many times people had actually flown Virgin; we asked how many times did the Premier fly it?

Mr Schwarten: Every Monday morning.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Good luck to you, but the issue here was how many times did the Premier do it after giving that edict? Not once—except when he put his hand in his own pocket to fly on private business to Sydney. Members should not stand up here piously prancing around, as this Premier does, saying he is going to do something, and never, ever do it. Nobody argues about whether the Premier should use the jet. That is not an issue. But do not stand up here and say that you are going to change your policies and try to make a virtue out of something that you do not do. That is what the Premier was trying to do, quite frankly. His performance before the estimates committee reflected the actions of an unaccountable Premier who was trying to weasel his way out of so many issues on the day, whether it be Berri or whether it be the use of the government jet vis-a-vis what he basically said he was going to do within the edict that he gave out to ministers and which he also said that he would follow himself. The Premier has got a lot to learn about being accountable in Queensland. His performance at estimates proves it.