



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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ENERGEX; TREASURER

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (11.31 a.m.): The Deputy Premier and Treasurer failed the test of accountability in this parliament this morning when he stood in this place and implied that if he had not done what he did in relation to the investigation into Greg Maddock then we would have stood in this place and asked for Greg Maddock to be sacked. That is an absolutely scurrilous, repugnant assertion from the Treasurer. Greg Maddock did nothing wrong. Greg Maddock was found to have done nothing wrong. Why would we call for an innocent man, who had done nothing wrong, to be sacked? That was a disgraceful assertion from the Treasurer and an act of a desperate man.

This morning we also saw the Treasurer cut Don loose. The other day when he jumped off his plane from Europe—maybe he was tired and emotional and jet-lagged—he said that he hoped the fallout from this whole affair involving Don Nissen would not affect their relationship and that Don and he could continue to be mates. When he was asked in this place this morning about who was telling the truth and who had lied—either the Premier or Don Nissen—the Treasurer stood in this place and said that he had known the Premier for six and a half years and that in six and a half years in cabinet he had not known the Premier to not tell the truth. That says to me that Don was not telling the truth—that Don has been cut loose, that Don is the scapegoat. Is there any way on earth that the Treasurer's former good mate Don Nissen will continue to be his mate, because he was cut loose in this place this morning by the Treasurer? This is what the Labor Party does. The Labor Party appoints these people and then these people become expendable. Its mates become expendable. Let us see how Don Nissen reacts to that.

Today in this place we saw the most extraordinary reaction from the Treasurer when I rose on a matter of privilege suddenly arising about what the Premier may have previously said. It was an extraordinary reaction. He stood up and said, 'The Premier was really only telling the truth for the last six and a half years but I will not go into what he had been doing before.' I refer to an article in the *Courier-Mail* of 14 December 1991, which goes into the events leading up to the resignation of Terry Mackenroth following on from the travel entitlements affair. The article contains quite a blistering interchange between Mr Mackenroth and Mr Beattie. It states of Mr Beattie—

He said he had to speak out because his position had been grossly misrepresented and he had come in for a vicious slur from Mr Mackenroth.

Maybe that is what Mr Mackenroth was referring to—that in the past Mr Beattie has not been honest, that in the past things between them have not been all beer and skittles as they have been making out in recent times.

How would Paul Lucas feel after reading the paper this morning? Both Paul and Anna desperately want to be Premier. If the Premier wants to work out which Labor mates are getting in there and starting to do the numbers, then he has to get used to the smell of Anna Bligh's perfume in his nostrils because he needs to look no further than that. We now know that to guarantee your chance to become Premier of Queensland you buy the Premier a takeaway curry. That means that you have consoled him, that you have sat there in his hour of need—in his most desperate hour—and that you are going to become Premier. I say to Paul Lucas: imagine the heights you can reach if you buy the Premier a takeaway pizza! Goodness knows where you will end up! You might even end up being trade commissioner to Los Angeles, London or

somewhere like that. When I walked into my office this morning my staff lined up and said to me, 'We went and got you a takeaway kebab. Does that mean we are going to get a promotion?' Tomorrow I expect a whole range of apples lined up on my desk from all of these people expecting promotion. What a bizarre way to run the state: you buy someone a curry and you are in line to become the Premier of Queensland!

Let us look at where Mr Mackenroth failed. We do know that Mr Mackenroth is the common denominator in the whole Energex saga. He has been there from day one. He was appointed in July 1998. He has held very senior positions since that time. He has been Treasurer for a long time now—certainly right throughout 2001—and during the second and the third Goss terms. That was the case except for the last term. In that case the Premier was acting—certainly acting. The Treasurer has been there since day one. He ignored the warnings. He raided dividends from those corporations—billions of dollars in dividends from Energex, Ergon and other government owned enterprises around Queensland. The total is getting up towards \$10 billion. I will be having more to say about that in the future.

The Treasurer also says that he did not know that the electricity system was failing and crumbling. He also has us believe that he did not know when the blackouts were coming. We know that Mr Popple warned the government in the late 1990s that the system was in crisis and in chaos, but these people, who had been charged with the responsibility of running Queensland at the very highest level, did not know. They did not know or they ignored it. So they were warned by Mr Popple, by the Nationals and by a whole range of industry insiders, but they continued to ignore the warnings. We now have in parliament four former and current energy ministers and the Treasurer, who have been promoted and absolved from responsibility. Who will take ultimate responsibility? We have people being sacked and people resigning from the board of Energex, but no government minister has been lined up. At the very worst we can say that they are involved and at the very best we can say that they are incompetent. They would be incompetent if they did not know about it and they did not act.

Who is the best mate of the Treasurer? Scott Flavell, the then head of the Office of Energy, who we have to believe lost that infamous memo written on 25 August last year warning that the electricity system in Queensland was in crisis. It was lost. It got to the Office of Energy—or so the Treasurer and the others would have us believe—and it got no further. What action has been taken against Scott Flavell or his wife, Loretta Boman, who subsequently held that position? We are also to believe that they were the only ones with enough courage to pose with Kevin Rudd on the famous election brochure that was distributed. It is typical of the way this government does business.

Mr Mackenroth is ultimately responsible for the investigation into Mr Maddock. He appointed his Labor cronies to government boards. On three occasions he ignored the recommendations of the Auditor-General when it came to further probity guarantees and strengthening of probity in GOCs. The Auditor-General has warned him for years in relation to the taking of special dividends. The Treasurer did absolutely nothing. But, when issues were raised about the CEO and his expenses, they literally broke their legs to go in there and investigate him. When it involved the government and the government's complicity in potentially illegal acts in taking those special dividends, the Treasurer ignored the Auditor-General's warnings.

The Auditor-General, in his report on the Greg Maddock saga, on three occasions warned the government—that is, the Treasurer—that it needed to tighten oversight arrangements and accountability arrangements. They failed on all accounts. He said that he would have to keep monitoring it. That is what he has to do. That is the hallmark of the Treasurer; so he has failed. If he had performed like this in the corporate sector, he would have been out on his ear. When he failed Wayne Goss's very high standards of accountability and integrity, he had to resign. I simply say this to the Premier: Mr Beattie, you had better have exactly the same standards of accountability and integrity as Wayne Goss had and demand the resignation of Mr Mackenroth, because he failed years ago, he is failing now and the people of Queensland who are left in crisis with our electricity system crumbling are paying the price for his incompetence.