



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Wednesday, 9 August 2006

APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL; APPROPRIATION BILL (ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A)

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing) (2.49 pm): I could not help but notice the hypocrisy shown by the previous speaker when he spoke about lying to parliament. I never, ever hear him criticise John Howard, who has the same rules that we do. The day he starts doing that and condemning him is the day he can be taken seriously on that issue. It is simply outrageous.

Mr Springborg: So you are never happy to have the higher standards.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I am glad to hear the opposition leader say that John Howard has lower standards than us. I take that as a confirmation that John Howard has lower standards than us, and I concur with him entirely. I note that the previous shadow minister for housing and public works has been replaced, and I am now onto my third shadow minister in this regard.

Mr Wallace: About time he got replaced.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Yes, and there is still not a whisper of a policy anywhere. I again note that the business units have come under attack. We hear that the Nationals support Q-Build and all those business units; that is what they say if they are asked. The previous National Party shadow minister actually said, 'We want to grow Q-Build,' while the former leader of the Liberal Party was condemning them. I do not whether that had something to do with him getting the spear; I presume not.

I think Queenslanders are entitled to know where the National Party stands on these business units, given the dissenting report that the Liberal Party has presented here about these business units. Where does it stand on CITEC, Goprint, SDS, Project Services, Q-Build, Q-Fleet, the lot of them? Like every other business, they have good and bad years. It is acknowledged that Goprint has struggled and will continue to do so. Printing is not the best business to be in at the moment, but the reality is that it is a business that we intend to secure on behalf of the government. I think all of those members who use the Hansard facilities provided by Goprint on a daily basis but then turn around and snipe at Goprint are hypocrites, because they are taking on the one hand and sniping with the other, and that is what has occurred here.

The previous shadow minister has obviously just woken up to the fact that ATSIC housing is a problem in those communities. This is something that anybody who has been to any of them for as long as I have or any member of this House who has had any experience with them would know. What he does not seem to understand or is wilfully misrepresenting—and he can make his own judgement and statement about that—is that these are their houses, these are on their land, they are provided by governments. It is a policy that has bridged the divide of politics in this state ever since DOGIT housing was provided back to Katter's day. It is only now that we are starting to get some semblance of a national debate on this; it is something that I have been saying for a long time.

I note that the UN visited some of our communities and the UN representative said that they were the worst in the world. I do not know whether they are worse than some that are found in Somalia or

wherever, but the reality is that it is not for the want of effort by government. Since I have been a minister, we have spent \$270-odd million. In a place like Palm Island, there were 325 houses when we started and there are fewer than 320 today, despite spending \$33 million there in the last five or six years. So something has to stop.

I have been taken out of context again—a bit like the member for Chatsworth does; they are good at doing this. What I said was that I did not think I would be saying this five years ago, simply because the reality is that I was hoping the communities would have turned the corner in regard to rent collection and the way they treat their housing. It has not happened, unfortunately. Five years ago, I would have been called a racist, patronising or something else for the attitude that I have taken. Now most people, including Aboriginal people, see this as a very necessary thing.

I would encourage the opposition to go to the election with a policy on these matters for the first time ever. It is all very good to snipe—and they are very good at that—but where is their policy? This is the most I have seen the opposition write on my portfolio for many, many years.

As far as the Racing portfolio goes, the reality is that I am telling the truth about the racing industry. It is run by the Australian Racing Board. Rules are set by them. No minister has ever controlled it, no minister has ever set prize money, no minister has ever set race dates. If the opposition is proposing to do something different, let the people of Queensland see the policy. Tell the people of Queensland that the opposition plans to take money away from hospitals, dams, water provision, schools, police and all the rest of it and put it into racing. That is the answer. I support the majority report.