



Speech by

## Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Thursday, 12 October 2006

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### YEPPOON HOSPITAL SITE ACQUISITION BILL

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works and Housing) (3.54 pm), in reply: Madam Deputy Speaker Jones, congratulations on your elevation to such an esteemed position. I see my good friend Henry Palaszczuk and the former Miss Holland in the gallery here to see their wonderful daughter this afternoon. It is ironic because had Mr Palaszczuk still been in this parliament he would have been in charge of this bill here today. I am sure his spirit is very much with us in this debate.

The interesting thing about this debate is that the shadow minister, the Leader of the Opposition and a whole number of shadow ministers came to the electorate of Keppel during the election campaign and not one of them ever said that they would oppose the bill that the Premier proposed the day parliament was dissolved—not one of them. When we talk about transparency, let us examine the facts. The government said, 'We must obtain this site. We have to build a hospital, and we are prepared to legislate to do so. If we are elected, within 100 days we will do so.' It was an election issue. There is no doubt about that. It was out there for everybody to see.

What happened? As I said—one, two, three, four—as many shadow ministers as possible who could be pushed into a marginal seat were there and not one of them said, 'We oppose the government doing this. What about poor old Mr O'Brien?' No, they never mentioned him once. So let us have enough of this dishonesty, shall we? Let us have enough of this hypocrisy. When they had the opportunity to seek the people's choice on this, to see who the people support on this, they did not take that option. Had they turned this into a referendum in Keppel then the honourable member for Keppel's vote would have skyrocketed even further than it did.

If those opposite ever want to win the seat of Keppel back, then they are going about it the wrong way. I have been talking to some old tory mates of mine in Rocky today, and they are appalled that the National Party has made them a laughing stock. It has made them a laughing stock because today we saw the National Party want to have its cake and eat it too. The National Party has criticised us year after year and day after day because there is no hospital. Then we came up with a site and over a 12-month period tried to negotiate in good faith with the developer, got driven to the point where we said, 'There is no more time left to do this,' and said to Mr O'Brien, 'You're still going to get a fair price.' Is that bloke who was speaking before a lawyer? He is the bloke who touched the accounts of those poor old pensioners. There is no doubt that he is as crooked as a dog's hind leg. The truth is that that gentleman who suggested, as he did, that this government does not intend to pay a fair price for this land knows nothing about the law. I am not a lawyer and even I know that.

The truth is that this bloke's right to a fair price is still there. What he cannot do, as I said earlier in the debate, is adopt this dog in the manger attitude, the same attitude that the National Party has adopted here today. Those opposite wonder why the people of Queensland so resoundingly rejected them at the last election. It is because they do not stand for anything. They are not standing up for Mr O'Brien's property rights. I would like to know what relationship Mr O'Brien has with them. It would be very interesting to find out what that relationship might be all about.

As for the lecture that we received about what Labor values are about, I have been in the Labor Party for 37 years and let me tell those opposite the philosophy that has always underpinned my views—that is, the greatest good for the greatest number. That is what is being fulfilled here today. They are the Labor principles that I believe in—one very wealthy person cannot stand in the way of all of those poor people who need a public health system in Yeppoon. That is what I believe in. Never mind about the downtrodden Mr O'Brien whom the Tories will always support, the silvertail from Sydney with the developer's white shoes and gold handbag. Never mind about him as far as I am concerned. He can go to hell as far as I am concerned over the way he has acted in this regard. But the law demands that he be treated fairly, and he will be.

I just want to say that the member for Keppel knows full well—and I think the shadow minister said—that my hands are all over this. He is dead right because I was the acting minister for health in the first instance when we were compelled to do something about this by Vince Lester, the former member. He demanded that we do something about it and make a statement while I was the acting minister. I checked with the health department, made the announcement and the announcement was that it was going to be rebuilt on that site.

Well, we all know what happened to that. The Livingstone Shire Council, of which the candidate for the National Party was a member, deliberately blocked that to make sure that that site was no longer available. The mayor of Livingstone Shire Council stands condemned for this. Bill Ludwig deliberately went out of his way to stand in the road of that development. That hospital would have been rebuilt on that site if I had my way, that is for certain. He deliberately went out of his way to stymie the progress on that, for whatever motive I do not know, but there was a motive there somewhere. The absolutely appalling sites that he offered, where other people would have benefited by the Queensland government putting in infrastructure as part of that development, stands in bold testament to what Mr Ludwig is all about.

As the honourable member knows, I have tried as much as I can as the minister for public works to assist this process, even having people from the building division of the department at the time go up there and look at sites. This was the site that they told me over 12 months ago was the best site. Then Mr O'Brien came back, as I understand it, and offered another site.

**Mr Rickuss:** But you don't own it.

**Mr SWARTEN:** That then came back to the health department and they said, 'That is not a site that suits our needs.' They should know, for heaven's sake, with all due respect to the honourable minister's department. His people may be very good—

**Mr Rickuss** interjected.

**Mr SWARTEN:** Look, I am talking to the doctor, not the disease. The fact is that the honourable member's highly qualified people in his department are not health planners. They can make a decision on the facts as they see them, but at the end of the day it is the health department that knows where to site hospitals. I have no doubt that this is the best site.

Guess who else thought it was the best site? The National Party did, because otherwise why did it stand down there in the middle of the campaign? The people who have a lot of answering to do are the people in the National Party who went up there and did not oppose it, and now since the election is over they have suddenly changed their minds. Why? That is the question that I want answered by somebody in the National Party. Why did they not oppose it then? Now they have the opportunity to support us, after giving us so much stick over the last couple of years over this issue. They are being given the chance today to say, 'The hospital starts tomorrow,' because that is effectively what it means once it gets through Executive Council next week. We have people on the site ready to go, we have plans ready to go, we have a site and away we go.

But, no, we heard the Leader of Opposition Business talk about another 30 days. The people of Keppel are sick of hearing about another 30 days, and we were the ones accused of deliberately holding this process up. I think it is an absolute travesty of justice to this parliament and to the people of Queensland to hear the nonsense that comes from those opposite. How much more transparent could we have been? Talk about sneakiness and arrogance and all of those things. Obviously this is what the people of Queensland voted for, because it was out there in black and white on the web site and in everything that we put out that we would legislate—that we would do what we are doing today. We said we would legislate within 100 days, and we have kept our word. One of the opposition speakers said that this is a sign of things to come. They had better believe it. It is. We intend to keep our word on every promise that we made. That is exactly what we are about. We do not intend to stand in the dark when it comes to these things. We said that we were going to do it. As the member for Keppel said during the election campaign, the people of Keppel want a hospital and they are going to get it. I cannot say it any better than that.

In closing, I want to say that I think the Livingstone Shire Council, especially Mayor Ludwig, has a lot to answer for on this subject.

**Mr Pearce** interjected.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** I take the interjection from the member for Fitzroy, because he is a neighbour. He knows all about the antics and problems that we have had from the Livingstone Shire Council, which the National Party candidate was a member of, to deliberately hold this site up, to make it look bad for the member for Keppel—

**Mr Pearce:** That's what it was all about.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** That is what it was all about. I take that interjection. We know that was the case. Today we are remedying that. We are fixing that problem once and for all, and yet again we see the National Party coming from behind to try to block the hospital at Yeppoon. While ever I have breath in my lungs I will never allow the National Party to forget this day of shame for the people of Yeppoon. I just wish Vince Lester was sitting in the gallery today to see this happen in the seat that he worked so hard for. He defeated me to win that seat. I know how strongly he is regarded in that area. Let me tell those opposite that not one of them will ever be held in the same regard as he was in that seat, and any candidate they ever put up ever again will be seen in the same light of the dishonest and underhanded way they went about their campaign in Keppel. I support the bill before the House.