



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Wednesday, 18 April 2007

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (6.11 pm): The member for Robina really led with his chin when he started talking about my very good old mate and former employer, Tom Burns. What a great job he did on public housing, and I cannot help but agree with the member. But we need to remember that we had a Labor federal government back then that cared about public housing and injected money into it. That was \$400 million ago. That is how much this federal government has taken out since then. So when Tom did a great job, he had a federal Labor government that was actually pumping cash into public housing in Queensland.

Mr Purcell interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I take the interjection, and that is about to be revisited because we have a federal government that clearly believes in the private market. The member for Robina is to be congratulated for his spirited defence of home ownership in this country, but that is what the Liberals always talk about. For the last 10 years, that is all the Liberal Prime Minister has been able to talk about because he has forgotten about the people who will never, ever be able to afford to buy a house. They are the people I am in parliament to help as well. Yes, I want to help the young people get a home. I have two sons myself and I want to see them own a home, but I also want to help the people who will never be able to afford a home, the people who John Howard has pushed off the edge of the universe as far as the rest of the community is concerned. The truth is that a low income earner has no chance—and never, ever had any chance—of owning a home, and we should not be discriminating against those people accordingly.

It was interesting that we had this sermon on the mount about *The Castle* and all the rest of it. It was just rhetoric with nothing to fill it. Honourable members should remember that the Liberal Party has gone to every election since I have been a minister with no housing policy whatsoever, and tonight it announced that its policy is to flood the rental market so that rents will come down and people will be able to rent. That is the policy tonight; I do not know what it will be tomorrow. The day I need a lecture from the member for Robina about housing affordability is the day I will jump astride a giraffe and ride in the Melbourne Cup. The truth is that the member for Robina has no comprehension about this, and his disgraceful record as mayor in the Albert shire when he did nothing at all about housing affordability stands in stark contrast to what we have done.

So what have we done as a government? The first thing we did was try to find an array of products out there to make this work. One example is Homelink. The federal government has been asked to bring forward 10 years of expenditure on rental assistance. We will then put in a capital grant, we will manage the property, we will ask councils to kick in their bit and then a private investor invests in it. That fits into a market that hitherto has been left behind of people who are not entitled to public housing; this is in places like Mackay and the rest of them. Where does the Liberal Party stand on Homelink? Nowhere. Not one word in the last 12 months has come from the opposition in support of that. We have our cash ready to go, but I cannot even get an answer from the federal minister on this. I cannot get an answer and it will not cost the federal government any money—not one cent.

The Brisbane Housing Company and the Gold Coast Housing Company, which is in the member for Robina's own backyard, are innovative means of providing people with affordable housing. There was no mention of that tonight. The member for Robina said we have not got any runs on the board, but in just the last couple of weeks we put some more runs into his own backyard. He does not know anything about it or care about it because they are not the group of people opposition members are targeting. They are targeting the people that they want to make buy a home. They are targeting only that group of people, and that is why they have only got the term 'housing affordability'. 'Housing affordability' to them means simply being able to afford to purchase a home. That was the exact point I made this morning, and he has given himself up on that tonight.

The Brisbane suburbs improvement scheme has been supported by the member for Stafford and he is doing wonderful things. He is getting affordability down by keeping communities together. He is doing great stuff. Remember what happened when that tory Caltabiano was out at Chatsworth. He was the previous member and he supported it. That was great. Off he was going, chugging along, getting it done well. But of course Caltabiano undermined it, and so did the Liberal Schrinner there, and we are back to tories over there with a scare and fear campaign portrayed by the Liberals.

That is what they do every time we try to build public housing, and members should remember that. Everywhere I have tried to build public housing on the Gold Coast a scare campaign has been started. When we tried to actually keep communities together and keep housing prices down by involving the private sector with home ownership programs in the Brisbane suburbs improvement scheme, what did we get from the Liberals? We got opposition all the way through.

I am delighted to state my record. There has been everything from community renewal, urban renewal, sales to tenant incentives, the upgrading of public housing, the building of new and innovative public housing and the introduction of new and innovative products on the market. The one big thing that is missing is a federal Labor government.

Time expired.