



Speech by

Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

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MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

National Housing Affordability Summit

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (12.20 pm): I recently attended the National Housing Affordability Summit in Canberra organised by the federal Labor Party. It was so refreshing to see our Labor alternative Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, looking for new thinking on housing in a time when getting a roof over your head has never been harder for many Australians.

Under Prime Minister Howard, supported by those opposite, we have watched the critical collapse of the private rental system, and Queensland has lost over \$400 million in real terms of housing funding from the Commonwealth government. Waiting lists for public housing have blown out across the country. It is not surprising. In 2002 the average private rent paid in Queensland was \$185 for a three-bedroom house. Today it is \$280. Rents have risen 47 per cent while at the same time average weekly earnings have risen only 24 per cent. What is missing from the market today are stable affordable homes for working families to rent.

What we heard on the day were real proposals regarding affordable housing as well as discussion from industry figures on how to achieve this. We are already starting to see considered policy flowing out of the summit from Kevin Rudd, with the proposal for a Commonwealth residential infrastructure fund already announced. Contrast this approach to Minister Mal Brough, who on the same day as the summit impulsively announced that he was walking away from the 50-year-old Commonwealth-State Housing Agreement—

Mrs Sullivan: Shame!

Mr SCHWARTEN: Shame all right—and putting public housing funding out to tender. I never thought I would live to see that day. After years of underfunding public housing right across the nation and with the private rental market in a state of collapse, the Brough solution is to walk away and ask the private market to solve the woes. We have seen how that has worked in the last few years. I can tell Mr Brough that there is no money to be made in housing the sick, the poor, the infirm and the aged. The private funds are only interested in funding projects where they can make money—and so they should be. Under Brough's proposal there is no more money for maintaining or housing poor and vulnerable public housing tenants and they are being cast adrift.

I congratulate the Labor leadership of Kevin Rudd, the future Prime Minister of this country, Wayne Swan and Tanya Plibersek, who will be the next housing minister—and the current mob does not even have one—on bringing the summit together.

Mr Horan interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: I condemn Mal Brough and the member for Toowoomba South, who is interjecting, for their support for putting public housing out to tender.