



Speech by

## Hon. Robert Swarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Wednesday, 8 August 2007

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### APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENT) BILL AND APPROPRIATION BILL: ESTIMATES COMMITTEE A

**Hon. RE SCHWARTEN** (Rockhampton—ALP) (Minister for Public Works, Housing and Information and Communication Technology) (12.23 pm): Firstly, I want to thank all of those who contributed to Estimates Committee A, especially the member for Ipswich for her sterling job as chair—a job she performs well in all committees. I also thank the members of the committee who made a very useful contribution. I notice that the dissenting report from the shadow minister, who regrettably is not here at the moment, again belts up on Goprint. That is a significant trend we have seen, and the opposition offers no solutions whatsoever except to privatise it. That is the droning, recurring theme we have had from everybody who has sat in his place.

In terms of public housing, the shadow minister continues to run the same theme there also. The point is that the last person who should ever criticise us is somebody from the Liberal Party. The truth is, as I said in the chamber this morning, that we started with 52,000 units of accommodation and we now have 64,000 units of accommodation, and we help 240,000 families in Queensland every year, and the number of families needing help is going to increase.

So far, there is no policy forthcoming from the opposition. In fact, there is nobody from the opposition here in the chamber whatsoever. That says it all really. In all my time in this parliament, I cannot remember when this has ever occurred. I know I am not the most riveting of speakers, but one would expect some opposition members to be here. Oh, here comes the member for Bundaberg, but he is a token opposition member over there anyway.

The fact is that this is a very important issue. I want to say to the shadow minister that he conducted himself in a fit and proper way and asked some very good questions, but the reality is that a tory is still a tory. The fact of the matter is that we know that people who sit on that side do not care about public housing to the extent that we do, otherwise they would be out there protesting about the privatisation that we have seen the Liberal Party announce in the last couple of weeks. Thankfully, they will not be in government to put that into place.

The serious issue that confronts this state in the future is not so much public housing, it is housing, full stop. As I pointed out at estimates, the reliance on the private housing market and having all the eggs in that basket has given any future federal government and the current state government a real challenge. It is interesting that the opposition does not have the words 'public housing' in the titles of its shadow ministers. There is a shadow minister for affordable housing, but that talks about homeownership. Rental accommodation in Queensland is a serious issue, as it is around Australia. The damage that has been done over the last decade by the federal government is going to be very, very hard to undo.

I am confident in the estimates that I put before the estimates committee that we are doing everything we singularly can. I am delighted that the Treasurer was able to allocate an extra \$500 million—the single biggest extra investment in the history of Queensland—to housing options for the people of Queensland into the future. As I said, the reliance on the private housing market has been forced upon us by the federal government and there has been a collapse in rent assistance to the point where nowhere near the assistance necessary is being provided to people to rent housing throughout Queensland. In

places like the member for Mackay's electorate, for example, people on \$70,000 a year are unable to rent a home, and that is rapidly occurring in Rockhampton—

**Mr Mulherin:** There are boarding house proposals.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** We have boarding houses, we are buying caravan parks, we are doing every single thing we can.

**Mr Mulherin:** 'Botels'.

**Mr SCHWARTEN:** We are buying motels and converting them into boarding houses. We are leaving no stone unturned. We are engaging the private sector in partnerships. We are doing everything that can be possibly done.

In relation to the Aboriginal communities, which you represent, Mr Deputy Speaker O'Brien—and I thank you for your cooperation in that regard—it is costing us \$300,000 to manage Wujal Wujal. The federal government is saying to us, 'We want you to step into the breach and manage each of these communities.' We are happy to do that, but every one of those that we manage costs \$300,000 and there is no money coming forward from the federal government. Mr Brough says that he will privatise all of that out. I again commend the report of Estimates Committee A to the parliament.