



Speech by

Hon. Robert Schwarten

MEMBER FOR ROCKHAMPTON

Hansard Wednesday, 22 August 2007

MOTION: SESSIONAL ORDERS

Hon. RE SCHWARTEN (Rockhampton—ALP) (Leader of the House) (12.15 pm): Can I say at the outset that if I were to put a motion that this House acknowledges that Christmas Day falls on 25 December I reckon the Leader of the Opposition would find fault with it and vote against it.

Opposition members interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Members of the opposition.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! Member for Burnett, I warn you under standing order 253.

Mr SCHWARTEN: And these people have the hide to lecture this side of the House on parliamentary conduct. The fact is that this was a genuine effort by me to try to address a concern raised by members opposite who believe they are not getting a fair go in the two-minuters, and this extends to members of my own backbench and Independent members.

Mr Messenger interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Burnett that you have already been warned. Any further comment and you will be asked to leave the chamber under standing order 253.

Mr SCHWARTEN: It is childish antics. Every time I get to my feet he indulges in childish, little boy activities.

The reality is that I have a responsibility to this parliament to ensure that the business of the day runs as thoroughly as it possibly can. We hear a lot about what the opposition gets in this parliament, but by and large ministers on this side get three minutes a week to tell the people of Queensland their portfolio responsibilities. Understandably, every day I get complaints from ministers who say to me that they did not get a matter up in this parliament that is—

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Mr Deputy Speaker, I am trying to speak here. The member for Maroochydhore continues with inane, idiotic, embarrassing comments. I heard the other speakers in silence and I would ask that the same courtesy be extended to me.

I will go through some of the issues which ministers have raised this week and let members opposite tell me that they were not worth talking about. What about the Captain Cook Bridge? I read all those stories in the *Courier-Mail*. Shouldn't the minister get up in this parliament and put before the people of Queensland what the story is? Those members opposite do not want to hear that—of course not. They do not want to hear through this parliament what the CMC had to say about child protection workers in Queensland. They do not want to hear about the testing at Kogan Creek. They do not want to hear about the major boost to tourism, employment and the Queensland economy with the new flights that are

available in Queensland. They do not want to hear about the Queensland minimum wage, but I am sure that all those people out there in Queensland who are going before the Industrial Commission will want to hear about the Queensland minimal wage.

We talked about Seniors Week and Minister Pitt drew to the attention of the House yesterday an excellent demonstration by kids from the detention centre, and he went on to talk of a number of issues in his portfolio. Is that of no interest to anybody either? I hear this drivel that comes from the other side, but I challenge any one of them to tell me that any of those statements—including my own statement this morning where I talked about new arrangements for funding peaks in housing—is not worthwhile and it is not a responsible thing to do.

The reality is that since I have been Leader of the House there have been time limits—unlike the days when that lot sat over here and we had ministers going on ad nauseam with no limit to their ministerial statements.

I remember the member for Gregory actually pushing Santo Santoro down because he went on and on. He made a ministerial statement for something like 20 minutes. That is the sort of thing that happened in those days. We are limited in how we can answer questions. Talk about democracy. We have three minutes to answer a question. In the days when the Tories sat over here were the answers limited to three minutes? No, they were not. They went on and on. The opposition got to put three or four questions up.

We have made this as fair as we possibly can. The Leader of Opposition Business says that we have two hours to ourselves. Excuse me, question time is the time when the opposition puts us on our mettle. It is not our time. The only time that ministers get to report to this parliament is in ministerial statements. We do not do MPIs, we do not do two-minuters, we do not move motions such as the one that will be moved tonight. That did not happen under the Tories—back in the Joh days—when they were on this side. If anybody wants to read the history of this parliament and talk about democracy then they should remember the days when the Tories were here and they used to answer the questions the day after they were asked. The opposition leader would stand up and ask his question and the minister would come in the next day and read the answer. That is the story of democracy under those opposite. Do not lecture us about this.

They have MPIs and two-minuters that we have enshrined in government business time. As the Premier said, we have given up a half an hour of government business time to allow this to happen. The fact is that I have never heard a two-minuter made by the Leader of the Opposition that would overwhelm anything that a minister has had to say in reporting to this parliament. Ministerial statements are necessarily brought before this parliament so that issues can be brought to the attention of the public. The journalists who sit up there and report on these matters—

Mr Hobbs interjected.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hoolihan): Order! Member for Warrego, I remind you that you have already been warned.

Mr SCHWARTEN: The journalists who sit up there and report on these matters write the stories based on what comes out of here. They put the heat on the ministers to report on things. Imagine if we continued to curtail the number of ministerial statements. We would be told that we are trying to cover up. Those opposite are always saying that we are trying to cover up and all the rest of it. We come in here and talk like the minister for transport did this morning about the Captain Cook Bridge and like the Minister for Child Safety did yesterday in bringing a warts-and-all CMC report into this parliament.

Do those opposite seriously believe that a cabinet minister of this state should get only three minutes a week and the Leader of the Opposition should have as much time as he thinks he should? What other opportunities do they want? They have the adjournment debate. No minister speaks then. No minister speaks in the MPIs. No minister has the right to move a motion in this parliament to be debated on Wednesday night. It is guaranteed that they get that time to have their say on an issue. The Leader of the Opposition will today talk about amalgamation.

Do those opposite think that if the minister for local government came into this parliament this week and did not make a ministerial statement about the progress of amalgamations he would not be open to a charge from the opposition that he was ducking for cover and that he did not want to reveal to this parliament the statistics that he has?

An opposition member interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: They do not want to hear it. I know that. This is their attempt to silence this government, these ministers on issues—

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: Yes, it is. It is nothing short of that. There are a number of issues that I just raised. There are a number of them that have not got up as yet and they would not get up if those opposite got their way and had a limit on that.

As the member for Gladstone rightly points out, this is not in the standing orders. One of the ministers cheekily pointed out to me before, 'Why don't we send a few people over there to help them out and vote this down so we can keep doing what we are doing now.' I get the call every day on when the ministerial statements will finish. The standing orders do not provide for this parliament to stop at any time to allow any of that to happen.

As I understand it, the member for Burnett this morning had a private member's bill to put before the parliament. He did not have the courtesy to come and discuss it with me, but that is par for the course. The reality is that I made sure that it did not get up this morning because we had ministerial statements to make. Under this system the member for Burnett today—had they had any nous over there; instead of debating this now—would be introducing his private member's bill in this time. That is what this time is set down for. It is to allow a private member's bill to be brought in without the Leader of the House necessarily giving it the veto, which is what I did this morning. I did it for very good reason. We had plenty of good stuff that we needed to be out there talking about and that the public is interested in.

I have to say, if the Leader of the Opposition believes that his two-minute performance has us quaking in our boots over here, then he is sadly mistaken. I cannot remember one sensible or articulate thing that he has said that would grasp the people of Queensland let alone grasp us in here. They are nauseatingly repetitive, they are mostly abusive and they are mostly unintelligent. The fact of the matter is that those two-minuters of themselves do not guarantee those opposite a front-page story in the *Courier-Mail* or the lead for Channel 9 or Channel 10. What would guarantee that is if those opposite could come up with the issues and put the hard work into it. If they have a two-minuter on a Wednesday that is going to bring this government down, let me tell them, they will have the gallery up there swarming with journalists.

Why would they do that? They do not just sit around, as we all know, waiting for Jeff Seeney to get to his feet in the vain hope that there might be some cataclysmic conclusion to this government. That is not going to happen. Step No. 1 is question time. Get in there with that rabbit killer question straight off in the morning. He has two questions every morning. Over here we get the sight of the wet lettuce leaf being wriggled around in front of us. That is the nature of the question.

If he cannot make it with the two-minuter he has the MPI. Again, they are mostly abusive, always negative, always threatening—all those things that he does. Now on Wednesday he will have the two-minuter straight up. As the Leader of Opposition Business knows, I had the Clerk redrafting this so that it ensures that the Leader of the Opposition gets first bite of the cake on Wednesday. How much fairer can I be than that?

He was complaining about it and whingeing about it. He wanted to have two bob each way. He said, 'If you are going to do it, make sure I get the first bite of it. Make sure I get the first hit. Never mind about the Independents or anybody else.' Graciously, as I am very gracious, I allowed him the privilege of doing that. I bent over backwards to try to help. The poor old Clerk was nearly in dizzy spells trying to change this as they rocked and rolled over there.

The reality is that this is part of the evolution of this parliament. When I came in here—

Miss Simpson interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: We have had plenty of rude people like you for a start. The member is out there lecturing people about behaviour. You want to grow up, woman!

Opposition members interjected.

Mr SCHWARTEN: People who behave like that do need to grow up. She just sits there persistently interjecting with inane, inappropriate and stupid remarks. She does it every day and wonders why she is still sitting in the same place and why Jeff Seeney would not give her an office in the first place. I do not blame him.

The final point is very simple. When I came in here—and people like the member for Southern Downs will remember this—we had ministers in the Goss government who had one question on notice and one without notice. There were people who just got up and read questions and ministers would take them as they pleased. We had motions that came from the other side. Terry Mackenroth used to sit here and say, 'Not formal'. That is what happened. That is what the opposition got as a say. It was a hybrid of what came out of the Joh times. The opposition got absolutely no say whatsoever.

We have evolved from that time to see things like private members' bills given time. The two-minuters are now guaranteed. As the member for Gladstone rightfully points out, they are now guaranteed. So again that is part of an evolution. They are not at the discretion of the government of the day. They are not at the discretion of the Leader of the House as they currently are. What it does is bring in a reform that

the government gives a half an hour of its time on a Wednesday to allow that process to happen in much the same way as MPs evolved 25 years ago or whenever they came into this parliament.

Enough of the nonsense. Enough time of the parliament has been taken up with this. I commend the motion to the House as part of the evolution of the democracy of this parliament.