



TAKING NOTE OF ANSWERS ON HOUSING AFFORDABILITY

By Senator Mathias Cormann on 19 September 2007

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia) (3.20 p.m.)—I also rise to take note of the answers given by Senator Scullion. Another day in the Senate and another day of empty Labor Party rhetoric. We on this side of the chamber take the pressures on working families very seriously. That is why we are focused on a strong economy, creating jobs, increasing real wages and keeping taxes low. The reality is that, in an environment where we have a growing population, the main thing that we can do to improve housing affordability is increase the supply of affordable land. If senators on the other side of the chamber were really so concerned about improving housing affordability across Australia, they would be phoning the Premier of New South Wales, the Premier of South Australia, the Premier of Victoria and the Premier of Western Australia. I call on my esteemed colleague Senator Ruth Webber to phone her very good friend the Premier of Western Australia, Alan Carpenter, and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure, Alannah MacTiernan, and call on them to release more land and cut red tape, and call on the Treasurer of Western Australia, Eric Ripper, to reduce the extreme property taxes, stamp duties and land taxes—these are great disincentives for investors to get involved in the housing market—and to make affordable housing available to renters across Western Australia and Australia.

All we have heard today is empty rhetoric. We need a plan for a strong economy and a plan to create jobs and increase real wages, which is why the workplace relations reforms that the Howard government introduced in 1996 and subsequently are so important. I had the great privilege of talking about this last night. What is Labor proposing? Labor is proposing to abolish Australian workplace agreements. Labor is proposing to abolish the Australian Building and Construction Commission. Not only is that going to push the cost of housing up; it is going to have a negative impact on real wages and employment and it is going to make it more difficult for people across Australia to afford their own homes. It is an absolute disgrace.

I have actually experienced, in my own home state of Western Australia, exactly what can happen when Labor comes into government and pursues those sorts of policies—indeed, particularly in the building and construction industry, which is so relevant when it comes to affordable housing. Straight after the Gallop Labor government was elected in 2001, in less than two weeks unions were going on a rampage across all of the major building sites across Western Australia. Of course, should Labor be successful—God help us!—at the next election, we are very likely to see exactly the same thing. The impact of that is less affordable housing, not more affordable housing.

Senator Ludwig spoke about marketing and how the government is focused on marketing itself. I do not think that there are any lessons we can take from the Labor Party on that. Today, I came across an article in the *Age* headed: 'Bricks' water ads broke budget'. I thought I would read that into *Hansard*, because it is quite outrageous. The article states:

Controversial advertisements starring former premier Steve Bracks spruiking the Government's water plans cost taxpayers more than \$1.7 million—70 per cent more than Mr Bracks admitted at the time.

Documents obtained by *The Age* under freedom of information reveal taxpayers funded television, radio, print and internet advertisements, shown in June, had a price tag of \$1.7 million.

Those are, of course, those infamous ads showing the then Premier, Stephen Bracks, coming down in the helicopter and trying to sell himself.

The issue of housing affordability is a very serious issue. There are many families across Australia aspiring to buy their first home and, in the current environment, finding it tough. We are the first ones to acknowledge that. All of us as policymakers across Australia, whether we are at the state or the federal level, ought to very seriously reflect and consider what sorts of policies are able to make a positive difference to those families across Australia. Those families are not going to be helped by empty political rhetoric from the other side. If you, the Labor Party, are really seriously concerned, if you are really seriously interested in making a difference, pick up the phone, talk to your premiers, talk to your state ministers and get them to cut red tape, get them to reduce their property taxes and get them to get off their backsides and do something about it.

I feel very passionate about this because in Western Australia the levels of taxes and property taxes—the disincentives for people to buy their own home and for people to invest in properties that they might make available for affordable rental housing—are just so enormous. We are having very serious issues, particularly in our regional areas. (*Time expired*)