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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Border Protection

SPEECH

Wednesday, 14 March 2012

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Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

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Mr MORRISON (Cook) (16:03): I am pleased to speak on this matter of public importance on border protection because it is critically important. I have listened to the contribution by the minister at the table and I have some sympathy for him. I understand Mr Clare is new to the portfolio and I understand that he has been delivered an absolute hospital pass by his predecessor. I am sure one of the first things he did when he became minister was to send a little note: 'Dear colleague, thank you for the hospital pass you sent me through your maladministration of the portfolio previously.' Maybe he saved himself time by using the proforma that the current Minister for Immigration and Citizenship used when he sent a little note to Senator Evans: 'Dear Senator Evans, thank you for the hospital pass you have given me through your maladministration of the portfolio.' I will not go too heavily on the minister at the table today because I am sure his failures are ahead of him. There will be plenty of time to deal with those in the future.

This debate is about the cuts that have been made to the Customs and Border Protection Service, which are a result of the fact that this government has lost control of our borders. It has had a budget blowout on immigration alone of \$3.9 billion over the last three years. When you blow that much money, because you blow your borders so badly, these are the sorts of decisions a government is forced to take.

The minister at the table made reference to what the view of the New South Wales government was. He may not be aware of what the New South Wales Premier said in question time today. He said: 'It is time the federal government stopped burying its head in the sand about the porous nature of our borders and our customs service. It's time they stopped focusing on themselves and their factional and leadership issues and it's time they started to provide this city, this state and this nation with the effective control of our borders that people have a right to expect.'

They have a right to expect it because they got used to it under the previous Howard government. They got used to it. They were used to having a government that understood the importance of domestic national security matters and having strong borders—and having a commitment to strong borders—and having the resources in place and the policies in place to provide strong borders. There is a delusion on that side of the chamber about who is trusted to protect Australia's borders and ensure our domestic national security. It is the coalition that is trusted. It is not a theory; it is a fact. Our record is a fact. The government likes to talk about its theories and its failed policies. The coalition can simply refer to the fact. The fact is, the Australian people know that we got the job done, the policies we had worked, we will restore them and we will get the job done again if given the opportunity to do so in government. We need to understand why and how the failures on our borders caused by this government that have produced \$3.9 billion in blowouts over the last few years have led to cuts being made in other areas that are putting other people at risk, as we mentioned in the House today. There were the government's decisions to abolish the Pacific solution and to abolish the processing centre at Nauru. There was the decision to reverse even the then Prime Minister's commitment to border protection before the election. Do you remember him—Prime Minister Rudd? At least 31 members on that side of the chamber remember him. They will remember that it was his commitment to turn back boats before the 2007 election. He walked away from that in a hurry.

Those in this House, and particularly those outside this House, will remember the asylum freeze that was announced by Senator Evans. That was a particularly good present that was left for the new minister for immigration after the election. It was something that led to an additional 1,200 Afghans being put into the system for six months to just sit there, which fuelled and fanned the dissension within the detention network. The Hawke-Williams review found that that played a key role in the build-up of pressures that led to the Christmas Island riots that happened a year ago this week, where the Christmas Island detention centre went up in flames. There was also the East Timor farce and there was the Malaysian failure. I refer to it as a failure because it did not work. Madam Deputy Speaker, I know you were not a great fan of the Malaysia policy of this government. There were many on that side of the chamber who were not fans of that policy.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke): The member for Cook should not push it.

Mr MORRISON: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. That policy was described as not working by none other than the member for Griffith, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Minister for Foreign Affairs thought he was so convincing in his demolition of the Malaysian people swap that he should become Prime Minister again. That is what we know about this government and that minister's commitment to that policy. Then of course it was crowned with the let-them-in, let-them-out policy of the Greens, which the government introduced in late November of 2011 and which was followed by the biggest summer of boat arrivals on record—2,100 people turned up on boats in the most dangerous period of the year following the government's decision to go to mainstream community release.

I received an email not that long ago from one of my constituents who was reflecting on the government's performance in border protection. She wrote that 'this government is run by muppets'. I think that is the frustration and concern that is out there in the community about the government's handling of border protection issues. They remind me, whether it is the Minister for Immigration or his predecessor or the Prime Minister herself, of the Great Gonzo, who would get up and blow his trumpet at the end of the *Muppet Show* theme. It would blow up in his face every single time he did it. That has been the history of border protection policy under Labor. Their immigration policy and their border protection policy would make the Great Gonzo proud. They are muppets for many other reasons. We know muppets are controlled by faceless men. That is something the government is pretty well aware of and the Prime Minister certainly knows that. There were also the two muppets who used to sit up there in the bleachers, not unlike the two older members in the chamber sitting up there in the bleachers—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Cook has strayed considerably and will return to the MPI or I will invoke standing order 90 and sit him down.

Mr MORRISON: I will return to the topic in saying this: when they said—

Mr Tehan interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Wannon has got one last chance.

Mr MORRISON: As the show would end, one would turn to the other and say, 'Just when you think things could not get any worse'—just like the government's border protection policy—'something wonderful happens.' The other one would say 'What is that?', and he would get the reply, 'It ends.' That is what the Australian people want to see from this government; they want to see this farce end.

The budget blow-outs of \$3.9 billion on this waste, mismanagement and incompetence on our borders have been catastrophic. There was a \$208 million blow-out in the additional estimates of 2009-10; a \$798 million blow-out in the budget estimates of 2010-11; a \$472 million blow-out in the additional estimates of 2010-11; and a \$1.528 billion blow-out in the budget estimates in 2011-12. In the most recent additional estimates, there was a blow-out of \$866 million. That is how you get to \$3.9 billion in blow-outs—by failed border protection policies; by being completely in denial.

Since the riots I referred to, a couple of things have happened. Those riots were a year ago this week. The heart of the problem we have with this government is they are in denial. Who is really running the show? Dr Hawke confirmed the view in evidence to the detention inquiry recently that the asylum seekers got a 'no' and they rioted. There was a build-up in the population within those centres in the detention network. There was a failure of the government to expand that network prior to the election and that led to considerable pressures in the system. At the end of the day, it was sparked off by the fact that a whole bunch of people got a 'no' and they rioted. What has happened since then? The rate of primary acceptance for refugee claims for IMAs has doubled; the number of protection visas given to people has tripled; and the number of 'no' decisions turned to 'yes' on appeal is four out of five. It would seem to me that the rioters got what they wanted.

The people smugglers have certainly had what they wanted for the last four years. They have had a government with failed border protection policies. As those policies have continued to fail, as the government has continued to ramp up the costs, it has undermined the capacity, more broadly, of our border agencies—whether it is Immigration, whether it is AQIS or whether it is Customs and Border Protection—to do the job that we trust them to do. That has resulted in guns turning up in post offices in my electorate. It has resulted in guns getting into this country, and Australians are very concerned about that. That has been exposed today and the government should be ashamed of itself. (*Time expired*)