
Mr SULLIVAN (2.22 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs. Minister, how will the Senate's failure to pass the necessary legislation to establish the Australian Business Investment Partnership affect small business in the construction and retail sectors?

Dr EMERSON—I do thank the member for Longman for his question. The House might not be aware that the member for Longman, in the early 1990s, was instrumental in setting up the Business Enterprise Centre at Caboolture. I thank him on behalf of the small businesses on the Sunshine Coast of Australia for his ongoing interest—the ongoing interest of everyone on this side of the parliament in the future of small business in this country. I note yet again that my opponent, the shadow minister for small business, will not ask me a question about small business.

Yet again the opposition leader has put his own base political interests ahead of the interests of the small businesses of Australia. We know that the Australian Business Investment Partnership is designed to support commercial property construction and development during the global financial crisis. We also know—and the opposition leader knows—that the commercial property sector employs around 150,000 people, including plumbers, electricians and carpenters. The advice of Treasury is that, without action, a combination of weak demand and tight credit conditions could result in up to 50,000 people losing their jobs in this sector. These are ordinary people, these are small business people, these are tradies, these are independent contractors.

The Liberal Party claim small business operators as their own core constituency, but last night the Liberal Party betrayed the small business people of Australia. Last night the Liberal Party and its cohorts in the National Party betrayed the tradies and independent contractors—our

electricians, our plumbers and our carpenters. That is what the opposition did, and they are boasting about it today at the doors. They are proud of their achievement in betraying the small business community of this country.

The opposition leader talks about jobs, jobs, jobs, but his actions and those of his party last night have taken jobs away. He has risked the jobs of up to 50,000 Australians. The opposition leader is saying to the tradies, to our plumbers, electricians and carpenters: 'Pack up your tools in your old kit bag; it's goodbye, bye, bye.' You regard the small businesses of Australia as your core constituency. Well, why on earth would you betray them? Why would you betray them? And we know the answer to that question: because by your actions, by the opposition leader's actions—

The SPEAKER—The minister will refer his remarks through the chair.

Dr EMERSON—he is trying to distance himself from the truth, from his past.

Mr Turnbull—Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance: practice does make perfect, but the minister should not rehearse a song for the Midwinter Ball here in the House!

The SPEAKER—The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. There is no point of order.

Dr EMERSON—I can advise the opposition leader that rehearsals were at 12 o'clock today, and we are looking pretty good!

The SPEAKER—The minister will get back to the response.

Dr EMERSON—This is the plot: the opposition are distancing themselves from their past. Let us have a look at the opposition's economic team: we have got the opposition leader living in the leafy eastern suburbs of Sydney, we have got the shadow Treasurer living in the leafy northern suburbs of Sydney—

Opposition members interjecting—

Dr EMERSON—and we have got the shadow finance minister—

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER—Order! The House will come to order. Those on my left!

Dr EMERSON—who, again, lives in the eastern suburbs of Sydney, in Woollahra. They are lovely suburbs, lovely suburbs. If you go to Woollahra, if you go to North Sydney, if you go to Frenchs Forest, they are lovely places to visit.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker—

Dr EMERSON—I am not finished.

The SPEAKER—The minister will resume his seat. The member for Dickson on a point of order.

Mr Dutton—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order, and it goes to relevance. The minister enjoys cosying up there and spends half his time in Melbourne. He is supposed to live in Brisbane—

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson!

Mr Dutton—He pretends to be somebody he is not. What's he still doing here?

The SPEAKER—The member for Dickson will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

The member for Dickson then left the chamber.

Dr EMERSON—Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

The SPEAKER—Order! The minister has not yet got the call. Minister.

Dr EMERSON—I do say to the member for Dickson: pack up your troubles in the old kit bag; it's goodbye, goodbye, goodbye!

The SPEAKER—The minister will get back to his response.

Opposition members interjecting—

Dr EMERSON—This is nothing but rank opportunism. It is a naked attempt to distance themselves from their true past, from their true values. They say, ‘Oh no, we’re not with big business; we’re for small business.’ Last night and today, you betrayed the small business people of Australia. The only job you care about is your own.

The SPEAKER—Order! Before giving the call to the member for Boothby, I remind the minister that he should address his remarks through the chair.