



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

OzCar

SPEECH

Tuesday, 23 June 2009

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Tuesday, 23 June 2009 Page 26 Questioner Speaker Emerson, Craig, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Dr EMERSON (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (4.47 pm)—We have been hearing over the weekend and in the early part of this week that this is the debate that will bring down the Prime Minister and the Treasurer of the country. You know what the attendance was at the shadow Treasurer's address on this? Twenty-five of the 64 coalition members thought it was important enough to come along. They stayed away in droves. Thirty-nine coalition MPs thought it was such a yawn that they did not even bother to turn up. Certainly, the Leader of the Opposition, who said this was the great debate that was going to bring down the Prime Minister and that was going to bring down the Treasurer, did not bother to turn up either. They stayed away in droves. Although I do not know the details—it might have been another fractious party room meeting of the coalition this morning—I am assured it is not true that Brendan had someone in a half-nelson. But I believe it is true that the member who has just spoken, the Leader of the National Party, had most of the party in a sleeper hold, so boring was he in his address here in the great debate that was going to bring down the government, bring down the Prime Minister and bring down the Treasurer.

A number of accusations have been made by the coalition, and I want to address some of them. For example, there is an accusation that only John Grant received special attention. The truth of the matter is that the emails that the Treasurer released yesterday show that other car dealers were receiving as much, if not more, attention from the Treasurer. At least three other dealers got similar or greater assistance to that which was offered to John Grant. Treasury also assisted at least four of these dealers by arranging meetings with financiers, including Ford Credit. So that demolishes the argument about special treatment for Mr John Grant.

The coalition are astonished that the Treasurer of the country would have a home fax. That does reveal that they work absolutely strict hours—nine to five. They were a nine-to-five government. The Treasurer and the Prime Minister of this country, now that the Labor Party is in government, do actually work after 5 pm and do have home communications. This is a novelty to the coalition: 'Wow! How is it that the

Treasurer would actually be working after five o'clock and receive faxes and emails at home? Well, well, well!' What a revelation.

Another accusation is that only John Grant had personal updates sent to the Treasurer's home fax.

Mr Robb—True!

Dr EMERSON—'True,' he says. Almost 30 per cent of all emails on OzCar that Mr Grech sent to the Treasurer's office contained documents specifically for the Treasurer's attention. That a fax went to Brisbane simply reflects the fact that the Treasurer was in Brisbane. If the Treasurer had been in Canberra it would not have been sent to his home fax; it would have been sent to his office. Wow! Remarkable revelation! The fact is that this year the Treasurer's office has sent 209 faxes to his home via email—and sending a fax to the Treasurer's home fax is supposed to be a unique event!

A further accusation is that only John Grant, according to the coalition, received personal referrals to finance companies, in particular Ford Credit. Mr Gregory Cohen, Managing Director of Ford Credit, was asked a question about this at a Senate inquiry just the other day. Senator Abetz said:

During those meetings, was the plight of any particular car dealer mentioned to you?

Of course, Senator Abetz thinks: 'Got him! We're going to get some really great information.' Mr Cohen said:

Yes.

Senator Abetz said:

And how many?

He was thinking that Mr Cohen would say, 'Just the one.' His answer was:

There are at least three or four that I can recall.

So much for special treatment for one person, John Grant.

On the issue of special treatment—that no-one else got any particular considered treatment—the member for Riverina has been generous enough to acknowledge

that her constituent did receive some very good treatment. The member for Riverina made a request on behalf of her constituent, as did Bernie Ripoll, the member for Oxley, and in her case she got a response from the Treasurer's office saying:

Kay,

I will refer your request to the appropriate person in the department, who will get in touch with—

the car dealer.

I have asked them to keep me informed, so I will let you know when I hear anything.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you need to follow anything up.

Regards

Amanda

Amanda is an adviser in the Treasurer's office. The response from the member for Riverina said:

Thankyou so much Amanda. I so appreciate it

Cheers Kay

Isn't this personal treatment for the constituent of the member for Riverina? Then there was an email from the treasury department to the Treasurer's office on Monday, 23 March 2009 saying:

FYI in case Kay Hull asks you where this is at - I have spoken with the dealer ... and explained to him where things are at.

Later in the email the Treasury official advised as follows about Kay Hull's dealer:

I told him to contact Capital Finance and to let me know if he gets resistance.

The case of John Grant was supposed to be a unique event, but that is the treatment that was given to a constituent of the member for Riverina, and she has been generous enough to acknowledge that fact.

The Leader of the Opposition has been saying that he has made no accusations against the Prime Minister or the Treasurer. Well, on Friday, 19 June, he said, 'The Prime Minister and Treasurer have used their offices and taxpayers' resources to seek advantage for one of their mates, and then lied about it to the parliament.' That is a very serious accusation, which the Leader of the Opposition is now denying. He says: 'I never made any real accusations. I was just saying: "Look, if it is right then there is a problem here."' 'This is the same Leader of the Opposition who today, under pressure in the media, admitted to having conversations with Mr Godwin Grech. The shadow Treasurer has also admitted to having conversations with Mr Godwin

Grech and yet they have given this impression that here was this public servant doing his job, giving honest and impartial advice, and then they were shocked that he gave this evidence, and on the basis of that evidence called for the Prime Minister and the Treasurer to resign. But the truth is that they had been in personal contact with him, including as recently as Saturday. Is it common for the coalition to ring up Treasury officers on a Saturday and say, 'Oh, I was just thumbing through the phone book and there we are under 'g'— oh, Grech. I wonder who that bloke is. I'll give him a call. Hello, Godwin, how are you, brother.' We know now of some of the basis of that relationship.

The Leader of the National Party just said something that I regard as very offensive. He said that the Australian Business Investment Partnership was set up to support Labor mates. I will ensure that all of those people, including the tradies, the electricians, the plumbers and the carpenters, who would have benefited from this initiative and those who would be in a position to secure the jobs of 50,000 people understand that the Leader of the National Party regards them all as Labor mates. The Leader of the Opposition, the shadow Treasurer and the Leader of the National Party do not care about them. We will continue to support small business in this country.

But in the last few weeks the opposition leader has been promoting around town, to everyone who will listen, a false email that he hoped would be his dirty little shortcut to the prime ministership. Well, it has not worked. A dirty little shortcut to the Lodge; that is what he thought he had, in a forged email, despite being told by Dr Andrew Charlton at the mid-winter ball that he did not send that email. The Leader of the Opposition ignored that advice because he thought he had a dirty little shortcut to the Lodge.

Yet, on the Alan Jones program, the opposition leader was asked: 'Have you sighted the email.' This was yesterday; it was hilarious. The Leader of the Opposition realised there was a problem emerging with the email so he responded as follows: 'Alan, I do not want to say any more about the email.' Yet within 30 seconds the opposition leader volunteered this: 'This email, let's talk about the email.' He is like a moth circling around the light. The law of the light is there and the Leader of the Opposition gets zapped and falls to the ground in a burnt mess. His wings are burnt and he is embarrassed and then dead. Why doesn't someone do the job for us? Brendan Nelson, come on down; you can be the Colin Barnett of the federal parliament. Come on, Brendan; come on, Peter: save the coalition from this useless Leader of the Opposition.