

18 June 2009

ADJOURNMENT

Mission Australia

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (4:35 PM) — I rise to speak on a matter that I have found to be most disturbing and that I know many people in my electorate—indeed, many people right around the country—would have also found disturbing. I refer to the disparaging reflections on Mission Australia made in question time yesterday by the member for Boothby, the shadow minister for employment participation. As I was listening to the debate in the House yesterday, I was shocked to hear the member for Boothby stand up in this place and imply that Mission Australia, which has an outstanding reputation for its work in the community, and the office of the former Minister for Employment Participation were somehow involved in a breach of the probity guidelines of the employment services tender.

This was a cheap, below-the-belt political swipe. The member for Boothby impugned the reputation of Mission Australia and he impugned the reputation of its chief executive, Toby Hall. He accused Mission Australia of having inappropriate discussions with the then minister's office immediately following the announcement of the successful tenders for the new Job Services Australia in April this year. The member for Boothby's line of questioning was made all the more contemptible because, until yesterday, in the 18 months he has been in the shadow portfolio he has not asked one question of the minister. In fact so brave is the shadow minister that he had to wait until the employment participation portfolio moved to a minister in the Senate before he could pluck up the courage to step up to the dispatch box.

At a time when the focus of the Rudd government and the nation is very much on supporting Australian jobs, the member for Boothby is only interested in casting unfounded aspersions on an organisation that has come to the aid of thousands of Australian families in need. For a shadow minister for employment participation, the member for Boothby just does not seem to want to participate in one of the most important discussions we are having in this country—the one about jobs. In the last 18 months, not only has the member for Boothby shown that he has no interest in employment; he has also shown a distinct lack of interest in participation when it comes to making a contribution in this place.

I was shocked by these allegations and made inquiries of the Minister for Employment Participation. I have been advised by the minister that the employment services tender was overseen by an external probity auditor, the legal firm Clayton Utz, who indeed signed off on the process at every relevant juncture and found no impropriety on the part of Mission Australia, the government or, indeed, any party involved. We can excuse the coalition for not understanding probity. We saw the way they administered what has become infamously referred to as the 'regional rorts program', where the most important criteria for project approval was being located in a National Party held seat. We know that the Leader of the Opposition, as the then minister for the environment, only days out from the 2007 election approved a \$10 million grant for an untested cloud-seeding program in his own electorate. That project did not even have the approval of his own department.

Mission Australia does not deserve to be the target of the member for Boothby's malicious smear campaign. In my electorate of Lindsay I have a very constructive relationship with Mission Australia, as I am sure many members from both the sides of this House do. Mission Australia, through a multitude of services, provide assistance to the most disadvantaged people in our community: the homeless, the long-term unemployed, the elderly, Indigenous communities, young people and people with substance abuse issues. I am pleased to say that Mission Australia are delivering employment services in my local area under Job Services Australia and they have also been successful in obtaining funding under the National Rental Affordability Scheme to construct affordable housing in Oxley Park.

As the Prime Minister himself noted in his answer to the member for Boothby's grubby line of attack, it is entirely reasonable for MPs, including ministers, to have contact with individuals from Mission Australia. In the case of the Labor Party, that is even more relevant because we have common aims: to assist the disadvantaged and to deal with issues such as poverty, homelessness and unemployment. It is rumoured that the Leader of the Opposition is looking to reshuffle his frontbench. I for one would be absolutely gobsmacked if the member for Boothby survived that reshuffle.