



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Votes and Proceedings

Hansard

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CORRECTIONS

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Wednesday, 14 December 2005

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Mr VAILE—In answer to the last part of the member's question, the answer is no. The member continually raises this assertion and allegation with regard to the government. Suggestions that the Australian government would have knowingly allowed kickbacks are unfunded and untrue—unfounded. Mr Speaker, the member for Griffith raised—

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, I raise a point of order. Our contention is these kickbacks were funded, and that's the problem!

The SPEAKER—That is not a point of order.

Mr VAILE—Assertions that are being made by the member for Griffith are completely unfounded and untrue. That is exactly what the Volcker inquiry found. The member for Griffith referred to concerns raised in 2000 and 2003 in his question, when general concerns were raised about contracts. I am advised that on both occasions the matters were referred to the United Nations, who were running the Oil for Food Program. As far as I am aware these concerns were dealt with to the UN's satisfaction with respect to their program. Following that the Volcker inquiry went through this issue forensically. The government and my department cooperated fully with the Volcker inquiry, and the Volcker inquiry has found no wrongdoing on behalf of our government.

Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business Program

Mr TICEHURST (2.48 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Small Business and Tourism. Would the minister outline to the House recent initiatives taken by the government to build entrepreneurship in small business, particularly in our young people? Are there any alternative views?

FRAN BAILEY—I thank the member for Dobell for his question and for his passionate support of small business. I can tell the House that this government is about building for the future. Last week I launched the government's program Building Entrepreneurship in Small Business, a program designed specifically to develop skills in our young entrepreneurs and to encourage young people to consider starting up their own small businesses. The program is centred on building on business skills, mentoring and succession planning.

Less than 10 per cent of Australia's 1.2 million small business operators are under the age of 30. So this government is putting in measures which really are building for the future and providing assistance to these young people. I can inform the House that, in just the week since this program has been launched, the AusIndustry hotline and web site has been taking record hits.

I am asked if there are any alternatives. I have to inform the House that the opposition has delivered zero for small business, absolutely zero. There has been no policy development. There has been no initiative what-

soever for small business. In fact, I think the Leader of the Opposition has been following the words and the lead of Greg Combet, when on 12 October ABC listeners—

Mr Beazley—There is limited time, Fran. Hurry up.

FRAN BAILEY—Small business are actually very interested, Leader of the Opposition. As I said, the Leader of the Opposition is following Greg Combet's lead, when he said he is afraid that he is no advocate for small business and neither is this opposition. Small businesses around the country know that it is only this government that is building for now and in the future for small business.

Oil for Food Program

Mr RUDD (2.52 pm)—My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. I refer to the published report of the Iraq Survey Group, the CIA team sent to Iraq to search for Saddam's WMD, which found that kickbacks to Saddam Hussein under the Oil for Food Program totalled approximately \$US1.5 billion. I also refer to the report's findings that, through these kickbacks, 'Saddam generated enough revenue to procure sanctioned military goods and equipment, dual use industrial material and technology.' Deputy Prime Minister, can you guarantee that no part of the \$300 million that the AWB provided by way of kickbacks to Saddam Hussein went to pay for military equipment used by Saddam to fight Australian troops?

The SPEAKER—Order! In calling the Deputy Prime Minister I remind the member for Griffith that he should direct his questions through the chair.

Mr VAILE—What I can confirm to the member for Griffith is that each time this issue was raised the government acted with proper propriety and referred the information and the issues to the people who were running the program, which was the United Nations under the particular section of the committee of the United Nations. Since then all aspects of this matter have been investigated by the United Nations, which has found no wrongdoing by the government.

Mr Rudd—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Deputy Prime Minister is a member of the National Security Committee of the cabinet. I asked him for a guarantee as to whether he had bothered to find out how this \$300 million was used.

The SPEAKER—Order! The member for Griffith will resume his seat. The minister has concluded his answer.

New Apprenticeships

Mr CAMERON THOMPSON (2.54 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education. Would the minister update the House on the number of Australians undertaking apprenticeships? How is the government ensuring that Australia's training system is responsive to the skills needs of industry?

Mr HARDGRAVE—I thank the member for Blair, who is a founding member of the Friends of Vocational and Technical Education, founded by the member for Hasluck.

Ms Macklin—Well, you haven't got any!

Mr HARDGRAVE—There are plenty of friends of vocational and technical education on this side. I know there are not too many on that side. I also acknowledge that Group Training Australia have their members advocacy day today and a number of their delegates are here today. These are people who should take a bow and who are making an enormous difference in assisting local communities create new job opportunities for more apprentices around Australia.

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr HARDGRAVE—I am listening to the cacophony of corny catchcries from those opposite. I note that they are hiding their own guilt. In 1993, when the member for Brand was Minister for Employment, Education and Training, we had an all-time low of apprentices in training of 122,600. Today we have 391,200 new apprentices in training. That is a record of definite activity in just the last 12 months.

The member for Blair wants to know about how things are going. In the last 12 months we have seen new apprenticeships commencements increase by four per cent. We have seen a six per cent increase in completions in apprenticeships. We have seen an 11 per cent increase in commencements of new apprenticeships by mature aged workers. We have seen commencements in trades and related worker categories increase by seven per cent. So we have more people starting apprenticeships, more people completing apprenticeships and more people in training.

Commencements in school based new apprenticeships increased by 50 per cent in the 12 months ending 30 June this year. That is despite the lack of interest from a big state like New South Wales in this program. Eighty-one per cent of all new apprentices commencing in the Australian Qualifications Framework were at level III or higher. That represents an increase of eight per cent from previous years. These recent figures are also backed by other recently released student outcome surveys from the National Council for Vocational Education Research, which reveal that 89 per cent of all graduates are either employed or in further study after their training.

It is not just the fact that this government is now providing record levels of expenditure of some \$10.1 billion over the next four years and that there is \$1.4 billion in new initiatives provide for skills needs, the biggest ever commitment to vocational and technical education by any government—it is the fact that Australian businesses recognise that the process of apprenticeships starts because they, as the Treasurer said ear-

lier today in question time, want to invest in their part of our economy. It is not just the investment in plant and equipment; it is not just the investment in new opportunities and new product ranges—it is very much the investment they make in their people. The government's programs will back that investment with our own effort.

Mr Howard—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

MR ROBERT GERARD

Mr SWAN (Lilley) (2.57 pm)—I seek leave to table a tax office audit report from March 2000 that refers to the affairs of the Gerard group of companies and Mr Gerard's letter, a report prepared on the Treasurer's watch.

Leave not granted.

BUSINESS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (2.58 pm)—On indulgence, I advise members that I am informed that there are at least two bills that are likely to be bouncing backwards and forwards between the House and the Senate tomorrow. Therefore, regrettably, it is highly unlikely that we will get up at the usual time. The government will do its best to inform members as to developments.

COMMITTEES

Procedure Committee

Report

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (2.58 pm)—On indulgence, I have received the Procedures Committee report: *Procedures relating to House committees*. I am pleased to inform the House that the government accepts the recommendations of this report. We will work with the Clerk over the vacation period to put the appropriate sessional orders into place so that those recommendations can be operating as soon as possible in the new year. I thank the Procedure Committee, particularly the chair and the deputy chair, for their good work in this matter.

DOCUMENTS

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (2.59 pm)—Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated with circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings* and *Hansard*. I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Transport and Regional Services—House of Representatives Standing Committee—Reports—National road safety—Eyes on the road ahead—Government response.

Train illumination—Inquiry into some measures proposed to improve train visibility and reduce level crossing accidents—Government response.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Gillard**) adjourned.