



Speech by
Jarrod Bleijie

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

Hansard Wednesday, 22 April 2009

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr BLEIJIE (Kawana—LNP) (8.07 pm): What an enormous privilege it is to rise in this chamber as the new member for Kawana—an enormous privilege and a great responsibility. I thank the voters of the Kawana electorate for having the confidence they have placed in me to be their representative. At the outset, may I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to your high office. You have now moved out of the ruck into the referee's role and you can be sure that those on this side of the House will give you our full support in your duty to ensure that the parliament always prevails over the executive government of the day. I acknowledge Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Australia, who provides such a distinguished example of public service to us all and to the sovereign's representative in this state, Her Excellency the Governor.

When I look around at my LNP colleagues, it gives me a great sense of pride and enthusiasm to be involved in a political party with such a diverse range of peoples, varying in age and experiences. I thought upon my election to this House that I may have possibly been the youngest member to serve in this 53rd Queensland Parliament, but that title goes to the member for Morayfield. I can say, however, with excitement and pride that I am the youngest conservative member of the 53rd Queensland Parliament. I envisage that my youth will bring to this House a fresh perspective, and I can particularly stand up in this House and bring to the attention of the House the plight of young Queenslanders.

Someone said to me soon after election day that I must feel a great sense of achievement. I pondered that for a while and decided that, no, I do not feel a sense of achievement because that means that personal ambition is the most important thing, but I do feel a profound sense of responsibility. I remember studying political science, learning about the different political philosophies and whether members of parliament are elected to be delegates or representatives. I will not breach the rules of inaugural speeches by being too politically controversial, except to say that all of us in this chamber, regardless of the political party that we represent and regardless of any office that we hold, are representatives for our constituents. The complexity of the issues that come before us mean that we have an obligation to research and study important issues and then ultimately, in our party room discussions and on the floor of this chamber, vote for what we think is in the best interests of our constituents and the people of Queensland.

One of the guiding lights for me in this journey that has led me to take my place in this chamber has been the support of my wife, Sally, and the love and support of our two daughters, Taylor and Madison. During the campaign when the day might not have gone as well as I would have liked, I knew that when I returned home it was to an oasis of unconditional love and support—unconditional but not, I hasten to say, uncritical. We all know that sometimes it is our family members, and I include my extended family, who ground us and it is the most important aspect.

I have lived on the Sunshine Coast for most of my life. The Sunshine Coast is a fantastic region, with the Kawana electorate one of the jewels in its crown, offering a wonderful mix of lifestyle, business and tourism opportunities and the perfect place to raise a family. I completed my schooling on the Sunshine Coast at Caloundra Primary and Caloundra State High School respectively. I then studied arts, majoring in

politics, at the University of the Sunshine Coast before completing my law degree at QUT in Brisbane. Can I say how proud I am to have the University of the Sunshine Coast, a first-class university, in my electorate.

Along the way I balanced my study with an involvement in a wide variety of local organisations and community groups. In that role, but more sharply since my preselection and during the campaign, I have been constantly reminded that volunteering is the glue that holds our communities together. We must do more to recognise and acknowledge our wonderful volunteers.

It is with some trepidation that I admit to the House that prior to coming to this chamber I was a practising lawyer. I was constantly reminded during the campaign of lawyers. People often asked me, 'Jarrod, what do you call 100 lawyers at the bottom of the ocean?' I did not know and they always said that it was a good start. Quite seriously, I hope that my legal training will help me in working to the best of my ability for the people of Kawana.

Apart from my professional work, I have been fortunate to be a Rotarian. When I was preparing this speech for tonight, I thought that the motto of Rotary International 'service above self', which was the guiding principle of our founder of Rotary, Paul Harris, was not a bad principle to follow as a member of parliament. I have also been lucky enough to be involved as a board director of Mercy Ships Australia. Some members might have seen the movie *Blood Diamond*, which highlights the purpose of Mercy Ships' global charity. The aim of the charity is to fund hospital ships to go to devastated countries like Sierra Leone and Liberia to help them get back on their feet and to provide an immediate and self-contained hospital in places which often have no public infrastructure. It is a relatively simple idea. Of course, the principle of hospital ships in the naval service is well established, but the profile of Mercy Ships Australia is not as high as it could be. I hope to be able to tell people more about this organisation and the life-saving work that it does when the opportunities arise. It certainly deserves public support.

Australia is by some merit a secular country, by which I mean that we do not have any state sanctioned religion. That is the very important decision taken not only by our Founding Fathers but adhered to in colonial Queensland and in other colonies before 1901. However, having said that and having made clear that I strongly support the right of people to profess their faith, or indeed profess no faith at all, I would like to lay down some of my own personal principles.

Australia is predominantly a Christian country and Queensland is predominantly a Christian state. We begin sittings of this House with a prayer which encompasses the Judeo-Christian tradition. For myself, I am not bashful about declaring that I am a practising Christian. I am an elder of the Kawana Waters Uniting Church, and worship and church activities play a major part in our life. I am sure that it will sustain me in this new role.

One of the major factors that encouraged me to run for public office was in 2006. I was involved in the Caloundra city future leaders program run by the Caloundra City Youth Partnership and now the Sunshine Coast Youth Partnership Inc. This program was inspired by former mayor Don Aldous and Mrs Heather Aldous. Don and Heather have a passion for youth on the Sunshine Coast and sought to strengthen the skills and qualities of young people. The future leaders program was based on leadership, development, career mentoring, project management, sharing wisdom and making new connections.

A major part of that program was building community spirit. We had to manage a local community project in our area, the Kawana electorate. My project was 'Know your neighbour'. I was challenged to come up with a project in my local area to bring my community together. I started to research projects to see what would benefit my local neighbourhood. Looking around my own neighbourhood, I recognised the need to know our neighbours better. We tend too much in our lives to only know of our neighbours by a simple wave bringing the wheelie bins in at night or checking the mail in the afternoon. When I was researching various projects to build neighbourhood community spirit, I began to see a sad fact occurring time and time again. I kept finding newspaper articles and media reports of fellow Australians passing away in their homes and their deaths going unnoticed for quite some time. In one article a man was found dead after dying more than eight months earlier in his house, and no-one noticed. In another instance it was six months before another man was found dead in his public housing unit. Again, no-one noticed.

Four days later police discovered the remains of an elderly woman in her home on the New South Wales Central Coast. Postal workers called the police only because she had not collected her mail for six months. No-one noticed. There were many other examples both in this state and in other parts of the country. This made me stop and think. We pride ourselves on progress in technology, support for community centres and wonderful advances in health care but, with all of this and all of our national affluence, why in 2009 are these fellow Australians spending their last days alone and even then are still not noticed?

These types of reports and articles made me not limit my community project to my street but made me extend it to my neighbourhood. I found that the community responded eagerly and approximately 150 people turned up to 'Know your Neighbour Day'. Part of the reason for this underlying problem, I think, is that in so many cases today people are so busy and simply do not have the time to get to know their

neighbours. This is particularly so with the increase of high-density apartment block housing. I found these cases so very sad. They gave me the sobering thought that just possibly if the neighbours of these people had taken the trouble to say hello on a regular basis or sit down with them and have a coffee these sad situations could have been avoided. It does not take much. One major contributor to this problem is that people increasingly feel they should go about their daily lives minding their own business. I will repeat that phrase: minding their own business. Too often that means looking the other way or crossing to the other side of the road. Too often that means seeing a crime being committed and not reporting it. Too often that means not supporting the police when they are trying to do their job.

There has been a great deal of public debate about citizenship and how people should know their rights. We have even seen public calls for some sort of bill of rights. Perhaps it is time that we balanced the ledger and emphasised the importance of people knowing their responsibilities. When I was at school, if I came home and told my parents that I had got into trouble with a teacher my parents would invariably side with the teacher. That was not because I was a particularly bad student; it was because they realised it was vital that parents give the level of support to teachers for a school to properly function. Increasingly, my friends in the teaching profession tell me that not only do children, even primary school children, stubbornly assert in some classroom situations that they have rights, but there are increasingly cases where parents will instantly side with their children and do nothing to support the school or the principal. That does nothing to engender a sense of responsibility in our next generation and it does nothing to educate the child concerned.

There is a major danger in the re-election of a government which has now been in office for more than 10 years. Because of the conventions applying to inaugural speeches I will not dwell on this, but on another occasion I will have something to say about the growth in bureaucracy and red tape and how significant a factor that was in the slowness of the response to the devastating oil spill on the Sunshine Coast.

I will also have more to say about another symptom of a government which has been in office for a long time. That is the increased propensity for local communities not to be consulted about major infrastructure developments which affect them or at least to get only lip-service consultation. The Traveston Dam, fast-paced greenfield site developments, the taking of the Sunshine Coast water and forced council amalgamations are to name but a few. Now is not the time to delve into these issues, but they are just some of the important matters that I look forward to raising in this House and on which I intend to hold the government to account.

The member for Buderim in his first speech in 2006 referred to the health system as being a basket case. Unfortunately, not much has changed since 2006. We have serious health shortfalls on the Sunshine Coast. I am, however, looking forward to the government building the Sunshine Coast University Hospital as promised by 2014—a greatly needed piece of infrastructure; an asset for the Sunshine Coast.

Our Westminster system works well under the authority of a constitutional monarchy with its established web of reserve powers and checks and balances. But a Westminster system also needs an opposition which probes and scrutinises relentlessly if necessary. Under the new Leader of the Liberal National Party, with his newly invigorated team, I look forward to contributing wholeheartedly to that vital task.

The journey to this parliament is not an easy one and, as members would understand, a journey that cannot be taken without assistance and support. Many people assisted me in my successful campaign. I would like to acknowledge those who have made a profound contribution to my campaign. En bloc I would like to thank my entire campaign team and the campaign helpers, for I know that without you and your tireless efforts over the last six months of our local campaign I would not be standing in this House as the member for Kawana. To my state colleagues on the Sunshine Coast, thank you.

I must today, however, pay particular tribute to my campaign director, Mrs Carol Humphries, and my assistant campaign director, Mrs Elizabeth Worthington. Carol and Elizabeth ran a campaign with the utmost professionalism and style and endeavoured to put up with my generation Y campaign thoughts and enthusiasm.

I thanked my wife, Sally, earlier in this inaugural speech and I must now express from the bottom of my heart my thanks to my parents, Pieter and Christine Bleijie. I recall during the election campaign a regular assertion being made that by choosing the legal profession as a career, as I had, and being a practising lawyer I must have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth. This assertion is wrong and those close to me know that I had a very modest upbringing.

I was born in Griffith, New South Wales. My father was a fuel tank driver and my mother had one of the most important and difficult jobs in the whole world—being a full-time mum. My family and extended family are very close. So when my Uncle Lindsay Cooper met with the late Ken Maynard, the artist of one of Australia's most famous landmarks—the Ettamogah Pub—he told Ken that he had the vision and

determination to transform the cartoon into a reality and build Australia's most famous pub. We followed Uncle Coop to Albury where he built, owned and operated the first Ettamogah Pub.

Following the success of the Ettamogah Pub in Albury, my family moved to Queensland in 1989 where again Uncle Coop continued the dream and completed the Ettamogah Pub on the Sunshine Coast. Shortly after that my parents opened a local camping store in Caloundra where I often helped on the weekends and when I was not serving customers at KFC.

My parents, although enjoying politics, were never involved in any party politics and when my interest in politics arose they were not members of any political party. They had a set of ideas, beliefs and values that they wanted to impart to me, my brother, Linden, who serves in the Australian Army, and my sister, Jessica, who is working abroad in business marketing. I want to thank my mother and father for the support and encouragement they have given me over 27 years. They have helped shape the person that I am today, the values that I hold dear and the values that I now teach my daughters. They taught me to believe in myself, to strive for excellence, to work hard, to assist the needy and to develop my own set of values but never shy away from good, old-fashioned values, manners, responsibilities and obligations. These were imparted to me by my parents, my Nanna Joan and my grandparents Jacobus and Myra. I might add that I believe that we have a lot to learn from our grandparents' generation in terms of self-respect and owning up to our responsibilities and obligations as a society and the shift away from the blame game that we often play these days.

This Saturday, 25 April, is of course Anzac Day. To the diggers of the past and the present I would like to pay tribute to the dedication you continually show when serving this country and the manner in which you conduct yourselves in battles abroad.

As I stated earlier, I was a lawyer prior to entering parliament. I would like to thank the partners of Sajen Legal, Mr Tony Sowden and Mr Kyle Kimball, for the encouragement and personal support they afforded me when I decided to contest the seat of Kawana. They are articulate lawyers and have provided me with many of the tools that I feel will hold me in good stead in this House.

I draw much of my political inspiration from Sir Robert Gordon Menzies. He stated—

What may be before us we do not know, nor how long the journey. But this we do know, that Truth is our companion on that journey; that Truth is with us in the battle, and that Truth must win.

Members may be aware that this quote was made by Sir Robert Menzies in his 1939 speech advising that Australia was now at war. However, in the context of our roles and responsibilities in this House the words make sense, and I have never forgotten to apply them in every aspect of my life, and this will hold true to my role in this House.

I commit now, whether my time in this parliament is long or short, to work hard for my constituents, to hold the government to account, to contribute constructively to debate in this place and in committees, and to hope that I am able to make a contribution to the betterment of our state, and to the true welfare of the people of Queensland.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!