



Speech by

Trevor Watts

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH

Hansard Wednesday, 30 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr WATTS** (Toowoomba North—LNP) (7.52 pm): Representing the constituents of an electorate is indeed a privilege and a humbling experience. Accordingly, I take my very first opportunity to speak in this place to record that now I am the servant of the people of Toowoomba North. I will work hard every single day to make sure they are represented to the best of my abilities as we, the LNP government, shape the future of Queensland and transform this state into the economic powerhouse of Australia.

It is with great pleasure that I speak in support of the motion for the adoption of the address-in-reply. As the newly elected member for Toowoomba North, I pledge my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, to her representative Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland and to this parliament. I congratulate Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II on her diamond jubilee. It is with fond memories of my distant childhood that I remember the street parties of the silver jubilee. I look forward to creating similar memories for my children this year. I join with my colleagues in congratulating Madam Speaker on her appointment. I thank her for the privilege extended to myself in allowing me to deputise for her as required.

I stand here today conscious of the honour the people of Toowoomba North have bestowed on me by electing me as their representative in this parliament, a place established by Queen Victoria to ensure the people of Queensland have a voice in shaping their destiny. With this honour and this privilege comes great responsibility. I will endeavour to use wisely my time in this place and help build a Queensland that future generations will be proud to call home.

I did not arrive in this place without the help and guidance of many people over many generations. I pay tribute to my grandma, Kate Watts, for being the 10 pound pom who risked everything she had to come to these distant shores. She came with hope in her heart but, like so many of her generation, had suffered the tragedies that war brings. I pay tribute to the next generation: my mother, Beryl Watts, for teaching me to be independent and self-reliant and to my father, Bill Watts, for ensuring I knew that giving up was not an option. Even as cancer raged through his body, his dying words to me were, 'Fight, fight!' Thank you, dad, and know that I will never give up on any fight. I pay tribute to my step-dad, Dave Mason, who brought me up as his own son, ensuring that I knew that hard work was to be rewarded, that traditions must be respected and that families grow strong with love.

In my own generation, I pay my deepest tribute to my wife, Susan, who changed her whole life and moved continents so that we could be together, leaving all she knew and loved to build a life with me in Queensland. I have known my wife since I was 12 years old and if I was a wiser man we would have had more years together. To the next generation, the children who make my family complete, Brianna, Shannon, Mason and Jordan: I thank you for all your love and support. I love you all very much and you make me very proud in all you do and achieve. More than that, you make me proud by simply being you. I thank my family for making sandwiches, wearing my T-shirts and for years driving around with me in a car that has my name and face plastered all over it. I know how embarrassed the children have been at the school pick-up gates. Finally, and privately, I say thank you to my God for watching over my life, especially through a near-fatal accident last year and for giving me the strength to meet life's challenges.

My congratulations go to the Hon. Lawrence Springborg for the vision and resolve demonstrated in uniting the two great voices of the conservative parties of Queensland into the one Liberal National Party. That vision formed the keystone of our result on 24 March. To the Premier, the Hon. Campbell Newman: thank you for your leadership and support. Now the children and grandchildren of Queensland have a brighter future and I will enthusiastically take on all challenges in our way to secure that brighter future. Premier, please pass on my heartfelt thanks and admiration to your wife and family for enduring the pain of the disgraceful personal campaign that a desperate Labor Party ran against you and your family. The people of Queensland deserve better and they voted accordingly.

As Mrs Thatcher once said, the problem with Socialist governments is that they eventually run out of other people's money. Labor loves spending other people's money. In government, the members opposite spent all the money in the Queensland Treasury and then planned to borrow \$85 billion more of overseas people's money in pursuit of a Socialist utopia for Queensland. Such waste! Such crippling debt! Every day millions of dollars were sent overseas just to pay the interest on the state's credit card. I am left in my office, explaining to a mother of a high-needs disabled child why there is no money left in the state budget for her desperate needs. Labor's waste, mismanagement and desire for debt has left the most vulnerable in our society exposed and suffering. It is left to us, the LNP government, to repair the damage of Labor's waste and mismanagement.

The awesome responsibility of charting Queensland out of Labor's financial mess falls to the Treasurer, the Hon. Tim Nicholls. My congratulations to you. We are confident in your ability to pull us out of this downward spiral left to us by Labor. Families, pensioners, small and large businesses and all of Queensland are looking to you. I am confident that history will show you were an outstanding choice for the job.

It will come as no surprise to those present to hear that I am a proud member of the LNP. Accordingly, I would like to thank so many of my local branch who are proud LNP members—people like Jeanie Penrose, Bev and Bevan Kahler, and John Lutvey who have watched their beloved regional Queensland neglected by the previous government but who still held strong for 20 years, making sure the home fires kept burning so this day would be possible.

Some like Cameron Hagan, Justin McGovern and Bec Williams brought the enthusiasm of youth to the campaign, igniting the flame of belief that a victory was possible. To my whole campaign team, volunteers, workers and booth captains, especially John White, Dave Nicholls, David van Gend, Mike Hogan, Glennis Batten, Jim Curtis, Jim Taylor, Dellys Kelly, the Goodwin and Birtchly families and Isaac Moody: I say thank you to you all. Without your unselfish effort this day would not be possible.

To all the team at LNP HQ and particularly Bruce McIver, Barry O'Sullivan, Pat Weir and the hardworking Mitch Redford: thank you for the late nights and the wise counsel. Your steely resolve and belief in me is much appreciated. To the Hon. Ian Macfarlane, federal member for Groom, and the Hon. Mike Horan, former member for Toowoomba South: I thank you for your support and wise counsel also.

A final thank you must go to my friend Barnaby Joyce, who said to me before I joined the party as I was enthusiastically lobbying him on an issue, 'Well, what are you going to do about it? It's time to put up or shut up.' Well, Barnaby, I have put up and I am probably never going to shut up about the issues that affect my electorate.

Let me assure the people of Toowoomba North that I am part of a united LNP government that is focused on them. We will lower their families' cost of living by cutting waste; we will deliver better infrastructure and planning; we will revitalise our front-line services; we will build the four pillars of the Queensland economy; and, most importantly, we will be accountable in government. We do this because the people of Toowoomba and Queensland deserve nothing less and because I gave them my word that we would.

Toowoomba sits atop the Great Dividing Range and was one of the 16 original electorates of the Queensland parliament. It is where the city meets the country, and I have called the Garden City home for over 20 years. I represent this proud regional city with my friend and colleague the Hon. John McVeigh. We are both graduates of the University of Southern Queensland, although the minister will always call it the DDIAE.

The people who have chosen me to serve them live in the north of our city. For over 150 years they have at different times chosen from all colours of the political spectrum in their search to find a representative who will ensure their wants, needs, desires and dreams are heard in this place and action is taken to deliver on them. In the very first parliament in Queensland the electorate of Drayton and Toowoomba was represented by another Mr Watts—the Hon. John Watts to be precise. One hundred and fifty-two years later the Queensland parliament and Toowoomba have elected their second Mr Watts. The Hon. John Watts and I share more than just the name, but more on that later.

The electorate of Toowoomba North was formed in 1972 and it has been a swinging seat. It was originally won by Labor and then in 1974 the Liberals won the seat. In 1983 the Nationals, with Labor

taking it back in 1989. Then Graham Healy won it for the National Party in 1992, followed by Kerry Shine for Labor in 2001. On 24 March the people of Toowoomba North chose me to represent them in the 54th Parliament, and I thank them. It has been a long road for me to earn their trust and get to this place. After losing a preselection in 2005 and being beaten in the 2009 state election, I have tasted defeat, and I hope that means my children can see me living my father's advice to never give up fighting for what you believe in.

Some whom I am now represent are supporters of the previous Labor member. To those people I say: be assured that I will work for all in the electorate. The previous member served the electorate well but he was part of a government that lurched increasingly left and neglected regional Queensland. I wish Kerry Shine well and thank him sincerely for his hard work and service to the people of Toowoomba North.

The Toowoomba North electorate has inside its borders the CBD of Toowoomba, two private hospitals, one police station, two ambulance stations, a TAFE college, 19 primary schools of which 11 are private, eight secondary schools of which seven are private, the Toowoomba Turf Club, the airport and much more. The western boundary of the electorate is the industrial and manufacturing hub of Toowoomba. The eastern boundary is the Great Dividing Range. The southern boundary follows the Warrego Highway, which shamelessly cuts through the heart of our town. The northern boundary is home to the Cabarlah Army barracks. This is a diverse electorate both geographically and socially, and I represent some of Queensland's wealthiest people and some of its most disadvantaged.

Unlike my honourable counterpart in the south of the city, I was not born or brought up in Toowoomba. I was not even born or brought up in Queensland. This gives me a unique perspective on my home town and a desire to build on the great foundation laid by past generations whilst maintaining the character and nature of the town I love. I was born in Essex, England, to an Australian dad and an English mum. I grew up in and around London and spent much of my time wondering why my dad clipped me on the ear if I looked happy when Botham hit a four off of Lilley. Dad loved Lilley. In my teens I left England to start my around-the-world adventure. But at 44 I am still only half way around the world because I fell in love with Queensland and stayed.

Along the way, at age 17 I found myself in Hong Kong, where I played basketball for the South China Athletic Association. I got to travel all over Asia as the Asian tiger economies exploded. I have seen the pace at which a growing economy builds productive infrastructure. I have seen the economic power of well-managed government and business investment and all it has achieved for the people of that region. And let me assure you that red tape, mindless regulation, ever-increasing taxes and knee-jerk planning endured by Queenslanders under Labor is not the way to manage an economy.

I marvelled as I watched communist China lower the bamboo curtain and set itself on a development path that still helps drive the Queensland economy today. There were also weaknesses in the Asian model. I got to see up close what happens when a society forgets to look after its oldest citizens and the most vulnerable—something we in Queensland must never let happen.

The first thing that drew me to Queensland was Expo '88, which showed me all the state had to offer. Whilst I was on that first trip I visited a friend in Springsure. I saw the contrast of the city and the country and I knew then that I wanted to leave Hong Kong and make my future in Queensland. I was sure Queensland was the place to build a life and raise a family—and I know now that my decision was the right one.

The Confucius philosophy of my Chinese friends had shown me that education was the key to a better future, and I saw my friends sacrifice everything just to put one child through university. The high value they placed on study ultimately inspired me to enrol at the University of Southern Queensland and start my life in Toowoomba. The rest is history.

In preparing this speech some advised me not to overreach and say things that might be used against me in future years by my opponents. They said I should choose my words carefully so as not to offend, overpromise or set myself up for later failure. But this is not my nature. I am cut from the same cloth as those who chose our parliamentary Latin motto—*audax at fidelis*, 'bold but faithful'. So, yes, I will be faithful to the people of Toowoomba North and regional Queensland who put me here, but I will also be bold in my vision and in my pursuit of the interests of my region.

So here is some of that vision—bold dreams. As I start my time of service to the people of Toowoomba, I dream of a time of fast commuter trains and double-stacked container trains heading down the range. I dream of an airport that can land commercial jets, an inland port at Charlton Wellcamp and a public transport service to be proud of. I dream of a thriving, revitalised CBD, a university that leads the world in speciality areas of research, an entertainment centre that can host large numbers of people and a stadium filled by Toowoomba based national sporting teams.

I can dream of many things that my constituents would love to achieve to add to the great lifestyle we have living on top of the Great Dividing Range. I will work hard to make some of these dreams a reality, but, to be honest, there is one thing the people of Toowoomba North have been dreaming of for far too long, and this one thing will be my single greatest priority. Honourable members, I have heard many of you

make a case for infrastructure that is overdue in your electorates. None have waited as long as the people of Toowoomba.

Mr Deputy Premier and Minister for State Development, Infrastructure and Planning, I did not forget you earlier in my speech and I congratulate you on your appointment. However, I wanted you to hear the words of the Hon. John Watts, the very first member for Toowoomba, echoed down the generations, first spoken 152 years ago and still relevant today. In the maiden speech of John Watts made on 19 June 1860, the honourable member called attention to the importance of attending to the condition of the road on the Toowoomba range. The honourable member went on to show that an unfair proportion of public money was spent on the Ipswich and Brisbane roads as compared to the main range, although the latter was the chief corridor of wealth. The Hon. John Watts noted that all of the toll money collected from 1858 to 1860 on the Toowoomba range had been kept by the New South Wales government.

For 152 years men by the name of Watts have called for a range crossing of a standard equal to other roads in Queensland. If I may speak for the late John Watts, we both still share a desire to see our town get a road that allows the wealth of Toowoomba and the Western Downs to flow freely and efficiently to the capital. Mr Deputy Premier, I know that you will work hard to build the business case and finally prise Queensland's fair share of money from the clutches of the federal government to deliver this road. It is time. It is surely Toowoomba's turn. Mr Deputy Premier, remember my dad's dying words to his son, 'Fight, fight.' This is one fight I will not give up on for the people of Toowoomba. Thank you and God bless.