



Speech by

Mr BRUCE LAMING
MEMBER FOR MOOLOOLAH

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr LAMING (Mooloolah—LP) (1.10 a.m.): Firstly, Mr Speaker, I join other members in congratulating you on being elected as Speaker. It is a very important position, and I am sure that you will conduct yourself very well. Together with other members, I commend the former member for Nicklin, who did a very good job in the Speaker's chair. I worked closely with him and found him very good to work with. I also congratulate the member for Woodridge who, I understand, will soon be appointed as the Chairman of Committees. I am sure that he will support you ably in that position. I also commend the work of the Clerk of the Parliament and his clerks assisting, who do a very professional job regardless of which side members sit on in this Chamber. They are to be commended.

I congratulate all new members of all political parties. Ours is a very important job. None of us knows how long we are going to be here, and when we are here it is time to do those things that we set out to do. It is interesting to listen to the maiden speeches of the new members. I suggest to those members that they revisit their maiden speeches if they are re-elected to see whether they were able to achieve some of the things that they set out to do in their maiden speeches. It is very important to do that, because it does remind us about what we are here for.

I also congratulate those members who have been returned to the Parliament. They were obviously regarded by their electors as doing a good job both here in the Parliament and in their electorates. Of course, there are members from both sides of the House who were not returned to the Parliament. Those members, too, should be acknowledged for the work that they did in their electorates and in the Chamber. Some members lose their seats through no fault of their own; the tide was going one way or the other. Nevertheless, those members contributed greatly to the process in their electorates and in this Chamber.

Of course, I am rising to oppose the motion of confidence in the Beattie Government. By way of comparison with this Government, one has only to look at some of the things that the former coalition Government had to address when it came to power after the Mundingburra by-election in 1996. I shall mention just a few of those things. One of them was the abolition of the tolls on the Sunshine Motorway. That had been a very unjust burden on the people of the Sunshine Coast for a long time. I am one of the members who are very proud to say that that was one of the things that should have been done a long time ago.

Mr Davidson: Hear, hear!

Mr LAMING: I note the support of the member for Noosa.

I also commend the former Minister for Transport, the member for Gregory, for the great job that he did right throughout the Transport and Main Roads portfolio. He was an excellent Minister, and he is just one example of the sort of Minister we had in our coalition Government. I believe that this incoming Government is going to find great difficulty in emulating the work of that former Minister.

I turn now to the work that was done by the former Attorney-General, the member for Indooroopilly. It is good to see him in the Chamber. Law and order is a very big issue. It has been a big issue for a long time, and it has to be addressed on a number of fronts, not only on the legal side but also on the police side, which I will mention directly. The former Attorney-General did an excellent job despite a lot of criticism, particularly from the then Opposition. The Criminal Code had to be reworked completely. The Penalties and Sentences Act and the Juvenile Justice Act contained some major flaws

and weaknesses, which were addressed by the member for Indooroopilly. A number of very fundamental things had to be done. I hope that this incoming Government does not set about rolling back some of the good things that were done by the coalition Government in that particular regard.

I have mentioned police numbers. We had the ridiculous situation in which police numbers decreased under the previous Labor Government. That is one of the major reasons why I would have difficulty in supporting a motion of confidence in a Labor Government. Heaven forbid that it should even consider going back to that sort of record whereby police numbers in this State decreased. The numbers are already very low on a national scale. For example, police numbers in the North Coast Region went from 726 in 1996 to 932 in 1998. The Sunshine Coast—or the North Coast Region, to give it its correct title—is one particular region that has never been well served with police numbers. This problem was starting to be addressed. I commend the good work done by the former Police Minister, the member for Crows Nest. He did an excellent job as a Police Minister in this State in many fields, not the least of which was getting those police numbers up and the opening of the new police academy in Townsville. I am anticipating another 40 new officers for the North Coast Region in August. That was the plan. I certainly hope that they are still forthcoming and that they continue to be forthcoming.

We do need more police in Queensland. We particularly need police in a couple of regions, namely, the Gold Coast and the Sunshine Coast. There is a police staffing allocation model. I do not mind telling this Parliament—I said it when I sat on the other side of the Chamber and I will say it on this side of the Chamber—that the police staffing allocation model that was brought in during the Goss years is flawed. It is better than having no model to work on, but it is flawed. It does not cater adequately for the fast-growing regions of the Sunshine Coast and the Gold Coast. It should be examined—not on the inputs but on the outputs and on how it actually provides police numbers around Queensland. It needs to be examined to make sure that those particular fast-growing regions are adequately handled.

I also wish to comment on ambulance staff numbers. Once again, the Sunshine Coast received a good boost of numbers. I am sure that it was not the only district that received extra ambulance staff. Stations in my electorate of Mooloolah, namely those at Buderim and Kawana, received a big boost in staff numbers. I also commend the former Minister for Emergency Services, the member for Southport, for the great job that he did in his roles as Emergency Services Minister and Minister for Sport.

While mentioning sport, I should also mention the funds that went to the Sunshine Coast University for the building—and it commenced only a couple of weeks ago—of a synthetic international-standard track at the university, which will be a drawcard for people coming from overseas to train prior to the Olympics. The former Minister for Sport in the coalition Government did an excellent job. The incoming Government will have great difficulty emulating the efforts of that particular Minister, too.

I remind honourable members on both sides of the House of the cessation of the Seniors Card discount for motor vehicle registrations, which was suspended by the Goss Government in 1994, I believe. We had the ridiculous situation in which we had two classes of citizens: those who received their senior citizens cards after June 1994 and who did not get a discount on their registration for their motor vehicles, and those who got it beforehand. We addressed that issue. I commend the Treasurer, the member for Caloundra, who will be remembered as one of the great Treasurers in Queensland. She did a big job to keep this State financially in the black and operating very well. Hers was one of the portfolios that were badly handled by the previous Labor Government. It is going to be very interesting to see whether some of those things remain in place, such as the registration discounts for seniors and the cutting of registration costs for vessels—boats—which were to be reduced by 50%. We will see whether they come to pass.

I noticed that it was stated in the Governor's Speech that there would be no new taxes and charges. I do not believe that in that speech there was any suggestion that some taxes would not be increased. We will see whether that comes to pass in the new Budget to be brought down in September. Those are just a few examples that affect my electorate and the good work done by the coalition Government.

Labor has proven time and again that it is unable to provide sound and responsible Government for Queensland as evidenced by its numerous policy failures, some of which I have already mentioned. I will outline a few of those failures in the Housing portfolio, which I have been given the opportunity to shadow. I commend the former Minister, the member for Moggill, who did an excellent job in that portfolio. I will start with the HOME Scheme, a financially flawed home-lending package that has seen hundreds of hardworking people who had a dream of buying their own home with a little help from the Government end up with not a dream but a nightmare. However, it is not just a simple matter of the \$17.3m of taxpayers' money that has been written off under the HOME Scheme; that figure also represents the despair, anguish and heartache of the 1,100 battling Queenslanders who have seen their aspirations, hopes and dreams repossessed along with their homes. HOME was marketed as Home Ownership Made Easy, but as every member on this side of the House knows, it stands for home ownership mismanaged entirely.

If the HOME Scheme was not damaging enough to the community, what about the number of subcontractors who were left out of pocket by the poor contractual management practices of Labor? For example, let us consider the financial years between 1991 and 1996 under Labor in the former Departments of Administrative Services and Housing, Local Government and Planning, where there were no fewer than 39 contractor failures or no fewer than 146 contracts worth a total of \$59.25m. That was \$59.25m ripped out of the pockets and mouths of hardworking and deserving subcontractors.

One does not have to go far to find other examples of Labor's poor management. One has only to look at the public housing system. Labor oversaw a tenancy management system that tolerated and even harboured tenants who not only damaged the dwellings that they occupied but also destroyed the communities of which they were supposed to be members. That went on unabated. I think this is also an appropriate moment to examine some of the other anomalies in their system. For example, what about the financial eligibility criteria? Irrespective of the size or the composition of the family unit, the income threshold was \$55,000. It did not matter whether prospective tenants were an employed couple with four children receiving social security payments or a single public servant on an AO6 salary level; they were equally eligible for public housing. During Labor's last stint in Government, we witnessed long waiting lists for public housing and an increase in the number of rental accounts in arrears. I suppose that I should not be overly critical of Labor's management of those issues when it was clear to any rational person that there was a total absence of it.

Thankfully for Queensland, the coalition returned to Government just in time to turn those problems around and get the State back on track. We did that by addressing the policy failings of the then Opposition by implementing sound and reasonable policies. That is a fundamental characteristic of coalition Governments here in Queensland. We addressed the problems associated with public housing by introducing tougher new tenancy management practices that stated clearly to tenants that, if they did not pay, they did not stay; if they unreasonably disturbed their neighbours, they could find new neighbours without the Government's assistance; and if they were irresponsible, the Government would no longer have a responsibility to provide them with housing.

Through tighter eligibility criteria and the introduction of the priority housing system, the coalition also targeted assistance at those Queenslanders in most need. Along with addressing those issues, the coalition also looked ahead to the ever-growing issue of an ageing society. Unlike Labor's approach of just building more three-bedroom detached houses, the coalition addressed the needs of older Queenslanders by realigning the portfolio through strategic asset sales of surplus detached housing under a construction program geared to include more seniors units and one and two-bedroom apartments. Under the coalition, Queenslanders witnessed a reduction in the public housing wait list down from 29,580 applicants in March 1996 to 24,070 in December 1997. The coalition Government also addressed the social issues associated with high densities of public housing through urban renewal programs, the most significant of those being in the suburb of Inala. The \$100m project titled "Inala—A New Beginning" is the largest urban renewal project ever undertaken in Queensland. Through the involvement of the private sector and the local community, that project will see the revitalising of the entire suburb.

However, the public housing system was not the only issue neglected by the previous Labor Government. Another issue was the security of payment for subcontractors and suppliers involved in the building industry. Labor had six years to address that issue but failed in its duty to do so. The coalition Government, however, held a commission of inquiry, consulted extensively with the major stakeholders and developed a whole-of-industry strategy to address the issue, which, I should remind members opposite, has the full support of the key industry stakeholders. Prior to the last election, the coalition also introduced an amendment Bill before this House detailing significant amendments to the Subcontractors' Charges Act—which is one of the two Acts covering the security of payment issue—in the process of drafting amendments to the Building Services Authority legislation.

During our 27 months in Government, the coalition had a number of other significant achievements, such as the introduction of the Home Safe Program, a \$3m Statewide initiative that provides additional security for seniors in public housing dwellings located in high crime areas. What about the increased funding and full Statewide expansion of the Home Assist and Home Secure programs, which provide for basic household services for seniors living in private accommodation? One should not forget our commitment to people requiring disability housing, a commitment that saw more than twice the number of people with a disability housed in 1996-97 than those housed in the previous financial year. That commitment was recognised by a prestigious award.

Because of the capacity of Mr Borbidge and the coalition Government, Queensland was powering ahead and was on course to be a major economic player within the Asia-Pacific region. However, with the member for Brisbane Central at the helm, I believe that Queensland has become the SS Minnow, reversed course and is heading directly for Gilligan's Island. In conclusion, I have absolutely no confidence in the Labor Government led by the member for Brisbane Central.
