



Speech by

**GARY FENLON**

**MEMBER FOR GREENSLOPES**

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Hansard 5 August 1998

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mr FENLON** (Greenslopes—ALP) (3.05 p.m.): I rise in reply to the Speech by the Governor of Queensland, His Excellency Major General Peter Arnison, AO, to the Legislative Assembly in this the first session of the 49th Parliament. In doing so, I wish to thank the constituents of the Greenslopes electorate who have shown their support for me in returning me to this Parliament as their representative. By returning to this Parliament after an absence of three years, I now belong to a very small group of members since the inception of this Parliament who have left by way of a defeat at a general election only to return by virtue of a successful candidacy at a later election.

Therefore, this speech is not a maiden speech but honourable members may wish to see this as a reincarnation speech. Of course, reincarnation is the notion of a person dying only to be recreated in a new and different form. I certainly feel that the experience I have enjoyed in the past three years guarantees that I have returned in a new and different form and that in this form I hope to be able to provide a strong contribution to this Parliament and an effective representation of the citizens of the Greenslopes electorate.

Mr Deputy Speaker, before referring to a range of issues that pertain to the Greenslopes electorate and other matters of Government policy, I wish to convey my congratulations to you and Mr Speaker. I am very aware of how well Mr Speaker has served the good citizens of Redcliffe for the past nine years. It is with the same confidence that I convey these congratulations, as I am sure that he will serve this Parliament and the people of Queensland with similar diligence and decorum. The role of Mr Deputy Speaker and the Speaker in this Parliament is important not only in terms of the status of Speaker attaching to any particular Parliament but also it has a more extraordinary importance attached to it at this point in history. I refer to the exceptional interest now shown by the public in the behaviour of politicians in particular and the standard and conduct of the Parliament in general. In common with other members of Parliament who in the past year have been active in their electorates and speaking to constituents on a daily basis, I have been listening carefully to what constituents have said about their perception of the Parliament and their expectations of it. It is very clear that there is a great deal of antagonism towards what the public perceive as very inappropriate behaviour and standards.

This is a perception that is certainly generated and assisted by the media and, indeed, blame must be attributed to current and past members of this and other Parliaments. It is now very heartening that this concern has been recognised and that there is a clear intention of this Government to confront this issue and rectify it. Just as blame should be apportioned to politicians and the media generally, the responsibility for rectifying the situation should be borne also by a range of individuals and establishments. Therefore, I call upon the media, other political commentators, academics and writers to make some attempt at conveying to the public what duties members of the Legislative Assembly fulfil and, in particular, the degree to which honourable members of this Legislative Assembly undertake a significant amount of work on a cooperative and collective basis. Indeed it is that cooperative approach to addressing the problems confronting the State that the community now demands.

For example, the public does not have any significant understanding of the degree to which members work together on the various committees of this Parliament. As honourable members are aware, when Parliament is sitting members of this Parliament work together on a daily basis over

sandwiches and tea to deal cooperatively with the business of committees, such as the Parliamentary Criminal Justice Committee, the ethics committee or indeed the committee which I have been appointed as chair, that is, the Legal, Constitutional and Administrative Review Committee. Members then meet when Parliament is not in session and also travel on various inspections together. In my experience, this work is undertaken very seriously and diligently, and it is a credit to honourable members that a significant proportion of the work is completed with the unanimous agreement of the committee members. These recommendations are referred to the Parliament and then often reach the point of legislation and implementation, whatever the colour of the Government of the day.

There is much to be done indeed in terms of turning this perception around, but it is for the good of society that the respect for and status of the Parliament and politicians is elevated. It must lead to a more open society and a society in which more people trust and participate in the political processes. I therefore commend the Premier, Peter Beattie, for taking the initial steps in attempting to rectify the situation by way of the tightening of various standards and practices. The Premier has indeed moved already to change the Standing Orders to give the Speaker greater flexibility in the control of the Parliament, and a sound code of practice and standards for Ministers are to be adhered to.

It is a great pleasure to be returned to this Parliament and to a situation where I can work for my local community on a full-time basis. While I have continued to work in the local community of the Greenslopes electorate over the past three years, it has been a frustrating time in terms of my capacity to bring about real change, and this was made even more difficult by the coalition being in Government. I have been tackling the local issues, the issues that affect citizens in the Greenslopes electorate, over the past three years, and now I know that I can really bring about change.

I now turn to some of these local issues upon which I will be concentrating to bring about change that will really benefit local citizens. I turn first to local policing. Prior to the 13 June election, we saw a desperate coalition Government attempting to woo voters in any way it thought possible. In its desperation, prior to the election it announced the construction of a single large police headquarters on the south side. It was only through the efforts of me and the honourable member for Chatsworth that the small print was finally revealed. That small print showed that this police station construction was at the cost of the closure of smaller police stations, at least Coorparoo and Camp Hill.

This was the start of the so-called clustering arrangement proposal for the south side. This clustering arrangement would mean a deterioration in the standard of community policing that our community has enjoyed. It would mean that the close relationship built between individual police stations and neighbourhood watches would be undermined. It would mean that there would be the possibility of rationalising police services such that there may indeed be fewer police provided for an entire area than were hitherto provided. It would also mean longer response times as the suburbs would have to share officers with a much wider area. As far as I am concerned, this concept is not on and there are better ways to spend taxpayers' money.

My priority for spending taxpayers' money on policing will be in fulfilling exactly what constituents have asked me over the past three years to achieve. That is, people want to see police on the streets—police cars driving down their street and police officers on foot or on bicycles in their neighbourhoods, with a high level of visibility. They want police who know their local neighbourhood and are part of it on a daily basis. Whatever funding we have available for police in future will be directed towards these ends and towards ensuring that police have adequate facilities in terms of vehicles and other equipment to assist them to work very closely with their local communities.

The Coorparoo TAFE college has turned into an obscene waste and a farce. Increasingly over the past three years, the coalition Government downgraded the TAFE college to a point where it was purely a shopfront pretence of an operation. This was detailed in a statement made this morning by the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations. He revealed the very substantial downgrading in funding suffered by TAFE over the past three years.

The high farce at the college reached a point last year where students turned up at the college library to find a sign that read "Sorry, library closed". All of the books were removed from the library and progressively ever since then so have the teachers and various courses. I toured the facility last week and I was absolutely appalled by the chronic waste and degradation of the facilities. TAFE has been removing not only the books and the courses but also other equipment gradually, gutting any semblance of a viable operation at the TAFE college.

There are many rooms, offices and commercial kitchens sitting completely idle for most of the day, and approaches by members of the public to use those facilities have been treated with indifference and a deliberate bureaucratic run-around in order to discourage further public interest in the facility. It has been a dog-in-the-manger approach to disguise the coalition Government's real intention to sell off the facility. But now there is hope. At a meeting of the shadow Cabinet held at the TAFE campus last year, in the historic Queen Alexandra Home building, I was able to secure an undertaking of \$1.5m to rebuild the Coorparoo TAFE campus and ensure that it provides a service to the local

community and does not sit idle. I have invited the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations to the campus, where I hope announcements may soon be made about progressing these undertakings.

Residents of the southern suburbs which I represent have also seen their local services declining in a variety of other spheres. They have seen both the State and Federal Governments walking away from service delivery through a drive toward economic rationalism and a callous approach to budget management. This has meant, for example, the closure of the local Medicare office at Coorparoo while, just 100 metres up the road, the Federal member for Griffith spends as much money to open a new electorate office. These are strange priorities indeed.

A real manifestation of this withdrawal from service delivery has been the failure by Energex to properly maintain and replace power poles. While the suburbs I represent clearly are apparently well suited by way of soil type to the habitation of white ants, this is no reason to walk away and ignore the safety requirements of the local community. Over the past six months at least, many residents have brought to my attention specific examples of power poles that are completely rotten and infested with white ants.

While this is serious in its own right, what is more serious is the fact that complaints made by citizens to Energex about these particular examples were completely ignored. Meanwhile, the Energex logo has been rolled out with great fanfare and spending, without any concern for the real safety issues of the day. In fact, in one instance the power pole was directly adjacent to a swimming pool that was being used by children on a regular basis. Had the pole fallen there, it could have been a complete disaster. I am still not happy with the approach taken by Energex in simply putting a steel sleeve around the bottom of that particular pole. It is just not good enough.

Right now I could give members examples of a number of other poles which have been the subject of complaints by citizens—power poles which crumble at the touch of the hand and which to any cursory inspection are a complete disgrace. I will not rest until this situation is rectified. Indeed, my complaint was well vindicated by a very unfortunate incident only a few months ago when, without warning, one such power pole on Logan Road snapped off and fell on a truck. It was verified as being riddled with white ants. Fortunately, on this occasion nobody was hurt, but it certainly could have been a disaster. I am grateful that the Minister for Mines and Energy has agreed to visit the electorate in the near future and to embark on a proper maintenance program.

I turn now to the matter of education in our local schools. Here I must confess to having progressed my own education very substantially over the past three years. Not only has my daughter started school and progressed to Year 3; I have become president of a P & C and for the first time used my teacher registration to teach at secondary school level. Honourable members can imagine some of the reactions I received lining up for my first day of secondary school teaching at the age of 41. Yes, I was certainly the one getting the education on that occasion.

I believe that the insights I have gained have equipped me well to provide some critical insights into the State education system, and I hope to make some further contribution in that respect as part of the policy committee of the Minister for Education. I am grateful that the understanding I have gained in relation to the education system has at least allowed me to appreciate the precipice to which the education system was heading under the coalition's so-called Leading Schools proposal. Leading Schools was a complete disaster, and I shudder to think of the state of our education system had it been allowed to move further down that road.

In short, the Leading Schools proposal was creating an uneven and unbalanced system—a system that allowed the Government to walk away and abrogate its responsibility with respect to the delivery of education services. In the short time during which the Leading Schools proposal was being implemented, the inequities that were being created were startling. In my electorate there was only one Band 8 and upwards school which had applied for and been admitted to the Leading Schools scheme. The remainder were not admitted and were not granted any additional funding in the current term. The inequities did not end there, as there are also examples of schools in the electorate that are high Band 7 schools which are clearly as deserving of additional funding but which receive nothing under the Leading Schools program.

We can now see the effort required by the Honourable Minister for Education in attempting to rectify these anomalies and inequities by attempting to redirect the funding again on an equitable basis. We are indeed fortunate that the coalition did not have longer in Government to fully implement this disastrous exercise. I am not suggesting that school-based management is bad or should be ignored. This is certainly not the case, for in my own school community I know that there is a sensible attitude toward a steady and systematic implementation of school-based management, where and when it improves the educational standards of our children. It is not something that should be pursued as just a trendy idea in its own right.

Another major issue that has affected many thousands of property owners in the Greenslopes electorate is the unfair 26% increase in property valuations. This has been a completely absurd situation where property values for about 11,000 dwellings in the Coorparoo district, consisting of Coorparoo, Camp Hill, Holland Park and Greenslopes, have recorded average increases of 26% across-the-board. The humorous side of this was well illustrated by a local resident, Mr Doug Fox, who suggested that the department must have put the decimal point in the wrong position, because it should have been 2.6%. Again, that was a clear symptom of an uncaring Government that was not prepared to listen to local people.

There was no acknowledgment by the Minister of the day that there was clearly something wrong, that some rectification was required and that something had to be done about it. Prior to the election, the now Deputy Premier, Jim Elder, and I met with local people, listened to them and undertook to conduct a review of the valuations. I am grateful that the Minister has appointed an independent valuer, Mr Randall Warren, to chair the current objection conferences, and I now look forward to an appropriate rectification of this absurd situation. It is indeed an absurd situation, for the anomaly between the Coorparoo valuation district and neighbouring districts is stark. We have dwellings at each border of the valuation district with increases of 26%, whereas directly across the road, only a matter of yards away, properties with identical amenity have recorded valuation increases of 0%. Clearly, if the previous Government could not see that there was something wrong with this, it did not deserve to be in Government, and the electors of Greenslopes voted accordingly.

Traffic volumes and traffic noise are problems that are widespread across the Greenslopes electorate. In a sense that is no surprise, because the Greenslopes electorate is indeed the smallest in the State at 14 square kilometres and, accordingly, it also has some of the largest and busiest roads in Brisbane traversing it. A range of issues arises from that. One is the use of the on-ramps to the South East Freeway. Local residents have a clear expectation that part of their local amenity is the ready use of the South East Freeway to reach the city, in particular, via the various onramps. Residents have a very valid fear that the so-called super highway from the Gold Coast, with eight lanes funnelling into six lanes, would restrict that access. I have asked the new Minister for Transport, the Honourable Steve Bredhauer, for assurances that this will not happen. Whatever occurs in the future, I will stand by the local community to ensure that this access is not restricted.

However, that is not the only issue. Many other streets and districts are the source of substantial and regular complaints from local residents and are invariably matters raised within the jurisdiction of the Brisbane City Council. The range and magnitude of the problems confronting the Brisbane City Council, especially in some areas of Coorparoo, mean that a more substantial approach is warranted, that is, an approach which would mean that the State Government and Federal Government also take an interest in, and responsibility for, addressing these problems. Here I am referring to the very substantial quality of life issue that uniquely affects the heavily populated and traffic-prone inner-city suburbs. Some of the traffic modification problems that are now warranted, and which I have discussed in some detail with my very able colleagues the councillors representing the Brisbane City Council, require substantial and costly treatment. Therefore, I will be working to seek a unified approach to this problem.

One of the fundamental issues facing constituents of the Greenslopes electorate is employment security and the reduction of unemployment. Increasingly, over the past three years the response from citizens from all walks of life and levels of training and education was that they feared being able to maintain security in their employment. I am pleased that the initiatives that will be undertaken by this Government will address those issues very substantially.

Those initiatives include a plan to establish 15,500 traineeships and apprenticeships in the public and private sectors, 8,980 work placements for the long-term unemployed, and a \$2,000 bonus to private sector employers or group training schemes where additional apprentices in areas of designated skill shortages are employed. These initiatives will be a great boon for the citizens of Greenslopes.

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