



Speech by

**Mr G. HEALY**

**MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA NORTH**

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Hansard 5 August 1998

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mr HEALY** (Toowoomba North—NPA) (5.23 p.m.): Firstly, it gives me great pleasure to rise in this Address in Reply debate to personally extend my courtesies to His Excellency the Governor following the opening of the 49th Parliament. I have already extended my congratulations to Mr Speaker in a previous debate in this Parliament on his election to the position. At this stage, I would also like to congratulate the member for Woodridge on his appointment to the position of Chairman of Committees which, of course, is also a very important position in this Parliament.

Wide-ranging debates such as this one give members the opportunity to canvass a range of issues. As well, it provides newly elected members with the opportunity to speak for the very first time as representatives of their own particular patch of turf. Before I begin my contribution to this debate, I want to say that I regard a member's maiden speech as one of the most important contributions that he or she will probably ever make in this place. It is probably the one speech that, in many years to come, he or she will dig out and show proudly to his or her kids or grandkids. It is the speech that stamps one's mark in this Parliament for however long one is a member of this place. I congratulate those new members who have made their maiden speeches. I trust sincerely that in years to come it will be that very speech that they can honestly say that they were proud to have made in this Parliament.

This debate also gives most members the opportunity to pay tribute to the hardworking people who contributed to their success in the recent election. I know that most members have taken this opportunity to do so, and I would like to do that as well. I pay tribute to the hardworking people of the Toowoomba North National Party campaign team under the chairmanship of Mr Graham Barron, who gave me tremendous assistance in the lead-up to the 13 July election to ensure that I was returned as the member. It was a very hardworking team. Compared with the budgets of some of the other candidates, we ran on a modest budget. However, over the years most of us learn how to use an election campaign budget in a way that will give us the very best value for money. Of course, it all depends on what the issues are at that particular time.

The electorate of Toowoomba North and indeed the City of Toowoomba have changed somewhat since I was elected in 1992. However, I can say that, particularly during the two and a quarter years of the previous coalition Government, there have been a couple of major pieces of infrastructure that both my colleague the member for Toowoomba South and I feel quite proud about. As a direct result of good representation by both my colleague and me, they have benefited the good people of the city. Those two pieces of infrastructure are the multimillion dollar redevelopment of the Toowoomba General Hospital and the construction of the much-debated high school facility at Wilsonton on the western side of the city.

Both of those projects were regarded by the people of Toowoomba as much needed and well worth fighting for. They were important to the city in terms of growth and for Toowoomba as a major regional centre. I congratulate the member for Toowoomba South, because often he had been accused of good old-fashioned pork-barrelling in relation to that redevelopment of the Toowoomba General Hospital. However, I sat here and so did he when, year after year, four Labor Budgets mentioned the redevelopment of that hospital, and nothing happened. The hospital was in desperate need of redevelopment. On many occasions the member for Toowoomba South said to me, "I do not care if I am accused of pork-barrelling, if I become the Minister for Health one of the first things that I

am going to do is honour that commitment that was made by the Labor Party in Government to redevelop the hospital." To his credit, he did it. Whether or not he is accused of pork-barrelling, the citizens of Toowoomba will benefit from that magnificent redevelopment, which stands as a true testament to the great and hard work that he put into his role as not just Minister for Health but also as the member for Toowoomba South.

As I mentioned previously, the other piece of infrastructure for the city is the high school facility on the western side of Toowoomba, which is the Wilsonton campus of the Toowoomba State High School. I thank the previous Minister for Education, the member for Merrimac, for agreeing to the vision that a few of us shared in relation to that particular facility. By way of history, it was a facility that had been promised for some 35 years by Governments of both persuasions. In fact, the land had been purchased almost 35 years ago by the Education Department. The area in which it was located was a growth area of the city—the suburb of Wilsonton—and there was and had been for some 35 years a call for a fourth high school facility in that area. After a lot of representation to Ministers of both political persuasions, under the coalition Government we managed finally to get together a working party to sit down and work out whether we could do it.

I pay tribute to one gentleman in particular, Professor Frank Crowther from the University of Southern Queensland, who also saw my vision that we needed to do something in that area without affecting the other State high schools in the area. There was always going to be the criticism from the other high schools that if that school drew students from those high schools, that would have a marked influence on the curricula that was able to be provided by those high schools. I know that the Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations was Education Minister at that time. I can recall him coming. At that stage some decision might have been made to press ahead with it and then the decision fell away.

**Mr Braddy:** The numbers fell.

**Mr HEALY:** The numbers changed slightly in the other schools, but what we found was that this new facility never ended up having a marked effect on the enrolment numbers of the other schools, mainly because we made it a campus of an existing high school on the other side of the city. That is unique. I do not think there are too many of those types of facilities available. Mums and Dads who live in adjoining suburbs are now able to see their sons and daughters go to a high school facility in their own area.

I argued with some of the bureaucrats within the Education Department when they said, "You will never reverse the trend of an increase in parents sending their kids to private schools." I said, "Don't bet on it. If you put a brand new high school facility in an area—I do not care what parents think—the convenience and the knowledge that the kids are getting a good education will win out, if parents can see the curricula being offered." In the end, a large percentage of parents took their children out of the private sector and enrolled them in the new facility. That is why the numbers at that school have remained the same. On day one, 250 Year 8 students started at that school, Year 8 being the first year.

**Mr Littleproud:** Was that the projected number or bigger than projected numbers?

**Mr HEALY:** That was bigger than the projected numbers. I think we started looking at around 150 and it ended up being 250 on that first day. We now need to look at what will be done with Year 9 starting next year and Year 10 starting in 2000. There have been some rumours that at the moment funding is not available for the extra facilities that will be needed for the expansion which is planned to take place. I ask the Minister for Education to continue the dialogue that was begun with the previous Minister in relation to that.

This facility was a bit of a trade-off with the Toowoomba community, because the Toowoomba community wanted a full-blown high school. We said to them, "Accept a campus of another high school. Will you accept the fact that this particular high school could be turned into a centre of excellence in technology?" The community accepted that. Because that was the trade-off with the community, we have to make sure that this particular school does become a centre of excellence. We have some linkages with the University of Southern Queensland and other educational facilities through ConnectEd. All the infrastructure had been put in there. I know that the Minister will probably look at that again, because there will be continued dialogue between the Toowoomba community, the Toowoomba State High School P & C and the new Minister for Education.

Another initiative that the City of Toowoomba now enjoys is the introduction of a third police beat, which is located in the suburb of Harlaxton. The member for Nudgee mentioned police beats. Police beats originated in Toowoomba.

**Ms Bligh** interjected.

**Mr HEALY:** We trialled it in Toowoomba. We had two in my area—both in my electorate. I do not know whether that says anything about the sort of crime that was happening in my electorate at the time. Interestingly, not long after that—in fact, probably within six months—I had members of

Parliament from all over the State coming and sitting beside me, asking how our police beat worked. It is a very good way of extending and promoting the idea of community policing, which is the post-Fitzgerald way of policing in this State. It is a very good one.

**Ms Bligh:** It was a Labor initiative, wasn't it?

**Mr HEALY:** The member opposite can take credit for a lot of things, but we enhanced the program. Labor members were also coming to me saying, "Give me some information so that I can take it to my Labor Minister, because he says that we have not got enough money for a police beat." So in fact we did give the information to quite a few of those members.

**Mr Cooper** interjected.

**Mr HEALY:** I thank the member for Crows Nest for his interjection. I was coming to that. The crime prevention partnership program was one of the major initiatives of the previous Government, and it worked successfully. School-based constables was another initiative. Those sorts of things happened in my electorate and were all very good. The idea of the police beats is a good one. I am proud to say that we now have a third police beat established in the Harlaxton area of my electorate.

On the subject of police, I pay tribute to a gentleman who is retiring at the end of this week, that is, the assistant commissioner for the southern police region, Assistant Commissioner Ken Scanlan. Over the years, we in the southern region have been blessed with some excellent police officers in the high administration areas. Ken Scanlan upheld that standard. He will be sorely missed in our area. I wish him and his wife all the very best for a successful retirement.

We have also seen the retirement of Superintendent Granville Pearce, the transfer of Superintendent Dick Condor out of Toowoomba—Dick has gone to Cairns—and we have welcomed back Chief Superintendent Wayne King. This is about the fourth time Wayne King has been stationed in Toowoomba.

**Mr Cooper:** He is an excellent police officer.

**Mr HEALY:** I agree with the member for Crows Nest. He is an excellent police officer, and it is good to see him back. During the period of the coalition Government, we did see huge increases in the numbers of police officers in not just the Toowoomba police district but also the southern police region. The previous Minister would often refer to them as the "warm bodies". They were there—they were visible; they were out on the street—and people could feel a lot safer. All of those initiatives were very good and they certainly were of great benefit to Toowoomba City.

In the last couple of years significant amounts of State Government money have been spent in Toowoomba for a whole host of projects. Money was granted to the Toowoomba City Council for the redevelopment of the magnificent Empire Theatre. If at some time members are taking a trip to Toowoomba and they want to see one of the best regional theatres anywhere in Australia, they should have a look at the Empire Theatre. It is excellent. It has been hailed by performers of national and international standard as one of the best performing arts centres anywhere in Australia. Today's Chronicle states—

"Redevelopment of Toowoomba's Empire Theatre into Australia's largest regional performing arts theatre has earned a highly commended in the Property Council's 1998 Rider Hunt Awards."

That is a feather in the cap. The Toowoomba Aquatic Centre is another project into which the previous Minister for Sport, the member for Southport, injected a lot of money to assist the Toowoomba City Council.

When the member for Indooroopilly was Attorney-General and Minister for Justice, he ensured the setting up of a consumer affairs office in Toowoomba. This was most welcome because time and time again people who wanted to talk about a consumer affairs issue were referred to Brisbane and perhaps put on hold for a long time. Consumer affairs is one of those areas in which people need to discuss issues face to face, because it is very hard to explain a complex situation to somebody over the phone.

Another very good initiative came from the former Premier's office. It related to a chair in landcare studies at the University of Southern Queensland. This was to continue the great work that was being done by Professor Brian Roberts, who is regarded in a lot of areas as the father of landcare studies. We were able to get together in excess of about \$600,000 to make sure that that good work was continued after Professor Brian Roberts retired. We had some fun with some Government departments, because I think there was a sense in some Government departments that landcare studies was the domain of them only and that nobody in the private sector or in education was sufficiently intelligent enough to put forward new ideas. We were able to put that very good package together and the next three years will see an enhancement of the work that is already being done at the University of Southern Queensland.

In the remaining time I have available, I will make mention of one of the major employers in my electorate: Darling Downs Bacon Cooperative Association Limited, or KR Darling Downs, as many people know it. Earlier this year the Darling Downs Bacon Board resolved to proceed with a new abattoir and boning room facility at its existing Willowburn site in Toowoomba. The new facility is to be built to export accredited standards, which will provide for a capacity configuration of 12,500 pigs per week, which includes a minimum of 2,500 pigs per week as a service kill component.

The completed project will cost in the order of \$25m, to be debt funded through a major banking institution. When it is completed, it will enable Darling Downs Bacon to better serve existing and emerging domestic and, most importantly, export markets for quality, fresh Australian pork and value-added packaged ham, bacon and smallgoods.

**Mr Lucas:** And the bacon factory union is a very good union.

**Mr HEALY:** As a matter of fact, I have had a lot of dialogue with members of that particular union. That union is one of the responsible ones. It has worked with the management of Darling Downs Bacon. I have to pay tribute to that union, because it has worked well. It knows that Darling Downs Bacon is locally owned and locally operated and that working cooperatively means jobs. It means that, if everybody works in well together, they will be more productive.

The pig meat industry is experiencing one of its most difficult times ever. This project represents the most significant undertakings of the cooperative since its inception way back in 1911. I urge the Government to continue the dialogue that began with the previous coalition Government in terms of any assistance that it can provide to ensure that this project comes to fruition.

There are a couple of things that I did not have time to mention during my contribution to the debate on the confidence motion the other day. They relate to the former coalition Government's achievements with respect to aspects of the portfolio area of Sport, which was administered by the member for Southport as the responsible Minister. Briefly, I wish to outline a couple of things that need to be said for the record. It was the coalition Government, with the coming of the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, that in 1997-98 allocated \$10m for the upgrading and development of sporting venues to provide for the pre-Olympic training needs of Australian and international teams. We saw the establishment of an International Sport Unit within the Office of Sport and Recreation to support the marketing of Queensland as a pre-Olympic training destination. That was highly successful, with teams from the United States, Italy, Britain, Norway, Canada, the Netherlands and the Australian track and field team all committed to training in Queensland.

We did not forget our own local sporting organisations. Grants and subsidy assistance funding in our Budget handed down earlier this year increased from \$30.4m in 1997-98 to \$50.8m in 1998-99. Those were real commitments to the sporting fraternity of Queensland. The Community Sports Development Program was just one indication of the coalition Government's commitment to assisting community based organisations in the development of sport across the State. The 1998 program saw a total of 624 organisations applying for assistance, with 537 of those receiving a total allocation of just over \$1.3m, which represented a 36% increase in funding over the normal allocation. This program had a special focus on rural, remote and indigenous communities.

In addition, the coalition Government further enhanced the State's 12 recreation camps, with more than \$7m earmarked to upgrade facilities, especially at Tallebudgera and Currimundi, as well as an operational plan that was developed to begin the repositioning of camps within a business framework. The former Minister for Sport, the member for Southport, deserves a lot of credit for his enthusiasm in this area.

The coalition Government was a Government of action, not merely words. In just over two years the coalition Government did what many Governments were quite simply unable to do given a full three-year term or even two terms. That is something that needs to be always remembered. Certainly, at every opportunity we as an Opposition and members of a former Government will be reminding members on the other side of the House of that and the successes of the former coalition Government.

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