



Speech by

Mr J. HEGARTY

MEMBER FOR REDLANDS

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr HEGARTY (Redlands—NPA) (1 a.m.): Mr Speaker, in rising tonight I would firstly like to take this opportunity to congratulate you on your appointment to the high office of Speaker. I am confident that you will carry out your duties with impartiality and distinction. I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome the new members on both sides to the House. It is an honour to be a representative in this House. I am sure they will be welcomed and will enjoy their time here, even though it may be as a oncer.

In addition, I would also like to acknowledge the electors of Redlands who have placed their confidence in me and have allowed me to represent them for another term. Their interests will be of paramount importance to me during this session.

In joining in the debate tonight, I oppose the motion of confidence moved by the Premier. I would also challenge the assertion made by the Premier this morning that anyone who speaks against this motion would lose credibility. I contend that testing if the House has confidence in the Government of the day is a fundamental responsibility of any Opposition, particularly when the Government is only in power conditional on certain commitments it made to enjoy that privilege. Quite a lot has been said following the State election by different interest groups as to who should form government. "Stability" was the catch-cry, but no consideration was given to the people of Queensland, of whom less than 40% voted for a Labor Government. One has to ask why then did the majority of Queenslanders not want a Labor Government and, therefore, why should this House have confidence in it.

Unlike when Labor came to office in 1989 and had no recent track record, the present Labor Government is open to scrutiny, having last been in office just over two years ago and therefore offering a clear comparison with the coalition which followed it, and a clear picture of what is likely to come based on Labor's past performance.

Labor Governments throughout Australia have never had a good record in economic management and the situation was not much different here in Queensland. Over the period between 1989 and 1996 we saw numerous instances of that. We witnessed Budget overruns, large amounts of money expended for little or no public benefit and public funds in crisis through mismanagement. Labor's answer to many of these problems was to transfer funds from one area to prop up another. This was not for one-off capital works projects but in many instances for overruns in recurrent funding. Already we see the potential for this pattern to recur with the commitments made by the Premier in the lead-up to the State election. I refer to unfunded commitments such as extending the tilt train to Townsville and the provision of free ambulance services to pensioners, to mention just two. Such projects have to be funded either by transferring funds from other areas of recurrent or capital works commitments or alternatively raising more money by increasing taxes and charges.

I note that the Premier said this morning that he would not be reversing decisions made by his predecessors. This suggests strongly that increased taxes and charges are on the agenda for the Budget coming up in September. The Premier has made job creation the major focus for his Government. Yet his party's past record is one of losing job opportunities, compared with the coalition's record in just over two years of creating nearly 100,000 jobs. Labor, on coming to office in 1989, inherited an employment rate of 6.9%. When it left office in 1996 it had presided over an 11% unemployment rate. In addition, Labor would need to vastly improve its economic growth record from

when it last tried to stimulate the economy. Labor's benchmark is measured against the Tasmanian economy—a low population State whose Budget is smaller than that of the Brisbane City Council. Yet the Goss Government just managed to out-perform Tasmania in State growth. By comparison, under the coalition State Government, growth was 4.7% when we left office, outstripping the national figure of 3.3% per annum. In fact, we outstripped first world economies such as the USA and the UK.

Job creation can be as simple as providing the public services that Queenslanders need. We need extra police, teachers, doctors and nurses, emergency service personnel, public servants, etc. Yet again in these areas Labor failed to deliver in spite of outlaying huge budgets. What was the effect on Queenslanders of this economic mismanagement? Police numbers declined, leading to higher numbers of unsolved crimes. Officers were overworked and experienced low morale through frustration in not being able to do their job properly.

In my electorate, the responsible police division had the lowest police to people ratio in the State under Labor. In just two years, however, that has changed through the hundreds of extra police who have been sworn in, together with the extra civilians who have been employed, and we are now on track to meet the targets set when we offered ourselves to Queenslanders as an alternative Government in 1995. A further 86 officers will be sworn in in August, and some of those are being allocated to the Wynnum police district. I am hopeful that the Cleveland and Redland Bay stations will receive some of those officers.

In deciding whether to support a confidence motion in this Government, we have to concern ourselves with whether this trend will continue. That is the big question mark. Will it continue, or will it go back to police intakes being cancelled, as happened in 1995?

Another matter of concern is the abolition of the Leading Schools program. That was one of the first things that Labor did when it came to office a few weeks ago. This is another example of irresponsibility and mismanagement and has left the education sector in Queensland up in the air. After two years of planning and establishing the framework to give most of Queensland's State schools some autonomy and self-direction, this new Labor Government has replaced it with uncertainty. Despite the funding largesse outlined by the Minister, those schools that were going into the second round of the Leading Schools program this year are now having to rethink the financial commitments made in the belief that more funds were to follow given the commitment that Education Queensland made to those schools going into the respective rounds of Leading Schools. They believed they were to receive a certain amount of funding over a certain period.

Once more Labor in Government oversees economic disaster and causes more stress to thousands of teachers and, in particular, the principals who now have to explain to their parents and citizen bodies that they do not know what will happen in the future. Little wonder that Labor does not inspire confidence in the future with this opening decision coupled with its past record.

Low capital works budgets and small increases in teacher numbers provide a stark contrast to the coalition's impressive record of employing 2,000 extra teachers, plus large capital works budgets, along with funding for many specific programs, bringing Queensland's Education budget up to the national average for the first time ever.

The coalition made an impressive start in just two years in redressing the shortfall in numerous capital works projects, some of which were on the drawing board when Labor came to office in 1989 and were no further advanced after six years. Some of the projects were basic requirements to service Queenslanders, to provide the police, magistrates, doctors, teachers and others with suitable premises in which to work. A new police station and courthouse is nearing completion next to my electorate. This is a very good example of what I am speaking about concerning the dearth of capital works that were undertaken when Labor was in office. This new police station and courthouse have a combined value of around \$7m. It was talked about for six years under Labor. During that time police officers were working in cramped and unsuitable conditions. With examples like that, how can anyone have confidence in another Labor Government? We must bear in mind that to fund the promises made in the recent election campaign without increasing taxes and charges would mean a cutback in capital works. Labor's credibility is the big question mark. In just about every portfolio area in the previous Labor Government there was economic mismanagement or underperformance. It would be difficult to concede, given that about a third of the current Ministers were Ministers in the previous Labor Government, that anything will change.

I commend to the member for Nicklin that he consider Labor's past record in Government before supporting the Premier's motion and that he err on the side of caution by supporting the Opposition motion if he is serious about delivering better outcomes for the people of Queensland. We talk about responsibility and the need for Government to listen to the people. We have to bear in mind the past record of this Government that is now seeking the confidence of the House. The member for Nicklin has to think very seriously about supporting this motion, because we are talking about a return to

stability and economic management in this State, which is something that we did not see from the Labor Party between 1989 and 1996.
