



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (4.51 p.m.): Mr Speaker, let me congratulate you on your elevation to the Speakership of this Parliament. I have confidence in your ability. Our relationship is one of mutual respect and dignity and has been since we came into this place in 1989. I look forward to your controlling this House in a very dignified and even-handed way. I think it is fair to endorse the comments of the Leader of the Opposition who indicated that there will be times in this Parliament when debate will be robust and you will face some extremely challenging times in the chair.

Firstly, I will make some general comments on the election result. In common with many other members, I take the opportunity provided by this motion to thank my constituents very much for again having faith in me and re-electing me to this Parliament, albeit with a somewhat reduced margin. However, I am still considered to have a seat that is a bit above marginal. As I have indicated previously, none of us should ever take our seats for granted. Certainly, many safe seats are the first seats to go. That is something rather quirky that has been happening generally in politics in Australia and particularly in Queensland over the last couple of elections.

In response to the concerns and ideals raised by the member for Nicklin, I point out that we are all idealistic. It is great to have those ideals while we continue in our capacity as members of this Parliament. He mentioned that when he was campaigning for election, people indicated that they had never seen a politician. That is one of the great difficulties that we face as members of Parliament. I point out to the member for Nicklin that no matter how long he is in this place—whether it be one term or six—some constituents of his will say the same thing about him. It is a quirk of nature that, no matter how many times one visits a place, one cannot see everyone. I remember going to one community in my electorate and somebody said to me, "Well, I haven't seen you here for about 18 months or two years." I said, "I've been here 12 times in the last year. I haven't seen you here, either. You must not come to town very much." That is the reality: we can visit a place, but because we are not there when a particular person is in town and they do not see us they believe that we are not representing their interests.

It is fair to say that members on both sides of this House and those elected to this House only recently will endeavour to serve their electorates extremely well. I know that they are entering Parliament with all of the right ideals. Today, members of Parliament are more accessible than they were 50 or 100 years ago—or even 20 or 30 years ago. As members travel around their electorates on the weekend or during the week, they will find that they will go to a number of functions and attend a number of community meetings in one day. Fifty years ago, there would have been no hope of doing that using early means of transportation. I will share a story that was related to me some time ago by a person whose father held the old seat of Carnarvon up till 1930 or thereabouts. His salary was about 35 quid a year. In order to attend functions he had to catch the steam train or his wife would drive him. On one occasion, when he had to attend an official function at Stanthorpe, the vehicle was unable to ascend the steep hill south of Warwick, whereupon he was forced to turn around and catch the steam train from Warwick to Stanthorpe.

Members of Parliament should not be too critical of this institution, because self-criticism only feeds the negative perception of this place in the community. We have to be very, very careful. Generally, members of Parliament are able to be contacted more easily today than they were in those

times. We all have a couple of telephones. We all have email and fax. In some ways, familiarity breeds contempt. We stand in this place day after day. As was indicated earlier by other members, only the things we say that are likely to be controversial are reported on television. People do not necessarily report what is said in this place during the hard grind of debate. In fact, members agree on 70% of the legislation that is passed in this Parliament. We must be very mindful of that.

Anybody who believes that what happened in Queensland at the last election is confined to our State really needs to consider what is happening worldwide and the insecurity worldwide as a consequence of globalisation. As a result of change, people are very concerned. We have been singularly unable to manage the consequences of change and soften the impact on people of some inevitable change and include them in the changes to the system. That is our great challenge. If we fail to do that, if we continue to go down the road of economic rationalism without considering the negative consequences, we will be confined to the scrap heap of political history. That is the great lesson that we must learn from the election result. As I say, we are faced with a tremendous challenge.

I turn now to the reasons why my electorate and I cannot have confidence in this Government. When the Labor Government occupied the benches opposite from 1989 to 1996, much happened in my electorate which I believe led to people losing faith in both the political process and the Government of the day. Many Government services were stripped away during that time. Courthouses were closed in places such as Inglewood and Texas. The Department of Primary Industries was gutted. We saw agronomists being taken away, research facilities downgraded and stock inspectors go. That certainly did not do very much at all to uphold the morale of those communities. I believe that that led to much negativity and many people moving away.

Four local government areas were amalgamated into one, without a great degree of community consultation. What consultation there was was mock consultation. That certainly undermined the faith of people in the process of government and created a great degree of ongoing community division and resentment. In a bizarre twist, that was manifested in a backlash against me at the last State election. If members think that the effects of negative actions by members of another party when in Government expire with that Government, they need to think again, because those actions can feed the resentment that some people feel towards that Government and its successor.

Railway staff were also taken away and stations were closed. In some towns such as Wallangarra, which is a small community that has a very, very low socioeconomic base, that did a great deal to undermine the morale of the community and took away business from some small businesses. However, places such as Inglewood, which lost its Department of Primary Industries building, its agronomist and stock inspector in 1990, had its position of agronomist restored by the former coalition Government shortly before its term of office finished. That has been greatly appreciated by the people of that area as they endeavour to get into new, alternative agricultural industries such as olive growing. People are always looking at new and innovative ways of underwriting and increasing the viability their enterprises. For example, my area has a growing peanut industry. I say to the honourable member for Barambah that I hope at some stage we are going to very much challenge the peanut industry in her part of the world. I think that we might be able to do that.

Today, my challenge to the new Government is to make sure that that proper process of reconstruction of the Department of Primary Industries—which was entered into by Trevor Perrett and continued on by Marc Rowell, the member for Hinchinbrook—which replaced half of those departmental people who were taken away from rural areas continues. I hope that the agronomist in Inglewood is kept on to make sure that the department is able to provide a service to the people in that community. As well, the former coalition Government reopened the Inglewood Court House as a place for holding court. That is something that has been greatly appreciated by the local community, which did not have access to that fundamental justice service. People had to travel either to Goondiwindi, which is an hour's drive away, or to Warwick, which is an hour's drive in the opposite direction, to have matters, such as simply having a debt claim, dealt with. People may say, "Those people can drive", but we are dealing with small-business people. When somebody has to appear before a court, sometimes he or she does not have access to transport to be able to get there. So it is very, very important for the morale of those communities, for the continuing fabric of those communities, that we maintain those facilities. So my challenge today to the Honourable Minister for Justice and Attorney-General is that that courthouse stays open. It has been greatly appreciated since it has been reopened. What has also been appreciated is the extension of the operating hours of the Queensland Government agency, which operates out of the same building.

During the term of the coalition Government, throughout my electorate a range of facilities, such as roads and schools, were upgraded. It would be remiss of me if I did not commend the former Minister for Police and Corrective Services for his great vision in putting forward a plan to decentralise our correctional facilities throughout the southern part of Queensland. That would provide an economic opportunity for people in that area. As well, it provides good, forward planning. If we had a number of small prisons they would have the capacity to expand as the prison population grows. In effect, that planning killed two birds with one stone. My challenge to the new Minister is to make sure that he

considers Inglewood when he goes through the process of deciding whether the Government is going to construct a new correctional facility in the southern part of Queensland. That consultation process, which was mentioned yesterday in the Governor's Speech, was already under way and largely completed. So I ask the Government to not throw away that consultation work. I know that the honourable member for Inala is thinking that this has not been funded. The issue is forward planning. I am talking about something that the coalition Government would have brought on board in a couple of years' time. It would have popped up in the coalition Government's next Budget or maybe in the one after that. It was good, proper forward planning.

I turn to the issues relating to the portfolio of Attorney-General and Justice, for which I am the Opposition spokesman.

Mr Palaszczuk: Where is your wig?

Mr SPRINGBORG: I say to the new Minister for Primary Industries that at the moment out my way it is pretty sad for the wheat. It is turning yellow and standing under water. The situation is quite the opposite of that of a drought.

Mr Palaszczuk: I did not say "wheat"; I said, "Where is your wig?"

Mr SPRINGBORG: I thought the member was talking about wheat. My wig comes a bit further down the track. I pay tribute to the now Leader of Opposition Business and the shadow Minister for Family Services, Denver Beanland. I believe that he should be remembered as an extremely proactive Attorney-General who achieved a great deal for Queensland. Unfortunately, over the past year or so there has been a lot of debate that did not necessarily give him the great credit that he deserved. He worked extremely hard. In a short period, the former Attorney-General put in place a new Criminal Code that met the aspirations of the people of Queensland in ensuring that people who committed offences had sentences imposed on them that properly met community expectations and properly met contemporary expectations. In some cases, penalties in the previous Criminal Code were doubled or trebled.

The previous Attorney-General brought in the new juvenile justice legislation, for which, owing to the splitting of the previous Government's portfolios, he is still responsible as the spokesman for Family Services. That Act gave the courts a greater ability to impose just and fair sentences on juvenile offenders—something that had been concerning members of the community for a long period. The previous Attorney-General beefed up the Penalties and Sentences Act to ensure that the protection of the community was the first responsibility of the courts, not that a term of imprisonment was considered to be an absolute last resort. Under the coalition Government's Penalties and Sentences Act, people who should have gone to jail actually went to jail. The previous Government also implemented people's right to choose whether or not to accept medical intervention.

The establishment of uniform court rules was an absolutely wonderful achievement of the former Attorney-General. We had the situation in which we had something like 700 rules and forms for our courts. The former Attorney-General was able to break down the process so that there are now only about 100 rules and forms, which are coordinated and uniform throughout the Magistrates, the District and the Supreme Courts. I believe that that process has made it a lot simpler for the lawyers and solicitors who participate and interact with the judicial system and, hopefully, that will reduce the cost on people who are required to use the judicial system.

On that point, I believe that we have to make the judicial process more inclusive. As I move around the State, a lot of people say to me that we have a legal system that is not really a justice system. People feel disconnected from the justice system in the same way as they feel disconnected from the parliamentary system. They feel that it is overly complicated and does not necessarily represent them. People go through the judicial mill, spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and, at the end the day, do not necessarily feel as though they have received fairness and justice. I am not saying that that is easy to fix without undermining the fundamental and very important tenets of our legal system, which has developed and evolved over a long period. However, a lot of people are extremely concerned about it.

The former coalition Government increased the number of Supreme Court judges, District Court judges and magistrates. It put into process the development of the discussion paper on stalking laws, which recently was released by the Attorney-General. I indicate to him that, although I commend him for doing that, that was a discussion paper that was developed by the former Attorney-General and was very necessary.

I reiterate my call for a review of the Bail Act to make sure that the Attorney-General has clearly defined powers and ability to be able to act in terms of an appeal or a revocation of bail. I believe that there are some grey areas in the Act and it may be in the best interests of the Attorney-General and the people that we look at the Bail Act. Whilst I am on that matter, I would like to say that, although I have confidence in magistrates getting things right 99.9% of the time, I believe that they are like members of Parliament, or like anybody else: there is always a concern that they may get it wrong.

Recently, a decision was made about an incident that occurred in Noosa. A decision was made by a magistrate that was subsequently adjudicated by a higher court to have been the wrong decision. It would help if we had a circuit-breaker that was more clearly defined in the Act. What occurred in that situation helped to undermine the community's faith in our legal system. I understand that matters relating to bail are very finely balanced. However, we have to move in that area.

The fines legislation was introduced by the former Attorney-General, Denver Beanland, and he deserves much credit for it. It is legislation that will help keep fine defaulters who should not be in jail out of jail. A lot of such people are in our jails and should not be there. There is no doubt that those people who do not pay their fines are at a lower level of offending. I think that most people agree with that.

I would like to differentiate between people who go to jail but should not be there and others. There are alternative ways of dealing with the former, such as by the revocation of their driver's licences. That might be an incentive to pay a fine, for example. Once these people, whose behaviour may have been minor or petty, get into jail, they have a chance of going on to become hardened criminals. At the other end of the scale, I have also flagged my intention—I believe this is in line with community expectation—to make sure that the worst types of serious violent offenders serve their full sentences. I will be bringing before this Parliament a private member's Bill along those lines.

Another innovation of the former Attorney-General is video linking across Queensland. The size of Queensland is such that if it were turned upside down the tip of Cape York would extend 500 kilometres south of Tasmania. When dealing with a State such as Queensland it is extremely important to make sure we can continue to deliver justice to its rural and regional areas. I think that is very sensible in this modern information age.

I refer to the discussion paper on the issues of consent and rape. Those sorts of issues were looked at by the former Government and measures were actually put in place. Much was achieved in the time the coalition was in Government.

I will be watching the actions of the new Attorney-General. I will be working with him in a constructive way. I congratulate him on his elevation to the position, but I indicate that we will be watching to make sure that those very great and necessary reforms are properly funded and that the things the coalition Government put in place continue to be taken forward. Also, I will be taking the initiative from time to time by introducing legislation into this Parliament as a private member, something which I believe is extremely necessary and overdue. I will be doing that as people come to me with other concerns as well.

When I was Minister for Natural Resources I oversaw the water infrastructure program—a \$1 billion, 10-year program of Government funding. I challenge this Government to put that in place. That program is necessary and essential to ensure that we have right levels of economic development in the rural and regional areas of this State. I would hate to see the Government throw out that program. It has been properly developed. It is the best planned program this State has ever seen. It would be unfortunate to see it go by the wayside now.
