



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mr SPRINGBORG (Warwick—NPA) (2.47 p.m.): I would like to thank the Governor of Queensland very much for his address and for the opportunity to be able to make a few comments in response. Before I do that, I join with my colleagues who have welcomed the new members of this Parliament and say that it really is an honourable experience; it is a great opportunity. As I say to school students when I travel around Queensland, we have something like 2.2 million voters in a State of about three million people, and each election 89 people are elected to this Parliament. It really is a great institution and they should all be very honoured to have been elected to serve in it.

It is fair to say that for each and every one of the members who come into this place, even though in some cases they may have similar ideals and similar philosophies, there are a range of different things that they want to achieve during their time in this Parliament. As I say, it is an interesting institution. I note that a couple of members who were first elected to this place along with me in 1989 have lost their seats since then and have been re-elected. So Parliament can also be a rather fickle institution. That is another thing to consider.

I think it would be somewhat remiss of me if I did not pay tribute to my wife and family for the support that they have given me over the past eight and a half years that I have been in this place.

Mr Schwarten: Putting up with you.

Mr SPRINGBORG: For putting up with me, as the honourable member for Rockhampton says. My father, in particular, who I think was looking forward to having his only son come back onto the farm and help him in his retirement years, has had to put up with me being away and not being able to assist him. I think my mother was also looking forward to having me around to help out. My wife, Linda, has tolerated me and has been a great support to me over the past eight and a half years. We were married only one month before I came into this place.

Mr Schwarten: You had her out doorknocking.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think it is widely known now that we did, in fact, spend our honeymoon doorknocking. We were married on Saturday, drove home on Sunday, commenced doorknocking on Monday, and I entered Parliament a month later.

The point I am trying to make is that being a member of Parliament does call for a lot of commitment not only on the part of the member of Parliament but also on their family—their spouse and immediate family. A lot of people do not realise the unbelievable pressures that are involved. When I was a Minister, for example, I was away from home for something like six out of seven nights a week. I am sure that most of the current Ministers appreciate that fact. Many members who represent rural constituencies will appreciate this as well. We have long distances to travel and we have to be away from home a lot. We may be away from home on some evenings but manage to wake up in our own beds.

Mr Schwarten: The day your son rang up in Toowoomba and said, "Are you coming home tonight?" People don't understand that.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Yes. There is another very interesting story. My wife came to Inglewood in my electorate to vote on election day. She left me in the car to watch the children while she went and voted. My young bloke, who was three years and eight months old, looked me in the eye and he said,

"You know, Daddy, I hope you lose your seat tonight because you can be home with me." I said to him, "Who will buy you all the toys?" He said, "Oh, Uncle Steven." That is the sort of thing that we have to go through. It is something that we must recognise.

My three children do not see much of me. I wish to thank my daughter Megan, who is in Year 1, Jens, and my little daughter Laura who is 10 months of age. On this latest stint I have been away from home for two weeks. I speak to them on the telephone and I am very much looking forward to seeing them again when I get back home.

I want to make some general comments regarding my electorate. I wish to thank the electorate for its support and friendship over the past eight and a half years. I particularly thank Ian Jackson, who works for me in my electorate office, and Jane Grieve, who works for me in my part-time electorate office in Warwick. One thing we do not consider in this Parliament is that most members, even though we have philosophic differences, represent our electorates very well. The electorate might not think so, but members do what they believe is the right thing for the electorate. Ultimately, of course, the electorate passes judgment.

In my case, I felt it was necessary to put a second electorate office in my electorate after the redistribution. I pay for the Warwick office myself. I opened that office to ensure that I provided a continuous service in the area so that after the redistribution there was not a diminution in services. I thank Ian and Jane and their respective families for their support.

I would also like to thank my branch people for their wonderful support in the time that I have been in Parliament. I know it is very difficult for them in times of economic hardship to be able to raise funds and to give of the time that is required to attend branch meetings and do the other work which is necessary to support the local member on election day or at functions throughout the year.

In my electorate of Warwick we have seen some very great improvements in service in the time when the coalition was in Government. I would like to refer particularly to roads. The Yelarbon-Texas Road is a very important connection road. It runs down to the Whyalla feedlot, which is one of Australia's largest feedlots and which employs a large number of people. It is a great value adding enterprise and it injects tens of millions of dollars each year into the local, Queensland and Australian economies.

There is a project in place to upgrade the Millmerran-Texas Road. No doubt the honourable member for Cunningham will be very happy to hear that. We will see more bitumen being placed on that road. When people come beetling down the road they will not see so many stones and not so much dust in the future.

In His Excellency's address to the Parliament there was one thing that concerned me by its very omission. I refer to the fact that the Government did not appear to give much priority to water infrastructure. It is pleasing to see the new Minister for Natural Resources in the Chamber because this is a matter with which I was vitally concerned when I was Minister. I have been concerned with this issue right throughout the time I have been in this Parliament.

Mr Schwarten: You ended up being caught by the coat-tails.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I think the Minister is the one who ended up being caught by the tail. The coalition made all of the absolutely correct decisions. The Honourable the Minister has now had an opportunity to be able to observe the decision-making process that went on concerning the Comet River dam and the Dawson River dam. The decisions that we made were correct on economic and environmental grounds.

I pointed out to the honourable member for Rockhampton during a previous debate that we need to be very careful because it is so easy to embroil ourselves in controversy sometimes of our own making and sometimes not. It is easy to go off chasing after other things. One of the difficulties that any Government in this State will face is the construction of very necessary infrastructure, whether it be roads, railways, ports, mines or dams. People want to be involved in the process today, and that is fair enough. They have empowered themselves. It does not matter how comprehensive a report is——

Mr Schwarten: You didn't do it properly.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Yes, we did. We undertook the process of consultation and environmental impact assessments. Whilst 99.9% of an issue might not be argued over, in some cases we end up quibbling over some form of words or whatever the case may be. We need to be cautious because the provision of infrastructure continues to be important.

Those opposite talk about jobs. It is on record that the former Premier, Wayne Goss, said that there were 100,000 jobs in this. Those opposite have said that they have seen the light——

Mr Schwarten: You don't put butter on burns any more.

Mr SPRINGBORG: There is no doubt that the Dawson River dam was going to be a great job-creating project for central Queensland. It involved tens of thousands of jobs. This project was going to filter, either directly or indirectly, right through central Queensland. I was very concerned that that was not mentioned in His Excellency's Speech.

I encourage the new Government to ensure that the new dam which is proposed for the southern part of the Granite Belt near Ballandean goes ahead. Only recently we knocked the Broadwater dam on the head. That dam was proposed for the northern part of the Granite Belt and had been talked about for a long time. Over that period of time the people had put their own infrastructure in place and the amount of water which would flow into the dam had been somewhat reduced by the level of private development. As a result, the cost per megalitre of water could not be justified. We now have the opportunity to establish a new dam on the Granite Belt. The money for a feasibility study has been granted. The dam will cost somewhere in the vicinity of \$30m and will yield about 8 million megalitres per year for town water supply and for irrigation. It is a most necessary development for the Granite Belt. I encourage the Minister to look very carefully at that development.

I would like to refer to the development that has occurred in schools in my electorate. It was great being able to assist with the provision of numerous resources for the Inglewood State School. This development cost something of the order of \$700,000. When I was at school there the teachers and the librarian had to pack up the books and put them on tables every time there was a rise in the level of the creek. We now have a raised resources centre which has been purpose-built and which is going to allow the children access to the latest technology. It will also overcome the previous concern about flooding.

We have the new home economics building at the Warwick State High School and the special education centre at Warwick East. At Glennie Heights we have the new preschool which will take into consideration some of the growth problems that were emerging there over time. At Warwick West we have the new general learning areas. I could go on and on. In Stanthorpe we have the covered play area and the new administration block. I believe that the Building Better Schools initiative was a great concept and I pay tribute to the former Government for that. The former Minister for Education had the foresight to keep it going and he was carrying it through. This concept has seen significant upgrades in many of the schools in our electorates. Areas which were not previously properly used are now properly used and have been turned into practical working environments. One thing that used to disturb me greatly when I became the member for Carnarvon, as it was then—based on Stanthorpe and Goondiwindi—was that we had constructed buildings that were purpose built for the tropics, not for an area that experienced sleet and roaring westerly winds at a temperature of about 5 degrees. So we have tended to consult the communities a lot more in the past decade. The outside veranda areas of schools are now being built in, providing a far greater learning area for students.

I turn now to emergency services. One concern of the people of Warwick is the potential downgrading of the fire station, which is currently a 24-hour, permanently staffed fire station. There is some concern that it is going to go back to being a station that is manned by permanent firefighters only during the day, relying on off-duty firefighters and auxiliary staff after hours. I acknowledge that new safety requirements stipulate that there must be three officers and one firefighter on duty at a 24-hour station, whereas in the past it was a one-on-one situation. However, the problem is that we do not have enough officers to staff that particular station on a 24-hour basis. I have called for a public meeting to be held in town next week. I acknowledge that the Minister has put the decision on this on hold pending the outcome of that meeting. At that meeting I will be explaining all of this to the community.

It is important to note that a mantle of safety has existed over that station for a long time, because it has operated as a 24-hour station and has been staffed by permanent firefighters. We are now telling people that for, say, 11 hours of the day it will now be staffed by auxiliary staff. Although people have confidence in those auxiliary staff, they are not so sure that the turnout times will be comparable with those that one could expect from a permanent firefighting crew. The challenge now is to convince the community that they are going to be safer, because if the community does not feel that it is safe, it becomes unsafe.

Mr Schwarten interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: People fear what can happen. In the end, perception becomes a reality, and this affects other potential business investment in the area. We have seen this happen with Danpork—and I hope it is not very far away—with the Big W distribution centre, which is the biggest north of Sydney, and other potential business investment. The challenge of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority is to convince the community that this will be to its benefit. Allora now has a brand-new fire station. It is a dual-purpose fire station which serves the town's auxiliary and the local rural fire brigade. When we built that new station, it made sense to incorporate all of that under the one roof rather than to have fragmentation.

I now want to pick up on a subject that was raised earlier today. It is a subject about which I am very interested, and it was something to which we committed ourselves some time before the last State election. Unfortunately, the process that we had to go through was brought about by the dreaded National Competition Policy. I refer to concern about dairy industry deregulation. It is very important to ensure that we maintain a proper farm gate price in Queensland. If we fail to do that, it will have the effect of squeezing out many dairy producers in this State. At the end of the day, it will not mean that consumers are going to get cheaper milk; there is no way on earth that that would happen. If it is abolished, the producer will get less, the consumer will pay more, and somewhere in the middle somebody will make a big fat profit.

One has only to look at what happened during the drought on the southern downs during the early 1990s. In many cases the feed bills of many dairy farmers exceeded their milk quota cheques. That situation was made even worse if the dairy farmers were producing manufacturing milk because their fresh milk quotas were not great. So the challenge for this new Minister is to ensure that he considers and adopts the retention of that farm gate price not only for the benefit of dairy farmers but also for the benefit of consumers in this State, because it guarantees a fresh, daily supply of a very wholesome product. That is of prime importance.

I do not believe that there can be any further rationalisation of the dairy industry in this State. Fifty years ago, everybody used to milk 30, 40 or 50 cows before they went off to school, and there was a dairy factory or butter factory every 10 or 15 kilometres. There was a very good reason for that: for transport people had only a horse and cart or a steam train. But modern transportation caused the centralisation of that particular manufacturing process. However, we cannot allow further centralisation of that process, and there is probably a lot that we can learn from history.

While I am seeking assurances from the Government, I seek an assurance from the Minister for Education that the new administration block for the Allora State School will stay at the top of the planning list and will go to the top of the funding list for next year. I understand that the administration block is at the top of the planning list for the local region. That school has very considerable requirements.

I refer also to Wallangarra. The former Minister for Local Government, under the Small Communities Assistance Program, assisted that particular community in the Stanthorpe Shire to the extent of a pledge of \$600,000 to assist them with new water infrastructure in that town. The old asbestos pipes, which were laid in the 1940s, are bursting all over the place, sometimes a couple of times a week. We had pledged that money as part of the Small Communities Assistance Program. That community had nothing done for it for many years. There was a crying need for that water infrastructure. I am sure that the new Government will commit to that project. That was testament to that scheme which the former Minister put in place, and it assisted a great number of communities throughout my electorate, including Texas, which was successful in achieving \$475,000 in funding for a new water filtration plant. I suppose a water filtration system is something that many people take for granted. However, I ask members to imagine being in the position of a young mother in Texas. While the river runs clear, everything is fine. But if not, and she has to wash a heap of nappies, they come out of the water a worse colour than they were when they went in. That causes some degree of consternation. Or if she runs a bath, she will notice a bit of dirt going down the plughole. That system will be of great assistance in increasing the water quality in that community.

My challenge to the Honourable Minister for Natural Resources is to forge ahead with the water infrastructure program. It was a very comprehensive program. Whereas the Minister may disagree with some aspects of it, it sought to take the politics out of building water infrastructure in this State so that people could properly monitor and study water catchments to find out how much water was available for the environment and infrastructure and then to put in place a program for the construction of that infrastructure. That had not happened in this State in the past, and it would be a great pity to see it thrown away.
