



Speech by

**Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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Hansard 30 July 1998

### **MOTION OF CONFIDENCE**

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—IND) (5.12 p.m.): I rise to speak to this motion of confidence. Other members have taken the opportunity of this debate to refer to their electorates and to the election. I would prefer to leave that to the debate on the Address in Reply, except to say that I do value the support of my electorate.

The 25 new members of this Parliament have an opportunity for a very rewarding three years. Electorates generally want a member who will work for them and who will represent their concerns. While not necessarily always getting the outcome that is requested, provided those community members feel they have been fairly represented they will be more than happy that their member has acted for them.

In common with many of the other speakers, I pass on my congratulations to the new Speaker. I believe the previous Speaker, Mr Neil Turner, encapsulated the role as to fairness and equity, and I look forward to enjoying that same characteristic in the new Speaker. It will be challenging, because the make-up of the new Parliament is dynamic, to say the least, and I am sure that as the three-year period unfolds our new Speaker will have many opportunities to exercise his right of control.

I also pass on my appreciation to the previous Government. The previous Government faced some very difficult situations, yet I always found that, irrespective of my voting pattern, I was dealt with fairly and with evenness of hand. Those in Government were always approachable and they were not vindictive. I can only hope that the Independent member for Nicklin, who has assumed a similar role in the current Parliament to the one I had in the last, will enjoy the same openness and availability of Ministers that I had with the previous Ministry.

I also look forward to the situation espoused by the new Premier that the new Ministry will deal fairly and equitably with all of us in non-Government seats. I particularly look forward to my electorate being dealt with in a non-prejudicial manner.

For the months prior to the recent election many asked about the possibility of a Queensland Parliament being once again hung as a result of the June election. My response at the time was that the possibility of that occurring was remote, to say the least. Time has proven that expectation to be wrong. Today we again debate a motion of confidence in a minority Government. This same debate held approximately two and a half years ago remains clear in my mind. Its contents are significant indeed in my considerations.

One very keen Labor supporter in my electorate recently attempted to interrogate a public declaration regarding my likely support on this confidence issue. In his argument he applied the same factors to this election result as were applied in my decision relating to the previous Parliament of Queensland. One of these was the actual percentage of votes received. In 1995 the coalition received 53% of the much vaunted two-party preferred vote. My opposition to the party system is well documented; however, I recognise the regular use of the two-party preferred assessment. This same formula cannot be directly applied to this election result, given the significant shift in voting patterns in Queensland.

Previously, a second issue was the significant change in seats held by each party. The previous Labor Government lost 18 seats in the 1995 election. In 1998, both Labor and the conservatives lost seats to One Nation. Labor lost six and the coalition lost five. Additionally, the coalition lost the seat of Nicklin to the Independent. Overall, however, the ALP retained the same total number of seats in this House—44.

A third indicator previously used was the work or lack thereof in my own electorate. I used a number of issues—hospital maintenance, police numbers and the like—as indicators only. This single factor has been most misused and abused over the past two and a half years. The tiny leak in the hospital roof, a reality which existed under both coalition and the Labor leadership, cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to repair properly. On behalf of all who work at the hospital and those who are and will be patients, I thank the former Minister for Health for the necessary work that was done. If work in electorates were a major factor in my decision, I would have to say that the coalition enabled a great number of concerns to be addressed. Residents in the Gladstone electorate can be justifiably encouraged.

I could not, however, apply on an identical basis the criteria used after the last election to this election result. There is, however, one very important component not new to this election but nonetheless a vital consideration, given the Statewide results of the 1998 poll: the issue of stability. In spite of repeated allegations from the Opposition in 1996 that a minority Government should not be tolerated, amid suggestions of the need for new elections, the coalition showed it could provide stable Government in a minority position for a full two and a half years. Given the call now for this Parliament to support a Labor minority Government, I can only accept that the opinions previously expressed have changed.

An example used earlier in this debate was that the president of the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry had called for a Labor minority Government as the only possible stable option. Ironically, I believe it may have been that same person who in 1996 said that the only chance of stability, given the option of a hung Parliament, was to call for fresh elections. His opinion must also have changed.

On Wednesday, 24 June, the member for Nicklin and I met separately with the Honourable Rob Borbidge, the then Premier, the Honourable Peter Beattie and Dr David Watson. I met also with the representative of One Nation, Mr Peter James, their State director. I am unsure whether the member for Nicklin's meeting list was identical.

At these meetings discussions on a broad range of issues were held. Although the facts were very important to me, I was also seeking to understand each party's attitude to stability in this State. What level of priority would be given to stability of Government as separate from predictable voting patterns, given the effect of instability on the economy, job creation, general employment and the like? Would the importance of stable Government be used to enforce a particular issue or political agenda in the State? Would the various new party groups place less importance on the State's best via stability as opposed to advancing any separate agendas?

At the conclusion of these discussions I could not feel confident that the overall importance of a Government serving its full term—the message of stability—would be paid the necessary regard as opposed to the potential for an unnecessary early election, excluding, of course, gross misconduct or proven criminality on the part of Government members.

I note that the Premier's motion includes an undertaking not to go to an election before 5 May 2001 without the express resolution of the House. Had the Premier not included that in his motion, it was my intention to move such an amendment, and I commend him for giving that undertaking.

In this election, the ALP succeeded in obtaining only approximately 39% of the primary vote. As mentioned before, there is no appropriate way to apportion this result into the mythical two-party preferred stream. That is a bonus, because in addition to two Independents, there are 11 representatives of a new political entity, One Nation. This fundamental shift in representative composition is a plus for the people of Queensland. It means that there are 25 new representatives in the Parliament adding a fresh perspective to debate. Whether sitting on the Government benches or on the non-Government benches, this new and significant block can and will influence the form and ethos that this 49th Parliament will take. That position of influence was also a factor that I considered. Those who would criticise the election result must, however, acknowledge that a very large proportion of the voting community chose neither established party. At least for this Parliament, the complexion of the decision-making process has changed.

We have before us a motion of confidence and three subsequent amendments. The first two amendments represent two very separate issues. However, they incorporate the same basic components—honesty and integrity. The first amendment recognises the undertakings given to the member for Nicklin. All matters have received publicity and have been a basis of the Premier's presentation of his new Government to the State of Queensland. I support the intent of the first

amendment. The member for Cook proposed an amendment to significantly water down that motion, which I will be opposing. The second amendment covers a very different matter. However, it goes again to the heart of the Premier's commitment to the State, to honesty and integrity. Therefore, I will support the second amendment also.

The current Government has all the support it needs to retain power. The undertakings given by the member for Nicklin ensure this. However, each one of us is required to consider this confidence motion and to consider our position. When the election outcome was evident, I spoke with a cross-section of people in my electorate. Most wanted a stable term ahead, not an Executive Government whereby this House is merely a rubber stamp. People now accept that close numbers in this unicameral Parliament ensure better scrutiny of proposed legislation.

I fully continue in the view that a Parliament of 89 Independents could work successfully, but that is not the scenario that we are considering in today's confidence motion. On the basis of all of the matters available to be considered, particularly the issue of stability, given the fact that the new Government has been formed and made quite marked changes to the various departments and has offered to the State stable albeit minority Government, I will support the motion of confidence, including the amendments of the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of One Nation.

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