



Speech by

Mr M. VEIVERS

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr VEIVERS (Southport—NPA) (5.41 p.m.): I rise to support the amendment moved by the Leader of the Opposition earlier today. However, I must firstly congratulate the member for Callide on his maiden speech. I also welcome all new members to this House. It is a place where one can be interrupted by a lot of people when one is trying to speak. The new members have all joined an elite club. My remarks apply equally to the member for Nicklin. People outside say, "Oh, you are a polly and you are in here." The quickest way to shut them up is to say, "You run against me at the next election." This is an exclusive club. I think the member for Crows Nest, Mr Cooper, explained it very well indeed this afternoon.

I was not very happy with Gough Whitlam. I was less happy with Malcolm Fraser. We State members are not always happy with the parties at the Federal level. I am certainly not happy with the confidence motion that those opposite have moved. I think the honourable member for Callide has explained it very well. The new members cannot interject on me, but the older dudes over here, such as the member for Murrumba and the member for Kedron, can interject if they really want to. I do not have any confidence in this Government because we saw Labor rip the heart out of us over six or seven years. I remember being a shadow Minister at that time and thinking, "Will we ever get these blokes out?" We got them out, but now they are back in again. I do not know if that is a big wrap for Mr Wellington, but it was his decision and I am not picking on him because in this place—

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Reeves) Order! The honourable member will refer to the member by his correct title.

Mr VEIVERS: Yes, the member for Nicklin. Mr Deputy Speaker, I was just about to congratulate you, even though you have not previously occupied the chair. As I am feeling warm-hearted this afternoon and I have waited a while to speak, I will congratulate you. You told me you would not pick on me, so I will not pick on you! I congratulate the new Speaker on his elevation to a very honourable position in this place. He has a very hard act to follow in the former member for Nicklin, my very good friend Neil Turner. I am one of those blokes who will stand up in this House and say that if he is not the best Speaker we have had since Federation I will jump off a bridge. However, I do not want to do those sorts of things.

During this debate I want to put on record my thanks to the thousands of emergency service workers and volunteers right across Queensland for their help and support during my period as Emergency Services Minister. I cannot speak highly enough of them. They train and work for the benefit of their fellow Queenslanders. As those opposite would know, the SES workers would send the Treasury into heart attack mode if we had to pay them. We do not pay them. They do their job for the benefit of the community.

I remind the House of the helicopter rescue people who received the Golden Hour Award last year. That is a major worldwide award for rescue. Those people have brought great honour to our emergency services. The former shadow Minister, who is now the Minister for Education, loved that. I gained that impression from the way he spoke this afternoon. He looks as though he is loving it, even though sometimes words fail him.

Mr Wells: I particularly liked what you said about the SES.

Mr VEIVERS: I thank the member very much. The member for Murrumba is a member of the SES. I must say that on occasions I was hoping that when he was at training on certain nights and the wind was blowing the rope would slip and he would fall off! That was just a thought that crossed my mind. I did not really mean it.

Mr Wells: Every time you thought that, you had another jelly bean.

Mr VEIVERS: Speaking of jelly beans, I want to talk about the Ambulance Service whose officers are undoubtedly the best in Australia. They set benchmarks and at times they were maligned by the member for Murrumba.

Mr WELLS: The honourable member's suggestion that I ever maligned an ambulance officer is untrue and offensive and I ask that it be withdrawn.

Mr VEIVERS: I withdraw.

An Opposition member: Ask him if he knows what an ambulance is.

Mr VEIVERS: I know more about it than you, sonny.

The rural fire brigades are always on hand to do the job for no reward. They are simply doing it to look after the members of their community. I am going to refer to the members of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. Before I do that I want to thank some individuals. I wish to thank my former director-general, Mr John Hocken, who worked very hard for the services. He did a great job. He came through the ranks. He worked for a former Minister, Don Neal, in the Department of Harbours and Marine. He was quite expert in that field. He also worked for the current Treasurer, Mr David Hamill. I thought, "If he can work for him, he can work for anyone." So I asked him to work for me.

Mr Cooper interjected.

Mr VEIVERS: Yes, a big silver bullet. He was a good man who was thrown out very unfairly by this new regime. How many did this Government get rid of? These people were just wiped out. The Government said it would not do that.

I must congratulate the member for Brisbane Central on becoming Premier. The Premier said that his Government would not throw out public servants. However, these people were just shot out the door within two days. I suppose the Premier thought that if he did it quickly the pain would be gone and everyone would forget about it. I have not forgotten about it. I am sure Mr Hocken has not forgotten about it. I know that the One Nation members have not forgotten about it. It is just not on.

The Premier said that he would not send people to the gulag. He simply fired them and sent them straight out the door. He gave them \$50,000 or \$60,000 and said, "DCM—don't come Monday." That was not good. I think a promise was made that some of these people would get a job, but they did not get a job. They were all good men, and Hocken was one of them. As the member for Crows Nest said this afternoon, they may have been affiliated with political parties, but they were apolitical in their work because they were professional public servants. For God's sake, I even hired Michael Kinnane. He is a member of the Labor Party and a person who stood as a candidate for the Labor Party. I knew that, Russell Cooper knew it, and Vaughan Johnson knew it.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I ask the honourable member to refer to members by their correct titles.

Mr VEIVERS: Mr Deputy Speaker, for a bloke who was not going to pick on me, you are doing a good job.

These people are professional. I may joke about a lot of things, but I am deadly serious about this issue. One cannot malign public servants. This is not the United States of America. We cannot change them every time there is a change of Government. Governments in America are in power for five years, whereas here we have three-year terms. Those public servants have hardly warmed their seats, but this Government is pegging them out again. We should retain them, because that is all they know.

Mr Cooper: You want to have a look and see how it affects their wives and families.

Mr VEIVERS: That is true, but members opposite would not be interested in that. That is why we cannot support this confidence motion in this Government. We should not do that to public servants, but members of this Government have done it. That is completely despicable, and it will come back to bite them. I am not necessarily referring to the new members, because they do not know about this, but the longer-serving members across the Chamber know all about it. They have seen it done before. They were professional at sticking those people in the Gulag. We did not put people in Gulags, but members opposite did.

I now want to give an accolade to a particular man. It will be hard to do, but I must give credit where credit is due. I refer to the secretary of the United Firefighters Union, Mr Henry Lawrence. There is no doubt that, because of his input to the board which I put in place—and I will get to that shortly—and

with his help, we really made great advances on behalf of firefighters. He did not agree with everything I said, and I definitely did not agree with everything he said. We used to have some blues. However, we did say that we would talk about things and that we would never hit the streets or the newspapers, and we did not. We talked things through and came to decisions. I do not care what members opposite say; I know that it was for the benefit of the Fire and Rescue Authority, because morale there increased dramatically. I thank Henry and all those firefighters and officers throughout Queensland. They were tremendous.

I want to also thank the voters of Southport, because without them I would not be here. I thank them for their confidence in me.

Mr Johnson: They know quality when they see it.

Mr VEIVERS: I must say that it involved a bit of quantity as well as quality. The swing against me was only 0.3%. This is my fifth term as a politician, although I am not a career politician. Isn't that amazing? I have lasted for five terms, but I am not a career politician, and I will tell members why. I am in a 54% Labor electorate, but I work hard. I am there all the time. If anyone wants to try to beat me at an election, they can try that at any time—although I do not want One Nation to stand against me next time. Things might change a bit over the next four months. If a member works hard and does the job properly, people will respect that member and vote him or her back in. I thank the voters of Southport.

I also thank my wife and family, because they have had to put up with a hell of a lot over the past 12 years. Another thing that I could talk about is how families of all politicians cop denigration when they go out into the workplace. That is unbelievable. It does not matter whether one is a member of the Labor Party, the National Party, the Liberal Party or the One Nation Party; over the years one's kids cop a hell of a hiding. That is not fair. Some people should say something about it. Maybe the members of the press will say something about it. Family members do not get paid. They answer the phone at night if I am not there. As those members who have been Ministers would be aware, Ministers are out all the time, so their wives have to answer the phone. Or if their children are home, they have to take the abuse—take whatever is coming—write notes and hand them on. Those family members also have their lives to live. My children are both professional youngsters. Well, they are aged 30 and 33. I call that young these days. Anyway, they are great children and they support me, too. But they should not have to put up with all the muck.

I want to thank the members of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority board, who have done a magnificent job, as have the members of the Queensland Ambulance Service board. I put in place two statutory authorities to take the politics out of all this, and I believe that I succeeded. I was taken aback at Kemp Place. I was invited there to have some tea and talk about a hypothetical problem that they had there. I walked in and they presented me with a trophy for being a very good Minister. I must admit that I was taken aback. I was lost for words—which is something!

I also take this opportunity to clear the air regarding certain uninformed statements made recently by the new Minister for Emergency Services, the Honourable Merri Rose. The debt from the former Queensland Fire Service is historical. It resulted from Labor getting rid of the old boards. The Staib report, which I commissioned, indicated that there was a need for \$30m extra funding per year. There was also the Masters report, which was commissioned by the board of the Fire Service. That report indicated a trust fund balance of \$6m in the red in 1997-98 and an \$8.5m deficit in 1998-99. The honourable member for Murrumba can take down these figures and give them to the Honourable Minister for Emergency Services, who is not in the Chamber at present.

I want to emphasise that this year's budget came in at \$18m in the black. The Minister has been saying that the budget is going to be in deficit. It is not. It is in the black, and it is up to her to keep it in the black. She has put lots of promises into that budget.

Mr Johnson: Fabricating it, too.

Mr VEIVERS: It is a fabrication, because the figures do not lie. I cannot condone the telling of mistruths. That is what has been done.

The member for Crows Nest said that when a new Government comes to power it always finds black holes everywhere. The members of this Government are jumping around and saying, "We cannot do this and we cannot do that", because they have to fund the billion-dollar promises of the Premier. Members should not delude themselves. That is what this Government is about.

As I said, this year's budget came in at \$18m in the black. There was an \$11m carryover and \$7m in savings through my good management. The Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority changeover from the former Queensland Fire Service involved a debt of \$21m. That debt is now only \$13.5m. My Government reduced that debt by \$7.5m over 29 months. The 1997-98 budget indicated that the trust fund would be in overdraft for eight months. The actual time was only two months. This was achieved despite not drawing down on the loan funds available for the Kedron Park complex. Kedron Park was paid for from cash flow. They call the complex at Kedron "Camp Veivers".

During 1997-98, under my guidance, we also focused on bedding down a range of industrial relations and human relations issues. A new award and certified agreement were finalised. I also bedded down an enterprise partnership as well as funding the costs of the change to a 38-hour week. In the last 18 months there has been enormous change in management through workplace reform. The entire management structure was changed. When the structure was put in place two years ago under my management, the morale of firemen was at an all-time low as a result of Labor's absolute mismanagement. Do members remember Tom Burns talking to firemen at the front of this building and calling them wankers? That has all changed, and the Fire and Rescue Authority has developed real pride in itself. Management has been devolved to all levels, and the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority men on the red trucks have a sense of ownership as never before.

Let me highlight another significant fact, that is, the massive drop in sick leave these days. I can honestly tell members that, at one station, the drop in sick leave has been over 40%. That is a massive decrease in sick leave. It is money in taxpayers' pockets. The high level of sick leave was the result of six years of Labor's mismanagement and financial incompetence and the fact that it did nothing to rectify the problems. Why did the Goss Labor Government not act on the recommendations of the Leivesley report, which referred to a \$40m shortfall in funding? This Minister fails to mention these very significant facts. Why did the then Labor Government not act on the Public Sector Management Commission review that it commissioned? We have never been told why.

As the former Minister, I was very aware of the financial mess that the former Goss Labor Government left behind for me. In conjunction with the board of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority and Henry Lawrence, I was proactively working to address Labor's financial incompetence and mismanagement. I challenge this Minister to tell the people of Queensland how she intends to address any anomalies in the current fire levy system. I will be watching her very closely.

I have always believed that there should be some reimbursement for road accident rescue work. The options range from a charge of \$10 per registration or fuel or tyre charges through to charging for any call-out. In some areas, most of the work is related to road rescue. At present nothing is received for that crucial emergency service. Savings can be made by hard decisions on some of the stations that have a low call-out rate and making them into day stations only. Decisions could be made to close stations in Brisbane and build new ones that are more strategically placed and which would cover greater areas. Some excellent work has been completed and would clearly justify the positioning of stations to achieve those objectives. That would also have the effect of providing better manning levels and providing greater safety for the firemen. That process was started with the construction of the new Chermside station. Once again, it was my Government that took that very progressive step forward. Financially, that is a positive as there are enormous savings as a result of adopting that process.

Big decisions have to be made regarding the urban interface in the rural fire brigade areas. There is a need to make big changes in that area and it will have an impact on income and costs. Residents in the Currumbin Valley, that is, in the Honourable Minister's own electorate, would be most interested to hear the Minister's plans in this regard. Enterprises such as the Mount Isa Mines project and the provision of training have the potential to provide income. It is to be hoped that Labor does not walk away from that aspect of the Queensland Fire and Rescue Authority. The Minister has brought pure politics into the debate. That is most unfortunate. Her moaning of late has been the first major destabilising influence on the QFRA in the past 18 months.

Time expired.
