



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE IN GOVERNMENT

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (10.30 a.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

"That this House expresses its confidence in the Beattie Labor Government; and, further, the Parliament advises the Governor that no writ should be issued for a general election to be held before 5 May 2001 without express resolution of the Parliament."

In supporting this motion, the Parliament today has a very simple choice. It is a choice between the stability and certainty that my Government offers and the chaos and uncertainty that would result from any attempt by other parties to form a Government. This Parliament and the people of Queensland can have absolute confidence in my Government, because we will continue for the next three years in the same determined, efficient way and with the certainty that we have displayed over the past month. My Government has already delivered certainty when, after the 13 June election, many commentators and the business community feared three years of chaos.

I believe that a long list of achievements from our first month in Government has already demonstrated to the people of Queensland that they can have confidence in my Government. Now I stand here today to explain why Parliament should also have confidence in my Government. I have to do far more than make promises and commitments. Anybody can make promises, but actions speak louder than words. And I say to members today that the actions of my Government have shouted that we are making things happen. Already we are making Queensland the can-do State.

It has been only 35 days since the Independent member for Nicklin announced that, on confidence motions, he would support a Government led by me. He said that he would continue to do so unless there is evidence of gross fraud, misappropriation or similar illegal activities and that he would support my Appropriation Bill and not abstain from voting. I table a copy of that letter from the member as well as a copy of a letter that I wrote to him.

The very next day, on 26 June, my deputy, Jim Elder, and I were sworn in at Government House. On Sunday, 28 June, I released a revamped Cabinet structure with portfolios designed to drive Queensland into the next century. The next day, on 29 June, my Ministers were sworn in. Only four days after the member for Nicklin had told me that he would support my Government, I had revamped the structure of my Cabinet, discussed with my caucus colleagues the composition of the Cabinet that I wanted and told those members selected what I expected of them. They had been sworn in, and they had moved into their ministerial offices to start work. "Start as you mean to carry on" is my motto, and that was demonstrated very clearly.

The Opposition argued that we would be a caretaker Government only until Parliament sat this week. For legal reasons we could not sit earlier. That would have led to four more weeks of Queensland drifting aimlessly with no leadership; four more weeks without a single meaningful decision being made; four more weeks of uncertainty; and four more weeks of damage to our economy. In my view, that was a weak, politically motivated assertion.

I sought legal advice, and the Attorney-General confirmed that the Governor had commissioned me to form a Government. There were no constraints. And only in the sense that I was determined to take care of Queensland right from the start was my Government a caretaker. We were in business

from day one to get results and to get Queensland moving again, and that is exactly what we did. We hit the ground running and started to deliver. So instead of Queensland being allowed to drift rudderless, we started the motor, went through the gears and accelerated away.

That first day, after Ministers were sworn in, the Deputy Premier, Jim Elder, and I held a working lunch with the leaders of Queensland's peak industry and business organisations to tell them that they could have certainty about the future. I assured them that there would be no freeze on capital works and no freeze on decision making; we were determined to get on with it. I also sent another signal: the days of the long lunch are over. We got down to business over sandwiches and orange juice. On 2 July, only a week after the member for Nicklin had told me that he would enable me to form Government, we held our first Cabinet meeting. Other Governments have used such occasions to reverse decisions made by their predecessors. Not us; we would have none of that.

As everyone knows, tourism is Queensland's second-biggest industry, generating \$7.7 billion a year and employing 122,000 people. Because of the Asian economic crisis, there was an urgent need to counteract the effects of the Asian financial meltdown and the impact of foreign media reports about One Nation and its policies. I accept that those reports were wildly inaccurate. Nevertheless, they were destructive of this State's image overseas. Queensland's jobs were at stake. So the first major decision of the Labor Government was to provide an additional \$5m to promote Queensland as a tourist destination both in Australia and overseas. That submission was brought by the Minister for Tourism, Bob Gibbs, and that was the first major decision of my Government. We were getting on to protect our second-biggest industry.

The tourism industry says that this funding will generate 1,400 new jobs and increase direct visitor spending in Queensland by \$56m. It is worth pointing out that every time 17 international visitors come to Queensland, it creates one job for a Queenslander. And every time a jumbo lands, that creates 25 jobs for Queenslanders in the tourism industry. That is why that industry needed support from Government, and it got it.

Let me give examples to the Parliament of some of our other achievements. Between 29 June, when my full Cabinet was sworn in, and yesterday, 29 July, we captured the biggest sporting event of the year 2001, that is, the world Goodwill Games, for Brisbane against strong competition from other countries. This will mean 1,700 jobs for Queensland and a boost of about \$167m to the State economy. Despite negative, harping criticism from the Opposition, the Minister for Tourism went to New York and signed the agreement. We got on with it.

Secondly, we persuaded international company Stellar Communications to locate its Asian call centre operations in Queensland, beating off competition from Tasmania, Victoria and South Australia and creating up to 400 new jobs. We created a \$5.4m package to boost building and construction jobs, with up to 3,000 apprenticeships being created in the first three years.

With one urban renewal scheme at Riverview slashing calls to police by 60%—so, in effect, reducing crime—we committed an extra \$7.5m to 13 crime-cutting urban renewal projects around the State this financial year. So what is happening here? We are starting to get tough on the causes of crime. We will tackle crime in a way that will be effective, and it will work; it will not be mere empty rhetoric.

We immediately installed a rescue package for the compulsory third-party scheme, which the last Government deliberately left in disarray, and we contributed a \$200,000 windfall from Government vehicle fleet registrations to child victims of road accidents. We organised and held a highly successful major trade and tourism summit to identify exactly what problems we have to overcome in trade and tourism with our Asian neighbours, and we sent out a positive message to Asia and the rest of the world that Queensland was back to business. That summit also identified strategies that can be used in boosting trade and tourism. As I said, we sent a positive message to our trading partners that we are and will continue to be open for business.

With the Health Minister, Wendy Edmond, I announced the construction of the largest cancer research centre in the southern hemisphere at the Queensland Institute of Medical Research at the Royal Brisbane Hospital at a cost of \$68m. We delivered a major law and order commitment to provide \$1m worth of basic equipment for prison officers. We have provided an extra \$8.7m to enable all primary and secondary schools to become leading schools. We have made all schools leading schools. That means that a total of 1,300 schools have benefited. The money has already been given to schools with more than 400 students. The smaller schools will receive their funding from the first semester next year.

In order to look after the victims of crime, the Attorney-General—as has the Government—has shifted the focus of the justice system back to victims, where it belongs. He has released discussion papers on reforms to the stalking laws and on ways to strengthen the rights of crime victims. This Government will look after the interests of the victims of crime.

We have boosted funding for Queensland's disability services by \$30m and established the Disability Services Agency, which will have a compassionate and caring role in relation to people with disabilities. We committed an extra \$5m per year to palliative care in the community sector. Importantly, I have set a three-month timetable to resolve the Wik impasse, with the first stage of the legislation being introduced in this House after this debate in accordance with the strict timetable that I have set. In fact, the Government has been making things happen on a daily basis.

If this argument fails to win support, members must answer this question: what are the alternatives if Labor does not form a Government? Anyone speaking against this motion must do more than just criticise, whinge and make allegations. I emphasise that members opposing this motion must put forward an alternative Government—a Government that can deliver more certainty than this one; a Government that has similar guarantees of a three-year tenure; a Government that offers better leadership than this one; a Government that will provide better services than this one; a Government that can supply more apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements, more full time jobs and better job security measures than this one; a Government that can win the confidence of business and industry. Let us consider what industry is saying. The chief executive of the Queensland Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Clive Bubb, has announced that the interests of the State would be best served if Labor were able to form a Government. Mr Bubb said—

"The political reality for the Coalition is that it cannot govern without the consistent support of One Nation members—and that party has made it plain that its members are new to the political process and will not be called upon to act as a cohesive force."

Mr Borbidge: You agree with him now?

Mr BEATTIE: Yes, I do. As the Leader of the Opposition knows, from time to time Mr Bubb has been a critic of me, the Opposition and this Government. Therefore, one could not have a more impartial person to endorse my Government. He is another person who has seen the light.

Mr Bubb emphasised—

"This reality makes it virtually impossible for the Coalition to form a stable Government."

For the benefit of the Leader of the Opposition I say: yes, I do agree with him. On the possibility of a Labor Government, Mr Bubb said—

"This option clearly has greater potential for stability than the alternative."

I repeat: anyone speaking against this motion will have no credibility unless he or she can propose a better arrangement that offers greater certainty. The plain facts are these: Labor has 44 seats and the member for Nicklin has given sufficient guarantees for Labor to form a Government for the next three years. The member for Nicklin has maintained his independence. I acknowledge that on the record today. However, with Parliament comprising four parties and two Independent members, the results of divisions are far from predictable. The member for Nicklin has asserted his independence on votes not affecting confidence motions and the Appropriation Bill. He has said that he intends to vote in the best interests of Nicklin and of Queensland. I assure the member for Nicklin that we believe that the policies that won us more seats than all the other parties put together are the best policies for Queensland. It is up to us to demonstrate that they are also in the best interests of Nicklin. We intend to do that over the next three years.

Having said that, there will undoubtedly be issues on which we will lose votes in this Parliament. Let us face up to that reality right at the beginning. Of course it will be tough for the Government. I have said it in the past and I repeat it: we will not win every vote in this Parliament. But that will not be the end of the world for us. That will not bring down the Government. I intend to ensure that it does not affect the confidence that Queenslanders can have in my Government. I will ensure that it does not affect the certainty that business and industry need to have in Government to invest and grow and produce jobs. I am not here to just form a Government and play it safe. My Government will continue to make decisions and govern as if we have a majority of 10. That is exactly what we have been doing over the past month. My Government is here to make a difference. I am here to lead. My Government is here to improve the lifestyles of Queenslanders, and we will. Not only has this Government been making things happen for the past month but also we will be introducing all those commitments and policies that attracted 53% of the vote on a two-party preferred basis. That figure is of crucial importance.

On 20 February 1996, the member for Surfers Paradise stood in this precise spot. He had proposed a motion of confidence in a Government formed by 44 members of the coalition plus one Independent. He said the fact that the coalition had achieved 53% of the two-party preferred vote gave his Government legitimacy. If the member for Surfers Paradise believed that then, he must surely believe the same of Labor today. Those votes were won by policies that focus on job creation and on increasing job security—by breaking the unemployment cycle suffered by thousands of young Queenslanders who cannot get a start in the workforce and by those who feel they are on the scrap

heap because they are over the age of 40; by generating nearly 25,000 apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements in the next three years; by creating a network of State development centres to drive job creation strategies specially tailored for each of the regions; and by accelerating the job-creating infrastructure and Capital Works Program which will light a fire under the economy.

On 6 July, in order to create new jobs, I ordered my Government to award as many capital works contracts as possible before the end of December. Other policies focus on providing a better health service, a better education service and on not only being tough on law and order but on being tough about the causes of crime. A comprehensive policy deals with crime prevention that works. It is far better to prevent crime in the first place than to try to deal with the damage suffered by people after a crime has been committed. We are proud of the policies we developed as a result of two and a half years of listening to the needs of Queenslanders. They told us that unemployment and job insecurity were by far their biggest worries, so this Government has a Minister for Employment who is concentrating on bringing down unemployment and increasing job security. We have created a Department of State Development to drive regional development strategies throughout the State in our quest to create new jobs and increase job security. This is being driven by the Deputy Premier. For the first time, responsibility for Information Technology and Telecommunications, with its massive potential for new, clean jobs, has been amalgamated into a single division. Again, a senior Minister, Terry Mackenroth, is driving that initiative. I have already announced the formation of a special Cabinet task force to investigate the creation of a new backbone fibre-optic communications network to deliver Government services to regional Queensland and create new jobs.

People with disabilities have not received the attention or the resources which they deserve and need, so I have appointed a Minister for Disability Services. I have also demonstrated that we will continue to listen to Queenslanders from all over the State. We received more than 110 formal deputations to our first Community Cabinet meeting in Edmonton in far-north Queensland. We will be holding 15 of those meetings throughout Queensland every year, and the next one will be in Ipswich.

I have demonstrated comprehensively that, having been sworn in only a month ago yesterday, my Government can already stand on its record. That record, rather than a long list of promises, is proof that my Government merits the confidence of Parliament. The choice is simple: on the one hand a jumble of One Nation, National and Liberal Party members creating chaos and uncertainty as they jostle for supremacy—and the National Party forecasting that such an arrangement would be doomed to failure—and on the other a can-do Government that is able to provide certainty, a massive job creation package, imaginative policies and better services for Queenslanders; a Government that will not only lift the standard of debate in this Parliament so it is respected by the whole community but also a Government that is going to get Queensland moving again.
