



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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Hansard 19 November 1998

## VALEDICTORY

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (8.55 p.m.): It is the custom of the Queensland Parliament to offer a Valedictory address at the adjournment of the House on the last sitting day of the year. It is a custom that I take up wholeheartedly. We have made it to the end of the year. Well done to all of us.

First, on behalf of my Government, I extend my very best wishes to all members and their families for a safe, healthy and happy Christmas and an equally healthy and rewarding new year. For the Government, 1998 has certainly been a rewarding year—we started off in Opposition as the alternative Government and won Government in mid year.

This afternoon, as Parliament rises for the Christmas recess over summer, it is my pleasure to offer a number of thankyou's. I do this gladly, because it gives me the chance to mention the many people who work so tirelessly to make Parliament run smoothly. And there are a lot of them. I would like to say that these are not mere duty thankyou's; they are offered from the heart.

Firstly, let me offer my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, for the wit and wisdom, the patience and perception, the balance and brevity you have brought to the job. Congratulations. I am sure that you have won the respect of both sides of the Parliament. If you have felt the need to monster the odd member from time to time, I am sure that we understand why.

I thank also the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees, the Temporary Chairpersons and the parliamentary committees for all their work in 1998. As we all know, the parliamentary committees play a very useful function in this Parliament. They have worked incredibly hard, and I congratulate them on that.

I thank the Whips on all sides for managing to maintain discipline in the House and for making certain that the House runs in an orderly way. I thank Terry Sullivan and Pat Purcell, for the Government; the Opposition Whips, Bill Baumann and John Hegarty; and One Nation's Whips, Jeff Knuth and Jack Paff, for their contributions. I thank each and every one of my Ministers for the efforts they have put in over the year, particularly in the past five months since we came to Government. I thank them for their loyalty and support and the team effort that they have put in. They hit the ground running in June, and that commitment has not flagged since.

I know that I have made many demands and set high standards for them all. I am very grateful for all their efforts in making our Government successful from day one. I pay tribute also to their families, because we all know that in the game of politics families are the ones who often miss out because of the busy lives that we all lead, particularly Ministers.

In particular, I thank the Deputy Premier, Jim Elder, for his strong support and unfailing assistance, particularly over the past five months of Government but also during the two years and four months of Opposition. His performance since the change of Government shows that he has indeed been—he won't mind my saying this—a runt with grunt, and I congratulate him on that.

**Mr Sullivan:** You almost got it right.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Russell Cooper started it; I have finished it. I have given it a bit of style. There is nothing wrong with being a runt with grunt.

I also thank my colleague the Leader of Government Business and Minister for Communication and Information, Terry Mackenroth, who has provided absolutely invaluable assistance during the past

months. His guidance from the Government benches in terms of tactics has been important and his role has been a key one. His help has been all the more appreciated because, as we know, in recent times he has had a very minor health problem. I am sure I speak on behalf of all members when I say that we wish you well over the next few months of treatment, and we know that you are going to be back in fighting fit form in early January. We wish you well.

I also single out David Hamill for his splendid first Budget, and I acknowledge the work of the rest of my parliamentary colleagues. I take this opportunity, too, to thank all the members of my caucus, who managed the transition from Opposition to Government with a spirit of determination and a work ethic which does us proud.

I have thanked all of my Ministers already, but it would be remiss of me not to thank all of the shadow Ministers as well for their wholehearted assistance in helping the Government make the nightly news in such favourable light on so many occasions in 1998. I look forward to receiving the same cooperation in 1999.

I want to thank the Opposition Leader, Rob Borbidge and his team. We have cooperated on a number of matters. As we all know, without an Opposition, this democratic institution does not function very well. A lot of people do not understand that, while we have our arguments on many things, we actually agree on a lot of things. I thank Rob for his cooperation throughout the year.

On a more serious note, I salute all of the members on the other side of the House. They managed the transition to Opposition with dignity—if reluctance. I should again say to Rob that one of the things about which we can all be proud is that the transition from the Goss Government to the Borbidge Government was handled with dignity, and the transition from the Borbidge Government to the Beattie Government was also handled with dignity. On a personal level, I thought that he handled that with grace and goodwill and in a very friendly way. While we have had some heated exchanges over the time that we have been in our respective positions——

**Mr Borbidge:** I am sure you will do the same.

**Mr BEATTIE:** The Leader of the Opposition will not live that long.

On a serious note, I do want to thank him for that friendliness. I am sure that, in another 20 years when I tire of this job, I will behave in the same way. On both sides of the House we recognise that the level of communication between Opposition and Government is necessary to make this place work, and I think that does go on to the level that is needed. I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition will agree that my Ministers offer the same level of communication to Opposition spokespeople.

I think that it is also important that we acknowledge the role of a number of people who make this place work. They are not just the Government members and the Opposition workers, but also the two Independents and the One Nation Party. At this stage I would like to thank the Independent member for Nicklin for honouring his commitment to support my Government in matters of Supply and confidence in what remains a finely balanced House. I commend him for fiercely protecting his independence, which he has successfully demonstrated to his constituents.

Notwithstanding some criticism that the member for Nicklin has had from time to time, he has had the courage and fortitude to accept that and has not gone out and whinged or complained about it. I think that shows him to be a very decent Australian, and I wish him well. I would also like to thank the other Independent in this House, the honourable member for Gladstone. Again and again Mrs Cunningham has proved herself to be a true Independent who has been prepared to communicate with my Government, and we thank her for that. At the end of the day, she has also made up her mind about how she will vote.

It is important on an occasion such as this to say that, being an Independent in this House is very difficult, indeed. It is much more difficult to be an Independent than it is to be a member of the Government or the Opposition. This House has not had a long tradition of Independents. In many ways, it has been a new experience for Parliament and, as I often say, it has certainly been a character building experience for both the member for Gladstone and the member for Nicklin, as it has been for the Government. I personally want to say that I have admired the way that they have behaved, and I wish them well for next year as well.

At this stage I would also like to mention the One Nation Leader, Bill Feldman, and his colleagues. We are getting there. As he knows, I have strong views about the role of One Nation and its policies. However, I have to say that, when it comes to this Parliament, as I have promised, we have treated One Nation members with courtesy and respect. His team has obviously had to find its feet. They have been at the disadvantage that, unlike the established political parties, they did not have anyone there to show them the ropes and help them throughout the processes. That is something that they have not had the advantage of. Under those circumstances, it has been incredibly difficult, but I think that they have started to weather that storm. While I disagree about policies, I think that they have demonstrated that they are committed to the institution of Parliament. We look forward to continuing

our sparring next year. As I said to them earlier on tonight, I visited Charlie Rappolt on Saturday—one of their members who has resigned from the seat of Mulgrave. I gave him the best wishes of all members of this House and I am sure that we all wish him well and a speedy recovery.

No Parliament could function as well as this one does without the goodwill and hard work of the supporting staff. I refer to the Clerk of the Parliament, Robert Doyle, and all of his staff. I thank them for all the bipartisan and non-political assistance that they offer both sides of the House equally. I certainly believe that they have earned a breather over the coming months. As honourable members know, it is often the advice of the Clerk that assists the Speaker in making rulings. It is never easy in that role, but he has always carried it out in an impartial way, and I thank him for that.

I would also like to thank the Parliamentary Counsel and staff. I want to make a particular reference to Alan Watson and his very hardworking Hansard staff, who really do a superb job often under trying circumstances. Anyone who can make English out of some of the more boisterous exchanges and interjections on this floor deserves a Victoria Cross, never mind a mere thankyou. I have often heard speeches made in this House that have made absolutely no sense until I have read them in Hansard.

I say a big thanks to Nick Bannenberg and all the Library staff for their swift help and their invaluable publications and resource material. The Library plays a very important role, as does Corporate Services and Property Services under their very able Executive Director, Robert Fick, not to mention the Members Support Services.

Special mention needs to be made here of the Chief Parliamentary Attendant, Kevin Jones, and all his very able staff. I doubt whether there would be another Parliament in Australia with friendlier or more efficient staff. I must commend them all on their unfailing cheerfulness, no matter how hectic the work. In many ways they are the show face—if I can put it in those terms—of this Parliament, and they do us all proud.

On behalf of the Government, let me also pay tribute to the Office of Education and Protocol. That office looks after all of the visitors, including schoolchildren, and it works very hard, as do the staff of Human Resource Management, Finance and Information Technology Services. That is an area that is under great and increasing pressure, and I think that they do a remarkably good job. All these areas are vital to the smooth running of the Parliament, but too rarely do we give them due credit. It is on occasions such as this that both sides of the House must do so.

At this stage I would like to say how much we all appreciate the switchboard operators, those unsung heroes who have to deal with the thousands of calls which pass in and out of our offices over the year. Thanks, too, to the Catering Division staff. Those of us who endure late night sittings know it sometimes takes a lot of fuelling the inner person to get through. Their service is great and so is the food. They do a great job.

I should not let the hard work of Property Services, which is involved in purchasing, stores, cleaning, maintenance and gardening, pass without saying a big thankyou. If I may, I would like to single out the gardeners for a special mention in dispatches. It never ceases to amaze me how beautifully the gardens are kept, especially the Speaker's Green. Let me pay a special tribute to the man who has been responsible for the Speaker's Green, those magnificent roses and all the other features around the buildings. John Pullman, the head gardener, who has tended the gardens of Parliament House for 26 years—more than a quarter of a century—is retiring at the end of next week. I want to thank John on behalf of all of us for the love and care that he has put into the grounds. We wish him a long and happy retirement, and we hope that he will visit us from time to time.

I know that I am not the only one to appreciate the tranquillity and careful order of the Green after the often unruly, hurly-burly of question time in the House. The two possums who are nesting outside the Strangers Dining Room appreciate it, too, and they send their best wishes to you, Mr Speaker, for allowing them to stay. Given the wildlife I have to endure in this place, it is a great comfort to know that I am not the only mild and cuddly creature seeking refuge in the greenery. That was a bit of humour.

I am coming to something very serious here. I want to also thank the security, which has been upgraded in recent times. I think the security staff do an excellent job here, and I thank them as well. It is a very difficult job.

The members of the parliamentary press gallery play an important role here. They must take the inevitable conflicting arguments from both sides of the House and attempt to deal with them in an impartial fashion. I have to say that they do not always achieve that end. I believe that on most occasions they manage that balancing act very well—at least, I think I believe that. Some have had more practice than others, and some have got closer to the mark than others.

I think it is important that I pay tribute tonight to Peter Morley, who has been a political reporter for the Courier-Mail for 20 years. Today is the last day that Peter is reporting on the activities of this House for the Courier-Mail. I may not have always agreed with Peter's assessment of political events, but he has certainly savaged both sides on a regular basis. He has been a loyal servant to the Courier-Mail and, on behalf of all members, I wish him well for the future.

Thanks, too, to all electorate staff. I know that I can say this on behalf of both sides of the Parliament. These are the people who keep our offices running smoothly, who answer the hundreds of telephone calls and who assist our constituents. Without them, we would be lost. I pay a particular tribute here to my own electorate secretary, Myra Freeman, who, as honourable members would understand, because of my responsibilities largely carries the electoral office work alone. She has done a superb job and I thank her for that, as I thank all electorate office staff on both sides of the House.

I also say a huge thanks to my own staff in the Premier's office. They have had a big year—in Opposition first and then in Government. They have given me unswerving loyalty. They have given me a bit of advice from time to time, some of which I have taken. They have also given me their support during the very long hours which this role requires. As the Leader of the Opposition would know, personal staff have an enormous burden placed on them. They suffer enormous stress. Without personal staff we would not be able to carry out—

**Mr Mickel:** Hear, hear!

**Mr BEATTIE:** Some of the personal staff go on to bigger and better things. Some of them perhaps should not have! We will be watching the member over the next few years. I do thank my personal staff, because they have performed incredibly well. I also thank the various departmental staff.

A very special tribute must also be paid to the families of all honourable members of this House. Many people in the community, while they understand how difficult politics can be, do not understand the 24-hour-a-day, seven-day-a-week demands which are made on politicians and, more importantly, on their families. All too often heavy strains are placed on families—particularly on those with young children. Many of us in this House do have young families. I think it is important that we pay tribute to our families tonight. I know that the Leader of the Opposition is in a similar position to me, having a young family. On these occasions we need to acknowledge the sacrifices that they make. I wish to thank my wife, Heather, for her understanding and patience. I thank my three children for accepting so gracefully that I am simply not able to be with them as much as I would like. I thank the dog for stopping biting me when I get home.

I wish all honourable members, all parliamentary staff, all personal staff and families the very best for the coming holiday season. I trust I have left no-one out. If I have, I apologise. I have not intended to do that.

1998 will go down in Queensland political history as an interesting year. We have seen the emergence of a new political party with One Nation. We have seen a change of Government. Notwithstanding all those things, while we have had our differences we have not had one drop of blood shed in this State. We should remember what a great democracy we live in. If we look at what has happened in countries such as Yugoslavia and many other countries of the world, we see that changes of Government do not occur in the organised, sensible, constructive way that they do in this country. We do not see the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition having a friendly chat about how they are going to go and see the Governor and make the change of office. We do not find that in many countries of the world.

I think one of the things we can all agree on, regardless of our political differences, is that the strength of this democracy is the future of a great country. We must all work hard to cherish it. Over the Christmas holidays I am sure that we will gain new strength and new vigour to come back and to ensure that in 1999 this remains a strong and vibrant democracy.

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