



Speech by

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE**

**MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE**

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Hansard 19 November 1998

**VALEDICTORY**

**Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE** (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (9.13 p.m.): I join with the Premier in making this Valedictory address. I thank the Premier and the members of his Government for the best wishes they have extended to Opposition and non-Government members during the course of the evening. I make these remarks tonight on behalf of my colleague the Leader of the Liberal Party, who has commitments elsewhere that were entered into in the belief that Parliament would be sitting next week.

I make these remarks in good humour, secure as all of us are in the knowledge that the Parliament, as the Premier has said, is the finest expression of our robust and healthy democracy—the great engine of executive power in this State—and, surprisingly to people outside, very often a place of friendship and fellowship that transcends party politics.

Last year at this time—well, not quite at this time; the coalition Government was energised and open enough to make Parliament work until a little closer to Christmas—the honourable member for Brisbane Central made the comment that "it will be a different Valedictory next year". He was right. In the spirit of this occasion I will forbear to remark on this significant improvement to his record, other than to note that there is a first time for everything.

The 49th Parliament is a very different place from the 48th, a fact that is notable in itself but which also warrants notice in this address. This parliamentary year spans two Parliaments and two minority Governments. It also marks the first time that a fracturing of the party system has created in this place a crossbench party in significant numbers.

At the June election several members retired—five from the Labor side and two from National Party ranks. I record my best wishes to Mark Stoneman and Di McCauley and to Wayne Goss, Keith De Lacy, Ken McElligott, Glen Milliner and Geoff Smith. Mark Stoneman served the coalition Government as the Premier's representative in north Queensland. He was a key element in our determination to be a truly representative Government for the tropical north as well as the sub-tropical south.

Queensland is a great State and none of us in this place would ever want to forget that. It is pleasing to see that the new Government appears at this stage also seized by the geographic extent of Queensland and that it, too, recognises the principle of vital difference between north and south.

Di McCauley was Minister for Local Government and Planning in my Government, a role she played with consummate skill and good sense right up to polling day, which was retirement day for her. I place on record, too, my appreciation for the way she so ably represented me and the then Government at the final voting meeting on Expo 2002 in Paris the week before the election when, for obvious reasons, I was unable to be present.

Queensland's innovative and enterprising bid for the world's first-recognised exposition was an initiative of the coalition Government. It was organised in a very tight time frame as an opportunity that Queensland should grasp with vigour. It was so good that it surprised the world's expo nations by forcing the first ever tied vote in the history of the Bureau of International Expositions. The bid is still alive, pending a final announcement by the Philippines—which narrowly won on the second ballot in Paris in June—on whether in fact it can proceed with its own plans.

The fact that the bid so nearly won only 10 years after World Expo 88 in Brisbane is to the credit of everyone involved in the bid process, the administration of the bid within the Public Service and the strong bipartisan nature of political support for it here and federally. That bipartisan support remains unshakeable. The Premier knows that he can count on exactly the same level of support from me as Opposition Leader as I had from him as Premier.

At the 13 June election we lost some good and long-serving members from our ranks—casualties of the electoral process that we all face and from which the practice and principle of democracy thoroughly benefit. In the course of shaping a new Parliament for Queensland, the electors removed five Nationals and six Liberals—the National members for Nicklin, Tablelands, Barambah, Lockyer and Mulgrave, and the Liberal members for Barron River, Greenslopes, Mount Ommaney, Springwood, Mundingburra and Mansfield. The National Party seat of Burdekin also changed hands with the retirement of Mark Stoneman. This, along with Labor's loss of six seats to One Nation, represented a fundamental change to the way politics has created outcomes in Queensland. This is not an occasion on which it would be proper to canvass either the advisability of that change or its results, as so far discerned, in terms of the people's representation and real interests. But if nothing else, it has concentrated minds on both sides of this House.

Tom Gilmore, Naomi Wilson, Trevor Perrett and Tony FitzGerald, Lyn Warwick, Ted Radke, Bob Harper, Luke Woolmer, Frank Tanti—the kilted Malteser—and Frank Carroll all made significant contributions to Queensland and to this House and are missed. Among these casualties, we especially miss the rare talent of former Speaker Neil Turner, whose contribution to the greening of this place—not to mention putting actual form to the legend of Jurassic Park, which you now enjoy, Mr Speaker, and reviving the fine old sport of chasing errant news photographers—is memorable indeed. The former Speaker's removal from this place by the overwhelmingly conservative electors of Nicklin came via a process that saw elected this Parliament's second Independent. Today, however, I want to make special mention of the other Independent: the pioneering Independent, the independent Independent, the member for Gladstone.

**Government members:** Oh, come on!

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I am expressing my view—and, I think, with justification.

**Government members** interjected.

**Mr BORBIDGE:** Mr Speaker, I heard the Premier in silence, and I would hope that, espousing the new standards of Premier Beattie, I would be extended the same courtesy. There are traditions in respect of this debate, and I suspect that new members opposite should learn them.

It was not always easy working with Mrs Cunningham in Government—and I believe that is wholly to her credit. But it was always rewarding; and it was always a process that, while challenging, was invariably conducted with civility and objectivity. I thank her for that and for her true independence.

At this point, too, I make special mention of my friend and colleague Jeff Seeney, who took up the National standard from Di McCauley in the seat of Callide. And I extend a warm welcome to every new member of the House. I wish every member the compliments of the season and the thanks of both the Opposition and the previous Government for their contributions to the proceedings of this place. I thank in particular the hardworking members of the former Government and the present Opposition front bench for their determination and energy in always striving to do what is best for Queensland.

I note with particular emphasis the contribution Joan Sheldon made to the coalition, both in Opposition and in Government, until she left the leadership in June, and her sterling service as Deputy Premier, Treasurer, Minister for the Arts and Minister for Women's Affairs during the term of the coalition Government. The coalition did not have a particularly easy time in Government. No minority administration ever will. But the new challenge of minority Government is one that has been decided upon by the voters, and it is the Government's job—Government in the widest sense—to work within the boundaries that the electors have set.

It is to the great credit of my colleagues in Government up to June this year that we achieved balance and successful administration in this difficult environment. This would not have worked as well as it did—or even at all—without the dedicated assistance of the professional Public Service and the heads of that service. I pay particular tribute on that score to the Director-General of the Department of the Premier and Cabinet under the coalition, Mr Peter Ellis. And I do so, too, in the case of Mr Ellis' deputy, Mr John Sosso, a career public servant of consummate skill and learning, whose employment was crudely terminated at the change of Government.

**Mr McGrady:** This is disgusting!

**Mr BORBIDGE:** I will ignore that interjection, because there are certain things that I could say that would severely embarrass the Government.

In any Parliament, the life of a Whip can be a torrid one. In a minority situation, both Government and Opposition Whips have a particularly hard job to do. I pay tribute to the Opposition Whips, Mr Baumann and Mr Hegarty, to the Government Whips, Mr Purcell and Mr Sullivan, and to the One Nation Whips, Mr Knuth and Mr Paff. They have all played their part in assisting with the job of keeping the House running smoothly.

I also will respond to comments made earlier by the Government Whip. I say to the Government Whip and to members of the Government that I think we have been more than reasonable in respect of pairs. In regard to the Minister for Mines and Energy, I remind him of my willingness to provide a pair so that he could go interstate last week in respect of certain undertakings that were given a long time ago when funeral arrangements were organised. I also make the point to the Government Whip that last night, when he had a big night on with his family, we were obviously prepared to provide that pair. I say to all the Whips that they have all played their part in assisting with the job of keeping the House running smoothly. In the 48th Parliament, the chief Government Whip's job went to Frank Carroll when Lawrence Springborg was elevated to the Ministry. Mr Carroll—at this point no longer with us in the Chamber—is due great credit for the way he handled his job during the sometimes fractious sessions leading up to the State election.

This is an occasion to be frank and sometimes to be blunt. I want to also pay tribute to the Leader of the House and to the Leader of Opposition Business in the House—to Mr Mackenroth and to Mr Beanland. Terry, we know that recent times have not been easy for you, but I also want you to know that you carry with you the respect of honourable members on this side of the House. We share with you the understanding, hopefully, of the process that you have been going through. We are pleased that you are making a speedy recovery, and we look forward to seeing you back when Parliament resumes in fine form and fine voice and fully recovered in that famous and inimitable style that we all enjoy. I wish you well on behalf of all members on this side.

It is, of course, perfectly true—as the Premier has already noted—that no Parliament would work at all without the energy and expertise of its supporting staff. The Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Doyle, has as always been unfailing in the support and sound advice he gives to all members. The Clerk Assistant (Table) and Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr Ian Thompson, the Second Clerk-Assistant, Mr Barry Sanderson, the Parliamentary Officer (Votes), Ms Annette Henery, the parliamentary officers in Bills and Papers, Messrs Bob Bradbury, Brett Charlier and Andrew Timperley, and the Chief Librarian, Mr Nick Bannenberg, and his staff have as always provided excellent service.

Special mention should be made of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, headed by Peter Drew, whose workload has significantly increased because of the new provisions for private members' Bills introduced by the previous coalition Government and carried on by this administration. Their work has always been exemplary, whatever the challenge.

Parliament's increased workload, as I noted in my Valedictory last year as Premier, has increased substantially through the changes we made to the committee system—changes I am glad to see are supported by Labor in office—and I add my congratulations to those of the Premier in his address to the Hansard staff led by Mr Alan Watson. My thanks, too, to the officers responsible for the Corporate Services and Members Support Program; everyone on the administrative staff; the Chief Parliamentary Attendant, Mr Kevin Jones, and his staff; and the Security staff under their coordinator, Ms Geraldine Broerse. As always, they have performed their duties with courtesy and efficiency. Let it be noted that this is always appreciated.

Likewise, I add my appreciation—offered both as Premier for half the parliamentary year and as Opposition Leader—to that noted by the Premier for the enthusiastic staff in Education, under Graeme Kinnear, and in Protocol under Ted Newton. They are responsible for much of what the public sees about how Queensland's Parliament works. We are not an overly large Parliament in the scheme of things, in those lucky places around the globe whose Government is based on parliamentary democracy. But this Parliament is nonetheless a complex undertaking. We are fortunate that it is so well served by dedicated staff in human relations, finance, the evermore omnipotent information technologists, and others. Parliament could not function without its telephonists and executive assistants and would not march anywhere—and I think it marches very well—without the Catering Division under Mr Jaakko Ponsi, who joined us only last year and who has been tempting palates widely ever since. My thanks, too, to Mr John McDonough and Property Services, who keep the whole precinct spick and span.

As ever, the gardens and lawns have been a delight to all throughout the year. As the Premier remarked, this year marks the retirement of Head Gardener, John Pullman. He joined us here in 1972. He has seen a few Governments come and go in that mere 26 years. While his retirement is a matter of regret—no-one likes to lose an old friend, and, in so many ways, regardless of our differences, we are all friends here—it is also well deserved. Parliament's gardens will be the losers on the deal, but as Mr Pullman would doubtless say with some force, he leaves a blooming great team that will always be a winner. The evidence of that is all around us. I know I speak for all members when I say to John: all the

best for the future, and may all your blooms be little beauties. He served this Parliament with great distinction and we will miss him.

The parliamentary press gallery has reason, one would hope, for concluding that 1998 produced some interesting copy—print or electronic—and we in this House always look forward to seeing our endeavours reported widely and accurately. Last year, I remarked that it is often astonishing what is left unreported from this place and astounding what is sometimes regarded as worth reporting. It seems appropriate to repeat that remark this year. I suspect it will still be relevant next year. But the press gallery has an important and historic role in the legislature. I thank its members for their scrutiny in the public interest over the past year. I join with the Premier in wishing Peter Morley well. At various times, we have been on the receiving end. At times he has been particularly astute; at times he has missed the mark. I remember that, just before the downfall of the Goss Government, we were described as the "Easybeats". That was not one of his better columns. I have to say that, right through the years, I have always found Peter an absolute gentleman to deal with, an absolute professional and totally objective to the point of annoying both sides of politics at regular intervals. That is probably one of the finest tributes that we could pay a member of the gallery. I wish Peter well for the future. We look forward to seeing him from time to time and enjoying his wit and his demeanour.

None of us here could, of course, function without the close support of our electorate office staff. On behalf of Opposition members, I offer my gratitude to them for their efforts this year, at all hours and in every sort of weather that this wonderful State is capable of producing. The ministerial staff who supported us in the half year up to the change of Government deserve a special mention, particularly perhaps those whose working lives were interrupted by that change and who, in some cases, are still looking for positions where they can properly use their considerable talents. The Opposition staff has helped tremendously in managing the mid-year change from Government to Opposition. They are a team that we on this side of the House can all be proud of and I thank them.

In Government and in Opposition, members and staff alike always have to be ready to put their families and loved ones, and their private lives and pleasures, to one side in pursuit of the matter of the moment. Only dedicated people are prepared to do that, and this is truly one comment that in this place can be made in a wholly bipartisan way in respect of each and every one of the 89 members.

I certainly could not have kept up the pace required of a political leader without the support and affection of my family. My wife, Jennifer, has selflessly maintained her deep understanding of the disruptions to normal life that flow from being a parliamentarian. My children have continued their generous and ready acceptance that sometimes—too often—a political dad cannot be there in person. They know, I hope, that I am always with them in spirit. My family has my enduring and growing appreciation for finding a way to live with the vagaries and difficulties of politics.

Mr Speaker, on behalf of the Opposition, I thank you for the courtesies that you have extended to us during your tenure in office. This year has been a fractious one. It has been one that in a community less blessed than Queensland might indeed have been an angry one. It is to the credit of every Queenslander that the political turmoil of this year has been managed with good humour and commonsense. It is a fundamental truth in Australia that much more binds us together than will ever drive us apart. In this place, as on the hustings, we debate and we argue and we are frank. From time to time we upset one another. That is what Parliament is all about. That is what parliamentary democracy is all about. Great issues are at stake. Firm opinions are held. Fortright points of view are expressed. The day we back away from that is the day we cease to be a Parliament. The other fundamental truth of our democracy is that we do all this in the spirit of one people forever held together by a great ideal. I cannot think of a better epitaph for the year now closing, or a better argument for resolving to come back here next year and be even better at the business of building an even greater and stronger community. I wish all honourable members, their families and their staff and the staff of the Parliament all the very best for a happy and safe Christmas and new year.

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