



Speech by

**Tony ELLIOTT**

**MEMBER FOR CUNNINGHAM**

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Hansard 4 August 1998

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mr ELLIOTT** (Cunningham—NPA) (3.25 p.m.): In rising to take part in this debate on the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply to the Governor's Speech, which I thought was a particularly interesting one, I pledge my loyalty and that of the subjects of Cunningham to Her Majesty through his Excellency the Governor. I would also like to say that the Governor, who has not held that position for very long, is doing a very good job. I believe that he has shown himself to be an excellent choice for the position. He is very much a hail-fellow-well-met type of person. For a long period we in Queensland have been very lucky because most of the Governors who have been appointed have been of the same mould and they have done an excellent job. The role of Governor is a very important one in our society, and I certainly support our Governor to the hilt.

I take this opportunity to thank those people who assisted me in the election campaign, particularly those people on my campaign committee and those party members who stayed loyal to me, handed out how-to-vote cards, and did all of those other things that people do in an election campaign. It was not an easy task, but those people's loyalty is greatly appreciated. Loyalty is a two-way street—it really is—and it was interesting to see those people throughout the State who stuck with the National Party and those people who did not. I certainly appreciated that the members of the National Party stuck with me and assisted and supported me in every way I could ask. It was greatly appreciated not only by me but also by my family.

While I am talking about my family, I would like to reiterate what the member for Warwick said in his contribution about the families of members. It is very important for members to understand what an impost their role is on their families, particularly the families of those members who represent country electorates. In many instances, the wives of those members do not hold official jobs but are involved in assisting with the family business. I know that, on many occasions, my wife would answer in excess of 20 telephone calls a day. She would have to take messages and ring my electorate secretary or try to get hold of me in order to pass on those messages to make sure that those people who rang were represented. At times, the way in which the media and some members of the public portray the families of members of Parliament really does annoy me. I was married in 1978, and I have been a member since 1974. During all of the time that I have been married, which is 20 years, my wife could count the number of trips that she has taken around the place on the fingers of one hand.

**Mr Lucas:** She probably gets relief when you go.

**Mr ELLIOTT:** That is possibly right. All of us need a change. As the saying goes, a change is as good as a holiday. Getting me out of the house may well be a change for my wife.

**Mr Lucas:** Things are run a lot better.

**Mr ELLIOTT:** That is right. She might be able to run the farm better than me. I should put her in charge of it totally. In all seriousness, the wives of members have a very onerous job. In many instances, they are required to represent their husbands at functions. I believe that, when one thinks about it, the public get a pretty fair deal. Often they get one and a half members, if not two, for the salary of one. I do not believe that the public is really badly done by in relation to the salary package of members.

I remember well that before Lady Bjelke-Petersen was a senator she travelled right around this State. Many who have served in this place for a fair while would remember her well. She went from one end of this State to the other talking, listening and taking notes. She brought back issues to be addressed as though she were an additional member of Parliament. I have never seen anyone in her position carry out as onerous a task and play the role she did in the days when Sir Joh Bjelke-Petersen

was Premier of this State. It was unbelievably good; there is no question about that. I thank particularly my wife, Sally. I also thank our kids. They have certainly paid a price as a result of my position in this House.

**Mr Johnson:** They have made many sacrifices.

**Mr ELLIOTT:** They have indeed, even to the point of being picked on at school and so on. All these things will happen to our children. We think they will not, but they do somewhere down the line. Those sorts of things really hurt kids. It is not easy for them. I have certainly appreciated the support of my children. None of them is madly keen on politics. My eldest daughter takes a passing interest. We have dragged our son off to a few events at different times. He gets a pained look on his face at times. So it is not all fun for the children, that is for sure.

I take this opportunity to thank also my electorate secretary, Rachael, who does a tremendous job. She is another person who, in my opinion, puts in a hell of a lot more hours than the Government pays her for. She is often at the office earlier than she has to be and she stays later—long after a lot of people in the street have gone home. When I have functions or meetings in the area, in Pittsworth or nearby, she often stays back and we will work right up until I have to go to those events.

We will stay and work to catch up, particularly when the House is sitting. It is not so bad when the House is not sitting, but at other times it is very easy to get behind with the electorate work coming into the office. So our electorate secretaries really need to be self-motivated people. They need to be able to handle problems without being able to get hold of us. In the end, in most instances good electorate secretaries will handle problems just as well as their members would. In fact, their network within the departments will at times be better than ours. They know exactly who to ring to try to sort out a problem. I pay tribute to Rachael because I think she has been an absolutely ideal secretary for me. She is easygoing. Over the whole time she has worked for me, which is a fair while, we have not had an argument. It goes without saying that I have been very lucky.

My area is a very diverse one, as are a lot of country electorates. It is not really big in the same way as the western seats but, by the same token, it takes up a lot of time and a lot of effort because it comprises a large number of shires. It contains the Shires of Clifton, Cambooya, part of Jondaryan, part of Toowoomba City, all of Pittsworth, all of Millmerran, the largest part of the Waggamba Shire and all of the Goondiwindi Town Council. All of those local authority areas call on me in some way or other to assist them.

My electorate also has nearly 40 schools. I am working all the time to try to ensure that those facilities are kept up to scratch. We have been very lucky over the years. I pay tribute to former Labor Minister Pat Comben. Everyone knows how many rows Pat and I had when I was shadow Minister for Environment. I remember him saying on the ABC one day, "Tony Elliott picks on me." What a lot of people in the public do not understand is that, while we might give each other a hard time in the Chamber, outside we are quite capable of having a beer together or discussing a problem. If we can do something mutually advantageous for each other's electorates, then we are always prepared to do that. After all, no matter what else we are here to do, our first job is to represent the people who elect us—to support and assist the welfare and betterment of Queensland. If we are not prepared to do that, if the ideological baggage we carry stops us doing that, then quite frankly we do not deserve to be here, because first and foremost we have to represent people.

I pay tribute to Pat Comben because he assisted me with a problem in Goondiwindi. It was very much a local problem, relating to not being able to get specialist teachers. I was assisted by a local farmer's wife who had gone to university with Pat. We both got stuck into Pat one day and suggested that this was a problem. Instead of taking umbrage at it, he listened and went away and did something about it. I have another issue that I will be bouncing off the current Minister fairly soon. I hope I will get the same sort of support from him.

As I said, there is a large number of schools in the Cunningham electorate. A lot of my electorate is made up of growth areas. The part of Toowoomba that I represent is growing like a mushroom—Middle Ridge, Darling Heights and even Drayton itself. The University of Southern Queensland is right in the centre of that part of Toowoomba I represent. All of these dormitory suburbs are developing. The schools in those areas are growing at an alarming rate. Members who represent coastal areas or growth areas would know only too well that the schools get an overload factor in them very quickly. They are always looking for new buildings.

I will mention some of the problems we have. Darling Heights, which is near the university, is looking to introduce a number of innovative programs into the lower school. It has been restricted in this area of advancement by a lack of classroom space, because every year a whole lot of new kids arrive and more classroom space is needed. We are certainly looking for assistance from the Minister in this area.

Because of Toowoomba's climate, it would be helpful if we could get more covered walkways between the buildings. I know that that has been done in some areas, and that has been tremendously helpful. The administrative block also needs updating. The current building is out of date and does not cater for the improvements in technology and equipment.

Those who live in Toowoomba would probably know of the issue relating to Middle Ridge. Spring Street runs along the edge of Middle Ridge school. That street also services the university. A lot of traffic on that street is going to USQ. It goes straight past the Middle Ridge school. There is also a parking problem. Additional land desperately needs to be bought so that buses can be brought into the school grounds and the kids can get onto buses in a safe environment rather than on the side of the road.

Those who know the climate of Toowoomba know that it is always wet, drizzling, cloudy or foggy. There are people zooming along that road faster than they should be. Mixed up in all of this are the parents who, instead of parking where they should park, putting raincoats on their kids, putting up their umbrellas and taking the kids to school, take the easy option and drop the kids off outside the entrance to the school. We need to try to get that quite dangerous situation in hand. The same problem exists at Middle Ridge school as at the other growing schools in that additional classroom space is necessary.

Goondiwindi, at the other end of the electorate, has a very pro-active group. It has actually started a program to raise its own funds. The school had begun to participate in the Leading Schools program and there is a need to finish off what was started. It needs probably \$120,000 and the group is actively raising funds. It is looking to get some assistance from the Government. I have already spoken to the Minister about this issue. I know the Minister well. I have worked on committees with him and I have found that he is prepared to listen. I hope he will assist us in that regard.

I also express my gratitude for the previous Government's funding for the Goondiwindi Convent. Through Government aid to the church schools system, the standards at that school were lifted. That is a credit to everyone involved. What the P & C achieved at that school last year was absolutely fantastic. It is now a great little school attended by a lot of children.

I wish also to speak about Emu Creek, a very famous old school attended by Steele Rudd, Greenmount and Greenmount East. Emu Creek school is experiencing problems because of rapid growth, and it needs another classroom now. A brand-new classroom should be built, rather than mucking around with the existing buildings, some of which are older buildings that possess a reasonable degree of architectural appeal. To me the worst thing we could do would be to muck around with the existing buildings. That would make the school look like a hotchpotch. In the old days, within Q-Build—and perhaps this is the case with the Education Department at the moment—there was an inclination to take that sort of approach. That school needs an additional building to ensure that population growth and the needs of the children are catered for. I hope that a new classroom will be built, and I believe that it will be needed by next year, that is, 1999. The department does not think that a new classroom is needed until the year 2000. However, I have news for it: the growth will be more rapid than it has predicted. I believe that school will be in desperate need of that building next year. I am calling for a classroom to be built.

Wyreema, which is not too far away, faces a similar situation, with very rapid growth being experienced. It is very much a satellite/dormitory suburb of Toowoomba. At the moment, its school is attended by 71 students. However, by the year 2003 some 131 children will be attending that school. It has a real need for an EEC unit. If we could build an EEC unit at that school now, by the time the next school year starts 22 children would have the opportunity to benefit from it, and that number would continue to grow from there. The students need those facilities. I ask the Government to look at providing them urgently.

The Pittsworth State High School is one of the better State high schools in the State. Both it and Clifton have consistently outperformed other schools in Brisbane and Toowoomba, including private schools. The staff at that school are excellent. A lot of the teachers have been in the area for a long time; they have stayed and built houses in the area. They treat it as though it is their own school and they take a hands-on approach. Accordingly, its students have been achieving better OP results than many students in private schools. What it has been able to achieve is absolutely unbelievable. I ask for some support with respect to the provision of a home economics block at that school. That has been on the drawing board for some time, and I had thought we would probably get it this year. However, at this stage a bit of stalling seems to be taking place. I ask that that project be brought to fruition as soon as possible. Further stalling is unnecessary. We should be providing the best facilities we can provide for those children. We cannot afford to drag our feet with respect to our children's education. The most important thing we can do in society is educate our children.

I wish also to speak about Yelarbon. Like many other small schools—the same sort of problem is faced at Brookstead and most of the other small schools around the edges of Toowoomba—there is a security problem at that school. We have to upgrade the security at all of those schools. Mowers, tractors, computers and so on will not be able to be kept at any of those schools unless their security is upgraded. Major security systems have been installed at the larger schools, such as Pittsworth, and that seems to have been very successful. However, at the schools that do not have a police station next door—as do the bigger places—it is not enough to install only electronic surveillance; other systems are needed to prevent these dreadful people from preying on the community. Most of the

money for tractors, mowers and so on is raised by the P & Cs. Mowers, computers and so on are being taken because these schools are seen as soft targets. That really is unbelievable.

I wish also to touch on Nobby. Under the SCAP scheme, Nobby obtained its own water supply. Nobby is a historic area, once again, partly because of its connection with Steele Rudd. It also has a very famous old pub that people visit from all over Queensland. The area is also home to the Sister Kenny memorial building. The area is also known as the home of Country Collectables. Many people in Brisbane would know Ross Coco and Leila Coco, whose very successful business is located in a beautiful old building. A lot of people travel from all over Queensland to visit it. There is a tremendous resurgence of interest in the history of that area. A lot of people are coming to the area to have a look at it. I congratulate all of those people who are out there working to keep that area viable. That is what we need. We need people who are prepared to put money into country areas to keep them alive.

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