



Speech by

VAUGHAN JOHNSON

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr JOHNSON (Gregory—NPA) (3.03 p.m.): In rising to oppose the motion moved by the Premier——

Mr Palaszczuk interjected.

Mr JOHNSON: I will get to that directly, Henry. The Honourable the Minister for Primary Industries——

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Dr Clark): Order! I remind members that Christian names are not an appropriate form of address.

Mr JOHNSON: Madam Deputy Speaker, I did correct myself.

At the outset, I congratulate the new Speaker of the 49th Parliament of Queensland, the Honourable Ray Hollis, on his elevation to the very honourable position of Speaker of the Parliament. At the same time, I wish to congratulate each and every new member of this House who has been duly elected to the 49th Parliament. As my colleague the honourable member for Crows Nest mentioned, the people have elected us. It is our role to represent the people accordingly, and I respect the points of view of other honourable members. However, I also have a point of view, and I will certainly be putting it across, as many honourable members would know, including the member for Sunnybank and the Honourable Minister for Tourism, Sport and Racing. I can see a grin on his face; he would like to say something, but I can see that he is refraining.

Mr Gibbs: You'll find it very hard over there.

Mr JOHNSON: I do not find anything too hard when it comes to the honourable member.

I wish to recognise one member in this House today, and that is the new member for Callide, Jeff Seeney, who is the one new member on the National Party side. I extend a very special welcome to him. That man will certainly make a valuable contribution to this place. He is a hard worker and, over time, the people of Callide will recognise that they made a very good selection.

The amendment to the Premier's motion from the Leader of the Opposition states that, in recognising the commitments given by the Premier to the member for Nicklin, the Premier and his Government should resign if those commitments are not honoured in full. That is a very worthwhile amendment to this motion. As the elected representatives in this Parliament, our duty is to the people of Queensland. This is all about the quality of the Government. The 48th Parliament saw a Government presided over by Rob Borbidge and Joan Sheldon, with the support of Mrs Cunningham, the honourable member for Gladstone. That was a Government of integrity and commitment and it represented all Queenslanders.

I hope and trust that the Beattie Labor Government, with the support of the member for Nicklin, will in the future be able to say the same. We in Opposition will be keeping the Government on its toes to make certain that it represents the whole of Queensland, because it is all about people, not individuals, not one party or another and not personalities. It is about the whole State. We are here for the betterment of the State, as the members for Nicklin and Crows Nest said. It is about time that we started to realise that. On 13 June the people said exactly that. It is now up to us to listen to what the people said on 13 June so that we can put in place policies and values that will be to the betterment of

the people of Queensland. I thank the people of my electorate of Gregory for once again placing their trust—

Mr Fouras: They show good judgment.

Mr JOHNSON: My word they do. I thank the honourable member for that comment. The honourable member was right in saying that it is all about trust. If people cannot be trusted, they are certainly wasting their time in here. The people of Gregory will certainly get my trust and commitment during the life of this Parliament.

The electorate of Gregory covers the largest landmass of any electorate in Queensland. It covers some 343,000 square kilometres of country and consists of just on 16,000 electors, plus the children who live there. It stretches from the Territory border through to just east of Emerald. It is a very diversified electorate, but at the same time, although it is a rural electorate, Emerald is a dormitory town for the coalmining area in the electorate of my friend the member for Fitzroy, where most of the big mines are located. The agricultural industries in my electorate are doing it hard. For example, the price of wool dropped another 20% recently. Cattle prices are also down. They should be 100% up on what they are now. Primary producers are receiving \$500 for a big bullock and around \$600 for a bale of wool. Unfortunately, the Minister for Primary Industries is not in the Chamber at present. That is not even a break-even price.

Sadly, one of the most significant exports from rural Queensland today is our kids. The member for Nicklin referred to employment issues in his speech today. I hope he keeps working hard with the Government to achieve the Government's election commitment to reduce unemployment to 5%. I will do everything in my power to assist the Government to get it down to 5%. But I do not know how the Government will do that. I know what we did in terms of major capital works infrastructure in two years and four months. My former portfolio area of Transport and Main Roads had a budget for works of \$2.14 billion, which represented 43.8% of the capital works infrastructure program for the State.

Mr Bredhauer: What about the \$120m for the Pacific Highway?

Mr JOHNSON: I say to my fine feathered friend on the other side of the House that I will come to the \$120m. If he, too, reads the Budget papers, he will find that that is in the Forward Estimates for 1999-2000. It has been taken to Cabinet. It is all square and aboveboard. The member opposite can shake his head and walk away, but his old mate here will keep reminding him that he got it wrong again.

We drew the Treasury spokesman to his feet this morning. My colleague the member for Moggill, Liberal Leader and shadow Treasurer, Dr Watson, said, "What about the \$73m that the Labor Party spent on building the eastern tollway and the koala tunnel?" That was \$73m just gone to the wind. However, that is Labor policy; \$73m means nothing to some of the people on that side of the House, but it means a hell of a lot to those of us on this side of the House. I just hope that the new Minister for Transport and Main Roads will take on board what I am saying here today. He can hold up every bit of paper that he likes. I cannot read it from here, although I know what he has.

While the honourable Minister does represent a large remote electorate, as I do, I think he understands the needs of people in decentralised Queensland, remote Queensland and rural and regional Queensland. I just hope that he will continue to progress some of the great projects that I set in train. I think he will. I have already spoken to him about a couple of issues and he has given me fairly favourable comment on them. I hope that, for the sake of the productivity of the State, we can continue to work in that vein.

However, it disheartened and saddened me somewhat when two days ago we saw the Briztram concept pulled. That is an absolute disgrace. The Lord Mayor of the City of Brisbane, the honourable Jim Soorley, supported it and embraced it. His own concept appeared in the Courier-Mail. I have great respect and admiration for the job done by Maureen Hayes. She supported and embraced it, too. She said, "Vaughan, it is a great job and we support it all the way." But, no, not the Lord Mayor; he wanted to play his own game. He wanted to get out in the front and say, "This is my grand plan." The Government came in with the responsible and costed project as well as \$65m of Federation Funding that the Leader of the Opposition made mention of this morning, but "no, we are going to pull that".

Do honourable members know what that means? Thirteen private enterprise companies in this State had shown interest in being a joint venture partner with the State Government and the Brisbane City Council in putting Briztram in place—that \$215m project. That project was going to be an innovative and state-of-the-art concept leading into the 21st century. This morning I read in the Courier-Mail that the Minister was talking about 19th century technology. I say to that clown that the trams were not going to be drawn by horses. However, that is the Labor Party in 1998. During the two years and four months that it spent in Opposition, it did not learn a damned thing. I will give honourable members opposite the mail. We are going to be monitoring what they are doing very closely. We will be watching those programs. I will give the member opposite the mail once more: we will show him up every time he makes a slip. I will wipe the grin off his face.

While I am speaking about the Department of Transport and Main Roads, I want to pay special tribute to the departmental heads of that great department: Dick Wharton, Director-General of Main Roads; Bruce Wilson, Director-General of Transport; and Vince O'Rourke, Chief Executive of Queensland Rail. Those three gentlemen gave my Government total and professional advice. The Government has made one grave mistake in dismissing Dick Wharton as Director-General of Main Roads. That man is one of the most honourable and most distinguished road builders in not only Queensland and Australia but also Australasia. At every ministerial council conference to which I went, he was called on to make comment more times than any other public figure whom I know. The man is apolitical; he is a man of integrity.

Mr Bredhauer: Apolitical?

Mr JOHNSON: He is apolitical. The member opposite shakes his head now, but he should look me in the eye and cop it. He knows as well as I do that that department has workers who are Labor supporters, National supporters, Liberal supporters and workers who support nobody at all. I did not go in there with a vendetta as he did to destroy the livelihood or the career of a professional person. He will rue that till the day he dies, and I will give him the mail whilst he is the administrator of that department.

I will just speak momentarily about Dick Wharton. As far as road building goes, there is not a road, bridge, local authority or any other part of Queensland that that man does not know about. I want to put on the record here today my total support and my thanks for the support and advice he gave me and the Government and for the way that he redirected the Department of Main Roads. Full marks to him! All I can say to Dick Wharton and his good wife, Julie, is: I wish them well in their endeavours. I know that comes from the record of the previous Borbidge/Sheldon Government and the current Borbidge Opposition. He is one fine, hell of a Queenslander; he is a bloke who knows the job well.

I will always recall that, when I became Minister and Dick Wharton was the director-general, he said to me, "Vaughan, the FBI is in charge." I said, "What is the FBI, Dick?" He said, "The forgotten bastards of the inland." Madam Deputy Speaker, I know that we do not normally use that type of language in the Parliament, but it meant that the people from rural and regional areas of Queensland would at last have their needs for road building and the provision of road infrastructure recognised. We put those programs in place. Even in the electorate of the honourable member for Cook, we provided for the sealing of the road to Cooktown. That was a \$60m program, and I know that he supported it. Those are the types of programs that Dick Wharton oversaw during that period. That was the sort of great work that he did as an engineer and as Director-General of the Department of Main Roads. At the same time, we recognise the need for all Queenslanders to enjoy good rail and road infrastructure. I salute those three people and that department.

Another issue I would like to touch on is the transport projects that we put in place: the South East Transit Project, a \$520m program; and the Gold Coast motorway, a \$750m program to upgrade the Pacific Highway to six and eight lanes. Those members who have travelled to the Gold Coast will appreciate the magnitude of that operation and the works that are under way there. I am proud that my Government put that program in place. Within six weeks of coming to power we had acted on that. The policy started to be implemented and the engineers started drawing up the design of the project.

At this point I also salute two men. The first is Bob Higgins, who is the manager of the Gold Coast motorway project. I think he has done a very able job down there. Again, it is the commitment and the professionalism of these sorts of people that make these things happen. The second person I would like to salute is Don Steele, who has made the South East Transit Project work, too. I salute the efforts of both those gentlemen.

One issue that I want to touch on is something that comes close to the hearts of everybody in this Parliament, and that is road safety. In Government, we embarked on one of the toughest road safety programs that I think any Government has ever embarked on in this State. In conjunction with my colleague the honourable Russell Cooper, who was Police Minister at the time, we introduced speed cameras into the State. It was not an easy decision, but it was a decision that we believe was a social decision, not a political decision. It was one for the betterment of road safety in this State so that honourable members, our families, friends and everybody concerned could travel on roads in this State without being run over by a hoon, killed by a hoon or crashed into by an irresponsible driver.

It gives me great pride to say that as of today the road toll in this State is 60 fewer than for the same period last year. I think that that speaks volumes for itself. I would like to salute everybody for that. I would also like to pay tribute to Paul Blake for the hard yards he has put in in his area of land transport and road safety in helping us bring about the introduction of speed cameras and putting them through the infancy stage. I also pay tribute to the Queensland police for that initiative.

I want to refer to the great work that Inspector Michael Hannigan and his team carried out. This whole operation has been a team effort. I hope that the Honourable Minister for Transport and the Honourable Minister for Police receive the same support as Mr Cooper and I received. I hope that those two Ministers will continue to pursue the road safety issue in the same way as we pursued it when we

were in Government. It is not a political issue; it is a social issue and it is one that affects each and every one of us, although I hope that it does not directly affect any of us.

I want to refer to Queensland Rail and mention the capital works program. We recognised the importance of maintaining the Townsville workshops. We spent \$8m to refurbish the south yard. This action saved the jobs of railway workers in Townsville. We had the \$170m upgrade of the northern railway line to Mount Isa. No-one knows how much mineral wealth lies under the ground in the north-west mineral province in the Mount Isa/Cloncurry region. When the mineral is extracted from the ground in that area it will be taken by Queensland Rail to the port of Townsville. I do not believe any of us can appreciate what is happening in the port of Townsville. The figures are going up every day and will continue to go up.

While in Government I was proud that the Premier, the Treasurer, the Minister for Mines, Tom Gilmore, and I made absolutely certain that we were able to get the minerals industry working in the north-west of the State. We made sure that the industry interfaced with Queensland Rail and the port of Townsville. This action created jobs and wealth for that part of Queensland. This whole subject is about wealth generation, about a future for our kids and about a future for coming generations in this State. Townsville is certainly going to become the industrial capital of Queensland and Australia. We have to plan accordingly with the Townsville City Council. We have to ensure that it is to the benefit of companies to invest in that area.

In Government we undertook a \$350m upgrade of Queensland Rail rolling stock for the Brisbane network. That upgrade should have been undertaken by the former Labor Government but was pushed onto the backburner because it said the money was not available. We had to find that money. Those cars are now being built by Walkers in Maryborough. This project is creating jobs in the City of Maryborough. Walkers are performing a very important function in that area. Some of our friends in this House represent Maryborough and Hervey Bay and I am sure they recognise the importance of the Walker workshops continuing to operate. It is important that we continue to get contracts in this area. I am running out of time, but I want to touch on a matter that was mentioned by the member for Crows Nest, Russell Cooper—

Time expired.
