



Speech by

LINDA LAVARCH

STATE MEMBER FOR KURWONGBAH

Hansard 2 March 1999

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (3.47 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I rise to support the motion for the adoption of the Governor's Address moved by the member for Bundaberg. I take this opportunity to thank the people of Kurwongbah for their support. It is with great pride and honour that I take my place in this Assembly as their representative. I will continue to strive to meet their expectations and serve my local community to the best of my ability.

Mr Lucas: And you do it very well.

Mrs LAVARCH: I thank the member for Lytton.

I wish also to take this opportunity to express my deepest gratitude to all of those who worked on my campaign—Michelle McJannett, Steven Miles, Matt Lawrence, Michael Harding, Joy Seiffert, Lyn Moffatt, Mick Gillam, and not forgetting my wonderful husband, Michael, my beautiful children, Simon and Elizabeth, and my exceptional mother-in-law, Colleen. It was with their support, encouragement and sheer hard work, together with that of numerous other friends, supporters and branch members of the ALP, that we achieved the stunning result in Kurwongbah. It must be remembered that we had two elections in less than 12 months. That all of the supporters and branch members of the Labor Party in Kurwongbah kept up their enthusiasm during that time was remarkable.

It has been some time since the member for Bundaberg moved the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply and much has happened since that time. Many programs referred to in the address have now been put in place and have changed Queensland for the better. Others have been initiated and soon will come to fruition—programs such as the Jobs Plan, the Regional Communities Program, the Community Renewal Program, services to people with disability and free ambulance services for pensioners and Seniors Card holders, to name but a few.

Today I want members to cast their minds back to the State election last June and remember the gruelling days after the election when there was no clear result and all the toing and froing that endured. I know many members would have shared the same experience as me following the election. The first few days were a flurry of activity—cleaning up after the election and putting away those valuable corflutes. Then as the first week wore on, the office became quieter and quieter. The phone hardly rang and people only popped their head in the door to see if I had heard anything.

By the second week it became quite eerie. My electorate office is located in a Westfield shopping centre at Strathpine. Each day I would go into the centre to buy my lunch, and it seemed as if the whole State was in limbo. Even though it was school holidays at the time, the centre seemed quieter than usual. It was quite depressing. Some local business owners were telling me that even their phones had stopped ringing, yet it was usually a busy time of the year for them.

By the Thursday of the second week, despite my best efforts, I had caught the depression bug and it was not until mid afternoon while listening to the radio that my spirits were lifted upon hearing the announcement of the member for Nicklin. By the next day it was business as usual and the spell was broken. I want to pay tribute to the member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington, for his decision to support a Beattie Labor Government and break the paralysis which had gripped Queensland following the 13 June election. His decision delivered stability for Government in Queensland. Although he was attacked

by some for this decision, I want to convey to him that he received an overwhelming endorsement from the people of Kurwongbah.

At the same time the media was having a feeding frenzy trying to analyse the success of One Nation. Many voiced opinions as to why the major parties had lost such levels of support and why so many people turned to One Nation. It can be said that deep feelings of community insecurity are probably at the core of the disillusionment which fed One Nation's support. But judging by the contribution those members have made to the debate so far and what has happened in their own ranks with one member resigning and five now sitting on the crossbenches, I do not believe that they have understood this or that they even know who their constituency is. I fear that their obsession with the extremist issues will entrench the disillusionment and further undermine our political institutions.

For my part, I became acutely aware of the deep level of insecurity and uncertainty in the community at the Kurwongbah by-election in May 1997. In my first speech to this House, I addressed these issues at length and, although still very committed to my plea for a bipartisan approach to addressing a new policy foundation for Queensland and Australia, I will not go back over them today. I will say, however, I have been able to achieve many of the goals set out in my plan for Kurwongbah, including the establishment of a Police Beat shopfront in the Westfield shopping centre at Strathpine and the publication and distribution of my Buy in Kurwongbah Guide to encourage locals to buy locally, supporting not only local businesses but local jobs.

I want to also pay tribute to my predecessor, Margaret Woodgate, for her accomplishments in gaining long-needed Government infrastructure—new as well as upgrades to existing infrastructure—in our area. These included the new police station at Petrie, the Pine Rivers Community Health Centre and approval for the new State school at Eatons Hill. Until 1989 we had become the forgotten suburbs and it looked like we were slipping back into this category under the coalition Government's term of office between 1996 and 1998. In the nine months since we took office, this Government has been responsive to the needs of the residents of Kurwongbah and Pine Rivers generally, and I have been able to build on those initiatives that Margaret Woodgate was able to achieve for our area, thereby making sure that we do not remain the forgotten suburbs.

In my contribution to this debate, I want to address some specific issues facing our community. Last year the daily newspapers carried a series of opinion pieces about leadership. The authors posed and answered the question: what makes a great leader? There were many views expressed about concepts of vision, of communication, of listening to people and the ability to take people with you. One of the more interesting reflections by Gerard Henderson was that leaders are made by the circumstances in which they find themselves. By this he means that we view great leaders by the events that surround them.

For instance, Henderson points out that Winston Churchill is regarded as the great wartime leader. But if the Second World War had not happened, if Chamberlain had secured peace in our time, then Churchill might have been regarded as a failed wartime leader—the man who would have been remembered because of the folly of the Dardanelles campaign of World War I. Maybe the same would be said of Abraham Lincoln without the American Civil War or Roosevelt without the Depression and the Second World War. Without these momentous events, both leaders might be regarded as competent and good leaders, but not great.

I think there is much to this argument. Take John Howard.

An honourable member: Where?

Mrs LAVARCH: As far as you can, perhaps. He is often criticised for being an indifferent leader without vision or passion. Actually, at the Woodford Folk Festival this year the topic for the great debate was: Australia is boring. The affirmative team had their whole argument in a name—John Howard. This criticism comes as much from his own side of politics as anywhere else. The Queensland National Party seemed particularly critical of him. However, I am going to be gracious here today.

John Howard's truly memorable display of leadership was over an issue which neither he nor anyone else would have foreseen at the time he became Prime Minister. I speak of his handling of the gun debate. The tragic event of the Port Arthur massacre provided the circumstance for Howard to display leadership. Why were his stand and his actions regarded so highly by most Australians? Firstly, the policy was correct. Despite the genuine views of some and the irrational ravings of others, it was undoubtedly the right thing for access to a range of high powered weapons to be highly restricted and in some instances prohibited. Secondly, the Prime Minister was obliged to push the reform in the face of opposition from his own side.

This should not be overstated as, clearly, the vast majority of Liberal Party supporters and even a majority of National Party voters wanted change. But the real opposition came from right of centre. The balance of the community report a leader who is willing to "break out of the type" and "stare down his own constituency" when that constituency is perceived as wrong and unreasonable in their views. On no other issue has John Howard been able to combine these two features again—a policy which

the majority believe to be correct and overcoming the opposition of his own side. On most other major issues he has drawn the opposition of both the Left and elements of the Right—issues such as the privatisation of Telstra and even the GST.

I have no doubt that in days to come his embracing of zero tolerance will receive a reception equal to its namesake. In cases such as the waterfront dispute he might have had Right Wing opinion behind him, but the implementation was so appalling he not only drew the opposition of the Left but also that of many people who probably believed some reform was necessary, but not at the price of thuggery, mass sackings, guard dogs and the like.

So what are the circumstances in which our Queensland leaders now find themselves? Will these be the circumstances which allow greatness to emerge and is there capacity to take up this challenge and provide true leadership? The Governor's address reveals that our circumstances are challenging. Our country does not face war nor our State the prospect of an economic depression, but short of these two terrible events we do face as daunting a set of challenges as we have at any time this century. Economic circumstances are not bleak, nor are they easy, but, most importantly, economic opportunity is very uneven.

Some industry sectors are performing reasonably well while others, such as the resource sector, some primary production and part of the service sector, are doing it tough. Equally, economic prosperity amongst regions and individual households varies considerably. This disparity of result and opportunity contributes to a community sense of uncertainty. This is manifested in concern about unemployment and job security. The Government's program, outlined in the Governor's address, quite rightly places job creation at the top of its priorities. This program is based on the development of the regional potential of Queensland.

With the establishment of the Department of State Development as the engine room of the Government's economic goals, we have already seen major projects getting support and encouragement to deliver growth and jobs to Queensland. Outlined in the address is the goal of economic development plans for each of Queensland's regions, which will be implemented in conjunction with local people through the establishment of a State development centre in each region. This is proposed so that each region's individual strengths can be maximised by having those who best know the region drive the development plans.

I am already aware of the excellent service provided by the Aspley Business Centre, which services my electorate. Recently I was called upon by an employer who was confronting the likelihood of losing the business and having 50 or more employees put out of work. I immediately rang the centre to speak to a business adviser. That adviser came out straight away—and I mean within 20 minutes—joined me on a tour of the factory and engaged the managers in discussions. I have since received advice that all may be saved and it will be business as usual. The support and prompt service given by the business adviser has gone a long way to saving those jobs.

As I said, jobs have been quite rightly placed as the highest priority of this Government. Throughout the Governor's address, references to jobs and job initiatives are to be found, such as the 15,500 traineeships and apprenticeships in both the public and private sectors and the 8,980 work placements for the long-term unemployed; a \$2,000 bonus to private sector employees or group training schemes which employ additional apprentices in designated skills areas; initiatives to increase employment opportunities in the building and construction industry; an additional \$5m for marketing and tourism, which should result in 1,410 jobs; and a commitment to employ more police and more teachers.

I advise the House of the great success Breaking the Unemployment Cycle is in my area. I have been asked by the coordinator of our local Jobs Pathway Program to pass on his thanks and gratitude to the Beattie Government and Minister Paul Braddy for the excellence of this program and the difference it has made to young people's lives in Pine Rivers.

I also advise the House of the extraordinary efforts of the Jobs Pathway Program team in Pine Rivers. In less than three months the Jobs Pathway Program team has assisted 149 Year 12 school leavers to gain full-time employment. Sixty of these positions are traineeships and 30 are apprenticeships. Apprenticeships is a very difficult youth labour market area. It is a credit to the marketing of this Jobs Pathway Program with employer groups that the team is able to secure these apprenticeships and traineeships, which have in some instances been the direct result of the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative.

The Jobs Pathway Program team is very conscious of the fact that the job market does not have a glut of trainee positions and that it has been able to acquire for its participants more than its fair share. This is what good government can do and this is what good government is doing—making a positive difference in people's lives.

Serving the interests of Queensland is much more than dealing with its economy. Queensland is a community, not simply an economy, and Government policy must give great store to strengthening

our State's social fabric. During the campaign in my electorate of Kurwongbah, the very different understanding of the Labor Party and my opponents about strengthening and enhancing our social fabric became apparent to me. By "social fabric" I mean the store of community and human relations which make a society work. This is the relationship which exists effectively between strangers within society—the basic trust.

In agrarian or traditional societies, individuals extend trust only to family members. Strangers are treated with hostility or suspicion. In a civil society such as ours, trust is extended to strangers because there is a legitimate expectation, not always fulfilled but at least presumed, that strangers will behave in a civil manner. Every minute of every day interaction takes place, whether it is in the commercial sphere or the social sphere, where we are dealing with strangers. Those dealings are underpinned by basic trust. If this trust continues to erode or is attacked to such an extent that we perceive no-one as trustworthy, we will end up living behind six-foot fences, never venturing out and living in fear that we will become the victim of a home invasion. In other words, we will have little or no quality of life. We will have zero tolerance of others. This is not what I want, neither personally nor for the community, and I am sure that no other member in this House would want it either.

The challenge for each member of this Chamber in their capacity as a community representative and otherwise is to show leadership by avoiding feeding perceptions. We must stop undermining and eroding basic trust by short-sighted politicking for no purpose other than a 15-second TV grab.

The Address in Reply sets out this Government's commitment to economic growth and development in this State and, equally important, our commitment to improving community services to Queenslanders. The major priority is to ensure that our social policies and initiatives make a real difference to the lives of Queensland families, parents, children and people in need. In nine months a real difference has started to become apparent and I have no doubt that this will continue, because good government can and does make a difference.
