



Speech by

**Mrs E. CUNNINGHAM**

**MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE**

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Hansard 3 March 1999

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM** (Gladstone—IND) (2.59 p.m.): In commencing my speech to the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply I reaffirm my allegiance to the head of State and her representative, the Governor. It is certainly a privilege to participate in a second Address in Reply. The first term in Parliament was unique to say the least, and I look forward to an interesting term of this new Parliament. I would like to take this opportunity to thank some very important people in the most recent election campaign: firstly, my electorate officer, Mrs Kitty McDonald, who works tirelessly for the people in the electorate of Gladstone. She works well in excess of her obligations, and I am thankful to her and her family for their support. I also thank Wendy Goobanko for her continuing support and, again, that of her family. Through her work she keeps the concerns and information flowing.

Many people were part of the process that has afforded me this honour. I would thank each one for their conviction that an Independent could hold the seat and their hard work to see that goal realised. To Wendy Goobanko for her organisation and to the team who assumed the financial side of the campaign, my thanks. To Denis, George, Rod, Lloyd and Val, and Peter and Kerry: thank you for your advice and practical support. On election day, the mammoth task of manning booths was made easy by those who volunteered to take on the responsibility. My thanks for your dedication and support. My thanks, too, to returning officer Len Radnedge for his fairness and even-handedness in the counting that followed.

I could not have pursued any political aspirations without the support, generosity and patience of my husband and family. My special thanks to John, Wendy, Rebecca and Emma, as they are as much a part of the hard work involved as I, and yet the impact of my work on them is generally not recognised—as is the case for all members. Thanks also to my mum and dad, whose support behind the scenes is greatly appreciated. I would also recognise the many who over time expressed their support and prayers for us during the past term in Government and now. Your generosity and support are appreciated and essential for the responsibilities of this work. Thank you.

My electorate is made up of two local authority areas: Gladstone City and Calliope Shire. Gladstone City has a predominantly urban base, while Calliope is a mix of urban, rural and industry. The port development over the past decade has seen the inclusion of a world-class marina and plans to incorporate a container port facility to complement the coal and product-loading facilities already in operation. Of great concern to the port authority, and consequently to many in the community, is the increased return being required by Government—from 30% to 70%, and ultimately 100%. That financial obligation to Treasury will, to a great extent, affect the port's ability to respond in a timely manner to industrial and community needs. I would certainly encourage a review of that requirement.

Of significant concern in our community is our high youth unemployment rate of around 30%. In addition to Government initiatives, a number of local community leaders launched Jobs Plan '99 only a week or so ago. On the subject of youth unemployment, I would like to acknowledge the Minister for Public Works and Housing, who in one of his early jobs as Minister signed an agreement with the local group apprenticeship scheme to ensure that it received the appropriate number of houses so that that scheme could increase the number of apprentices in the construction industry. I thank the Minister formally for that.

In spite of the problems of youth unemployment, the Gladstone/Calliope community remains positive and supportive of responsible development that recognises the constraints of the area's airshed, watershed and land mass with regard to human, industrial and primary production emissions. Surrounding the City of Gladstone, Calliope Shire is home to a diverse economy. This diversity has added greatly to the shire's stability throughout the prolonged drought, a drought which, in spite of the rain north and south of us, continues. Awoonga Dam, also in Calliope Shire, is the primary source of both domestic and industrial water supply and serves as an impressive water recreational site for water-based recreation. Previously I have spoken about concerns that the preferred option of the water board was to dam the Calliope River, the other major catchment in our region. Happily, just before Christmas it was announced that the preferred option had been reviewed and the preferred move is to raise the level of Awoonga Dam, which will ensure that sufficient water is available for domestic and industrial development into the future, but it will also protect that second water course in our region—environmentally, socially and in a number of other ways.

Tourism is another important component for the region. Although industrial, the coastal and hinterland beauty—especially in good years—offers attractive holiday destinations.

Part of the strength of our region is attributed to our multicultural community—all add a vital dimension to the rich fabric of our past, our present and our future. I have a very active community and I congratulate them on the work that they do, particularly with regard to the multicultural festival.

One must acknowledge the stability of this region and its contribution to the State's and the nation's economy. However, to ensure continuing development it is imperative that diversification of the economic base, complemented by a broadening of the skills base, is planned and achieved. It is imperative that proposals mooted for the area—the PNG gas, Comalco's aluminium smelter, the mooted steel mills and importantly the light metals industry, as outlined in the Premier's statement this morning—are achieved. One looks forward to such an advance into value adding. It will certainly increase not only our job opportunities but our type of work available to a broad cross-section of the people living there.

The seat of Gladstone is a blend of the urban, rural and industrial ethos, with two distinct local authorities varied in their make-up yet cooperative in their activity, resulting in a successful blending of demographics and economics. Demographically my area would represent a cross-section of Queensland: non-skilled, qualified tradespeople, operators, technical officers, and those tertiary trained—the full spectrum of our nation's skills, their expectations and aspirations. I believe our State's community is looking for—even demanding—representation which reflects the community will even more than the party political will. By that I mean that decision making must be community focused and not focused on that which will, or is perceived to, reinforce the party political agenda as opposed to the community good.

Each Anzac Day and Armistice Day we pay tribute to all who have been part of our many wars. It is my privilege today to again express gratitude for the great contributions made by our parents, grandparents and friends during times of conflict. Through their sacrifice we enjoy peace and prosperity. To those whose fathers, brothers, sons, mothers, daughters or sisters paid the ultimate sacrifice, we say: thank you. To those who are returned servicemen and women, we thank you, for you left our shores as idealistic youths filled with a desire to fight for freedom and democracy. This you did—and successfully—but you have paid over these many years with a torture of memory which we who have not been involved in war could never begin to imagine. To all involved in conflict to ensure our freedom and unfettered way of life: thank you again. May we live worthy of the legacy you have given us.

Over the past decade or so great advances have been made towards recognising the wonderful contribution made to our society by the physically or mentally handicapped. In the shadow of these people live those with a profound disability, and I would express my thanks to them, their carers, support workers and indeed to all who contribute to a better quality of life for these members of our community.

There are a number of issues affecting my electorate that I wish to raise. Developments have occurred as a result of planning by the previous Government and those plans have come to fruition recently. There has also been planning by the current Government for which we are certainly grateful—the high school, the police station, the courthouse and the Calliope pool have added to the quality of life of our residents. To both Governments, I say: thank you. There is still a need for a Calliope police station and I thank the Minister for Police, who has seen fit to accelerate the placement of a prefabricated police station similar to the one in Emu Park that will serve the needs of that community well.

One of the proposals that is currently before the Government is a multipurpose sports centre for the Gladstone area. It is proposed to be built in conjunction with the PCYC. The previous Government had a submission for a different location and a different building. I know the current Government has now received a submission jointly with the PCYC for a development on that building site. The community will benefit from that in so many ways, not only in terms of sporting events but also social

get-togethers; it will be a building where people can hold significant events. They are applying for funding under the national sports facilities program, and I commend that project to the Government.

In common with all communities, Gladstone has a significant ageing community. I have a copy of a petition that has been lodged with the Federal Government with over 3,000 signatures petitioning the Federal Government for funding for more aged care, particularly nursing care facilities, in Gladstone. I certainly support that. I would like to thank the Minister for Housing, Mr Rob Swarten, for his support to date for a proposal to see land in Philip Street allocated for State Government aged care facilities. There is sufficient land there to see the community well into the future. It is a discrete block of land that will give the residents a high quality of life. It is close to facilities such as shops, doctors, chemists—all of those things that mobile, aged people will be able to access by foot. I look forward to that project developing, and I thank the Minister for his support.

**Mr Swarten** interjected.

**Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM:** That is right. It is an ideal spot, yes. Another matter of concern to our community—and, again, this is a Federal matter—relates to fishermen in my region who have been greatly distressed by Senator Hill's recent comments over the Christmas period. He wants to strip the Queensland Government of the power to administer and manage fisheries. Fishermen have written to me and asked these questions: why has Senator Hill taken a big stick approach to implement a range of managerial changes that are already devised and being implemented by the Queensland Government? Senator Hill and his advisers must not care for the social and economic damage that his actions will have, and the fishermen have listed four: thousands of jobs gone, social displacement, family disorientation and the disastrous flow-on effects to the community at large.

Some of Senator Hill's press releases that I have read imply that nothing has occurred in Queensland in relation to trawl management. Let me say that nothing could be further from the truth. Already implemented are size limits for fishing vessels, vessel placement restrictions, horsepower restrictions, mesh size limits on trawl nets, net size limits generally, species size limits, nil retention of certain species and preservation zones. There are areas of the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park where there is no trawling allowed. All trawl vessels must have vessel monitoring systems on board. In certain areas BRDs and TEDs are now compulsory. The other consideration that ameliorates the impact of trawler fishing is the fact that windy weather and rough seas already prevent trawlers from going to work. I believe it is a fisherman's understanding and belief that the Queensland Government is managing that fishery acceptably and well and that the Federal Government should keep its cotton-picking fingers off it.

On numerous occasions I have spoken with the Health Minister about the need for a renal unit in my region. I know that the Health Minister has responded on a number of occasions. However, I reiterate that need. A lot of people in my area travel to Rockhampton to attend the renal unit. Not only does that dislocate those people as patients but they also have to have a carer to accompany them. It often means that if that carer is a spouse, that person cannot hold down a full-time job. Most people travel three days a week. It is a huge impost on them as individuals and as family units. If the renal unit is going to be some time in coming, I ask that people with chronic illnesses—those suffering the types of illnesses which involve a long recuperation period, if there is a recuperation at all—receive an additional travel allowance over and above the allocation made to those who travel regularly for medical treatment. I make that recommendation to the Minister.

Recently, announcements have been made—and I am not too sure by whom—about an intention to get older vehicles off the road. I would like to say on the public record that I oppose that. If vehicles are roadworthy and safe, irrespective of their ages, they should be allowed to remain on the road. The people who are going to be affected are the battlers—the ones who cannot afford a 1999 model Ford, Holden or whatever. They should not be disadvantaged. If their vehicle is sound—and it should be—then why should they not be allowed to drive around in whatever they choose and whatever they can afford? I find that notion to be incomprehensible and unjust as well.

In the final few minutes of my speech, I want to pay tribute to a lady who passed away over the Christmas period. During my previous term in Government, there were times when things were not particularly comfortable. I would have to say that on every occasion that I met this lady she was courteous and polite, and I appreciated that. I refer to Mary Hanson, wife of Marty. I would like to quote from a eulogy that was given by her son, Patrick Hanson. He stated—

"Mary Elizabeth Hanson was born in her parents bedroom at Cairns Terrace, Paddington on the 13th February 1924, the second child of Ned and Elizabeth Hanlon. Her childhood home held fond memories for our mother. It was a poor neighbourhood of Irish Catholic relatives and friends where economic hardship could never quell the laughter and sense of community—a magical place where mum, as a little 3 year old girl, could sit on the back stairs and imagine she flew over the young city of Brisbane around the then tallest structure, the spiral on the top of the Greek Orthodox Church.

As the Hanlon family grew, with Hannah, Mum's elder sister, and Julie, Pat and Teddy, her younger sister and brothers, they moved out of their small cottage and into a three bedroom home at...Paddington which has remained to this day a Hanlon family home giving Mum great pleasure to return throughout her life where she was so lovingly welcomed by her brother Pat and his family.

Her life in those years was full of happy memories; robust political discussion and activity; and a growing involvement in the service of her community.

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Mum attended Rosalie Convent and All Hallows College where she developed lifelong friendships which brought her so much joy and happiness. On leaving school she acquired a clerical position at the Department of Agriculture. She often recalled fondly her experiences working at the front desk, issuing milk allocations to vendors during the war. She especially recalled one bold young man who complained bitterly about his allocation and then tried it on by telling her if he didn't receive more, he would be taking the matter to his uncle, the then Treasurer Ned Hanlon!

In 1942, Mum began training in her chosen career of nursing at the Mater Hospital. She had a lifelong passion for matters relating to health and nutrition. We were always in the best of care with Mum as our family nurse! In 1946, only three months after Ned became Premier, tragedy struck again when her mother died suddenly. Mum put on hold her nursing career and developing romance with young returned airman Martin Hanson of Gladstone, whom she had first met as a teenager at a GPS sports meeting, where Martin was a representative of Nudgee College. She set out to fill the gap left by her mother's passing, both at home and with public responsibilities as hostess for her father the Premier. She met royalty and people with desperate problems. As we now know, they can both be one and the same.

In chairing the Premier's welfare committee she was working with women of more mature years, wives of senior cabinet ministers and prominent citizens. Their respect and affection for her late mother fortified her, but she soon earned that for herself as she demonstrated her interest in and regard for people of every level."

I cannot read into Hansard all that I want to. Suffice to say that the eulogy outlines Mary Hanson's history and the fact that, in the days when there was not support in the electorate, when Marty became a member of Parliament, she fulfilled the role of electorate officer and companion to Marty with great determination and great success.

As Mary got older and become more frail, the eulogy states further that she—

"... returned to Brisbane, the city of her birth, and renewed many childhood friendships ... She never stopped placing others before herself, right up to and even beyond the time of her diagnosis with terminal illness."

The eulogy goes on to talk about Mary's commitment to her faith as unswerving—

"The truth that we are all children of God, each of us unique, each of us equal in dignity, was the foundation of her political life."

The eulogy to Mary received a great deal of support at her funeral. It was a big funeral, deservedly, and I would like to place on record my community's appreciation not only of Marty but also of Mary for her unswerving support.

I am convinced of the value of the role of Independents in Government. That is an obvious statement. However, the role of decision making is a team job—a job of representing our electorates and our people, providing them with personal values, behavioural parameters and legislative guidelines which are clear, definable, just and achievable. I trust that as part of this 49th Parliament, we will be characterised by representative decision making, by consideration of issues based on community benefit and not introspective benefit. I trust that each one of us here is big enough to accept this challenge that the community has so clearly given us.

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