



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 10 December 1999

VALEDICTORY

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (4.57 p.m.): It is one of the finer traditions of this great Parliament of ours to offer a valedictory address as the House adjourns on the last sitting day of the year. It is a great pleasure for me to rise in this place and follow this custom. In fact, this is the last parliamentary sitting day of this century. When we come back, it will be a new century.

Mr Borbidge: A new millennium.

Mr BEATTIE: We could argue about the new millennium. Some argue that it will be a new millennium. I accept the overwhelming argument that it is 2001. It is a shame really.

We have reached the end of another year of hurly-burly in the Queensland Parliament. I offer my congratulations to all members for that. On behalf of my Government, I wish all members and their families a happy, healthy and safe Christmas and an equally happy, healthy and safe new year. It will be a very special new year, as it marks the beginning of a new century and the start of a new millennium. I truly believe that it will also mark the start of a great future for our State.

It will be a century in which we will come into our own as the greatest State in the nation. For all of us in this House, it is a great privilege to be a part of a Parliament that will lead Queenslanders into this future. As we move towards the next century, this is a good moment to remember what a great democracy we have. When we consider the turmoil that has devastated other countries this year, some as close to home as East Timor, we realise that government is not always the considered, organised and constructive institution that we have in Queensland. As I said recently, in the last 10 or 11 years we have had six changes of Premiers and not one drop of blood has been spilt. That is the strength of our democracy.

In this House we may be passionate about our political differences, and we have seen a little of that today. We may be heated in our debates at times, and we have seen a little of that today also. On the very odd occasion, we may even be unruly, although I have to say that that happens less these days than previously. There is no doubting that the one thing that we all have in common is that we recognise that ours is a great and vibrant democracy. We are all committed to seeing that it stays that way, that the heated debates stay in this Chamber and that we conduct ourselves in a civilised way outside this place. The leaders of this Parliament do that on a regular basis. Unfortunately, of course, in the hurly-burly of coverage, that is never fully appreciated.

This afternoon, Parliament rises for the Christmas recess. There will be quite a few sighs of relief as a result, because it has been a particularly hectic year for everyone in this place. At today's adjournment, this Assembly will have met on 56 occasions, which is the lengthiest sitting calendar year since 1910 in terms of the number of hours. We sat for around 664 hours, which is an average of about 11 hours and 52 minutes a day. In the modern era from 1980 onwards, only 1990, with a sitting time of 596 hours and 25 minutes, and 1991, with 581 hours and 51 minutes, have come close to matching the length of this sitting year.

There has been an increase in the average number of questions answered during question time. It was 13.4 under the last Government and 18.1 under mine. We have passed 90 Government Bills, which is the largest number passed since 1991. As well, 25 private members' Bills were introduced during the 49th Parliament and we have debated nine of them during the year. We have established a revolutionary way of dealing with private members' Bills that gives private members unprecedented

access. I am delighted that the system has worked so successfully. While I have not always agreed with the private members' Bills, we have given private members an unprecedented opportunity to raise issues that they believe should become law.

I know that all this has often placed a great strain on members and others who work here. Therefore, I take this opportunity to offer a number of heartfelt thank-yous. As all members are aware, there are many, many people who toil long and hard to make the Parliament work as well as it does. First of all, Mr Speaker, let me thank you for all your hard work during the year. It is a difficult job trying to keep some members in their places, but you have displayed a grace under pressure that has earned the respect of all sides of the Parliament. I commend you for your fairhandedness and congratulate you on your patience. You have a patience that I could never have and I respect your tolerance.

This is a good moment to thank the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees, the temporary chairpersons and the parliamentary committees for all their work. It has been a big year for all of them. Parliamentary committees have a very important function in this Parliament. They have worked incredibly hard and I thank them for that.

I must not forget to thank the Whips on all sides for ensuring that the House runs in an orderly fashion and for maintaining discipline. My thanks go to Terry Sullivan and Pat Purcell on the Government side, who have really done a great job at the tactics meetings and in this place. Well done. I also thank the Opposition Whips, Bill Baumann and John Hegarty.

I thank each and every one of my Ministers for their hard work during the past 12 months. Their loyalty and support have been much appreciated. That has been central to the excellent performance of the Government. The Ministers form a great team and the effort they have put in on behalf of the people of Queensland has been outstanding. I set the bar very high this year and big demands were made of all of them, particularly at Community Cabinet meetings. I know that they have valued the opportunity to talk and listen to and work with the community. However, that has put an enormous amount of pressure on them, particularly those with young families. Every three weeks or so, Ministers are away from home from Sunday to Monday night. Indeed, often Ministers will leave home on Saturdays. They give up most of their weekends. While they work weekends normally, they are away from home for that additional time. It has imposed a lot of extra pressure on them.

My Ministers have set the highest standards of commitment and hard work and I sincerely congratulate them on that. I also pay tribute to their families. We all know that in this game it is the families who often miss out because of the hectic lives we lead. That particularly applies to Ministers but it applies also to all other members on both sides of the House. From my own point of view, I thank my wife, Heather, and my long-suffering children, who have also had to put up with long periods of absence. I know the Leader of the Opposition would appreciate that, both in his current role and his former role as Premier. I know that he, too, has a young family.

At this point I need to thank my fabulously dedicated and talented staff. Honourable members can see that they wrote this! I am only kidding; I wrote it. Last year my staff chastised me because in the Valedictory I acknowledged my dog, Rusty, before I acknowledged them. Today they said to me—

Mr Hamill: You don't live with your staff.

Mr BEATTIE: Well, I don't, anyway. They said that I had to get my priorities right, and I certainly have. All of my staff are fabulously dedicated and talented. They have worked incredibly long hours under difficult circumstances.

Mr Hamill: And a very intelligent dog.

Mr BEATTIE: I thank every one of my staff, and I want to thank Rusty also. All of my staff have worked hard and deserve a break as much as we all do.

I particularly thank the Deputy Premier for his support and unfailing assistance and loyalty. He has worked very hard. I thank Jim. He has been a pillar of strength in a very busy year, not only in his own portfolio but also as Deputy Premier. I thank my colleague the Leader of the House and the Minister for Communication and Information and Minister for Local Government, Planning, Regional and Rural Communities, Terry Mackenroth, who has provided absolutely invaluable assistance during the past month.

A Government member: Only the past month?

Mr BEATTIE: Months—plural; in fact, the past almost 18 months. Terry's renowned inner strength and good humour served the Government well this year. His guidance from the Government benches in terms of tactics has been important and his role is a key one. We all know that the smooth running of Parliament is essential, and he contributes to that—in fact, he does it.

Let me also acknowledge the work of the rest of my parliamentary colleagues. I take this opportunity to thank all of the members of caucus, who served their constituents with a spirit of determination and commitment which does the Government proud. If it were not for the back bench

there would not be a Government. We love them dearly. They are wonderful people. I would hug them, but it would be misunderstood.

A Government member: But you put Rusty before us!

Mr Mackenroth: Warren Pitt wasn't here when you last made this speech.

Mr BEATTIE: I was about to get to that. Yes, there is nothing wrong with hugging a dog; we feel better at the end of the day. Animals help us to live longer. As we all know, Warren Pitt celebrated his first anniversary of re-election a few days ago, and we can celebrate that. It is good to have him back.

I thank the Opposition Leader, Rob Borbidge, and his team. They helped us get into the news headlines in a favourable light on many occasions over the past year, and I thank them for that most sincerely. But on a more serious note, Rob and I have cooperated on a number of matters, and that is important for the good running of this place. As I said before, a lot of people do not understand that outside the hurly-burly the leaders do have to communicate. On a number of occasions, I have met with Rob privately about important issues that are in the interests of this State and the Parliament, and I thank him for that personal support and cooperation.

We all know that without an Opposition this democratic institution does not function very well. A lot of people do not understand that, while we have ding-dong arguments on many things and we might shout and squawk at each other across the Chamber, we actually agree on many of the things we do. The truth is that we agree on more things than we disagree. But in modern politics and with the modern media that is not the way it gets reported.

Honourable members on both sides of the House know that a level of communication between Opposition and Government is necessary to make this place run properly. We all try hard to make it work. I feel sure that the Leader of the Opposition will agree that my Ministers offer a good level of communication to Opposition members and frontbenchers.

I acknowledge also the Leader of the Liberal Party, David Watson, who also has worked hard to help the benches on this side hit the headlines in a good light all year, and he is to be congratulated on his fine efforts in that regard. I am only kidding. David has also on a number of occasions worked with the Government on matters of importance. Just as I thanked Rob, I also say thankyou to you, David.

Mr Hamill: We worked very well together on Tuesday.

Mr BEATTIE: I am sure that is true. We should do more of it.

As we all know, this House now contains a much-reduced One Nation. Let me wish its Leader, Bill Feldman, and his colleagues and their families all the best for the festive season. As Bill knows, I have strong views about One Nation and its politics, but I promised that we would treat One Nation members with courtesy and respect, and that is exactly what we do. However, I look forward to continuing the sparring next year. I wish Bill and his members well for the festive season.

There is not just the Government members, the Opposition and One Nation in this Parliament; there are also a number of Independents. Some were former members of One Nation. It is important on this occasion to say that being an Independent in this House is a difficult business. It is much more difficult to be an Independent than to be a member of the Government or the Opposition. This House does not have a long tradition of Independents. I note that the recent Victorian election resulted in three Independents holding the balance of power. My advice to the Independents in this House is: please do not get any ideas from Victoria! Seriously, I wish each of them and their families a very merry Christmas and a fulfilled new year.

In particular, I thank the member for Nicklin and the member for Gladstone, who were elected as genuine Independents. I am not trying to be divisive when I say that; they are the only two in this House who were elected as Independents. The others were elected as members of One Nation. I thank the member for Gladstone, Liz Cunningham, and the member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington, for cooperating and working with the Government. They very regularly do not vote with us. However, we respect their right to vote as they see fit. On many occasions they have worked with us, and I thank them for that. Again, I wish them well for the festive season.

I wish also to acknowledge the roles of a number of people who make the Parliament work behind the scenes. No Parliament could function as well as this one does without the goodwill and superb work of the support staff. I refer first to the Clerk of the Parliament, Robert Doyle, and all of his staff. They deserve our heartfelt thanks for all the help they give both sides of the House. No-one here would argue that they have certainly earned their Christmas break. Robert has to provide advice to the Speaker on a range of matters. He does it fairly and objectively and I thank him for that on behalf of all honourable members. As all honourable members know, it is often the advice of the Clerk that assists the Speaker in making rulings. That can be a bit of a hot seat. But he always carries out his role in an impartial way, and I thank him for that.

I take the opportunity also to thank the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, headed by Peter Drew. Their work is always of the highest professional standards, and I thank them for that. As honourable

members would understand, with 90 Bills—the most in nine years—Parliamentary Counsel have had a very heavy responsibility, and they have fulfilled it very well.

Alan Watson and his very hardworking Hansard staff deserve a special mention. They do a wonderful job here under circumstances which would often try a saint. I do not know how they make any sense out of the wild interjections and uproar that they sometimes cop from members of this House—not from this side of the Chamber, of course! I do want to stress and add to Alan and his team—and I know I have said it—that they really are very special to all members. They are world class in the work they do and I have enormous regard and respect for Hansard. Ever since I came to this House—over 10 years now—I have felt that if ever there was a professional group of people, it is Hansard. They really are very, very good. I thank them for putting up with the late nights. When I read out how many hours we have sat this year and how hard we worked, that means that they were here, too. So I thank them very much.

I say a very big thank you to Nick Bannenberg and all the Library staff for their willingness to always help and for the invaluable publications and resource material. The Library plays a very important role, as does Corporate Services and Property Services under the very able Executive Director, Robert Fick, not to mention Members Support Services.

I also want to make a big mention of the Chief Parliamentary Attendant, Kevin Jones. He and his very professional staff make life very much easier for all of us. Their willingness and unfailing cheerfulness, no matter how difficult the work, is astounding and I congratulate them all on it. The tours they run here for the community and often for groups within our electorates are well run. I often get very positive feedback about the tours from people from my own electorate and I know other members must receive the same thing. I say congratulations to them.

Parliamentary Education and Training Services replaced the Office of Education and Protocol earlier this year. I give many thanks for all the hard work put in there. They have worked incredibly hard. I say the same to the staff of Human Resource Management, Finance and Information Technology Services. That is an area that is under great and increasing pressure. They do a remarkably good job, staying at the cutting edge. We need to continue to do that. I want to pay a tribute to all of them. All of these areas are vital for the smooth running of the Parliament, but they get due credit only rarely. I make certain on this occasion that I give them the credit they are due.

At this stage I need to say how much we all appreciate the switchboard operators— those unsung heroes who have to deal with the thousands of calls in and out of our offices over the year. Some of those calls are more interesting than others, but they always handle them very pleasantly and with cheer. I say thanks, too, to the Catering Division staff under Jaakko Ponsi. Those of us who endure late nights know that sometimes it takes a lot of comforting the inner person to get through. Their service is great and so is the food. They do a terrific job. People have only to look at me to know how good it is.

I should not let the hard work of Property Services under John McDonough, which is involved in purchasing, stores, cleaning, maintenance and gardening, pass without saying also a big thank you. I want to single out the gardeners for a special mention. When one works in a place as hectic as this, it really is very, very pleasant in the odd quiet moments to enjoy the tranquillity of the Speaker's Green. It never ceases to amaze me how beautiful all the gardens are in this place. I know that does not happen without a lot of hard work, care and devotion. Let me say a special thanks to the head gardener, Shaun Stewart.

I am coming to something very serious here. I also want to thank the security staff for the excellent job that they do here. All honourable members are aware of the important role also played by security. It is a difficult job. I know that, when we went from Opposition to Government, we were sent a small parcel bomb here, which was distressing for everybody. I am delighted that security was able to handle it. That is the sort of day-to-day problem they have to deal with.

All honourable members are also aware of the important role played by members of the parliamentary press gallery. They must take the inevitably conflicting points of view of both sides of the House and attempt to deal with them in an impartial fashion. The Deputy Premier is endorsing my view here. I do not believe that they always achieve that, but I feel sure that this is one subject on which the Leader of the Opposition and I will wholeheartedly agree. Nevertheless, I think that on most occasions they manage the balancing act very well, and I thank them for that. I wish them a happy Christmas and an accurate reporting year in 2000.

It would be very remiss of me not to mention all electorate staff. I know that I can offer them heartfelt thanks on behalf of both sides of the Parliament. In particular, I would like to thank my own electorate secretary, Myra Freeman who, for almost the last four and a half years, has carried that load largely on her own. All our electorate secretaries do that; they are very hard working. These are the absolutely invaluable people who keep our offices running smoothly, who answer the hundreds of telephone calls and assist our constituents. We would stop in our tracks without them. So I say thank you very much.

As I said, Myra Freeman, my electorate secretary, has largely carried the burden. She has also ended up with an extra burden because a lot of people ring my electorate office who are obviously chasing the Premier's office. I am sure that that happened to Rob Borbidge, too. So my electorate secretary not only has to deal with my own electorate but has also to deal with issues that are more general in relation to the Government, but she handles that one.

I cannot let this occasion pass without paying tribute once more to my very able, dedicated and ever modest staff. My chief of staff, Rob Whiddon, the media representatives and the rest of the staff work incredibly hard and have given me support during the very long hours that this role requires. Of course, I mention Rusty as well. I could not do the job of Premier effectively without them—at least that is what they keep telling me. I pass on my thanks to my personal staff because they have performed. Have I made up for last year yet or not? I have done it twice. Have I made up for last year? Are they here? Good.

I also want to thank all the members of the Department of Premier and Cabinet and my Director-General, Glyn Davis. As all honourable members would know, I have set a cracking pace for them this year and they have responded with dedication and professionalism no matter how difficult the task, and I thank them for that.

At this stage, let me pay a very special tribute to the families of all honourable members. I know I did this before, but I want to do it again. While many Queenslanders understand how difficult politics can be, they do not understand the 24 hours a day, seven days a week demands made on politicians and, more importantly, on their families. All too often families come under heavy strains, particularly those families with young children. On these occasions we should acknowledge their sacrifices. Again I pay particular thanks to my family as well.

I want to wish all honourable members, parliamentary staff, all personal staff and their families the very best for the coming holiday season. I trust that I have left no-one out. If I have, I certainly give them my apologies.

I notice when Russell Cooper indicated quite recently that he was going to retire from politics one of the things he said that he looked forward to was having more personal time. I ran into Russell in between some debates and it was interesting listening to him. He said that the most important thing he is looking forward to is actually spending some quality time with his family. When we all leave this place, which will happen to all of us—some sooner than later—that is one of the things we look forward to: some sort of normality.

Over the Christmas holidays I am sure that we will all gain some new strength and vigour for the coming year. Let us all come back to this place and ensure that in the first year of the new millennium—2000—this remains a strong and vibrant democracy. Let me conclude by saying that I think this Parliament, notwithstanding the exchanges we have, is a Parliament of goodwill. Outside of debate, whether it is meals or elsewhere, I think there is a degree of camaraderie; a degree of goodwill exists. I do not see any nasty personal exchanges once the debate is left in the Chamber. That I think is a strength. Days have gone by on both sides of politics where the animosity has continued outside the Chamber. In this Parliament that has not happened. I think that is very, very important. That is a credit to the people here. It is a credit to the goodwill that people have demonstrated here. I wish everyone a very merry Christmas. Thank you for your support. Thank you for making 1999 the success that it was.
