



Speech by

Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard 13 April 1999

MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

Constitutional Centenary Foundation, Gladstone Convention

Hon. P. D. BEATTIE (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (10.11 a.m.), by leave: In two months the City of Gladstone will become the focus of national attention when it hosts 120 leading Australians who will discuss one of the most important issues facing our country. The Queensland Government and the non-political Constitutional Centenary Foundation will hold the fourth Constitutional Convention in Gladstone from 16 to 18 June to address crucial issues which will confront all Australian States if the people decide their country should become a republic when they vote on the issue in November. The Governor, His Excellency Major General Peter Arnison, has kindly agreed to officially open the convention and the Chief Justice of Queensland, the Honourable Paul de Jersey, has accepted an invitation to chair the convention. His Honour's chairing of the convention maintains the tradition of eminent judicial officers chairing these conventions.

The convention is being jointly sponsored by the Queensland Government with the Constitutional Centenary Foundation, an august body established in 1991 to promote public understanding and discussion about the Australian Constitution and system of government in the run-up to the centenary of Federation in 2000. It is an independent and non-partisan body and holds no views or positions on the desirability or form of any change. The foundation's body is chaired by Mr Donald, AO, with members including the Federal Attorney-General and shadow Attorney-General. The Right Honourable Sir Ninian Stephen is the patron of the foundation.

Given this background, I must inform the House that I am deeply disappointed by the response from the Leader of the Opposition to the convention in Gladstone. For reasons best known to himself, the Leader of the Opposition has publicly criticised this event. This convention and the issues which made it necessary are too important to be lost in political debate stirred up by the habitual negativity of the Leader of the Opposition. First, the Prime Minister wrote to me asking the State Government to do all it could to ensure a smooth transition to a republic on 1 January 2001 if that is the will of the Australian people. The Gladstone convention is an integral part of our response to the Prime Minister's request.

Second, all of the States will have to deal with a number of issues arising out of a yes vote at the national referendum. For example, what would be the role and powers of State Governors in the republic of Australia? What changes would be necessary or desirable for State Constitutions? It is crucial that the views of Queenslanders be heard on these issues, and they will. That is why a broad cross-section of people has been invited to Gladstone to take part in the convention. There will be representatives from the business community, the media, the ethnic community, the indigenous community, academics, union representatives, legal experts, local government delegates, members of this House and so on. The four political parties outside the Government have been invited to participate in this convention, including the Leader of the National Party, the Leader of the Liberal Party, the Leader of One Nation, the Independent member for Gladstone and other Independent members of this House. I have done that because it is important that their views be heard.

Queenslanders have already shown that they want to take part in a debate on our country's future. We should not ignore their wishes and we cannot afford to dither. The State Government has acted to ensure that Queensland's interests are heard in this important national debate. I therefore

urge all members here to play a constructive role by encouraging debate on the future of this country and this State and by supporting the convention that will allow all sides of the debate to be heard.

I want to table for the information of the House a memorandum that I am sending to all members setting out more detail about the convention and, along with it, a framework document so that all members of the House are fully informed. I would hope that we can get a bipartisan commitment to this convention. This is a genuine desire on behalf of the Government to get some bipartisanship into this convention, and I would ask the Leader of the Opposition to reconsider his position.
