



Speech by

# Hon. PETER BEATTIE

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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Hansard 16 November 2000

## VALEDICTORY

**Hon. P. D. BEATTIE** (Brisbane Central— ALP) (Premier) (7.30 p.m.): As the Queensland Parliament rises for the year 2000, it is timely to look back over a year of achievements, and I will do that very briefly. Before I do that, I take this opportunity to table documents further to my response to a question without notice asked this morning relating to the Queensland Heritage Trails network. The documents provide useful information about the major projects in the network.

It has been pleasing to see our job creation policies at work, bringing down the unemployment rate to 7.5% from the 9% level when we entered office. It has been just as pleasing to see the Queensland economy growing at just under 5% per annum for the last two years. I am proud of the new investment projects delivering new jobs to Queensland this year, with companies such as Virgin Blue setting up their headquarters in Queensland, the \$1.5 billion Millmerran power station and coal mine, a number of major call centres, and the resuscitation of the meat processing industry with new jobs at AMH Dinmore and the new hope at Murgon meatworks. We are very close to finalising \$1 billion projects such as Australian Magnesium. There was a major announcement this week regarding the Comalco aluminium refinery. They are just a few, of course.

This Government has been productive in the community and productive in the Parliament. We sat for 41 days this year, for around 11 hours and 30 minutes each day. Since my Government came to office the Parliament has sat for 119 days. As of 14 November, the Parliament had sat for 1,355 hours and 7 minutes. That figure does not include the last two days.

This year has seen the passage of important legislation which advances the interests of Queensland. In addition to today's legislation, here are a few examples—but not all, of course: the first State-based native title regime in the nation; a number of Bills building stronger foundations for law and order, child protection and child care; a new fuel subsidy scheme which will deliver benefits direct to motorists; new motor accident insurance arrangements to keep CTP premiums down; fairer procedures for retail shop leases; better protection for our natural environment; and a whole new system for managing and sustaining our precious water resources. Those are only a few. It is a record of which my Government is proud.

As this parliamentary year draws to a close, it is my pleasure to offer thanks to the many people who contribute to the running of this place. My first thanks go to you, Mr Speaker, for the patience and the balance you have displayed in the job—a job that all members know to be challenging at times. Mr Speaker, whatever you do there is always going to be some degree of controversy. You cannot please all the people all the time, but you try, in my view, in a balanced and fair way to achieve that. On behalf of the Government, I thank you for the fairminded way in which you have approached your task.

I know you will allow me a little latitude, Mr Speaker. Sometimes you are a gentle, kind soul and you ensure that there is fairness for the Opposition. I think that fairness is important for this place, and I congratulate you for demonstrating that fairness. Not every one on my side would do that, but I think you have been impartial. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition, in his finer moments, will agree with me.

I also thank the Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees, the temporary chairmen and the parliamentary committees for all their work in 2000. Mr Speaker, they provide valuable assistance to you and to the Parliament. I thank them all. As we all know, the parliamentary committees work hard

and make important contributions to the functioning of this Parliament. I thank the parliamentary committees.

I also thank the Whips on both sides for managing to maintain discipline in this House. On our side they are Terry Sullivan and Pat Purcell. I thank Terry and Pat on behalf of the Government. They have done a marvellous job. As we all know, without Whips Parliament would not function as effectively as it does. To Terry and Pat: well done.

I also thank Bill Baumann and John Hegarty from the Opposition and Jack Paff and Harry Black from the City Country Alliance. I particularly thank Bill Baumann and John Hegarty, because they do most of the work on behalf of the Opposition. I thank them for their cooperation. I think one of the things the community does not understand is that there is ongoing cooperation. That makes this place work in the fine institutional way that it should. I thank them for their cooperation.

Many thanks also to each one of my Ministers for their dedication, loyalty and team spirit. Their hard work has been integral to the ongoing success of this can-do Government. I know that every one of them is excited about and loves Community Cabinet meetings. I know that Community Cabinet meetings are supported in Cabinet 17 to 1. Hopefully that one will improve to two or three as time goes on! I am only kidding. I thank my Ministers because, as we know, their job entails not only giving up Sundays—Ministers and parliamentary secretaries have families—but also travelling long distances.

I know that the member for Mount Isa, the member for Cook and the member for Rockhampton in many senses have to travel considerable distances to make connections. The member for Currumbin faces the same issue. Therefore, those Ministers make enormous sacrifices, as do all Ministers. I thank each and every one of my Ministers for their hard work, dedication and team effort. This is a great team that works very hard together. I thank them very much for that.

**Mr Schwarten:** You're a great captain.

**Mr BEATTIE:** I take that interjection. I thank the member for that comment. Did you get that, Hansard? He said I was a great captain. I want to make sure that is on the record. It was a slip of the tongue and I do not want to let him get away with it.

In particular, I thank my deputy, Deputy Premier Jim Elder, for his strong support and for the results delivered through his Department of State Development. Jim and I work very closely together. He is a good mate and he has worked very hard. Jim, I thank you.

I also thank my colleague the Minister for Communication and Information, Terry Mackenroth. As well as being a strong performer in a key area for this Government, he has been exceptional as Leader of the House. He has a brilliant tactical brain that is unmatched in this Parliament. I thank Terry for his support.

I thank the Treasurer, David Hamill, who has done a fine job in delivering another balanced Budget which progresses the social and economic priorities that Labor holds dear. I cannot thank each individual Minister. You are all stars and I love you all dearly. My thanks go to the rest of my team. Every member of Caucus has worked hard and in a dedicated way. Thank you very much. I appreciate that.

Of course, this democratic institution would not function without an Opposition. Here I would like to pay tribute to those opposite. I thank the Leader and Deputy Leader of the Opposition for their cooperation throughout the year on various issues and parliamentary matters. It is also important to acknowledge the other members in this House—the Independents and the City Country Alliance members.

My thanks go to the Independent member for Nicklin, Peter Wellington, who has maintained the fierce independence that has been the hallmark of his time in this place. He regularly votes against the Government. We all know that he does that in a very genuine and sincere way because he holds his views very strongly. Peter, I thank you for your contribution. I thank Liz Cunningham, the member for Gladstone, who also pursues an independent position here.

I offer thanks to the Leader of the Opposition and to the Leader of the Liberal Party. I say this to the community: there are many times when the Leader of the Opposition and I cooperate on matters. I think honourable members would have noticed that I have moved on a number of occasions that ministerial statements be noted. The Leader of the Opposition and I, on important occasions, have shown bipartisanship. We did that in relation to the untimely death of the Agent-General, which was a tragedy. We also did it on a number of other occasions. It is important that the Leader of the Opposition and I can pick up the phone and communicate, which we do on a regular basis. When we come into the combatant atmosphere of the Parliament, he and I pursue in our own way issues, on behalf of the Government and the Opposition respectively, in a fierce and determined way.

I say to the Leader of the Opposition: while we do disagree on many things, I appreciate the many occasions you and I have spoken personally. On those occasions we have been able to advance

the interests of this State together. I thank you for that, because that is something that is not often recognised or acknowledged. We do talk personally on a regular basis, and I thank you for that.

I pay tribute to the families of all members. We all know that families can miss out on time and attention because of the busy lives that we all lead—particularly Ministers. My own family has been a great source of support. I cannot say enough about my wife, Heather. I offer my heartfelt thanks for her sincerity, support, strength, friendship and love.

I thank my children as well. My daughter, Larissa, was 16 recently—16 going on 30—and knows it all. She is like her mother, fortunately—very intelligent. Both my sons, Matthew and Denis, will be 15. They have been terrific about the time I have had to give to this job. I know Rob has a young family, too. We all understand what that means.

In my family we are heading into the birthday season. My daughter was 16 not long ago and I have a birthday on Saturday. I thought I would share that with you all.

**A Government member** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** Twenty-one.

**Mr Sullivan:** We'll shout you drinks tonight.

**Mr BEATTIE:** I understand that the drinks are for me later. My sons are 15 at the beginning of January.

**A Government member:** What about Rusty?

**Mr BEATTIE:** Hang on. Don't get excited. He has been accused of some pretty shady things lately. I have to put him down the order. Of course, another member of the family deserves acknowledgment and that is Rusty, our loyal and loving mutt. These days Rusty has developed a bit of a media profile of his own and I am getting a bit jealous. Some in this place have been heard to mutter that he has become the 19th member of Cabinet. I am not sure that we will bring him to Cabinet meetings. We also have a cat called Tiddles who is pretty upset that she is not getting any mention. Anyway, I will move on.

**An Opposition member:** Enrolled her yet?

**Mr BEATTIE:** No, she does not want to vote. She is not interested. She is just jealous of the dog. Rusty would love to hear that.

The Queensland Parliament functions as well as it does because of the goodwill and hard work of the supporting staff. I give sincere thanks to the Clerk of the Parliament, Robert Doyle, and all his staff. I thank them all for the non-partisan assistance that they offer both sides of the House equally. As honourable members know, it is often the advice of the Clerk that assists the Speaker in making rulings. His is never an easy role, but he has always carried it out in an impartial way, and I thank him for that.

In addition, as we all know, the Clerk has the responsibility—along with the Speaker, but in particular it is the responsibility of the Clerk—to administer expenses and entitlements for members of Parliament, that is, pays and so on. That is done in a very accountable way. I am not being political when I say this but, as we all know, there has been a lot of controversy about Peter Reith. One of the things that is not understood in the community is that we have checks and balances in this place that would make certain that that could not happen here. Through the checks and balances that are administered by this Parliament we are more accountable than are other Parliaments. If the rules that exist here were in operation Federally, there would not have been a Peter Reith incident.

I think that, somewhere along the line, when there is no election atmosphere, we should seriously examine some of the systems that are in place for some of the allowances at a national level. For example, all members know that, under the rules, electorate allowances are paid to members for expenses that they determine. That allowance is spent entirely at their discretion, but there is a level of accountability, and that is to the Australian Taxation Office. Frankly, the members are the ones who determine what are appropriate expenses and what are not. Members can spend that electorate allowance on many things that are not tax deductible. Members know that. Nevertheless, this is about servicing electorates. It is entirely a matter for members as to how the electorate allowance is spent. That is the way it should be. The members know that, one day, they are accountable to the Taxation Office.

The electorate allowance was introduced many years ago as a form of pay rise. That is the way it is treated. It is treated as a member's income to be dealt with at their discretion and accountable to the Taxation Office. I just wonder whether we should not actually pay some of these other allowances—at both the national and State levels—to members but instead simply say, "At the end of the day, you are accountable to the Australian Taxation Office." I think we should give some thought to that somewhere along the line.

I remember having this discussion with Sir Max Bingham, who was once the head of the Criminal Justice Commission. After we had had the argument in this place about the so-called travel rorts, I said to him, "The most simple thing would be to do this", and he actually agreed, but he thought that the climate was such that it would be impossible for us to pursue it. However, as members of Parliament, one of the things we have to do is help to lift the reputation of members of Parliament in the community. We need to look at how these allowances are paid. I think it is important that we say to a member, "There is the money. You have to determine how you spend it, but if you do not spend it for taxable purposes, then you have to pay tax on it." If members do not spend their electorate allowance in a claimable way, they pay tax on it. That way the community gets the money back. That provides a level of accountability. I hope that, once this election is out of the road, all sides of politics can have some discussion so that we can get some sensible rules and accountability—the way it should be, and that is through the Australian Taxation Office.

I also thank the Parliamentary Counsel and staff. They draft Bills at short notice. They have been very professional over a long period and have done a marvellous job.

I make a particular reference to the hardworking Hansard staff—especially to Alan Watson, whom we farewelled earlier this year. I had enormous regard for Alan Watson, as I know everyone else in this Parliament did. He has been replaced by Doug Rohl—someone we also have a lot of regard for. Hansard does a superb job in turning what is said in this House into English. Over the years there have been many occasions on which I have sat in this House and heard debates and then read them in Hansard later. It is almost like there are two different speeches. On reading the speech we can actually understand what someone has said. I say to the Hansard staff that they are superb. They do a great job under enormous difficulties, and I thank them very much.

I also thank Nick Bannenberg and the Library staff for their swift help and their invaluable publications and resource material. The Library plays a very important role, as do Corporate Services, Property Services and Members Support Services. Special mention needs to be made of Kevin Jones and all of his very courteous and professional parliamentary attendants. The attendants are very polite, they are helpful, they run the school tours and they really do a superb job.

I have to say that today was a good illustration of how well this Parliament works. Today we had over 800 soldiers from the 6th RAR. As members know, this was one of the first times—in fact, I think it was probably the first time—that the Queensland Parliament has ever hosted the 6th RAR, who had served in East Timor, or a corps of servicemen like that. Parliament catered for that very well. The Leader of the Opposition also attended. I thank all of the staff for their contribution to that event.

I also thank the security staff. We all know that from time to time their job is not easy, but I think the security staff here are courteous. They also do a wonderful job—as do housekeeping and as do the gardeners. I say sorry to the gardeners for the damage caused to the lawn today. I do not think there was too much damage. I think it will recover with a bit of rain and a bit of Queensland sunshine. It will be as good as gold tomorrow. I say to the gardeners that they do a marvellous job.

I also pay tribute to the Office of Education and Protocol, which looks after all the visitors to this place, and to the staff of Human Resource Management, Finance and Information Technology Services.

None of us here could do without the switchboard operators, who are courteous and friendly. They have to deal with the thousands of calls that pass in and out of our offices over the year.

The Catering Division deserves a special mention. A person who likes food as much as I do knows how wonderful they are. Many of us here are testament to the quality of their culinary skills, and I thank them for that. Property Services is involved in purchasing stores, cleaning, maintenance and gardening. They deserve a big thankyou.

Watching all of this, of course, is the parliamentary press gallery. They have always had the challenging and sometimes daunting task of observing the way the day's proceedings—

**Mr Borbidge:** They're not watching you now.

**Mr BEATTIE:** I reckon that is the best gallery that I have seen this week.

**Mr Elder:** The best looking.

**Mr BEATTIE:** The best looking. No, I do not really mean that. They are nice people—warm and cuddly; the sort I would take home and let Rusty give a good licking. The parliamentary press gallery have the always challenging and sometimes daunting task of observing the day's proceedings and reporting them in a fair and impartial way. I must admit that I do not always like what I see, hear and read, but I respect and will always defend a free and independent media.

It is important to note that one of the most independent members of the press gallery is Channel 7's political reporter, Mike D'arcy, who next week notches up 20 years of watching and reporting on Queensland politics. I congratulate Mike on that. Well done! Can members imagine what it would be like without Mike D'arcy?

**An honourable member** interjected.

**Mr BEATTIE:** A 20-year reunion.

**Mr Borbidge:** The lunches would be shorter.

**Mr BEATTIE:** The lunches would be short. I want to tell members a short story. I went to City Hall the year that Bob Ward ran against Jim Soorley and lost. Bob Ward had given up his council ward and run for Lord Mayor and he lost, which meant that he was without a job. He came out a bit stunned to a pack of journalists. Mick D'arcy got a chair, stuck it at the back and stood up on it. Before anyone else could get a word in he asked, "What are you going to do now for a job?" Bob Ward was stunned and there was silence. I do not think Bob Ward recovered for the rest of the news conference. In fact, I am surprised he is trying to make a comeback, but I will not get into that. There should be a law against those who survive those 20 years, but D'arcy is a bit of an institution.

I thank all electorate staff. These are the people who keep our offices running smoothly, who answer the hundreds of telephone calls and who assist our constituents. I pay a special tribute to my electorate secretary, Myra Freeman, who carries much of the electoral work because of my responsibilities. I certainly would be lost without her. May I also say thanks to my staff in the Premier's Office. They are dedicated and loyal people who work long hours, sometimes under considerable stress. They are a great team. I especially thank my chief of staff, Rob Whiddon, for his superb performance seven days a week since we came to office, providing advice and leading the ministerial team. I thank also his Deputy Chief of Staff, Damian McGreevy.

I offer my special thanks also to the Director of the Media Unit in my office, Ron Watson. All honourable members would know Ron. Ron is leaving my office tomorrow. Ron has been an outstanding member of my staff. He is extremely hard working, committed, with a quick and tactical mind and is a good bloke as well. I thank Ron for all of his hard work. He has been with me since I was in Opposition. This is the last time he will be at Parliament House, as he is leaving tomorrow afternoon and will be starting a new job on Monday. We will certainly miss Ron. He has been a great help. As I said, I will miss him dearly.

I wish also to acknowledge the other members of my team—Steve Bishop, and Lorrان Downer, who is sitting here watching proceedings tonight.

**Government members:** Hear, hear!

**Mr BEATTIE:** She is embarrassed so we should say it louder—hear, hear!

I thank all of my other staff. I thank also the staff of my department and across the Government generally for their professional advice and assistance, in particular Dr Glyn Davis, who is the head of the Premier's Department, and the other directors-general, who do a marvellous job.

I hope that over the Christmas holidays we all take the time to become refreshed and return for what I am confident will be yet another challenging and exciting year in Queensland politics. One thing about Queensland politics that is irrefutable is that it does not matter who is in Government or in Opposition and it does not matter what the state of politics is—something will happen that none of us predicts. There will be a crisis of some kind. Queensland politics is the most interesting politics not just in Australia but in the world. We should sell tickets. We could make a fortune. I reckon this could be a revenue raiser.

**Mr Borbidge:** It's a theme park; you don't know whether you're on the Tower of Terror or the Giant Drop.

**Mr BEATTIE:** That is right. I reckon we could sell tickets and make a fortune. The Treasurer is taking notes. This could be another revenue raiser. I reckon we could attract people from around the world.

On behalf of my Government, I extend my very best wishes to all members and their families for a safe, healthy and happy Christmas and an equally healthy and rewarding New Year.

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