



Speech by

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE

MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Hansard 16 November 2000

VALEDICTORY

Hon. R. E. BORBIDGE (Surfers Paradise—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (7.54 p.m.): This occasion is a tradition. Like all traditions, it should be honoured. In that tradition, I am happy to join with the Premier in making this valedictory address. We would not serve ourselves well or benefit the people if we did not recognise the unique nature of this place or—and this always merits special emphasis—its traditions.

One of the traditions of this place is that in a valedictory address we do not engage too strenuously in the robust arts that Parliament demands. I would, however, just take issue with a couple of the comments that the Premier made at the start of his address. He mentioned the achievements of the Government. I have to place on record that I do not necessarily agree with that. In fact, I have to say in the nicest possible way that I do not always think this has been a good Government. I would also indicate—and I do not want to delve into this, but I would just flag it—that we will not be moving an amendment but we will be opposing the special adjournment motion on grounds that we made very public today. It is the very strong view of members on this side of the House that we should be back here on 5 December. But I will not canvass those issues, because that would run against the traditions of this public address, except to say that we feel those sittings in December should not have been cancelled and that the Parliament should have resumed on 5 December for that sitting week. However, the reasons for that no doubt will be canvassed in other places.

On this occasion we put the emphasis on good humour and seasonal cheer. Therefore, I thank the Premier for the courtesies that he has extended to me and the Opposition, when he has done so, and also, Mr Speaker, I acknowledge the same to you. In the spirit of this occasion, I thank the Premier for remodelling the calendar. The standard version is not for him and Christmas has come early this year—in fact, one week after the Melbourne Cup. And this may have caused some confusion for Santa. Lest there be any confusion, I make the point that I refer to the resident of the North Pole, not the member for Thuringowa. And I wish Ken a happy Christmas.

I note, obviously, that the Government managed to keep us here until the end of the second week in December last year. This year we leave in the third week of November. Whilst this is sometimes a fractious place, it is also a place where, as we often pleasingly have cause to observe, friendship and fellowship actually do transcend party politics. That is something that is not always recognised outside this place. People see question time on the TV and sometimes wonder how it is possible that honourable members on opposite sides of the House manage to have a civilised conversation. But that is very much the theatre of Parliament—the drama of Parliament. As the Premier indicated, there are areas where the Premier of the day and the Leader of the Opposition of the day and Ministers and shadow Ministers and other office bearers have to have a sound working relationship within the robust and sometimes fierce nature of the Parliament. I just make the observation that one of the good things always about the parliamentary system should be our ability to fight hard and long inside and not make those differences personal outside. That is sometimes challenging, but I have to say that by and large over the years it is observed by a majority of members on both sides of the House, and we are poorer if that great tradition of Parliament is not acknowledged and followed through.

Having delivered three valedictories in a row, I have noted that the 49th Parliament is a very different place from the 48th. We continue to see new chapters written in the political and parliamentary

story of Queensland that future historians will, I am sure, conclude have built on our State's unique reputation as a different place. The 2000 parliamentary year, the last of this millennium, has also seen the record books rewritten, and I will not canvass those events at this time out of respect for this debate. I believe the process is still some time from being at an end. But again I acknowledge that these are dramatic and tumultuous times. One thing about Queensland politics is that it is a roller-coaster ride. It is probably the most spectacular political theatre in Australia today, and it has been for some time. I guess that is the nature of this place and it is hardly likely to change.

Last year at this time—well, I guess it was a little closer to Christmas—I suggested this might be an appropriate time to invite all members to reflect on the real imperatives of politics in the Queensland of today. That is still the case, and the body of evidence is growing ever larger in favour of a finding that the curious is an expanding phenomenon. I wish every member on the Government side, the Opposition side, the crossbenches and the Independents the compliments of the season and give them the thanks of the Opposition for their contributions to the proceedings of this place. I thank the hardworking members of the Opposition front bench. I thank our backbenchers, who have consistently demonstrated their determination and energy to strive to do what is best for Queensland.

In any Parliament the life of a Whip can be a torrid one, with a strenuous call on time and patience. In a closely matched situation, both Government and Opposition Whips have a particularly difficult job to do. It is always interesting to watch the chemistry between the Government and Opposition Whips when a series of close divisions comes along. Sometimes the saving grace is the civil conduct of these affairs through the gentlemen's agreements—and I apologise to the member for Archerfield for using such gender specific language—that our rules and our procedures provide.

I pay tribute to the Opposition Whips, the members for Albert and Redlands; to the Government Whips, the members for Bulimba and Chermside; and to the CCA and Independent members who perform like duties. They have all played their part in assisting with the job of keeping the House running smoothly.

No legislature anywhere could work without the energy and expertise of its supporting staff. I believe special credit should be given to the Clerk of the Parliament, Mr Doyle, who, as always, has been a tower of strength and a fount of wisdom in every circumstance imaginable and in many that are not. I also place on record the Opposition's acknowledgment of the fine services provided by the Clerk Assistant (Table) and Sergeant-at-Arms, Mr Ian Thompson. Mr Thompson; the Second Clerk-Assistant, Mr Barry Sanderson; the Parliamentary Officer (Votes), Ms Annette Henery; the parliamentary officers in Bills and Papers; and Messrs Bob Bradbury, Brett Charlier and Andrew Timperley have all done sterling work this year. I thank all the Clerks and Table staff for a job well done.

The Chief Librarian, Nick Bannenberg, and the Library staff have continuously provided service at a level of excellence that is a tribute to them all when they have been under some strain and pressure.

Special mention must be made of the Office of Parliamentary Counsel, headed by Peter Drew. Parliamentary Counsel can always be relied on to provide first-rate service and the soundest of advice. The office this year has again answered the call unswervingly under a workload that remained significantly high. I speak for everyone, but I especially speak for my staff in the Opposition office, when I say how grateful we are for their professionalism and for their dedication.

I also, of course, acknowledge Neil Laurie, who is in front of me, to whom very often we reach for advice simply because he is closest.

Mr Springborg: We give him industrial deafness as well.

Mr BORBIDGE: Yes, we sometimes give him industrial deafness as well, as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition says. His advice is always there and always very much appreciated.

I also want to thank the staff who look after the backbench members on both sides of the House in the annexe in terms of secretarial support. They play an important role in this place. The research directors and committee secretariats have all performed magnificently and with unfailing courtesy.

The Hansard staff who, as the Premier indicated, must all be qualified translators—sometimes, I think, from Martian—have done a tremendous job in circumstances that have obviously been very trying. I would also like to make special mention of Mrs Jeanette Lippiatt for the professional manner in which she deals with the massive electronic copy that now flies around the place and the vital interface that she provides between those who produce the verbatim record and those who utter the words that must be recorded.

This year we lost the services of Alan Watson as Chief Hansard Reporter. He chose to exchange the impossible task of reducing his handicap here at Parliament House for the less difficult challenge, I hope, of reducing his handicap on the golf course. His erudition and complete attention to the job at hand are sorely missed. It is a shame that he has gone, but the tradition continues with his

successor and with his fine band that he has left behind. Members sometimes forget that, if we sit late, the Hansard staff sit even later and that, whatever is the hour of the House's rising, it meets at 9.30 a.m. and Hansard has to be there first.

My thanks go to the officers responsible for the Corporate Services and Members Support Program; everyone on the administrative staff; the Chief Parliamentary Attendant, Kevin Jones, and his staff; and the security staff under their coordinator, Geraldine Broerse. As always, they have performed their duties with courtesy and efficiency. Let it be noted that this is always appreciated.

I emphasise my appreciation for the enthusiastic staff in Education and Training under Graeme Kinnear. They are responsible for much of what the public sees about how Queensland's Parliament works.

Parliament could not function without its telephonists and executive assistants, and would cease all activity without the Catering Division under Mr Jaakko Ponsi and Executive Chef, Sucil De Silva, and their staff.

My thanks and deep appreciation go to John McDonough and Property Services, who keep the whole precinct looking good. We say goodbye this year to two stalwarts of Property Services, Ray Thompson and Jim Rae. Ray Thompson is the foreman carpenter, someone I am sure every member knows well and whose services have at some time come in good use, perhaps even sometimes essential. I probably should not admit this, but he actually came to the rescue in my room upstairs the other week when I broke my toilet seat. That is indicative of the multiskilling—

Mr Beattie: I think we should move on.

Mr BORBIDGE: Yes. I believe in being accountable, you see. I think we should move on; you are correct.

Ray joined us here in 1978 and was a vital part of the fitting out of the annexe, which is the home away from home for so many of us and our predecessors. It is certainly a tribute to Ray that after two decades, excusing a twinge or two resulting from the ageing process and following the refurbishments that began under my Government and continued under the current Government, the annexe remains comfortable accommodation and serves us all well.

Jim Rae is, of course, our painter extraordinaire. He, too, has decided that the time has come to retire and, with Ray Thompson, will be leaving us on Friday, 22 December. Jim's work is seen and enjoyed in the quality maintenance of the special finishes in Parliament House itself. I say to Ray and to Jim: all the best, friends. We wish you a happy retirement. We thank you for your long contribution to the Parliament of Queensland, and we wish you well.

I would also like to thank the cleaning staff, in particular Patricia, who looks after us on level 6 at the Opposition offices. The cleaning staff all do a wonderful job with unfailing courtesy and great determination, although I am told by one of my senior advisers that they do appear to have run up the white flag with him and his work space. He says that he is not surprised. His identity will remain anonymous.

The gardens and lawns, as always, are a delight. Our gardeners maintain a green oasis here in the middle of the city no matter what the weather and even manage to do so with the Speaker's lawn, which now seems a prime social venue. Today, of course, as the Premier mentioned, it was in parade order for the visit of the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, whose colours flew bravely within these precincts on what was a very special occasion indeed. The 6th RAR is a Brisbane based infantry unit. It is our own. It has just returned from duty in East Timor. I know of no-one in this Parliament or anywhere who is not as proud as punch of the battalion, of its fine troops. They are a credit to themselves and a credit to us all.

The parliamentary press gallery has again, I feel sure, had an interesting year finding stories for newspapers, radio and television. I believe that we have maintained the fine traditions of this place in making sure that they have been provided with some good copy. I hope that the members of the gallery feel that they have been entertained as well as challenged by some of the things that they had to report. The press gallery has an important and historic role in the Parliament. I thank its members for their scrutiny in the public interest over the past year, and I join with the Premier in congratulating Mike D'Arcy on 20 years of service to this place. He has outlasted several Governments and several Premiers.

None of us here would function without the close support of our electorate office staff. On behalf of all Opposition members, I offer my thanks to them for their efforts this year. This year again I want to place on record my particular appreciation to Ros Bennett, my electorate secretary. She resolutely follows orders to always advise callers to my electorate office in Surfers Paradise that the sun is shining and the palm trees are swaying— gently, one hopes, or if they are not, she will not be too specific. Ros is a gem.

I thank my Opposition staff. They are a team we are appreciative of and a group on whom we know we can rely. In Government and in Opposition, members and staff alike always have to be ready to put their families and loved ones and their private lives and pleasures to one side in pursuit of the matter of the moment. Only truly dedicated people are prepared to do that. No political leader could possibly keep up the pace required without the support and affection of his or her family. My wife, Jennifer, has selflessly maintained her deep understanding of the disruptions to normal life that come with being a parliamentarian. My children have continued their ready acceptance that their dad does not have a regular schedule and some times, too often, cannot be with them in person. They know I am always there in spirit. They understand that, which is great.

Last year I said that this is the people's House. I said that this Legislature is a forum in which the people are supreme. I repeat that message this year. I believe it is even more important than ever to remind ourselves of that fundamental democratic fact. We have had some hard times this year in this Chamber, some tough times. We are under no illusion that next year, at least prior to the election, will be no different. I just make the observation. Again, out of respect for the traditions of this debate, those issues will be canvassed elsewhere at another time. Our Parliament is a robust place. Our debates are always frank. They are sometimes fractious, but it is never dull, and that is the bonus. I wish all honourable members, their families and their staff and the staff of the Parliament all the very best for a happy and safe Christmas, a bright new year and the warmest of wishes for the new millennium.
