



Speech by

Miss FIONA SIMPSON

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard 4 April 2001

ADDRESS IN REPLY

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (12.42 p.m.): I pledge my support for the Crown and respect for the Crown's representative, the Governor. I would also like to congratulate all new members and continuing members in this place, because it is indeed an honour when we are chosen by the people to represent them in this place.

We come from a range of philosophical backgrounds and beliefs, but I still believe that the majority of people who choose to step into the public arena do so because they believe that they can make a difference, that they see that, in being bold in our community and having values about how to make the community better, it takes a conscious decision to get out there and be part of that process of actively seeking to put your philosophies of bettering the community into practice.

I feel honoured to represent the Maroochydore electorate for this my fourth term. In a climate where there is so much cynicism about politics, I am reminded of the enduring words of Abraham Lincoln when he talked about people needing to have a heart to help if they wanted to have a right to criticise. As we know, where there is a lot of cynicism, the challenge is to say to people, 'We must all together be part of that process of making our communities better,' because you do not make your community better by sitting in an armchair. There has never ever been a cynic who has changed the world for the better. So I believe that, although we come from different philosophical beliefs, we are in pursuit of trying to represent our local areas, represent the state and, of course, Australia.

This address in reply debate provides us with the opportunity to speak primarily about our electorates. I believe that at the heart of being good members of parliament is keeping our focus first and foremost on our local area. That is a microcosm of the state and the nation. As every member knows, there is nothing more realistic than having a constituent coming up to you in the street or ringing you up or talking to you—with nobody, no staff, in between—if you want to keep in touch with the issues and know what is going on. We all recognise and appreciate that that direct contact with people and listening to people's different issues is part of the accountability of being in this place.

A few years ago I was a bit disappointed to have passed to me a comment that a political journalist had made about backbenchers. It was not about any backbencher in particular but about the fact that they did not have much work to do.

Honourable members interjected.

Miss SIMPSON: I hear other members laugh and knock this belief. I was astounded and very disappointed by that comment, because I believe that at the heart of being good members of parliament is first and foremost keeping our finger on the pulse in our electorates, regardless of the amount of work that we may have to do in serving the greater good of the state as parliamentarians through the legislative process or in other means of advocacy on other issues, and to understand what is happening in our electorates and as best as possible, representing those needs regardless of people's political or social backgrounds.

Mr Terry Sullivan: That's right. The real politics are out there.

Miss SIMPSON: That is correct—listening to the people and knowing what they are saying. At the end of the day, a member can still work very hard in this place and still lose their seat. But that is the choice of the people. I acknowledge that some very hardworking members of parliament have lost their seats. But we accept that this is also part of the democratic process.

This Westminster system of government evolved over 700 years to this point. When there are changes of government, we are blessed to see that there is not violence in the streets. In some of our small neighbouring countries there has been a lot of turmoil and a lot of involvement of the military in trying to wrest control of the people's democratic right to control their parliaments. We have a lot of reasons to be grateful for the system of government that we have. It may not be perfect—we should always strive to make it better—but it is still a system that has evolved over those 700 years. This year, in Australia we are celebrating the 100th year of federation—of having a national parliament bringing together the people under a Westminster system of government. It is indeed historic that, as the 50th session of the Queensland Parliament, we are meeting in this place and we will deliberate on issues that affect our constituents.

At this point, I would like to acknowledge some of the people who have helped me. I have heard from some Independents criticisms of the party political system. I believe that all parties have to listen to the comments of the people in regard to how to best meet the needs of their constituency. But there is a value in people being joined together in a common task. There is still value in having a party—in my case, I am a member of the National Party, which represents my philosophical direction—and in coming together in a joint effort in order to achieve an outcome. Once again, that is one of the values of the Westminster system. Although there is a role for individuals—obviously, the people choose to elect Independents—I still believe that more can be achieved through a force of numbers, with people going in the same direction.

Our challenge is to persuade people to the best course of action and to listen to people's views of what they believe to be the best course of action. As someone said to me, it is not enough to be right; you have to be able to persuade others to the same course of action if you want to be able to achieve that outcome. The power of one is being able to take other people with you.

I am grateful to those who have shared the journey along with me over the past eight years as a member of parliament, but longer in campaigning before that. I acknowledge my family, and particularly my father, Gordon, and Norma Simpson and my extended family. I also acknowledge Barney Lawless-Pyne, who has been a great and enduring hard worker, and many, many other people who, although I omit their names, I would still like to recognise. Nobody comes into this place on their own; they come through the help of many volunteers. They come to this place through many people who are outside our direct party structures, and for their help and support I am very grateful.

I come back to the point about how important it is for members of parliament—backbenchers and, obviously, ministers—to recognise the work that is done at the local level. That work should never be denigrated by those who have never worked in an electorate office or who have never understood the sorts of concerns that come across our desks. Our electorate officers, secretaries and others—some of us have paid for extra staff members—talk to and help people. They help us to represent our constituents. I pay tribute to my secretary, Betty Ledger, to Dawn James, who has worked for me, and to other people who have helped out over time. I have a great deal of respect for the ladies—and other members may have men working in their offices—who assist as best they can in dealing compassionately with and resolving local issues in the best way possible.

I wish to raise some of the local issues affecting the electorate of Maroochydore. Tourism is a very important industry to my electorate. I will be distributing a tourism brochure on the Sunshine Coast to members later. This industry employs a lot of people, especially young people. Obviously youth unemployment is of concern to us. We must try to generate more employment in the tourism industry, which cuts across a wide range of businesses, particularly small businesses. It is important that every opportunity is given to the tourism industry to expand and that we provide an environment where young people and small businesses can flourish through the growth of employment in the local area.

Obviously the Sunshine Coast and the electorate of Maroochydore have some natural advantages, with a number of beautiful beaches, and we also have a lot of new and older accommodation sites. That makes selling the message of tourism so much easier. It is with pleasure that I will be distributing this brochure and encouraging members, when they take a break from the 80-hour week that many of us work, to think about going to the Sunshine Coast for their annual holidays. It is a great place. We love it. I know some members and the ministers have been there recently with the community cabinet.

Ms Spence: We would like to go back more often.

Miss SIMPSON: Yes, you must come back more often. It is a wonderful place and it is not a long drive from Brisbane. We would welcome anyone from any political persuasion who wanted to holiday on the Sunshine Coast.

Mr Schwarten: I'll come up there if you come up to the Capricorn Coast for your holidays.

Miss SIMPSON: I am sure that I will be up there at some time. Public transport is an issue that affects many communities. Recently, the final report of CAMCOS, the public transport study on the Sunshine Coast, was released by the government. That study was started under the previous coalition

government. It is about planning for the future and planning for good public transport. I will be urging the government to commit funds to that project. The first stage will look at bringing an improved bus network online through the development of high-speed dedicated busways. The concept of a rail network is flagged in that report for eventual development. Money will need to be assigned to implement those projects in a staged way to best meet the future growth of the Sunshine Coast and the current needs of the people.

We also need better coordination. Although it is not exactly rocket science, there have been incredible difficulties getting the bus companies to coordinate with Queensland Rail to provide a coordinated service between the coast and the railway stations. I urge the government to provide any assistance that it can in this matter. As the new contracts are signed with bus owners, the subject of better coordination should be put on the table and insisted upon.

There is no doubt that the building industry on the Sunshine Coast and in many other areas has really hit hard times. I wish to focus on the issue of security of payment, which affects many people. A single operator with a family to support may lose thousands of dollars on a number of different jobs because someone has failed to pay the principal contractor or the principal contractor has failed to pay them. The ramifications of that on the local economy can be horrific. A number of quite significant building company failures have occurred on the Sunshine Coast. I have talked to some of the businesspeople involved. They have employed people as subcontractors and there is no doubt that their track record as businesspeople was good. They were not shoddy with their book work, as some people will try to make out when a subcontractor faces ruin. They were good businesspeople, yet they were stuck with costs worth tens of thousands of dollars because other businesses have gone under—businesses that the BSA had been supposedly keeping an eye on. At the end of the day, that did not do the subbies any good. We require a review of the security of payments system for subcontractors so that people are no longer used as the banking system for those further up the chain who do not have the appropriate finances and bookkeeping practices in place. It has to end. It is a process that has cost many people their homes and, tragically, sometimes has had even worse ramifications.

I wish to recognise the new seniors housing project in my local area. I have been very keen on this project, particularly as it affects people with mobility problems. Only so many people can fit into the ground floor of medium-rise accommodation. Disabled access to medium-rise accommodation is of great benefit and will definitely help vulnerable people who are in need.

I know that time is short, but I want to mention the need for indoor sporting facilities. The obligation to provide young people with worthwhile activities rests with us as older members of the community. Sometimes some members of the community will criticise young people who say that they have nothing to do. A lot of us may have been self-motivated in finding activities to keep ourselves busy. However, I believe that it is the older generation that has let these young people down. There is a need for our generation to be involved with young people by giving them opportunities to get involved in scouts, guides, sporting activities and other community activities and by working hard to provide the facilities that such activities need. There is a need for the provision of indoor sporting facilities not only in Maroochydore town itself but also on the north shore of the Maroochy River.

Recently, I raised with the Police Minister—and I will continue to raise—the issue of the improvement of the Sunshine Coast police to population ratio so that we at least have the same ratio as the Gold Coast has. Currently we do not have the same ratio. There needs to be a recognition of the fact that a lot of people come to the Sunshine Coast for holidays. We have a very transient population and a big turnover in population. Issues in the community require a higher police presence, yet we do not have the police numbers to reflect that. That must be addressed and the community is constantly asking for it to be addressed. The north shore of the Maroochy River needs a police beat or a police house. There is also a need for a police station to be built in Coolum itself. While Coolum township is just outside my electorate, it affects my constituency of Mount Coolum, Yaroomba and further south.

Other members have mentioned the subject of roads. A lot of money has been spent on the Maroochydore road. That money needed to be spent given that traffic volumes were exceeding the design capacity of the road. There is also a desperate need for the Sunshine Motorway to be upgraded. I will keep mentioning this until we see the money allocated through the budgetary process. I have raised this subject with the Transport Minister. I believe that the plans for the ramps and interchanges on the Sunshine Motorway need to be brought forward. The state should consider putting some funds into the southern access to the motorway to improve the road network, because the local government does not have the capacity to completely fund that road. The southern access road into Maroochydore will carry significant traffic from outside the rating base of the Maroochy Shire Council, from shires further south. Once again, as it is a regional centre, people travel into the heart of Maroochydore. It has been recognised as a regional centre by the state government and there is a need for assistance to make the project come to fruition.

I believe that there is a need to expand the provision for counselling and guidance officers in our primary schools. Earlier today mention was made of the lack of funding provided by the state government for drug education in our schools. The state government responded with comments about the services that it was supposedly putting into some of the high schools. There is a desperate need to start those campaigns in our primary schools. The school chaplaincy program is now moving into primary schools on the Sunshine Coast. That is terrific and I support it. I believe that there is a need for the state to provide more counselling and support services in our primary schools. It is heartbreaking to hear some of the stories that teachers tell about how they see problems and they wish they could help, but they are limited in what they can do. This is an area that needs quite a strong focus from government to help the communities at the coalface.

Small business obviously is the backbone of employment in our communities. As the GST windfalls come to the state government in the next few years, I will be calling on the state government to give small business a fair go, to reform the tax system at the state level and to roll back some of the taxes that are currently hitting our small businesspeople. They are the ones who are going to create the jobs in this state. They are the ones who are going to employ our young people.

While I know that benefits flow from the deals that were done behind closed doors with Virgin Blue Airlines, with the state giving them benefits, I think that those things should be made public and I think that benefits should be provided and concessions given to small business. When we look at the stamp duties they are paying and the costs that they have to incur, cutting red tape is important on one hand. But if the government really wants to send a clear message that it supports small business, there has to be reform of the state taxes that small businesses are paying.

I will be going into the other issues more specifically within my portfolio of Health, Tourism and Women's Policy in more detail when I have the opportunity in this parliament and when more time is available to me than here today.

There is a need in my own electorate for a public dental service. You would think that Maroochydore would have a public dental service. We had one temporarily when we were in government, but unfortunately the Beattie Labor government took that service away when they got in. I implore them to have some compassion for people who cannot afford public dental services and who cannot get to Kawana, Noosa or Nambour to attend their dental services. There is a school dental clinic which is vacant for up to half of the year. It would take only minor modifications to allow people to have direct access to it without having to go through the school grounds. I have put this issue to the government, and I would urge it to use this option so that people can have decent public dental services in Maroochydore.

The Maroochydore State High School's renewal program is something that the school has pushed for, particularly since the change in the school leadership, which has given them an opportunity to formulate this plan. I will certainly be supporting their move for renewal funds for this great high school. It is terrific to see a public high school such as this with a great attitude, getting great results and working hard to really lift the profile of their school and also what their students are doing and doing so well in our local communities. I really do wish that school leadership team all the best because they really have been flying the flag high as far as the wonderful things that can be achieved through a local state high school are concerned.
