



Speech by

**JOHN ENGLISH**

**MEMBER FOR REDLANDS**

---

Hansard 5 April 2001

### FIRST SPEECH

**Mr ENGLISH** (Redlands—ALP) (11.57 a.m.): There are a few truisms about maiden speeches in political circles. One is that they can be rather boring and the second is that they can come back to haunt you. I am sure that many experienced members of this House could give a few testimonials to this. I hope to avoid the first truism. If I can achieve the second, I aim to make it a good one as opposed to an embarrassing one. I want this maiden speech to set the tone for how I will represent the people of Redlands and contribute to the Beattie government's second term. I owe the people of Redlands a great deal for giving me the privilege to represent them.

I think my success in getting elected had a lot to do with Peter Beattie's strong leadership and his down-to-earth approach to the job of Premier. The Labor Party has provided the most credible alternative and we must continue to be vigilant about the standards we set for ourselves. If we fall short of implementing Peter Beattie's reform agenda, then we can be sure that the people will let us know at the next state election. As a new member of this House, I am determined to deliver on Labor's promise to live up to the ethical standards which Peter Beattie has put in place within the ALP and for this House.

The team of true believers, volunteers, friends and family who helped me during my campaign worked extremely hard under difficult circumstances at times, and I thank them for their support and commitment to the people of Redlands. We did it without any fancy political stunts, just a straightforward campaign. At this point, I make special mention of my two favourite girls—my wife, Lisa, who is in the gallery, and my daughter, Kelsea. It has been a learning curve for all of us, but I think it is tougher on partners and children than many people are prepared to admit. I have to confess that my two year old daughter Kelsea already understands the rigours of envelope stuffing. I am very lucky to have their love and support and wish to say publicly how much I love them both.

The main focus of my campaign was to be an accessible and honest candidate with a fresh and solutions-focused approach to issues. I come to the job with a broad range of life experiences and limited political experience. I do not think the people of Redlands were looking for a genius to represent them in this place—just someone with energy and commonsense who knows the difference between right and wrong. As a former sergeant of police in the Ethical Standards Command, I was able to give the voters the assurance they needed to give me their support, and I thank them for that.

I think the fact that I lived in the local area for over 10 years and established a family home there and the fact that I share the same kinds of problems and concerns helped people to overcome some of their cynicism about the political process. I aim to live up to the standards that people are looking for in their local members. I have pledged to be approachable, open and honest about finding solutions for local issues. These are the key values that I will bring to public office. I will not be promising quick fixes just to make myself look good. I will endeavour to get results promptly, but I will not give people unrealistic expectations.

Not every decision will be the right one for some people. That is a fact of life. I can assure the people of Redlands that I will be putting forward the views of my electorate to contribute to decisions affecting them. I am committed to taking responsibility for communicating with constituents the reasons behind decisions which impact on my electorate. The voters want decision makers to give them the courtesy of providing the rationale behind decisions made by state government. Equally, they want the

courtesy of being able to get their message through if they do not like something. I will make those representations without fear or favour. This is a value that I am hearing from the electorate that we need to see more of in political life.

One of the strengths of the Labor team is that we have a policy framework designed to benefit all Queenslanders. Unlike some of our opponents, we provide policies that seek to manage issues in the public interest to come up with balanced solutions for the majority of Queenslanders. By continuing to value the social impact of government policies, the Labor Party has remained relevant to people whether they live in the bush, the city or the regions. A series of pork barrels and ill thought out policy one-liners to win votes during a campaign is something the voting public simply will not wear. I think the election result here in Queensland reinforced this message.

I think Redlands has been very astute in asking for a strong, sincere, local voice in state parliament. A lot of people felt that the political process was becoming a hollow attempt to exploit the problems communities are facing. Even traditional conservative voters I met during the campaign told me that Labor was the only option to keep Queensland moving in the right direction.

The old maxim that disunity is death was reinforced on 17 February. The voters of Queensland have sent a clear message on this, which reminds me of the Queensland Police Union motto of 'unity is strength'. The major parties have lost support over the past five years by not providing the public with a feeling of ownership about the political process. I think this is at the heart of the disillusionment that people have been feeling in recent years. The Beattie government has been rewarded for taking a more open and inclusive approach to governing to respond to this feeling of disillusionment.

I think the Premier's community cabinet approach has helped to restore Queensland's confidence. Even the Prime Minister is now borrowing our community consultation ideas, although I do not expect him to have much success, given his claim that he will not be changing his fundamental policy direction—that is, doing too little too late and making policy backflips a new sport in Canberra. I am very pleased to say that I am part of a political party that has the ability to take a good hard look at itself and its policies and respond in a constructive way to issues facing local communities.

The conservative parties, particularly the infighting within the coalition in Queensland, have added to the disillusionment out there. The exploitation of this disillusionment by extreme political parties has damaged Queensland's and the nation's reputation at home and overseas. I think the people of Queensland deserve more than that, and I am proud to be part of a team that values people and a fair go.

During the campaign I made three key commitments for the local area. My first key commitment was to be an honest and hard-working member of parliament. The second was that within four weeks I would visit the bay islands and continue my program of listening to residents about issues of local concern. I also made a commitment to have regular community meetings, where I would be available outside of business hours to meet constituents and discuss issues.

I have already been to Coochiemudlo, Lamb, Karragarra, Macleay, and Russell Islands, which have a number of very difficult issues with a long history. Residents and volunteer groups have given me a first-hand account of the issues they are facing, and I will continue to work with island residents to find solutions. I look forward to establishing a solid working relationship with island residents. I can announce today that my first community forum will be held on Saturday, 28 April at the Mount Cotton Hall from 9 a.m. to midday.

In terms of my commitment to work hard for Redlands, I can honestly say that I have hit the ground running. From the moment I received pre-selection it has been non-stop Redlands in the English household. In the first few weeks I did not have an office or staff, but with the help of a lot of local people, friends and family I was able to make the transition to being the member for Redlands, and I thank everyone for their assistance during this transitional phase. On the Monday after the election I was inundated with requests for advice, assistance and support from the people of the Redlands. The valued assistance of Jo Henderson allowed many of those early inquiries to be managed with minimal delay.

There were many people who worked hard to see the Beattie government re-elected and to see the Redlands returned to the Australian Labor Party. I must thank my campaign director, Ken Hughes, and his wife, Kath. Their experienced, guiding hand directed and guided my youthful enthusiasm. Ken's health is not good, but he did not allow these problems to divert him from his work on the campaign.

There were many others who assisted throughout the campaign, and I apologise now if I overlook somebody. Rod Carter, Carol Evans, Malcolm and Wendy, Peter and Mary Donald, and Jo and Mark Henderson all contributed to the successful campaign. I thank comrades from Wynnum and members of the Lytton Hall committee, those who staffed the booths and those who provided advice and support behind the scenes. At this point I would also like to say thanks to my ALP organiser, Lindesay Jones, who was always saying, 'Are you with me?' Yes, Lindesay: I'm with you.

Another source of advice and counsel was Mr Jack Houston, who is also in the public gallery today. He is a life member of the Australian Labor Party and was a member of this House from 1957 to 1980. Jack, I thought you may have had enough of this place, but I appreciate your making the effort to come here to support me today. Jack was leader of the opposition from 1966 to 1974. These were the dark, Joh years, when Labor seemed in permanent opposition. Jack's dedication through these difficult years never wavered and I was proud to have him on my team.

I did not have a huge profile at the start of the campaign and, as I said previously, limited political experience, so I fell back on my personal experiences and skills. I was born in the Maleny Hospital, and growing up on a dairy farm in a little town called Conondale taught me the value of community. In tough times it was essential for our local community to band together to help each other. During floods and other problems we would always be ready to help our neighbours and they were always ready to assist us if we needed it.

This philosophy was very strong in my family home. As anyone who has lived on a farm can attest, children are expected to do their fair share of milking cows, dipping cows and being an all-round dogsbody. My parents, Con and Dee, are also in the public gallery. What they asked of my brothers and me they returned tenfold in love and support. Mum and Dad: I love you both.

I also mention my brothers, Neil and Peter. My elder brother, Neil, has embraced community values in his life and work. He is a rescue crewman on the Queensland government Emergency Services rescue helicopter. His dedication and compassion were recently recognised when he received a pride of workmanship award from the Acacia Ridge Rotary Club. I would like to extend my appreciation for the excellent and difficult work performed by all members of the Queensland Emergency Services Helicopter Rescue Service and other rescue services around the state.

My younger brother, Peter, has sought to continually improve his knowledge and experience since he graduated from Padua College. He has held a number of jobs, from service station attendant to hotel manager, and he has run his own business. I admire his commitment to self-improvement.

I have a confession to make. Growing up just down the road from former premier Mike Ahern in what was then a conservative stronghold—that is, up until the election of my colleague the honourable member for Glass House—led my father to become a strong supporter of the Country Party. I strongly suspect that my parents' votes in the recent state election cancelled each other out. As could be expected with their strong sense of community and family, both of my parents were there on election day helping out. I appreciate and value their ongoing love and support.

That brings me back to the Redlands connection. As is the case in many rural and isolated communities, services were limited in Conondale. This is also true of the southern Moreton Bay islands. My parents eventually moved to Brisbane to increase our options for a good education and a job. I later left Craigslea State High School and became an apprentice electrician with SEQEB. I commend the Honourable Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing, Robert Swarten, on his strong commitment to Q-Build and I commend the government on the role it is playing in skilling Queenslanders. I know just how much getting a trade can point someone in the right direction.

During my time with SEQEB there were some difficult times. The conservative government at the time gave us a really hard time by attacking the safety and employment conditions of the average worker—much like the current Howard government's anti-worker approach led by Minister Reith and now Tony Abbott. It was at this time that I came to appreciate the invaluable role unions play in protecting workers from political thuggery. It inspired me to get out and have a go at a tertiary education.

On returning to full-time study at the University of Queensland, I continued to witness the repressive and unethical conduct of the infamous coalition government. Following my graduation, I decided to join the Queensland Police Service. I did my training in the Wynnum district, with a number of months spent at Cleveland, so I had a chance to get a first-hand look at the law and order issues in the area. I then moved on to work in specialist investigative areas. I have seen first-hand the results of crime on our society, our people and particularly our children.

I applaud the Honourable Minister for Police and Corrective Services for his commitment to increase police numbers and provide greater resources for them to perform their duties. However, it is important that I highlight, from a police perspective, that our crime problems are not solved by police alone. The Beattie government's visionary whole-of-government attack on the underlying causes of crime will, over time, curb the need for people to turn to crime. Having worked as a police officer in a wide range of investigative areas, I cannot stress enough the importance of a sincere and committed approach to law and order issues. We must not lose sight of the importance of the basics of crime prevention, tackling poverty and unemployment, giving young people a good education, helping families in need, good health care, decent housing and support programs for those less fortunate.

At the beginning of the campaign I did not have a huge profile and, as I said previously, I had limited political experience. I then had to rely on the skills and experiences I have acquired over the last 38 years. The key traits which were most beneficial were my honesty and ability to listen to what people

had to say. As I travelled around my electorate, I got to see the diversity which makes Redlands such a great place in which to live. I got to hear and see a lot of my constituents' concerns.

On the southern Moreton Bay islands, I talked to people about their transport problems. I have observed the escalating transport costs, and I have experienced the difficulty of coordinating activities with a ferry timetable. I have seen, heard and experienced the difficulty in providing a viable police presence on those islands. Along with many other residents, my wife's father and mother have personally experienced the rapid decrease in island land values.

The residents of Thornlands, Victoria Point, Redland Bay, Cornubia, Carbrook, Sheldon, Shailer Park and Mount Cotton are suffering with limited and, in some areas, a non-existent public transport system. The commute to Brisbane occurs over roads that are too small to take the volume of traffic, resulting in substantial delays. For those having trouble finding work locally, the only option is to drive out of the electorate to find employment. I will be working hard to try to improve our roads and generate more local employment opportunities. A lot of the issues in Redlands are fundamental, and there are no overnight fixes. But there is a positive way forward in correcting some of the bad planning decisions of the past, and I am determined to work with all parties with a role in finding a way forward.

Redlands is well known for its fertile farming land. Our flower farmers exclusively supply Woolworths national retail chain. So wherever honourable members travel in Australia, I urge them to buy flowers from Woolies and support the people of Redlands. I will be speaking to the Minister for Industrial Relations about a supply of red carnations in the near future.

I have spoken to small crop farmers and chicken farmers and listened to their concerns about increasing rates and decreasing market prices. I am particularly interested in helping industry in the area explore sustainable industry opportunities with the government. With such a lovely, green and beautiful electorate, it is no surprise that an increasing number of people are moving to the area to retire. The bayside area has a wonderful lifestyle—if one has time to enjoy it. The older residents are currently distressed by the cruel and vindictive policies of the Howard government. In residential aged care, the underfunding to Queensland is a disgrace. In categories 1 to 4 for aged care subsidy, Queensland receives the lowest level of funding of all states. If Queensland received just the national average in aged care subsidy, then an extra \$50 million would be paid to Queensland's nursing home providers. This funding inequity is a pretty shabby way to treat our elderly people, and the impact in Redlands has translated into a situation where nursing homes simply cannot cope with the demand for nursing home placements. I think it is extremely important to be up front about how to manage these issues.

One of the reasons that I joined the ALP was that I wanted to make a difference. To make a difference, we must value people equally. I think that this is the best theme for managing issues, whether they are big ones or smaller ones. Because if we take our eye off either, the big ones become giants and the smaller ones become big ones. This reminds me of a great Billy Bragg song: from little things big things grow.

I would like to follow in the member for Clayfield's footsteps and conclude on a literary note, which I will use as a mission statement for representing Redlands. To paraphrase the character Tom Joad from Steinbeck's classic *The Grapes of Wrath*—

Wherever there are hungry people fighting for food, I will be there;  
Wherever there are people being beaten up and victimised, I will be there.  
Wherever there is injustice and hatred, I will be there.

I will be there, working to help all people of the Redlands.

---