



Speech by

# JOHN KINGSTON

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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Hansard 3 May 2001

## ADDRESS IN REPLY

**Dr KINGSTON** (Maryborough—Ind) (11.48 a.m.): Firstly, I wish to congratulate all members elected to this, the 50th Queensland Parliament. I congratulate the Premier on a brave and clever campaign. I urge him to ensure that his government has full opportunity to demonstrate its democratic debating skills. It can only do this if it has a strong and well-equipped opposition. My definition of 'opposition' includes the so-called crossbenches, the members of which are currently disadvantaged by lack of staff funding. Basically, I am saying that this government will be better able to convince the electorate of its competence if it has to defend its policies against well-equipped non-Labor members.

Secondly, I wish to thank all the people who had faith in me and worked hard to see that I was re-elected. I apologise that I gave them some anxious moments. I was staggered by the geographic spread from which support was forthcoming. Additionally, the former political loyalties of my supporters are varied and interesting.

I think the message to me is that people are looking for representatives who care, listen and who go to great effort to understand their situations, to fight for their cause and to communicate with them. I intend to continue in this mode, despite the fact that it creates a lot more work for my long-suffering staff. I must give special thanks to the Parliamentary Library for a fantastic service.

Special thanks go to Gary Turner, who appeared from Kilcoy and, although we had never met, volunteered to write press releases for me. He then took over my campaign office. I am afraid that he was the recipient of more argument than thanks, for which I apologise. I promise my constituents, regardless of politics, colour and creed, that I will do the best I can in the interests of each and every one of them, the Maryborough electorate, Queensland and Australia.

If I learned anything from working at government policy levels for some 20 years in Asian-Pacific countries, it is that government policies will not be successfully implemented until the grassroots, the majority of the population, feel that they are involved in the decision-making process and that they have clearly defined and assured rights and some ownership of legislation. This demands adequate genuine consultation with the broad spectrum of industries and communities. Because of these beliefs, I congratulate the Independent member for Darling Downs on his call to arms to the dairy industry. Deregulated dairy farmers face a future that no democratic government can go along with without lasting social guilt. I also congratulate the member for Fitzroy on his call for more government intervention when multinationals act without due consideration for their workers and family.

My experience in trying to expedite adequate consultation between the previous Beattie government and, for instance, SGP holders has been particularly frustrating for me and for the forestry leaseholders. I believe that that particular ministry lost credence due to their lack of genuine response. I believe that the dissatisfaction with governments is basically due to the feeling that we are travelling towards a largely unknown demography without adequate consultation and explanation. In fact, we are being pushed like cattle up an abattoir ramp by the religious addiction to a particular economic policy. The high priests of this economic cult dwell in the national Treasury and see and know little of the real Australia. To them, the theory is more important than people.

I think that many of our rural communities feel that they are being led like lemmings towards largely undefined circumstances—undefined but unpleasant. Having been elected with such an overwhelming majority, the temptation to lose contact with grassroots people will be a challenge for this Beattie government. Whilst recognising that there are now large segments of the population who feel that their interests are not considered within the current political spectrum, it is important to realise that there has been a convergence between traditional political foes. Arthur Calwell identified this in his

memoirs. In 1980, David Kemp wrote about the unhelpfulness of the traditional left-right dichotomy for understanding a range of social and political issues in Australia. Ladd, an American psychologist, used the terms 'cosmopolitan' and 'parochial' to describe the new cultural divisions that defy the traditional left-right dichotomy. John Higley has described the way in which interest groups labelled 'liberal' and 'socialist' came to occupy the middle ground. This has resulted in a volatile and confusing political climate. This is the environment in which this House must work in the best interests of all citizens.

The divergence between rich and poor continues to grow throughout the world. There are economists who have examined history and who believe that such periods of wide divergence are usually followed by periods of recessions and severe depressions.

The Maryborough electorate is about 50 per cent urban and 50 per cent rural. We have a multiskilled population. That has been our strength and our resilience. But urban Maryborough and our small rural communities are currently struggling. Wendell Berry, the author of *The Unsettling of America: Culture and Agriculture*, states that since its inception the industrial economy has systematically undermined rural communities. He claims that the impoverishment of rural communities is simply a way in which the large, exploitative, absentee economy works, liberating farmers from their land, their self-employment and their self-respect.

Currently, we, the Maryborough community, have several development projects on the horizon. The success of these projects is essential to the welfare of the Maryborough region. Firstly, a foreign company is examining the comparative advantage of producing chicory in rotation with sugar cane.

**Mr Mickel:** A good crop.

**Dr KINGSTON:** Spot-on. Eight thousand hectares of crop, with a contract price linked to the CPI, for five years and a large processing factory—some \$100 million. Chicory contains a polysaccharide, inulin, which is essential to give fat-free products like fat-free ice-cream an improved taste and structure. The DSD offices in Maryborough and Bundaberg have been working hard, as have the Hervey Bay council and the Maryborough sugar factory, to secure this investment. I strongly suggest to the Premier and Treasurer that they give very serious consideration to the benefits of regionalisation and help us ensure that this new and complementary industry is established in this disadvantaged region of Queensland.

Secondly, the Maryborough sugar factory, always progressive, and Stanwell are progressing well on the feasibility of a cogeneration plant utilising bagasse in the crushing season. Currently, there is a problem acquiring adequate fuel during the non-crushing months. Sadly, minority politics are again providing a hurdle. I find it frustrating that this audible minority makes recommendations about sustainability but does not come to examine carefully the results achieved by our silviculturists. These graziers sustainably produce twice to four times the mill logs that their Forestry Department neighbours do. They have their own methodology of sustainable multiple land use. Now, they are actively preserving habitat.

It is a serious mistake to think that all knowledge lies within university or bureaucratic circles. If this vocal minority cannot learn from simple hardworking farmers, then they should examine the 150 permanent woodland grazing sites established by Joe Ebersohn and Bill Burrows up to 35 years ago. Bill Burrows has just been awarded a fellowship of the Tropical Grasslands Society for his impact on the understanding, development and sustainable management of Queensland's grazed woodlands.

Significantly, Bill has little time for those who choose to make important land-use decisions based on politics and emotions. One of his favourite sayings is that politicians come and go, but good science will live forever.

The correctional centre is progressing well and is already causing a demand for rental houses. I thank the member for Waterford for his tolerance of the barrage of letters, faxes and literature that he received from Maryborough whilst we were trying to convince him. Unfortunately, the Maryborough electorate lies within the federal electorate of Wide Bay, and Wide Bay has been judged as the most severely disadvantaged federal electorate across a range of socioeconomic parameters. Our heavy industries, always equated with the pulse of urban Maryborough, are feeling the impact of foreign competition, especially for very large contracts from privatised railways. We are grateful that the Beattie government commissioned the construction of the tilt train, we are anxious about the local construction of the cogeneration plant and we are watching the study of the light train project very closely.

Walkers/EDI/Downer have just received an award from this government for making the maximum and most efficient use of local subcontractors. To understand Maryborough, members must understand this essential synergy between the bigger companies and our subcontractors and their mutual reliance. We cannot afford to lose the smaller multiskilled firms as they broaden the skills base available locally. Regrettably, many of the smaller firms are currently feeling the pinch.

However, the diverse and often divisive constituents of Maryborough have the ability to forget their differences when their security is threatened. United they are formidable. Premier Beattie had to rescue his Health Minister when locals thought that the future of our base hospital was being eroded. I

put the government on notice that Maryborough is still not convinced that the standard and capacity of the base hospital is assured. There is still movement at the hospital and the word is getting about.

Hynes, a Maryborough-bred, statewide timber and hardware company, continues to expand and upgrade. It will still stay world competitive. Hynes played a pivotal role in easing the log jam encountered when Premier Beattie and his deputy were introducing the SEQ RFA. Their undertaking to establish softwood plantations was brave and crucial.

Representing such a multiskilled and troubled but resilient electorate is a demanding and interesting experience. I have to admit that the past three years have felt like a wild roller-coaster ride because of the exogenous challenges that are confronting us with increasing frequency.

I congratulate the Beattie government on its drive to make Queensland the Smart State. However, I urge it not to neglect the skills that we already have in abundance in Maryborough—skills that are easily taken for granted. Those skills are lacking and are highly desired in developing countries. Herein lies an opportunity to provide practical educational services in Maryborough and Queensland.

Our current communication abilities now mean that our smart operators can enjoy the great lifestyle available in the Maryborough area whilst working with a company based in Brisbane. I urge this government to seriously consider decentralisation. Additionally, I urge the government to consider the portability of services. For instance, carefully developed computer programming skills can be rapidly transferred to another country with lower wages such as India. Microsoft did that some time ago.

In his book *The Work of Nations*, Robert Reich, a former Secretary for Labour in the Clinton administration, describes the growth of a new class whom he calls the symbolic analysts in our post-industrial society. They are more oriented towards the ownership and manipulation of symbols, words, numbers and ideas than to the ownership and manipulation of things such as factories, machinery, gears and grease.

This new subgroup of society depends on individual creativity and skill, and speculation in currency and futures. Such economies, coupled with economic globalisation, have deep ramifications for the national labour markets in the future. This should be very seriously considered by a responsible government.

In her book *The Great Divide*, Katherine Betts agrees that our switch from a system in which profits came from high volume production to a system in which profits come from high value production will produce three types of jobs in the future. The first job type is routine production services, including routine data entry and programming. Those jobs are vulnerable to global competition. They are easily moved offshore. Next are the services that must be provided on a person-to-person basis such as cleaning, sales, child care and security. Such jobs are not immediately vulnerable to global competition because the services are provided in person.

The third job type of the future is providing symbolic analytical services. The people who do this work include management and financial consultants, bankers, international tax consultants, academics and so on. They make a living by identifying and solving problems through manipulating symbols. Those people are high-flyers and are more likely to feel themselves at the hub of global capitalism. Thus they are less nervous about global competition as they are part of the global community. They sell their services to the world market, although they may have a base in Australia for convenience.

The question has been raised: will symbolic analysts willingly pay taxes and fight for the welfare of their less fortunate compatriots? Reich argues that this is the darker side of cosmopolitanism for, without strong attachments and loyalties extending beyond family, symbolic analysts may never develop social responsibility. They will be world citizens but without accepting any of the obligations that citizenship normally implies.

Contrast this lack of recognition of obligations with the social obligations of closely knit rural communities. A sound regional economy is not adequately reflected by a good GDP, even if supplemented by other measures of material wealth. Traditional measures of wellbeing do not cost very important factors such as lifestyle, privacy, safe places for children, clean air, the networks and safety nets of mutual trust and obligation which thrive in smaller more stable communities. Those uncoded aspects of human life are termed natural and social capital. Technology is now emerging to value them.

There is justifiable concern that world citizens will not contribute to the social capital of a region. To an increasing percentage of families, social capital is more important than accumulating material wealth past a certain point. I suggest that the members of this House ask their constituents what they value and in what direction they want their communities to develop. I believe that a majority will place a very high value on social capital. Therefore, I urge this government to consult with the whole electorate and encourage smart industries, but do not forget that the majority of the population will remain reliant on traditional occupations. I believe that improved lifestyle will emerge as a common objective.

I have worked in 20 countries and none enjoy a lifestyle equal to ours—none. Let us clearly recognise this and work together to build on it.

Until eight years ago my wife Joy lived in communist and troubled Laos. Joy has stoically experienced more hardship than most people. Members should ask Joy about where she wants to continue to live, even with a husband who is rarely home and who, when home, is grumpy, preoccupied and often on the telephone. I wish to publicly thank Joy for her understanding, her tolerance and her pride in what I am trying to do. With a lesser person, I could not contemplate involvement in this House or servicing my electorate.

Regrettably, I conclude by saying that the only place in Australia where Joy, an Asian, has ever been spoken to rudely is within these precincts. That was by a multicultural Labor minister.

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