



Speech by

Mr L. SPRINGBORG

MEMBER FOR WARWICK

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OFFICIALS IN PARLIAMENT AMENDMENT BILL

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (11.57 a.m.): It is with a degree of pleasure that I rise today to support the bill before the parliament. I congratulate the putative minister on his appointment to that position as of tomorrow. I realise that he will do a good job, but it is my intention to ensure that he does do a good job and also to assist in placing a bit of a different stamp on this particular portfolio from an opposition perspective over the next three years.

I was very pleased yesterday, when I was listening to the Governor's speech at the opening of parliament, to hear the Governor place so much precedence and priority on the development of technology as an important way for our economy to go forward. That statement underpinned not only the government's consideration of technology and innovation and a whole range of other innovation linked processes as important to our economy and our future but also the importance that Queenslanders in general attach to it.

Information technology is something that I have had an interest in for a long time. I am very pleased to have been appointed the shadow Minister for Innovation and Information Economy, and I would like to acknowledge and thank the Leader of the Opposition for that privilege.

There is no doubt that a knowledge-based economy is a great part of our future. It is something that has developed over a period. As a result of watching the exponential development of technology we can see that it is something that will continue to accelerate rather than decelerate. To have Queenslanders and Australians in a position to take on those opportunities, whether it be through our education system or industry or other alternative opportunities, is extremely important.

We need only see what happens to Australia when one of the significant undersea cables that carry the Internet traffic between here and the United States is severed by a ship's anchor or develops a problem to understand what that does not only to industry and those people who conduct their business by the new electronic means but also to the many hundreds of thousands of Queenslanders and Australians who communicate every day by email or the Internet. It is essential that we acknowledge that this is an important part of our economy.

I wish to make a few general points about my portfolio and what I would like it to achieve. Certainly, technology is driving change in our community. Technology has driven changes in the transport and communications industries that, for a lot of people, have created great opportunity. However, for a lot of people, they have also created a great degree of uncertainty and insecurity. That needs to be managed very carefully.

Earlier today we were talking about the dairy industry. The member for Toowoomba South, the member for Cunningham and others who have a significant dairy linkage in their area would be able to look around their electorates and see that years ago there used to be a dairy factory there, a butter factory 20 kilometres down the road and so on. Basically, things such as refrigeration, technology and transport led to a change in that regard. There was a consolidation. While we do not necessarily need to accelerate or accentuate those changes, it goes to show that as technology and innovation become more and more developed some people do lose and there are consequences for the social fabric of our society. That is extremely important. The key for the Premier's government—

Mr Lucas: This is about shortening supply lines in a number of rural communities.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I understand what the minister in waiting is saying. However, we need to ensure that the rhetoric, the theory and the intention is actually carried forward so that we have more winners than losers. My point is that sometimes losers are created out of technological innovation. One only needs to look at the banking industry to see this. Whilst most of us might be au fait with telephone banking, Internet banking and so on, a lot of people, including our parents in most cases, prefer to talk to somebody across a counter. As we deal with innovation, we need to consider that people still like to deal with people. When we talk about call centres and a whole range of other things, we must remember that it is important that there are opportunities for everyone, including the technology wise and the technology unwise. The minister is aware of that and he needs to work through it. Change is inevitable and technological change is inevitable. We have to ensure that we use it to our advantage, so that we create an egalitarian community rather than a community of winners and losers or haves and have-nots.

Mr Lucas: It's a servant, not a master.

Mr SPRINGBORG: That is exactly right. This is not a reflection on this government or any other government, but in the past we have sometimes seen it become the master rather than the servant.

As the Leader of the Opposition said earlier, the important thing is that we need to use technology and innovation and all of the opportunities that they present us with to strengthen our existing industries. I note that a couple of interjections from the other side indicated that during the course of the debate today. That is extremely important. Queensland industries have been based largely on agriculture and mining. We have to use technology to strengthen those industries, because they will always be a mainstay of our state. A lot of the wonderful work currently being done at the University of Queensland is helping to build on our existing industries. Providing technological opportunities in the mining, agricultural and manufacturing industries will provide great opportunities for people in the future.

The Leader of the Opposition also indicated that we want to use technology to provide opportunities for young Queenslanders. The Premier has also talked about that matter. Earlier on a couple of quips were made in the chamber about the amazing things that young people can do with computers. The Premier said that they are even better than us. In just about all cases, Queenslanders as young as nine, 10, 12 or 15 years of age are far more technologically adept than most members of this chamber. We all need to recognise that. Whilst I use a word processor and certain other capacities of my computer, I still have to print things out to have total comprehension. Perhaps the next generation will be the paperless generation that we have been dreaming about for a long time but are still waiting for. It is very important to provide opportunities for young people.

I return to the issue of creating a society of haves and have-nots. Let us take the case of a bricklayer who works extremely hard. He probably earns \$30,000 year and is burnt to a cinder from working in the hot sun in what is a very physically demanding job. It would be very difficult for him to understand how someone who punches a keyboard is worth \$150,000 or \$200,000 a year. There is a degree of concern about that issue in the community. People do not want to be left behind; they all want a share. People tell me that they really do have a problem with this issue. They say, 'A 25 year old guru in IT earns \$250,000 or \$300,000 a year. I have been doing this job for so many years and I get only this.' We have to do a lot more to breach that particular divide.

Much has been mentioned about the way that other countries have introduced and encouraged a significant technology industry. The honourable member for Cleveland talked about Ireland. We need to consider also that one of the real power houses of the IT industry is India. India is doing extremely well. Only recently I was listening to a radio program about the significant brain drain from places such as Pakistan as young people move to India seeking opportunities in IT. That goes to show that we should be at the front rather than following in the area of information technology. Who would have thought that India would become a world leader in software development? That is pretty significant.

The specific responsibility for rural technology has been added to my shadow portfolio. I am very interested in rural technology. Queensland is an extremely large and diverse state. We have to ensure that rural Queenslanders, whether they be farmers, town workers, small businesspeople or others who work in rural and regional areas of Queensland have access to equal opportunities. While a lot of things are said when we talk about change in the farming sector, I must say that most farmers whom I know probably embrace technology and change a lot better than others. If one looks at the six furrow plough and the six draft horses that were around even up to—

Mr Beattie interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Absolutely. It had to be done because of economies of scale and competitiveness. If we compare it in dollar and real terms, over the last century we have been able to deliver cheaper food and fibre to the populace through advances in technology. The mining industry and the rural industry have been able to do that. How many people in this chamber would be able to survive if they were taking home a pay packet that, not only in dollar terms but significantly in real terms,

was 50 or 60 per cent less than what they were receiving 20 or 30 years ago? Rural producers have been able to use the latest in mechanisation, technology and genetic modification to keep ahead. For a long time I have wondered how long that will continue. It is like running a four-minute mile. With the best in nutrition, training and so on, it is not so long before one can run a four-minute mile. However, once that goal has been reached, it is a very long time until one can run a mile in 10 seconds below four minutes.

What worries me in relation to technology and the opportunities for agriculturalists in Queensland is where the next step will come from. I note that great things are happening with genetic modification and that that will provide opportunities in the future. However, we need to be very careful about migrating genes from one species to another. Whilst people are happy that plant breeding is accelerated by taking a couple of different types of wheat and grass and breeding a new strain of rust-resistant wheat, or whatever, they are not so happy when a pig gene is put into a potato or vice versa. We need to be careful about that sort of thing when talking about the future of genetic modification. However, whether it has taken place through natural selection or in a laboratory, over the past 20 or 30 years genetic modification has helped to feed people throughout the world relatively cost effectively and efficiently.

A government member interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I wonder what the crackling on them is like.

Also, global positioning systems are being used by many rural producers to spread fertiliser by tractors far more efficiently and effectively. They are also being used on headers. If a producer has patches in his paddock where the yield is up or down, he is able to design a program that allows for different fertiliser requirements. Producers are using the latest technological applications, such as air seeders and GPS technology, and are at the forefront of the use of beeline technology, which can guide machinery a lot better.

Something else that we need to look at with respect to rural producers and people in rural areas—and the Leader of the Opposition touched on this a moment ago—is the issue of Internet access speed. If we are to have a true information economy, people in rural areas need to know, regardless of whether they live in or out of town, that if they wish to transact business over the Internet they will have sufficient access speed to do so. At the moment, many of us are victims of the vagaries of antiquated technology. Where I live, at the end of the road there is only a single copper cable. That is fine for a telephone, but if I try to force a certain amount of information down that line I am somewhat limited.

I know the federal government has a program—Telstra Big Pond Satellite—under which a subsidy is available so that we can access high-speed data and telecommunications networks. However, that comes at a significantly greater cost to rural users than to a person living in a major regional centre or in Brisbane who has a fibre-optic cable coming to their front door through which four megabits a second can be pushed. That is something that we need to address in the future. I was also pleased to learn from the Governor's speech that there will be a significant concentration on engineering, aviation and technological innovation in that area. This is providing great opportunities around the world.

The pharmaceutical industry is also extremely important. I know there is a significant interest in bringing major pharmaceutical development to Queensland. I am sure that the Premier—

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr SPRINGBORG: Yes. I am aware of some of the people involved in that. If we compare it, though, with what is operating in other places around the world, we see there is still a long way to go. A lot of people would say, 'What are pharmaceuticals all about?' The pharmaceutical industry around the world is worth hundreds of billions of dollars each year. It is the industry that keeps our communities healthy. We know that pharmaceutical companies are investing billions of dollars into research into new pharmaceutical products. Although those products are worth an absolute motser to them, they invest a lot of money into research. This is a clean, green industry involving a lot of money and high-tech jobs. This is something that we should encourage in Queensland.

Mr Robertson: That's why we need to protect our biodiversity.

Mr SPRINGBORG: I understand that. There is a range of untapped opportunities for the pharmaceutical industry on the Great Barrier Reef. Natural compounds are yet to be discovered on the reef and in our rainforests. A lot of compounds have been discovered in rainforests. Many pharmaceuticals consist of either natural compounds or artificial compounds created in a laboratory to do exactly the same thing. There are great opportunities here and I think that, basically, the government is going in the right direction.

However, from the opposition's viewpoint, my role will be to ensure that the government takes advantage of those opportunities and in particular that the many areas of Queensland that we represent share in the opportunities available to them as well. We need to make sure that all Queenslanders benefit not only socially but also economically from information technology and future innovations.
