



Speech by

PETER LAWLOR

MEMBER FOR SOUTHPORT

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FIRST SPEECH

Mr LAWLOR (Southport—ALP) (4.01 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, could you pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on his election to the high office of Speaker of the 50th Queensland Parliament. I also extend my best wishes to the previous member for Southport, Mick Veivers, and his wife, Betty. I wish Mick a long and happy retirement.

It gives me great pleasure to make my maiden speech this afternoon. In doing so I am filled with a sense of humility, achievement and satisfaction that I have finally been elected to represent the people of Southport. At the outset I acknowledge the Kombumerri people, the traditional owners of the Southport area. Southport has never been represented by the ALP, so it was quite a leap of faith for the voters to place their trust in me. I can assure them that that trust has not been misplaced.

This is the fourth time I have stood as the ALP's candidate for Southport, so it has been a long and arduous campaign—I had hair at the beginning—but the foundations for this victory were laid well before I began my quest to win Southport. There are many true believers who worked, prayed and dared to hope for a Labor victory in Southport for over 50 years, and they include my mother and father, Mary and Jim.

I am the eldest of five boys, and I have vivid memories of all of us handing out how-to-vote cards for the ALP at various polling booths in the fifties and sixties. It was very unfashionable to be a Labor supporter in Southport in those days, but those experiences gave me a lifelong interest in politics and in social justice, which I believe can best be achieved through the Labor Party.

Although Labor politics were not popular, we were happy to be identified as a Labor family and to involve ourselves in charitable and community affairs and issues. I particularly remember the SEQEB strike in the mid-80s, which scarred and in fact destroyed many Queensland families, and I am happy to say that many of those sacked workers remain my friends to this day. I am only sorry that I could not give them more assistance.

What a difference half a century makes. At the recent election we obtained over 60 per cent of the two-party preferred vote. I thank each and every one of those voters, many of whom voted Labor for first time. As I said to a friend who admitted to me that he had voted Labor for the first time, 'If you do it often enough, you will get to like it. It could even become habit forming.' I will be working day and night to ensure that the voters of Southport become addicted to voting Labor.

There are many people to thank for getting me to this place—of course, my mother and father particularly. Unfortunately, mum passed away several months ago, before the election. She would be so proud and pleased with the result. She worked hard for many years and dared to dream about a victory for all those years. She knew that she was dying, and about two weeks before she died she said to me that she hoped she was going somewhere where she could do me some good. I am sure she has. She certainly deserved this victory.

My three children, Ali, Jane and Phil, are the most important people in my life—always encouraging, enthusiastic, willing to work and ever ready to bring me back to earth with a friendly piece of advice or a humorous comment whenever they consider I am taking myself a little too seriously. Ali is a journalist, is presently working in Hong Kong and is known to many members as she worked for several years with the *Courier-Mail* in Brisbane and in Townsville. One member said to me the other day

that she did not think journos were human until she met Ali. That is probably taking it a bit far, but she is certainly a caring, competent, conscientious and happy young lady who has the ability to make everyone around her happy. She came home from Hong Kong for three days, just so she could be involved on election day. Having been heavily involved in previous campaigns, she was not going to risk missing out on a victory party.

Jane has been living and working in London for over three years but decided to return home at Christmas to run my campaign office. She knew that this was the last roll of the dice for me, and she threw herself into the campaign. Many days for her began at 4 a.m. with letterboxing and ended at midnight after folding letters or doing similar tasks. I am sure that she would have appreciated a day or even a few hours off, but she would not ask and kept going right up to the completion of scrutineering on election night.

Phillip has lived in London for four years but came home for three weeks to work on the campaign. It was great to have him home. Ali says that Phil is my best audience. Not only does he love sixties music; he laughs uproariously at my sixties jokes and sayings. When he arrived home and complained of jet lag I said that I had a cure—a day of letterboxing starting at 4 a.m. the next day. He worked with great enthusiasm. I did not hear another word about the jet lag, so I believe I have discovered a cure.

Having the three children home for the victory was priceless, especially given the disappointment of the previous elections. They were quite bewildered and could not really understand that all the effort was unrewarded. They could not understand how anyone could vote against their father, I think, which is blind faith if ever there was such a thing. But from them I got the inspiration and determination. They are what kept me going.

Ali was born in Durban in South Africa, where we lived for three years, was educated on the Gold Coast and in Toowoomba and Canberra, and is now living and working in Hong Kong. Jane was born in Brisbane and was educated on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane, and has lived and worked in London. Phil was born in Brisbane and was educated on the Gold Coast and in Brisbane, and is now living and working in London. They are citizens of the world, and I am so proud of them.

My brothers Patrick, Brian and Gerard and Brian's wife, Simina, have been willing workers and supporters on each campaign. I thank them, as I do the many volunteers and branch members who assisted in a variety of ways, before and on election day and in previous elections. They are too numerous to mention individually, but Terry Callaghan, my campaign manager, deserves my special thanks for his support both prior to and since the election.

My special thanks must go to Lindsay Jones and his wife, Norma, who have encouraged me and worked so tirelessly to win Southport over so many years. Thanks go also to Di Farmer and Peter Shooter from the party office—indeed, all the staff from the party office, especially Cameron Milner, who conducted such a brilliant campaign.

Partners of Gall Standfield & Smith—Lester Gall, Dennis Standfield and John Smith—were ever tolerant of my absences from the office on campaign duties and, more importantly, are such great friends. Kathy Standard and Victoria Chatterjee were a great help to Jane in the campaign office.

Of course, the person the whole 65 members must thank is our leader, Peter Beattie. He is certainly a man of steel. A lesser man would have been disheartened and destroyed by the events of the last six months, but not Peter Beattie. He was convinced, as many of us were, that honesty and hard work would win out, and he governed and campaigned on that basis. The people of Queensland had a chance to assess the Beattie style of government during the first term, and they liked what they saw. They were able to see through the coalition's negative campaign and identify the coalition as a policy-free zone and voted accordingly. That was particularly so on the Gold Coast.

Politics on the Gold Coast will never be the same again. Today the ALP holds seven of the nine seats. Most members today will remember the infamous six-pack of coalition members from the Gold Coast. The Gold Coast was safe coalition territory and, as a result, it was completely neglected. It was this neglect, together with Premier Beattie's determination to rectify decades of inaction by coalition members, that led to the results of 17 February 2001. Up until then, Merri Rose, the member for Currumbin, had been fighting a good but lonely fight for the people of the Gold Coast. I am sure Merri will appreciate the additional support she now has in promoting Gold Coast interests.

I welcome the Premier's and, indeed, the government's determination to properly recognise and resource the state's second-largest city. The honourable member for Robina is not in the House today, but I remind him that he is a member of an endangered species: Tory members from the Gold Coast. Hopefully, the ALP can push that species to the brink of extinction in the forthcoming Surfers Paradise by-election.

Southport, like the Gold Coast itself, is a diverse electorate. It extends from the new mortgage belt suburbs of Parkwood and Arundel in the west to Molendinar, Keebra Park and Southport itself in the south. To the north is working-class Labrador, and the eastern electorate boundary is the

Broadwater. The Southport CBD is the business heart of the Gold Coast and includes the courthouse and the Gold Coast Hospital. The older parts of Southport are undergoing a period of urban renewal, with higher density housing replacing the detached housing, larger holiday homes and so on which were such a feature of Southport.

There are several state and private schools in the electorate, and the Arundel State School is the largest in the state. This school adjoins the Suntown tip which for many years posed a health risk to the children and teachers at that school due to the dust nuisance and the stench from rotting garbage. I am pleased to say that, with the assistance of the state Labor government and the Gold Coast City Council, I was able to have that tip closed some months ago.

Parkwood residents adjoining Smith Street had been promised sound barriers for many years, but they were nothing but hollow promises until I contacted Steve Bredhauer, the Minister for Transport. I am pleased to say that the barriers have now been constructed at a cost of \$1.2 million. The Griffith University has a campus in Southport, and it is making great progress in many areas of biotechnology. It is well placed to make a major contribution to Premier Beattie's Smart State, and I will be strongly supporting them in their endeavours.

One of the major problems confronting the Gold Coast is traffic congestion. The Gold Coast has a resident population of 410,000, plus at least 50,000 visitors at any time. It is Australia's sixth-largest city and second-largest local authority. A total of 3.7 million tourists spend \$2.24 billion per annum in the city. One million-plus international tourists per annum and a total of two million passengers pass through Coolangatta Airport, which is Australia's seventh-busiest airport.

The Gold Coast has a predicted population of 800,000 by 2030. As one who has lived basically all my life on the Gold Coast, the one consistent thing about population predictions is that they consistently underestimate the rate of growth. The city is choking to death now. What will it be like in 2030? It is predicted that between 1995 and 2011, the population will be up by 51 per cent and that car trips will increase by 67 per cent.

The Gold Coast cannot rely on roads and cars alone. The cost is too high in terms of petrol prices, land acquisition and construction costs and, of course, the environmental cost. The answer, I believe, is a public transport system and, specifically, a light rail system similar to the ones that now operate in Orleans and Montpellier in France—cities of similar size to the Gold Coast. The system is fast, comfortable, electric powered, airconditioned and wheelchair accessible.

I am pleased to say that the previous Labor government committed \$650,000 to fund a feasibility study into a light rail system, the first stage of which would come from the Gold Coast railway at Parkwood, thereby linking the population centres of the Gold Coast by rail to Brisbane and Brisbane Airport. It would also service Griffith University, the Parklands showgrounds complex, the Gold Coast Hospital and medical precinct and the business centres of Southport, Surfers Paradise and Broadbeach, including the casino and the proposed entertainment and convention centre, which, of course, is another initiative of the Beattie Labor government. It would terminate at the Pacific Fair shopping centre. That would be the first stage.

On 10 August 2000, in a letter to the Gold Coast Mayor, Gary Baildon, Premier Beattie said—

I am aware that the Gold Coast Light Rail is a key initiative in Council's City Transport Plan and would like to express the State Government's continued support for the plan's implementation.

As I mentioned, funds have been committed for a feasibility study, and this is further evidence of the Beattie Labor government's commitment to give the Gold Coast the attention it deserves as Queensland's second-largest city. The project itself will require state, federal and local government and private sector funding. However, if it does not proceed, the city will lose the advantages which made it what it is today. And as mentioned during question time today, it is unfortunate that John Howard has just robbed Queensland of \$65 million. Howard just does not get it. I can tell him that he is heading for a train smash, because the people of Queensland will not put up with \$65 million being taken out of that project. Gary Baildon, the mayor of the city, made representations to Mr Howard that if he was not going to spend the money on a Brisbane transport system, the money should not be lost to Queensland, but effectively it is.

The amazing thing, too, of course, is that coalition members have not said a word about this, just as they let the GST pass. They have not woken up to the fact that the people of Queensland understand that they cannot get out of this by washing their hands and saying that it is a federal issue. The people of Queensland will be waiting for Mr Howard and his government at the next election. Fortunately, so far as the light rail project goes, we will be dealing with a much more reasonable federal Labor government.

The Broadwater is the greatest natural asset of Southport, and I have given a commitment to the people of Southport that I will resist any further reclamation or commercial development of the western foreshores. The Broadwater is in danger of being loved to death. It is like Queen Street on weekends, and any reclamation will only exacerbate that problem and add to flooding problems.

There are many developers on the Gold Coast who positively salivate at the prospect of utilising public land for commercial purposes. One recent proposal was to relocate the Indy track to the Broadwater. Such a proposal, were it given approval, would be the start of World War III. The Sky Rail, which the member for Currumbin had to deal with, would pale into insignificance. And just because a proposal might seem ridiculous, it does not mean that it will not be pushed by a local authority and, in some cases, approved.

The Borbidge government approved the construction on the Spit of a horizon tank, which is apparently used for making films such as *Titanic*—and given recent electoral results, maybe Mr Borbidge would have made an excellent captain of the *Titanic*—but it would have looked like an oil refinery on the Spit. It could have been built on appropriately zoned freehold land anywhere, but the attraction was that this was public land. The project was so ill founded and far-fetched that it did not go ahead anyway; but it was approved, so we must remain ever vigilant.

It gave me a great deal of satisfaction that I was able to convince the Gold Coast City Council to give some council-owned land to the state government for the extension of the courthouse, which was in danger of being relocated to Robina. That courthouse now boasts three District Court judges and 10 magistrates. And as almost 50 per cent of the work of the Brisbane Supreme Court emanates from the Gold Coast, I believe it is an appropriate time to consider the appointment of a Supreme Court judge to Southport.

When asked by a member what I did before I got elected, the response to my answer was, 'Not another bloody lawyer!' Therefore, I feel obliged to explain myself and give a pen picture, as quickly as I can, of my work history and how I became a lawyer. My secondary education was completed as a boarder at Marist Brothers at Ashgrove. Upon matriculation, I worked for the Commonwealth Bank. I enrolled to study economics at the Queensland University but had a great deal of difficulty in getting past the RE and the Regatta—or, as we used to call it, the 'Regretta'—and did not complete my degree.

After two years, I worked as a clerk for the Gold Coast City Council. I then went to Port Moresby, where I worked as a customs clerk. Then I worked as a bookkeeper in a small engineering firm in East Brisbane. In 1971, I got married and travelled to Durban in South Africa, where I worked as an accountant in a food franchising company for over two years. My eldest child, Ali, was born in Durban. When we returned to Brisbane, when she was six months old, I got a job as an accountant in an insurance company. I have never obtained any formal qualifications, but I always intended to study to be a solicitor when I could afford it. As most members would appreciate, if they waited until they could afford something, they would never do it.

So at the ripe old age of 27, with a wife, three kids and a mortgage I could not jump over, I resigned from my safe job in the insurance company and took a job as an articled clerk at \$45 a week and commenced studying law through the Solicitors Board. I could not afford full-time university, and I worked part-time in the Stones Corner Hotel to make ends meet, and so on. Lectures commenced at 7 a.m. or 6 p.m., and there were exams every six months. I was admitted in 1981 and commenced practice as a sole practitioner on the Gold Coast and practised in private practice for about 20 years.

What would make a supposedly sane person become a lawyer in these circumstances? I certainly could not recommend the course I took to anyone. The answer is fairly obvious, and a friend put it nicely when he said, 'It's the Irish coming out in you.' By that he meant that the Irish cannot have things going too smoothly; they must subconsciously have drama. Whether it is your marriage, friendships, career or any aspect of your life, you just cannot have things going too smoothly.

Fortunately, this propensity for self-destruction can apparently be cured by age. This is evidenced by the fact that I have been involved in the law as an articled clerk and solicitor for 25 years. So do not judge me as just another lawyer. For 10 years after leaving school I travelled and lived in other countries, even though Southport has always been home. I have had various occupations and generally knocked about and been knocked about before becoming a lawyer.

As I said at the outset, I thank the people of Southport for placing their trust in me. The support and service of the people of Southport will always be my highest priority. I am proud to take my seat in this Assembly as the first Labor member to represent Southport.
