



Speech by

# ROBERT POOLE

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

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Hansard 4 April 2001

## FIRST SPEECH

**Mr POOLE** (Gaven—ALP) (4.58 p.m.): I stand before this House a very humble and proud man. Firstly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to convey my congratulations to Mr Speaker on his return to the office of Speaker for this the 50th Parliament. As our Premier has asked us all to do, that is to respect this institution, I can surely speak on behalf of all other politicians from our side of the House, especially for the newly elected members from the Gold Coast, that this will be adhered to.

I would especially like to thank Peter Beattie for the strong and determined leadership that he showed us all during the election campaign. It was because of that leadership and grassroots know-how that we are here today. Peter Beattie brought the Gold Coast together during the campaign and showed for the first time that a government actually cared for the region after so many years of neglect in the past. For the first time to my knowledge, the Gold Coast region believes that we actually own our identity; we own our hard-earned sporting events, such as Indy, the surf carnival and, of course, the Gold Coast Marathon, and no-one is trying to take any of it away, as once was the case. It is because these events have been so well catered for and patronised by this government, which has shown its leadership and support and has recognised the importance to the region, that these events have been so successful.

This government has also backed the building of the Gold Coast Convention Centre. It is hoped that during those months of low tourist numbers we will still be able to attract others to the Gold Coast for different reasons. The \$600,000-plus made available by this government to study the feasibility for the light rail project should also rate a mention. It is no wonder there was such a welcome change in voting patterns which enabled this government to win so many more seats on the Gold Coast. Hopefully we can win Surfers Paradise on 5 May as well. Knowing all members on the Gold Coast as I do, I can say that the region is in good hands.

I am delighted to stand in the House today to deliver my maiden speech. I do so, though, cognisant that my election as the inaugural member for Gaven carries with it not only the responsibilities which fall to each and every one of us in this House but also the hopes and aspirations of many people who see my election and the return of the Beattie Labor government as vital to their continued welfare, not only in Gaven but throughout this great state of Queensland. I shall be vigilant in my efforts to put the people of Gaven foremost in my mind in any discussion we have in this House and in my activities on their behalf at all times. I say this deliberately, because I view elements within local government on the Gold Coast with concern because they appear to act driven not by public interest but by self-interest. Please allow me to explain.

I was elected with a large swing of some 14 per cent in the seat of Gaven, based as it is on the southern part of the old seat of Albert and the northern part of the old seat of Nerang. This was some four per cent to five per cent above the state swing to Labor. It is my firm belief that those additional votes for me resulted from the stand I took in delivering the long-awaited Helensvale Town Centre so that residents of the north-western suburbs of the Gold Coast could have the same access to retail and commercial services as those enjoyed by the rest of the Gold Coast.

After having knocked on many doors during the campaign and attended numerous meetings at which the residents of the area all told me the same story, I am totally convinced that the delay in the approval of this vital centre has resulted from the application of self-interest over public interest. I am a

proud member of the Helensvale Residents Association, a large active and well-led community organisation on the Gold Coast. For the past 11 years the president of this organisation with more than 1,000 members has been Mr Philip Gray. Phil is a tireless worker in the community whose pursuit of this issue—and I can see that he is in the public gallery—with many other members has gone on for more than six years, which clearly demonstrates that the dealings of certain councillors within the Gold Coast City Council makes a mockery of open and transparent local government and of the principle of public interest being superior to self-interest.

The Helensvale Town Centre was defined as a subregional centre with some 40,000 square metres of retail space under the old Albert Shire town plan. That same instrument set Coomera as a regional centre which would allow developers to construct almost unlimited retail space. Former Councillor Colin Kleinschmidt and current councillor and Chairman of the North Planning Committee within the Gold Coast City Council David Power largely drew up that plan. Councillor Power lives at Coomera, where land has been approved for subdivision a short distance from the proposed Coomera Town Centre. Over the past six years, growth in the Helensvale, Gaven and Oxenford areas has been amongst the highest in Australia. The residents in this area are concerned that they are being left behind with little or no infrastructure, with no commercial or retail hub, with poor transport facilities and a host of other disadvantages because of this rapid growth in the region.

Many people in this area must shop in other areas, including Southport. They must travel long distances on public transport, taking more than two hours to get there and a further two hours or so to return. Many of these people are elderly and frail and are often too tired to put their shopping away when they return home. However, I am pleased to say that this government has announced that a community health centre will be built in the region. Also, a new primary school is to be built and opened next year in Pacific Pines and a new high school has been opened in Pacific Pines. Of course, a primary school has been opened in Gaven recently. However, this forward planning in meeting the needs of the residents in this area on behalf of the state has not been matched by the growth of commercial, retail and transport services. When one follows the history—or should I say drama—of the efforts of a major developer to construct a sorely needed retail centre at Helensvale, one becomes very concerned about whose interests are being served in this area of the Gold Coast.

The first application to construct a shopping centre occurred over six years ago. The application was tied up in the courts for years. The developer has withdrawn it. It knows that once it reapplies it will be opposed and tied up again in costly litigation. It is now working with the council to prepare a proposal that conforms to the Helensvale local area plan, which by the way took three more years to review. This means that the residents of the area have waited six years and are no closer to achieving an outcome than they were three years ago. The local area plan allows for some 40,000 square metres of retail space for the whole town centre, including the existing Helensvale Plaza, which occupies some 5,000 square metres and has applied for another 3,500 square metres. This should leave some 31,500 square metres for the developer, Westfield.

But wait, there's more! Councillor Power, for reasons which we well know, considers that 40,000 square metres in total for the town centre site is too big and believes that it should only be 38,000 square metres. He has gone out of his way to interfere and overturn a legitimately constituted council decision which allowed for the planned 40,000 square metres. This can only be regarded as mischievousness to again disrupt the process. This man has also included in the town centre plan the necessity to develop a two-lane underpass under the highway to connect the existing plaza to the new centre. This would cost the developer between an extra \$3 million and \$5 million. This is totally unnecessary, because a pedestrian underpass already exists between the two areas. It is simply designed to make it harder and financially non-viable—that is, a smaller complex and unnecessary, costly infrastructure.

To its credit, the developer has not packed up and gone home. It realises the value of the site. It has the support of the local residents, and it certainly has my support. This development will bring not only shopping convenience to the area but also entertainment facilities, the strong possibility of a library and, most of all, 2,000 initial jobs. These jobs will be created during construction and are vitally needed in today's federally induced downturn. Once constructed, the centre will create almost 1,500 permanent and part-time jobs, bringing between \$12 million to \$15 million into the local economy annually and into the future. I am determined that this centre will be built and that the opportunities which come with it will benefit all members of my electorate one way or the other. This farce has been allowed to continue for too long and it is time for action.

Ridiculous comments made to local newspapers by people associated with the Southport Chamber of Commerce and the councillor for Southport about my being naive and misguided without even consulting me prior to getting headlines have only strengthened my resolve and gained support for me from people in the electorate who did not vote Labor at the last election but certainly will vote for Labor at the next election. It is a great pity that my maiden speech has had to contain such negative

comments about certain community leaders, but if they took the time to speak with me and forget about their political differences, we could all work together for the good of the Gold Coast.

I now turn to the people of my electorate. They are good people. They are people from all different walks of life. After moving from interstate, many people start new lives and careers. Many are shift workers and work in the hospitality industry. As many people who live on the Gold Coast do, they work inhospitable hours. They work weekends and night shifts, struggling to keep their families together on very meagre wages. I represented many of these workers during the past 10 years as a union official with the Australian Liquor Hospitality and Miscellaneous Workers Union. I understand how important it is to have a strong award system to protect these workers. I also understand the importance of strong industrial legislation to protect workers' rights. I am proud to be a member of a government which recognises that fact, unlike the federal government's anti-worker legislation orchestrated by Peter Reith.

I am also very fond of the Nerang end of my electorate, having moved there almost 15 years ago. Prior to my entry into parliament, I was president of the Nerang branch of the Australian Labor Party. I am very proud to say that two other members of that branch were also elected to parliament—Diane Reilly, who unfortunately cannot be here today, the new member for Mudgeeraba, and Peta-Kaye Croft, the new member for Broadwater. Our youngest member of the branch almost won Surfers Paradise and another member, Victoria Chatterjee, is the candidate for Moncrieff in the next federal election later this year.

My three daughters, Rebecca, Melanie and Kate, all attended school in Nerang, and I am very happy to tell this House that the two eldest are now successful small business owners on the Gold Coast, employing several people in the baking industry.

Nerang has a small village atmosphere, and I will have my electorate office in the Nerang CBD. The Nerang area has unfortunately been forgotten in recent times. With the help of the local business community we can all help to make it vibrant and to reach its full potential.

The Nielsen Road-Alexander Drive overpass is to be widened to alleviate congestion during the peak hour rush. Work should begin shortly. Also, a 24-hour police station in Nerang has been promised, along with extra police numbers. An ambulance station is to be built in the region to help reduce response times to emergency situations.

I must also talk about the rural area of my electorate. This is the hinterland region, from Mount Nathan to Upper Coomera. This is a very unique and beautiful area. It has pristine regions, rivers and native flora and fauna. We need to be aware of this region. We need to make sure that the Nerang and Coomera Rivers are protected and that the wildlife in these regions are safe from overdevelopment. We need to find the funds to clean up the rivers.

I know that we have wonderful, dedicated people who give up their valuable time to volunteer their efforts to save what we have from carelessness. People such as Sally Spain of the Greens, who also contested the last election, and other people, including Dr Lloyd McGuire and his wife, Irene, Mrs Lynne Ogden and others of the Nerang Community Association ensure that the environment is being carefully monitored. I hope that these people feel free to involve me in their concerns and ideas. It is people such as Phil Gray, the McGuires and Sally Spain who give heart and meaning to Gaven. These people volunteer their time and efforts without the recognition they deserve. In this the Year of the Volunteer I thank them on behalf of all my electors.

Finally I thank my campaign team, which most certainly helped me to become a member of this 50th Parliament. My campaign director, Phil Gray—he keeps getting a mention but we all know he well deserves it—his wife, Astra, Keith Duggan and Keith Dando and his family walked the electorate knocking on doors in all kinds of weather to support my election campaign. Without these people the result may have been different.

I must also thank the numerous people who turned out on 17 February to hand out how-to-vote cards under difficult conditions. A special thanks goes to my daughter Melanie for the wonderful catering she did to feed the volunteers on the day.

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