



Speech by

ANITA PHILLIPS

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Hansard 6 August 2002

PARLIAMENTARY SERVICE AMENDMENT BILL

Ms PHILLIPS (Thuringowa—ALP) (3.07 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I rise to speak in support of the Parliamentary Service Amendment Bill 2002. I first arrived in Townsville on a holiday in 1968 and I was so taken with the place that I went back south, packed my bags and moved to live there in September 1969. It has taken 33 years for the government to catch up with the idea, although I must admit that for the vast proportion of that time the regressive National Party was in government and in fact it took the Beattie government a very short time to appreciate the importance of north Queensland.

My first job in Townsville in 1969 was as the second social worker to the pioneering Joan Innes Reid at Townsville Hospital. I had come from working in Victoria and I could not believe the poor quality of the hospital and medical services in Townsville. It was like something out of a 19th century movie—long dark wards, unpainted metal beds, concrete floors, a complete lack of staff and hardly any specialists at all. The difference between then and today is remarkable, with our brilliant new, state-of-the-art \$185 million-plus Townsville Hospital, courtesy of the Beattie Labor government. The psychiatric ward in 1969 was a brick building at the back of the central state school. This Friday we open a forensic secure mental health unit—the most modern in the state and possibly in the country.

Even in the early 1970s, patients with head injuries, sick babies and cardiac problems had to be flown to Brisbane because there was not the expertise or capacity at TGH to treat them. Imagine how traumatic it was for families with their loved ones sent more than 1,500 kilometres away. Schools were badly resourced. There were no preschools in Queensland. Two high schools were in Townsville but there was no university. Students had fewer years of education in Queensland than they did in any other state in Australia. Class sizes were huge.

How startling it is to compare that situation with the progressive education reform package that was introduced by the Minister for Education this year. Among other initiatives, it advocates a full-time preschool year and fantastic ICT improvements. In 1969, the population of Townsville was about 50,000. Today, it is 150,000. Then, the Townsville council was dominated by businessmen and developers. Today, it is the most longstanding and successful Labor municipal council in the country. Thuringowa was a shire, not the fastest-growing city in the state. There were no national sports teams such as our beloved Cowboys, the Townsville Crocs, or the Townsville Fire. There was no magnificent football stadium, university, Australian Institute of Marine Science, Museum of Tropical Queensland, Reef Underworld or our fabulous Strand.

I know that when hearing all this honourable members just cannot wait for the sitting in Townsville, but I wanted to be sure that they were aware that none of this would have been possible except for the visionary leadership of our Premier.

Mr Mickel: I'm like Big Kev; I'm excited.

Ms PHILLIPS: I take that interjection from the member for Logan. I, too, am very excited.

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Poole): Order! The member will return to his seat if he wants an interjection taken.

Ms PHILLIPS: Parliament in north Queensland is much more than a chance to celebrate what these great twin cities have achieved over the past 33 years; more than an opportunity to showcase what a Labor government has brought to the north of the state; and more than our chance to show off this great region to our colleagues from down south. It is about affirmative action for the people who live in north Queensland, and it is about their opportunity to observe and have access to the workings of parliament.

In the very short time of 18 months that I have sat in this place, I have probably seen upwards of 200 groups of school students pass through the chamber or sit in the gallery and observe parliament—being guided through the entire House, learning about how the parliament operates and how they can be part of it. In that time, with all of those schools and possibly thousands of children, not one student from Thuringowa has been on a school trip to see democracy in action. Students from schools in Thuringowa are disadvantaged. They do not have the same privileges and access as children south of the tropics have. This is just not fair.

So the north Queensland parliament was born—an initiative of equality—so typical of this Beattie Labor government. It is very disturbing to sit here and see members on the other side of this House criticise and knock the decision. While the Leader of the Opposition has waxed lyrical today, a few weeks ago he appeared on television saying that the sitting in Townsville was a waste of money. Regrettably, the member for Nanango has supported this position.

Already, over 3,500 students have booked in to be part of the tours and to see parliament in Townsville in action. Every school I visit in my electorate is very, very keen to participate. They ask me questions about the process, about the passage of legislation, about how backbenchers and ministers operate. Teachers are setting up mock parliaments, students are debating youth legislation. Adults, too, who have never seen what it is like—what happens in this chamber—will also be coming along. Seniors are planning to come by the bus load to see parliament in session. How extremely cost effective this exercise will prove to be.

I am extremely privileged to be part of this exciting landmark occasion. This will live in the memories of the people of north Queensland for their lifetime. On behalf of the community of Thuringowa in particular, I want to thank the Premier for this groundbreaking event. I also want to invite all honourable members to take some time outside the parliament to observe the north Queensland lifestyle, to talk with locals, to smell the tropical flora, and appreciate a little the unique issues there are for us living in the north of this state. Hopefully, such a sharing will help to break down the barriers and will educate those members who have never been so far north.

Mr Reynolds: I wouldn't mind betting that some of these parliamentarians have never been to Townsville.

Ms PHILLIPS: I take the honourable minister's interjection. I am sure that that is true. I hope that the trip to Townsville will help remove the paranoia expressed by some north Queenslanders that people from the south-east corner are ignorant of the needs of northerners and that they just do not understand.

This exercise is not just about giving north Queenslanders access to the parliament and to democracy; it is our chance to show the rest of Australia and the world that, when we come out of our traditional boxes, when we experience how it really is for other people, anything is possible. It is with the greatest optimism that I commend this bill to the House.