



Speech by
Dr DAVID WATSON
MEMBER FOR MOGGILL

Hansard 27 November 2003

VALEDICTORY

Dr WATSON (Moggill—Lib) (5 p.m.): It is with a sense of trepidation that I get up and say that I am making my final contribution to a parliamentary debate. In politics, I have learned that your words come back to haunt you. With six days scheduled for early next year, I am not quite sure that I totally trust the Premier in this particular case. That would surprise the Premier, I am sure!

I think that most of us expect this to be the final sitting and I think that this time that is probably a fairly good bet. I would like to start by first of all thanking all the parliamentary staff for over the past 14 years who have enabled me to contribute to the government and the parliament of Queensland. It is passe to say that we could not do our job without the tremendous support that we get from everywhere from the groundsmen, the catering staff, all the way through to the upper echelons of the parliamentary staff: Hansard, the Parliamentary Library and, of course, the Clerk of the Parliament. I should remind everybody that the Clerk of the Parliament is there because I gave him his first break. I actually hired him on behalf of Ken Davies when we were members of the PCJC. He was brought in as an assistant research director for the PCJC.

An honourable member interjected.

Dr WATSON: That is right. The other thing, of course, is that Leanne Clare is there, who at the moment is Acting Deputy Clerk. She was one of my students. I find that incredible. But I just say to members that the parliament is lucky because it has such two outstanding individuals as Clerk and Acting Deputy Clerk. I think that augurs well for the future of the parliament of Queensland in a professional sense.

To my electorate staff—and people who know Wendy O'Connor and Ruth Forrest—

An honourable member: I've seen their picture.

Dr WATSON: That is right. If members had read the annual report they would have seen the photograph. They have been with me since I was a very young professor at the University of Queensland. Ruth was my secretary and administrative officer there and Wendy was my secretary when I was dean of the faculty. They are absolutely tremendous workers. The electorate ticks over because of them and I think that every one of us—

Mr Springborg interjected.

Dr WATSON: A lot of people have said that. Come election time Wendy used to say, 'If you don't vote for David, I get fired.' They used to say, 'We want to keep you around.' We rely on our staff so much and I have been blessed with having two excellent electorate officers. I wish to thank them very much. To the supporters of the Liberal Party and the members of Moggill—

Mr Mickel: And Ryan.

Dr WATSON: In the heart of Ryan—I looked at the speakers' list and I saw the member for Logan down there so I say this with some trepidation, and I am going to say something else, too; I do not want this to be used against me later on—we need people to help us and work at election time. I have had great support from the members of the party and I appreciate each and every one of them for their contributions.

I should also say that, like other members here, I owe a great debt of gratitude to my wife, Shirley, and to my two sons, Tavis and Devin. Like the Premier's sons and daughter and like the

younger children of a few other members, my sons grew up with me being in public life. When I started in federal parliament, as John Mickel knows, they were young boys. I think they have grown up into two outstanding young men. I am very proud of that.

Mr Mickel: Brighter than their old man.

Dr WATSON: Brighter than their old man. Can I just say—and this is why I have a bit of trepidation—in 1995 I was actually challenged for preselection. So when my sons turned 16, I suggested—and I say to Mr Mickel not because I was branch stacking—that they should become members of the Liberal Party. If they wanted to make sure that there was an income stream in the future, I said that it would be appropriate. So they did.

An honourable member interjected.

Dr WATSON: No, let me finish. In the 1998 election, we went along to the preselection. There were 400 preselectors there. This is Moggill.

An honourable member: Only 400.

Dr WATSON: Only 400. There were 400 there. At any rate, I received 398 yes votes and two no votes. Of course, my sons had great delight in saying, 'You made us join. That's what you get.' In the last preselection, my eldest son was having to work as he is putting himself through university. Only my younger son could come along to the preselection. On the way to the preselection, he said, 'Oh God, I hope that there is not only one no vote.' Fortunately, there were no no votes. I said, 'You didn't have enough guts, did you?' Anyway, we cannot be in this place without the support of our family. Everyone knows that. Our families sacrifice a hell of a lot for us. It is at a time like this that one should publicly express a vote of thanks. A number of people—and I know that the member for Tablelands is here—have expressed my penchant for a market, a free market in particular.

An honourable member interjected.

Dr WATSON: No, I am not going to tell that story. I am going to tell a story that is against me. When I went into federal parliament, the philosophy of the Liberal Party was not as perhaps as pure as it is today. I was to give my maiden speech, which was about higher education—since I had just come out of university—and how higher education needed to react more to price signals. I guess Brendan Nelson is trying to do that today. That was not the Liberal Party position. When Don Dobie, who was the whip, found out what I was going to talk about he started to panic. He tried to get hold of Howard, who was at that time deputy leader, to find out what he would say about it. He was not around. He tried to get hold of Andrew Peacock, and he was not around. Eventually, he got hold of Fred Chaney, who was the leader of Senate. Fred looked at it and said, 'Well, it's not the Liberal Party's position, but it is his maiden speech. Let him go ahead and do it.' This was only a couple of hours before I was to give my speech. My wife came down that night. We had two young sons and we had to arrange for them to be looked after overnight. What happened, as usually happens in parliament, was that it was getting close to when the House was to rise at 11 o'clock at night. I was going to get on, I had worked out, at 10 to 11. So I was going to get only part-way through my maiden speech. I went along and saw Mick Young and told him what the problem was and asked what he could do. He looked at me and said, 'Okay.' So when it got to 11 o'clock, he moved that the House allow me to continue to speak to the end of my speech. When I had finished, when people were giving me the normal kind of congratulations, he came over to me and he said, 'That is the first and last favour you will get from me.' He was a great bloke, Mick Young.

Mr Terry Sullivan: And he kept his promises!

Dr WATSON: He kept his promises. It was interesting, because that was the time of the great Howard-Peacock challenges. Believe it or not, I actually supported Howard. When the time came, there was a change in leader. I was sitting in the back row of the Old Parliament House chamber. There was only one spare seat, right next to me. Lo and behold, Andrew Peacock came back and sat next to me. On the other side of me was Don Dobie, who was the whip and a very strong Peacock supporter.

On the first day after the change of leadership Andrew came in and sat down. He was not looking particularly happy. I said, 'Andrew, you have to look on the bright side of this.' He said, 'What's the bright side?' I said, 'I'm going to get a lot more TV coverage now.' He kind of looked at me. That night, at 6 o'clock, right across Australia, there was Andrew Peacock, looking kind of forceful, and me looking very happy, talking to him. So the next day I went in and I said, 'See, I told you, Andrew. Some good things have come out of this.'

Mr Reeves: Did you support Peacock for the next one?

Dr WATSON: No, no, no. At any rate, they were some interesting times.

I was talking about Mick Young. During that time there was the Coombe-Ivanoff affair. Some members might remember it. When I came into this place I was on the first parliamentary trade delegation under the Goss government. I think Henry Palaszczuk is the only member who is still here

who went on that delegation. We went to Japan and Korea, and on the way to Indonesia we stopped at Hong Kong. The Trade Commissioner there was David Coombe.

Ken McElligott, who was leading the delegation, brought us all together and said, 'We are going to dinner tonight with the Trade Commissioner. Some of you might recall—David, you in particular—that there was an issue in Canberra. It's very sensitive. We don't want you to talk about it. It could be embarrassing.' So we all promised to do the right thing. We went down to dinner, David Coombe came in and Ken McElligott was introducing people in the delegation to him. He came to me and David said, 'I know David. He was there during the Ivanoff affair.' Of course, that started off the whole conversation. I just said to Ken, 'I didn't raise it.' He was quite open and we had an absolutely tremendous night. He was a tremendous host, a great man. David Coombe was very knowledgeable and great fun to be with.

I want to say one or two personal things. When I entered politics I made a vow to myself that people who respected me when I came into politics would still respect me when I left—that I would behave in a way which did not diminish what I thought of as my own position with people who were fairly senior not only around Australia but also around the world. I think you have to earn respect and trust not only by your words but also by your actions. It takes a long time to build that up, but you can lose it so easily. Politics is a place in which you can lose it so easily, in so many different ways. I hope that the people outside that I know still have the same feeling for me now as when I started in politics nearly 20 years ago.

The last few months, while I have been acting chairman of the PAC, have been difficult, because we had one of our members being investigated by the CMC and the Auditor-General. I say on a personal level—I think I speak on behalf of all of the members of the PAC—that I never had any doubt about Ken Hayward's integrity. I think that is important. Over the years Ken has earned people's trust and respect. I think it was tremendous that people showed that in the parliament. Over the years Ken and I have become fairly good friends, although we did not know each other beforehand—not in a social sense but in a political sense. I was glad to see the outcome.

I have made quite a number of friends in this place and previously in politics. I think integrity and the ability of people to trust you is important. I think there is a role for that in the political arena. I think most members show that—some members more so because they have the opportunity.

I will tell one story that I probably should not tell. It involves the current Deputy Premier, Terry Mackenroth. Just before the 1998 election—Joan and some of my colleagues who were in cabinet with me might remember—I wanted to reappoint somebody, a very senior public servant. I was aware that the election would be coming up. At the time Terry was shadowing me, and there was some concern about what he would think. I made a decision that I wanted to do that, so I actually rang Terry and said, 'You are the alternative minister in this area at the moment. I do not know what is going to happen after the election.' I went through why I wanted to do it and the arguments. I can remember that I said, 'What do you think?' We had a chat for a while and he said, 'For a Tory he's not a bad bloke. Go ahead and do it.' I said, 'There won't be any problem?', and he said no.

When I went to cabinet of course the issue came up. I remember Rob Borbidge saying to me, 'This is a problem. It is a political problem. You shouldn't be doing this.' I said, 'I spoke to Terry Mackenroth about it and he said that it was fine.' Rob looked at me, a couple of my colleagues looked at me and eventually Rob said, 'Look, David, if you feel comfortable with that, it is your decision. It is your political head. If that is what you want to recommend, we will approve it.' And we did.

It went through, it was approved and it was made public. I do not know what happened; we have never spoken about it. But Terry Mackenroth indicated that it would be okay, and the important thing from my viewpoint is that, in politics, he kept his word. I can tell a lot of other stories, but I told that one because it is with the opposition. We have to work with people. In our environment, when we work with people we have to be able to trust them.

Joan and Bob and I have worked closely over quite a number of years now. In politics—it was probably known at the time—we all have our ambitions and wishes to do things. Joan and I developed an extremely strong relationship in Treasury. It was one that I enjoyed immensely. I think it was probably a surprise to a lot of people outside. On a day-to-day basis, I think we did a lot of good things in Treasury. We had a very, very strong working relationship and I think a very trusting relationship. That took effort on the part of both of us to begin with, but as we did more and more of it it became easier and easier. I think I will always remember that. It is something that I think was a very important part of the government and a very important part of our lives.

I had the same kind of working relationship with Bob, who was deputy for me in the last parliament. The same kind of trusting relationship developed. Bob, I want to thank you for all the support you gave me as leader.

To my other colleagues on this side of the House I say that it is tough being in coalition. I think it is probably tougher being on the right or the left faction of the Labor Party, but it is tough being in coalition. It requires some robust debate from time to time. What I have learnt in that process, however,

is that you have some very strong people with the best of intentions, you sit down, you argue things through, you come up with a solution and you go out and you defend it and work hard together. That is the strength. Providing that is done, there will continue to be a strong coalition in the future.

I have enjoyed being in parliament. I enjoyed being in government immensely. I would have liked to have had another couple of goes, but that is life. To all of my colleagues here, I wish you all the best in the future.

To those who are retiring: Matt, Steve and Wendy—we all came in in 1989. Matt and I were on privileges committee and also did some good work on the Parliamentary Papers Bill. To Anita, I wish her all the best. Vince, who is not here at the moment, has been a person of incredible stamina. He is certainly one of the best campaigners you have ever seen. Then there is Joan. I wish each and every one of them all the best in the future.

Mr Speaker, it has been a pleasure working with you over the years. We have had only one or two instances where we have had a vote of no confidence. It was always done in a professional fashion. I have enjoyed the interaction with you over the period. I wish you all the very best, too.