



Speech by

## Lawrence Springborg

**MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS**

Hansard Wednesday, 19 May 2004

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### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

**Mr SPRINGBORG** (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (2.08 p.m.): In rising to give my address-in-reply, I would like to acknowledge the Governor for her presentation in opening the parliament and wish her all the very best in the job that she will be doing. I know that she and Mr Bryce will do a fantastic job in representing Queenslanders.

I also thank my family for the support they have provided me, not only in the time I have been Leader of the Opposition but also when I have had various other roles in the time I have been in parliament. I thank my wife, Linda, and my children, Megan, Jens, Laura and Thomas, for their forbearance. We all know that the families of members of parliament face a significant challenge and responsibility, regardless of where they may live. Even members who are fortunate to live closer to parliament here in Brisbane still have long parliamentary sitting hours and the other duties and obligations that go with being a member of parliament on a day-to-day basis.

The position I hold and the electorate I represent often mean being away from home for maybe four or five nights in a row. Sometimes you may be at home in your own bed only one night a week. The conversations I have with my children on the telephone are quite interesting from time to time. My wife has enrolled my children in soccer, so they are enjoying going off each Saturday to play soccer. So far I have been to one game, but I do not know when I will be at the next one. The disappointment in their voices when I ring up and they ask me whether I am able to come along and see something they are doing at school or attend their sporting event at the weekend is quite pronounced. However, that is one of the sacrifices we as members of parliament make.

Once again, I thank my family for their very strong support. As I said, it is somewhat difficult for them, but they do provide me with very strong support. My wife of some 14 and a half years, Linda, has provided that support right from day one. All of our children have been born in the time I have been in parliament. It is true, also, that when you are away so much you see some quite dramatic changes in your children. As they develop naturally, you see the personality development in an even more pronounced way because of the time you spend away from home.

I also thank my electorate staff and the staff in the opposition office. I do not want to go through and name each and every one of them, because they are all as important as each other. If it were not for them, I would be unable to do the job I do at an official level—the job as Leader of the Opposition and also, very importantly, in the electorate. When you have a job that takes you away from the electorate as much as mine does—ministers and the Premier would appreciate this—sometimes you feel as though you are not necessarily doing the job in the electorate that you should. Even though your heart, your mind and your thoughts are there, you know that you are missing things you would otherwise be able to attend if you did not have extended office commitments. That is why your electorate office staff are so essential in providing the support necessary to ensure that day-to-day electorate matters are able to be dealt with.

I also thank my very excellent campaign committee. As all members on both sides of this chamber realise, recognise and have reflected on during this debate, if it were not for our campaign committees we probably would not be here. We all say that our individual campaign committees are the best in the world.

That is, of course, a matter of subjective evaluation. I would like to thank my campaign committee, headed so ably by my electorate council chairman David Littleproud, campaign committee chairman Jill Smith and all of the other members of that committee.

I acknowledge my electorate council and the numerous branches I have in my electorate that have provided extraordinary support to me on an ongoing basis. Their loyalty and dedication are absolutely unquestioned, to the extent that during the last election campaign, when I was unable to get back to my electorate on any more than four occasions, people on my electorate council and my campaign committee were able to make sure that day-to-day election matters were very ably and capably dealt with.

I also thank the electors of Southern Downs for returning me. This is my sixth term in parliament. In that time I have held three electorates—Carnarvon, Warwick and Southern Downs—following a number of redistributions and also a distribution in 1991. I welcome the fact that they have given overwhelming support to me, with 75.2 per cent of the two-party preferred vote. I acknowledge that. That is a significant margin in my electorate. Notwithstanding the overlay of the other previously existing electorates, it is probably one of the highest votes of confidence that has been given to a member of parliament in that region for a long time. It is my very strong intention to make sure that I do not let those people down in my advocacy on their behalf in this place and also in my representation of them in the electorate and outside of it.

I am fortunate enough to represent an extremely vibrant area of Queensland. It is the southernmost electorate in this state. It has amongst its population people who specialise in very many areas. Of course there is a strong agricultural base. There is much light industry and light manufacturing. Also, there is a quite extensive service industry throughout the electorate. That is a service industry of both the private sector and the government sector. Often we tend to forget the importance of the service sector in electorates such as mine. I will take a moment to reflect on the government services.

When I go to school presentation nights each year I sit there and look at the number of teachers and extended staff who work in schools and think, 'This school must be almost the biggest employer in the town.' In many cases it is. The schools and hospitals provide not only service to that community but also employment to the area and the resulting boost to the economy. I pay tribute to all of the government employees who do such an excellent job in my electorate. I acknowledge the number of staff who work in hospitals as well.

I have been concerned, however, that there were a number of fundamental attacks on the people of my electorate by the government through its policies in the previous term. I think people in many areas of Queensland, particularly regional areas, reacted against the government to the extent that I said in the lead-up to the election that, quite noticeably, there were two Queenslanders. There was the Queensland that existed west of the Great Dividing Range and the Queensland that existed east of the Great Dividing Range.

Unfortunately, the policies of this government helped to harden and focus the view of many people in my electorate that the government did not care for them. There were a range of those issues, and I want to speak in detail about some of those in a moment. Principal amongst them were matters such as property rights. There was the attack by this government on the racing industry. There were other issues such as the lack of appropriate investment in infrastructure, whether it be roads or water, and the undue, over-the-top and disproportionate impact the ambulance levy had on many people in my electorate. There is a range of other issues, including cross-border issues, that need to be properly addressed by government.

I do not believe that, notwithstanding that members of the government say that they want to address cross-border issues, there is a serious consideration at the administrative level of government of some of the difficulties people who live in near-border communities have to deal with. They have to deal with day-to-day transaction of commerce and service access across the border. People who live in another area of the state that does not deal with those things on a day-to-day basis probably think, 'So what? Who cares? What is the real issue?' I can say that it is a very real issue for people who live in those areas.

The ambulance levy brought this to the attention of many people who work, have their extended family and own businesses in my electorate. They can no longer be an ambulance subscriber in Queensland, even though the only ambulance that can service them is in a Queensland based town only five or 10 kilometres from their home, which is over the border in New South Wales. There is no other ambulance service within 100 kilometres of them. It is ridiculous that those people can no longer subscribe when they have done for generations. They work, send their kids to school, have businesses and have properties in Queensland, but they are told that they cannot subscribe. If needed, they will be picked up by a Queensland ambulance and will then have to try to recover costs from their private health scheme or the equivalent scheme in New South Wales. The lack of understanding and real appreciation of those sorts of issues brings enormous frustration not only to people in my area who have friends who live across the border but also to those people who are such an important part of our community because they engage on a day-to-day basis.

On the property rights of individuals, for example, we saw some extraordinary attacks right across regional Queensland at the last state election and also prior to that. People were saying, 'We are trying to make a sustainable living out of agriculture. We are trying to preserve the land as much as we possibly can. There is no recognition of that fact but we continue to be demonised by the policies of this government and by the perception that it wants to create, whether it is in water use, salinity, vegetation management or whatever the case may be.'

Those people bought those blocks of land with certain rights. They actually had a premium built in when they bought the vegetation on that property. If the government wants to take that away, then there is a responsibility on government to ensure there is an offset against that by some sort of reasonable compensation. Even the legislation that passed through parliament recently did not appropriately address that matter.

We have deficiencies with roads funding. We have heard the Minister for Transport and others stand up in this place over the last few days and allege that the Commonwealth government is not fulfilling its responsibility in road funding in Queensland. Look at the diminution in road funding on state roads in Queensland under this government. It has been quite significant and it is falling back to levels that it fell away to in the Goss government, where there was a very significant and deliberate neglect. I do not argue that there is not a very strong role and obligation on government to ensure that there is a proper focus on social policy and investment in that area, but that cannot be done at the expense of the infrastructure which is so necessary to keep the state moving. Whether that is in a regional area, a remote area or a metropolitan area of Queensland, the government must invest. It cannot keep shoving and ducking its responsibility. There is an enormous fall-away in the necessary investment in roads and other transport infrastructure throughout this state.

Look at water—another area where this government does not have a comprehensive policy, particularly in regard to bringing new water to south-east Queensland. Look at the situation of the Gold Coast. It came within six months of running out of water only a few months ago. The government by way of its policy decision in 1989 knocked Wolffdene dam on the head. Fair enough; that was its policy position, notwithstanding the fact that that piece of land had been identified as a dam site for a long period of time. Basically the caveat was on the titles. As people bought those pieces of land, they were aware of it. The government then said that it would no longer be a dam site and knocked it on the head. That was its policy position. It did, however, acquire two much smaller dam sites which were nowhere near as efficient on the Gold Coast hinterland around the Beaudesert area.

The real question we have to ask is: what is this government doing to expedite the development of those water storages? I would have thought as a result of what we saw happen on the Gold Coast, and also with the population growth in south-east Queensland, that there is a very strong obligation on this government to move forward those particular water infrastructure developments to ensure we do not again face the situation of the Gold Coast being within six months of running out of water. We had the ludicrous situation where people could not have a shower on the beach after going for a swim.

This is where this government is very much falling behind. It may be spending a lot of time dealing with social policy issues. That is its desire; fair enough. But there is a range of infrastructure issues which are not being appropriately dealt with by this government in a focused and a strong way. At least at the last Brisbane City Council election we saw Campbell Newman take a very strong policy platform to the people of Brisbane to address the issue of gridlock and to ensure road congestion in Brisbane was going to be dealt with and addressed. The real challenge now will be for the Labor-dominated council to work constructively and cooperatively with Campbell Newman to ensure that those commitments which he made, for which he received the personal support of the people of Brisbane to implement, will be implemented to reduce that gridlock to make sure that Brisbane's liveability is maintained in the future.

Unless we invest in these areas, the lifestyle which people enjoy—the reason they want to move to south-east Queensland—will be seriously compromised in the future as we see gridlock from Noosa down to Currumbin and west to Ipswich. That is what we are facing, particularly if we are moving towards 3.7 million people living in south-east Queensland by the year 2026. We have to make sure that we have the roads and the infrastructure and other government service infrastructure in place regardless of where we are across Queensland. That is one area where this government has been extremely derelict. That is one area where this government has never been able to match the capacity of the conservative side in this state to invest in that type of infrastructure. That is one area where we have always had a superior record than the Labor Party in this state. I would encourage the government not to let that fall by the wayside because it is extremely important.

I would like to touch on a couple of specific issues relevant to my electorate. We have had a lot of ongoing problems with drought. I know people might be sick of the focus on drought but the last 10 years has been absolutely extraordinary. The seasonal conditions have never been quite like it before. We have had a decade of marginal rainfall. If honourable members want to look at the records, they will see what I am saying is proven. Those people, I believe, have come through that quite resiliently. The drought is not

over yet, but there are a lot of challenges ahead for people and we are hoping that things have turned a corner.

With regards to biosecurity, there is much concern at the moment over proposals put up by Biosecurity Australia for the importation of, amongst other things, apples from New Zealand. I note there are other issues with regards to bananas and also pork, as was mentioned in parliament this morning. We can be political all we want in this place but one of the really strange things that I think has happened over the last 20 years in this country is that we as politicians have let those decisions get out of our clutches. We have handed over to so-called independent statutory authorities the decision as to what is going to be imported and on what basis it is going to be imported in this country.

The mechanism for making these decisions on the importation of apples, bananas, pork or whatever the case may be was put in place by the Hawke government in the early 1980s. The only thing I can say in its defence is that rural industry through the National Farmers Federation and other rural advocacy groups said at that time, 'We want politics taken out of this. We want these decisions made on a biosecurity basis. We do not want these decisions made by politicians. We want to have open access to trade. We want to know the things that are being imported into Australia are being imported for the right reasons. The only reason we can stop them is if there is a disease threat. So that is the best way to ensure that as a trading nation we are able to keep trading.'

That is what they said and the government responded at the time. We have a situation now where, because of the decisions which are being made, we must still wear the political odium even though we have cut ourselves out of the decision-making process. You cannot have it both ways. It is not the bureaucrats who make the decision; it is not the people who work in biosecurity who make the decision who get themselves unelected. It is the government of the day which has to face up to the political consequences of the decision.

With regards to the apple industry, the apple growers in my electorate produce magnificent apples, and they come on sooner than any other apples in Australia because of the climate and the geographical area. These apple growers are sick and tired of having to fight this issue over and over again. They have at least once, if not twice, beaten the issue on sound scientific terms. It is back again and it looks like we will have the importation of apples into Australia. They are saying that the processes are working against them. There is going to be a much higher standard for them to export their apples to Tasmania and other places. Because of some other pest, they will not be able to export Queensland apples to Western Australia or Tasmania, but New Zealand will be able to bring apples into Australia and more easily access markets across Australia than they will be able to export their own apples across the country, and that is the lunacy of the current system.