



Speech by

Lawrence Springborg

MEMBER FOR SOUTHERN DOWNS

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VALEDICTORY

Mr SPRINGBORG (Southern Downs—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (4.49 p.m.): I join with the Premier in this valedictory debate. I will follow the conventions of valedictories and I will not talk about the political achievements of the government or the lack thereof or the achievements of the opposition throughout the year. There are plenty of deficiencies in the government. However, this is the time of the year when we reflect upon those people who have supported us during the year and the great times that we have been able to have together. It is also a time to wish our families and our colleagues all the very best for the future.

I think it is appropriate at the outset to pause to reflect on those who have achieved and contributed so much who are not with us—Sir Walter Campbell, the former Governor of Queensland; Alex Wilson, the former member for Townsville South; Charles Porter, the former member for Toowong; and, from my personal perspective and that of many of my friends and colleagues, my very dear friend Greg Jackson.

Mr Speaker, I thank you and your staff and the deputy speakers for the job that they have done throughout the course of this year. We have not always necessarily agreed, but I do agree with the Premier that being Speaker is a challenging job and maintaining order in this parliament can be challenging. Having to be the balanced hand and the way that that is perceived no doubt is something that has troubled not only you but also many former speakers. Your support staff also perform an extremely important role.

To the Leader of the House and the Leader of Opposition Business, I acknowledge the very good working relationship that you have. You ensure that the parliament is able to work well and having that cooperation is extremely important. I thank the Premier and all of his ministers. While people see our very robust debate, with barbs thrown across the chamber and what always appears to be us disagreeing, there are many times that we do agree and there are many meetings which we have privately and confidentially where much good work is done. We also take people to see ministers and much good work is done.

I will make the point, as I did last year in this place, that many people do not realise that seven or eight out of 10 pieces of legislation that come before the parliament have bipartisan support. That is extremely important. However, in the nature of the adversarial times in which we live, and considering the thirst which those people who report from this place have for portraying that adversarial nature and the way that that feeds a particular stereotype, I think we have to accept that we will always be seen as arguing and never as agreeing. I had a journalist ring me one day and ask, 'What do you think of what the government is doing?' I said, 'I agree.' He said, 'You won't be of much use to us. Do you know anyone who does not agree?' I said, 'You will have to go and find them.' That is not to say that some things on which we agree are not reported from time to time.

I would like to thank my deputy, Jeff Seeney, who has done a wonderful job in supporting me throughout the year and also from time to time for performing my role in my absence. I also thank my shadow ministers, who work very hard. We should not devalue in any way whatsoever the contribution and the work that ministers or shadow ministers do. I wish I had a full complement of shadow ministers. There are 19 ministerial positions and we have 15 shadow ministers, including me. The point that I make is simply this: what comes around goes around. It is only a matter of time. The dual roles and responsibilities

of members of parliament who hold shadow ministerial positions can be challenging from time to time. Whilst ministers have an extremely important job to do, they have a large number of support staff. They have a lot of things that they need to know. Shadow ministers, particularly those who hold a number of portfolios, have a lot of things to know and do as well.

I acknowledge the role of the opposition whips. They have done a fantastic job for us during the year. I acknowledge the work of Ray, Ted, the government whips, the Liberal whip and Liz Cunningham, the Independents' whip. To the Leader of the Liberal Party, his deputy, Bruce Flegg, members of the Liberal Party, the Independents and the One Nation member, I say that it has been good to work with you throughout the course of the year.

I thank the parliamentary committees and their support staff. The committee process is an important part of this parliament. It has been for a long time and it will continue to be for a long time. I do not think we value enough the role that committees play. They are extremely bipartisan in their approach and they look after a number of extremely important issues. They are doubly important in a parliament which is unicameral in its nature.

To the Clerk of the Parliament, Neil Laurie, to his deputies and to his staff, thank you very much for providing fearless advice in this place and also great support to members, whether they be in opposition, government, minor parties or Independents. I thank the Chief Reporter, Lucinda Osmond, and staff. I agree with the Premier when he said that sometimes the things that you thought you heard said in this place do not necessarily read the same; they read much better the next day. I would agree with that. They certainly take the spoken word and enhance it greatly. In the case of some members of parliament, that can be a great attribute.

I thank the Parliamentary Librarian, Mary Seefried, and all of her staff, who provide very timely support to members of parliament and great research backup as well. I thank the parliamentary staff in general but especially the Sergeant-at-Arms, Ian Thompson. To all of those in the Bills and Papers Office, people on whom we place extraordinary demands from time to time, I say thank you very much. To those in the corporate and finance sections, to the catering and kitchen staff for looking after us, thank you again. We greatly appreciate the work that you do. I say to the catering and kitchen staff: when we are away from home so much, we need to have that little bit of home here. They do their very best to ensure that we have good meals, that we are looked after and that we feel like we are a part of a big family when we are away. To Property Services staff, Human Resource Management staff, our security staff, who do a great job in keeping this place safe and secure, the parliamentary attendants, who are always there with a smile and who provide an enormous service to us not only in this place but also in other areas around parliament, thank you very much for looking after us. I thank the cleaners, who have to pick up after us, and the gardeners, who keep this place looking very well. We have some of the best gardens around the place, so thank you very much.

The Parliamentary Counsel and his staff, from the opposition's point of view, provide timely responses to requests for private members' bills and amendments. Thank you for your work and for the accuracy of that work. Our electorate staff do a fantastic job. In many cases, the more senior the position you hold, the less time you are able to spend in your electorate office. So your electorate office and your electorate officers become even more the front in looking after your area. I know that my electorate staff do an absolutely exemplary job when I am away. They have to field all the phone calls and have the correspondence prepared. Basically they are as good as a member of parliament in many of the things that they do. I thank the electorate staff on our side and the electorate staff of all members of parliament.

To my personal staff in the opposition office, thank you for looking after me and for looking after the team. You have done an absolutely great job. I will not run through all the names; they know who they are and they know the work that they have done.

I would also like to acknowledge the media, or some would refer to them as the fourth estate. The Premier mentioned a moment ago that he does not necessarily always agree with their interpretation or the way that they put forward a story. I can assure the Premier that from time to time I feel exactly the same thing myself. However, we cannot undervalue in any way whatsoever the role that a free press plays in a democracy. It has been an important part of the Westminster tradition, of a democratic system, for centuries and should continue to be so. People say to me, 'How do the media get away with that?' or 'Why do they do things like this?' or 'Why do they do things like that?' Keeping in mind that we have a particular interest in putting something out in a particular way, if they see something a different way and wish to report it a different way then that is a matter for them. The community, by and large, is capable of seeing through that and making its own interpretations, which it does.

I say to the people who argue against a free press, what is the alternative? A free press is an important part of the government process as well, because often it exposes things that sometimes oppositions do not expose. How would the government and the opposition get their message out if it was not for a free press? It performs a very, very important role and should be recognised and supported in that.

In conclusion, I also agree with the Premier that there is no better system of government than what we have. What is the alternative to a democracy? There is no alternative to a democracy. Unfortunately, many people take our democratic processes for granted because it is the only thing that they know. When it is the only thing somebody knows the high bar goes up higher. For people who may have lived under a system with far fewer freedoms than what we experience today, this is the absolute pinnacle of utopia in freedom of expression and freedom of participation. However, we always have to strive to ensure that people have a good understanding of our democracy and the way that it works. There is no better expression of that than this place.

I say thank you to all members, all staff, their families and my wife in particular, Linda, and to my children, Megan, Jens, Laura and Thomas. They are primary school age. They are always asking me on the telephone if I am going to be home for their speech night, if I am going to be home for their sports day or if I am going to be home to see them play soccer. My young bloke is always on the phone saying, 'Dad, when are you going to be home?' I say, 'Well, Saturday. Not Saturday but Saturday week.' He says, 'Oh, how many days is that?' I say, 'Like eight days.' Then the next day he gets on the phone and says, 'It's only seven days now.' It does impact on them. It affects them very, very much. I think sometimes they probably wish that we were not here and we were actually at home with them. If we were not in this place they probably would not be as sorry as we are.

Mr Beattie: That's true.

Mr SPRINGBORG: To my own family, to the spouses and the families of other members and our staff, I say merry Christmas, have a happy new year and we look forward to seeing everyone back here next year.