



Speech by

Liz Cunningham

MEMBER FOR GLADSTONE

Hansard Wednesday, 12 May 2004

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mrs LIZ CUNNINGHAM (Gladstone—Ind) (12.02 p.m.): I rise in this address-in-reply to thank the community of Gladstone for their continued support in fulfilling my role. This is my fourth term. It has been a privilege over that time to work with the residents of my electorate in an endeavour to get answers to the problems that they face and also to bring their concerns to the parliament of Queensland.

Gladstone, which incorporates the city of Gladstone and the shire of Calliope in its entirety, is a dynamic and diverse community; one that sees what can be done, not what cannot be done. That has been demonstrated through a number of years of significant growth. Industry development in the area has meant that there is a mix of industries that potentially place significant strain on emergency services, but employ great numbers of people at various plants.

It is a region that is highly dependent on the alumina industry. Therefore, the potential is there for adverse effects should there be a downturn in alumina. But it is balanced by the urban communities of Gladstone, Calliope, Boyne-Tannum, Mount Larcom and the townships in the Boyne Valley. The area also sustains rural industries such as grazing, horticulture and small crops. I have found working with those various groups in the community challenging, but most rewarding. Overwhelmingly, people in the electorate just want a fair go.

As other members have stated, the election campaign is a particularly focused time and all members are grateful to those who offer support, not just through the ballot box but also from those who offer practical support in the lead-up to election day. I would like to particularly thank Wendy, who is a born organiser and just wonderful in organising rosters, et cetera; her husband, Don; Trish and Floss; and Kitty, who unfortunately had to resign as my electorate officer 12 months ago to come to Brisbane as her husband was studying. She came up to help with the campaign and she also came up to offer support on election day. I also thank Alan, a member of the community, who was just brilliant in the run-up to the election.

I would like to thank those members of the community who allowed corflutes to be placed on their property. It takes with it a degree of risk, I guess, and I would like to thank those people for their support. I thank all those who offered their support to man booths on election day. It was a long day and a hot day.

In particular I thank my husband, John, who over many years has been prepared at times to play second fiddle. I think members' spouses do that often. No member in this chamber would be able to do the job successfully without the support of their partner. Those who do not have that support would have an absolute uphill battle, and their life would be a misery. I would like to thank my husband John for his support.

I thank our daughters, Wendy, Becky and Emma, who came on election day to help, and their partners. I have not checked with the partners how willing they were; I think it is just best left as it is, but I thank them for their support as well. I would also like to put on the record my thanks to Mum and Richard. My Dad was always supportive before his death. Mum and Richard have continued on with that support and I value their encouragement.

Since the state election we have had the council elections, and in my electorate the two mayors were returned but there are several new councillors on both councils. I welcome the new councillors to an area of work that is very challenging but gratifying and enjoyable, and I look forward to working with both councils in an endeavour to advance the concerns and the issues in relation to the community.

The fundamentals of government funding remain uppermost in the community's mind. Funding for health, safety, emergency services, education and housing continue to be fundamental and will continue to be because they are the essence of a contented life. The knowledge that you have the health services available to you when you need them, that you can do your business, that you can go out to your social function, to school and work with a degree of safety, and the knowledge that housing is available and affordable when it is needed all meld together to provide a quality of life that people look forward to.

We have had many challenges in my electorate in the health area with what many in the community see as a diminution of services. A reduction in the number of visiting specialists, resignations of obstetricians and other supporting specialists, and a reduction in ophthalmology services, to name a few, have meant that people in the community feel very aggrieved at the level of health services. I put on the record, however, that since the new minister took his portfolio my ability to discuss the issues of concern and get a well-thought-out response has been gratifying. I thank the minister on behalf of my community. We can look forward to seeing some solutions to those problems. The staff who work at the hospital are excellent. The nurses work above and beyond the call of duty. They work long hours, at times in very difficult conditions and at times put themselves in positions of risk. If one reads the paper one can see how many of the nursing staff have been subject to physical as well as verbal abuse from patients for varying reasons. I put on the record my thanks to the staff and the doctors and I look forward to their situation improving. I thank the Minister for Health for his direction when looking at the redesign of the medical and surgical ward nursing station. That will go a great way towards reducing the problem of mixed wards.

Another area of great concern in my electorate is that of affordable housing, particularly when there have been industrial booms. Our region has had a history of fairly static development and then a Comalco, a CAR or an Aldoga project comes along and there is an exponential growth in the number of residents in the region. They need affordable housing. It not so much the construction workers that have difficulties; it is those on fixed incomes and who have been consistent contributors in the community who are challenged to pay the increased rentals and maintain a quality of life for them and their families. We are through the worst of it now. When Aldoga comes on line the same thing could potentially occur. It is not those on construction wages; it is those on fixed incomes who are challenged most when rents increase from \$100 to \$200 and \$230. In the next wave the rents will increase from an already inflated base. I will speak to the Minister for Housing about affordable housing during this term I am sure.

I appreciate the minister's support in relation to boarding houses and men's shelters. There is a significant and identified need in Gladstone for a men's shelter. A committee has been formed to create a men's shelter. Judy Wicker is the president. A site and a building have been identified that would be eminently suitable. Comalco has allocated \$100,000 to allow group apprentices to modify any buildings or contribute to the building of a new structure. We are seeking capital to purchase a building that is in a central location and suitable for these gentleman who are perhaps alone as a result of either spousal death, marriage separation or some other unfortunate event in their lives. These people need care and support. The shelter we envisage being made available to them will satisfy a great many of their needs. I look forward to speaking with the Minister for Housing in relation to that capital.

As in many electorates, roads are an important artery to move those in the community from place to place. The Department of Transport in Gladstone has been suffering greatly with long waiting times in its office for licence renewals, machinery inspections and the like. The new machinery inspection process has not been well accepted by the taxi and trucking industries in Gladstone. I look forward to the minister reviewing that process to see where it can be improved. The building needs extension to allow for an increase in staff and to ensure that people are not waiting half an hour to three-quarters of an hour to get served. It is too long, particularly when many people come in their lunch hours.

I have spoken before about the need for boom gates at Witney Street and Mercury Street. An older gentleman was killed on the Witney Street crossing. It was an error of judgment on his part but no less tragic. There has been toing and froing between the council and the state government in relation to who is responsible for this. However, the reality is that it is a QR line that transverses the community. The community has to access the school which is on the opposite side of the track. Young children are walking across there on a daily basis. Boom gates are essential. There are lights there now, but that is an insufficient barrier.

I thank the Minister for Transport, Paul Lucas, for visiting the electorate some time ago to announce the construction of toilets at Calliope River. The Calliope River boat ramp is the major boat ramp in the Gladstone area. Quite a cross-section of people use it. I did an interview on radio about the need for the toilets. It was highlighted that it might be okay for fellows when they go fishing not to have toilets but the rest of us are a little disadvantaged. I know that the older ladies who go fishing will greatly appreciate that structure at Calliope River. I thank the minister for that.

The dredging of the Boyne River remains a priority. The previous Minister for Transport said in correspondence that on a cost-benefit analysis the dredging of the Boyne River did not stand up. The community's response to that has been that if there is one fatality that statement will suddenly become quite inappropriate. The most cost-effective way of doing it is to have it dredged when the dredge is doing the port. I look forward to talking with Minister Lucas in relation to that.

Policing in our region, as in all areas of the state, is critically important. Boyne-Tannum is a growing and dynamic community. It is a lovely place to live. It is on the beach. A great number of people have settled there. It does not have a 24-hour police service at the moment. The closest police station is either Gladstone or Calliope which are about 20 minutes away. The community feels greatly exposed at night. They look forward to having a 24-hour police station. During the previous Police Minister's term the station was extended to allow sufficient room for the staff. That has been very much appreciated. We need staff numbers built up to allow a more appropriate service for the number and demographic mix of people at Boyne-Tannum. There has also been an identified need for a Water Police presence and at least one dog handler in the Gladstone area to be able to cope with the mix of industry and issues that police have to deal with. I place on the record my appreciation of the police officers who do a great job, often under very trying circumstances.

Access to Awoonga Dam has been a matter of great concern to the community, particularly in the Boyne Valley. During the alliance negotiations members of the Boyne Valley were assured that they would be given another area to replace the existing picnic area that was heavily used by people from Boyne Valley, Gladstone, Calliope and elsewhere. That has not been forthcoming. I attended the meeting with the alliance when the undertaking was given.

There has also been an issue of accessing the Awoonga Dam for waterskiing other than through the ski club. Rod Page, the CEO of the Water Board, has given an assurance that these matters are being reviewed and a report will be available at the end of the financial year. In terms of the Boyne Valley residents' access to Awoonga Dam, there is only one answer and that is that the Water Board honour the undertaking given to the Boyne Valley residents in good faith. They deserve to see the realisation of that undertaking.

There are still a number of areas in the electorate that have problems with the reliability of their power supply. It is overwhelmingly because of the age of the power supply. Many areas of the state would like to see funds directed into the upgrading of the power supply to ensure as reliable a supply as possible. Overwhelmingly, those areas that are most unreliable are in the country.

The Department of State Development plays a vital role in my electorate. They oversee the Aldoga Industrial Estate. The GEIDB committee looks after that area. Residents of Targinnie have been poorly compensated for the purchases of their property. I have raised that issue before in this House. The poor valuations are well under replacement values and well under recognised property values in the region. They have been impacted on most greatly by SPP. SPP was the trigger for those purchases. SPP has now been sold to QERL. I had a meeting with Jeff Sanderfer from Sanderfer Holdings of America and several other members. They gave an outline of their proposal for the next couple of months. It sounded very responsible and very targeted. I raised the issue of the situation facing Audrey and Don, an older couple who must be treated as a priority in terms of the company finalising the purchase of their land, which is in its stage 2 development lease. Mr Sanderfer gave an undertaking that he would review that situation, and I look forward to an early response from him.

Because of the mix of industry in the electorate from aluminium refining and smelting to the production of sodium cyanide, chlorine, cement and shale oil, the potential demands on the Department of Emergency Services are great. Fire services have an acknowledged safety turnout of one in three. One in three allows for breathing apparatus to be used at any time of need. However, because of a policy that was adopted statewide in response to difficulties in the south-east corner, once seven absences a month have been reached, the turnout is one in two. This does not allow for the safe use of breathing apparatus and means that firefighters are asked to standby when they should be responding to the event or are asked to take a risk and go in with BA without the proper supervision. I call on the new minister to review that situation to ensure that the turnout is one in three except in the most extenuating circumstances. Boyne Island is looking forward to its new ambulance station, which again has been a matter of some conjecture.

The area of child safety is one that is important in all parts of this state—in fact, in this nation. I want to thank Minister Reynolds for his briefing on the new structure that he is looking at putting in place. My prayer is that the structure will be as effective as it sounds. We say that our children are the most important people to us. We have to match that with actions that will produce safe and protected results. To that end, the area of communities and disabilities needs additional staff in the electorate in the form of FSOs who bear the brunt of the work in terms of investigating notifications. Folk who work there do a brilliant job, but they are well understaffed.

There are other areas of concern and other issues to be raised, but time will not allow that. Again, I place on record my thanks to the community of Gladstone for its support and give it an undertaking that in

this three years to come I will do my best to represent its concerns to government. I will do my best to represent the government's initiatives to it, particularly where those initiatives are supportive of the community. I look forward to working with other members of this chamber to ensure that the state of Queensland can grow productively. In those areas of most sensitivity like child safety and Aboriginal safety, I hope that together we can work to ensure that those young people—both Aboriginal young people and other young people; all young people—grow up in a safe and nurturing environment.