



Speech by

PAUL HOOLIHAN

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

Hansard 18 March 2004

FIRST SPEECH

Mr HOOLIHAN (Keppel—ALP) (12.26 p.m.), who was received with government 'Hear, hears!', said: It is an honour and pleasure that I be given the opportunity to move—

That the following address be presented to the Governor in reply to the speech delivered by Her Excellency in opening this, the First Session of the 51st Parliament of Queensland—

May it please Your Excellency—

'We, the Members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland, wish to assure Your Excellency of our continued respect for the Crown and loyalty to the system of government in this State and to tender our thanks for the speech with which you opened the First Session.

The various measures to which Your Excellency referred, and all other matters that may be brought before us, will receive our careful consideration, and we shall strive to deal with them so that our endeavours may contribute to the advancement and prosperity of the people of this State.'

It is a great personal pleasure to have been accorded the honour of responding to the Governor's speech. The people of Queensland have endorsed the Beattie Labor government by returning them for an historic third term. The positive policies of the government during its first two terms, and concerns for the citizens of this great state, have been recognised as promoting and improving their quality of life, and they have responded with their support. As part of that recognition, I have been honoured by the voters of Keppel in bringing that electorate back to the Labor fold, and I will strive to live up to that honour. Over the life of the 51st Parliament, the Labor Party will have 63 members to undertake the legislative program outlined by Her Excellency in her address, and I am pleased to be one of the members charged with that responsibility. I look forward to working with this great team.

The first Labor government, and probably the shortest at seven days, anywhere in this world was formed by Anderson Dawson in Queensland in 1899, and it is hoped that Queenslanders will continue to elect well-performing Labor governments well into this and the next century. It was with some awe and a sense of history that I entered this chamber for the first time. Perhaps like Banjo Paterson's *Man from Ironbark*, I felt like a 'man of mark' but really I am more like Paterson's *Clancy of the Overflow* and have 'seen the vision splendid', not of 'the sunlit plains extended' but a vision of the obligations imposed on me in being elected to this House and the ways in which we will seek to advance society's wellbeing.

I have an historic ancestor on my mother's side who walked the halls of this parliament over the period from 1870 to 1896. He was Sir Thomas Mcllwraith, my great-great uncle. He served three terms as Premier from 1879 to 1883, 1888 and 1893. He annexed New Guinea for Queensland in 1883 and was made to relinquish it by Britain, who later had to recover it from Germany by force of arms. He was a visionary who tried to build a railway from Charleville to the gulf as part of a transcontinental rail. He failed through lack of funds in the 1890s. I hope I can show the same dedication to parliament and to this state as he did. His memory lives on in an engineering prize bestowed each year by the University of Queensland.

I come to this House after a background of service in communities across the state. I am a baby boomer, one of four children born in Longreach into a shearing family, of which I am immensely proud. My father was himself the son of a shearer. Many of his family were rural and railway workers, and each and every one of them has felt the impact of harsh government policies and attitudes. I am thankful to be part of a progressive, proactive and caring government.

To come from a working class background, as many of us have, and to reach this position by one's own hard work is a humbling experience. Coming from an Irish Catholic—more correctly, Celtic Australian—background, I was educated by the Presentation Sisters in Longreach. They always sat me in the front row, but I am not quite sure why. I think it was because I was talkative. I have now been relegated to the back row, and I hope it is for the same reason. Over the next three years I guess I will find out.

I commenced work at 15 in the old PMG. The old red bike in the summer heat was my penance. Then I joined the Magistrates Court service—thankfully, they had airconditioned offices—where I worked for 16 years in places such as Townsville, Mount Isa, Mitchell, Brisbane and various north and central Queensland communities, and had a year in Barcaldine working for Suncorp Insurance. During my early working years I also served seven and a half years with the Army Reserve owing to national service commitments. That was a Liberal Party approach.

I have worked as a solicitor in North Rockhampton for 24 years and have represented a wide variety of persons whose problems have made me aware of the difficulties which confront our society. My recreational pursuits of amateur theatre and rugby refereeing have also contributed to the person I have become. I am also president of the CQU Norths Chargers Rugby League Club in Rockhampton, which brings me into contact with a diverse and colourful group of people of all races and walks of life.

A love of the arts, especially Australian poetry, and sport has also given me contact with a wide spectrum of people who have helped shaped my knowledge of society in general. It has also given me a good insight into mainstream society. During my work in the court and legal system, working within community organisations, I have encountered a great many of the problems with which our society and this parliament must deal. The problems caused by alcohol, domestic violence, homelessness, crime and insufficient society support for our less well off have all been part of my working life. It seems that, although much has changed, more work is needed. I hope I am now in a better position to help people who have suffered through those problems.

My election not only resulted from my own work but is a tribute to a large band of supporters and friends who worked hard to help me get here. They come from all walks of life and are not all Labor supporters. In fact, some of my closest friends have never been Labor supporters but continue to provide their friendship, which I see as a personal endorsement of me and my ideals.

Firstly, I pay tribute to my parents, whose love and caring gave me a good education and upbringing, which I trust has shown through in my life and personal achievements, of which my election is the zenith. It saddens me that they are unable to be here today owing to ill health. My mother has one of my posters up in their room and tells everyone who will listen of my achievements. Some important family members are present to represent them as my election is also part of their pride in family.

My children and stepchildren, including even one in London, were my greatest cheer squad. My wife, Elizabeth, also deserves much credit for her love and support. She was there during the highs and lows, and when things did not seem to be working out, provided a quiet, steady shoulder to lean on. To my dedicated team, guided by Sophia and headed by Tony and Thelma, I say a great big thankyou. All candidates should have supporters like my family, of which there are many, the Murphy family who are all friends and strong supporters, Labor Party office staff, Emu Park and North Rockhampton party branches, and other good friends of long standing who were there not only for this campaign but, like me, started in 2000.

I acknowledge my long friendship and professional interaction with my parliamentary colleagues, the Hon. Robert Schwarten, member for Rockhampton and Minister for Public Works, Housing and Racing, who was always there when guidance was needed, and the quiet support of Jim Pearce, the member for Fitzroy, who has also assisted my campaign. To both of those colleagues I also say a heartfelt thankyou. I also thank those other parliamentary colleagues who were always very quick to lend support and assistance, and still are.

The electorate of Keppel was first created in 1912 when it was held by James Larcombe, who became the longest serving member of this House. The boundaries of the electorate have varied since that time and the seat did not exist under the name for 32 years from 1960 to 1992. For the 60 years during which it did exist, its people were represented by Labor for approximately 43 years, plus a further three years as Broadsound when held by Jim Pearce. It is my intention to meet the challenges and work hard for the benefit of all people right across the electorate and hope to continue its representation by a dedicated Labor member.

Keppel is a seat of differences. It has a large urban area in North Rockhampton where the problems of cities arise, a large seaside tourist and residential area, and a rural area separating urban and seaside areas. The residents of all of those areas are interdependent, as they are with Rockhampton, Gracemere and throughout the Capricorn region, and range from the well off to those less well off and the battlers. It has suffered from the closure of a meatworks as a major employer and experienced other economic problems, but all people have remained steadfast and worked to maintain

their community. Hopefully, by my hard work and with the cooperation of the electorate, we can continue to improve our region and to have our major employer reopen and other benefits flow from this government.

The government has already shown its intention to continue listening and consulting with the community by holding a community cabinet meeting in Yeppoon. Our citizens have benefited from 69 such meetings since 1998, and the details received from the community can only be of assistance in carrying out our legislative program. It is a big thankyou to Premier Peter Beattie and his cabinet for this inclusive style of government.

We need to position Queensland for the 21st century, and it will be not only our fellow citizens who benefit from our deliberations but our own children and grandchildren. This Smart State should power ahead with positive policies such as those set out by our government. Advances in medicine, education and technology coupled with world-class emergency services, improved educational opportunities, industrial and trade strategies for the creation of jobs and job opportunities will be fully supported by those policies.

I have a strong commitment to social justice and believe that our less well off and those suffering from social problems caused by violence, alcohol, physical and sexual abuse will be helped by the programs proposed. Children and older Queenslanders will be especially catered for. Our environment and physical welfare will be advanced by our land, water and transport programs, and this government's continuing support for increased police numbers and operational capacity gives Australia personal security which does not exist in many parts of our world.

We as a state and part of the Australian Commonwealth have much to offer this nation. Many people come to Queensland because of its good government, not to mention the lifestyle and economic benefits if you work hard. We as a parliament must and will provide leadership and remain focused on our obligations to our people, and I will work with the committed team in this House and to the best of my ability to represent the people of Keppel and the people of Queensland while I remain an elected representative of those people.

Once again, I thank my family and my team for their hard work and dedication and assure the voters who elected me that I will give my very best to representing the whole of an electorate which covers some of the loveliest areas in Queensland, of which we can all be justifiably proud.