



Speech by

Mr Michael Caltabiano

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Hansard Thursday, 29 September 2005

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr CALTABIANO (Chatsworth—Lib) (2.30 pm): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I appreciate the relaxation of the standing orders of the House. Today is a great day in the history of the Liberal Party in Queensland. Today we acknowledge the by-election results conducted on 20 August 2005. The people of Chatsworth and Redcliffe delivered by-election victories for the Liberal Party over the Labor Party for only the fourth and fifth time respectively in the past 55 years of parliamentary democracy here in Queensland.

It is with a sense of pride and achievement that I rise in this place to deliver my maiden speech. My journey to state parliament began nine years ago with my election to the Brisbane City Council. I have enjoyed great support from the residents of the Chandler ward on this journey in addition to the immense support of my family and members of the Liberal Party. As the newly elected member for Chatsworth, I pledge to always do my best to faithfully represent all of my constituents, their ambitions and their aspirations in this place.

The electorate of Chatsworth is a slice of Brisbane that has many similar features to other electorates in and around the middle suburbs of Brisbane. A significant difference, though, is the average number of people who speak Chinese, Greek or Italian at home—approximately double the state average. The seat was created in 1959 out of the seats of Mount Gravatt and Coorparoo and covers the eastern suburbs of Belmont, Carina, Camp Hill, Carina Heights, Carindale, Capalaba West, Chandler, Gumdale, Ransome, Wakerley, Manly West and Tingalpa. There are some wonderful natural features and sporting facilities in the electorate—Mount Petrie, Pine Mountain, Whites Hill and Bulimba Creek to name a few. Those features provide the community with great recreational opportunities as well as sustainability for flora and fauna. In the position of councillor for the ward of Chandler, the enhancement and protection of the national environment was one of my key priorities. This commitment I will continue in my new role in this place. The Sleeman Sports Complex at Chandler and the Belmont Rifle Range complex are sporting facilities of a national and international standard and deserve

special mention as they are major contributors to the lives of so many people from Brisbane and across Queensland.

The first member for Chatsworth was the Hon. Sir Thomas Hiley, Treasurer and minister for housing, who served from 1960 to 1966. In his maiden speech he said—

It is the duty of His Majesty's opposition in this House to assist in the passage of legislation that comes before us for consideration. It has the duty to question it and it has the duty to criticise and through the exercise of those duties to guard against malpractices and abuses.

Those were wise words at the time and equally significant today. Sir Thomas Hiley was succeeded by the Hon. Bill Hewitt, minister for environment, valuation and administrative services, who served from 1966 to 1977. Today Bill lives just outside the new Chatsworth boundaries. I thank Bill for his assistance with the by-election campaign. Bill is a life member of the Liberal Party and still plays an active role in our community. The third member, until his recent resignation, was the Hon. Terry Mackenroth, Deputy Premier and Treasurer, who served from 1977 to 2005.

On 20 August, after almost 28 years of being held by the Labor Party, Chatsworth is again a Liberal seat. I am honoured to be elected to be the fourth member for that seat. The people of Chatsworth made a firm, clear and historic decision. Their decision was not based on the electorate-specific issues of the day; their decision was based on the performance of this government since 1998. In the past 18 months, it was not possible to cause the public health system to go into meltdown, as the Premier described it. Eight years of this government were required to achieve that feat. It is not possible for this government to describe removing asbestos in schools as a low priority without stating to the electorate that it has the wrong priorities.

With a growing population in south-east Queensland, this government has not provided the necessary infrastructure to support Queenslanders. There has been no physical start to the long-awaited duplication of the Gateway Arterial road. Local and regional communities will be waiting at least another six years for this project to start to alleviate the existing congestion. If local residents believe that congestion is intolerable now, in six years time they will be unable to move on this motorway. It is interesting to note that, when the Gateway Bridge and motorway were built, it cost \$240 million. The revenue collected from this tollway has now exceeded \$650 million, yet we still do not see the start of the new road or the bridge. The 30 million trips taken each year over the Gateway Bridge yield a revenue in excess of \$65 million per year and the road is at capacity today.

As a civil engineer, I have a personal and keen interest in the physical development needs of Queensland. One of the great tragedies in the past eight years has been the lack of infrastructure development in Queensland. How many lineal metres of new rail track on new and emerging routes should a growing state be building per year to service our community? People might say 100 kilometres, perhaps 200 kilometres a year. How many kilometres should this state government have built over the past eight years? The actual performance is astonishing. All Queenslanders should know that, after eight years of Labor government, zero kilometres of new rail track on new rail lines to support our residential communities has been built. With a growing population, in the past eight years there has been only 24.8 kilometres of duplicated rail track built to support Queenslanders—a total increase in the network of 0.2 per cent. I look forward to pursuing this and other pressing transport issues in the months and years ahead.

It is extremely worth while to analyse the capital expenditure as a percentage of the total state budget as a measure of this government's performance. In 1985 the state

government spent 48 per cent of the budget on capital works. In 1990 that figure had dipped to 25 per cent. However, the lowest ebb in more than 20 years was in 2003 under this government: an appalling figure of only 23 per cent. In fact, to put the past 20 years into perspective, this government has delivered five of the lowest 10 capital spending budgets as a proportion of the total budget. With this record of performance, is it any wonder that the fastest growing state in the nation is suffering from congestion on its roads, hospitals in crisis and a power system that cannot provide a reliable electricity supply to the people. With rapid population growth over the past eight years, emergency services have struggled to keep up. New ambulance, police and fire stations that should have been built years ago still have not been started. It is because of eight years of neglect of our community needs that the people of Chatsworth voted against the Premier and against this government on 20 August.

On 11 August in this place the Premier tried to define, for the people of Queensland and his government, the biggest issue for the Chatsworth by-election as being the unwritten and as yet not presented federal legislation on industrial relations. On that day in parliament the Premier said—

The people of Chatsworth and Redcliffe do not have to agree with me or the government. They can vote down my candidates, the government's candidates, the party's candidates, and we can lose ... I am making it an issue in the by-elections, with the support of my colleagues, because I think that the people should have a say. It is very simple. Is that not what democracy is all about? ... They have a chance to send a very clear message to John Howard and to the Liberal Party. Bear in mind that the candidate for Chatsworth, Michael Caltabiano, is the president of the Queensland Liberals. You could not have a better person to send a message to.

What message did the electorate send to this government with one of the largest by-election swings in Queensland's history? The defeat of the Labor Party in a seat it has held for more than 27 years is a significant message about the future. There are 35 other Labor seats across Queensland on a smaller margin than that in Chatsworth.

The Chatsworth community is concerned about its future and it has asked me to represent their concerns in this place. This is a responsibility I take seriously and a responsibility I will not shirk. It is not possible to have arrived here without the support of so many people. I formally take this opportunity to thank the people of Chatsworth for giving me their support and their trust to represent them. I commit to represent all the residents of Chatsworth to the very best of my ability and to bring their concerns to the fore for debate and resolution.

Without the support of my family I could not have been an elected representative. To my wonderful wife, Andrea, and daughters, Elysia and Rhian, thank you for your love, patience and understanding which has enabled me to follow my passion to be in this place. My parents, Brenda and Sam, have been towers of strength throughout my life and are here today to support me. Ken and Carol, Andrea's parents, have also played a significant role in supporting us.

I thank the Prime Minister for his personal involvement and support with these two by-elections. Senator Santo Santoro provided tremendous assistance that allowed me to communicate the message to the electorate, and I thank him sincerely for his untiring efforts and support of the Liberal Party in Queensland. The Liberal Party state director, Geoffrey Green, and the staff at Liberal Party House are to be congratulated for their outstanding management of the campaign.

I would like to wholeheartedly thank my dedicated, hardworking campaign team. There have been so many local members and supporters of the Liberal Party who contributed to our success on 20 August, and today I can only name a few. David and

Anne Cusack, Kevin and Kay Whitmee, Richard Craig, and Betty and Laurie Robinson have all been there from the start of my elected career nine years ago, and I greatly appreciate their tireless efforts over all these years. The assistance of Andrew Hatfield, Michael Hart, Jane Hawkins, Kathi and Warwick Parer, Laurie Horton, Janet Killer, Alysa Isobel, Rus Egan, Julie MacIntosh, Steve Hill, John Connor, Coral Franklin, Carolyn Taylor, Adrian Schrunner and the Young Liberal Movement has been great. Without the dedication of volunteers, people with a passion for making a better government here in Queensland, I would not be standing in this place here today.

The constant support of my parliamentary colleagues—particularly the Leader of the Liberal Party, Bob Quinn, and the Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party, Bruce Flegg, who, together with John-Paul Langbroek, visited the electorate during the campaign—was very much appreciated.

I stand by the values of the Liberal Party and will use them to guide my decision making in this place. Respect and support for families are principles that are important to me. Families are the core of our society and one of our key roles is to ensure that everything we do in this place reinforces the strength and security of Queensland families. Freedom of association, freedom for individuals to work and a freedom to create wealth and opportunity should be part of a future Queensland that I want to be part of. I was born in Townsville and raised in Cairns and Mackay. I am a product of the state school system and I was fortunate to have a loving family to provide me with the opportunities to pursue my sporting and academic interests. This was achieved through sacrifice and hard work on my parents' behalf. These lessons of hard work were passed down from my grandparents—one a cane farmer who carved out a future for his children and instilled a passion for hard work; the other a wharfie, living a physical demanding job to allow his children to have the opportunities of a full secondary and tertiary education. The work ethic I have carried through my life is a direct result of my home environment. My parents allowed me to make decisions and to pursue interests and passions with a clear guiding hand to avoid wherever possible the potholes in the road of life.

Nurturing ambition is necessary, for without it mediocrity would rule and our state would stagnate. Without the individuals who strive to succeed with the ambition and drive to do better for themselves, their families, their companies and the work force—indeed, our society—would not be as well off as we are today. Encouraging people to excel and providing the environment for this to occur should be one of the roles of any state government. The lessons we learn in life do have a big impact on our success or otherwise in life's pursuits. Our ultimate success in life, though, is in our own hands. A strong sense of personal responsibility for the decisions we take and the consequence of our actions cannot be shirked. We are all individually responsible for the choices that we make in life.

In my working life I have enjoyed, as a professional engineer, designing and building roads in the state sector and the private sector, undertaking tertiary studies overseas and working across Australia and internationally before taking on the role of an elected representative in the City of Brisbane in 1996. During the early part of my career as a professional engineer I thoroughly enjoyed the sense of achievement in completing a new road project, building a team of people to work together to deliver a piece of new public infrastructure. I am truly grateful to my mentors in the workplace who took the time and showed the interest in developing my skills, skills applied in all facets of my life.

As a councillor in Brisbane, creating new opportunities for local residents to have a say about the development of their local community was an essential component of my

everyday life. I enjoyed the opportunity to work for the local community and deliver those improvements for local families. I will maintain an active interest in the delivery of better local facilities for families.

It is the desire to work with the local community and provide a lightning rod for their concerns that drives me every day to work harder and do better. The people of Chatsworth have in their state member someone who will strive every day to deliver improvements for our area. The challenges we face as a city and a state are enormous if we are to maintain the quality of life our parents enjoyed and are able to pass on those benefits of our toil to our children. These challenges are the same for the residents in the electorate of Chatsworth as they are for all other residents, particularly of the south-east Queensland corner. Everyone strives to succeed so their children might enjoy a better life.

Before we can look into the future we have some enormous problems that must be addressed now. Removing asbestos out of our local schools to keep our children and teachers safe is a project that I am personally committed to pursuing. It is unacceptable to have roofs in primary schools in the Chatsworth electorate that are in a fair condition, have not been inspected for more than three years and are desperately in need of replacing. Every day is a day too long for local families to have their children exposed to this health menace.

The development of emergency service facilities for our growing communities has simply been non-existent in the south-eastern suburbs of Brisbane. Putting families' lives at risk must come to an end. As new communities are established, the provision of state services must keep up. It is surely one of the primary responsibilities of a state government to ensure a local community's safety. As a resident of one of those developing communities, I am acutely aware of the deep concerns of local residents in the Chatsworth electorate.

Building the basic infrastructure that services the daily needs of a growing community is essential. Things such as our arterial road networks, train services, the provision of power and water, and the capacity to keep our communities safe from crime are the highest priorities for any good government. These areas are all major failings of the current government over the past eight years. It is not only time for some catchup but also time for a change of government.

There are many aspects to the development of a better future that we must start discussing now and engage the community in debate. The Queensland community has not been engaged in determining how together we might be able to meet and conquer the challenges for the future. The population increase projected for Queensland over the next 30 years will see our state grow to the second largest in the Commonwealth. The infrastructure that needed to be put in place over the past eight years would have provided the backbone for the management of this future growth. It is very sad to reflect on the missed opportunities over the past few years, including chronic underspending on the infrastructure to support a growing state like Queensland.

The old adage of build it and they will come does not apply in this state anymore. They are coming anyway, so not building the infrastructure only serves to reduce the quality of life for all current and future residents. The challenge of the late nineties and early 2000 years was to do the planning and commence the construction of state infrastructure to support our growing community. The lost opportunity of the past eight

years is lamentable. So inwardly focused on saying, 'I'm sorry. I promise I'll fix it,' has robbed all Queenslanders of a better today and a brighter tomorrow.

It is truly time for some clear, articulate vision for our state. I will play my part in the development and delivery of that new vision for Queensland. We must have a state where people can get around their suburbs, across their cities and around the state on a road and rail system that is modern, safe and reliable; a state where our children have facilities in their schools that positively contribute to a learning environment, taught by qualified teachers using a curriculum that reflects the essential components of today's society, allowing them to compete with the best not only in Australia but also in the world; a state where the essential services required to sustain a community are in place and guaranteed into the future.

Water storage facilities, energy generation and distribution and a capacity to protect our community from threat must be the envy of the rest of Australia. When members of our community need care there will be first-class hospitals, emergency clinics and 24-hour day surgeries in the suburbs—all staffed by qualified professionals delivering first-rate care to our fellow Queenslanders. Providing a hand up to those less fortunate than us to encourage and nurture them rather than a hand out enshrining disadvantage will be part of the Queensland of tomorrow.

I come to parliament with a burning desire to improve the quality of life for the people of Chatsworth. I want to have a go. I want to use the God-given talents that I have and bring the skills that I have developed through life and use my best abilities to work on behalf of the people of Chatsworth and Queensland. I commit myself to doing the hard work around the House. I commit myself to the right priorities for Chatsworth and Queensland.