



Speech by

Dr Alex Douglas

MEMBER FOR GAVEN

Hansard Thursday, 20 April 2006

MAIDEN SPEECH

Dr DOUGLAS (Gaven—NPA) (2.30 pm): I am very honoured and humbled to stand before this parliament today as the newly elected member for Gaven. It is a privilege to be supported by so many people in the Gold Coast Hinterland community and to represent them. I would like to thank my family and friends for believing in me and for their unerring support.

As I stand before this House I am reminded of the maiden speech by Dame Annabelle Rankin. She was a National Party member and the first female member of parliament to be elected to the Senate. In her maiden speech she highlighted the fact that every time she cast a vote it was like a ripple on the surface of a pond and like that ripple the effect would spread through the community. Like Dame Annabelle, I will take the responsibility for each vote, weigh it in my conscience and consider its ramifications for the community at large.

The seat is named after the long-serving Queensland MLA from the Gold Coast Eric John Gaven, a Country Party member. He represented the seats of Southport and South Coast from 1950 to 1966. Gaven is an area of five interlinked communities, separated by a forest, bordered by two major rivers—the Coomera and the Nerang. It is a truly beautiful area. Nerang is the gateway to the hinterland and is an historic community, one of the foundation communities of Queensland, and dates back to 1820. Oxenford, Helensvale, Maudsland and the Gaven Way are very important key communities built around major families who have contributed so much to Queensland and Australia's heritage.

I intend to commit myself to representing all of the people of the electorate of Gaven. I will undertake to listen to the community. I will be their voice in parliament. We as a community have been neglected in Gaven despite it being the fastest growing area in Australia. Our needs are great and our current resources are few. Under my representation I intend to change this situation through effective and positive representation.

I am committed to restoring health services, better roads and transport, ensuring a safer community, creating opportunities for our children, improving our overall way of life and providing a strong commitment to serving the Gaven electorate. I intend to build Gaven as a total community, spiritually as well as physically, and, at the same time, recognise the individuality of each community in the electorate.

I am both a traditionalist and a realist. My motive for joining parliament was quite simple. I had experienced enough of talking, negotiation, being blocked, being fed a diet of motherhood statements and being told to patiently wait for change. My main concern was that my patients and their families were being increasingly denied services they needed because the current Labor government has failed to understand and listen to their needs. I felt that I was compelled to act and go through the democratic electoral process so that I could advocate for change for the community.

I am the principal of a group family general practice and have been in Nerang for 19 years looking after the needs of the wider Gaven area and surrounding districts. There are many new families who have come into the area. At some stage I would have had contact with the majority of them. I believe that I am very aware of their deepest concerns and needs.

I was educated in Brisbane at St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace, and completed six years of undergraduate medicine at the University of Queensland. I did nine years of postgraduate study and have worked for Queensland Health for 25 years in a variety of positions in hospitals, prisons and public health. I have either been a full-time or part-time visiting medical officer for Queensland Health in that time.

I have represented general practice in all sorts of associations, divisions and faculty groupings at all levels. I have taught students from undergraduates to postgraduates. I have been a GP accreditation review doctor since the inception of accreditation. I have a deep understanding of health—its systems, manpower needs, training and standards of practice. I feel it strongly needs to be said that if someone such as me enters parliament driven by the continuing current crisis in health then this Labor government is denying reality and it is denying the people of Queensland open and accountable government if it does not realise the legitimacy of their voice.

The United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was introduced by Mrs Roosevelt in 1948, included the following provision—

The State has a duty to maintain, or to ensure that there are maintained, comprehensive arrangements for the promotion of health, for the prevention of sickness and accident, and for the provision of medical care and for compensation for loss of livelihood.

This Labor government has failed to meet this very basic human rights obligation and it has constantly failed to address the needs of the wider community and the individuals at large. The current Labor government proposes to address problems that it has had eight years to supposedly fix and involving proposed grand schemes that will take five to 10 years. They may be proven to be of little or no benefit to the immediate needs of Gaven and the state of Queensland.

Overwhelmingly families in Gaven need to be assured that our regional Gold Coast Hospital remains a place of first and last refuge. The hospital needs be resourced appropriately. It needs to be allowed to pursue excellence. All staff need to be equally rewarded, not politicised nor bullied nor demoralised. The people of Gaven have asked for a person to champion their concerns, particularly on this issue.

I believe Condoleezza Rice has a simple statement on her desk that says, 'Blame no-one, say something, do something.' There will always be excuses for avoiding controversy and neglecting issues that will upset some people. I intend to be never one of these people who just offers excuses and apologies.

My family has had a strong tradition of public service in Queensland over the last 150 years. We believe in standing up and taking positions that are often at odds with the views of the prevailing government. My great-grandfather was John Douglas MLA, who was Premier from 1877 to 1879. My grandfather, Henry Douglas MLA, was the member for Cook from 1907 to 1915. My great-grandfather, TC Beirne, was a leading businessman in Queensland. The two families interlinked have provided Queensland with many judges, doctors, teachers and politicians. My mother's two brothers were senior surgeons and major hospital superintendents for Queensland Health for many many years.

My uncle, Dr Michael O'Rourke, is the former chair of the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. My parents, Alex and Morna, had five sons. I am the third son. They instilled in us a strong commitment to public service and a willingness to stand up for what is right. My own children Caroline, Alexander, John and Helen have the same values. I thank them for their support. They are here today with my parents. I have no expectations other than for them to be happy. They should love one another, set a good example and teach others to contribute equally to society. These are values I believe the people of Gaven share and want imparted to their own children.

To my wife, Susie Douglas, councillor for Surfers Paradise—and who is currently weathering significant challenges—I would like to thank you so much for your support and wisdom. To my extended family, I would also like to thank you for your support.

I now turn to the campaign committee. I would also like to thank the following individuals: the chair of our committee, Gordon French; Bruce and Muriel Duncan; Geoff Green; Brad Henderson; the National Party chairs, Bruce Scott, who is here today, and Warwick Parer. A coalition campaign to wrest a Labor seat on the Gold Coast over to our side is an historic event and reflects a terrific team effort. To all those who volunteered huge amounts of their personal time and contributed to assisting in the menial tasks that come with every campaign, I would like to say thank you. To the magnificent blue team who assisted on polling day, I thank each and every one of you very dearly.

My electoral success and, ultimately, the success of and the benefit for the people of Gaven were greatly assisted by all of those people. Our campaign in Gaven mirrored both the needs and concerns of the electorate and spoke to the values that I believe in and which many individuals within the electorate asked me to pursue. Those values included largely avoiding any negative criticism and addressing the problems, and proposing solutions to those problems, that face the people in Gaven.

The Labor government reacted to the values that I espoused and promised \$55 million to the community of Gaven in direct moneys for schools, school resources, roads and a new—beyond the

\$55 million—\$1 billion hospital which I believe, based on current costings, is a 500-bed hospital. This Labor government promised my electorate, as part of its campaign, a new ambulance station for Nerang. I intend to hold the government to its promise.

My electorate also desperately needs a new fire station. I intend to deliver on this need by advocating for it to the government and holding it accountable. The police in the Gaven electorate are desperately understaffed and underresourced. My electorate urgently needs a new 24-hour police station in Helensvale. Again, I am committed to ensuring that these essential, basic community service needs are met.

A major road noise issue exists in the Helensvale/Studio Village to Nerang section of the motorway. It is a health hazard. It needs to be corrected urgently. Local residents are suffering from Labor government inaction and sound protective resurfacing and fencing of a new type is required for the motorway. Again, I intend to see that this need is met and addressed by this Labor government.

The forest that separates the five communities in the Gaven electorate is precious to all. I am concerned that this Labor government has not sought to act in a proactive manner to deal with access to the forest in the future. Statements by the minister for the environment have only compounded these concerns and have not allayed any of my electorate's fears.

The proposal to build a shipping terminal on public open space on the Gold Coast Spit is viewed with horror by the majority of people in my community. I undertake to give a commitment to actively discourage any development on it whatsoever.

People will often state that they believe in democracy, but in reality they do not practise it. They say that they believe that everyone deserves to have their say, but deny that they heard the sentiments that they do not personally share. It is these same people who say they value the individual, but they reward only those who share that similar view.

I have had the great privilege to listen to people and patients one-on-one throughout my career. That has taught me to listen carefully. Often the answers that you seek to your deepest problems can be found by organising those seemingly unrelated pieces of information. Exclude the noise and the diagnosis appears.

The message that the Gaven electorate has delivered to this Labor government is: criticise us and you make us stronger. Do not listen to us and you sow the seeds of your own destruction.

It is with humble pride that I take my place as the member for Gaven on behalf of a diverse and rapidly expanding electorate. I sincerely thank my constituents for their trust in me. I solemnly swear that I will not betray them. I will strive to serve them and proudly represent them.