



Speech by
Jeff Seeney

MEMBER FOR CALLIDE

Hansard Wednesday, 21 February 2007

MOTION: BEATTIE LABOR GOVERNMENT

Mr SEENEY (Callide—NPA) (Leader of the Opposition) (5.31 pm): I am going to move a motion that is slightly different from my notice of motion this morning. For the information of members, I inform the House that, after discussions with the Clerk, I have agreed to amend the motion slightly to take account of the ruling the Speaker has given. I move—

That this House calls on the Beattie government to focus on delivering the infrastructure and services needed to address—

- the water crisis;
- the long-running health crisis;
- and the infrastructure crisis;

rather than focusing on diversions and distractions aimed at diverting attention from these crises and the string of high-profile court cases.

It is somewhat regretful that the debate in recent times not just in this parliament but in the public domain has not focused on the issues that are important to the people of Queensland. The issues that impact on the people of Queensland, wherever they might live in our state, are not the ones that have been at the centre of the political debate in this House, in the general media and in public debating forums.

I believe the issues I have listed in the motion have been around for awhile. They are issues that are a direct result of the mismanagement of the Beattie government. They are issues that have been building for a long time, and they are certainly issues that will take a long time to solve. They are the issues that this government should be focusing on. They are the issues that should be the focus of political debate and political discussion. They are the issues that all of us who seek to represent our constituents in the political debates both in this place and in public debates should focus on.

One such issue is the water crisis, and my colleagues will deal with that in some detail. That issue is affecting people here in south-east Queensland who have seen their property values fall as the gardens and landscaping that they put so much work into fade away and die. That issue is affecting people who carry around buckets of water to try to keep their gardens and pot plants alive. That issue is directly affecting businesses, especially those in the nursery and horticultural area which have had to put off staff and wind their businesses back. Those effects are going to get greater.

Unfortunately, what we are seeing now is only the tip of the iceberg. As we get further and further into our traditional wet season, if we do not get that rain that we are all hoping for, this crisis will get worse. It is a crisis that cannot be fixed overnight. It is a crisis that requires the construction of major infrastructure that the government should have started building years ago. The government should have started building that infrastructure years ago when we were urging them to build it, when we were getting ridiculed for it. Now that infrastructure has to be built in a panic and a rush. We should be focusing on making sure that everything is done to ensure that infrastructure is delivered. The minister answered a couple of questions in parliament this week, and it is clear from those answers that there is not even any real indication of how well those projects are progressing.

There is also a long-running health crisis. If you were an outsider to the Queensland community listening to the public debate, you could be forgiven for thinking the health crisis has gone away. No doubt

the political operatives in the government hope it has gone away, but those of us who sit in our electorate offices and deal with our constituents and the issues that affect them and their families know only too well that the health crisis is every bit as bad now as it was 12 months ago. The impact on people is every bit as severe now as it was 12 months ago. If there is any progress being made, it is infinitesimally small compared to the size of the problem.

They are the issues we should be debating. They are the issues the government should be focusing on. We have not heard anything this week in parliament from this government about its so-called Health Action Plan that got so much airtime during the election campaign. During the election campaign, Peter Beattie talked endlessly about his Health Action Plan and his water grid but it has to be more than words, it has to be more than glib labels. There has to be a focus from this government to ensure we get some real action and real concrete results to address these crises.

The other crisis is what I have called the general infrastructure crisis. It is reflected right across a whole range of government services and right across a whole range of our communities. The most visible feature of that infrastructure crisis is the increasing traffic problems that all of us endure, no matter where we live. The impact of that increasing traffic volume on a road system that has had no significant money spent on it for so long is another crisis that will envelop people across Queensland wherever they live.

Rather than focusing on finding resolutions to these difficult issues that have been simply brought about by the government's own mismanagement, we have instead had a series of diversions and distractions that have got sillier and sillier and sillier as the weeks have gone on. There is no doubt that it is politically opportune for the government to try to distract attention away from these issues and ensure that the media outlets focus on something else other than these particular crises and those string of high-profile court cases that I have referred to in the motion but out of respect for your rulings, Mr Speaker, I will not list. But we all know what they are, and we all know that the revelations from those court cases are embarrassing for the government. The government's intention has been to try to distract attention away and come up with all these other nonsensical things that will somehow keep the public and the media busy so that people will somehow forget about the issues that the government should be ashamed and embarrassed about.

There are a couple of notable examples that some of the other speakers in this debate will talk about. First of all there was the North Bank proposal. What a nonsense approach by the government to come out with a proposal that the Premier himself did not even know whether he supported. It came out with a cardboard model that was designed to provoke debate. It was designed to provoke an argument.

Ms Bligh interjected.

Mr SEENEY: Whatever money was spent on it was wasted irrespective of what the model was made of. The Premier went so far as to say that he wanted all ministers to express their own points of view. 'Get out there and start an argument,' he said. 'Get out there and start a debate. Get out there and get people talking about it. We want people to be arguing about whether we should build high-rises in the Brisbane River. We do not want them talking about the water crisis. We do not want them talking about the health crisis. We do not want them talking about the fact that we cannot drive anywhere because of the traffic. Get out there and have a debate about whether we should fill in the Brisbane River and build high-rises,' he said. What a ludicrous approach to government in this state!

But of course the grand-daddy of all diversions was the Premier's sudden conversion to the Bradfield Scheme. It should be called the Beattie scheme. What hypocrisy and what a cruel hoax on those people who have waited 20 years for governments in this state to build some water infrastructure. What a cruel hoax for those people in north Queensland whom the minister over there likes to make fun of and take for granted; those people between Hughenden and Richmond who have long pinned their hopes on things like the Bradfield Scheme.

Of course the Premier and the government have no intention of proceeding with those projects. All they wanted to do was create a distraction. They need bigger and bigger distractions all the time. They needed something to create an argument. It is an absolute misuse of this parliament and the political positions that they hold to use those issues in that way. If nothing else, it raises false hope for those people who want to see those projects progress and who have waited for so long for water infrastructure to be built.

It is a measure of the government's shame and embarrassment that this type of nonsense has been deliberately introduced into the political debate. The government should be ashamed and embarrassed. It should run for cover and hope that people will look and talk about something else.