



Speech by

## Vaughan Johnson

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

Hansard Tuesday, 6 February 2007

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### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

**Mr JOHNSON** (Gregory—NPA) (3.21 pm): As one of the previous speakers said, it seems a lifetime since we witnessed the last state election in September 2006. So in rising to speak to the address-in-reply debate today, I convey to you, Mr Speaker, my best wishes as you hold that high authority of Speaker in this parliament. I wish you well in your deliberations. I know full well it is not an easy position to uphold, but I respect the position that you have and I trust that you will have a very successful reign as Speaker of this parliament.

I wish to pay tribute here this afternoon to Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland, Quentin Bryce, in her delivery of her message at the opening of parliament. As the member for Nudgee said, this woman always presents herself with absolute dignity. I think she is a lady that Queensland can be fiercely proud of. I also pay tribute to her husband who supports her very ably, Mr Michael Bryce.

I also wish to pay tribute to the electors of the electorate of Gregory for returning me for another term in this parliament. I have just served 17 years here, and I find it an absolute honour to serve the people of this very diversified remote electorate in far-western Queensland. It is an electorate that is made up of very resilient people. It is a very resilient country. Whilst we suffer the hardships of droughts, fire, famine and the tyranny of distance, I think it is something in the make-up of our culture and heritage that we are fiercely proud of. I know, Mr Deputy Speaker Hoolihan, you are a product of that country and you can understand full well what I am saying.

I also want to mention my family who have supported me over the years. These are not easy times but in an electorate like Gregory you are never home—you are away all the time. My family means a lot to me. There are always difficult occasions in representing a seat like this. I will not elaborate on that because I think there are many people in this House who know what it is like. To Robyn, Monique, Tanya and Michael, I thank them for the care they give me. I also have two sons-in-law I should add to that equation but, more importantly, four beautiful little granddaughters. But again that proves what life is all about. It is about our families regardless of where they are or who they are. I think life is about children and it is about us in this society protecting those children and making certain that they are able to go through life and enjoy the great things that we enjoy.

I also want to pay special tribute to my electorate staff. Carole Tanks in Longreach has been with me for 17 years. Carole has not enjoyed good health in recent months but she is back on duty again now and I wish her a speedy recovery to full capacity. Mark Maguire in Emerald has not been with me long but he is a young man who has taken the bit in his mouth and is doing an able job. I am also very ably supported by Sue Mitchell. To Carole, Mark and Sue, I thank them for their contribution to the people of the Gregory electorate and for their commitment and loyalty to me. It makes the job a great deal easier, I can assure you.

I also want to put on record today my sincere thanks to Mike Burns, my electorate council chairman in Emerald, and also to all the members of the party in the electorate of Gregory, especially Lenore Johnson, my campaign manager, and Peter Johnson, her husband, who are always there. These people

certainly make a difference and without the support of people such as them we cannot operate as members of parliament. They keep the machinery going.

I know that there are a lot of people in the electorate of Gregory who do not support my side of politics but who do vote for me. I heard the member for Redlands say a while ago that regardless of who votes for you you still represent those people. They are your constituents and it is absolutely paramount that they be respected as constituents and not as members of a political party as such. That is how I operate and that is how I will continue to operate.

I congratulate the new members of parliament on their election. It is a great honour. I see the member for Inala in the House today. She follows her dad, Henry Palaszczuk, who was a very honourable member of this parliament for a long time. I look at the young people in this place on both sides of the parliament and I think they are an inspiration. They add to the calibre and integrity of this place and are an indication of the way Queensland is going. I think it will be an exciting parliament as we see these people develop and hone their skills as members of parliament as we progress through this term. To all those people who are new and also to my colleagues who have been returned, I wish them all well and I congratulate them on their election to this place.

I also want to pay tribute here today to Lawrence Springborg, the former leader of the opposition, for the work that he did in that capacity. It is not an easy task. I also want to pledge my loyalty here today to Jeff Seeney and Bruce Flegg for the work they are doing in leading the coalition parties. I believe we are going to show some great strength, determination and commitment in this coming term. We are going to be not only reactive but proactive in relation to the implementation of policies that are going to be advantageous to the people of Queensland. Where the government does have good policy we will certainly be supporting that, but at the same time we will be exposing where we believe there is a flaw in government policy.

So on with the task. There are many issues in the Gregory electorate that I do want to canvass here today. It is about quality of life regardless of where we live. There are 89 electorates in Queensland and the most important factor in any of those electorates is the value of the education system that we can offer to the young people in those electorates, and the electorate of Gregory is no exception. The fact of the matter is that isolated education is in a very difficult situation and costs a lot of money, especially in remote communities. The Isolated Children's Parents Association has done an exemplary job over a long period of time in bringing about changes, working with the government of the day to make certain we have policies in place that are going to advantage children in isolated areas. I pay tribute to people like Rosemary Philp, the outgoing chair, and also the incoming president, Peter Powne. These people and their executive do a great job working with the ministers and government of the day. It is through their commitment, involvement and own personal expense that we have seen that change.

In relation to the issue of ag colleges, there are two in the electorate of Gregory, one in Emerald and one in Longreach. We have seen change there in the last couple of years. Some of that change has been negative. I will be monitoring those colleges very closely over the next 12 to 18 months to see exactly and precisely how that change can be turned around into a positive, especially with the numbers down in both of those colleges. I understand that could be applicable to the Tropical College at Burdekin and also the college at Dalby. I will speak more about that later.

In relation to the issue of biosecurity, we have witnessed over a long period of time what has happened with citrus canker in Emerald. We talk about stock inspection services and the government talks about biosecurity. Biosecurity is a very important factor, but if we do not have field personnel to monitor the biosecurity it will not work. I am talking about keeping stock inspectors at key points around the state to monitor the movement of livestock, whether they are tick infested or infected with some other disease or whether they are on legal shipment so that we can assist the Stock Squad and make certain that the pastoral industry is working in an honest, fair fashion and people are not concerned about the welfare of their stock and wondering whether they are in the paddock or someone has knocked them off.

Another issue I wish to refer to is health services. Maternity services have been a contentious issue in the major centres of Gregory for a long while, especially in Emerald. We see that getting back to some sort of a straight line at the moment. I hope it continues that way. It is absolutely paramount that we continue to see visiting specialists in centres such as Longreach, Emerald, Blackall, Barcaldine and Charleville so that we can bring a more professional service to those areas in question.

The Remote Area Planning and Development Board based in Longreach is a fantastic initiative. It is one that is bringing a lot of worth, vision and development to western Queensland under the stewardship of the CEO, David Arnold. He has done an exemplary job. Under the chairmanship of Councillor Gary Peoples from the Aramac Shire, who is the chair of those 11 remote area planning and development boards, it has certainly identified in a visionary and responsible way objectives that can improve the quality of life, development and productivity of the region in question. This has been achieved through liaison with government and their own communities to bring about that change in question. I salute them for their work.

One of the issues that came up recently was a model put forward by the Barcaldine Shire Council in relation to improving health services and bringing doctors into the region—a hub concept. While there was criticism of it, at the end of the day, when it is identified and the final analysis is sorted through, we will see good things come out of that. It is like anything we do: it is about open and constructive debate and putting the issues on the table so that we can get an outcome.

I note that in the police budget this year the minister has earmarked something like \$260 million for 20 new police stations around Queensland. I remind the minister that the Longreach Police Station is still in an absolutely deplorable mess. It is an indictment on the professionalism of police officers working out of that centre. I call on the minister to fast-track the construction of that new facility. We have a modular office in place there at the moment. It has been sitting there now for 12 months. It is still not utilised. It is a monstrosity of a thing. It is an embarrassment to the police to think that they have to use it. I can assure members that it is an embarrassment to the people of the central west to think that that is their police district office.

The other matter that I wish to touch on is the drought in Queensland. The drought has far from broken. We have had significant rain in western Queensland over recent weeks. Whilst I say in the parliament here today that that rain that has fallen in the western part of the state—especially the far west and the Diamantina and Boulia shires—has been absolutely brilliant, the point I make is that it is only relief. Do not forget that for one-half of one minute. When you get four inches in an hour like we had in Longreach that is probably the equivalent of 50 points in real terms because of the run-off factor. Places between Quilpie and Windorah have had no rain at all. Last Sunday coming to Brisbane I drove through Gayndah in the electorate of the member for Callide and there has been no rain in that country at all. Do not kid yourselves, honourable colleagues, there is certainly a drought still raging in many parts of Queensland and it will continue if we do not get follow-up rain—substantial general soaking rain—over the period of the next two or three weeks. Please God, we are going to see it right across the state. I remind the government that the drought is not broken; it is only relief.

There are water issues in western Queensland. I know that there are water problems in the south-east. The Premier has made reference today to taking off the agenda the sale of water out of the Warrego system into the Murray-Darling system. It was stated recently that the Warrego water was going to be sold off in two auctions in March in relation to the irrigation in that network. I remind members that the Warrego is not a river that runs frequently, it is not very long and it certainly will not contribute very much to the Murray-Darling system.

**Mr Hobbs:** None!

**Mr JOHNSON:** Virtually none. I take the interjection from the member for Warrego. Part of his electorate is situated on the Warrego in the Paroo shire based in Cunnamulla. The point I make is that there is a lot of homework still to be done on this and the government should certainly not be playing politics with it. This is a very serious issue. The mayor of the Murweh Shire, Mark O'Brien, has shown some great leadership in recent times in relation to this and I support him in that regard. At the end of the day we have to have deep and meaningful meetings with some of these mayors in conjunction with both sides of parliament on a bipartisan approach to get the best possible outcome for this water problem in Queensland.

The other issue I want to touch on here today is the rail freights issue in western Queensland. This is a contentious issue and one that is not going away. Places like Quilpie, Cunnamulla and Winton on the end of some of those lines are paying significant increases in rail freights, as are the people right along those service routes. Bear in mind that this is a CSO operation of Queensland Rail. It is funded by the taxpayers of this state to bring some fairness to the equation of rail freights in these areas in question. There is a CSO operation here in Queensland to subsidise the urban rail passenger network on a day-to-day basis. It is absolutely paramount that the government of the day makes certain that we see fairness and equity kept in this equation of rail freights right across Queensland. I know how handsome the revenue from the coal and mineral lines is. I know the generation of freight on that main line. Bear in mind that it is 20 per cent of the population that provide for the majority in this state and they are the 20 per cent that live outside the coastal strip. They are the ones that generate the dollars here and it is absolutely paramount that they are not crucified and put down in their endeavours to get a fair income and generate a fair income for this state.

In the short time I have left available to me, I want to touch on roads and Indigenous issues. Recently I was given by the Leader of the Opposition the responsibility of Indigenous affairs in this state. I will certainly play a responsible and proactive role in relation to Indigenous services. I will be supporting the government on Indigenous issues that will be of beneficial value to Indigenous communities. However, I put on record here today that the opposition will not be in the business of supporting the government in throwing money at Indigenous issues unless those Indigenous communities can get off their backside and show leadership, commitment and delivery of the services that the Palm Island report has brought down that can flow right across all other communities. The leadership and the responsibility of those communities has to be forthcoming from those councils. They are now under the banner of local

government. They have to show that commitment if they want to be a part of the structure of Queensland. It is not about shovelling bucketloads of money into communities and then see it going out because the alcohol management plan is not working, and we are seeing the sexual abuse of women and children in those communities because they have had a gutful of grog and they do not know what their mind is doing.

The opposition will not support that concept. I can assure members that the Leader of the Opposition did not give me this job to pay lip-service to it. I think the government should be put on notice today exactly and precisely where the opposition is coming from.

We know what is going on at the moment in relation to a certain court hearing in Queensland. Mr Deputy Speaker, if you do not get it absolutely right no young people will want to join the Police Service in Queensland, and nobody will want to go to Indigenous communities. That is the talk of the town.

The other issue I want to talk about relates to road construction and road funding. That is a very important and very contentious issue. The federal government has a very big and very important role to play in this issue. We want our fair share of the GST dollars spent on country roads so that we can see the development, productivity and support base we have out there enhanced through the productivity sector with good roads and good infrastructure. I do not say that lightly.

I put on the record today that I will be keeping the government on its toes in relation to road construction and road funding outside the south-east corner. Whilst we know that there is a developing factor in south-east Queensland, with multitudes of people coming in at the rate of 1,000 to 1,500 a week, the government wants to remember that it is out there where the tucker that they eat is coming from, where the gear is coming from that they put on their back and, at the end of the day, where the dollars are coming from that they put in their pocket every Friday to go down to the local pub. People in the south-east corner do not have to worry about whether the bullocks have got fat or whether their cows are not calving or whether their animals are bogged in a waterhole or somebody does not have a job next week.

I thank the people of the electorate of Gregory for the confidence they have shown in me. I can assure them that I will support them to the last during the next term of parliament.