




Speech by  
**Gavin King**

**MEMBER FOR CAIRNS**

Hansard Tuesday, 29 May 2012

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### MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr KING** (Cairns—LNP) (4.35 pm): Inspired by the campaign tactics of the Australian Labor Party, I will start by quoting from one of my old newspaper columns. On this occasion, however, I will endeavour to keep it in context. I wrote this particular piece while sitting in a Cairns city cafe as a community campaign was unfolding on the street outside. The campaign ‘CBD Blitz’ was aimed at revitalising our long-neglected CBD. The campaign was all about proving that people power can achieve what governments often fail to do—and that is to listen, to respond and to act to community concerns and needs.

A cross-section of the community from business owners through to artists joined forces to help kick-start the revival of our city’s heart. This particular column described the scenes I saw looking out through that window of that cafe on Grafton Street on December 2010. The column was titled ‘Cairns, take a bow’. I begin the quote at the moment politicians of all stripes started arriving at the event conveniently at the same time that the media arrived at the event—

Politicians and political hopefuls are everywhere.

...

But forget the politicians.

They need to do more than just turn up.

I don’t want to write about them.

I want to write about everyone else down here at Grafton St, who despite their differences all want the same thing: a city that is alive.

They all ascribe to different political affiliations.

...

But these are not greedy business owners or weirdo artists or unscrupulous shopkeepers or dole bludging performers.

They are Cairns.

Some of them work themselves down to the bone, hanging on by the skin of their tired fingers, just to make it through this most terrible economic downturn.

Some are national leaders in their creative fields, musicians and artists and theatre actors and classical performers.

They are the heart and soul of this city.

They are the colour, the spark, the salt of the earth and the cream of the crop.

A 30-year plan or another feasibility study or more meetings and talk ... won’t help them.

They need action, they need to be listened to.

It was while writing about this event and, indeed, participating in it that a flash of realisation hit me. I saw how desperate the people of Cairns were for action, how desperate they were to be listened to. Suddenly I was inspired to do more than just write about the problems and pontificate about possible solutions. I saw firsthand that the community was intensely passionate about our city. They were ready. They were willing to donate their time and effort to make it a great and vibrant place once again, if only just for that moment.

I also saw, without a shadow of a doubt, that they lacked the political leadership to help them achieve it. Some 18 months after I wrote those words, the people of Cairns made an historic choice. On 24 March of this year, for the first time since Federation the people of Cairns placed their trust in a non-Labor member of parliament. It is a humbling and awe-inspiring honour to be handed that trust after more than 100 years of Labor dominance in the seat of Cairns. The community made that choice after several years of the worst economic slump in the history of our city and two decades of the worst state government in Queensland's history.

Our unemployment rate across the region remains among the highest in the nation, hovering close to 10 per cent—double the state average. Our tourism industry has been battered by forces beyond its control. The construction industry is on its knees. And everywhere you look, particularly in the CBD, there are empty shops and small businesses closing down. But with a new state government and now a new regional council, there is a tangible air of hope and optimism in our city. Green shoots of economic recovery are sprouting all over Cairns. It is now my job, every single day, to help foster and support that renewed sense of hope and optimism. And every single day I will work to convert it into action and results.

To that end, we will deliver on the promises and policies we put to the people of Cairns during the campaign. We will tackle our very serious law-and-order issues with more police on the beat and tougher sentences. I will work with the community and agencies to deliver and enhance our crime action plan, released last week in partnership with my colleague from Barron River, Michael Trout. We will continue working hard in our efforts to secure direct flights between Asia and Cairns to stimulate our economy and bring confidence back to our region. We will improve marine access to Trinity Inlet to help bring more cruise ships and boost the capacity of our neglected port. We will work with the new council to deliver a long-overdue new headquarters for the SES and a Cairns campus of the Regional College for Disaster Management.

The health needs of Cairns residents—so long treated like second-class citizens, so long forced to travel to Townsville or 2,000 kilometres away to Brisbane for often basic surgery—will now be met by the new local hospital board and our \$15 million fund to attract specialists to Cairns Base Hospital. Cairns will also benefit from the building of the Institute of Tropical Health and Medicine at James Cook University. These plans and policies are but the beginning of a new era of confidence and economic growth in Cairns.

I firmly believe in the Newman government's four-pillar plan to grow the Queensland economy, because it will directly benefit Cairns and Far North Queensland. The four pillars are aligned with our region's economy, both now and into the future.

Tourism, of course, is the No. 1 driver of our economy, contributing well over \$2 billion annually to our gross regional product. I am honoured to serve as the Assistant Minister for Tourism in the first LNP government, and I am incredibly thankful for and humbled by that opportunity. In my role as Assistant Minister for Tourism I represent the tourism industry across the state, but as the member for Cairns—and with apologies to the many, many members from the Gold Coast—I firmly believe that Cairns is Queensland's premier tourism destination. I am also thankful to the Premier and tourism minister for choosing Cairns as the host city of our first DestinationQ forum, to be held on 25 and 26 June. This once-in-a-generation forum will be the start of a new conversation between industry and government and will set the course for the future direction of tourism in our state. It is just one of the early steps we are taking to achieve our goal of doubling overnight visitor expenditure by 2020.

Aviation access is the lifeblood of the Cairns tourism industry, and our government's \$8 million Attracting Aviation fund has been warmly welcomed by the industry as a long-overdue measure to stimulate aviation in Queensland. I note that Jetstar just yesterday announced a massive boost to domestic services into Cairns and the basing of up to 60 staff in our city. This is absolutely fantastic news for Cairns and yet another sign that confidence is returning to our great city.

Agriculture holds enormous potential for growth in our region, with Cairns serving as the supply hub for our nation-best produce, farmed on the Atherton Tablelands. Far North Queensland will be a key player in our government's goal to double agricultural production by 2040.

Mining can provide huge ancillary benefits to Cairns. Due to our world renowned lifestyle and our magnificent natural environment, our city has strong potential to become a fly-in fly-out destination for mineworkers and the regional base for large companies working in Papua New Guinea, the Pacific Islands and mines near Weipa.

Property and construction in Cairns goes hand in hand with the fortunes of our tourism industry. No place in Australia has been hit by the disastrous domino effect of the global financial crisis and government neglect more than Cairns. Four of our biggest multimillion dollar construction and development companies have collapsed in the past three years. This has caused untold damage and pain for hundreds of tradespeople, subcontractors and small businesses that have supplied these large construction companies. And this is reflected in our nation-high unemployment rate. Our government's property and construction strategy contains practical measures to help revive our building industry once again, and our government's broader plans to ease the cost of living for families and to cut red tape and waste will also

help the Cairns economy enormously. I am proud to be part of a government that takes its hands out of the cash registers of small businesses and instead allows them to get on with the job that they do best: running their business and creating employment.

Alongside law-and-order issues, cost-of-living pressures and our local health system, getting the Cairns economy firing again is a priority for me in this term. I will not be diverted or distracted from the plan to sustain, grow and build a four-pillar economy. I will make every day count to deliver on this plan.

I will also set my sights firmly on the future of our great city. A very strong point that I would like to make is that for too long Cairns has been viewed, both locally and further afield, as being at the end of the line, and not just in a geographic sense. But instead of being at the end of the line, I want the nation and the world to view Cairns as the exact opposite. We are in fact at the starting line of Asia and the Pacific. We are at the starting line of opportunity to engage in trade with our near neighbours across the waters. We are ideally placed to compete with tropical cities around the globe.

I want Cairns to grow—to thrive as an international and sustainable city. I want Cairns to be an international hub of training and learning, from tertiary and language studies through to marine and aviation skills. I want the Cairns CBD to be a tourism attraction in its own right. I want our city heart to be a buzzing, cosmopolitan place with more residential living and more business, be it public or private sector. I want Cairns to link in with China, and not just in terms of tourism. I want Cairns to be a place of innovation, of new technology—a place young professionals choose to move to. I sincerely believe that, working in partnership with industry, the community and my fellow far northern MPs, we can achieve all of this and much more.

I grew up in the Hunter Valley of New South Wales, where my parents still live. I want to thank my parents for the sacrifices and hard work that they have endured to help me achieve the goals that I have set down throughout my life. My dad worked at an aluminium smelter and just last week lost his job after 37 years in the same role. My mum is a nurse and she has gone back to work to help pay the bills. Our family comes from humble working-class stock and the values of a small town upbringing will always remain with me.

I want to sincerely thank those people who helped during the long months of my election campaign. It was one of the toughest and ugliest on record and I am so very proud that our team showed admirable restraint by never, ever joining the Labor Party down in the gutter. We held our heads high and through discipline, integrity and teamwork we prevailed. I will never forget those people who stood by me and helped on that campaign. I want to sincerely thank the Premier for his leadership and support over the past 12 months. I want to thank my fellow government MPs for their new friendship and the work and achievements over the next term.

While they are not yet old enough to realise it, I want to say thank you to my beautiful babies, Saskia and Percy. Thank you for giving me endless moments of peace and clarity. To Leah, thank you. Thank you for believing in me. Thank you for our home and our family. You are the one forever.

Thank you also to Cairns—the place that I love and treasure. I met Leah in Cairns. We bought our first home together in Cairns and both of our children were born there. We feel blessed to live in Far North Queensland. It is a city that is a home to the most privileged and the most disadvantaged, a place where people from all walks of life and cultures interact in one of the most beautiful, most inspiring natural environments on earth. Through high-flying booms and devastating busts, the Cairns community has always endured with an in-built sense of resilience and strength, of perseverance and determination. Perhaps it is the lingering spirit of the pioneers who forged new paths northwards into the tropics in the late 1800s or the love and respect of country by those Aboriginal elders who treasure the land they are custodians of. Maybe it is our region's dry wit in the face of cyclones and natural disasters, exemplified in a classic hand-painted sign outside a boarded-up shop in February last year that simply read, 'Kiss my Yasi!' That is the spirit of Cairns that I am proud to represent. I want to be the strongest voice possible for Cairns in a state government that truly takes regional Queensland seriously. I do not take the responsibility of being the member for Cairns lightly and I do not take it for granted—not for a second.

Finally, my pledge to the Cairns community is that I will always listen and I will always take action. I will strive every single day to help people who ask for assistance, regardless of their background or political persuasion. I will always support and help foster good ideas and good projects. I will never proclaim to be an expert in all things or tell the people of Cairns what is best for them the way the previous Labor government so often did. Again, I pledge to always listen and to always take action. Most of all, I pledge to give absolutely everything I have to make Cairns the jewel of Queensland once again. I thank the House.