




Speech By
Howard Hobbs

MEMBER FOR WARREGO

Record of Proceedings, 27 November 2014

VALEDICTORY

 **Mr HOBBS** (Warrego—LNP) (5.32 pm): After nearly 29 years come the next election and 40 years in total including local government, I am calling it time. It is not often an MP can leave at a time of their choosing, and I believe that time has come for me. We have had many great challenges over the years. There have been a lot of changes made in this term of government. I think that has been one of the reasons why I have decided that it is time, because we have really been able to make some changes, particularly in areas that affect my electorate such as the issue of freeholding. Minister Cripps has done a lot of work on that, as well as the Treasurer. They are fantastic changes for people when it comes to security of tenure. There have been changes to vegetation management as well—practical changes, sensible changes, that needed to be made and that have made life a lot easier for many people out there.

The Royalties for the Regions program—what a fantastic program and one I helped develop originally. It is now rolling out and helping a lot of people out there in a lot of areas. The changes we have made to the guidelines for the coal seam gas industry have been spectacular and have really helped that industry make better rules so that both sides can work better in collaboration.

The roadworks that have been done have been fantastic. Speed limits have been increased thanks to Scotty Emerson, Minister for Transport and Main Roads. I have always wanted 120-kilometre speed signs. During my election campaign and every year I would put a request in but I never got them. I got 110-kilometre over most of my electorate, so that is pretty good. But we do need more, Minister. Passing lanes on the busy Warrego Highway are starting to happen which will be great. The changes in Health have been spectacular over the time, and there is more to come.

Levee banks have been built out in my electorate to protect the towns, so people can rest easy at night when it rains. Today we had a big storm. After you have had your home flooded and your business flooded, people have a lot of anxiety about whether they in fact are going to have their home flooded again. If they have a levee bank there, it does help them sleep at night. With these achievements, there has probably never been a better time than now for me to move on.

I do recall many events over the years. I came here in 1986. That is before mobile phones. Can you imagine doing your work without a mobile phone?

Miss Barton: Before Symesy was born.

Mr HOBBS: Before Symesy was born too! And fax machines came in not long after, but we did not even have those. Communication was by telephone, mail or face to face. That is what you did.

Mr Berry: Carrier pigeon?

Mr HOBBS: Well, we did not have those out there. We did not even have TV in my area. In fact I was a pretty happy mayor out there, or chairman as you were called in those days, getting television for my community. I will never forget that at one stage they wanted to put in a tower that covered about five kilometres—and you can imagine how good that was out there. We kicked up a hell of a

fuss and eventually got a tower that had a range of about 45 kilometres and that at least gave us some television. But that only happened a few years before I got into parliament. That is how much things have progressed since then.

At that time I was chairman, or mayor as they call it today, I had a pretty busy time. I stayed on in that position for about 18 months for various reasons. I was also learning to fly a plane, so I had to go and get my pilot's licence.

Mr Crandon: Is that when you had air mail?

Mr HOBBS: Air mail, that is right. I was learning to be a new MP and I had a sheep station to run. So it was a pretty busy time, but I have always learned to delegate and we were able to get the job done. My wife, Marilyn, did a great job as station manager in those days and I thank her for the work that she did.

It was the Joh era. When I came in here Joh Bjelke-Petersen was Premier. He was Premier for 19 years. The magic of the man—you had to be here to believe it. It was the little things like at breakfast. He would come down for breakfast every morning and no-one ever sat in his chair, not that he would be angry about it but you just did not do it. There was always someone trying to get a newbie to go in there and they would say, 'Sit down here,' and they would. Joh would never be upset about it but others would say to them, 'Mate, don't you ever do that again.' That was the sort of thing that happened. Many loved him but many loved to hate him as well.

But there were many legends of that time. They are often talked about and often written about. A lot of it is wrong, but then again people are allowed to write what they like. Russ Hinze was a great minister for local government and racing. He was the minister for everything I think in those times. He was minister for main roads as well. I had many deputations with Russ as a local government representative as well as later on as an MP. I can recall one time when I went to see him. I was not a member of parliament at that time. I went to see him in Blackall about doing some work on the road from Tambo to Alpha. It was in terrible shape. We needed a plan and I wanted to have something long term in place. He heard me out and he said to me, 'Well, boy, come back in three days time when I come back from up north.' So boy was there in three days time when he came back from Blackall. He had worked it out. He said okay and he gave me some long-term funding for that road and we were able to make that road useable for many years to come. In fact, there is still ongoing work. Russ was a giant of a man. If you want the proof, his bath towel is still up here in the member's dining room. I will never forget a story about the Tree of Knowledge and when we were there one day in Barcy.

Mr Johnson: Leave it alone.

Mr HOBBS: I will tell this story. Basically, what happened was that there was a cabinet meeting—and I do not think I was actually a member at the time—and they all went out there on the train. They had the ministerial train in those days with the carriage and so forth, and quite a few of them were sleeping on that. We had been to one of the pubs there, and at the closing time—which was probably 10 o'clock or whatever it was in those days—they rang the bell and we all went out the door. I will never forget—and even now I can still see him—Hinzey walking down those stairs and he pulled his trousers up and he said, 'Where's that so and so tree? I'm going over to it,' and I will let members imagine what it was that he was talking about doing, but I am quite sure that in fact he did not do that.

Dr Douglas: It was the thought that counts.

Mr HOBBS: It was the thought that counts; that is right. He was quite a legend of a man.

The Fitzgerald era is an interesting period. Tony Fitzgerald portrayed himself as an independent person at the time. In recent times, that has proven to be incorrect. Clearly, an MP today would not be found guilty as they were during that period; in fact it was proven only a few years later. The record shows that. That era has now been consigned to the history books. We hope in future that no MP will ever be subject to the lynch mob mentality that occurred at that time.

Neil Turner was a giant of a man too. He was as strong as a bull. If anybody had any doubt, just ask what happened when he and Mick Veivers used to get into holts together—ask Madam Speaker perhaps. What a great fellow he was. He was here from 1974 to 1986, 12 years. He was a man's man, a tough fellow; he was strong. He had this poem that he used to recite—the horse poem, *The Pearl of Them All*. Any new member who came in was subject to this poem that he would tell, and he did a good job of it too, I have to say. I was very pleased to be able to recite some of that poem at his condolence motion here in this parliament. What a great friend he was. What a great man. What a tough man as well.

I will never forget one time we were having some refreshments in the members bar while parliament was sitting and the division bells rang. I do not know what made him do it, but Rob Schwarten actually walked past him and bumped him or kneed him and Neil had had a new hip done. Of course, Neil just happened to get hold of him by the throat and put him straight up against the wall which made his feet dangle off the ground. Neil said to him just three words—he said, 'I hate pain.' The bells were ringing and we had to come back in here so we all scurried in. Mick Veivers was sitting over there somewhere and he looked over and he said, 'Hey, Robbie, you look a bit taller.' They ended up being good mates. That is the thing about this place—you can have a bit of argy-bargy, a bit of good fun.

My mate Vaughan Johnson has been around for a while and I knew him well before he got into this place. I will never forget that when he was first selected they were worried about him so they sent out Kevin Lingard, who was the deputy leader or something at the time—I cannot remember what his position was. He had to tell Vaughan to do three things: to stop swearing, to stop drinking rum by the gallon and to stop bloody fighting. He did that and look what we made him into. How good is that. We have modelled the man just the way we need him, the way the party wanted him and the way Kevin Lingard wanted him to be at the time—the mild mannered man from Gregory.

Mr Walker: Groggery.

Mr HOBBS: Groggery, that is right. The member for Gregory is not a very good flyer, as many members would know. He has broken many seats on planes. He has scared the bejesus out of a lot of kids on planes as well.

Madam SPEAKER: I am now also going to ask the member for Warrego to be careful about unparliamentary language.

Mr HOBBS: I withdraw that, Madam Speaker. It just fell out. I humbly withdraw it. He flies with me okay. I will never forget one day I took him out to Barcaldine because there was something on out there. We flew out from Rocky in my plane and I wondered how he was going to go. It was morning so it was pretty smooth. We were flying over the Blackdown Tableland National Park and I said, 'Let's have a good look at this,' so down we went over the treetops. He was as good as gold, so I thought his flying at the time was getting better. Mate, as a whip you have done a great job. It has been a tough job.

Mr Malone interjected.

Mr HOBBS: He did a better job than Lawrence Springborg did as a whip; that is for sure. Lawrence used to chase me everywhere. I even got a voodoo doll for him in the end. I thought I would give it to him and he could put pins in it so it would be easier than chasing me.

I want to also talk about Wayne Goss. I offer my condolences to his family. He did try very hard and he ran a good, sound financial budget. There were some issues at the time that did concern us—the erosion of property rights, the freehold title and land rentals. One of the missed opportunities I believe that occurred at this time was the fact the Wolffdene Dam was cancelled. It was about 1.1 million megalitres—almost the same size as Wivenhoe—and it would have cost about \$400 million at the time. In the end, as a consequence perhaps, the Beattie government spent between \$7 billion and \$10 billion on a water grid, a desalination plant and other things. So it was a missed opportunity, but it is one of those political things that did occur.

With the courts, we saw the appointment of a lot of left wing and affirmative action people at the time which led to a deterioration of law and order. Young offenders were let off and back they came within a few days on a similar offence. It is a bit disappointing but that is the way it goes.

Kevin Rudd was Wayne Goss's chief of staff. He was known as 'Dr Death'. He was the one who basically ran the Public Sector Management Commission—well, he did not run it; I think it was Coaldrake. He was in charge of all of that when they did a purge of the Public Service. There has been talk in recent times about what we have done. That was nothing compared to what happened in the past. In fact what they did—and it is interesting to remember this—is that in this purge they took out what they thought were all the National Party people, but they were the leaders of the Public Service. So basically it was left rudderless—that is what it was; it was leaderless. That was the issue. It is like anything else—if you take out the leadership of any group, of any company, of any major organisation, you have a vacuum. We ended up then where they could not make decisions and it was bound up in process and indecision. Is that familiar to you all in the Public Service? It certainly was. It was disappointing. So those things happened but that is in the past. I could not understand why

people were walking around Brisbane sucking lemons at one stage, and I later realised it was because Kevin Rudd had lost his prime ministership and they were sucking lemons to keep the smile off their face.

I have to tell a story about Ken McElligott. He was a good man. He was the minister for health. I will never forget one time when he came out to Augathella, Quilpie, Charleville and I think Cunnamulla. I had my plane at the time and I was there at every airport to meet him. I did not have to go to Quilpie because it was not in my patch; I think that was in Vaughan's patch at the time. I was there at every airport. When we got to the final one, he said, 'How can I beat you?' He never came back. The use of the plane made a big difference to me in my electorate of Warrego, which is bigger than the size of Victoria.

Kenny Vaughan was a decent fellow, too. He went to Yowah one time. I knew he was going there and it was arranged. I did not know what he was going to say or do there, but he went there and he announced that he was going to allow the golf course to be mined. Well, it was worse than the worst union meeting you have ever been to. They tore strips off him. I honestly had to get him and tell them that he did not really mean that. I put him on his plane and let him go. That was an interesting time. He was a decent man too. We did not do anything with the golf course; it is still there. It is sacred ground.

In the Borbidge government I had the pleasure of setting up the department of natural resources. In fact, I named the department of natural resources. I pulled it together from the department of water resources and the lands department. I had Tom Fenwick as the director-general, Peter Bevan as deputy director-general and Jim Varghese. We made that department into something that was really going.

We had the water infrastructure task force. We had \$1 billion to spend to build dams, and that certainly was good. At about the same time the federal government decided to support the Kyoto protocol. That meant sustainable logging of forest and tree-clearing guidelines, which caused a lot of grief for us up here. I refused to sign up to that agreement for vegetation management until they acknowledged that we had vigorous growing and thickening timber here in Queensland and we could, therefore, change our guidelines.

Towards the end of the Borbidge term I had a very public divorce, which was a difficult situation for all. The accusations against me were never substantiated and no adverse findings were ever made. With the election looming, I stood down and took one for the team. A ministerial position was available after the election if we were elected, but we were not. Politics is hard on families.

It has been a privilege to represent Warrego in the state parliament. It was a marginal seat. In 1986 I won by 579 votes and in 2001, by 96. At the last election I had a healthy 75 per cent margin, achieved by never taking the seat for granted, always looking at it as a marginal seat, responding to constituents' needs and always having the philosophy of the harder you work, the better the result you will have.

I want to thank my family: my children, their families and my grandchildren. I also want to thank my son Will who, for many years, has taken on running the family operation. I thank him so much for the great work that he has done.

I also take the opportunity to thank the Premier, the ministers and the opposition leader. I thank you for your kind words, Anastacia; I really appreciate that. I say thank you to the ministers, the departmental staff, the parliamentary staff, the committee staff over the years—and I have been on numerous committees—and certainly my electorate staff as well. My electorate officer Ann has been selected by the LNP as a candidate for Warrego. She has been selected by the membership. Warrego is one of the largest LNP memberships in Queensland. We are making history out there; Ann will be the first woman ever selected to stand for the LNP in Warrego. She is the granddaughter of the first Country Party state president, John Leahy, in this state. I wish her every success for a successful campaign and to carry on the dream of her grandfather, who wanted to bring together the conservative forces in Queensland.

I want to thank the Warrego electorate council, the LNP membership and the warriors: Frank Manthey, Henry Crothers, Russell Dowling, Nelson Neal, Rodney Smith and many others I do not have time to mention.

I also say thank you to the bench here, this great bench with the great team of people around us. Ricko, Deb, Lisa and Gavin, thanks so much for the camaraderie. It is handy to be here to keep the whip in line as well. I want to thank you and wish you all the success for the coming election. To those members not seeking re-election—VJ, Ted, Rosemary, David, Peter and Desley—I thank you for your contribution. It has been a privilege to work with you. I bid you farewell.