




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (5.50 pm): I rise to make a brief contribution to the address-in-reply debate to His Excellency the Governor's speech at the opening of the 56th Parliament in February this year. I also put on record my thanks and admiration of the Hon. Paul de Jersey AC and his wife, Kaye, for their visit to Parliament House as part of the PH 150 Open Day, as well as their prolific travel to centres in regional and rural Queensland. Their dedication is to be commended.

At the outset, I would like to congratulate all members who have been returned to this place and in particular I congratulate those members who have been elected to parliament for the first time. It is humbling to receive the faith of your electorate to represent their interests in this place and beyond. Serving as a member of parliament is a high honour and privilege, but it comes with great responsibility. To the new MPs I say: it will not be easy. You will have days which you will absolutely dread, but you will also have days when you will feel an enormous sense of satisfaction at your contribution to public life.

It is in that spirit that I wish to again say thank you to the honourable members of this House for electing me as the Speaker of the Parliament of Queensland. I have always had the greatest respect for those who came before me in the office that I now hold. I am both humbled and grateful for the opportunity. While I appreciate I will not make every member happy with my rulings, rest assured I am committed to not only appearing to be impartial in the role but strive to actually be impartial. If you have any concerns, you should talk to George, Shane, Elly or anyone else in the Speaker's office.

As members in this place know, you cannot hold a higher office without being a local MP first and foremost. I would like to thank my campaign team for their tireless efforts towards my re-election campaign. I would like to make special mention of my dedicated campaign committee: Bronwyn and Mick Hodgkins; Melinda Eades; Jim Smith, my campaign director; and, of course, my hardworking parents, Warren and Linda.

I thank Steve and Sonya Struber and Phil Cassell, Luckbir and Ranjit Singh, Vanessa Maruna and Dhananjay Bose and his son Abhijit who flew up from Brisbane especially to help. To everyone who did the handing out at pre-poll and on election day, including Helen Cooper, Jenny Dovaston, Nathaneal Honnef, Jordan Rooke, Karen Jacobs, Amy Malsem, Cheryl Malsem, Tracey Morris, William Tapaitau, Sharon Winn, Jimmy Floyd, Larry Kellett, John and Jan Philips, Ken Robertson, Leigh Dall'Osto, Anne Holden, Nola Jappe, Deb Pearson, Krissie Bishop, Peter Firth, Natasha Lyons, John Brennan, Bruce Slade, Brenden Slade, Darren Hunt—whom I visited at the Wesley Hospital earlier this week; get well soon DJ—Michael McGarry, my father-in-law, Bill Grant, Vivian Robertson, Patrick Hoare, Tom McCartney, Paula Neal and Councillor Richie Bates, again I say that these things are not a solo act and nothing happens by accident so thank you.

I want to give a special mention of my grandma Doreen Dodd who has had some health concerns lately. Even though she has been living independently for so long, after a recent stay in hospital the decision was made that she would move into an aged-care facility. A couple of weekends ago we helped her make that transition. We all love her and we are pleased that she is enjoying her time there and making new friends.

I would also like to express my enormous gratitude to my electorate staff, Coral-Leah Kemp and Rebecca Spencer, who do such great work with me to assist the local constituents of Mulgrave. Thanks also to local unions, broader ALP members and others for their terrific support.

I simply do not have enough time or words to thank my amazing wife, Kerry, and my beautiful children, Tristan, Layla and Kobi, for their support, not only during a hectic campaign period but also over the past three terms. My family is everything to me. Other members in this place know all too well that we simply cannot do our jobs without the love and support of our respective families.

I am very proud to be re-elected as the member for Mulgrave for my fourth term and to share the win with the member for Barron River, as well as my newly elected colleagues the member for Cairns and the member for Cook, and all members on the government who were re-elected. My congratulations go to all members elected to this House. Your electorates have spoken and have spoken loudly.

I seek leave to incorporate the remainder of my speech into *Hansard*. This has the approval of the Deputy Speaker, the member for Townsville. I thank him for being so easy to work with.

Leave granted.

I wish to place on the record my thanks at being given the opportunity to serve this state as Queensland Treasurer and express my gratitude to officials and staff at Queensland Treasury, who were always extremely hard working and tireless in their efforts to ensure the wheels of industry kept turning, the economy continued to grow and that Queensland improved its fiscal footing.

Specifically, I wish to thank the former Under Treasurer Jim Murphy for his contribution. Jim came to the Queensland Government with a wealth of knowledge and experience given his long public service career in the Commonwealth Treasury, time in Washington at the IMF, as well as the private sector.

I thank him for his friendship and contribution to a marked improvement in Queensland as it transitioned to a post-mining boom economy.

I must also say a huge thanks to my former Chief of Staff Jason Humphreys for his loyalty and wise counsel, and to Lindsay Marshall and all members of my former Ministerial Office.

The economic and fiscal success under this Government can be found across all the important metrics and indicators. This was achieved without resorting to austerity measures, without selling assets.

I want to share with the House a real world example of how economic policy was crafted around the needs of Queensland communities.

In mid 2016, I was struck by a common refrain from Cairns regional businesses about their capacity to hire new staff.

Many business owners told me that trading conditions were picking up, but they were not ready to hire new staff from fear that the new conditions would not last.

By November 2016, the youth unemployment rate in the Cairns region was not in a good place—it was the highest in the nation at 28.0%.

Knowing this situation, working with Treasury, we created a policy to incentivise employment of young people between 15 and 24 years of age.

From this the \$20,000 Back to work youth boost was born and came into being from 1 December 2016. This triggered a wave of youth employment across Queensland, but particularly in Cairns. By December 2017, the 12 month average youth unemployment rate had more than halved to 13.8%.

The combination of the broader Back To Work program and successful initiatives like Skilling Queenslanders for Work saw spillover effects into the general regional unemployment rate where during the final months of 2017, the Cairns regional unemployment rate reached lows not seen since 2008.

This was part of a larger trend along the coastal regional communities of falling unemployment after a period of difficulty.

From a statewide perspective, I'm proud to have delivered three surplus budgets during my time as Treasurer. Stronger economic growth, lower debt, higher employment growth, an improved credit position, lower unemployment, and higher business and investor confidence were achieved—all while delivering the essential public services, Queenslanders expect and deserve.

Since becoming Speaker, I have had the opportunity to undertake several youth parliaments—here at Queensland Parliament House as well as in regional Queensland in places like Emerald.

I've also had the opportunity to represent the Queensland Parliament on two occasions overseas. Attendance at the Presiding Officers' and Clerks' Conference (POCC) in Wellington in July provided me with the opportunity to represent the Queensland Parliament to develop closer ties and a greater understanding of parliamentary practices and issues in other parliaments; and gain an understanding of the needs of delegates in order to begin preparations for Queensland to host the 50th Presiding Officers and Clerks Conference in 2019.

I was elected the Deputy Chair of the Conference and also represented the Queensland Parliament at the Australian Region Management Committee Meeting of the CPA and a Joint meeting of the CPA and Australian and Pacific Regions Branches.

I co-presented a paper with the Clerk and I also had the opportunity to meet with the Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand Ewen McDonald. I also want to acknowledge Indigenous Liaison Officer Brett Nutley who was invited to the conference to speak about his role and the benefits that it brings to the Queensland Parliament.

In early August I travelled to the United States to attend the 43rd National Conference of State Legislatures Summit 2018, which was the primary purpose of my travel. Attendance at the Summit had been recommended to me by the Clerk who advised that Queensland had never been represented at the Summit. Other Australian jurisdictions had been represented many times and other Australian Presiding Officers and Clerks had indicated it as a worthwhile event.

After being invited to attend the Summit, I obtained the necessary approvals in accordance with the guidelines for the Office of the Speaker, including approval for my spouse to travel. All relevant approval correspondence was tabled and was also the subject of estimates committee examination. The NCSL Summit was indeed a worthwhile event and extremely well organised. To expand on my trip report, the material accompanying my invitation invited my spouse to register as an international guest, and she accompanied me to NCSL receptions and events as well as other meetings—as has been the case for previous spouses to accompany the Speaker on official business.

The NCSL Summit is one of the largest gatherings of legislators, experts and policymakers and aims to create an environment that works to address modern challenges and give attendees the opportunity to build strong networks and institutions. The Summit attracts more than 5,000 attendees annually. I understand that it is usually attended by over 250 international delegates from over 23 countries. Indeed, almost every other Australian State or Territory was represented at the Summit I attended. It is important that this Parliament be outward-looking, heuristic and continually establishing networks and benchmarking our activities against others—not just those in Australia. We have much to learn from events such as the NCSL summit and visiting other places, learning, sharing and establishing networks. An example of this was an opportunity to deliver a guest lecture at Columbia University in New York as part of their Summer Program, and I thank Associate Professor Patrice Derrington for that invitation.

Section 5.8.1 of the Guidelines for the Financial Management of the Office of the Speaker mandates the Speaker to request to undertake duties on behalf of Queensland during overseas travel which requires the Premier's approval. To fulfil this requirement, in addition to the NCSL Summit, I also undertook trade, investment, international education and tourism related meetings on behalf of the State of Queensland in both Los Angeles and New York. I want to thank the Trade and Investment Queensland and Tourism Events Queensland staff who assisted in putting together the program, including a very worthwhile meeting with the Australian Consul-General in LA, the Honourable Chelsey Martin.

Of particular note was an opportunity to meet with Ralph Bertelle, Executive Vice President of Paramount Studios, to discuss one of Queensland's most successful periods of film and television production. Specifically, I talked about my vision to see a sound stage built in Cairns. This isn't a new idea. I've been speaking with industry contacts over the past few years and others have floated the idea before me. But the time is right to revisit it. And when it comes to opportunities for the Far North in film and television, we should be thinking big.

In recent years through a targeted strategy by the Queensland Government, a range of incentives and grants have been offered—with great success—to land major Hollywood blockbusters to be filmed in Queensland. Think THOR Ragnarok, Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Men Tell No Tales, Pacific Rim: Uprising, Aquaman and a live-action version of Dora the Explorer. The demand for content on Netflix and other streaming services is rapidly outpacing the available infrastructure to produce it.

Tropical North Queensland has some of the most diverse locations in Australia within an hour of an international airport—tropical islands and beaches, desert, rainforest, farming country and the Art Deco capital of Australia—Innisfail. But these local assets are not enough on their own. The missing ingredient is a purpose-built sound stage to provide 'weather cover' and allow for construction of interior sets.

The economic benefits of building our local film and television industry could be huge. Deloitte estimated in 2016-17 that the screen industry supported more than 7,000 jobs and contributed almost \$1 billion to the Queensland economy. I want to acknowledge the Premier who has been a champion for the screen industry and earlier this year announced \$12 million to repurpose five disused warehouses in Brisbane for use in film and television production.

That same opportunity exists in Cairns with sites like the former Masters Home Improvement or Bunnings.

The largest sound stage in the Southern Hemisphere is the 4000m² Sound Stage 9 which came at a price tag of \$15.5 million. But we don't need to think that big. Village Roadshow's Sound Stage 5 on the Gold Coast is considered the most versatile by those in the know, largely due to its sunken water tank/false floor. A sound stage in the order of 1000m² would be ample, as long as it had a high ceiling, big barn door entry, load-rated floors, and could be sound proofed.

It would need to be close to the CBD and hotels, have lots of outdoor space (for parking and exterior set builds) with room to build more studios in time, and have on-site office and production space.

And like the Gold Coast's Sound Stage 9 (built as the squash venue for the Commonwealth Games but with ongoing benefits for the creative arts), a FNQ studio would need to be multi-use to cater for sport, media, education or cultural activities—but be available should a big production want to shoot a film or TV series.

I learned two key things from my meeting at Paramount Studios. Firstly, the certainty of permanent incentives—including a Federal Film Location Tax Offset—is crucial. Over 80% of recent productions have relied on some form of incentive offered by a government or affiliated body to be filmed outside of the United States. The 2016-17 State Budget committed \$30 million in funding over four-years to foster growth in local productions and attract large-scale film and high-end television productions. This was boosted by \$20 million in this year's Budget.

Second, Queensland is genuinely recognised as a 'film-friendly' destination with the capacity to support large budget international productions, and it's not just because of our unparalleled locations. A couple of years ago I had a conversation with Hollywood royalty Jerry Bruckheimer who said that Australia has some of the most highly-regarded technical crews in the world. One thing's for sure is that we don't have enough of them—and that's where the 'rest-of-the-time' use of a sound stage comes in. There are already moves within the TAFE and university sector to provide the skill base needed for this growing film and television industry to provide employment pathways in fields such as script writing, set design, camera work and more. I've been having

conversations with CQ University about just how their strategic plan could complement a sound stage proposal. And I want to thank the Premier's office and Tracey Vieira from Screen Queensland for meeting with me to progress how we can turn this from concept to reality.

There is every reason to believe that Tropical North Queensland can become a genuine film and television destination—not only within Australia but also in the competitive international market. With the Queensland Government's Production Attraction Strategy and Screen Industry Roadmap with Screen Queensland—as well as the increase in the Federal location offset—a sound stage in Cairns would give major studios every reason to consider basing future productions in our region. Add to this skyrocketing interest in the gaming, motion capture, and immersion technology, the development of a sound stage in Tropical North Queensland starts making a whole lot of sense.

This is just one more way that we can further diversify the economy in the Far North.

I am also very proud of the initiatives in the Cairns region that have been driven by this Government since the start of 2015.

One of those is the Global Tourism Hub (GTH) in the Tropical North that I announced in October last year. The GTH has seen strong market interest from national and international firms. Expression of Interest (EOI) documentation was released in May 2018 to suitably qualified proponents from the ROI phase and EOIs have now closed.

EOI responses have closed and for probity reasons, and to maintain competitive tension, the names and the number of the proponents who responded to the State with EOI documentation cannot be released.

I want to thank the Minister for Tourism for her continued focus on Tropical North Queensland and in particular for running hard with the GTH. She may have been adopted as an honorary Gold Coaster, but we like to think she has a soft spot for Cairns!

And the stakeholder briefing on the GTH that I attended last week with the Member for Barron River was an opportunity to update people on where this process is up to. And I want to thank David Edwards for providing that briefing.

Those successful in the EOI phase will be issued with the Request for Detailed Proposals documentation in the first quarter of 2019.

As with Queen's Wharf Brisbane, it may well be that the incumbent operator in Cairns—the Reef Casino—could meet the objectives of the GTH process and no new licence needs to be issued.

While the total value of the project will not be known until announcement of the Preferred Proponent—expected in late 2019—it's anticipated it could be around half a billion dollars.

It will be important for locals to continue to talk positively about the GTH, but also on other projects—like the \$120 million Port of Cairns upgrade and \$176 million Cairns Convention Centre upgrade.

I am also keen to pursue local growth in the international education and training sector. People would know my passion for this area since from my time as Ministerial Champion for International Education and Training last year. Cairns, which already plays home to a broad range of world-class education programs, from study tours, English language courses; primary and secondary schools; to Universities and vocational training—is set for continued strong growth.

And while tourism is one of the cornerstones of the Cairns economy and numbers of international students are growing, we must seek to improve all sectors, not just tourism.

While the Cairns South State Development Area (SDA) process is still undergoing consultation it has great potential for industrial expansion for the Cairns region's economy and greater employment opportunities for Gordonvale residents and the future community of Mount Peter.

If it does go ahead, intermodal/freight related industry and regionally significant industrial enterprises could operate from the area proposed to be unlocked by the SDA.

The process has been boosted by a Memorandum of Understanding that I signed on behalf of the State with MSF Sugar, the operator of the Mulgrave Central Mill. MSF had concerns that the SDA might resume productive cane land and place the ongoing viability of the Mill at risk. The intention of the SDA has always been to complement the existing industries south of Cairns, not replace existing industries with a new ones.

In closing, I'm proud to be part of a Government that reduced public debt, brought down unemployment, stopped the spiralling growth in electricity prices and improved business confidence. These actions have established favourable conditions for Queensland's continued economic growth and diversification. My electorate of Mulgrave—and the greater Cairns region—stand ready to build on this momentum in order to capitalise on these opportunities.