




Speech By
Hon. Curtis Pitt

MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE

Record of Proceedings, 15 November 2018

ADJOURNMENT

Valedictory

 **Mr SPEAKER:** Honourable members, the parliamentary year is now about to end. This week has been somewhat like muck-up week at the end of a school year. They say that a week is a long time in politics. A week in parliament can sometimes be even longer, so a parliamentary year can seem like an absolute eternity! This special adjournment does provide us an opportunity to reflect on the year that was.

Members may note that, after my election as Speaker, I recognised how each of the members who preceded me in the role of Speaker had contributed to our parliamentary democracy through their stewardship of this House. At the time I singled out the very first Speaker of the Legislative Assembly, the Hon. Gilbert Elliott. In what I believe to be perhaps the best piece of advice ever offered in this House to new members, he urged members to display mutual forbearance and self-control during debates. The jury is still out on whether we have achieved that during the 56th Parliament so far.

As part of the PH150 anniversary celebrations the parliament was privileged to regain a refurbished version of Speaker Elliott's robes for permanent display on the precinct. While the garb of the Speaker may have changed significantly over the years, in practical terms the role remains the same. The uniform has changed but the job is the same. When Ted Hanson, the former member for Buranda, became Speaker in 1939 he was the first Speaker of the Queensland parliament to not wear a wig. He apparently told his daughter, 'I'm not wearing a sheepskin on my head.' Although many would argue that if anyone in this parliament could use a wig it is me, I have chosen not to continue that tradition.

Whilst it is my job, of course, to bring the House to order, there are many moments that have made me smile and hopefully have made some of you smile as well. There are too many to mention but I want to highlight a couple. There was the Minister for Police and Minister for Corrective Services for his lengthy build-up in telling a dad joke on International Talk Like a Pirate Day. There was the member for Currumbin, who receives the award for the best and worst timing of the year when asking a question about the impact of students from south of the border when students from New South Wales were in the public gallery. There was, just this week, the Minister for State Development taking my consistent advice about talking about members in the third person too far and applying this to talking about himself. He agrees with the Minister for State Development entirely: he is a very learned gentlemen!

As Speaker of the Parliament I can categorically say that, whilst we have a diversity of voices in the green chamber, quite often they are not in harmony. It has been said that when it comes to certain issues our members can sometimes make too much of a song and dance. At other times members are asked to lift the tone. This year we made sure we could say that all of those things could be fixed, with the presentation of opera in the upper house in June this year. I want to thank the Brisbane City Opera, the University of Queensland and the Former Parliamentary Members' Association of Queensland for that wonderful event.

On another note, the running of our parliament and the management of our precinct does not happen without a lot of hard work and goodwill. As the year closes I would like to express my gratitude to those who have assisted in this task. I thank the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition and their respective leadership teams for their constructive approach to the parliamentary process. Specifically, the smooth running of our parliament relies very heavily on the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business reaching agreement on many matters—some in the chamber, some outside the chamber. I thank them both for their efforts.

I thank the Committee of the Legislative Assembly for its counsel and support for the operation of the chamber and management of the precinct. Those people contributing include the Leader of the House and the Manager of Opposition Business but also the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, the member for Logan, the member for Capalaba, the member for Condamine and the member for Hill—or sometimes the member for Traeger or sometimes the member for Hinchinbrook. I think we actually had all three at our meeting today. Thank you to you all.

I thank the Clerk of the Parliament, Neil Laurie. While Neil can only speak in a limited formal capacity in this chamber, he is always heard by all members. The parliament cannot run without his guidance, which has been honed in this place over decades. While as Speaker I work very closely with Neil, his experience is, I believe, invaluable to all members. He makes himself available to all members. He is counsel and confidante to all members. That work is greatly valued and appreciated. The Clerk, of course, does not work alone. He is well assisted by Deputy Clerk Michael Ries, First Clerk Assistant Amanda Honeyman and the other clerks at the table. I thank them all for their support and assistance this year.

I thank the Deputy Speaker, the member for Townsville, and all the members of the temporary Speakers panel for helping me with Speaker's duties. Keeping the House in order is no easy feat. Sometimes you have to make decisions that are unpopular. I think most people now know how the Deputy Leader of the Opposition felt when he was a Rugby League referee.

Mr Mander: That was easy compared to what you got!

Mr SPEAKER: I take that interjection!

I of course thank our Hansard staff, who hang on our every word but also record it for posterity. There can be no parliament without Hansard. I thank them for their dedication to this important task. The staff and management of the Parliamentary Service generally deserve our thanks, and I want to place that on the record. We have heard from the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and the member for Noosa about individual members of staff. I will name some but not all. I ask all members to take the opportunity this evening to say thank you in person. Go and spend some time and have those conversations that you do not have the time to have throughout the rest of the parliamentary year. I think one of the most important aspects of Speaker's drinks is taking the opportunity to say thank you.

I give a general thanks to the staff of the functions and catering team. As the Premier highlighted, it has been a very big year—particularly with the seven-course degustation menu that was put on as part of the Parliament House 150 celebrations. I am not allowed to be too biased, but I will say that it was probably one of the best dining experiences I have had anywhere over the past couple of years. It is a real credit to the entire team—an amazing outcome.

Our committee staff do such an amazing work supporting the very valuable work of our committees. As a unicameral parliament, we are very reliant on our committees to ensure we have a check and balance of legislation—to ensure we understand it and to ensure the public can contribute to its formation. I acknowledge the work of all members of committees but particularly the support staff behind the scenes. It is a very important part of our parliamentary democracy.

I thank the staff who work in old Parliament House and provide services to the Assembly. I thank the parliamentary education team for the range of things they do around Queensland, particularly focusing on youth parliaments. I always say to our young parliamentarians that our democracy is a participation sport: you have to use it or lose it. Their strong engagement can only happen with our parliamentary education team.

It is also worth noting that we had our first junior Indigenous Youth Parliament in Cairns only last month. It was an amazing experience and I thank the members who came to that parliament as temporary Speakers as well as all of those members who have contributed to the Legal Studies Youth Parliament, the Indigenous Youth Parliament here in Brisbane or the YMCA Youth Parliament. They are all very important and it really gives me great hope to see just what sort of young people we will see coming forward into the future as representatives in our state, whether they are in elected positions or otherwise.

I want to express my appreciation for the service of the heads of respective divisions of the Parliamentary Service—Craig Atkinson, Stewart Johnson and Janet Prowse. As I said, members, I am a very brave Speaker to be standing between you and drinks and so I will try to limit my contribution. I want to say thank you to the parliamentary press gallery for its reporting of the proceedings in this House. Of course, it provides a very important service to the people of Queensland and I thank it again for its cooperation on a number of matters this year, particularly with its sensible reporting and sometimes nonreporting of issues that affect this parliament. I think it is important to acknowledge that as we go forward.

I thank members in this House for the way you have conducted yourselves. I might seem grumpy sometimes. I may sometimes pull you up or try to correct something you have said or try to ensure you are sticking to the standing orders, but I say thank you for the way you have conducted yourselves and it is my enduring hope that we will continue to lift the standards in this place and make it a place where people can be very proud of the contributions made by all members in the House.

It was a very big year with the 150th anniversary of old Parliament House. For those members like me who are fortunate enough to work in this place, I am sure you would all agree that this is essentially a living museum and it is an amazing place to work and we all create history every day just by coming to work. It is of course held in sacred trust by the Parliamentary Service, which operates the legislative arm of government in Queensland. I am but the current Speaker. There have been Speakers before me. There will be Speakers after me, but it is the members of the Queensland Parliamentary Service who are those entrusted with this place and the importance of it as part of our parliamentary democracy. Of course, it is about ensuring that what goes on here in parliament is not just as a legislature but as the beating heart of our democracy in Queensland. Members should always remember how important a job it is that we all have but also how fortunate we are to be here representing all people across Queensland.

I want to acknowledge that we have a number of groups that come to Parliament House to utilise this place. The Parliament House 150 celebrations have made it very clear to me that this is the people's house and we must ensure that it is available and as accessible as possible to members of the public, and that includes the parliamentary friends groups we have here—whether it be MPs getting a chance to try their arm and have a hit of tennis or play a bit of football. I will say congratulations again to Country for winning the touch football challenge for the sixth straight year.

Members, there are cultural groups that utilise the parliament. There are a number of community and charity groups that use this place as a particular important opportunity to have their voice heard. I am always very heartened to see how many members come together to support these initiatives either through direct membership of those parliamentary friends associations or as attendees at events. Last night Foodbank was here and it is an amazing organisation, and I thank the members who attended that event. If you were able to hear the presentation given, you would know why it is such an important organisation and it is just one of the many groups that we have had through the Queensland parliament this year.

I want to thank my Mulgrave electorate officers, Coral and Bec, for stepping up to some new challenges that have arisen as a result of my election as Speaker. I want to thank my Speaker's office staff—George, Shane and Elly. They do great work and, again, they are hopefully always available for people who need them. I want to thank my wife, Kerry, for her unwavering support and importantly for helping me raise—but mainly doing it on her own—our wonderful children, Tristan, Layla and Kobi.

As we know, as part of a longstanding tradition, I want to invite all members to the end-of-session function. In terms of the House and this place that we are in right now and going forward to the next sitting in February, members, I am hitting the reset button. Just like your warnings only last until 1 pm at this point, I am hitting the reset button and I hope that we are able to come here next year with a clean slate. Don't blow it!

Members, we have to do something a bit new for the function this year, however. As we are not having a December sitting, we are going to be lighting the Christmas tree in November. It is just like when you go to Big W and everything is on sale in October. We have had a few members saying, 'It's a bit early, isn't it?' However, we will light the Christmas tree and have a refreshment on the President's Verandah and then we will move to the Green Deck. As I said, members, please take the opportunity to talk to the parliamentary staff to convey your thanks for the great work that they do supporting all of us in this job that we are very fortunate to have in this place.

Members, I want to wish all of you a safe and merry Christmas and a happy new year and I trust that you will come back refreshed next year and debate the important issues that matter to Queenslanders.