



Speech by

Andrew Cripps

MEMBER FOR HINCHINBROOK

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr CRIPPS (Hinchinbrook—LNP) (5.22 pm): I rise to contribute to the address-in-reply to the Governor's speech at the opening of the 53rd Parliament of Queensland. On behalf of the people of the Hinchinbrook electorate, I request that you, Madam Deputy Speaker, convey to Mr Speaker my congratulations in relation to his election to that high and respected office. While all members of parliament have a responsibility to behave in a manner that reflects positively on this place, the Speaker is particularly burdened with the responsibility of ensuring that the traditional impartiality and dignity of that office is preserved.

I am truly humbled and honoured by the support that I received from the people of the Hinchinbrook electorate at the state election on 21 March 2009 and I intend to repay that support by providing the strong representation to all of my constituents that they deserve. I am pleased and proud for the second time to pledge my loyalty to our most gracious sovereign Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and to her representative in the great state of Queensland, Her Excellency the Governor, and to my constituents in the Hinchinbrook electorate. Once again, I wish to make the observation that the Commonwealth of Australia, including the great state of Queensland, has been very well served by our constitutional monarchy and reaffirm my view that our current constitutional arrangements have served the people of Queensland and the people of Australia well, and I am a strong and committed advocate for retaining our present constitutional arrangements in the interests of good government.

I wish to offer my sincere thanks to a number of people who have assisted me in being successfully returned as the member for Hinchinbrook for a second term. In the first instance, I must sincerely thank the people who make up the branches and committees of the LNP in the Hinchinbrook electorate. These people are very dedicated supporters of the party and helped me enormously during the recent election campaign. I am very grateful for their support. There are also many people in the Hinchinbrook electorate who are not members of the LNP who volunteered their time to assist me during the campaign, and I am very grateful to these people also. It was great to have so many people who are not directly connected to the LNP express confidence in me and I will do my best to repay that confidence.

In particular, I want to extend my thanks to my campaign directors, Nat La Spina and Marc Rowell, who were once again very generous with their time and experience during the campaign. I value the support and guidance of both Marc and Nat. As always, my family were unfailing in their support for my endeavours and I wish to express my gratitude to my mum and dad, Lloyd and Lorraine, for their love and encouragement. They have made a lot of sacrifices for me. They worked hard to give me an opportunity to get a good education and instilled in me the values and the principles that guide me, and for that I am truly grateful and I thank them.

During the course of the 52nd Queensland Parliament I lost my grandmother, Gladys Margaret Cairns, who passed away aged 88 years. When I delivered my maiden speech on 11 October 2006, it was certainly the most difficult public address I had ever given at that time. But that was surpassed when it fell to me to deliver my grandmother's eulogy at her funeral. Marge was not only my grandmother but she was a good friend. Without redelivering her eulogy, she was a modest woman and an honest woman who loved her family fiercely and I loved her very dearly, and I want to dedicate my address-in-reply speech in her memory.

All honourable members in this place understand and appreciate the importance of the support that we receive from our friends and our family. They make significant sacrifices for us to be able to discharge our commitments to our electorates. The other source of support without which we could not do our jobs is that which we receive from our electorate staff. I put on the record my sincere appreciation to the dedication of my staff in the Hinchinbrook electorate office—Leisa Menegon, Jess Exelby and Lorraine Valinoti—who are really dedicated to the job and are genuinely committed to serving the people of the Hinchinbrook electorate. Leisa, Jess and Lorraine are fantastic staff and I am lucky to have them.

I have been afforded the honour and privilege of representing the people in the communities in the Hinchinbrook electorate for the second time in this place. In my maiden speech I described the Hinchinbrook electorate as God's own country, and I stand by that statement. In last year's redistribution I was very pleased to retain all of the communities in my electorate that I represented in the last parliament, but the virtue of the Hinchinbrook electorate has been greatly enhanced following the addition of new areas at both the southern end and the northern end as a result of that redistribution process.

At the southern end of my electorate the boundary was extended from the Black River to the Bohle River on the eastern side of the Bruce Highway so that the Hinchinbrook electorate now encompasses Mount Low, Bushland Beach and Burdell on the northern beaches of the city of Townsville. These communities are dynamic, they are diverse and they are growing, and they face challenges because of that rapid growth. There are plenty of experienced Queenslanders who have retired after their working lives and who are now living on the northern beaches of the city of Townsville. Lifestyle issues such as the amenity of the local area, access to health services, access to other community support services and the affordability of living are matters high on their agenda. They are concerned about issues such as beach erosion, the ongoing problems at the Townsville Hospital, the need for a community centre at Bushland Beach and the increase in the cost of electricity as, in many cases, retirees are on fixed incomes.

On the northern beaches of Townsville there are also many young working families, and they are also concerned about the affordability of living as many are battling to meet the payments on their homes in this difficult economic climate and in this tightening employment market. Young working families on the northern beaches at Bushland Beach and Mount Low struggle twice daily during peak hour on Mount Low Parkway trying to get the kids to school in the morning and home from school in the afternoon and trying to get themselves to work in the morning and home again in the afternoon. The overpass, which has been constructed, will alleviate some pressure on the intersection of Mount Low Parkway and the Bruce Highway, and I acknowledge that that project has improved safety and reduced traffic congestion at what was previously a very bad bottleneck.

However, the overpass is not the silver bullet for many traffic issues on Mount Low Parkway. There will be a large amount of traffic using this road on a daily basis, particularly at the peak times in the morning and the afternoon that I mentioned earlier. There are parts of the puzzle still missing from the solution that I believe includes the construction of the North Shore Boulevard which would directly link the suburbs of Bushland Beach and Burdell. A solution to the traffic congestion problems on Mount Low Parkway includes the expansion of public transport services to Mount Low and Bushland Beach, and I raised this issue last year in my budget reply speech when I spoke about the rapid population growth on the northern beaches of the city of Townsville and the traffic congestion on the Bruce Highway between the Bohle River and Bluewater at peak times.

At that time I noted that there were no public transport services to the various northern beaches communities north of the Black River in my electorate. I also pointed out last year in my budget reply speech that south of the Black River the Queensland Transport funded Hermit Park bus service announced the qconnect route 33 service, which goes only to Bushland Beach twice before 9 am and returns to Bushland Beach twice after 3 pm, which again corresponds with those peak hour periods that I mentioned earlier. But this is really inadequate to service the needs of the community on the northern beaches of Townsville.

At the northern end of my electorate, the redistribution saw rural areas to the south-west, west and north-west of Innisfail included in the Hinchinbrook electorate. Areas such as Utchee Creek Road, west of Mena Creek, East Palmerston, Nerada and Upper Daradgee were included in the Hinchinbrook electorate. These areas are focused on agriculture, such as the production of sugar cane, bananas and other horticultural crops. Cattle are also raised in these areas. This is a very beautiful and a very productive area and I am very pleased to represent it in the Queensland parliament.

The addition of those areas to my electorate reinforces the Hinchinbrook electorate as an important contributor to Queensland's primary production. In a good season, the Hinchinbrook electorate's four sugar mills—Victoria, Macknade, Tully and South Johnstone—will crush about seven million tonnes of sugar cane. The Hinchinbrook electorate grows approximately two-thirds of Australia's bananas. Each year, literally millions of dollars worth of high-value horticultural crops are grown in my electorate. The commercial fishing industry is also a very important high-value industry in my electorate, although along with other primary industries in Queensland it is much maligned and persecuted by the policies of the state Labor government.

The Hinchinbrook electorate has a diverse economy. Tourism is important in places such as Mission Beach. The electorate has some outstanding tourism destinations, including Wallaman Falls, Hinchinbrook Island and the Family Islands group, the Ma:Mu canopy walk and Paronella Park. The nickel refinery at Yabulu, now owned by Clive Palmer, and the northern iron and brass foundry at Wangan give the electorate an industrial base.

Mr Lawlor: Is that the same bloke who owns the LNP?

Mr CRIPPS: Jealousy will get the minister nowhere. However, our great primary industries continue to underpin the economy of the Hinchinbrook electorate. They provide many jobs, both directly and indirectly, for the families who live in the communities that I represent. As I said in my maiden speech, I am ready to defend the rural sector against the aggressive and punitive policies of this government, which always tries to undermine the productivity and take away the property rights of the people who are involved in these industries. They have acquired those property rights in good faith. They have a right to farm and fish. They have a right to provide for their families. I reaffirm my commitment to that today.

I am very concerned about the way in which the Bligh government has commenced the 53rd Parliament of Queensland, with the introduction of the Vegetation Management (Regrowth Clearing Moratorium) Bill and the Great Barrier Reef Protection Amendment Bill. While the Queensland and Australian economies have fallen on difficult times, the rural sector remains relatively strong and the policies contained in those bills threaten jobs in my electorate. As well, they threaten jobs in many other electorates across the state. I am at a loss to understand why the Bligh government is determined to undermine the viability and productivity of our rural industries with these policies. I find it really appalling that those industries were sacrificed and became the subject of a grubby political deal with the Greens in return for preferences at the state election in March. Labor's approach to the environment always involves more bureaucracy and regulation. In contrast, the LNP prefers to be innovative and positive on environmental issues.

Mr Shine: Ha, ha!

Mr CRIPPS: I have some examples if the honourable member for Toowoomba North would like to listen to them. During the course of the 52nd Parliament, the opposition promoted an ethanol mandate to reduce reliance on fossil fuels, a voluntary carbon credit trading scheme and registration concessions for hybrid vehicles. These initiatives were opposed by the state Labor government for base political purposes.

Indeed, the government in Queensland should be embarrassed that the New South Wales Labor government beat it to the punch, because that state has had an ethanol mandate for years. With Queensland's great sugar industry and grains industry, we should have had an ethanol mandate years ago. Over the past six years, on three separate occasions the LNP opposition has introduced private members' bills to provide for an ethanol mandate—between 2002 and 2008. Three times the state Labor government has defeated the proposal to have an ethanol mandate in Queensland. For that the government should be ashamed of itself. At the 2006 state election, the Labor government made a promise to introduce an ethanol mandate by 2010. So next year is crunch time for the state Labor government to deliver on that promise. I look forward to the introduction of that ethanol mandate.

The Bligh government's decision to axe the fuel tax rebate in Queensland will have a serious impact on regional and rural areas, particularly North Queensland, which is heavily dependent on heavy vehicle road transport. In this regard, government members representing North Queensland electorates have really abandoned their constituents. It is not fair for the Bligh government to target the rural sector. Those primary industries employ thousands of Queenslanders and, more importantly, feed millions of Queenslanders. Sooner rather than later the government needs to realise that it cannot continue to take the rural sector for granted.

Since the 2009 state election we have seen an extraordinary series of events that has totally undermined the confidence of the people of Queensland in the state government. Public policy positions, such as the removal of the fuel tax rebate and the sale of public assets, were not canvassed with the people of Queensland before or during the state election campaign. Indeed, in both cases those policies were disavowed by the Labor Party. In a sneaky, tricky manoeuvre, both the fuel tax and the fire sale of state assets were unveiled after the election.

The other major issue that has plagued the state government is the allegations of inappropriate links with lobbyists, many of whom are former Labor members of parliament, and the extent of their influence over government decisions. The state government voted against a motion moved by the LNP opposition to establish a royal commission to investigate the culture of secrecy and allegations of corruption. On 29 July 2009, former Fitzgerald inquiry commissioner Tony Fitzgerald had the following to say in respect of the current state government, formerly led by Peter Beattie and now led by Premier Bligh, which has been in power for the past 12 years—

Access can now be purchased, patronage is dispensed, mates and supporters are appointed and retired politicians exploit their connections to obtain 'success fees' for deals between business and government.

In 1987, amid allegations of a similar nature, the then Queensland National Party government had the guts to call a royal commission and appoint Tony Fitzgerald as the commissioner. The result of that royal commission is well known. It was a watershed for politics and public administration and government in Queensland. Two decades later, the Bligh government has demonstrated that it does not have the same courage to open itself up to the scrutiny of a royal commission. The government is protecting the Labor mates and insulting the people of Queensland.

There is a claim made by the state government that the CMC has the powers required to investigate the allegations of corruption that are dogging the government and that a royal commission is not required. That claim would be laughable if it were not so serious. The state government is asking Queenslanders to believe that the CMC has made royal commissions redundant and that we will never need one ever again. The findings of the royal commission into Dr Patel and the Bundaberg Base Hospital shamed the Bligh Labor government for its mismanagement of Queensland Health. Does the state Labor government really believe that we should have just left that inquiry to be undertaken by the CMC? The Bligh government is just trying to sweep these matters under the carpet. The integrity and the accountability green paper released by the Premier during the last sitting week of the Queensland parliament is just a good old fashioned political distraction. The government is asking Queenslanders to ignore the current scandal and accept its promise that it is cleaning up the system that has seen the Labor mates flourish. It is just a joke.

I was the youngest member of the 52nd Queensland Parliament. I have relinquished that title in the 53rd Queensland Parliament to the member for Morayfield. But I also acknowledge that my colleagues in the LNP the member for Kawana and the member for Beaudesert are both aged under 30. As I said in my maiden speech, the Queensland parliament ought to reflect the diversity of the community and it is appropriate that young people have a voice in this place as well.

I also recognise and appreciate the contributions and the experience of longer serving members. My more experienced colleagues from the LNP have been generous with their advice and guidance to me as a new member during the last parliament. I welcome all the new members of parliament and I offer my best wishes to all former members who left the parliament in a variety of circumstances.

I am pleased to be a member of the LNP. It contested the recent election as a united and genuine alternative to the government, which is out of touch. Queensland responded positively to the LNP with an increase in our primary vote and a strong two-party preferred result. Eleven new members of the LNP have come into the 53rd Parliament with the opposition now numbering 34. I am confident that the people of Queensland will be drawn to the LNP in greater numbers as the government continues to demonstrate its lack of regard for them and as its policy agenda is exposed as nothing but cheap political spin.

I am also enthusiastic about addressing the challenges that my new shadow portfolio of disability services and multicultural affairs poses in a complicated and difficult sector of public policy. My election as the member for Hinchinbrook in 2006 was a humbling experience. I am equally humbled and grateful to the people of Hinchinbrook for placing their faith in me to represent them in the Queensland parliament for a second time. The Hinchinbrook electorate has not been held by the ALP since 1960 but, as I said in my maiden speech, it has never been a long-term safe seat—previously for the Nationals. The LNP has been successful at this election, but I do not expect it to be a long-term safe seat for the LNP either.

The people of Hinchinbrook expect strong and effective representation and, as such, it is a challenge to me to demonstrate to my constituents that I am worthy of their support. I have not taken their support for granted in the past and I will not do so in the future. The people of Queensland have returned the government, but the people of Hinchinbrook have returned me as their voice in this place. I take this opportunity to reaffirm my undertaking that I will do my best to further their interests and to provide them with the strong representation that they deserve.