



Speech by

CHRIS FOLEY

Member for MARYBOROUGH

Hansard 28 May 2003

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

Hon. A. M. BLIGH (South Brisbane—ALP) (Leader of the House) (5.37 p.m.), by leave, without notice: I move—

That the House notes the election of the member for Maryborough.

Mr ACTING SPEAKER: Order! Before calling the honourable member for Maryborough, I remind members that this is the member's first speech and should be listened to with the courtesies reserved for such occasions. I call the member for Maryborough.

Mr CHRIS FOLEY (Maryborough—Ind) (5.38 p.m.): Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker. I feel greatly privileged today to be given this opportunity to present my maiden speech to parliament as the recently elected member for the electorate of Maryborough. My election, resulting from the 26 April by-election, was a great honour and I very humbly thank the people of the Maryborough electorate for the faith and confidence they have shown in me by affording me the honour of representing them. I will do my utmost to deserve their respect.

I assure all members of the House that I come here among you not as a political enemy in any sense but as a friend and colleague seeking to do the right thing by my electorate, by my state and my country and by this House at all times. I want to pay tribute to all of the people who worked tirelessly on my by-election campaign, in particular Col Walker, Jonathan Snoswell, Bob Macfie, Boyd Baker, Bill Gunn and Gilbert Alison and the army of locals who worked on booths and gave generously of their time and resources to get me over the line.

During the recent by-election campaign, I made a commitment to voters in my electorate that by my actions in this place I would support legislation or other issues which I believed were in the best interests of my whole electorate and the state, and I reaffirm that here today. Government proposals which I believe deserve my support and my vote will get it and those that in my view do not I will oppose as a truly independent representative of my electorate.

I would be remiss if I do not at this juncture pay tribute to my opponents in the recent by-election for the manner in which they conducted themselves and their campaigns. The by-election campaign was free from personal acrimony, attacks or abuse, and I respect my opponents for that.

Today I wish to raise a number of issues with honourable members, some of them are concerns or aspirations I have held for some time and some are matters that emerged as specific issues of concern during the recent Maryborough by-election.

The Maryborough district is a great place to live, work and raise a family. I am blessed to have a wonderful wife and five beautiful children, ranging from year 12 to year 1. In fact, I would not have had the honour of being elected to the 50th parliament of Queensland without the support of my wife, Glenys, and my children—Chelsea, Jessica, Jared, Caitlyn and Brittany. But there are underlying concerns, too, which we share with many other families throughout the region.

Jobs and job security emerged as one of the key issues of the by-election, and there is a very real desire within the electorate to see government at all levels make a much stronger formal commitment to encouraging and creating real lasting jobs based on real growth, not merely opportunistic one-off or ad hoc schemes providing short-term artificial fixes or benefits for selective political impact or gain at election times.

The Transport Minister, Steve Bredhauer, and the Primary Industries Minister, Henry Palaszczuk, recently attended the Tilt (Train) Rock 'n' Roll Show Ball in Maryborough and praised the city for its innovation and initiative as characterised by that special function. I agree with them. Of course, Maryborough is very well known nationally and internationally for the skills and innovation of its industries, dating back many generations. But industries cannot work in isolation left purely to their own devices to find and sustain work and jobs without governments helping to create the right climate for optimism and expansion and also 'greasing the wheels' where possible, especially in these times when government actions and policies do so much to influence the tide of opportunity and optimism either positively or negatively. But I believe the government's efforts in this area must go much further than this.

The Wide Bay region has the highest level of unemployment in the country. The people of this region have the right to expect more than just a 'stop, go' approach from governments, both state and Commonwealth; they expect them to provide real long-term commitments and initiatives and to provide real growth and real lasting jobs in the long term. For example, Maryborough Walkers EDI has the skills, expertise and capacity to produce all of Queensland Rail's railway rolling stock requirements for the foreseeable future. It should be given the opportunity to do just that through this government entering into a formal long-term agreement with Walkers EDI to provide all Queensland rolling stock needs for the next 10 to 20 years. That would remove the uncertainty which hangs over this facility and the future job prospects of the workers and the families who depend on it at this time. Companies or families relying on them cannot make long-term commitments or even have long-term hopes and aspirations based on short-term ad hoc work prospects and contractual arrangements. I will be pressing this on behalf of the company and the electorate as strongly as I can with all relevant ministers. I urge them to consider the long-term best interests of a vital industry and a vital city and region in giving this proposition the recognition it deserves.

I would like to thank the government and encourage it to be even more futuristic and forward thinking on these ideas. I direct my comments here not just to the state government but also to the Commonwealth. I urge both governments to consider declaring the Wide Bay-Burnett region based in Maryborough a formal regional development growth region to attract specific-purpose funding from state and Commonwealth sources over and above the normal government funding arrangements to generate real growth and long-term jobs and job security in this region. The region's appalling unemployment levels warrant and fully justify this special treatment.

There are a number of worthy, feasible and achievable projects in this respect which both governments could direct their attention and resources to under such a program. For example, Maryborough industry has the expertise, the skills and the potential to become the production hub of Queensland's alternative power generation—wind and solar—which could lead Australia. Walkers EDI executives have confirmed to me that this is both feasible and achievable given the right impetus and level of support from state and Commonwealth authorities. I will be taking a proposition on this to relevant government ministers in the near future, and I urge the government to look very closely and seriously at this project, as it is achievable in our time. Environmentally it is a very desirable clean industry with worldwide application and implications.

Another exciting project that is starting to gather momentum in our region is a marine park, which has the potential to become a major employer through a coalition of businesses large and small. This project has the potential to employ between 400 to 2,000 workers. This is a logical fit for our district, as it harnesses the skills of our brilliantly skilled tradespeople.

I was pleased to see that the Environment Minister, Dean Wells, recently gave an assurance that Queensland's coastal areas—beaches and foreshore areas, et cetera—would remain open to access wherever possible for public use and enjoyment, as distinct from the closure of many beach and foreshore areas in the southern states. I believe that is a most welcome assurance, but it is not without its responsibilities.

In the Burrum district in my electorate and in other coastal areas of the region there is mounting concern over the growing incidence of coastal beach and foreshore erosion. I urge the government specifically to take a more sympathetic approach to calls from residents of the Burrum district for assistance with foreshore and beach erosion works to protect properties and public assets in that area. While government commitments to this type of work in the glamour spots of the Gold Coast and Sunshine Coast are well known and documented, I believe the same cannot be said of areas such as the Burrum, where the same high risks and cost of restoration works apply.

The area's claim for major and urgent silting correction works to make the Burrum River more navigable and free flowing deserve greater government recognition and action also. Whilst on the subject of the Burrum area, I am aware that the government has a proposal put before it for the development of a theme park on the site of the old Howard power station. I urge the government to approve this project to open the way for a much-needed new development for the Howard-Torbanlea area—one that would not only provide a welcome economic shot in the arm for the region but would

also provide greatly enhanced job prospects for this area. This is an area which has no value to anyone in its present state and would simply become an unwanted liability to the government or to the Hervey Bay City Council if this private development on the site is not facilitated. It makes sense for the government to grant the land to the proposed development to help get the project off the ground, and I urge the government to do so.

I point out to government members in particular that there is a legitimate and growing concern in the Maryborough electorate over the decline and fragmentation of local and district health services. Specifically, the decline of available services at the Maryborough Base Hospital is an issue of real concern to many, many Maryborough district electors and their families. Whilst the rationalisation and regionalisation of services at district hospitals is a fact of life, what is not appreciated is the manner in which this is being done and in particular the way this has affected available services and staffing levels at the Maryborough Base Hospital. Electors' concerns are more sharply felt especially in view of much-publicised comments by the Premier and by the Health Minister that Maryborough Hospital staffing and services would not be downgraded as they have been. The staff at Maryborough Base Hospital are wonderfully talented and dedicated health professionals who have the patients' best interests at heart.

I urge the Premier and the Health Minister to consider issuing a firm policy statement setting out definitely the future staffing and service levels at Maryborough Base Hospital and specifically an indication of precisely when and if services that have been downgraded or withdrawn at Maryborough will be reinstated or restored. Maryborough district residents deserve to know this. Half the problem with our hospital is that the lack of good communication regarding the depth and pace of change has given rise to a problem in our community on the expectations of the service. In my experience, it is better to underpromise and overdeliver than the other way around.

I draw the attention of honourable members, and particularly the Transport Minister, the Hon. Steve Bredhauer, and the Premier, to the need for an urgent government review of the state of bridges on rural roads throughout Queensland to avert a possible major crisis for the haulage of the state's rural production in many areas. My concern and the concern of rural industry, which I relay now to the government and to honourable members from all areas, has been prompted by a consultant's report to the Tiaro Shire Council, which recommends that load limits of 10 to 35 tonnes be placed on more than 50 old timber bridges in the shire. This means that the haulage of vital beef and timber resources to markets in Maryborough and elsewhere could be dramatically affected.

There are special concerns, for example, over how this will affect the cartage of some 15 per cent, or 114,000 tonnes, of the 2003 sugarcane crop from the Tiaro-Bauple area for processing in Maryborough. The point is that, while this prospect factors only part of the Maryborough district now, the problem that it highlights could be merely the very small tip of a very big iceberg for rural industry if this situation and concern becomes an issue statewide. I cannot imagine that it is only one small shire in one district that faces a problem with the condition of its rural road bridges and the threat of damage, accidents, insurance claims and losses that that poses. It is inconceivable that only one council among the state's 138 local authorities faces this dilemma. How are councils such as Tiaro, with limited rates revenue bases, going to cover the cost of (a) bringing all bridges up to the required standard, or (b) insurance claims or losses against them? Mr Acting Speaker, Mr Premier and honourable members, I believe that there needs to be an urgent statewide survey to establish just how widespread and how potentially serious this threat is and possibly urgent funding measures to improve bridges at risk quickly.

There are many other areas in my electorate, such as Boonooroo and Curra, which have their own challenges and potentials as small communities and must not be overlooked and forgotten when it comes to carving up the pie of community resources and support. I would like to thank the Premier, Mr Beattie, and the relevant ministers on behalf of the electorate of Maryborough for their generosity in terms of commitments made to my electorate during the recent by-election, which has given rise to this maiden speech. We look forward with gusto to the delivery of commitments such as the 14-person tactical response group, the safety upgrade of the Lamington Bridge to include a bikeway, the St Mary's Primary School renovations and the \$150,000 initiative to promote engineering in our region.

With regard to the tactical response group, we applaud the Premier for his wisdom in deciding to locate the tactical response group in Maryborough at the last general election. Maryborough is the logical choice, because of its geographical centrality to our region. In addition, because of the swift response times needed for a tactical response group, Maryborough's location on the Bruce Highway gives it quick access to the feeder roads to the surrounding regions. Even though this group has not eventuated yet, the Premier has reminded us that he has not forgotten his initial promise to the people of Maryborough and district.

We appreciate the government's commitment to the upgrade of the Lamington Bridge. This bridge has been a nightmare for the parents of schoolchildren in Maryborough. A tremendous number of children ride their bikes to school across this bridge each day with no bike lane. This commitment is a vote for safety of our kids and we look forward to its speedy completion.

I welcome and applaud the government for recently introducing its \$150,000 project to promote engineering initiative in the Wide Bay engineering industry. Around 5,500 people are reportedly employed in the region's manufacturing and engineering sectors. Almost 1,500 of these people are employed in Maryborough. The upgrade of St Mary's Primary School is again a welcome boost to our area and we look forward to its completion.

I look forward to working with the government to ensure that all of these projects are delivered in a timely and efficient manner to my electorate. We aim to build a positive relationship with the government so that these and many other valuable projects will be delivered to our region to enhance the quality and safety of the lives of my constituents in our electorate. I look forward to reading in next week's budget about the funding for these commitments.

Over the past few years, real estate values have risen strongly in many regions of south-east Queensland. Last week I had the privilege of being part of the opening of a new office in Maryborough for a very successful and astute Hervey Bay real estate agent. During the course of conversation, he indicated that many areas in close proximity to our city have become far too expensive, but Maryborough real estate is an undervalued gem that is set to rise strongly in the near future.

I intend to create an affordability index in the near future that will show what a wonderful and inexpensive place Maryborough and its surrounding districts are to live in. Over the past few years, we have seen the building of the Brolga Theatre, which has brought such fantastic acts as Tommy Emmanuel and James Morrison to our city; our Station Square Shopping Centre, where people can find it very difficult to get a car park; and the Maryborough Correctional Centre. All of those facilities have been a massive boost to our economy and have brought many new jobs to town.

The Reddacliff plan aims to bring to Maryborough a vibrant, inner city based on our beautiful river being the door to the city with marinas and refurbished classic buildings that will complement the beauty of Maryborough's famous Queenslander homes. Maryborough may well develop a Mapleton style feel with riverside coffee shops, art galleries and live music venues as people rediscover the beauty of our classic buildings and riverside inner-city Queen Park.

When we stop to consider that Maryborough has produced more sporting champions than we could poke a stick at, that we have Queenslander homes that would make Brisbane renovators drool, and a laid-back, live-and-let-live lifestyle, members begin to get a baseline understanding of why we love our region. In closing, Mr Acting Speaker and honourable members, I look forward to the challenges of managing the sometimes competing interests of my electorate and being a truly Independent state member who works hard for the entire electorate, great or small. I humbly purpose in the future to be remembered by history as a state member who worked hard for his electorate with vision, skill, enthusiasm and integrity. I dedicate this maiden speech to my Heavenly Father and to the memory of my son, Joshua, who left us for a better place after three short years.

Motion agreed to.