



Speech by

PETER WELLINGTON

MEMBER FOR NICKLIN

Hansard 30 July 1998

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

Mr WELLINGTON (Nicklin—IND) (2.30 p.m.): Mr Speaker and honourable members, I most humbly seek your patience and tolerance as I rise for the first time to pledge my support for Premier Peter Beattie and his Government. In pledging support for the Labor Government, I stress that it is limited to confidence motions, the Appropriation Bills and a commitment that I will not abstain from voting. However, I will not support the Government if there is evidence of gross fraud, misappropriation or like illegal activities. I render this pledge because I believe in my heart that it is in the best interests of the people of Queensland.

My decision to support the Labor Government is not so much an endorsement of the Labor Party or of its policies, but more a chance to secure for Queensland stable government and to give certainty to Queenslanders. The alternative to Labor was a National/Liberal coalition with, maybe, the support of One Nation and my colleague Independent Liz Cunningham. My pro-Labor decision was made after discussions with all of the parties concerned and after much soul-searching. I will leave it to history to judge whether my decision was right or wrong.

Today I am overwhelmed with feelings of pride, humility and gratitude and am greatly honoured to be here. It is the realisation of a dream that began approximately 20 years ago when I was studying law next door at the Queensland University of Technology. I used to sit upstairs in the gallery, look down into this Chamber and wonder whether one day I would take my place in the Chamber. For helping to make that dream come true and bestowing on me this great honour, I thank most sincerely the people of Nicklin. I also thank my wife, Jenny, who was my campaign director and chief supporter and without whom I would not be standing here today. I want to assure my constituents and the people of Queensland that I will do my very best to be worthy of the honour that they have bestowed upon me and make them all proud of me as the member for Nicklin. While I am delighted to have won my seat in Parliament, I am conscious of the heavy burden of responsibility that comes with it. I give this unflinching undertaking to the people of Queensland: I will consider every piece of legislation carefully and take appropriate advice before I make any decision that will impact on their lives and future prosperity.

In the lead-up to today, I have been overwhelmed with messages and telephone calls of support from within this State of Queensland and throughout Australia. I had a very touching letter of thanks from Brisbane's Chinese community and even a letter from a student in Japan. From the bottom of my heart, I sincerely thank all of those people for their best wishes. However, my decision certainly did not please everyone. I will be working very hard to convince those people that I did what I believed was in the best interests of Queensland.

To date, I am impressed with the manner in which Mr Beattie has gone about the task of running the State. He has been out there working from day one—leading. I applaud his regional Cabinet meetings where he is getting out there and listening to the people of Queensland. He appears to have a genuine desire to deliver those promised jobs and improved services. I will be watching him with great interest. I wish him well in the days ahead. There is no doubt that Mr Beattie took on board matters that I raised with him at our first meeting. At that meeting I said that the bells were ringing for change and, if politicians did not listen, they would signal the end of the party political system in Queensland. We are at the crossroads. Throughout the State Queenslanders are watching us as never before. Television has turned the political scene into prime-time viewing and political scandal sells

newspapers better than anything else. People are fed up with doing it tough. They believe that no-one gives a damn, particularly politicians. There are real problems out there, real poverty and real despair. There is a sense of alienation among many Queenslanders who have delivered a serious rebuke to both the major political parties at the ballot box. When I was doorknocking in the Nicklin electorate, I discovered people who were not just angry—they were very angry. They said that they had been treated with contempt by politicians at all levels. Many people I spoke to in the lead-up to that campaign had said that they had never even spoken to a politician. I believe that never before in the history of government have politicians been as despised as they are currently.

The reasons are there for all to see. Many of our young people are growing up without any prospects of a job, families are breaking up and many of our middle aged are being retrenched from jobs that they have held all of their lives. Crime is escalating and many of our elderly live in fear behind locked doors. Everywhere there is uncertainty and distrust. The National Competition Policy has contributed to the demise of our small towns and communities. A centralisation of services has dealt them a death blow. Service industries are vanishing. The station masters, police officers, bank managers and postmasters are disappearing and with them thousands of jobs. Most of the time, there is nothing to replace them except social security and despair.

Something must be done, and done quickly, and I caution those honourable members who may be inclined to declare war on the Government to focus on the real enemy: unemployment. It is unemployment that is destroying Queensland. The message to us from the recent election is: stop attacking each other and start finding ways to improve the lot of the people we represent. There are tough times ahead. We will suffer a backlash from the Asian crisis, but, if we are prepared for it, we will survive it. We will not survive if we are so busy fighting each other that we lose track of the real issue, that is, unemployment.

We need to focus on delivering to Queenslanders the dignity that they so rightly deserve. We must learn from the past. We must encourage and help small business and clean industries. We must promote our wonderful tourism destinations and give our farming sectors a fair go. Forget the "develop at any cost then jet off to Spain to spend the loot" scenario and the white shoe brigade and their brown paper bags—this State needs strong and steady growth that will drive its economy and deliver those real jobs. Queensland has some of the best brains in the country. We must harness their talents and put them to work for us so that they can provide us with the solutions that we need. No more jobs for the boys—let us give the jobs to those who can deliver the goods for Queenslanders.

The ballot box has proved what we all should have known: there was a massive protest vote out there. It told us that politicians were out of touch and that they needed to get back to basics, get out in their electorates and find out what it is like in the real world. The voters of Queensland told us to lift our game—to play fair, play clean and do the right thing. Only by behaving decently towards each other and by concentrating on the game instead of trying to score political points against each other will we win back the respect of Queenslanders. The slanging matches must stop. Honesty and integrity must replace greed and arrogance.

We are fortunate to live in the finest State of Australia and in one of the last remaining true democracies. And, because we are a democracy, I as an Independent could aspire to political office. The reason that I ran as an Independent was that I was disillusioned with the party system. I had been a member of the National Party and the Liberal Party, but I decided that loyalty to my constituents—to my electorate—would come before loyalty to a political party. The punters said that I had no hope, yet I rolled the Speaker of Parliament who I think at the time had about a 13% plus majority. I won Nicklin against the odds because I had a strong support base in Nambour, Nicklin's heartland. As the local councillor for more than four years, I had provided a grassroots style of representation that involved massive community involvement, including hand delivering my own newsletter to my electorate on a regular basis. It was roads, rates and rubbish stuff. I knew very well what my electorate wanted and I did my jolly best to provide it. My hard work paid off and I was deeply grateful to the people of Nambour for giving me such a huge vote of confidence at the ballot box. Although I doorknocked the major settlements of Nicklin, the people at the southern end did not know Wellington very well, but they will. I make them this promise: I will become as familiar to those people in the southern end of Nicklin as I am to the people of Nambour, the northern end of Nicklin.

I believe strongly that people power is presently stifled by the party political system. For example, a politician tied to a party must toe the party line no matter what the people in his or her electorate think. The only way that the people can show their disapproval is at the ballot box. But there is a way that the party system would be more acceptable to me and that is if Parliament embraced citizen's initiated referendums. I am informed that this piece of legislation was first introduced to this Parliament at the beginning of the century. It is perhaps appropriate that towards the end of the century this same legislation will be presented to Parliament and, hopefully, will become law. Citizen's initiated referendums have the capacity to deliver true democracy to the people and, by supporting it, I believe

that this Parliament will redeem itself with the voters of Queensland. I will not speak further on citizen's initiated referendums but foreshadow that they will be the subject of my first private member's Bill.

The recent election has been a serious lesson for us all and one which we must learn from in order to go forward. It is my sincere hope that in the coming term I will see hospital waiting lists slashed, police back on the streets, our economy stimulated and thousands more real jobs created. In this way our weak and sick will be cared for properly, our elderly will be able to feel safe in their homes, our young can look forward to a future and our battlers will be given some real hope. But we cannot achieve any of this unless we are prepared to put our differences aside and work together for the common good of Queensland. With this in mind, I make this appeal: during times of war, politicians buried their differences and worked for the common good. Let us unite and go to battle together to make this great State of ours a better place for all. I thank members for their patience.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!
