



Speech by

Scott Emerson

MEMBER FOR INDOOROOPILLY

Hansard Wednesday, 22 April 2009

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr EMERSON (Indooroopilly—LNP) (8.26 pm): In a democratic society there is no greater honour than to be selected as the representative of your community in its parliament. I wish to thank the people of Indooroopilly for giving me that honour. For those who voted for me, I hope my efforts over the next years will reward their faith. For those who chose otherwise, I will be working to earn your support. In either case, I am here to serve you.

I would also like to thank my family for its support in the lead-up to and during the campaign: my wife, Robyn, whom I met more than 20 years ago when we were students at the University of Queensland at St Lucia; my daughter, Kate, who is fast becoming a young woman but it seems just yesterday that I was taking her to ballet lessons at St David's parish hall in Chelmer; and my son, Jack, who could barely reach the boom when I was teaching him capsizing training at the Oxley Sailing Club but by the end of the year I suspect will be taller than me. They endured, without complaint, the long absences and roller-coaster of emotions that a campaign inevitably brings.

I need also to mention the efforts of my campaign manager, James 'Josh' Mackay. His hard work, enthusiasm and commitment to this endeavour were crucial to its success. While James is not one to be selfish about credit, I think it is important to note that it is done and he did it. I also need to thank Councillor Jane Prentice for her friendship and encouragement over many years. Jane is a talented and tireless worker for her Walter Taylor ward. It is significant that her husband, Ian, was once member for this seat in the early eighties when it was named Toowong and fought for greater accountability of government during his time in this place.

Today I would like to outline what I see as my role in this parliament and what principles will guide me in the deliberations ahead. As we celebrate the state of Queensland's sesquicentenary, it is appropriate that we acknowledge the milestones on the historic map of our last 150 years, and indeed the times before that.

The people and lands of Indooroopilly have played a significant role in Queensland's history—from the lost convicts that guided John Oxley along the stretch of the Brisbane River, which this electorate, alone of all seats, straddles, to the world-class scientific breakthroughs achieved at the University of Queensland. It is right to recognise and revel in our great history. But I see it as incumbent on me among colleagues in this place to build positively on that past and dedicate myself to the collective task—indeed duty—to guide our state into the future. I do not use the word 'duty' lightly. It is something that has been instilled in me from an early age. I was proud to have my 81-year-old father in the chamber gallery for yesterday's opening ceremony of this 53rd Parliament. He served for many years as an officer in the Royal Australian Air Force and then after leaving the military worked tirelessly in his own local Brisbane community with numerous volunteer organisations. His efforts left an indelible impression on me. I will strive to achieve the same level of dedication, diligence and determination in serving the Indooroopilly electorate that he demonstrated over so many years.

Entering this chamber as an MP for the first time, I reflected that I was in a rare, if not unique, position. As a journalist for both the ABC and the *Australian* newspaper, I reported extensively on the proceedings of the Queensland parliament and its members. I am sure there are examples of where I

commented adversely on the performance of some long-serving members in this House. However, I like to believe and hope that that reporting was fair and balanced. I now expect to be exposed to similar rigorous scrutiny by members of my former profession seated in the press gallery. I am not foolish enough to believe that reporting will always be favourable. The media has a fundamental role in keeping the Queensland public informed about the proceedings of this House. That should not be their responsibility alone. I believe that the business of the Queensland government and parliament is the business of the Queensland people.

Too often we have seen government slouch towards secrecy, skulking behind cabinet doors rather than embracing scrutiny, and parliamentary rules manipulated to thwart rather than facilitate open discussion. It is not just the media that is obstructed in its efforts. Queenslanders are stymied when they seek to discover what is being done in their name and paid for by their taxpayer funds. Open, transparent and accountable government is fundamental to good government. It is always easy to make decisions behind closed doors, free from scrutiny and the need for explanation. But when so many decisions are made in secret, it risks undermining faith in government and its processes. While there needs to be a balance between on the one hand reasonable confidentiality in order to functionally administer government and on the other hand transparency of government, I am committed during my time in this House to err on the side of openness rather than obstruction when it comes to the work of this parliament.

As for the work of parliament, I do not believe, and I do not believe that Queenslanders believe, it is the government's or parliament's job to do everything. What they do expect is that this parliament is relevant to a people who have grown up in a modern, tolerant, progressive Queensland. I believe Queenslanders want a parliament that respects the individual's right to choose how they live in a free and tolerant community. They expect their parliament to promote an economically progressive agenda that respects the right to choose in an open and competitive market. They also demand an efficient government that effectively plans and manages the state.

In my electorate of Indooroopilly I have seen firsthand the failure to plan and manage. Like other members of my community, I wonder why traffic congestion seems to worsen by the day; why there has been a failure to ensure the Western Freeway and Centenary Highway can cope with demand and not force rat-running through suburban streets; why the train line that runs through the electorate is the most overcrowded in Brisbane; why a \$26 million redevelopment of the busiest train station outside the CBD failed to provide even one park-and-ride space; why pressure builds on precious green space in the face of inappropriate and short-sighted development; why the failure to manage the economy means students graduating this year from the University of Queensland face rising unemployment, massive state debt and increasing taxes—burdens that no-one sitting in this House has seen in their lifetimes; and why each child born in Queensland in our 150th year is born with almost \$13,000 of state debt just because they are born a Queenslander.

These are difficult economic times, but they can be made far worse by poor choices. The solution will not be achieved through the growth of government departments, the multiplication of rules and the imposition of endless regulations. I believe the solution lies with promoting individual freedom and free enterprise, a light and fair-handed government which encourages and respects private sector initiative, and low taxes. Having run my own business over the past five years, I understand the challenges of creating jobs and also how important a job is to a functioning and healthy society. I still believe our best hope for future prosperity rests, in the words of Sir Robert Menzies, with the 'divine restlessness and ambitious enterprise of the individual'. In difficult economic times, I believe the challenge for us as parliamentarians is to do more than just frighten people. We must do more than spend our energy indulging in smear, scare and false scandal. Truth and integrity must underpin our decisions and the goals we set. I believe we must be aspirational and in turn we must inspire. Our task is to explain the challenges, promote the opportunities and provide leadership.

There are two areas that I would like to particularly mention—the environment and the community. Today most reasonable people accept how important the environment is. We are all environmentalists now, whether we are farmers who long ago recognised their livelihood depended on the health of their land, Indigenous people with a deep spiritual understanding of responsibility—a responsibility that deserves recognition—or urban Queenslanders who see a clean, green environment as an essential part of their modern lifestyle. Unfortunately and increasingly, the environment is used as a wedge issue, divorced from genuine concern and hostage to political expediency.

Having warned of that risk but paying heed to that practical mantra which calls on us to act globally and think locally, I want to raise an issue in Indooroopilly. It is a growing urban electorate that desperately desires to preserve and enhance its green space if we are to ensure our children and our grandchildren room to run, play and breathe fresh air. Much to our surprise, Brisbane people have suddenly woken up and, in the face of population pressure, found ourselves short of green space. That childhood spent climbing mango trees and playing in the local bush has been replaced in many cases by a distant park you have to drive to. With the state government mandating that room be found for an additional 140,000 dwellings by 2026, this will be even more the case in future.

Those of us who love the local communities at Indooroopilly understand that growth has to be accommodated, but so does our lifestyle. I call on the state and federal governments to reserve considerable tracts of land for public use in perpetuity. They can do this in Indooroopilly by not selling the Alan Fletcher Research Station in Sherwood and the CSIRO and DPI land in Long Pocket. That land is owned by taxpayers. It is an investment in the future and, in the view of many of my constituents, a contributor to future lifestyle. It should not be sold off for quick funds. No-one is making extra land. Once it is lost, it is lost forever. This is an opportunity which must not be lost. Losing this land is a price too great to pay.

We all understand the importance of community. My own journey to this place has involved a longstanding commitment as a community advocate. My wife, Robyn, and I co-founded the St Lucia Community Association seven years ago and for more than two decades together we have fought to make our local community a better place—over the years working with bush care, sporting, education, crime prevention and history groups. I know I can and will rely on her guidance in the years ahead and she would argue that good community groups keep you honest and grounded. They are the ones who pull on gloves and pick up mattocks to clear weeds and protect suburban waterways, work with local police to make our streets and homes safer and get our kids away from the computer and out onto the playing field each weekend. These committed and caring groups will be central among my advisers and the electorate of Indooroopilly has more than 200 such groups, all staffed by volunteers working to making their community a better place.

Despite the efforts of these many volunteers to support their local community, there is in our society a sense of a loss of community in the face of change and uncertainty. That provides a challenge for us who sit in this parliament. Social commentator Hugh Mackay warns that the sense of change and loss of community cohesion tempts us to impose a kind of regulated morality on society where we take the short cut to good behaviour. We ban, we regulate, we legislate, we control. This exposes us to the risk of limiting our freedoms. The essence of morality lies in our freedom to make moral choices. If we impose too many regulations in areas previously left to the dictates of our consciences, we may discourage people from thinking that moral choices have to be made. I accept that strongly held views on matters may never be reconciled. It was John Stuart Mill who argued that exchanges between individuals should be based on free will and mutual tolerance of different moralities. He said—

... the only purpose for which power can be rightly exercised over any member of a civilised community, against his will, is to prevent harm to others.

For myself, as I deliberate on the many decisions I will make in my time as a member of parliament, it is about recognising that there must be a limit to the interference by government in people's lives.

In conclusion, let me again thank the people of the Indooroopilly electorate for granting me the honour to be their member of parliament. I hope that my efforts here will ensure that for all Queenslanders in the years ahead, to quote Menzies words, 'life is free and its horizons wide'.