



Speech by

Jack Dempsey

MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG

Hansard Wednesday, 11 October 2006

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr DEMPSEY (Bundaberg—NPA) (3.54 pm): Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. After hearing the maiden speeches of the member for Gympie and the member for Hinchinbrook, my resolve that the National Party is a great and visionary party for the people of Queensland has been strengthened. I would like to thank the people of Bundaberg for putting their faith in me and giving me the opportunity to represent their interests in state parliament. This is an honour that I intend to reward by hard work and dedication to the community of Bundaberg. I would also like to formally thank and acknowledge the Independent candidate for Bundaberg, Greg McMahon, for his preferences, which enabled me to be elected the member for Bundaberg. Greg's intestinal fortitude, sincerity and family values are to be commended and I thank him for his support.

I am not an academic, but I know the difference between right and wrong. I look forward to listening to the people of Bundaberg to give me good advice for the benefit of our community. To be elected the first Nationals member for Bundaberg in 110 years is a very humbling experience—an experience that I take on with great respect for those who have elected me and with an appreciation of the responsibilities that lie ahead. I congratulate the government on its election and I wait with great interest to see how it will take advantage of our current national wealth and how it secures benefits for future generations.

I would also like to wish the previous member for Bundaberg, the Hon. Nita Cunningham, and her husband, Elvin, good luck and happiness in retirement. I wish them a healthy future and many happy times with friends and families. I also acknowledge the dedication of the honourable member during her time in representing the people of Bundaberg—as the mayor for four terms and state member for three terms. That is a long political career that certainly deserves recognition.

I thank my wife, Christine, and my five beautiful children—Bridine, Aidan, Brennan, Lachlan and Ronan—for giving me the confidence and support to achieve my goals. Not a day goes by without me learning from Christine and my family, who all have their own special ways. I know that the single most important thing to my existence is my family. I would also like to thank my mother and father, Bridget and Patrick, who emigrated from Ireland, for instilling in me life's qualities, about which I am still learning, and for teaching me never to be shy of hard work. I would also like to thank my four brothers and sisters for giving me the challenges to reach new heights and of whom I am always very proud. From this, members can confirm that I am a believer in the family unit as the cornerstone of social cohesion, no matter how diverse it may be in this ever-changing world. Through strong families we build strong communities, and this is one of the many factors that makes Bundaberg such a special place in which to live.

I have a great passion to work for the people of Bundaberg and to see Bundaberg get its share of facilities and services to meet its current and future needs. Bundaberg is a fast-growing community, and I will work hard because that community is in my heart. Bundaberg is the town that I call home. I say to members here today that Bundaberg is truly a great place in which to live. I sincerely invite every member to come and stay for a time and enjoy one of the most beautiful places on earth. Bundaberg boasts the most even climate of any Australian town or city and in this capacity the city is ranked fifth in the world.

Bundaberg is perhaps best known for its sugarcane industry, but the region also boasts a diverse array of horticultural businesses, an extensive seafood industry, a range of manufacturing industries, a large Public Service sector and, of course, Bundaberg is home to the famous Bundaberg Rum and Bundaberg Brewed Drinks. Bundaberg also has a rapidly expanding tourism industry and is part of the southern gateway to the Great Barrier Reef.

This great community is a fantastic place to raise a family and it has great pride in its sense of community. This pride is exhibited by numerous civic buildings and churches that have added to the bringing together of community members over many generations. This pride is also exhibited in the faces of the people of Bundaberg and in their hearts and actions. I would like to personally thank Timothy Langmead and his family for giving their time and advice during the election campaign. I give a special thankyou to Richard, or should I say, Dick Bitcon and his wife, Carmel; my campaign manager, Greg Pershouse; Betty Raticliff; Kate Barwick; and every person involved in the campaign team from booth workers, branch members and volunteers.

I give a special thankyou to Paul and Margaret Neville and Rob Messenger, the member for Burnett, for their words of confidence, support and guidance during the election campaign. The motto 'through hard work comes great opportunity' certainly describes the dedication of all of those involved, and without their support and guidance I would not have had the opportunity to be elected and be here with everyone today.

Prior to being elected, I have spent the past 19 years of my working life in the Police Service. It has been a pleasure, and I am eternally thankful for the skills and confidence that I have developed working with a team of highly motivated and professional people. I will miss the Police Service but, most of all, I will miss the dedicated, hardworking and honest people within its organisation. I joined the Police Service to help the community and achieve a great deal of satisfaction in doing so. The motivation of helping people has also steered me in the direction of politics. We all have passions that motivate and inspire us, and I look forward to achieving the same level of satisfaction as a member of parliament.

Thank you to Father Jim Spence, who taught me to walk quietly and care for others. I thank all my sporting coaches who taught me to respect my opponents and especially the late Dick Gunthorpe from Oxley, who always said, 'A true champion is someone who gets up when they know they can't,' Col Wilson from Sacred Heart School at Ipswich, Jim and Barb McClellan and Trevor Lovell from Brisbane State High School—all of whom I respected dearly for the time they gave to others to teach young people new skills and confidence. Their dedication, like so many other coaches and volunteers in our community, is invaluable. The job of a volunteer or coach can often be taken for granted, but they are such an invaluable part of every community. In Bundaberg we are indeed fortunate to have so many hardworking, community minded people, and I thank each and every one of them for their commitment. Their dedication is what makes Bundaberg such a great place to live and raise a family.

I personally believe very strongly in decentralisation and the need to ensure that all of Queensland shares in the state's economic wealth and prosperity. I strongly believe that all levels of government must work together and show the fiscal and political will needed to promote family and community lifestyles right throughout this wonderful state. We must develop policies, trade agreements, viable transportation, reliable electricity, gas and water supplies and tax incentives to promote decentralisation and its benefits to the state of Queensland.

People are spending more time in their vehicles and in other modes of transportation than with their families. Despite the widespread problem of traffic congestion, it is still much faster to travel by car than by public transport. Despite the increased cost of fuel and environmental concerns, we continue to use our vehicles because we want to get to and from work faster. Why? To be with our families. The annual wage-equivalent cost of time commuting in Australia is a loss of \$21 billion per year. According to an article in 2004 *The 200km City*, the Brisbane City Council transport plan and Brisbane Institute research, only two per cent of the people in the area between Noosa and the Tweed travel by public transport—the lowest rate of any major urban area in Australia.

I will be promoting decentralisation to regional Queensland and, in particular, to the Bundaberg region—for individuals and families to return to family and friends, or to purchase an affordable family home within easy reach of workplaces so that less time is wasted commuting. The increased infrastructure that comes with decentralisation will also create jobs in regional areas. With increased employment and education we can decrease social divisions and reduce poverty. With employment we create stability, direction and a safer community, and with jobs we give people respect, dignity and a sense of worth within their community.

Increasing financial independence reduces domestic violence, street and property offences and drug use, which is a major issue affecting today's society, especially with the increase in the use of amphetamines and other so-called 'designer' drugs. Education and training are vital in regional Queensland so that young and older Queenslanders have the same learning opportunities as their city counterparts. I will be pushing for improved facilities and courses to facilitate the needs of the fast-growing region of Bundaberg. I am also concerned about declining standards in the basics being taught within our schools. I am a firm believer in teaching the three Rs before all else to give our children a solid base.

An increasing problem for young families in regional Queensland is the high cost of rental and long-term accommodation. The long-held dream of home ownership is sadly becoming an unrealistic goal for many, and I believe that all governments should do whatever is in their power to restore this dream. The cost of land and home construction is becoming too expensive for families. Yet due to work commitments we are forced in the direction of the CBD and time away from our loved ones. There is an identified benefit to linking land and transport policies for the benefit of the community.

Rural and regional Queensland offers a better way of life—increased time with our families and a better lifestyle where we can have the best of both worlds, being close to work and the opportunity to spend more time with family and friends. Many regional families are torn apart in the chase for job promotions and career opportunities. This is a necessity at the present time, but we need to look further at models that are working elsewhere—models that embrace information technology, models that offer flexible, more effective workplaces while embracing family and community values. The numerous ports along our coastline give Queensland a distinct advantage over other states in Australia for this model to develop.

In my electorate of Bundaberg, health remains one of the main issues, and I look forward to working with community organisations and government at all levels to achieve successful outcomes that will benefit the people of Bundaberg and surrounding districts. We must fix the problems of the past and give closure and justice to all of those who have been affected. We must grasp the future with openness and transparency.

During the election campaign, the government committed to \$41.4 million to upgrade the Bundaberg Hospital, promising 30 new beds and improved services in the emergency department and rehabilitation unit. I, along with the community of Bundaberg, will be closely watching to ensure that the government honours those commitments. While this financial commitment is welcomed, it is only the first step in what will be a long journey to restore faith and confidence in our local health system—a journey that I will embrace, remembering the quote that from little things big things grow. We must put faith and confidence back in our health system. Our hardworking health staff must be able to enter their workplaces without fear of retribution, knowing that they have the confidence and support of a caring and understanding community.

Another concern raised with me during the election campaign was the need for an open and honest government. The perceived image of dishonesty and a lack of trust in all politicians is a major concern. I look forward to the future, when the perception of governments condoning lying will be removed and full confidence in our elected members returned; a future when integrity will be strengthened not by a motion moved on the strength of numbers but on moral fibre. Making mistakes, rectifying them and moving forward in a positive way is part of life's journey and not dissimilar to political life.

During the election campaign I was told by a humorous Labor gentleman at the railway station that, if I could not hear the train, I should simply move closer to the track. I passed on my sincere gratitude and advised these kind souls that I could hear the rattle of the train coming from the yards. However, it was not the tilt train but the loud voice of the people of Bundaberg sending a message—a message that they wanted to be heard and not be taken for granted.

In conclusion, and most importantly, I look forward to the challenges ahead and know that with the support of my family, friends and the people of Bundaberg we can work together in an atmosphere of cooperation and partnership to make Bundaberg an even better place—a better place not just for this generation but for the generations to come. Thank you.