



Speech by

Mr M. HORAN

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard 17 July 1991

FIRST SPEECH

Mr HORAN (Toowoomba South) (5.12 p.m.): Mr Speaker, as the newly elected member for Toowoomba South, I pledge my loyalty and that of my electors to Her Majesty the Queen and her representative in Queensland, His Excellency the Governor. The Toowoomba South by-election was an historic Queensland election precipitated by this Parliament legislating that a person could not hold jointly an elected local government and State Parliament position. This caused Alderman Clive Berghofer, Mayor of Toowoomba, to resign his position as member for Toowoomba South. The election result was also historic in that I received 63 per cent of the vote after preferences, which is the biggest margin recorded since the inception of the seat in 1972. For this result, I sincerely thank the people of Toowoomba South. I feel humbled by the result and all the more determined to give quality representation for the betterment of Toowoomba.

The by-election campaign was a tremendous team effort, and I pay tribute to the chairman, Mr Michael Hogan, and members of the Toowoomba South branch of the National Party, Russell Cooper and his team of parliamentarians and the many party members and personal friends who helped. But I do pay special tribute to my wife, Helen, for her incredible support, juggling her work and family commitments with almost daily sessions of doorknocking and campaign assistance. I thank my children, Matt, Tim and Emma, for their assistance.

Political ideals are formed by our life experiences. I am proud that my mother is present this afternoon in the gallery. I admire the way she raised our family, at the same time educating herself from Grade 10 status to PhD status. It is sad that my father, the late Ernie Horan, could not be here. He served the Queensland Police Force with distinction and dedication for 43 years. On a policeman's humble wage, my parents put me through St Laurence's Christian Brothers College at South Brisbane, where I had the honour to be school captain. As a Rugby League footballer, I have learnt the ups and downs of life and the necessity for teamwork in all that one does. It was when, with my wife, Helen, we moved to a dairy farm in Gympie that I realised the rigours and hardships facing families who live and work on the land.

My 13 years as general manager of the Royal Agricultural Society of Queensland at the Toowoomba showground has taught me what can be achieved by the work of committee and community. The Toowoomba Royal Show is renowned throughout Australia as one of this country's great shows, and it was a monumental effort for the committee to move from the old Toowoomba showground to its new 250-acre site. The entire process took some 10 years. In that time, the 250 acres were developed with some \$8m of funds coming from the community, the society, Government subsidy and voluntary work. The Toowoomba Greyhound Racing Club was established at that showground, and that club and the track are the envy of other clubs throughout Australia. It says a great deal for that development that, last year, 186 separate events were held at the showground, bringing great economic benefit and interest to the community of Toowoomba. With this background, I see a need for a society with a positive, have-a-go attitude to create the opportunities for the security and dignity of employment for all. Our society must be based on the family unit, with care and compassion for those in our community in genuine need.

It is an honour to follow in the footsteps of the previous three members for Toowoomba South. Peter Wood held the seat for the ALP from 1972 to 1974. He has since given many years of service to the Toowoomba City Council and is currently the Deputy Mayor. Mr John Warner won the seat for the National Party in 1974 and held it until his retirement in 1986. During that period, he held the honoured

position of Speaker of this House. Finally, Clive Berghofer held the seat for the National Party from 1986 until his retirement this year. Clive Berghofer is a remarkable man. He is self-educated, and all that he has achieved has been achieved from a base of virtually nothing. In 1973, he was elected as an alderman on the city council and, in 1982, he was elected as Mayor. He has been intensely loyal to Toowoomba and has achieved much for the city as a member of local government, as a member of this Parliament and particularly as a builder and developer. His support of clubs, associations, families and individuals is legendary. Clive Berghofer has my respect as a practical man, a doer and an achiever who has given outstanding service to Toowoomba.

Recently, Toowoomba was announced by the *Sydney Sun Herald* as the best place in Australia in which to live. Our garden city is blessed with a wonderful mountain climate, beautiful parks, gardens and buildings. With a population of 85 000, it is Australia's largest inland city. It is famous for events such as the Carnival of Flowers, Green Week, the Toowoomba Royal Show, the Weetwood racing carnival, Farmfest, the largest vintage car swap meet in Australia and the McGregor Summer School. As testimony to the growth of Toowoomba, housing is booming virtually throughout the city. In my electorate of Toowoomba South, the enrolment increased by 1 700 people from that at the previous election. Toowoomba is the rural capital of Australia, and I can not emphasise too greatly how important that is. It is the largest cattle-selling centre in Australia, the centre of the feedlot and abattoir industry and the centre of the largest intensive piggery area in Queensland. Dairying is a major industry on the Darling Downs, as is grain and now the burgeoning industry of cotton. In the same area, there are some very innovative farmers, particularly in the irrigation areas. Recently, through the assistance of Austrade, one group of farmers achieved a marvellous contract to export broccoli to Tokyo. It shows the innovativeness that can come forward in the time of a supposed rural depression.

In education, Toowoomba is renowned as the provincial education capital of Australia. My electorate of Toowoomba South has a university college, a portion of a TAFE college, seven high schools and 14 primary schools. We cannot give enough emphasis to the importance of education in the provincial centres such as Toowoomba for the income that it can bring in from both overseas and interstate students, particularly through centres such as the university and the TAFE college. In health, Toowoomba is well served by a general hospital, St Vincents Hospital, St Andrews Hospital and many aged care centres. Since the days of the Galloping Clydesdales, Toowoomba has been famous for its sport and recreation. In recent years, the Toowoomba City Council has done a marvellous job in developing fields and parks to meet the sporting needs of children and adults alike. However, it is the people of Toowoomba who make this fine city. The people of Toowoomba are basically hard-working achievers who give back to the community. They are people such as Nell Robinson, who was the first lady Mayor in Australia. Jack McCafferty was also a Mayor who, 50 years ago, developed one of Australia's great coach services. Kath Dickson gave a life of dedicated service to the education industry throughout Australia. She was headmistress of the Toowoomba South girls' school when there were 900 pupils at that school. Now, aged in her mid-eighties, she still works almost every day for the Kath Dickson Centre, which she helped to establish and which cares for some 1 000 children a day in home care and on-site care. Jack Duggan gave a life-time of service to the State both as a member of this Parliament and as a member of the Toowoomba City Council. He has been a friend to all. John McDonald, a great Rugby League footballer, returned to his home town of Toowoomba to coach the first winning State of Origin Queensland side. He then turned to administration and is now President of the Toowoomba Rugby League, a director of the Queensland Rugby League and Vice-president of the Australian Rugby League. What great examples those people are to the young people growing up in Toowoomba to carry on the traditions.

At the moment, there are a number of important issues in Toowoomba. The major one is law and order. In the first five months of this year, there was a 50 per cent increase in break and enter offences and a 100 per cent increase in car thefts. Major and vicious crime is on the increase as Toowoomba grows towards a large city and as criminals from the capital city venture forward in pursuit of soft crime areas. Last Saturday, one of the most vicious rapes on record took place. It was due only to the vigilance of the police that the victim was picked up and perhaps her life saved. With the difficulties that the police now face in obtaining prosecutions, policing has changed from the old ways to community-based policing. The police rely very much on a pro-active role. They rely very much on the support of the community through organisations such as Motel Watch, Crime Stoppers, Taxi Watch and the community and police committee. If a pro-active and community-based policing system is to work, it will require massive amounts of manpower and equipment. Policing is not like it was in the old days when a sergeant could give a teenager a friendly kick in the rear. Those days are past. It is important that the police show the flag in an endeavour to prevent crime. I am pleased that the Minister for Police is in the House. On behalf of the Toowoomba community, I bring forth this request from the people. I ask the Minister to give urgent priority in his budget to the need for major and priority funding for the police force not only in Toowoomba but also throughout Queensland so that the pro-active and community role can be effectively carried out.

Everywhere, unemployment due to the recession is a problem. In Toowoomba, it has been slightly less of a problem than in most places. When the Queensland average was 10.7 per cent, unemployment in Toowoomba was 7.7 per cent. That was due in part to a very vibrant building industry associated with the growth in the area. However, the sad thing is our youth unemployment. Some 30 per cent of our youth are unemployed. Many of them are quite lowly skilled. To address that problem, we desperately need to attract a major processing plant to Toowoomba to provide some value-adding to the many primary products produced in the area. I commend the Toowoomba Regional Development Corporation for the work it is undertaking in developing industry. Also, I would like to advise honourable members of the problem we face with the possible closure of the 7SD RAAF depot, where some 157 jobs could be lost.

Education is the flagship of Toowoomba, and it is important that the University College of South Queensland be accredited with university status. That college educates 4 500 permanent students and 6 700 students through distance education. Our magnificent TAFE college is doing a great job both at the new site and at the old site and is educating 12 000 students. It has just received an additional allocation of \$2m from this Government, and I thank the Government for that. I have visited all of the Government schools in the electorate and wish to advise the Minister of the urgent need for additional class rooms and administration areas at the Glenvale and Middle Ridge schools that are situated in growing areas. Also, at the Harristown State High School, there is a desperate need for a machinery and trades building and a domestic science building. There are eight non-Government schools in the electorate. Parents go to great sacrifices to put their children through the schools of their choice, and I ask the Government to maintain the per capita grant scheme and the interest assistance scheme. On the subject of regionalisation, I wish to advise that there is great concern amongst teachers about the changes to the transfer system. There is also an urgent need for the construction of the school support centre.

Last year, the Toowoomba City Council suffered a decrease of \$187,000 in the local government grants allocations. This year, there is expected to be a decrease of 6.2 per cent, or some \$119,500. Townsville, which is a city of the same size and with the same population as Toowoomba, will receive \$1.5m more and Ipswich, which is a city of smaller size than Toowoomba, will receive \$250,000 more. The Government is asked to heed the recent request from the Toowoomba City Council and from 13 other major councils for a fairer distribution of local government grants.

The Toowoomba General Hospital has an urgent need for improved specialist services and equipment. Under the historical system of budgeting, this hospital has been very efficient in past years, but it has suffered from lack of funds. There is an urgent need for these specialist services and equipment, and I ask the new regional health authority to look urgently at this matter. I commend the Toowoomba General Hospital for the establishment of the Cunningham Centre, a first for provincial hospitals. The centre includes a rural practice training program.

Due to the growth in Toowoomba, there is a long waiting list for low-cost housing, particularly Housing Commission rentals, and for Housing Commission finance. I am pleased to have been of assistance to a community consultative group which has recently received money from the Minister for Local Government and Housing to commence a community rent scheme.

Being a regional centre, Toowoomba is stretched to its limits with regard to meeting welfare needs. Lifeline is handling the problems not only of Toowoomba, but also of the western areas. Those problems have been created by the rural recession. It is very sad to see the work that the Salvation Army has to do in order to provide shelter homes. I have visited the 19 shelter homes provided by the Salvation Army for women and families who have suffered from domestic and sexual abuse, and it is a sad comment on our community that this has to be so. St Vincent de Paul and the Fatima Home are battling against all odds to meet the ever-increasing welfare needs. I wish to commend the Menukah Day Respite Centre to the Minister for Family Services. It does a wonderful job in providing respite care for the parents of children who are physically and intellectually handicapped. This centre has made application to the Minister for some funding.

The Toowoomba Turf Club is the centre of Queensland's thoroughbred industry. Thoroughbred studs throughout the downs are famous for the quality and quantity of horses that are bred each year. There are 600 horses in work daily at the Toowoomba track, which requires a large number of facilities by way of training tracks, staff and maintenance. Toowoomba provides 3 000 starters each year for races in south-east Queensland on which the TAB operates. The Toowoomba Turf Club and the galloping industry on the downs deserve recognition for this and they deserve TAB coverage on the suggested four races each Saturday afternoon program to dovetail in with the four-race coverage that is now provided to Caloundra. The extra income derived from this TAB coverage through the totalisator pools will assist the club to maintain these tracks which benefit so much of south-east Queensland and to provide increased prize money.

Spring Bluff is an historic railway station on the line leading to Toowoomba, which is the most historically significant line in Queensland, having been built by the company which constructed one-

twentieth of the world's railways. At the other end of the line is the Toowoomba Railway Station, Queensland's oldest station. The Spring Bluff station is a great tourist attraction, drawing some 20 000 people during the six weeks of the Carnival of Flowers, and there is a dedicated committee comprising the three surrounding councils which are endeavouring to retain this station in the new plans to computerise the line. I urge the Minister for Transport to keep this station open and to retain one caretaker at an estimated cost of \$30,000. I know that the local community committee will do the rest in order to make this a viable tourist attraction.

I wish to advise the Minister for Primary Industries of the need for decisive action regarding the bread war, before this war leaves Queensland dominated by large southern bakeries and causes an eventual price hike that will give consumers bread prices similar to those in New South Wales. Already we see vendors and corner stores in Toowoomba facing financial ruin and large and small bakeries facing a similar fate. The rural industry is the backbone of Australia's export income. With Toowoomba so dependent on a buoyant rural sector, I urge the Government to continually recognise the importance of the rural sector to Queensland's economy.

In Toowoomba, the life-style and environment are precious to all of us who live in that beautiful city. Toowoomba sits on the edge of the big growth triangle of south-east Queensland which extends from the border to Noosa and Toowoomba. It is extremely important that long-term planning looks at this area and at the extremities of the area, particularly Toowoomba. It is considered that the Warrego Highway leading up the range to Toowoomba will be full by the year 2005, and it is a requirement that we start looking at an alternative route now. James Street, the main east-west road through Toowoomba, is getting close to being clogged with semi-trailers as they come through the city on their way to Melbourne, through Goondiwindi.

There is a need to look at electrification of the rail line from Toowoomba to Brisbane. Already we are only some one and three-quarters to one and a half hours from the city; we need to bring people from Brisbane to Toowoomba, not from Toowoomba to Brisbane. I also urge the Government to look, in the regionalisation of various departments, at the cheap cost of rental in Toowoomba, which would make relocated departments far cheaper to run. In these days of fax machines, it seems to make great sense for people to move to the nice environment of a decentralised city. Finally, I want to remark on the central business district of Toowoomba, which is under review by a special community task force.

Good Government requires a strong Opposition and alternative Government. Since joining the National Party prior to the election, I have been impressed by the organisation and the strength of the party, particularly under the State president, Mr Don McDonald. A hard-working State conference last week indicated that our great party has emerged from the electoral defeat of 1989 and is now growing stronger and wiser. Our membership continues to grow. Under the dedicated leadership of Russell Cooper and his deputy, Rob Borbidge, the parliamentary party is now united and determined. I look forward to working in this Parliament in a statesman-like and fair manner.

Toowoomba is a very special part of our great State. I am determined to serve my electors and the people of Toowoomba with honesty, vigour and commitment. I thank you, Mr Speaker, and the members of the Parliament for the tradition of the maiden speech extended to me as the newly elected member for Toowoomba South.
