



Speech by

Evan Moorhead

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Hansard Wednesday, 11 October 2006

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr MOORHEAD (Waterford—ALP) (4.33 pm): I pass on my congratulations to the Speaker on his election to a position of such high esteem. The Speaker of parliament is one of the linchpins of our parliamentary democracy. I have no doubt that the Speaker will uphold our democratic processes with fairness and integrity.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I also acknowledge the peoples whose traditional lands include those on which the Waterford electorate is based. I hope that, in partnership, we can do much to address the continuing disadvantage suffered by our Indigenous peoples.

I am both honoured and humbled that my fellow residents of the Waterford electorate have given me the responsibility of representing them in this parliament. Whilst this is my first speech in parliament, it is by no means my first job as a parliamentarian. On the Sunday after the election, my work as a local member had already commenced, with phone calls and queries from local residents. I believe that it is a show of great faith in the Beattie government's capacity to deliver, particularly on the key issues of water and health, when constituents feel confident in contacting a new member for advice and assistance so soon after the election.

We went to the election with a positive campaign and a coherent vision for Queensland's future. The Beattie-Bligh team proved that we had the strong leadership to deliver a strong economy, a revitalised health system and the infrastructure to meet the worst drought in 100 years. With every call that I have received, I have proudly assured constituents that I will be working with our community to ensure that this vision becomes a reality. I will be doing everything possible to ensure that I can return to the Waterford electorate the faith that they have shown in electing me.

I must recognise those people who have made my election possible. Our local election campaign was a positive campaign, talking about the issues that affect the lives of people in the Waterford electorate every day. This campaign was built on the hard work of volunteers who supported me and the positive agenda of the Labor government.

First, I must thank my partner Siobhan for both her hard work and for supporting me throughout this time. Contrary to all accepted wisdom, I asked Siobhan to be one of my two campaign managers. The strength of our relationship is clear from surviving an election campaign together. Siobhan, together with her fellow campaign manager, Anton Thompson, ran a tight ship that allowed me to focus on meeting and listening to the voters of the Waterford electorate.

I am overwhelmed by the number of people who were prepared to chip in to help. To these people I say thank you for supporting me from the start of this journey. I know that with your ongoing support it will be a journey of change and achievement. While there are so many, there are a few who I would like to particularly mention: Anton Thompson, Alissa Macoun, Lonnie and Ruth Nielsen, Kerrie Nielsen and Nicole Nielsen, Dolly Chang, Sean Leader, Barry Ramsay, Terry Gobert, Heather Redman, Debbie Evans, Charlie Meyers, Terry Wood and Moray Newlands.

I must also recognise the contribution and support of my family. To my parents Col and Ailsa, who are here today, thank you for your faith in me. One day I hope to be able to emulate the humility, ethic of

hard work and sense of community that you have shown throughout your lives. I thank my sister Leisel and her husband Andrew, my brother John and his partner Dot, my brother Scott, Kate Keating, always ably assisted by Jo Heaton, and Rebecca Keating.

I thank my colleagues at the AMWU—Andrew Dettmer, who believed in me from the start, Peter Lees, David Fyffe and Warren Butler, who helped make this possible. To Peter I say that I am sure the residents at the top of Bingo Street appreciated the pamphlets.

The electorate of Waterford based on the Logan River, is a place of contrast. At the southern end, Beenleigh is a community with a strong sense of identity built upon its rich and proud history. Despite increasing urbanisation, farming properties follow the Logan River as it makes its way through the electorate. In the east, the suburbs of Loganholme, Tanah Merah and Meadowbrook have seen recent growth and development, providing homes for some of the 1,500 people moving to south-east Queensland each week. The challenge that faces all of these communities is to provide the infrastructure and support for this growth. Providing housing for a growing population, whilst preserving lifestyle and providing services to meet growing need, is the task ahead of not only me but also the Queensland government.

The Beattie government's record of providing for growth in the Waterford electorate is an achievement of which I am very proud. Our area has a hospital for quality health care, a TAFE campus and a university campus that provide training and career opportunities for local residents, particularly school leavers. Improvements to the M1 motorway, Beenleigh-Kingston Road and Loganlea Road make our growing community accessible. There is no more important challenge in managing this growth than ensuring that our community has access to affordable housing. The demand for affordable housing is outstripping supply. Secure and affordable housing is one of the building blocks of a stable and supportive family environment. Affordable housing is not just about roofs over people's heads; it is about an opportunity to move forward to meet the challenges of daily life.

In Queensland, an estimated 24,000 people are homeless, but the problem goes deeper than that. Marginal housing rates are increasing as a result of pressure in the private rental market. Where three generations of a family are living in a two-bedroom unit or where schoolchildren are moving home every three or four months, pressure comes to bear not only on the financial resources of a family but also on relationships. Average house prices relative to income have more than doubled over the last 10 years. The increase in housing prices means that those who would otherwise be buying houses must remain in the private rental market, putting pressure on private rental and, in turn, our public housing system.

I am proud of the visible and measurable improvement that the Beattie government's Community Renewal Program has made in the Waterford electorate, particularly in the area of public housing. I am also proud of the Beattie government's comprehensive homelessness strategy, but there is much work ahead of us, and I will be part of getting it done. However, the challenge of growth in our community is much more than roads, hospitals and TAFE colleges. As our community grows in population, it must also grow in spirit and a sense of belonging.

Despite our ever-increasing population, meaning that we are living closer together, many people still have a sense of social isolation and exclusion from a rapidly changing society. The effects of social isolation go far beyond the individual. Whether due to issues such as mental health, unemployment, homelessness or sometimes a combination of these, the effect of social isolation ripples across our community. In my view, the measure of the strength in our community is the compassion that we can all show for those who, at some time in their life, need a helping hand.

When we are looking to our neighbours we must understand the complex path that brings people to a feeling of isolation. Issues of crime and poverty are often inextricably linked to issues of mental health, intergenerational poverty or abuse. The policies that guide us in addressing disadvantage must be informed by this understanding.

When I look back at my time in this parliament, I hope that I can say that my contribution was to leave both the Waterford electorate and the state of Queensland with a stronger community, a stronger economy and a strong sense of what is just and what is fair, with understanding and respect for our neighbours. This is the passion that I bring to this parliament.

As I come to this House, the area in which our sense of fairness and justice is most affronted is in the area of working conditions. I am proud to say that I have spent the last six years of my life representing workers in the manufacturing industry as an official of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union. I am proud to stand here delivering my first speech and say that I remain a proud trade unionist and a proud member of the AMWU.

My commitment to social justice for working families did not end when I was elected to parliament. In this House, whether representing constituents or working Queenslanders or arguing for issues which are dear to me, I hope to bring the strong advocacy learnt during my time with the AMWU. Whether a union official, a member of parliament or a local volunteer, the task before us is the same—to foster the social and economic conditions that allow people to create the life they want for them and their family.

This advocacy is so much more important at a time when the working conditions of Australian families are under attack from the federal coalition and its WorkChoices legislation. As a union official, I saw firsthand how these laws affect people. This legislation will affect every family. Even those who may think that they will not be directly affected will have a husband, a wife, a daughter or a son who has their working conditions given to them on a take it or leave it basis. The Queensland government has a responsibility to fight these unjust laws and make it known how these laws will put downward pressure on working conditions. My commitment is to take up the fight against these laws: the fight to restore balance and a fair go to working conditions.

I am lucky to represent an electorate which has such an active and committed network of volunteers. If volunteers are the lifeblood of our community, then Waterford is in good health. As a volunteer with the Beenleigh Neighbourhood Centre, I have seen firsthand the critical role that local community organisations play in delivering support where it is needed most. It is these organisations that make our government's policies of service and support a reality in the community.

Each of the many community groups in the Waterford electorate has a vision based on inclusion, acceptance and support in times of need. To those who each day extend a helping hand to others I offer my role as an advocate to ensure that the institutions of government help them as they help others.

My election campaign was a positive campaign. I talked about the issues that were important to the daily lives of voters. I believe that as a member of parliament I have a responsibility to build support for our processes of democratic government. Our mandate as members of parliament enjoins us to uphold the tenets of democracy in all of our actions. We must be careful to avoid fostering cynicism both of politics and of politicians. Politics and our democratic process are one and the same.

It is important that we encourage participation in our political process. Many new members who have stood here before me have expressed concern about increasing disengagement from the political process. It is a concern I share. I think it not coincidental that disengagement from the political process has increased in tandem with pressure for us to embrace an individualist society. For those who feel disengaged, politics has a pejorative connotation. It is viewed not as the medium through which individuals and communities engage in the democratic process and affect change but as the domain of vested interests and clashing ideologies that stand apart from people.

This government has taken up the challenge of participation. Through its e-democracy program it is providing new ways for people to engage with the political process. After only four days in the job I have already been approached by a local resident who asked me to establish an e-petition so that community anger over a development proposal could be made known. Finding new ways for people to engage with politics and politicians can only strengthen the quality of our democracy and, in turn, our government.

As a local member, I will play my role by giving a sense of ownership over this green seat and what it represents to the people of the Waterford electorate. I will consult, inform and engage. I will listen, understand and advocate. I can only achieve this by being accessible and approachable, and that I will be.

One of the passions that I bring to this House is my passion for apprenticeships as a career path, particularly for young people. In my time with the AMWU, the work I enjoyed most was with apprentices and training. The achievement of which I am most proud was improving the wages and conditions for apprentices and helping to make apprenticeships a real option for young Queenslanders. I strongly believe that apprenticeships are invaluable in providing workers with certified, portable skills—skills that contribute to our growing economy and skills that enhance our international competitiveness.

I worked with tradespeople who were proud of their qualifications and proud to have learnt their trade through the apprenticeship system. These tradespeople were highly skilled workers who delighted in sharing their skills with other tradespeople and apprentices—the next generation of tradespeople. The modern apprenticeship is something very different from the apprenticeship of the seventies or even the eighties. With competency based training, flexibility of training delivery methods and school based apprenticeships, the apprenticeship system has kept up with the needs of today's industry. Queensland leads the way in apprenticeship training. Last year, 58 per cent of the nation's school based apprenticeships were engaged in Queensland. The Queensland Skills Plan will further ensure that more apprentices will become tradespersons in Queensland industry. At the same time, the qualifications that apprentices receive will still have the integrity and value of those earned by the tradespeople who have gone before them.

A key change needs to be undertaken in improving the image of apprenticeships. Parents, teachers and guidance counsellors must see apprenticeships as the first-class career opportunity that they are. Apprenticeships provide lifelong skills and lifelong careers. I will be working both within my electorate and in this parliament to promote and support our apprenticeship system.

I am honoured to come to this House as only the second member for Waterford, a seat created in 1992. My predecessor, the Hon. Tom Barton, delivered significant gains for the suburbs of the Waterford electorate. Most notable of these achievements is the upgrade of Beenleigh-Kingston Road. A two-lane road with dirt shoulders is now a four-lane road with a new Larry Storey Bridge that can cope with the

demands of growth in our suburbs. Tom's legacy is also evident in many other projects in our community, with new police beats, community renewal projects and a Police-Citizens Youth Club building that is a hub of activity for the Beenleigh community.

Tom also leaves political life with a distinguished career as a minister, bringing his talents and commitment to a range of portfolios. One of Tom's great contributions to our state is the introduction of the Queensland Skills Plan to promote apprenticeships and training. As an instrument fitter tradesman himself, Tom has ensured that generations of young people to come will have the opportunity to become skilled tradespersons. I wish Tom and Traute well in life after politics.

While many have stood here before me, I think it is important to bring to my role as a parliamentarian my own experiences, passions, skills and commitment. Each of us will make what we will of the mandate we have been given. When others look back on my time in this House I hope they see achievements and change that are the product of hard work, words that are strong yet fair and causes which are just and right.