



Speech by

**Mr N. ROBERTS**

**MEMBER FOR NUDGEE**

---

Hansard 7 September 1995

### FIRST SPEECH

**Mr ROBERTS** (Nudgee) (2.30 p.m.): It is with great pleasure that I second the motion for the adoption of the Address in Reply moved by my colleague the honourable member for South Brisbane, Ms Bligh. I thank Her Excellency the Governor for her Speech. I pledge my loyalty to the people of Queensland. I acknowledge that I am accountable to those who have elected me and that I have a duty to take proper account of their views in the exercise of my duties as a member of this Assembly.

Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to your high office. I also congratulate the Deputy Speaker and members on both sides of this House on their election to this place, especially those who have been selected by their respective parties to hold Cabinet and shadow Cabinet positions.

I sincerely thank electors in the Nudgee electorate for giving me their support. I give to them a commitment that I will do my best to give effective representation to their collective and individual interests during the course of this Parliament. My sincere thanks are also extended to those many Labor Party members, supporters, family and personal friends who worked so hard to assist me in my election campaign. No candidate for political office achieves the great privilege of being a member of Parliament by his or her own efforts. I particularly pay tribute to my campaign director, the former member for Nudgee, Ken Vaughan. As a mentor and a mate, Ken Vaughan taught me much about the business of politics. I am eternally grateful to him for teaching me the discipline and regimen required for conducting successful political campaigns and also for teaching me the importance of providing personal, prompt and efficient service to my constituents.

I know that Ken Vaughan was much admired and respected by members on both sides of this House. Ken Vaughan's term in this Assembly commenced on 12 November 1977. During his parliamentary career, he occupied the offices of Minister for Resource Industries, Minister for Employment, Training and Industrial Relations, Opposition spokesman on Mines and Energy, Employment and Industrial Affairs and Police. His charm, his wit and his energy will be affectionately remembered in this place for many years to come. I wish Ken and his wife Lesley a long and happy retirement together.

I also extend my gratitude to the trade union movement for giving me opportunities to fulfil my desire to work in the interests of ordinary workers across our great State. In my role as an occupational health and safety trainer for the ACTU Queensland branch and during my eight years as an industrial officer—one year with the Vehicle Builders Union and seven years with the Electrical Trades Union—I was fortunate to work with many people whose sole motivation was to improve the lot of ordinary workers and their families. I am proud to have worked with such people and to have been given the opportunity to have contributed to that noble cause.

In many respects, I have led a fortunate life. I am particularly grateful to my parents, Roger and Louise, for their love and support and for giving me opportunities in life which many go without. I also acknowledge the love and support given to me by my own family: my wife, Jenny, and two children, Bridget and Fiona. Over my many years of campaigning and community involvement, Jenny has provided unwavering support and encouragement. I sincerely thank her for her efforts and sacrifices during that time.

During the past year, I have come into contact with many thousands of people in my electorate: the young, our senior citizens, families, single parents and single persons making a life for themselves. Whereas many had views—both supportive and critical—of particular Government initiatives, a common theme amongst them was an expectation that Governments should focus attention on delivering the basic services and infrastructure required to maintain and improve their day-to-day quality of life. It is always true for any Government that some things could have been done better. However, I believe that this Government's record on quality-of-life issues is worthy of recognition. Improvements and reforms in basic community services such as education, health, policing and crime prevention, public housing, transport and industrial relations have benefited electors in my electorate, and I am proud to highlight some of those achievements today.

I have six Government and five non-Government schools in my electorate. One of my intentions as a local member is to work closely with my school communities to assist them in acquiring the necessary resources and infrastructure needed to provide quality education to our children. Over the past few months, I have spoken with teachers, principals and parents about the particular needs of many of our local schools. Whether it be a desire for the upgrading of music or manual arts facilities at Banyo High School, the sealing of the car park entrance at Boondall State School or requests for extra classroom space or teachers, I will do my best to ensure that my schools receive their fair share of the allocations made by the Government.

Significant reforms are being implemented in our education system. Key initiatives include student performance standards, the Year 2 diagnostic net and the Year 6 test for literacy and numeracy. I applaud the objectives underpinning these initiatives. Proper emphasis on the basic learning areas of literacy and numeracy should be the cornerstone of any education system. It is important, however, not to forget that the principal role of teachers is to teach. We must be careful that the implementation of new processes does not unnecessarily divert energies away from this task.

Two areas in which I encourage the Government to continue to focus attention are the reduction of class sizes and increasing the number of support teachers for children with learning difficulties. In these two areas alone, I believe that significant, tangible and immediate improvements can be made on the quality of education provided to our children. In this regard, I welcome the Government's election announcement that it will introduce a reading recovery program under which more than 550 specialist tutors and teachers are to be employed across the State.

A range of other initiatives is benefiting school children in my electorate. The school computer program is an excellent example. Computer literacy is an essential skill required by our children. The Government's objective is to provide access to a computer for every 10 upper primary and secondary school students. Significant emphasis has also been placed on increasing opportunities for parents to have a greater say in the running of their local schools. Moneys from the School Improvement Subsidy Scheme have meant that several schools have been able to purchase items such as shade structures and playground equipment. The \$50 per child per year school uniform allowance will provide welcome relief to families by helping to pay for uniforms, shoes or schoolbags.

School security has also been improved by the installation of electronic movement detectors and better lighting. The School Watch Program, which seeks to reduce crime directed at schools and to foster a greater degree of community involvement in school security, is a welcome initiative of the Government. I give due credit to the Banyo Neighbourhood Watch group for its efforts to initiate this program in conjunction with the Nudgee State School.

Banyo High School, the only State high school in my electorate, has recently benefited from both State and Federal moneys to provide a modern and well-equipped resource centre. Banyo High has also recently received an allocation for a much-needed upgrade of its arts teaching facilities. However, much more can be done at Banyo High School to improve its attraction to local families. Only one of the Government schools in my electorate, namely, Geebung State School, has an assembly hall. Recently, the Nudgee State School had to hold its pantomime in the assembly hall at Sandgate High School. I will be making it a priority of mine to continue to lobby the Government to ensure that such facilities are more readily accessible to schools in my electorate. The Government's Community Recreation Centre Program will provide some local communities with facilities of that nature.

Local public halls in Banyo and Nudgee were built prior to 1920 and are not capable of meeting the community and recreational needs of the district. The Zillmere area has no genuine public facility in which local organisations can meet or conduct community activities. I will be working closely with my local communities to prepare our claim for community recreation centre funding. I commend the Government for the introduction of this worthy program.

Every citizen has a right to expect that he or she will be safe in the comfort of his or her home and the local community. No Government can legislate or provide all the resources necessary to rid our communities of the scourge of senseless crime and antisocial behaviour. We all share some responsibility in tackling this blight on our society. Governments, however, can provide significant resources and programs to tackle the problem. Since 1989, the police district of which Nudgee is a part

has seen a threefold increase in its budget. Police numbers in the district have increased by over 60 per cent in that period. Our police district is better equipped to fight crime with significant budget allocations for modern computer systems and equipment needs in areas such as forensic science and communications.

The Police Beat Shopfront at Toombul Shoppingtown and regular patrols of the local rail network have increased the level of safety of local residents. These initiatives need to be maintained and extended to new areas. I particularly encourage the continuance of security patrols on our public transport networks. We have a good public transport infrastructure servicing the Nudgee electorate. Public usage of this facility will be enhanced if travel is safe, comfortable and relevant to the needs of commuters. Safety for rail travellers is also being enhanced by the installation of surveillance cameras, emergency telephones and better lighting on stations on the Shorncliffe and north coast lines.

Crime prevention, however, is more than just police presence on public transport and at shoppingtowns and the upgrading of facilities. Local community organisations in the Nudgee electorate have been the recipients of youth crime prevention grants from the Department of Tourism, Sport and Racing. These grants have generated positive results by involving some local youth in planning and implementing affordable, accessible and safe recreation activities in the district. It is important to not lose the impetus of crime prevention programs of this nature, and in that respect I am particularly grateful to the North East Community Support Group at Zillmere and the Banyo branch of the Nundah and Districts Youth Club for their assistance in continuing with youth work in the Banyo district.

The overwhelming majority of young Queenslanders are constructive and responsible members of our communities. Young people often have energies and talents which are underutilised and unrecognised in our communities. Last year, students at Banyo High School won their final in the Queensland Debating Union State championships. This year, an enterprising group of students are producing a community-based magazine for distribution to local residents. At a local football club, young artists, with the assistance of the Federal Government and the Brisbane City Council, have produced an exciting and vibrant mural to cover one entire side of the clubhouse.

There is always a minority, however, who engage in antisocial forms of behaviour, including vandalism and gang activities. Such behaviour is often disruptive to the functioning of local communities, making life unpleasant for those who seek to be good citizens. Such behaviour should not be tolerated lightly. Offenders and potential offenders must be given clear messages about the community's expectations in relation to these matters. In that respect, I welcome initiatives outlined in the Government's plan to deal with the graffiti problem. This plan deals not only with penalty provisions for offenders, including cleaning up the mess they have made, but also with positive measures to tackle the problem at its source. Programs such as the Youth and Community Combined Action Program and the Youth in Public Spaces Program seek to give young people a sense of involvement and ownership of their local communities and thus reduce the propensity to vandalise their surroundings.

The Government places a high priority on the provision of affordable and appropriate public housing and assistance for those who are unable, for whatever reason, to afford it through the private market. Since the election of the Labor Government, there has been almost a 50 per cent increase in the levels of public housing stock across the State. In the Nudgee electorate alone, just under \$4m has been spent on upgrading and maintaining the existing stock of public housing. One of the important initiatives of the Government has been to dramatically improve the design and amenity of its homes and units. In the Nudgee electorate, units and townhouses at Ewing and Kolberg Streets, Zillmere, have recently been refurbished with modern kitchens and attractive landscaping; grassed areas and gardens have replaced the harsh concrete presence of excess car parking spaces.

Since Labor was elected, tenants also have access to improved security on their homes by the provision of security screens and doors. Since my endorsement, I have had the opportunity to talk with many public housing tenants in my electorate. Amongst the older tenants, one of the key concerns is security of tenure. I have raised this matter with the Minister and have been advised that, in the case of long-term residents, where their circumstances have changed—for instance, children may have grown up and left home—departmental policy is that whereas they may be offered smaller accommodation, they will not be forced to leave their homes. Decisions such as this have been well received and have given elderly tenants in my electorate that peace of mind they deserve in their later years of life.

Given my background, it would be remiss of me not to mention some of the Government's achievements in industrial relations—an area in which I intend to maintain a strong interest during my term in this place. Soon after its election in 1989, the Government repealed all of the draconian industrial legislation enacted in the period subsequent to the 1985 SEQEB dispute. Significantly, the Government also passed legislation which reinstated the superannuation entitlements of hundreds of ex-SEQEB workers. I take this opportunity of expressing once again the gratitude of those people who benefited from that welcome initiative.

Another key initiative was the introduction of portable long service leave in the construction industry. Access to fair wages and conditions and a fair system which enables improvements to be

made to those wages and conditions is a crucial element of Labor's policy. A key area of policy which distinguishes us from the coalition is our commitment to a proper award safety net and a continued role for a strong and independent Industrial Relations Commission. Under Labor, awards have received periodic adjustments to maintain their relevance as a genuine safety net.

Workers are also protected by provisions in the Industrial Relations Act which require the commission to be satisfied that any agreement that is registered does not disadvantage employees when compared with the basic award conditions applicable to their employment. Workers have also benefited by provisions which protect against harsh, unjust or unreasonable dismissals. The enterprise bargaining system has delivered many benefits to workers, industries and enterprises in Queensland. It is important, however, that we seek new ways of extending these benefits to as wide a range of employers and employees as is possible.

During my period as industrial advocate for the Electrical Trades Union, I had many discussions with employers and union members about our wages system. Many of them expressed a desire that the wages system be opened up to facilitate the registration of industry level agreements, specifically in cases where representative bodies such as employer associations and unions agree. I sympathise with these desires and accordingly, in due course, will bring to the attention of the Minister some suggestions as to how such agreements could be handled in the context of our current wages system.

The Industrial Relations Act has also facilitated the amalgamation and rationalisation of unions across the State. With respect to rationalisation of unions—I have had personal experience with the Act's provisions in lengthy cases relating to Mount Isa Mines Limited and the sugar industry. Those experiences have confirmed my long-held belief that issues relating to union coverage and amalgamations should primarily be left for unions and their members to decide, and not employers or tribunals.

It is important to record some of the history of my electorate in my first speech. I am particularly indebted to local historians, Mary Zalewski, known by her Aboriginal name of Karbeethon Brisbannu, and Kath Ballard for sharing with me their knowledge on local history. One of the significant features in the electorate is the Boondall Wetlands reserve, a reserve which stands not only as a landmark for future generations but also as a reminder of the natural beauty of our land and of those who inhabited the district well before the coming of white Australians.

The original inhabitants of the land within the electorate of Nudgee were the Oooundumbi clan of the Turrubul people. Generations of Oooundumbi people cared for and took sustenance from the district, up until the events of 1887, when the Government-appointed "protector of Aboriginals" organised for members of the clan to be rounded up and transported across to Fraser Island.

The district provided the clan with a rich source of food and shelter. Several camp sites are still able to be identified within the electorate, the Nudgee waterholes being one of the more significant. Located nearby is a bora ground, used principally as a place where young men were educated in the rites and knowledge required for initiation to manhood. The Oooundumbi clan made use of the abundant food sources of the wetlands and surrounding district. Wild strawberries, raspberries, passionfruit and figs featured prominently in their diet, as did fish, tortoises, snakes, kangaroos, wallabies and wild ducks.

The richness of local soils was also recognised by the early white inhabitants of the district. The first white inhabitants were mainly farmers, many of whom were German. The suburb of Nundah was the site of the earliest German settlement in Queensland. It was established around 1838. From the early 1860s, the area now known as Banyo and Nudgee was redeveloped for fruit farms, vineyards and dairies. Farming was still a significant feature of the district right up to the late 1970s. They were still flourishing when Jack Melloy won the seat of Nudgee in 1960.

In his first speech, Mr Melloy registered local farmers' complaints that the Brisbane Markets had been relocated to their current site at Rocklea. Nudgee wines and champagnes were not of your average garden variety. Over the years, they won gold, silver and bronze medals in wine exhibitions at Franco-British and Earl's Court exhibitions.

The first white inhabitants of the Geebung area were brickmakers; they arrived in the district around 1865. The Zillman's waterholes area, now Zillmere, was first developed by farmers. The first white inhabitant of the Geebung area was John Luke Ward, and some of his bricks were used to build St Joseph's College at Boondall.

The Geebung area soon took on a military significance, and in this year of "Australia Remembers" it is fitting to record some of the military presence of the district. Murphy's paddock—a large expanse of land which spills over into the neighbouring electorates of Aspley and Chermerside—became the focal point for military activity in the district during the First and Second World Wars. Around the time of the Boer War, the new art of trench warfare was practised in Rutenburg's paddock, then situated at the corner of Ellison and Geebung—now Newman—Roads. During World War II, the area in the vicinity of Marchants Park was once again used as a major military camp. The campsite area

actually extended from Ellison Road in the north to Hamilton Road in the south and from Gympie Road in the west to Newman Road in the east. An Army hospital was also housed in the area, second in size only to the Greenslopes Hospital.

Today the electorate has been transformed from essentially farming communities to a major residential part of the City of Brisbane. Nudgee electorate contains all or part of the suburbs and locations of Toombul, Nundah, Northgate, Virginia, Banyo, Nudgee, Nudgee Beach, Geebung, Zillmere and Boondall. Principally a residential area, it does however contain significant areas of commercial and industrial activity. Some of the better known business icons in the electorate include the Golden Circle Cannery and the Arnotts biscuit factory. It is a great district, a great place to live in, and I am proud to stand here as its representative in this place.

One of the most important issues facing the citizens of Australia is the debate on the future of our Federation. It is important that this debate is not marginalised or trivialised by the mass media. To date, much of the commentary has focused on the simplistic question: should the States continue to exist? It is imperative that the public debate encompasses far wider parameters than that.

Our founders established a democratic federation with appropriate checks and balances between the powers of the States and the Commonwealth. The events of history now seriously question the effectiveness of some of those checks and balances. The Senate, originally constituted as the principal defender of the interests of the States, now rarely, if ever, performs that role. Commonwealth powers, once able to be scrutinised and checked by the Senate in the interests of the States, are now exercised in some cases almost with impunity. It is now time for us to critically examine the structure of our Federation and to make the changes necessary to carry us into the new millennium. I support a full review of the powers of the Commonwealth, the States and local authorities in order to implement a new federation which maintains the strong democratic traditions inherent in our current structure and enables the services and functions of Government to be delivered in the best interests of all Australians. In doing so, let us simply not tear down that which has served us well.

The Australian Federation has provided us with almost 200 years of political stability and a nation where democratic freedoms have flourished. However, if we are going to create a new federation, let us tackle head-on the issues that need to be tackled. One of the major issues to be confronted is the vertical fiscal imbalance that exists between the Commonwealth and the States. Because of the narrow revenue base of the States, Queensland is able to raise only about 57c in every dollar needed to deliver our basic services. The other 43c is provided by Canberra, increasingly by way of Section 96 tied grants. It is simply not just nor reasonable to continue with such imbalances. A truly democratic federation is one based on shared responsibilities and a capacity for each level of government to finance those responsibilities. The creeping centralism arising out of the tied grants approach is strangling the autonomy of the States. Slowly but surely, powers and functions which the Constitution properly allocated to the States are being reined in under the control of the Commonwealth.

The future of the Australian Federation is far too important to allow changes to be made by stealth. We must act now to restate the rules of our Federation. In that regard, I support calls by the Premier for a national program of action to address issues such as vertical fiscal imbalance, the future role of the Senate and the delineation of powers between the three levels of government. Failure to act soon will result in a Federation comprising an all-powerful central Government and weak and dependant client States.

It is appropriate at this point to acknowledge the work of the many voluntary community organisations in my electorate. For some time now, I have had the opportunity to work with and observe the tremendous contributions that volunteers make to the quality of life in our communities. School P & C associations, RSL sub-branches, Meals on Wheels, Rotary, Lions, local community associations, pensioner groups and sporting and recreational clubs all play an important role in strengthening the fabric of our communities. No Government can provide all that is needed in the way of support and services to a community. Governments can and should, however, provide assistance to voluntary organisations to enable them to fulfil their roles. In that respect, I am pleased to give my support to Government initiatives which provide direct assistance to organisations at the local community level, examples being, the volunteer involvement program to assist with the training and coordination of volunteers and the direct funding available through programs such as the Gaming Machine Community Benefit Fund.

I also wish to give credit to the work of the Lodge Youth Support Service located in my electorate at Northgate. This worthwhile service provides secure, medium to long-term accommodation and support for homeless and at-risk young people aged between 15 and 17 years. It is sad that such services are required. However, it is also gratifying to witness the positive results achieved through the efforts of the young people themselves and their youth workers.

I have been an active member of the Labor Party for almost 15 years. I joined the party because I believed in its fundamental traditions of social justice and the equitable distribution of wealth and power. My faith in this party remains as strong as it was on the day I joined. One of the telling features which distinguishes our party from the conservative coalition is our support for appropriate Government interventions in the economy. Labor rejects the political philosophies of those who place their total faith in free market economics.

There are many examples of Labor's willingness to intervene: the maintenance of an adequate award safety net; an expanding public housing sector; record budgets in public health and education; the provision of generous financial assistance to community-based organisations; land rights legislation; freedom of information legislation; the Home and Community Care Program; and job skills and training programs for the unemployed.

I am proud to stand here as a member of this Labor Government—a Government which is not afraid to intervene in the interests of those in the community who are in need of help. I look forward to giving further support to this fine tradition in the coming term of this Parliament.

In conclusion, I place on record my commitment to the electors of Nudgee to properly acquit myself to my duties as a member of this Assembly. In doing so, I am reminded of a quote from a *Courier-Mail* article dated 19 November 1994. The article stated—

“No assessment of a politician is more damning than the claim that they did nothing.

Failure to act properly when in possession of immense power must be the cardinal sin of politics and the resting place of the inept and the timid.”

I look forward to participating in the parliamentary work and debates which shape our State's future. May the work of this Parliament be fruitful and in the best interests of the citizens of Queensland and Australia.

---