Speech by

CRAIG WALLACE

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

Hansard 18 March 2004

FIRST SPEECH

Mr WALLACE (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.40 p.m.): It is with pleasure that I second the motion for the adoption of the address-in-reply moved by my colleague the member for Keppel. I begin by congratulating the Premier and his team on such an historic occasion. The people of Queensland obviously appreciate the good governance of the Australian Labor Party and its leader. I am sure that all members on this side of the House look forward to a positive and proactive term that will keep Queensland moving. This government has been returned so overwhelmingly because it has a positive plan for this state—the highlights of which are the creation of the Department of Child Safety and an extra $468 million for the health system.

I proudly come to this place as the member for Thuringowa and a member of the Australian Labor Party. I am unashamedly and unabashedly a north Queenslander. It is for the residents of Thuringowa and north Queensland that I will fight. Indeed, my family has been in north Queensland for over 130 years. We have seen the north grow and prosper to become one of the premier regions of this state. My family has always been Labor—no easy task when one considers my home town, Home Hill. This is a place not known for its Labor sympathies.

My great-great-grandfather was a customs officer in Ross Island in Townsville in the 1870s. I am following in the public service tradition. In those days Ross Island was part of the old Thuringowa divisional board. My great-grandfather, Jim Wallace, was the first stationmaster and postmaster in Home Hill. Indeed, the famous Wallace's Creek is named after him. Should honourable members wish to catch some mud crabs or a barramundi, I would be happy to be their guide.

My grandad, Alec, worked at the local Inkerman sugar mill, as does my dad. My dad, Don, and mum, Carol, taught me Labor values and hard work. They put me through school and university while bringing up four siblings all on a single wage. People like mum and dad are the backbone of our state and the Australian Labor Party. Indeed, my dad ran as the Labor candidate for the seat of Burdekin in 1989. I am proud to say that he won the Home Hill booth for the ALP for the first and only time in living memory.

That is why I am so passionate about the north. One could say that it is in my blood. I love the climate and the lifestyle, the friendliness of the people and, of course, the mighty North Queensland Cowboys, who I am sure will take the premiership soon.

Mr Mickel interjected.

Mr WALLACE: I thought that might get a rise out of the minister. In short, I want to work hard to make sure my region goes ahead. I served a wonderful apprenticeship before entering this House. I can boast having worked in all three levels of government: firstly, as an adviser to the former member for Herbert, Ted Lindsay; secondly, as an electorate officer for the former member for Townsville, Geoff Smith; and, finally, as an executive officer for one of our state's finest politicians, Tony Mooney. They taught me well.

Like me, the Beattie government cares about the north. I was indebted to have the Premier visit two schools during the election campaign—Kirwan State High School and Rasmussen State Primary School. I am sure that during the heat of the election campaign and the northern summer the Premier appreciated the airconditioning that his government delivered to these schools as much as the students

and teachers. The government's $3.1 million program to aircondition up to 117 new classrooms in Thuringowa and surrounds will be warmly welcomed in my electorate—or should I say 'coolly'. The new 70-bed nursing home in Kirwan and the new community health centre at the site of the former Kirwan Women's Hospital will also be welcomed.

This administration is also to be congratulated for its commitment to Thuringowa and Townsville residents with its budgeting of a further $57 million as subsidy to NQ Water for engineering works on the Ross River Dam. This will guarantee a safe and reliable source of water for the twin cities well into the future. The provision of a reliable water source is essential for the development of north Queensland. With the construction of the Burdekin Dam stage one in the 1980s, under the direction of the then Hawke Labor government, our water supply was guaranteed in times of drought. This in turn has led to a boom in industry and population for the region. I note in the condolence motion for a former member for Townsville South, the late Alec Wilson, that he too spoke about the construction of the Burdekin Dam some 26 years ago.

The Department of Local Government and Planning projects that Thuringowa's and Townsville's population will double over the next 30 or so years. Combined with the inevitable increase in industry that this government's gas-fired base load power station will bring, there will be an even larger call on the resources of the Burdekin Dam.

Whilst the need is some way off, I believe that we should start planning in the near future for stage 2 of the Burdekin Dam. Construction of stage 1 took over 100 years of planning and agitation from the north. We cannot afford another 100 years for the dream to be realised. I will do my very best to put it on the agenda at both a state and federal level.

Planning for the future and unlocking the north's potential will be another of my goals whilst I am in this place. Over a century ago north Queensland led the way for Queensland when it came to Federation. Without the strong support from the north the vote in this state may have been lost. Many of the north's civic and political leaders joined together to achieve the common goal—a better deal for the north.

I am pleased to advise that the north's leaders have agreed to join together once more to forge a stronger north Queensland. My colleague the member for Mount Isa and Minister for State Development and Innovation has agreed, along with the Mayor of Cairns, Councillor Kevin Byrne, the Mayor of Thuringowa, Councillor Les Tyrell, and the Mayor of Townsville, Councillor Tony Mooney, to help organise and participate in what I will loosely describe as a convention on the north's future. This idea was born out of the efforts of the former managing director of the North Queensland Newspaper Company, Mr Max Tomlinson, who envisaged northern communities working together with the common good. Max has moved to Adelaide to take over the running of the newspapers in that part of the world.

Apart from many other papers in its stable, the North Queensland Newspaper Company is the publisher of the ***Townsville Bulletin***, a newspaper renowned for over 100 years, like the ALP, for its championing of the north. Max's replacement, Mr Jason Scott, has agreed to consider continuing his company's involvement. Over the coming term I will be working with these gentlemen to get this convention under way. I hope the member for Cairns can join in this common goal.

Ms Boyle: I look forward to it.

Mr WALLACE: The common purpose of delegates is to ensure that the event is not simply a talkfest but a forum for politicians and business and community leaders to have a say and influence north Queensland's direction. Topics will be as diverse as transport, energy supply, the involvement of local government in the development process, migration to the north and state and federal funding for major projects.

It is a rare occurrence to get leaders of such calibre together, especially if one believes reports of the much vaunted rivalry between Townsville and Cairns. This just does not exist. We work well together. I am confident that a positive blueprint for the north will be the end result.

Locally, there are a number of projects that I will ensure are at the top of the government's agenda. In Thuringowa the impressive Riverway scheme will be a marvellous asset to the city providing recreation and cultural facilities across the twin cities of Townsville and Thuringowa. Features include a large swimming lagoon, cultural centre and first-class cricket and AFL sporting facility. Like many in the north, I look forward to watching a Sheffield Shield game right in the middle of Thuringowa.

Already the Beattie government has committed several millions of dollars towards the Riverway project along with the use of public land. Just like its funding for the Townsville Strand, this government has the runs on the board when it comes to the provision of recreation facilities for Townsville and Thuringowa. The extension of the community renewal scheme from Rasmussen to the Upper Ross is also a step in the right direction which deserves congratulations. The success of the Rasmussen scheme is measured in the increase pride in the suburb by local residents and their willingness to be involved in the project. Its extension to Upper Ross will ensure the area continues to improve in leaps

and bounds. I would like to thank particularly the Minister for the Public Works, Housing and Racing and the Thuringowa City Council for ensuring the success of the scheme.

Because Townsville and Thuringowa are the powerhouses of the northern economy, an efficient transport system is essential. Already the joint state and federal $40 million Douglas arterial project is taking shape. When completed, it will revolutionise the movement of traffic into and out of Thuringowa. My predecessor, Anita Phillips, deserves congratulations for securing the funds for this massive project.

Whilst not directly in my electorate, the Townsville port plays an essential role in the economy of Thuringowa. The government's multimillion-dollar pledge to develop the Stuart bypass and future eastern port access corridor are to be welcomed in the twin cities. I will do my best to finalise these two essential projects.

Also on the agenda for the coming term for the development in the port precinct is the construction of an ocean cruise terminal. As my community has an excellent harbour, a number of US warships and civilians cruise liners call into the port of Townsville each year. Not only is this excellent for our international relations but the contribution to our economy is enormous. You can just imagine 4,000 US sailors calling into the port of Townsville, being at sea for three or four months, with those US dollars in hand. It is a great boost to the economy.

Unfortunately, the port lacks facilities that cater specifically for these vessels and if berths are fully booked for sugar freighters, zinc freighters, et cetera, many ships are turned away. I am pleased that this government has considered the findings of a preliminary assessment report and confirmed that an ocean cruiser terminal is a priority project. The north looks forward to the further progress of this facility.

As members can see, I have taken a keen interest in the north and its development. I am overjoyed that I could be here as its advocate. Like many other members in this place, I could not have made it without the support of family and friends. I am pleased that my wife and daughter are up in the gallery watching me today. Firstly, let me thank my beautiful wife, Jennifer, who supported me on this journey: Xie xie ni—which, for the members' information, is Chinese mandarin for thank you. Of course, I must mention my gorgeous daughter, Gigi, who, whilst only three, has persevered through many late nights while mummy and daddy stuffed letters or undertook other campaign matters. Thank you, Gigi. She takes great delight in seeing the Premier on TV and calling him 'Pizza' Beattie. To my mum and dad, Don and Carol Wallace, thank you for your support and for teaching me Labor values.

I thank also my former boss and mentor, Townsville Mayor, Tony Mooney. Tony is indeed a gifted leader and Townsville is very lucky to have him. The transformation of the city under his leadership has been nothing short of stunning. I am sure that members on this side of the House would join me and wish his team well on 27 March. The Mooney team dominates the Townsville City Council, holding all 11 seats. I have no doubt that Tony will triumph next Saturday. For the information of the members of this House, that will mean that by the end of next term over 32 years of unbroken ALP administration at the Townsville City Council since the late Perc Tucker led the party to victory in 1976. That will eclipse the National Party's record in this place from 1957.

I give special thanks to my campaign director, Mr Barry Mitchell, who went out of his way to ensure success. To Paul and Cheryl Fletcher, I give a big thanks. To my good friend—and a wonderful person—Mrs Vi Cox, I could not have done it without you. I give thanks also to the former member who held my seat, Anita Phillips, who I trust will soon be the new federal member for Herbert. Finally, to the Premier, the State Secretary, Cameron Milner, and my organiser, Melissa Thomas, thanks for a professional and well-run campaign. It was indeed an honour to be involved.

Unfortunately, I cannot thank all of those who helped me here today, but from the bottom of my heart, your help was much, much appreciated. I could not have done it without you. I look forward to the term ahead and hope that I can make a positive contribution in this House for the benefit of Thuringowa, north Queensland and our wonderful state.