




Speech by

Hon. John McVeigh

MEMBER FOR TOOWOOMBA SOUTH

Hansard Thursday, 17 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Hon. JJ McVEIGH** (Toowoomba South—LNP) (Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry) (10.35 am): I stand here today a very humbled and honoured new member for Toowoomba South and newly appointed Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry in this Newman LNP government. To say that the past six weeks has been eventful would be an understatement, but I very much look forward to serving as a member of this parliament, as a minister of the Crown and, most particularly, as the member for Toowoomba South. I therefore confirm my allegiance here today to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her representative, Her Excellency the Governor, Penelope Wensley, and my loyalty to this parliament and to the electors of Toowoomba South. Madam Speaker, I especially acknowledge the Governor's address in opening our parliament yesterday and I sincerely congratulate you on your appointment to the high and respected office of Speaker in this House.

The 2012 Queensland state election was unprecedented in terms of the clear decision made by Queenslanders for a change of government. For my part, I am certainly proud that my result in Toowoomba South represented 71.5 per cent on a two-party preferred basis. I sincerely thank the electors of Toowoomba South for placing their faith in me. At the same time, I recognise that, as a candidate succeeding the only retiring LNP member in this past election, the foundation for my campaign was set on the record of my predecessor, the honourable Mike Horan. I have been very fortunate to have known Mike and his wife, Helen, for some years and he was and is a great friend and mentor to me, as is Helen to my wife, Anita. During the last six weeks, I have come to recognise that Mike retired from this place as one of the few members who was genuinely liked on both sides of politics. He was certainly revered on our side as one of those who played an incredibly important role over the years in the genesis of this new LNP government of the 54th Parliament of Queensland.

I have had the pleasure of knowing all of my predecessors in Toowoomba South: the late Peter Wood, member from 1972 to 1974 and former Deputy Mayor of Toowoomba City Council; the late John Warner, member from 1974 to 1986 and Speaker of the House; Clive Berghofer, member from 1986 to 1991 and Mayor of the Toowoomba City Council, businessman and renowned philanthropist; and, as I mentioned, the member over the last 20 years, Mike Horan.

My success in this campaign is due to the efforts and support of a number of important people. My campaign team—led by a campaign manager of enormous intellect and capability, Mrs Cynthia Hardy—is among the most dedicated, driven and endearing teams of people I have ever had the pleasure of working with. I thank many friends and extended family, especially my parents, Mary and Tom, and my mother-in-law, Cel, who supported and encouraged me through that journey. I enjoyed the support of the entire LNP party organisation—from our president, Bruce McIver, and our regional chair, Pat Weir, through to the volunteers who stood with me in the electorate rain, hail or shine.

I have already been joined by a dedicated professional team led by my Chief of Staff, Bruce Mills, and Kevena Franklin in my electorate office. I thank my children—Meghan, Kevin, Bridget, Annabelle, Marita and Tessa—who put aside their university, school, sport, music and even their social lives to walk that journey with me, and they were perhaps my greatest source of motivation and inspiration throughout the campaign. Finally, I thank my wife, my partner, my best friend, Anita, who prompted me to make the

final decision to run and then sustained me throughout. As I thank and acknowledge them all, I recognise that I am indeed a very fortunate man.

Toowoomba South has significant features and issues within its own boundaries and yet a sense of shared responsibility for the broader region given our catchment of southern Queensland and the northern parts of New South Wales to our south. We have in the order of 20 schools, 28 church communities, 14 aged-care facilities, numerous child-care centres, 16 shopping centres and 19 sporting complexes and facilities. We have one of Queensland's largest livestock selling centres, the iconic Picnic Point on the edge of the range and the East Creek and West Creek catchments that were the scene of flooding devastation in our city in January 2011. The seat extends from the range and our CBD west towards the Royal Agricultural Society's iconic Toowoomba Showgrounds and south to the University of Southern Queensland. We have residents who work in rural industries, in agribusiness, aged care, education at all levels, health, food and other manufacturing, tradespeople, professionals, government services and retail. We are a region facing significant growth challenges, be it the need for resources for our growing school populations and numerous aged-care facilities; the pressure that we bear together with other communities along the Warrego Highway, especially as it cuts a swathe through the heart of our city carrying produce and supplies to and from the west; the balance that we must find between agriculture, mining and other land uses; and the need for flood mitigation and CBD infrastructure development.

Toowoomba, like much of regional Queensland, is ready to play its part in rebuilding the Queensland economy. We are willing to share the burden of challenges with the rest of the state, but we must ensure that we are not left with all of the costs, all of the pressures. We will simply seek our fair share of the benefits flowing from the development of our great state. Our local economic profile indicates that our local economy continues to be based on the mainstays of agriculture, education, health, retail and an increasing contribution from the energy sector in more recent times. In this regard, I am very pleased to see the strong statements in today's Toowoomba *Chronicle* from my good friend His Worship the Mayor of Toowoomba Regional Council, Councillor Paul Antonio, wherein he explains that Toowoomba is open for business and has the potential to be an economic powerhouse. From the glory days of Southern Cross Windmills, Defiance Flour, KR Darling Downs to the current business leaders of Wagners, Easternwell, FK Gardner and Sons, Heritage Bank and the University of Southern Queensland; from Steel Rudd to Geoffrey Rush; from Duncan Thompson, Jason Little and Tim Horan to Will Power in international motor racing, we boast of national and international leaders in the arts, sport, commerce and education—all of whom we are justifiably proud.

It is fair to say that one's political ideals are forged through their life experience. I grew up on the Darling Downs and in Toowoomba South, attending primary school and secondary school before moving on to study business at the University of Southern Queensland. Prior to coming to this place, I have been fortunate indeed to enjoy a most satisfying career in agribusiness, including Elders Pastoral in North Queensland, Cargill Australia in the grain belt extending through to Central Queensland, the Queensland Department of Primary Industries in the early 1990s and the federal Fisheries Research and Development Corporation. For the past 15 years my colleagues and I have operated a management consulting practice working for Australian businesses and industries in every continent of the world. It has been enjoyable to work through those roles in the cane and beef industries of North Queensland; the grains industry throughout Southern and Central Queensland; the seafood industry in Moreton Bay and Bundaberg; the pork industry in the Burnett; in regional development roles in Western Queensland; in value-adding in the food processing and packaging, wool, vegetable and cotton industries; in irrigation and engineering; and in energy development best practice activities in the Surat Basin. I know through this experience that Queensland industries, particularly regional, have a tremendous potential for wealth and employment generation, not only in my home, the rural and regional centre of Toowoomba, but throughout the entire state.

Like us all, I have benefited from the wonderful education opportunities offered in Queensland—in my case, from Jondaryan State School to my beloved Downlands Catholic College in Toowoomba to a business degree at the University of Southern Queensland, an MBA at Bond University and in more recent years postgraduate studies at the University of Queensland School of Agriculture and Food Sciences. But as I consider the careers of my wife and me to date, our family and the challenges that lay ahead, I must recognise the efforts of our forebears. My paternal great-grandfather, Patrick McVeigh, carried salt with his own horse team in the late 1800s to feed workers on the Grandchester to Toowoomba railway, and he and my maternal great-grandfather were among the first selectors on the Darling Downs. Whilst I would love to go back in time and seek the advice of both my pioneering great-grandfathers given my current position, it would be just a little embarrassing to have to share with Patrick that the Toowoomba rail line is much the same now as he saw it being built almost 150 years ago.

PJ Skerman's book *Guiding Agriculture Queensland, 1887-1987* reveals that in his opening speech of the parliament on 19 July 1887 Governor Sir Anthony Musgrave said he had been advised by his ministers that they had authorised the establishment of a Department of Agriculture. In the address-in-reply, the Hon. WF Taylor moved and the Hon. Horatio Wilson seconded that the department be established, with the Hon. AJ Thynne appointed as the first Minister of Agriculture. A later Minister of

Agriculture, the Hon. DF Denham, announced an apprentices in agriculture program in the early 1900s to be operated at the Hermitage Farm near Warwick, which remains an important grains research station under my department to this day. It was there that my great-grandfather and my grandfather Thomas McVeigh, like other farmers in the local community, assisted in instructing those apprentices free of charge. It is therefore satisfying indeed that not only am I charged with the responsibility as Minister for Agriculture to re-establish a dedicated department of agriculture under the Newman LNP government but that I also look at reinvigorating agricultural education and research activities at centres like Hermitage where my own forebears played their part over 100 years ago.

I reflect too on the legacy of my mother's father, James Meara, a leading Darling Downs farmer, grazier and businessman and the longest-ever serving mayor of the former Clifton shire council. It was significant for me to sit in the same council chambers he did during my role with our regional council in recent years. It is especially poignant for me that in the gallery today, together with my wife, my mother, my sister and my campaign manager, I have my father, the Hon. Tom McVeigh, a former federal member for Darling Downs, later Groom, and Minister for Housing and Construction as well as Home Affairs and Environment in the Fraser-Anthony coalition government of the 1970s and 1980s.

After marrying in Townsville, my wife and I spent the early part of our careers—mine in agribusiness, as I said, and hers in teaching—throughout Queensland before settling our own family back in my home town of Toowoomba. With her forebears involved in grocery and produce supplies in her home town of Charters Towers, as well as mining and railways activities, and mine, as I said, in farming and grazing, Anita and I have an appreciation of both regional and metropolitan Queensland. We have an appreciation of the rewards of hard work and enterprise, of study and dedication, all of which was instilled in us by our own parents—Kev and Cel Phillips and Mary and Tom—given their farming, small business and industry association backgrounds, as well as a shared passion for conservative politics in our great state.

As I do so, I acknowledge the example of my late father-in-law, Kevin, focused as he was on his small business, church and community service, including quiet support of the local Indigenous community such that he was referred to on the front page of the *Northern Miner* newspaper at his untimely passing some years ago as 'Charters Towers very best friend'. I have been fortunate to work with others in continuing such legacies through involvement on the board of Concannon College at the University of Southern Queensland; our local chamber of commerce; the Toowoomba regional economic development board; the Condamine Alliance natural resource management body, where we have focused on environmental custodianship of the Condamine River catchment; sustainable forestry development initiatives; our Indigenous heritage; our regional RSL advisory and Australia Day coordinating committees; and as a councillor with the Toowoomba Regional Council.

Although at times there will be—and should be—spirited political debate and ideological differences in this House, I look forward to pooling my experience with that of others in this chamber and joining with every member in making the very best contribution I can to the 54th Queensland Parliament. In closing, I reiterate that I am very proud to represent Toowoomba alongside my colleague Mr Trevor Watts, the new member for Toowoomba North, as we take over from our predecessors the honourable Mike Horan and Kerry Shine—both well-respected local members from our region. I recognise that it is a challenge to represent the interests of one's electorate at the same time as serving as a minister of the Crown, especially in a first term. Toowoomba, though, is where I am from. It is a place that I love, I am humbled to represent it in this parliament, it has a great affinity, of course, with the cabinet role I now hold and it has so much to offer to the future of the state of Queensland. Therefore, as I prepare to represent my electorate in this parliament I reflect on the closing lines of the poem *Toowoomba*, written by George Essex Evans in 1900. It states—

The vision of a city, wide and splendid,
Crowning the Range's wall,
And o'er thy sweeping plateau, far extended,
Welcome for all!

I thank the House for affording me the opportunity to make my maiden speech and I thank you, Madam Speaker.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!