



Speech by

Dr Mark Robinson

MEMBER FOR CLEVELAND

Hansard Wednesday, 20 May 2009

MAIDEN SPEECH

Dr ROBINSON (Cleveland—LNP) (7.59 pm): Mr Speaker, fellow members of parliament, family, friends and guests in the gallery and residents of my electorate of Cleveland watching online, I consider it a great privilege and honour to stand here in this grand House before you all today as the new state member for the electorate of Cleveland. I rise in the House to deliver my inaugural speech at the outset of the 53rd Queensland Parliament and during the 150th anniversary year.

The opening of the 53rd Parliament marks the first time in 20 years that the people of Cleveland have been represented by a conservative MP. It is a great honour for me to enter the parliament at this momentous time and in this set of circumstances. I begin by thanking the people of Cleveland for their vote of trust—trust in me and in the LNP to represent them in this House. I am deeply honoured by the support that I received from the people of the Cleveland electorate—from Wellington Point, Ormiston, Birkdale, Cleveland, Thornlands and North Stradbroke Island.

I would also like to acknowledge the LNP leadership team for their solid performance during the election. Their leadership has placed the LNP within striking distance of government at the next election. I would like to thank my campaign team and volunteers for their tireless effort since November 2008. I pay particular tribute to my campaign team, Paul, Shane, Matt, Paul Gordon and Adam, and also the Cleveland SEC, volunteers and friends. I would also like to acknowledge the federal member for Bowman, Andrew Laming. The Redlands is fortunate to have such a hardworking federal member and I wish him well at the next federal election.

May I also especially congratulate Lawrence Springborg, along with Mark McArdle and many other lieutenants, for the successful formation of the LNP as one united conservative force in Queensland. While history does not record the name of Lawrence Springborg as Premier of Queensland, premiers come and go but this party, the LNP, will go on and Lawrence will be known as its founder. The revitalisation of the conservative forces in part was my motivation for running for parliament. I represent a new breed of conservative Queenslanders with neither Liberal nor National Party background, but conservative and united. The seeds of greatness in the LNP have been sown and may we all nurture and water the seedling as it grows to full maturity. To the new opposition leader, John-Paul Langbroek, he has my full support, and I look forward to him becoming the next Premier of Queensland.

What of the result? Our win in Cleveland was by a narrow margin—155 votes. However, in real terms it is a 5.3 per cent increase in the LNP primary vote and represents a significant turning of the tide. Although after redistribution of the 2006 boundaries the margin was officially 1.3 per cent to Labor, in reality, the polling showed that I was more than five per cent behind when the election was called. Our victory took place against massive union resources of finance and manpower. In every way, we were the underdogs.

But the will of the people was for electoral change. This desire for change is exemplified in a guy called Doug—someone who I never met, but who was not expected to live past the weekend of the election. So he made a special effort to vote before the weekend in case he died before the election.

The reasons for our victory are varied. The win was partly a positive response to the vision that we put to the residents of Cleveland to deliver the infrastructure and services that the people of Cleveland need so as to make Cleveland a better place in which to live. I am committed to protecting and improving the quality of our bayside lifestyle.

The result was also a negative reaction to the government's poor performance in health, education and the economy in particular. Local issues included a lack of infrastructure—roads, the Eastern Busway, train services—the takeover of Redland Water and the permanent exclusion zones for recreational fishers in Moreton Bay. The government is seen by the people of Cleveland as having largely failed and forgotten them. I remember what thousands of Cleveland residents told me and I will not forget. I commit myself to working hard to achieve all that we set out to do. I am writing to relevant ministers about specific commitments made by the government in the hope that they will keep their word to the people of Cleveland.

I am deeply honoured by the fact that I join a small, but not elitist, group of individuals who have represented the people of Cleveland, whether by the name of Cleveland or otherwise, in the Queensland parliament. Between 1929 and 1989, the residents of what is currently known as the electorate of Cleveland were represented in state parliament by conservative MPs from the Country Party and the National Party for all but five of those years. The people were represented by conservative MPs Thomas Plunkett, Robert Harrison, Dick Wood, John Goleby and Paul Clauson and Labor MP Edgar Baldwin. Since 1989, with the encroachment of urbanisation into this rural area and the redefining of boundaries, the seat has been held by Labor MPs Darryl Briskey and Phil Weightman. Today, I honour all of these men for their contributions and it is with pride that my name is added to that distinguished list. I am humbled to think that I have played a part, albeit modest, in returning the region to its conservative home.

The electorate of Cleveland, which has approximately 40,000 residents, is situated within the bayside region of south-east Brisbane known as the Redlands. Previously a rural area on the outskirts of Brisbane, Cleveland has been enveloped by the city in its eastward expansion to the sea. The shire of Redland has become Redland city. Living in various parts of Queensland has helped me see the unique character of Cleveland, which has a culture of its own that must be understood, appreciated, respected and considered in policy formation. The people of mainland Cleveland enjoy a mix of fast-paced urban existence and a relaxed country feel in this coastal electorate. North Stradbroke Island reveals an eclectic mix of beach style living, tourism, other forms of work, and all at a gentle pace until the holiday season sets in. I would like to acknowledge the Quandamooka people as the original inhabitants and custodians of the land of mainland Cleveland and North Stradbroke Island.

Cleveland is also characterised by a diversified and strong small business sector, tourism and various service industries. The magnificent North Stradbroke Island, Cleveland Point, Wellington Point, Wepstead Manor, the Redland Museum, Ormiston House and Norm Price Park are just some of the local icons that characterise the region and the community. I consider myself most fortunate to represent such a beautiful area and great people.

What of my journey and priorities for Cleveland? My journey to state politics has taken more than 25 years since completing my first university degree. While I was inspired to run for parliament by the historic formation of the LNP, my motivation predates this event. In truth, it probably stems from watching one too many episodes of *Yes Minister* and *The Hollowmen*. I guess resistance to my calling to politics was useless and, ultimately, I yielded to my destiny.

In reality, politics is a natural progression from my various roles in community leadership and service and my background has positioned me for this new level of public service. I am a product of the convergence of various forces, including conservative political thought, free enterprise, traditional family values, a sense of social justice and a desire to protect the environment.

I was born in Traralgon, Gippsland, where I lived for the first 17 years of my life. My father, Allen, and mother, Lauris, owned a small business in jewellery and watchmaking. Dad worked very hard to establish the business. Mum was mainly a stay-at-home mum who at times helped dad at work. They had three boys, Mark, Graeme and Michael. I am the eldest. My childhood was a happy one and I was raised in a stable, longstanding, loving and caring home. I thank my mother and father for the home they created and for the start in life they gave me.

After completing year 12 at Traralgon High School in 1980, I moved to Townsville where I studied for three further years to achieve a Bachelor of Science in marine biology and zoology. Over the next 10 years I worked in the education sector as a TAFE science teacher, tutor, lecturer and chaplain. I also met my wife, Julie, at university while she studied social work. We were married in 1985, bought a house and started a family.

After moving to Melbourne in 1993, where we lived for six years, we returned to Queensland, living at Mount Gravatt for two years and then moved to the Redlands, where we have now lived for more than six years. Living in various parts of Queensland has taught me much about our great state. I have loved living in North Queensland, Townsville; visiting Central Queensland, Rockhampton and Yeppoon, where

my wife's family still live; visiting Western Queensland cattle stations; and living in Mount Gravatt and for the last six years in the Redlands.

Between 2000 and 2009 I completed a masters degree in international studies at Griffith University and a PhD in cultural studies at the University of Queensland. During that time I have continued to work in various education roles, particularly lecturing in multicultural and intercultural studies. I have also been involved in charity management, working with children and youth. A highlight of this work has been helping to build an orphanage in Indonesia in 2008. Many of the principles that I have learned in my journey are useful in my service of the people of Cleveland. Among others they are family values; educational opportunities; small business; hard work and job creation; balanced growth and sustainability; and social justice and care for the underprivileged.

What of family values? My wife, Julie, and I have been married for 23 years. Julie is the love of my life and true soul mate. She is both my match and my complement. I honour her and I honour her parents, Maurice and Clare Murray, for raising such a well-balanced and lovely woman. These 23 years of marriage have produced seven awesome children: Benjamin 20, Mitchell 18, Laura 17, Melissa 14, Joseph 12, Susannah 10 and Isaac three. Our commitment to each other in marriage, for better and for worse, has formed the secure foundation upon which our family has grown. I am grateful for each of our children. I love each one of them dearly and am truly blessed. Today I am a better man for their love and support. I especially thank my wife, mother and mother-in-law for their support during the election. It has been said that behind every good man is a great woman and a surprised mother-in-law. I am truly a lucky man to have scored the most amazing wife, with the package deal of a great mother-in-law thrown in.

Throughout the campaign people have commented about my large family. Depending on how one looks at it, it is either brilliant family planning or terrible. I was often asked, 'Are you Catholic?', to which I answered, 'No, but I could be.' People have asked whether power blackouts are really that common in the Redlands. Others have suggested I buy a bigger TV. In response I have purchased three TVs, including a plasma screen. I have had suggestions from friend and foe alike about permanent solutions, from simple operations to other solutions that are as subtle as a brick—or two. My wife is here today. She is easy to identify. She is the most red-faced woman in the gallery. I did run this speech by her.

In all seriousness, the family is the basic building block of society. Communities are strong when their families are strong. Keeping our families strong and close has not been without its struggles, but my wife and I have worked hard to create a warm and loving environment in our home. I value my family and they have had a massive influence on me. I would not be able to do what I do without their support. The strong traditional family unit has made our nation great. I believe that governments must enact laws that help families to be strong and stay together. I am passionate about protecting and promoting the welfare of the children and the families of Cleveland.

What about educational opportunities? I am grateful for both the learning and teaching opportunities that I have had. I am most fortunate to have attended fine state primary and high schools, followed by three Queensland universities: James Cook University, Griffith University and the University of Queensland. I believe that good education and training is critical to the future of our children whether, for example, via a TAFE system into a trade or a university into a profession. It concerns me that this government has taken its eyes off the ball when it comes to the education of our children, delivering them the lowest quality education in Australia. Further, I passionately believe that our children are best served by a system that allows for choice between public, independent, Catholic and other private options. I note in the Redlands that 60 per cent of children attend public schools and 40 per cent attend independent and Catholic schools. I am committed to standing up for the education rights of all the children of Cleveland. I am also committed to the teachers of Cleveland and commend them for their service of our children. Unlike the current government, I do not blame them for the low education standards of our children.

What about small business, hard work and job creation? Hardworking local small business is the foundation of job creation and wealth generation. In our state, many millions of jobs have been generated over our history through the productive output of small and medium-sized business. It is the entrepreneurial spirit of ordinary Queenslanders that has contributed to the greatness of this state. The stimulus of small business is needed to create real long-term, sustainable, bread-winning jobs. I call on the government to implement specific measures—for example, payroll tax relief—in the upcoming budget to stimulate small business and to thus produce desperately needed jobs in Cleveland and elsewhere.

The issue of local job creation is of paramount importance to the residents of Cleveland. About 60 per cent of Redlands workers leave Redland City each day to travel to work outside the area. This situation is not primarily due to the recent GFC, but a lack of growth and job creation in the area. The government has exacerbated the problem by continuing the infrastructure drought in the Redlands. Further strain on employment in Cleveland has been caused by the failure of this government to prevent the closure of Fisher & Paykel, costing at least 300 local jobs and the job losses, direct and indirect, caused by the recreational fisher permanent exclusion zones that are part of the government's Moreton Bay Marine Park plan.

What about balanced growth and sustainability? My early experiences in marine sciences and zoology underlie my commitment to the environment. The Redlands should not be forced into extreme development, but needs balanced growth. The residents want progress, but without unnecessary destruction of the environment. The recent excessive clearing of koala habitat by this government to make way for the new Thornlands State School is deplorable and shows that the government is not as ecofriendly as the Treasurer claims; rather they are 'ecowolves in Green's clothing'. Further, residents have cried out for a Moreton Bay Marine Park plan that works for all. The government's policy has already resulted in job losses in Cleveland.

What about social justice and care for the underprivileged? During the second year of my university degree, having come from a non-religious background I embraced Christian faith. I am proud of the Christian heritage of our state and nation. My faith has fuelled my charitable work with children and troubled youth. It has inspired me to work with the poor and needy, both in Queensland and in many developing countries. I am encouraged by the work of both non-faith and faith based groups in my electorate and commit to working with all groups for the betterment of our most vulnerable residents.

I have also been involved in chaplaincy work at universities and continue to serve in my local church, Gateway Church, as a board member. The Redlands, as part of the Bible Belt in south-east Brisbane, is flourishing with churches and Christian groups like the Salvation Army, SU Chaplaincy, Star of the Sea Catholic Church, Cleveland Uniting Church, Redlands Reformed Christian Church, Cleveland Baptist Church and Redlands Fellowship Christian Church. I acknowledge the helpful work of such groups and others in meeting the challenges of homelessness, poverty and domestic violence, among other issues, in the Redlands.

In conclusion, President John F Kennedy penned the following words that I feel are poignant to those who would take up the responsibility of public office wherever in the world they live. He said—

We in this country, in this generation, are by destiny rather than choice the watchmen on the walls of world freedom. We ask, therefore, that we may be worthy of our power and responsibility, that we may exercise our strength with wisdom and restraint, and that we may achieve in our time and for all time the ancient vision of peace on earth, good will toward men. That must always be our goal, and the righteousness of our cause must always underlie our strength. For as was written long ago: Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

Can I suggest that, as is written in the stained glass windows of this very parliament building, we are the watchmen and women who stand on the walls. We are guardians and protectors of the people. May we be enabled by God's grace to do so with distinction. I close by thanking the residents of Cleveland for their trust and support. I commit to working hard for their sake.