



Legislative Council

18/08/88

GOVERNORS SPEECH: ADDRESS IN REPLY

Second Day's Debate

Extract

The Hon. Dr B. P. V. PEZZUTTI [3.32]: Mr President and members, before I begin I would like to thank you all for your many kindnesses in making me feel welcome in this august chamber. Mr President, I should like to thank you personally for your guidance and open friendliness. I pay particular tribute to the Clerk, Mr Jeckeln, and his staff in this Council. The staff has been most professional, friendly and enthusiastic, and has made my job of being a new member a pleasure. I should also like to raise my voice in thanks to the Governor and Lady Rowland for a duty well done. After hearing the speech of the Hon. M. R. Egan I particularly thank Nick Greiner, our Premier, for his leadership and vision and for his commitment to clean and open government and good management.

Honourable members will know that I am a member of the Liberal Party and a native of the North Coast of New South Wales. I place clearly on the record my position on serious matters and the way I come to this House philosophically. I find it an attractive liberalism that emphasizes mutual efforts, the rights of all people to equality of opportunity, equality of access to programs—sometimes extensive—to make that right a reality; a form of liberalism that emphasizes our obligations to respond to needs while we pursue the creation of wealth and the enhancement of human potential. It is a philosophy that values liberty, which dedicates itself to the task of empowering human beings, a philosophy that emphasizes truth, tolerance and generosity. It has ideals that seek to promote the empowering of individuals.

An informed population is more powerful and more autonomous. The foreshadowed changes to the Defamation Act and the Freedom of Information Bill will allow people to be better informed. This House and this Parliament should not ignore the demands placed upon it by its constituents. What I have said in no way lines up with the socialist ideals of achieving equity and efficiency through concentration on equal outcomes. I believe in the primacy of individual choice and, most importantly, the notion of informed consent. I believe there is no free society that does not have a flourishing and successful business class. In fact, historically, I believe there have never been free societies that have been stable and which have allowed for the achievement of freedom without such a successful business class.

In his maiden speech in November 1970, the Hon. H. J. A. Sullivan in this House used a quotation from the President of the inaugural responsible Legislative Council, then Chief Justice Sir Alfred Stephen. After his resignation as President in 1857, Sir Alfred prayed:

I trust to be spared for many years to take part in the deliberations of the House; to contribute my humble aid in the passing of laws that shall bear the test of examination and of time; and to assist in establishing irrevocably the opinion, amongst all classes, not only that this Chamber is an invaluable auxiliary in Legislation, but, from the learning and intelligence, the unselfishness and single-mindedness of its members, their courtesy in debate, their love of justice, and their earnest search after truth, that it is an honour to the Constitution, and the Country, to which it belongs.

I hope we can all live up to his expectations in that regard. I come to this Legislative Council as a new boy, very much aware of the long and turbulent but distinguished history of this great House. I am also aware that the first Legislative Council of four appointed members included as one of those members the Surgeon-General of the colony. It has been always a source of constant amazement to me that more medical practitioners did not use their skills and knowledge to follow in his footsteps in this House. I am mindful of the shadow cast on this Parliament by that great Premier, Sir Henry Parkes, a great Liberal. Sir Henry was mainly instrumental for my family coming to this country. In 1859 a large group of Italians, Germans and Frenchmen set out on an expedition promoted by one of the great charlatans, the Marquis de Rays, who promoted the Bismarck Archipelago as a single island which he termed Nouvelle France. These faithful Europeans set sail on ships that were not equipped entirely for the problems ahead. However, two of those

ships successfully landed their cargo on what is now called the island of New Britain.

After they had struggled there for some months, racked by various fevers and some even eaten by cannibals. Sir Henry Parkes was filled with compassion and sent a ship from Sydney to take those poor people to New Caledonia. Once they had reached New Caledonia the Frenchmen disembarked but the Italians would not, so Sir Henry brought them to Sydney where he housed them in fairly basic accommodation down the road from here in Hyde Park. The *Sydney Morning Herald* of the day commented that they were emaciated and wretched on arrival in this country.

Sir Henry Parkes allowed the families to be farmed out to various settlers to give them work and dignity. He then sent my great grandfather to the north to seek out a piece of territory on the North Coast where the families could be settled and reunited. In 1881 that land was settled at Swan Bay near Woodburn, and some 130 families moved there to what was to be called New Italy. The choice of the land, in fact, was poor indeed. As individuals they would have failed, but the families struggled and worked hard together, achieving much. The children of those early settlers moved out to farms in local areas and further afield. However, the community stayed close, even though they left the initial settlement.

Those forebears of mine have become very widely respected settlers on the North Coast and have worked very hard to maintain their dignity and to advance by each generation the opportunities for their children. I am very proud of the efforts of my great grandparents in setting up New Italy and the work that they did in the community and among themselves. That spirit was common at that time in a developing Australia, and I hope to see that spirit return.

It is worth remembering that even in those days things were not easy. My grandfather, Bazzo, for example, had seven sons who fought in World War II. His eldest son died in Changi prisoner of war camp. In spite of that, during the war the secret police came and shot his racing pigeons in case he should attempt to send a message to Mussolini. That type of xenophobia and action had no place then and has no place now in this country. My education commenced at Bonalbo Central School and the convent school at Mallangaree, followed by a bursaried stay at St John's College, Woodlawn. I give particular thanks to the Reverend James Murphy of the Society of Mary who took this country lad and opened his eyes to the possibilities of the world. He encouraged and even bullied me to achieve my potential. He must take a great deal of the credit for my success.

I graduated in medicine from St John's College at Sydney University. My first posting was to Parramatta district hospital, where I began to understand the problems of western Sydney. The problems that confront the North Coast today are much the same; growth without reasonable planning and reasonable infrastructure development. I qualified as a specialist in anaesthetics and intensive care and set sail for home to Lismore as quickly as I could, where I was comfortably established until the arrival of the Hon. Laurie Brereton.

The North Coast is one of the most beautiful and friendly regions in New South Wales. It has been described as the playground of this great State. However, for all of its advantages the North Coast region and its population suffer many injustices. Until 1954 the population growth of the North Coast was much the same as the population growth of all New South Wales. In 1954 the development and population growth on the North Coast came to a shuddering halt with the entry of Britain into the European Economic Community and the loss to us of our lucrative dairy markets. Only recently those markets have been returned by the brave actions of a Minister of the previous Government. Quite suddenly, in 1966, for reasons unknown to many, the population explosion on the North Coast began and has been increasing constantly ever since. The area's population has more than tripled since 1966, yet all funding for the area, especially capital funding, has been basically at 1966 levels plus a little bit added occasionally for inflation. In other words, growth has been unsupported by adequate infrastructure development. The prime example of that lack of support is the Pacific Highway north of Hexham, which is by far the State's busiest rural highway. The Pacific Highway carries more traffic than the Hume Highway, yet last year the Labor Government spent a bare \$13 million on its upgrading. I am pleased to note from the Governor's Speech that this Government intends to spend much more to develop the Pacific Highway at a much faster rate than was proposed, by using different and innovative methods.

Tourism, which is the mainstay of the recovery of New South Wales and is most important for the future of the North Coast, has been disadvantaged. Sydney is the most popular dropping off place in

Australia; and the second most popular dropping off place in New South Wales for international tourists, Victorian tourists, and their money, is the North Coast. As 85 per cent of those tourists get to the North Coast by way of surface transport, the deregulation of long distance bus services is most welcome. I welcome also the increase in road funding, which was announced by the Hon. B. G. Baird. A look at the Pacific Highway and the region's grossly inadequate railway system will demonstrate how, to date, the tourism potential of the North Coast has not been realized. The beef, fishing, cane, and the expanding horticultural industries on the North Coast, have bright futures, especially since this Government has moved to clean up the markets and to rationalize abattoirs.

The problems on the North Coast must surely be caused by capital works programs that have not proceeded. Each year the North Coast experiences a 2 per cent increase in primary school enrolments. No other area in the State has experienced such increases. In most areas enrolments are falling in number. The enrolments for secondary schools in the region are numerically the same as those in the western suburbs of Sydney, but capital works funding is a fraction of what is required to support such growth. The Government and the Hon. Dr T. A. Metherell have my complete support for at least attempting to correct injustices and at least offering the freedom of choice in education and of schools to which one may send one's children. In health we have witnessed the formula of 1966 funding, plus inflation, reach its most ridiculous level. The North Coast on an age-weighted, catchment basis is the lowest funded region in New South Wales so far as funding for health is concerned. However, because of its aged population the region has a greater demand for health services than many other areas. The advantage of becoming sick on the North Coast is—and figures will confirm this—that the average length of stay in any hospital on the North Coast for any condition one might care to mention is about 80 per cent of the length of stay in any hospital anywhere else in New South Wales.

In spite of inadequate funding on the North Coast, hospital, medical, paramedical, nursing, and administrative staffs have worked diligently to provide a service second to none. Though the Australian Labor Party did its very best to destroy the public hospital system in New South Wales—and it very nearly succeeded—on the North Coast, perhaps because of its climate and the nature of its people, health services have continued by sheer hard work and dedication by the providers of that service to maintain a high standard. I acknowledge also the efforts of hospital ancillary workers and administrators. These inequities cannot and must not persist. How long will it take governments of the nature of the Whitlam and Wran administrations to realize that artificial developments such as Albury-Wodonga and Bathurst-Orange are nonsense? It would be far better for governments to be responsive to the wishes of people and support infrastructure developments in areas where people want to live. This failure of the use of capital funding for infrastructure developments has been the prime cause of the socio-economic decline of the North Coast.

When surveyed by the Australian Bureau of Census and Statistics in June 1986 the three federal electorates on the North Coast—namely Cowper around Port Macquarie and Coffs Harbour, Page based at Grafton and Ballina, and Richmond based at Byron Bay, Lismore and Tweed Heads—had the lowest socio-economic profile of any electorate in Australia. The region has the highest level of unemployment, which is double that of any other region in New South Wales. It has the highest percentage of single parent families; that is families under stress. It has the highest percentage of population on social security benefits. It has the lowest *per capita* income for families of any area in Australia. The forgotten north has become a poverty trap; a poverty trap generated by government neglect. Yet this same poverty trap attracts hundreds of thousands of visitors to its coastal and hinterland areas every year. More and more people have decided that the North Coast has the climate and communities in which they would wish to raise their families. Much more will be heard about this matter in the coming years. Honourable members can be sure that North Coast people do not wish to receive more than their fair share of capital and recurrent funding, but they cannot tolerate, and will no longer tolerate, the neglect that was raised to an art form by the former Government.

This Government's health ministry is working for the first time on a fairer formula for the distribution of health funding. Thus we have a glimmer of hope. Let me tell the House briefly how it comes about that there is a Liberal Party member from the North Coast in this House. In 1982 the Minister for Health of the day, Mr Kevin Stewart, went to Lismore after discovering that the local people, sick to death of waiting for governments to do anything, raised \$350,000 by public subscription to rebuild the children's ward at Lismore Base Hospital. The Minister was staggered by the success of the campaign and by the large amount of money raised. The fact that the money came from Tweed Heads, the Northern Tablelands, and the

Grafton area meant that the Minister was impressed enough to decide that Lismore Base Hospital should not have just a new children's ward but should go through the process of redevelopment. Plans were set on foot and much work was done very enthusiastically by many people.

The next Minister for Health, Laurie Brereton, came to Lismore to open stage I of the redevelopment. He was introduced to the people by the long-term member for the State seat of Lismore, Mr Bruce Duncan, as the man who walked on water, the next leader of the Labor Party, the man most likely to succeed Neville Wran. Laurie Brereton stood up and said—and I paraphrase: "You can forget your \$12 million development. I am opening this laundry. I will put the children's ward on the eighth level of your existing building, take the cafeteria from that level, and you can build a cafeteria for your staff with the change left over from the money you have raised for the children's ward". Needless to say, that caused an uproar. The local member, Mr Duncan, thanked the Minister, saying it was better to have half a loaf than no bread at all. In fact, what the Minister at that time was offering was one-half of one slice of that loaf of bread. At the same time Mr Brereton announced that he was reducing capital expenditure, trying to save the State money. He reduced that capital expenditure to some \$60 million a year from the previous year's figure of \$120 million. At that time on the North Coast we thought: "Even so 6 per cent of capital funding, which is about our percentage of population, over a five-year period gives us about \$21 million. That is plenty of money for our A and B requirements". However, the slashing of the Lismore Base Hospital's redevelopment meant that the money went to the redevelopment of the Rankin Park Hospital in Newcastle—a decision forced on Neville Wran by the Newcastle coalmining unions—and to the redevelopment of a new hospital at Bossley Park. That hospital is now completed; it is a hospital in search of a role and it will need a redevelopment in its own right just to become a useful part of the hospital system in this State.

The community in Lismore area decided that political action was now imperative. The local member was an Independent. It was thought that people should join political parties of their choice in order to agitate. I chose to form a branch of the Liberal Party, mainly at the instigation of many of the friends of the base hospital and the community, in particular Mrs Pam Nardi, who is here today. Shortly after the formation of the Liberal Party, the previous Deputy Prime Minister of Australia, Mr Doug Anthony, resigned. I was prevailed upon by my friends to stand as the Liberal Party candidate for the federal seat of Richmond at the subsequent by-election. Though we lost the by-election, which was won by Mr Charles Blunt of the National Party, the result was the formation of branches of the Liberal Party up and down the North Coast and on the Northern Tablelands. Thus in this Government there is a Liberal Party voice from the North Coast to add to the effective voices of National Party members from that area.

This Government now has a widespread influence across the entire length and breadth of the cities, the towns, and the countryside in New South Wales, and has been given a vote to do something to improve this State. I am pleased to be part of that Government and the initial steps we have taken to do something about this State in this bicentennial year, to try to develop a hope and a vision for the future that was so lacking in 1986 and 1987. Recently the Premier released the results of the suppressed report by the Unsworth departmental razor gang which identified clearly the problems of State services rapidly outstripping revenue and resources. The razor gang identified clearly the future problems likely to occur in this State. They are increased demands on health, on housing, on community services and welfare, and on law and order. The recently released report of the Commission of Audit shows how poorly the State was placed to meet those demands.

The North Coast has the lowest private home ownership of the State. It also has the lowest provision of public housing in this State; necessarily, therefore, it has the highest percentage of private rental housing in New South Wales. This Government has shown clearly that it has in place the initiatives to try to correct the Walker years of ideological folly. In terms of community services, a report from the Department of Youth and Community Services in 1987 identified clearly that the North Coast had 6 per cent of the population, requiring 8 per cent of the community services but receiving only 2 per cent of funding from the department. I welcome the obvious greater emphasis shown by the Minister for Family and Community Services on support for family life, foreshadowed in the Governor's Speech, and the initiatives she will take to support the family, particularly the elderly.

In these circumstances I think honourable members will agree that it is quite a credit that the North Coast community has been able to absorb such massive increases in population. People are willing to

help one another and to resist the problems of a lawless society by their ability to constantly care for their fellow man—not to isolate him but to treat him as part of our community and part of our family. As the population has gone forward by some 2 per cent or 3 per cent per annum over the entire North Coast—some areas by much more than that—it means that in funding we are slipping back in real terms by that same amount per annum. That means that over five years, and each five years for the past 15 years, we have slipped back some 20 per cent in real terms.

This growth of population and lack of funding means that maintaining current services has become a never-ending and harrowing problem. Even in the old days when Sydney was seemingly awash with money, the provision of new services for a population so over-represented with old people was just about impossible. To give honourable members some small idea of how the North Coast has achieved survival—and it may be a good example for the State to follow—we can look at the comparisons between two hospitals in this State: one, a large teaching hospital in this city; the other, a hospital in Lismore.

In the same number of bed days, namely 700, the hospital in Sydney could treat only 64 patients who required removal of their gall bladders, though the hospital in Lismore was able to treat 85 such patients. In case honourable members think that Sydney hospitals would treat the more difficult or the more impossible types of patients, let me inform the House that from my own medical knowledge—and I have been in the business for a while—it is never the case that a general surgeon would refer a patient requiring cholecystectomy to another general surgeon in another hospital. He would do the operation right where he was. So the comparison is extraordinarily valid. Again it could be said that these patients are leaving hospital too early, that we are being careless and kicking them out. In fact, the Department of Health complaints unit—and I recently checked with it—has received no complaints from hospitals on the North Coast, extraordinary though it might seem. The only complaints received have been about overcrowding and waiting times, complaints shared with the rest of New South Wales.

There will be those opposite who would say that health costs are getting out of hand. Could I give you an example of what happened when the dead hand of the previous Labor Government tried its form of correction. In 1978 the Labor Government decided it did not want to pay doctors on a fee-for-service basis for the care of public patients in public hospitals. So it instituted a new system of salary service, or sessions. This was meant to reduce the cost of paying senior specialist doctors to the rate of between \$20 and \$30 per hour.

Most doctors objected to the new system. They did not like the idea of clocking on and clocking off. The Government found to its horror that when the doctors actually charged for what they did, compared with the previous low level, the figures showed that they were being paid twice as much as they had been under previous arrangements. That is because many doctors simply did not charge for every single thing they did; they charged on what they thought was a reasonable basis. The previous Government did not like that.

Further down the track, the Government decided that using its new sessional arrangements it would try to get control, so that this extra money would be well spent to further its social aims. Honourable members will remember the major disturbance of the section 17 dispute, which required doctors to work at the behest of the Government, wherever the Government wanted them to work, and the very cynical insertion of the "coercion" clause so recently and graciously dropped by the Minister for Health and this House. The Government lost the control that it tried to win with section 17, and it lost because the profession was able to point out that it was not the doctors who were the targets; it was the patients who were losing out over many years of neglect.

The Government then bequeathed a health system where the cost of providing all services is much greater than ever before, and the access that public patients have to high quality services, particularly in the areas like orthopaedics and ophthalmology, is very limited indeed. The morale drop that followed the interventions of that high profile Minister, Mr Brereton, and the very low profile Minister, Mr Mulock, has not yet been regained.

At the same time the nursing profession lost its faith in the quality of care that they were allowed to deliver to patients under their care. Professional nurses would cry at the end of their shifts when they

would have seven or eight patients delivered to their ward following surgery, and would not have the proper time or nursing numbers to give the standard of professional care they expected of themselves. Because they were not able to provide that level of care, and because they always felt they were doing a lousy job, they decided they might as well get out—and get out they did.

The Government reacted to this by reducing funding even further, and used the furphy of nurse shortages to close more and more beds, and to limit more and more the access for patients to public hospitals. At the same time it ensured that there were no new private hospital licences issued in the State. During the whole eleven years of the previous Wran and Unsworth administrations, not one new private hospital licence was issued.

That meant that the better organized, the more wealthy, and the more influential could find ways to jump public hospital queues. So we find the situation today where Dr Blewett now says that our public hospitals have too many private patients in them. What he should be saying is that there are not enough beds in New South Wales, either public or private.

That is why the so-called doctors' dispute was not a doctors' dispute. It was basically a realization by the medical and nursing professions and other health care professions, and later by the general community, that the previous Government had ruined what was the best health service in the Commonwealth of Australia bar none, and arguably the fairest and the cheapest public hospital system in the world.

At this stage I would pay tribute to those specialists who gave their time to teach me, for no payment, and to treat public hospital patients with all their skills, for no payment. I acknowledge the debt of gratitude owed to them by the people of New South Wales. I refer to men like George Davidson, and John Von Wilier, at the Prince of Wales Hospital in Sydney, Professor Toby Bowring, the renowned paediatric surgeon at that hospital, and Professor Doug Joseph from the University of Sydney. These people and their staff specialists, and professorial teachers continued in the tradition of their forebears, in providing that standard of care, that dedication to excellence which was almost destroyed by the attacks of an envious and cynical Government.

I know that that level of care, concern and pursuit of excellence is still able to be recovered. In these times of adversity the nursing profession has advanced in leaps and bounds, because of the confrontationist nature of government, and its own need to protect its standards of care, and the recognition that if it did not stand up to protect its standards of care, no one would. I know that our current Minister for Health, the Hon. Peter Collins, is aware of these problems, and has shown that he is prepared to attack them at their root cause. The professions, and the community, not only wish him well, but have seen the way in which he has been prepared to act, in the interests of the patients in New South Wales.

I would like to thank those people who have helped me on my way politically—my friends in Lismore and elsewhere on the North Coast. I thank the Leader of the Government in this House, who has made a sterling attempt to improve the quality and effectiveness of this House. The Hon. Virginia Chadwick also has been more than encouraging and helpful, as have her visits to the North Coast. The Hon. Beryl Evans and her husband, Dick, were my first contact with Liberal politicians, and have remained firm helpers ever since, both politically and personally. My good friend Michael Bames, previously Vice-President of the National Party and my running mate on the Legislative Council ticket, was a constant and helpful companion during the final struggle to wrest government from the Labor Party. I hope in the fullness of time to see Michael Bames in this Chamber, helping to continue to make New South Wales the better place that we know it is capable of being.

John Valder, Stephen Litchfield, Peter Kidman, John Booth, M.P., and Robyn Kerr have all been of enormous assistance. The Hon. Tim Moore and his wife Jane, and the Hon. John Hannaford and his wife Denise have been more than friendly to someone from out of town. I would like to thank Senator the Hon. Peter Baume and Senator Chris Puplick for showing me what liberalism meant, and for making that free philosophy live. I thank also the Hon. Max Willis and the Hon. John Jobling for their constant help and timely advice, and all my running mates here present. I should here acknowledge that my wife has been a constant and outstanding help to me. She has been a fantastic mother to our four children, a most capable

Liberal administrator, and a source of wisdom and, I must say, caution.

A tradition lost in antiquity but steadfastly honoured in the parliaments of the Commonwealth is that a speaker on his maiden journey is listened to in silence. The House has been most gracious and I thank honourable members for their generosity.