



Legislative Council Hansard (Extract)

Police Amendment (Miscellaneous) Bill

Extract from NSW Legislative Council Hansard and Papers Tuesday 14 November 2006.

The Hon. MATTHEW MASON-COX [6.01 p.m.]: I rise tonight to support this bill and, with the indulgence of the House, to give my maiden speech in this place. At the outset, I thank you, Madam Deputy-President, other honourable members, and the Clerk and staff of the Legislative Council for making me so welcome as a new member of this House. I am very fortunate indeed to follow the Hon. Patricia Forsythe in representing the interests of the people of New South Wales. I thank the Liberal Party for the opportunity to serve, and acknowledge the significant contribution Patricia made to the good governance of this State. I very much look forward to continuing this tradition of service.

I also acknowledge and thank those who have provided invaluable support to me in my journey so far. Some are present in the gallery tonight. In particular I refer to my wife, Wendy, my parents, Catherine Anne and Joseph, my siblings and my friends. Others, like my children, Lachlan, Clare, Samuel and Rachel, unfortunately could not be here tonight. To you all, I give my thanks for the love you have shown me, for the wise counsel you have given me and for the times we have shared together. Tonight, I wish to share with members some of my story, together with some of the things that I will strive to achieve in this place.

I was born in Wagga Wagga, New South Wales, and will always be proud to be called a country boy. As one of six children, I quickly learnt how to survive in a competitive, boisterous, ego-rich environment. You could say it was the perfect training ground for a politician. In my early years, I learnt the importance of belonging to a community whose members cared for each other. My parents were active members of their community—serving at the local church, the local school, on council and as members of local community organisations. Their actions spoke louder than words and awoke in me an abiding commitment to serve others that has led me to this place tonight. One of my early influences came from an unlikely source. It was a poem by "Author Unknown" that used to hang on a special wall in my parents' home in Wagga Wagga—the toilet wall! From memory, it read:

You may be strong
But do not find fault with the man you see
Stumbling along the road,
You have not worn his shoes
Or struggled beneath his load.

I have always appreciated the lessons this poem teaches—of putting oneself in another's shoes before reacting, of not judging another, of being humble, not proud. I do not know whether hanging the poem in the toilet was a deliberate attempt by my parents to impart wisdom, but whatever it was, it worked. As a result, I have always been careful about what I hang on toilet walls!

Another important influence was my upbringing in the Catholic Church. One of the many lessons this taught me was how wonderfully and fearfully we are made, and that no matter what happens each of us is precious and each of us has a special purpose in life. I was educated at Chevalier College in Bowral under the care of the Missionaries of the Sacred Heart. Discipline and vigorous sporting activity were the order of the day—both leaving their mark—and I thank them for it. This was followed by degrees in Law and Commerce from the University of New South Wales.

I then graduated to work as a solicitor at Freehills and as corporate counsel with Elders IXL Limited before embarking on what has become a rite of passage for many Australians—the backpacking trip overseas. During this time I experienced the culture of many other countries but the most memorable things I learnt were, ironically, about our country.

I learnt that we are blessed with the most diverse and pristine environment on this planet and that we had better look after it. I learnt that this is by far the best place in the world to live and the only place I want to live. I came to appreciate the personal sacrifice made by our gallant military forces in the defence of our great country and the freedoms we often take for granted. I stood on the beach at Anzac Cove on the Gallipoli Peninsula and looked up in disbelief at the cliffs our troops faced when they came ashore. I walked silently among the endless fields of white crosses on the Western Front. That is why, just before dawn on Anzac Day, you will find me, head bowed, remembering the sacrifices of our fine young service men and women defending our country. Tonight, I pay tribute to them and pledge to uphold the values and freedoms they fought so selflessly to defend.

Upon returning to Australia I settled in the fine town of Queanbeyan and joined the Department of the House of Representatives as an adviser to, and later secretary of, a number of parliamentary committees. It was here I served on the child support inquiry and saw first hand the dramatic impact that government can have on

people's lives. It was then I realised that I wanted to be part of the solution.

I subsequently served in senior public sector roles in the privatisation of the Federal airports and in the fast tracking of major infrastructure projects, including the \$10 billion expansion of the North West Shelf liquefied natural gas project. These experiences demonstrated to me the enormous benefits that can be attained when the private and public sectors work together in partnership. I believe this partnership is absolutely critical to the future delivery of infrastructure and services in this State and nation.

I left the public sector just before the birth of my first child. Since that time I have had the privilege of sharing the care of my children with my wife, Wendy. Together, we have also enjoyed the challenges of small business in growing our optometry and dispensing businesses in the Queanbeyan region.

I have always believed in the value of serving others and in the capacity of an individual to make a real difference in other people's lives. That is why I have served as a member of the Queanbeyan West Rotary Club and many other community organisations for many years. One of my great concerns is that my generation is less committed to each other and indeed to the ideal of public service than past generations. In the parliamentary sphere, Sir Robert Gordon Menzies expressed the same disquiet over 50 years ago when he said:

If you were to ask me what I thought was the most deep-seated fault in Australia, I would unhesitatingly reply that the old notion of disinterested public service has almost disappeared, and that politics has come to be merely regarded as a war of interests in which much loot is to be won from the defeated.

Today nothing much has changed. This war of interests continues unabated. Often the victims are good public policy and the politically weak, sacrificed to the process in the name of progress.

One of the key responsibilities of government is to, without fear or favour, determine the balance points between competing interests. In making those types of decisions, in my view, the first question for government should be whether to intervene at all, as the market itself is generally the best mechanism for allocating resources to their best use. In many circumstances, however, governments do need to intervene to address market failures and to reallocate resources to ensure that we maintain a cohesive and compassionate society. After all, we must always remember that at the end of each day we go home to live in a community, not an economy.

I believe in efficient government that pursues outcomes with the minimum of regulation. A key focus of government should be to create the right environment for business to grow and prosper. If we get this balance right, then jobs and economic security will follow, along with the investment and increased government revenue that we all require. Governments need to appreciate that business is the engine room of prosperity, not a whipping boy for bureaucracy. Governments are elected to serve, not enslave.

Government is also about leadership and nation building. Where would we be without the vision of past governments to build wonderful infrastructure such as the Snowy Mountains Scheme? Today the private sector is well equipped to play a major role in funding and building infrastructure, but it is still the government's pivotal role to decide upon priorities and regulatory imperatives.

In my view our current Federal-State system of government is failing us on a number of these fronts. Our Federal-State system suffers from a chronically blurred and confused division of responsibilities between the Commonwealth and States, resulting in massive overlap and duplication. Our Federal-State system is characterised by a lack of consensus on national goals and forward planning in key areas such as infrastructure investment and service delivery. Our Federal-State system is burdened by a burgeoning bureaucracy that continues to breed due to a lack of oversight and accountability. A recent study by the Business Council of Australia entitled "Reshaping Australia's Federation" confirmed that our current Federal system is failing our nation. It found:

There is growing evidence that the way Australia's system currently operates is becoming a major barrier to future prosperity. In many instances, Australia's 20 million people face greater regulatory diversity, overlap, duplication and barriers to movement than Europe's 457million people.

Australia currently has some 1,400 regulatory bodies overseeing Commonwealth, State and local laws and regulations. This complexity adds enormously to the day-to-day cost of doing business both within and across State borders. It is a major hurdle in attracting international investment and detracts significantly from our international competitiveness.

The cost to Australia of our dysfunctional Federal-State system is estimated to be between \$9 billion and \$20 billion dollars each year, every single year. This appalling waste of resources must stop. The blame game between governments must stop. The time has come for all governments to work together to put the national interest ahead of State interests where this is necessary to secure good policy outcomes for all Australians. It is time to forge a new federalism based on clear responsibilities for each tier of government and an outcomes-

focused co-operative framework to deal with issues that require joint decision-making. The people of New South Wales and Australia deserve no less, and I pledge to use my time in this place working towards this end.

A dysfunctional Federal-State system of government contributes to a dysfunctional society. We are increasingly a society that spends our health to make money and then spends our money to restore our health. We deny the aged the right to die and deny the unborn the right to live. We champion freedom and the rule of law, yet pass law after law denying freedom. We spend billions on overseas aid yet cannot come to the aid of our own homeless and hungry. We champion the family as the cornerstone of civil society yet facilitate family breakdown at every turn. We derive our self-worth from what we achieve not what we believe, and we judge success by material standards not personal standards.

Everywhere I turn I see a crisis of meaning in people's lives. It manifests itself in many ways—mental illness, homeless people, drug dependency, high divorce rates and violence in our communities. The reality is that there are no simple solutions to these problems. I see many government departments and organisations trying to help but they invariably focus on the physical symptoms rather than the underlying problems. We urgently need to consider new approaches, new ways to offer hope and meaning to those on the margins of our society.

I am heartened that recent events have focused debate on our values, the things that bind us together and make us great as a nation: values such as mateship, respect, personal responsibility, honesty, doing your best, and treating others as you would have them treat you. Sadly, there are extreme elements of our society who would replace our values with their own, judging our values to be corrupt and immoral. To those I say: You should not be an unwilling citizen or resident of this country. Either respect our values and our laws or depart for a culture that better reflects your beliefs. It is imperative that all Australians work together to ensure a cohesive, respectful and inclusive society.

As a country born and bred member of this place I will also strive to represent the special interests of country New South Wales. The country is a great place to live and a great place to raise your family. It is home to our great wealth-producing primary industries including forestry, mining, farming and fishing. It is home to many vibrant businesses and close-knit communities that know the importance of pulling together in difficult times. This so-called one-in-1,000-year drought is proving to be one of the most difficult times in living memory. It is inflicting an unprecedented toll on farmers and the businesses and communities that rely on farmers for their employment and economic security. They all need and deserve our support.

In Australia, a farmer takes his life every four days. This tragedy is getting worse as the pressure from the drought builds. Water levels in the Murray-Darling Basin are at critical levels, farmers' water entitlements have been slashed without compensation and everyday drinking water is under threat. This crisis knows no State borders and looms as another critical test of our Federal-State system of government.

Another issue of grave concern in country areas is the relative lack of investment in infrastructure and services—a situation that is exacerbated by the wide geographical spread of population centres in country New South Wales. This failure to invest is slowly eating into the social fabric of many country communities. If it is not addressed, it risks creating a permanent underclass in Australian society. I will not sit idly by and watch this happen. Tonight I pledge to invest my time in this place to promote investment in infrastructure in country areas, to promote investment in services in country areas, and to promote business investment and innovation in country areas. In this way I will be a strong advocate for vibrant and economically secure communities in country New South Wales.

As you would be aware, Madam Deputy-President, I am the first member of this place to be sworn in under the new, modernised oath and under the New South Wales Coat of Arms. Both replaced their former royal equivalents. Given that the existing prayer read at the commencement of each sitting day pursuant to Standing Order 28 is also in the process of being modernised, I thought it appropriate to conclude with it tonight because it best sums up what I hope to achieve in this place:

Almighty God, we humbly beseech Thee to vouchsafe Thy blessing upon this Parliament. Direct and prosper our deliberations to the advancement of Thy glory, and the true welfare of the people of our state and Australia. Amen.

Thank you.