



CHIEF MINISTER

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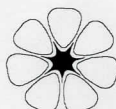
Mr Shane Stone MLA  
Member for Port Darwin  
GPO Box 559  
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Dear Shane

There has been a lot written and broadcast in the media about the events of the past two weeks or so, and I wanted to take this opportunity to write to you directly on how I see my role as the sixth Chief Minister of the Northern Territory.

I was born in Queensland in 1948 and I have two adult daughters from a previous marriage, Lisa and Angela. Annette and I have two children, Sam and Tom, both attending school at Palmerston where we have made our home since we came to the Northern Territory in 1992. I worked in the pastoral industry after leaving school, was inducted into the Army during the National Service call-up of 1969, starting off as a trooper in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment. I decided I liked Army life, managed to be admitted to Officer Training School, and after a 25 year military career which included UN peace keeping duties in Beirut and other parts of the Middle East, came to the Northern Territory as Commanding Officer of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Cavalry Regiment – the outfit in which I started.

I enclose (\*) with this letter a Hansard copy of my first speech to the Legislative Assembly as Chief Minister, and I would appreciate your taking the time to read it, and pass any comments or criticisms you may have back to me. You will note from the speech that I am firmly committed to the basic CLP platform, and to the policies my predecessor, Shane Stone MLA, took to the electorate so successfully just 18 months ago. As I say in my speech: 'this is a continuation of the CLP Government elected by the majority of Territorians'.



Northern Territory Government

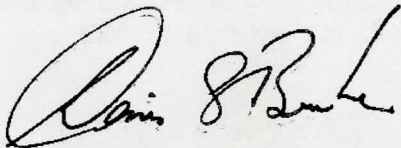
Despite editorialising by some journalists, I am **NOT** about to go soft on law and order, or to water down the highly successful mandatory sentencing regime. In fact, I will explore the possibility of widening the scope of mandatory sentencing to take in malicious crimes against the person, such as sexual assault. We remain a pro-development, pro-jobs Government, supportive of business, trade and commerce. I will strive to maintain the excellent relationships with our South East Asian neighbours which have been pioneered by my predecessors. I inherited a Northern Territory with a strong, vibrant economy and increasingly cohesive social structure. I intend to keep it that way.

By any measure, we are fortunate that one of Australia's most vibrant ethnic communities has contributed so much to economic development, as well as the growth of a tolerant multi-cultural society which is the hallmark of this community of ours. From my few years of direct contact as Minister for Health, I predict a re-awakening of all aspects of Aboriginal culture across the Territory. My ambition is to see this matched by improvement in health, education and career opportunities, particularly for Aboriginal youngsters.

One aspect of my marriage which has caused comment is that Annette is the elected Mayor of Palmerston. Some commentators have warned of a possible conflict of interest between the Mayor and the Chief Minister, either in public or worse still, over the dinner table at home. We are both in our current positions because of the support of our respective electorates. If there are any real problems, I am positive the citizens of Palmerston will give either or both of us the message in no uncertain terms.

I intend to keep up the tradition of regular reports to Territorians on my stewardship as Chief Minister, and hope you find the attached (\*) speech informative. As I say at the end of it, I hope that when my terms ends in this job, my fellow Territorians will say I earned my stripes and they consider me to be a true Territorian.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Denis G. Burke', with a stylized flourish at the end.

DENIS G. BURKE

Encls (\*)



**Topic :** CHIEF MINISTER'S STATEMENT

**Subject :** Chief Minister'S Statement

**Date :** 16/02/99

**Member :** Mr BURKE (Chief Minister)

**Status :** Chief Minister

**Information :**

**Mr BURKE (Chief Minister):** Mr Speaker, since we last sat in this place, a few people have swapped seats on both sides of the House. Changes have been made, new responsibilities and privileges taken on. As one of those people it is incumbent upon me to provide some insight into what the changes on this side of the House mean and what effect they will have on public life in the Northern Territory.

From the outset let me be clear - this is a continuation of the CLP government elected by a majority of Territorians some 18 months ago, but with the Burke stamp upon it. CLP policies are direct, clear and simple. I will quote from the official platform of the CLP.

*The basis of Northern Territory Country Liberal Party philosophy is the recognition of the freedom, rights and responsibilities of the individual in an open society. The Northern Territory Country Liberal Party believes in a just and fair society which encourages the innovative, protects the disadvantaged and accepts diversity of race and lifestyle. It is committed to the furtherance and maintenance of a harmonious, multicultural society.*

On the other side of this House are men and women who do take their instructions from outside the Territory, who do not have the policies, any policies at all, at this time, who are by self-admission merely a branch of federal Labor.

I am stunned that members opposite have welcomed the federal Labor Party's intervention in their affairs and have so willingly given up any claim to independence of thought and action in this unique part of Australia.

Members opposite must feel that they are in free-fall at the moment on policy. First, they ditched all their own policies from the last election, now their Canberra leaders, the policy draughtsmen at the federal level, have announced that they too have ditched current policies across the range of government.

Consistency and solidarity of policy underpins our ability to carry out our foremost task as parliamentarians - to serve the constituency and the parliament. I despair at the Labor Party's frantic efforts to re-shape and re-form itself in a desperate attempt to win support from Territorians. Labor calls in, of all people, Canberra party hacks to tell them how to appeal to Territorians.

In contrast, I am grateful that I have arrived in this job with a solid base of policy from which to build. I come to this job after only a few short years in this Parliament, less than some of my colleagues on both sides of the House. I know that I have much to learn, I know I have much to offer - skills and experience and a capacity for hard work with which I will serve the Northern Territory.

I came to the Territory as a soldier and like so many others never wanted to leave. The Territory seemed then a place of endless possibilities, huge promise and great opportunity. It still does today,



although optimism is tempered by experience and I now see the difficulties more clearly alongside the opportunities.

The Army teaches duty, loyalty, honour and country. These are values that should be a prerequisite for a career in politics. The Army also teaches self discipline and imposes annual performance assessments. Taking hard and fast decisions is part of military training as is the necessary consultative process with specialist advisers. In the Army you are taught that you cannot know it all. Such teachings will, I know, be useful in this new job. I also bring to this job strongly held beliefs - political likes and dislikes which apply in the Territory context. I stand against socialism, authoritarianism, paternalism and isolationism, all of which run contrary to the Territory's course.

Socialism drags down on a community. Its ideological base is to bleed the rich and placate the poor with handouts. It would provide services of high cost in the name of humanity and make humanity foot the bill.

Socialists put ideology ahead of good sense. They propose to bring everyone down to the lowest common denominator rather than seeking to raise everyone up.

For example, driven by socialist ideology, members oppose protest against the alleged privatisation of our hospitals when what we are talking about is private management of public hospitals - which will enable us to get better value for taxpayers' dollars by moving more of our resources into basic health care to create a healthier community. Does that mean Labor is critical of the way St. Vincent's hospitals operate - privately managed public hospitals which have been an icon in national health service for most of this century?

Socialism, is not just out of date it is out of touch. I dislike authoritarianism, because it goes against the grain of our national character and our way of life. The nature of the Territory's people is to live and let live. It is one of those characteristics of the Territory that makes life here what it is - tolerant, multi-racial, egalitarian.

I am against paternalism, because it says that we know better than you, that we will protect you because you are not capable of making your decisions. It is a form of colonialism and the Territory knows only too well what it is to be treated as a colony. Territorians have the right to decide for themselves what to make of their lives, how to use their land, what sort of future they want.

Isolationism I dislike because it goes against the Territory's key interests. Isolation from our international neighbours loses us trade and opportunity; isolation from each other makes for a poorer society. We can see the lessons in our own history. One hundred years ago an economically depressed and undeveloped Territory looked to the new Commonwealth government for a greater commitment to all of Australia, including the north.

Such hopes were soon dashed. The Commonwealth takeover saw immediate disenfranchisement of Territorians followed by decades of isolation, remote administration and miserly financial allocations. Not until self-government was the Territory able to shake off that isolation and since then it has been a story of rapid growth, new friendships and new chances. But we have one last step to take - that is statehood. But this time we must listen, we must confer, we must educate, we must make it understandable, we must give every Territorian a chance to be involved.

There are still isolationists about, they argue for re-regulation of international trade and finances, protection for industries of choice and severing ties with less democratic neighbours. Here in the Territory we are running in the opposite direction. We are looking for a free and open market, international trade and friendship.

Our nearest neighbour, Indonesia, is facing hunger, social unrest and political instability. It might seem like a good time to abandon relations altogether, but this is precisely the time to try to be a part of



Indonesia's effort to repair its finances, rebuild the economy and move towards greater democracy for its peoples. We will make no better friends than those we made in times of hardship. The free world market has its dangers. We felt the effect of the Asian financial crisis very directly. Lost cattle markets have hit the pastoralists hard, small businesses have closed, travel and tourism dollars have been lost.

The future is here whether we like it or not - globalisation means new competition, new information, new opportunities and new dangers. In this fast paced world of unregulated cross-border capital flows it is becoming more difficult to control local and national economies but we cannot retreat, we cannot prosper by re-regulation and isolationism. What we can do, and what we will do, is maintain the impetus of Territory growth - by encouraging local business, smoothing the way for enterprise, pursuing international friendships and trade, building the railway, creating a modern seaport and achieving the promise of oil and gas and other developments on our doorstep.

My commitment to economic imperatives does not exclude social issues. Far from it. Labor will have us believe that somehow care and tolerance are incompatible with strong economic development. In fact, economic decline leads directly and unavoidably to personal impoverishment, social disorder and government impotence. The stronger our growth economy, the more compassionate we can choose to become as a society. Without economic strength we have no choice, no starting point from which to build a better, more inclusive, future.

CLP policies put before the constituency at the last Territory election will help ensure growth. Our commitments were, and still are under my leadership, to job creation, to foster key industries, alleviate red tape, provide more training and press ahead with key projects such as the railway. We are also committed to the highest standards of education, a strong community health system, incentives for home ownership, more child-care places, and provision for those going into retirement.

It is a great strength of my party that its parliamentary wing has ensured the delivery of promises and its ministry has enacted the policies put before the people at election time. All ministries are in the process of reporting to me to make sure we are on schedule to meet our commitments.

The government's responsibility for the economy has a duality. On the one hand, we will continue to support small business - and nearly all business in the Territory is relatively small - concentrating our efforts in helping those who have put in their time and, frankly, done the hard yards.

The new Department of Industries and Business should be a one-stop resource of information and assistance to local enterprise. The rules and regulations that apply should be there to help business prosper, not to fetter their activities. We will provide a service that makes it easy for business to know what is expected from them, without having to trek from one government agency to the next. We are small enough to see that coordinated through one outlet, and since we can do it - and should do it - we will do it.

On the other hand, we must also help the customers - the consumers - to know the facts and what their rights and entitlements are. I will commence a review of the powers of our fair trading and consumer affairs agency, and ensure it has the clout to act where necessary and the ability to communicate to people their rights as consumers.

Having said this, as we move towards the next millennium, people will nevertheless have to adjust their expectations of government. There is much that governments can and should do but most of what is done can and should be done by people without resort to government.

Not unrelated to this theme I give notice that I will move for the establishment of a select committee on food prices, a committee whose job it will be to establish the facts and the underlying reasons for high prices in the Territory. But it should not seek to tell business how to run its affairs, nor second guess the management and operations of food provision to the Territory. We will not take the path of price regulation, shopping hour restrictions or other means of exerting control over business. That is the way to reduced



competition, a distorted market and increased inefficiency. All sure ways to increase prices. Rather, the select committee may provide the facts and can safely leave consumers to make their own decisions on how to respond armed with new knowledge.

I blame politicians in general, through their election-time promises of an endlessly better future, for creating many of the unreasonable expectations that people have today of government. The rising tide of scepticism and cynicism that attaches to politics today can be traced to the populist rhetoric of the 1970s when it was believed that governments could and should solve all social problems. In the 1990s that has translated into disappointment and frustration for many people. Now, and into the next century, there will be increasing limitations on government's control of events in a globalised world. International borders are being dismantled, meaning governments will have less power. Nations will have less sovereignty. International finance dealings can and already have brought unexpected repercussions. It is therefore our responsibility to have the courage and honesty to tell the truth about how much government can and should do.

I intend to run an open, honest and accountable government. But more than that, I intend to be frank, to be honest about what is achievable, what is manageable, what is properly a role for government as opposed to the private sector.

Related to this is Planning for Growth, a management exercise which re-examines across government what we are doing well, what we are doing badly, what we should do, and what we should not do. It is a process that is now drawing to an end. It is my intention to see the outcome is bedded down without further disruption and insecurity amongst our top-class public service. I have great faith in the service - in its ability to welcome change as progressive, to perceive its own shortcomings and eliminate them, and to recognise its strengths and to build on them.

Planning for Growth has been a necessary exercise in line with our first responsibility to those who pay for and benefit from government services. I am certain it will lead to even better performance and commitment from government and its employees.

The Ministry for Women's Policy remains with the Chief Minister, as evidence of my government's continuing support for the participation and advancement of women in Territory life. This year, the views of Territory women about their aspirations for the 21st century will be sought. This consultation should lead to new ways to ensure that women are able to participate, even more fully, in Territory life. I also intend to continue to seek the views of Territory youth through the Youth Round Table.

One responsibility, which remains constant, is to provide an environment in which people can safely go about their lives, to live in peace and feel safe in their own homes. The CLP went to the last election with a strong law and order policy which included mandatory sentencing. We do not resile from that commitment. However, all acts of parliament should be constantly under review. There are some areas of the mandatory sentencing regime that need amendment, but at the same time I believe it is time to extend it beyond the limited range of property offences. This government will pursue the changes that are needed to improve the overall working of mandatory sentencing.

I have just talked about 'isms' that I dislike. Liberalism, pragmatism and egalitarianism, values which are about tolerance, commonsense and a fair go, are those that I hold dear. To improve the health, the economic standing, the lifestyle and the conditions of Territorians - these are our priorities. Improving the lot of the individual, improves the lot of the community. I believe in getting everyone involved and included in the Territory's future development.

In terms of land mass, mineral riches, potential development, the Territory is immense. It is a daunting one-sixth of mainland Australia. But in terms of population the task is not so large. There are less than 200 000 of us. It should be easy for government to keep faith with such a relatively small number of people. The delivery of health and education services are inextricably linked. Our small population and the



size of our communities and towns means that we can coordinate the delivery of these services without the need for a large and expensive bureaucracy.

But it must be admitted that there is a large sector of our population that has not and still does not generally enjoy the benefits to be had from our economic growth. The great irony is that they are the great land owners of the Northern Territory. Aboriginal Territorians, hampered by the ineptitude and inefficiencies of national and regional governments, hamstrung by the big land council administrations who are jealous of their power and privileges have, for the most part, been excluded from the Territory's success story to date. We must turn that around. The truth is that to do so will take a national expression of will and effort. Only the national government has both the income and the political clout to ensure its success.

Professor Matthews of the Menzies School of Health has pointed out that the conditions and problems of Aboriginal Australia are much the same as those of slum-dwelling Australians in the early part of this century. A national effort saw Australia all but eliminate urban slums from the Australian landscape. Thus we already know the solutions. It is unforgivable to continue to throw money at the problem in a haphazard and uncoordinated manner. To date most government action in this area has been sporadic, piecemeal and short-lived. Well intended special purpose funding which comes to an inexplicable end after a few short years is not the answer. Such programs are wasted effort providing only band-aid assistance and can lead to further despair as hopes are raised and then dashed when funds are reallocated to some new area of need.

What opportunities will continue to be lost if Aboriginal Territorians are left out of our future? What chance is there for economic progress when so much Territory land is tied up in legal dispute or tied down as inalienable holdings? Somehow we must reach past the power and rhetoric of big land councils and explain to the people on the land how the defence of their interests has become a barrier to progress. It is as if they are fenced in and we are fenced out.

Let me conclude by outlining what can be expected of the government I now have the honour the lead.

It will be inclusive and not pander to sectional interests or vocal lobby groups. It will be pro-development. It will ask, 'How can we help you with your enterprise?', not 'What is wrong with it?'. Our only ideology will be the pursuit of what is best for Territorians, unhampered by southerners' political correctness. It will look to the future in order to provide a better place for our children, and our children's children rather than dwell in the past lamenting lost opportunities.

It will refuse the proposition that economic development is incompatible with a compassionate society. They are not the two ends of the political spectrum. Without the first, it is impossible to have the second.

This government does not believe it has all the answers. In fact, I believe government cannot and should not provide all the answers. Territorians should be able to live their lives, go about their business without an interfering government telling them what to do, when to do it, or why they shouldn't be doing it.

Government's role is to facilitate. To let people get on with their lives. To give them a helping hand if needed - whether it be in their individual circumstances or in their businesses.

Circumstances have changed from the last time we met in this Chamber, but Territorians should know that what remains constant is the central core ideals of the CLP. To change these would be to break faith with the people. We represent Territorians, we answer only to Territorians, and we will do all in our power to ensure that the Territory continues to prosper and develop, and that all Territorians participate and benefit from the prosperity and development.



I am here for the long haul. I will serve as long as the people and my parliamentary colleagues have confidence in me. And at the end of my term - whenever that may be - nothing would make me prouder than to have people say I had earned my stripes and that they considered me to be a true Territorian. I move that the statement be noted.