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Member: Mr SPEAKER

Status: Speaker

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Mr SPEAKER: Honourable members, I am pleased to inform the Assembly that His Honour the Administrator intends to attend the Assembly immediately to declare the causes of his calling the Assembly together.

Serjeant-at-Arms, please inform His Honour that the Assembly is ready to receive him.

His Honour the Administrator took the Chair.

His Honour the ADMINISTRATOR: Mr Speaker, honourable members, I have called you together at this time for the dispatch of business and to outline my government's legislative program for the ensuing period. Since the achievement of self-government, the Northern Territory has demonstrated its ability for real growth under the management of a regionally-elected government. It is my government's renewed intention to continue that progress by enabling people to capitalise on the opportunities that the Northern Territory offers.

Despite the achievements to date, my government believes that there are many opportunities yet to be taken up, which have so far remained dormant because of our lack of population, capital and essential facilities. It is my government's first priority to overcome these barriers to progress by attracting the people, the investment and, where necessary, the attention of the federal government, to overcome disadvantages which reduce our ability to prosper and grow into a full member of the Australian Commonwealth. In this regard, my government remains committed to establishing the strongest possible working relationship with the federal government, ensuring that the interests of the Territory's people are a constant consideration in national policy making. That is my government's first responsibility to the electorate.

In this Assembly in March last, I was pleased to welcome the announcement that the new federal government would build the railway from Alice Springs to Darwin. It is a matter of great disappointment to my government that this commitment and other undertakings given have been set aside. My government will endeavour to persuade the federal government to renew and honour those commitments. My government will look for a relationship with the federal government under which decisions which affect the Territory are enacted after consultation, and in agreement, with the Territory electorate. The construction of the north-south railway, the establishment of a Territory university, the removal of restrictions that prevent Territory uranium mining ventures from proceeding, the maintenance of coastal shipping services and the settlement of outstanding Aboriginal land claims stand among the most important issues which must be resolved in the interests of the Territory and all Australia. My government will work wholeheartedly with the federal government in bringing these and other Territory issues to a successful outcome. The Territory has much more to contribute to national prosperity and progress if it is given both the means and the freedom to make that contribution.
One of the most serious questions facing Australia today is the provision of employment, particularly for young people. My government will continue to promote the growth of our tourist industry and the manufacturing sector in order both to diversify the Territory’s economic base and provide new job opportunities. With the Yulara Tourist Village near completion, with consideration of tourist facilities in the Kakadu National Park under way, with new international standard hotels built or under way in the major centres, the Territory is rapidly improving its tourist facilities and opportunities.

Plans for the relocation and construction of a civil airport terminal in Darwin are welcomed, and my government will use its voice to promote a rapid start to that project.

Tourism is one of the major growth industries in the world today, estimated to be increasing in importance at a rate of about 15% per annum across the world. It is a labour-intensive industry with many hidden benefits for the community - commercial and cultural. My government's commitment to the creation of real, long-term jobs in the private sector can be fulfilled in part by the growth of Territory tourism. The apparent reluctance of the Commonwealth government to come to grips with planning for tourism in Kakadu National Park is a matter of very serious concern to my government.

While the manufacturing sector is undergoing a traumatic period of readjustment nationally, the Territory is in a position to reap the one benefit of our past lack of an established industrial base. The Territory does not face industrial upheaval in order to readjust for the manufacturing needs of the 1980s and beyond. New Territory enterprises can and will be encouraged to adopt the latest technological advances.

My government will also seek to attract manufacturers of new-technology products to the Territory. Our aim is to secure for Territorians the best long-term employment advantages for the future.

A fair measure of the Territory's success in the future will be the degree to which we are able to cement a growing link of trade and mutual interest with the countries of our region. My government believes that this is, firstly, a responsibility of national government, but that the Territory is uniquely positioned to assist in that effort. Accordingly, we will promote the concept of a Territory university, able to offer studies to north Australian, South-east Asian and west Pacific region students.

North Australia is the only major area of the world with a tropical climate within what is known as the 'developed' world. North Australia can provide a senior educational institution within an environment similar to many regions of the world where over-population, under-employment and food production yields are some of the most pressing problems. Australia has the resources to provide and maintain such an institution and its presence in the Territory would provide a major intellectual and economic stimulus to local progress. There is scope too in the Territory for private educationalists to take advantage of the undoubted demand in the South-east Asian region for Australian secondary education.

I have spoken of the broad, long-term aims of my government. There are many matters of more particular concern which will occupy my government during its term of office.

Taking into account the undoubted high costs of both living and investing in the Territory, my government remains committed to minimising the taxes imposed on people and business activity. Wherever possible, Territory taxes will be held down, offsetting some of the cost disadvantages borne by the community, and helping to attract new investment and individuals. My government takes note of the recent encouragement by the federal Treasurer to the states to hold down taxes. At the same time, there is an increasing need to ensure a fair spread of financial responsibilities across the community. My
government believes that a fair contribution is a necessary part of the growing-up process that the Territory and its communities are presently undergoing.

In the long term, my government will move towards full commercial operation of public transport and water and sewerage services and will continue to examine the problems associated with Aboriginal communities, particularly those situated on Aboriginal land, contributing to the cost of water, sewerage and electricity charges.

On receipt of the report from the greater Darwin Rural Advisory Council, my government will consider the progressive introduction of a form of local representation with a concurrent local contribution towards the provision of services in this and other similar areas.

My government will continue to work closely with the business community in all matters related to training, investment opportunity and regulatory legislation. The Territory Development Corporation Act will be amended to include a representative of the small business community on the board, and small business services are being expanded to include a shopfront advisory centre. The Territory Development Corporation will continue its important work of identifying business opportunity and of encouraging local entrepreneurs or interstate and overseas investors to take up those opportunities.

My government will pursue prospects for the commercial development of large gas reserves in central Australia and the further exploration of the Territory's mineral-rich areas.

After nearly 6 years of self-government, it is time to review the Public Service Act and ensure that it is tailored to meet the emerging needs of a modern Territory service. In particular, it is appropriate to look at those areas concerned with conflict of interest, equal employment opportunity, discipline and Aboriginal development. The Public Service Commissioner's office will be responsible for drawing up a public service code of ethics which will be complementary to the act. Equal employment opportunity, although specifically addressed in the present act, is a concern of my government. The encouragement of applications by suitably-qualified women for senior positions within the public service, and the appointment of women to boards, councils, tribunals and trusts within government and semi-government authorities, will receive particular attention.

A study of the present and future impact of technology on the service and the related issue of information dissemination in view of the ever-growing volume of records compiled by such technology is clearly necessary.

Other matters under consideration include the formation of a senior executive service and the revision of conditions applying to new recruits. Wherever possible, the emphasis will be on local recruitment to the service, and my government will be looking for ways both to reduce the hidden costs of interstate recruitment and to ensure a longer-term commitment from those brought to the Territory from other parts of Australia.

Permanent part-time employment will now be introduced to the Northern Territory Public Service. It is the intention of my government in all matters concerning the public service to promote a true Territory-based service providing excellent career opportunities and the highest level of effectiveness.

In education, a number of new initiatives will increase the need for cooperation and joint planning between authorities in the vocational training and post-school areas. My government will meet its commitment to expand post secondary education with particular emphasis on vocational preparation of youth, better school staffing levels and the provision for post-graduate scholarships. My government will
strive to achieve its objective for self-sufficiency in teacher education through the Darwin Community College and Batchelor College.

Proposals for improvements in secondary correspondence education available via satellite technology, TAFE centres in smaller towns, cooperation with primary Production on short training programs in rural skills, and teacher and student exchanges with our Asian neighbours will be followed through. Alternative schooling for disinterested or behaviourally-disturbed students and secondary student accommodation in Darwin are other matters under consideration.

To meet the demands and aspirations of communities for more skilled and qualified local members of their community, a range of strategies for improving the academic and secondary education will be introduced. Liaison with the Commonwealth on the question of provision of permanent and transportable outstation schools will be necessary because the Commonwealth funds such schools. In anticipation of the establishment of the Tindal air force base, my government will enter into negotiations with the Commonwealth on the development and funding of new primary and high schools at Katherine.

A Northern Territory board of studies is being established to accredit senior secondary school courses and issue certificates for both junior and secondary school courses. The new board will closely monitor changes taking place in the South Australian system to which the Northern Territory is currently linked.

In health, my government is proceeding with plans for a children's hospital at Casuarina, a sports medicine institute, retirement villages in Darwin and Alice Springs, a new hospital wing at Katherine and, provided federal government support is forthcoming, a nursing home in the same town.

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The Territory's future can be assured only with the full commitment of its people, and my government will act to encourage home ownership in the community. We will maintain current levels of assistance to people wishing to buy their own homes. The home loans assistance available to date has helped increase Territory home ownership by some 30% since self-government. This year, the present public service waiting list will be exhausted, allowing my government to introduce a single set of policies over housing matters. To prepare for this, a major review of housing policies will be carried out. The Planning Act will be streamlined to make it easier for applications to be processed speedily and efficiently. My government is also reviewing covenant requirements over all leases and is preparing to act against those who have failed to comply with their undertakings.

It is my government's intention to provide a recreation lake for the people of Alice Springs.

Among legislative initiatives to be brought before this Assembly for consideration will be those resulting from the current review of the Evidence Act and the inquiry into workers' compensation. The results of the Territory freight costs inquiry will be put before this Assembly for consideration, and my government will act upon the conclusions in the Territory's best interests. A submission to the federal government on the desirability of a free trade zone for Australia's most northerly port is under final preparation and should be ready by mid-year.

My government will use its term of office to advance the Territory economically, socially and constitutionally, using all opportunities to encourage new population and new investment, maintaining the view that real and sustainable growth and thus greater opportunity is created only through the growth of the private sector.

Mr Speaker, honourable members, I will now leave you to your important deliberations.

His Honour the Administrator was led from the Chamber by the Sergeant-at-Arms.