Introduction

Thank you -

It’s great to be back in Canberra– and a real privilege to be here at the National Press Club today.

This place has hosted many great leaders …

.. and many prominent and influential public figures over the years …

.. and I’m very grateful for the opportunity to take the stage today and talk to you about Australia’s other great Territory!

Like many Australians, I suspect most of you here today will already have formed a view or an impression about the Territory.

And if past experience is any indication, your views and impressions will all be very different.

Some of you will think of us as a remote Northern frontier, a land of vast open spaces and inhospitable terrain.

Some of you might think of the bombing of Darwin and Cyclone Tracey and the resilience and determination of our people to rebuild and forge a better life for themselves time and again.
Others will think of the ‘rock’– maybe even images of Oprah at the rock …

.. they will think of Kata Tjuta and Kakadu …

.. and some of the most precious and symbolic indigenous cultural sites in the land.

The list goes on – because to most Australians the Northern Territory is still something of a mystery.

But when I think of the Territory …

.. I think of a place of great opportunity – a place where you can come and build a new life for yourself and for your family…

.. a place where you can live your dreams.

And I speak from personal experience.

I am one of the many, many Territorians who headed north to seek out new opportunities and build a new life.

It was 1983 when I left my job as a marine fitter in a mining camp on the very cold west coast of Tasmania and made the trek to the Top End.

The original intention was a working holiday…
.. but I ended up getting a traineeship, meeting my wife, having a couple of kids …

.. and becoming Chief Minister.

Ok – so there were a few steps in between, and a lot of hard work along the way…

.. but it is a move I have never – for one moment – regretted because the Territory is not only a place of great opportunity …

.. not only a place that rewards hard work and a go-ahead, can-do attitude …

.. it is also a place where you can quite literally achieve anything.

And yes – we face some big challenges in the Territory …

.. and none bigger than spreading opportunity and prosperity across our towns and regions and to all our people.

But I’m an optimist – and I believe that the unlimited potential of the Territory and its people is our greatest asset …

.. and it is an asset that our Government is determined to encourage and nurture.
I want the Territory to be a land of opportunity – a land of opportunity for all.

And it is opportunity that drives our work in Government.

Today, I want to tell you more about the Northern Territory …

… about our new, dynamic 21st century economy …

.. about our strengthening ties to the economies of Asia …

.. and about the work we are doing to tackle indigenous disadvantage and the steps we are taking to spread opportunity to our all our people in all our communities across the Territory.

In short, I want to show you why the Northern Territory should stand proudly and independently in our Federation …

.. and as equal partner in our great nation.

But first to our economy.

The Economy
The Northern Territory is currently experiencing an employment miracle.

Over the past year, unemployment in the Territory has been at its lowest level since records began and we have recorded the lowest unemployment rate in Australia for 18 months in a row.
In fact, the current unemployment rate of 2.4% is half the national average and well below what most economists consider ‘full employment’.

And – importantly – we have achieved this at a time where our labour force participation rate is close to the highest in the nation.

Now days, Territorians understand that if they want a job, they can get one …

..which, of course, explains why they are entering the workforce in droves.

Like other jurisdictions around the nation, we felt the hit of the GFC … but in reality it was only a shudder.

It was a reminder to all of us about how strong and robust the Territory economy is today.

Economic growth has averaged around 4.5% annually for the past six years.

The resources boom has been integral to this growth and to our development …

.. and with projects like the $12 billion Inpex gas project coming to Darwin …
.. most forecasters predict that economic growth will remain strong in the Territory.

For example, Access Economics predicts annual economic growth of 3.9% for the next five years.

Given our strong, resilient and growing economy, it is unsurprising that business confidence is high …

..and that business confidence in Government is the highest in the country.

The Territory is growing up … it is coming of age … and we have well and truly entered a new and exciting era.

We are strong, independent and increasingly confident – and we are ready to face the challenges that lie ahead.

But we are not resting on our laurels.

**LNG and jobs**
In terms of our economy, we know that the resources boom, as we’ve known it, will not sustain us indefinitely.

We have ridden the sheep’s back – we’ve had the mining boom – and now we are at the foot of a new LNG wave.

LNG will mean a cleaner, more efficient energy source …
.. an energy source that will make Northern Australia the engine room of the nation’s economy.

In the next five years – just in Territory waters alone – companies are forecast to spend around $1 billion on exploration alone.

And that is outside of the projects already planned to come on-line …

.. including the Inpex-Ichthys LNG plant – which will employ around 3000 people during construction and a further 200-300 for the life of the project.

Projects like Inpex are transformational – and Northern Australia is set to reap the rewards.

And it’s not only the Inpex project in Darwin. There’s Gorgon in Western Australia and Gladstone coal seam LNG in Queensland to name a few…

These projects offer immense economic opportunities for the North – but they also throw up some big challenges.

Investments like these require strong and decisive action from Government, which is why I am working with Premier Bligh and Premier Barnett to pull together a cross government task force to manage this growth now and into the future.
We need to work together to ensure we aren’t cannibalizing each other’s workforce as more big projects emerge.

The bottom line is that stable and secure economic growth requires a collaborative approach – and I know that both premiers are as eager as I am to ensure the sustainability and integrity of our respective workforces.

These new projects throw up other challenges as well.

For example, there is also an underlying social issue we need to grapple with– and that is ensuring we don’t lose workers in crucial frontline sectors like teaching and nursing.

We need to make sure we have a strategy in place that stops people jumping ship from our classrooms, hospitals and businesses …

.. and taking the big pay packets on offer to work on these projects.

And we also need to ensure that the community still has access to a skilled and accessible workforce …

.. access to the people who have played such a vital role in building the Territory and creating one of the nation’s great lifestyles.
We will work with business … with the unions … and with schools and trade training centres to make sure we create the right pathways into these new 21\textsuperscript{st} Century jobs.

And as someone who has come from a trade background, I am really passionate about making sure we have good, highly paid, skilled trade jobs in the Territory.

These are the kind of nuts and bolts issues that we need to work through together – and they will be high on the agenda for the new cross-government task force.

LNG will take the Territory economy to another level …

… it will take job creation to another level …

.. and I am determined that all Territorians will benefit and reap the rewards of this new, exciting era of prosperity.

While LNG is set to drive a new era of prosperity in the Northern Territory …

..it is our strong ties and maturing relationships with nations to our north that will sustain our economy – and the national economy – for the rest of the century and beyond.

\textbf{On the doorstep of Asia}

I said earlier that Australians have many different impressions and views of the Territory.
And I know that for many our proximity to Asia would rate highly.

Yet it would surprise many Australians to learn that Darwin is actually closer to places like Singapore and Jakarta than it is to our own capital here in Canberra.

We are quite literally on Asia’s doorstep – and as Australia’s gateway to Asia, and Asia’s gateway to Australia, we have a potential customer base in the hundreds of millions.

And my Government has worked hard to build strong trade, development and cultural relationships with our northern neighbours.

For example, last year we had the honour of hosting the Vice President of China…

.. and I believe it’s a growing testament to our relationship that on a whistle stop trip that included meeting with the Prime Minister and former Victorian Premier John Brumby …

.. Mr Xi Jin-Ping also made time to drop into the Territory for a little ‘croc spotting’.

Crocs aside, his visit proved productive.
As a direct result of our discussions, the Chinese Government this month gave the green light to the establishment of a Confucius Institute at Charles Darwin University.

The Institute will play an important role in building even closer ties between the Territory and China.

In the Territory we are well and truly on the front foot when it comes to strengthening our ties with our northern neighbours.

For example, our $14.4 million four year Bringing Forward Discovery initiative, has helped promote the Northern Territory as the preferred destination for exploration …

..through strategies such as the provision of new geoscience data for explorers, and our China and Japan Mineral Investment Attraction Strategy.

And it is reaping dividends.

The latest Australian Bureau of Statistics Mineral Exploration Expenditure figures show that the Territory set a record spend last year of $166.7 million – that’s up 12% on the $148.4 million spent in 2009.

Indeed, during the GFC in 2009 the Territory was the only jurisdiction to increase exploration expenditure, while the rest of the country suffered significant drops.
That says a lot about our proactive approach to business in the Territory and a lot about the strong and respectful relationships we have developed with our Asian neighbours.

**Tacking Indigenous disadvantage**
Of course, a strong and resilient economy is not an end in itself.

A growing economy allows governments like ours to invest in the infrastructure and the services that their people need and demand.

It means having the capability to spread opportunity and prosperity across the board.

And for us, that means being able to tackle indigenous disadvantage and forge a better life for all our people.

And while the problems we face are complex and difficult, our Labor Government has always been determined to turn things around and make a real difference in towns and communities across the Territory.

Today I’d like to highlight a few areas of genuine achievement that may not make it on to your TV screens or into weekend newspapers down south.

In partnership with the Commonwealth Government, and in particular Jenny Macklin, who I would like to acknowledge today for sharing my concern, determination and drive to ‘close
the gap’, and working jointly to achieve real improvements in our bush communities.

As a Labor Government, the areas of health, housing and education will always be central to much of our work.

For example, in the area of health we have seen some real improvements in recent years including:

- A three year improvement in the life expectancy of Aboriginal women

- The Indigenous infant mortality rate has fallen by 35 per cent since 1996

- Anaemia rates for Aboriginal children have reduced by 20%

- Cervical cancer rates have fallen by 61% since 1991

- And there has been a dramatic decline in mortality from cervical cancer, falling by 64% in non-Aboriginal women and by a staggering 92% for Aboriginal women since 1991
• And for patients on Renal dialysis, survival rates are now equivalent to the rest of Australia – that equates to an improvement of seven years.

• Put that in the context of our starting point, coming to office – where the CLP had only put renal services in Darwin, Alice Springs and limited in Katherine.

• We have spent $40 million putting dialysis machines in remote communities for the first time.

These are significant achievements and I’m confident we will see further improvements in the future.

In terms of housing – our government, together with the Commonwealth, has a $1.7 billion Remote Indigenous Housing Partnership Agreement, of which our $672million Strategic Indigenous Housing and Infrastructure Program is a part.

This is now in full operation.

But – when it comes to housing – we face some major challenges.

For example, building a two bedroom home for a family in Gunbalanya in the north or Hermansburgg in Central Australia is not like knocking down a slab, then marking out a master bedroom, cinema room and double car port.
There is no off-the-chart plan, there is no agent, there are no bitumen roads and very few, if any, retail outlets.

I think many of you would understand the challenge of trying to get a tradie to fix your hot water or plumbing in Canberra or Melbourne or any of our major cities…

It’s not like dropping into Bunnings after work to pick up a tap washer.

.. and you know all too well the frustrations associated with that.

Imagine the issues and complexities we face in remote bush locations.
But we will overcome these obstacles and I’m confident our partnership with the Commonwealth will bear fruit in the years ahead.

If there is one area that I believe holds the key to unlocking indigenous disadvantage it is education …

.. which is why our Government is undertaking some of the most innovative and nation-leading approaches to education in the country.

These approaches are based on partnerships – not just partnerships between the NT Government and aboriginal people …
.. but partnerships between our Government, the
Commonwealth Government, aboriginal communities and the
private sector.

Clontarf is a good example of this innovative approach to
education – an initiative which uses the power of Aussie Rules
to get kids to come to school and stay in school.

It’s important to note at this point that when our Labor
Government was first elected in 2001, after 27 straight years of
conservative rule, the number of indigenous kids that had
graduated from bush schools was zero.

That’s right - not one kid.
That says a lot about the priorities of the CLP in the Territory
and their ‘do nothing’ attitude to education in the bush.

Now, with programs like Clontarf, we are getting more boys to
come to school, stay in school and finish school.

This ground-breaking program is the result of a landmark
partnership – with the funding being equally shared between
our Government, the Commonwealth and the private sector.

We have nine Clontarf Academies across 10 campuses with
over 670 students from years 7 to 12.
Last year we saw 36 young men finish year 12 through Clontarf and, importantly, 29 of those graduates have jobs or are in training right now.

And I can report that this year we are on track to have 60 kids finish high school through the program.

In addition, our *Every Child, Every Day* strategy will tackle student attendance, especially in the bush.

We are putting in place more Attendance and Truancy Officers, as well as new Infringement Notices of $266 for non-school attendance.

And we have introduced innovative programs like the *Extended School Year* initiative, which will ensure children in select remote areas can access schooling for an extra 10 weeks a year to make up for time lost due to weather and various cultural events.

And our *Beyond School Guarantee* initiative will help students that finish year 12 with a good attendance and participation history get into the right career pathway if their initial choice after completing school does not work out.

At the same time, we are working closely with LNG companies in the Territory to ensure that young indigenous kids, including many of these graduates, can access the jobs these new investments will generate.
In fact, last week I was at the opening of the Larrakia Trade Training Centre, which was established in partnership with Inpex and the Larrakia nation.

Already there are 300 kids enrolled there learning a trade.

This is a concrete example of how these LNG projects can help make a difference to our kids by giving them the opportunity to build a rewarding career.

We are strongly committed to establishing partnerships like Clontarf right across the Territory.

Discussions are underway already with mining companies about under-writing training in schools. A pathway to a job is critical in keeping indigenous students in school, and building partnerships with the private sector …

.. town by town, community by community, child by child …

.. will make a profound difference to future generations of Territorians.

We have a long way to go in closing the gap – but I am optimistic that we can build on the progress we have made so far.
Of course, the work we are doing in our Indigenous communities will come to nothing unless we address the scourge of alcohol abuse.

The figures paint a depressing picture:

- Alcohol consumption rates in the Territory are one and a half times the national average
- Alcohol plays a part in 60 per cent of all our crime – and 60 per cent of all assaults in the Territory
- And alcohol-related crime accounts for around 40 per cent of our policing costs.

Indeed, if we are to close the gap, we need to turn off the tap to problem drinkers.

The research is clear and the evidence is overwhelming – excessive consumption of alcohol is the key factor in the social, domestic and family problems experienced by so many people in our indigenous communities.

That is why – last month – my Government introduced the toughest laws in the country around alcohol.
These include a banned drinkers’ register that will use an ID system to prevent problem and banned drinkers from buying alcohol anywhere in the Territory.

The new laws are tough and I make no apology for that.

Decisive action is needed – because people caught up in the horror of chronic alcohol abuse not only neglect themselves …

.. they also neglect their families and their kids.

Tackling the scourge of problem drinking is the only way we can build better, safer and more productive communities …

.. and better lives for their people.

**Conclusion**

Today – in 2011 – the Northern Territory is a strong, independent and increasingly prosperous part of Australia.

We are standing up and shaping our future in the Territory – a future we can look to with confidence and with optimism.

We are quite literally coming of age – and I can say to everyone here today that we are ready and able to self-govern.

After all, when Tasmania achieved Statehood in 1901 its population was recorded as less than 172 000.
When Western Australia became a State in the same year its population stood at around 188,000.

The Territory’s current population is over 230,000 – and it is forecast to be 320,000 by 2036.

The time is right for the Territory to stand on its own two feet – particularly now, as we mark 100 years since our ‘separation’ from South Australia.

And our people, our neighbours and our trading partners expect no less.

Thank you.