



Speech by

JULIE ATTWOOD

MEMBER FOR MOUNT OMMANEY

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FIRST SPEECH

Mrs ATTWOOD (Mount Ommaney—ALP) (4.59 p.m.): I am very honoured and proud to stand before honourable members today as the first elected female member for the electorate of Mount Ommaney. Firstly, may I congratulate the new Speaker on his attainment of the Speaker's office. I sincerely look forward to working with him and also benefiting from his guidance through the course of this Parliament.

My heartfelt thanks go to a large number of dedicated people who worked tirelessly for and with me and the Australian Labor Party to achieve the result in Mount Ommaney. I also thank God who, through Archbishop Rush and the Sisters at Canossa, provided my spiritual sustenance. Most of all, I pay tribute to the people in my electorate, particularly the ethnic communities who showed their strong support during trying times. Despite the cynicism about politicians, which I was constantly reminded of throughout the campaign, I believe that I can represent all constituents in the electorate, and I look forward to the next three years as we enter the 21st century.

What will the 21st century bring? Everyone has a vision or a dream, a vision of how they would ideally like things to be. My vision for Mount Ommaney, which this Labor Government will deliver, is based upon policies which directly reflect the needs and aspirations of the people. Labor and I want people to have the freedom and the opportunities to have their say in what happens to them through honest, accountable and stable Government.

My ideal State of Queensland would be one in which employment is high, where everyone who can work can get work—a place where small business thrives with opportunities to expand within Australia and overseas, where farming communities are able to prosper despite fluctuating demands for their products from overseas markets, where the Sunshine State is seen as just that: a place which people from overseas and other States choose first for migration, investment or holiday destination. My Mount Ommaney is a place where people from every possible background can live together in peace regardless of their colour, religion or social status, where they have the freedom to be who they are without fear of discrimination.

We have freedom of speech which can cause racial disharmony, but it is our responsibility to use this same freedom to speak out against racism. Queensland in the 21st century should be a place where one feels compassion for others and we do not get angry when our workmate gets crook and we have to do a bit extra to continue providing a service—a place where we can get real service which is not simply profit driven. It is a place where politicians actually consult with their constituents, listen to their concerns and, more importantly, care about their wellbeing and strive to meet their needs. This should be a place where people can actually understand what politicians are talking about and know that the politicians are doing what they were elected to do—actually represent them.

The electorate I represent—Mount Ommaney—in the western suburbs of Brisbane is unique in that it is divided by a major highway, and this line separates two vastly different socioeconomic environments and communities. One side represents a majority of working class individuals and the other, middle to high income earners. Mount Ommaney, however, is a tolerant, caring, multicultural area. Over 28% of residents, or over 10,000, were born overseas; 15% speak a language other than English compared with the State mean of 7.2%; 23% of residents have academic qualifications compared with the State mean of 12%; and the employment rate is around 94%.

While most people are valued members of our community regardless of their ethnicity, religious or personal beliefs, I want to ensure that all members of our society have the opportunity to fully participate in the decision making processes that affect their daily lives. My aim is to bring all of these communities in the electorate together to celebrate their cultures, achievements and history. I do not value one individual higher than any other but treat all with great respect and dignity, and I value them as individual human beings. To do this, I will communicate and consult with as many residents as possible and seek their views on issues that are of importance to them.

I must bring a number of significant issues to the attention of honourable members in this address and I seek their assistance in their resolution. I intend to establish consultative committees with representatives from each suburb in the electorate to advise me on the issues and needs of all constituents. I will lobby for the construction of a youth community drop-in centre where young people can participate in community projects and recreation in their own space. I will ensure more job creation projects and apprenticeships are offered locally in Mount Ommaney and demonstrate that support, through the Centenary Chamber of Commerce, for small business to allow more employment within the electorate. There are a large number of small businesses in the area which need Government support to allow them to harness opportunities for success and to create jobs.

Generally, areas with high employment rates and effective community groups have lower crime rates. The various neighbourhood watch groups have done a remarkable job with few resources to improve the safety and security of Mount Ommaney, and I congratulate those involved with neighbourhood watch on their efforts. However, there can be no substitute for an effective Police Service. The availability of police officers to respond to requests for assistance needs to be addressed as does increased administrative support in stations to free up uniformed officers for operational duties.

The new police station which was built in the Mount Ommaney area was promised as a 24-hour station. However, the station does not open its doors 24 hours a day, and this needs to be remedied. A brand-new building means nothing to people who are burgled after hours if no-one is available to hear their complaint. A police presence in all parts of the electorate, including Oxley and Corinda, is essential to deter crime. Also of concern is the number of officers required to staff the new station. Too few will mean that response times to crime occurring in these suburbs will potentially increase and, with the current Oxley station being depleted of operational staff, criminals may not be apprehended.

Offenders must be appropriately housed. This Government must ensure that no more prisons are built at Wacol near people's homes and it should retain prison reserves in their natural state or put them to use for the community. The Concerned Residents Against More Prisons group—CRAMP—formed in March 1997 to stop high-security prisons being built on land bordering properties of Riverhills residents achieved a significant victory over bureaucracy gone mad, and I commend its achievements to honourable members. Prisons should be kept away from the backyards of urban dwellers and enough distance should be put between the two to allay the fears of a community who would be close targets for prisoners who break out of these jails.

Prisons should be places of rehabilitation, not merely a place in which to keep offenders away from the community and then release them back into the community unchanged to commit the same crimes. If no incentive is provided to prisoners to change their ways such as early release, the discontent that erupts in our prison system would induce more rioting and more break-outs. Not enough resources are put into the rehabilitation process. Will the CRAMP group need to re-form and fight another battle if a future coalition Government wants to jail increasing numbers of prisoners?

Crime prevention and focusing on repairing the social structure of our community are a better use of funds. Labor's policy to put into place social structures to reduce crime makes sense. We need to ensure that increased resources are targeted towards crime prevention in our community. Through my involvement in the community advisory committee, I have gained a valuable insight into the problems facing our custodial officers. It may well be that the Government can provide that well supervised community service for minor offenders to minimise the number of offenders in custodial care.

This Government will honour the existing commitment to a new high school in the Centenary suburbs, and I am pleased to report that the construction is progressing satisfactorily. The new Centenary State High School will open in January 1999, and I look forward to that occasion. I will ensure that the maintenance needs of the other local schools are investigated, with the meeting of relevant safety standards a priority.

The people I have met from Parents and Friends Associations throughout the electorate have worked hard to adequately resource their schools. They have provided the latest information technology, equipment and facilities to enhance learning opportunities for students. Dedicated local teachers are providing the best educational opportunities to all children, with programs tailored to meet their varying intellectual needs and abilities. As any teacher knows, not everyone will be a rocket

scientist, and children must be given a broad education necessary to sustain them in an economically driven world during their noble careers as nurses, plumbers, carpenters, etc. This includes the provision of a sense of right and wrong and at times this will mean parents and friends need to support children wishing to speak out against injustice, divisiveness and inequity.

When parents of these children reach retirement, a caring society would ensure that they are looked after. Free ambulance services for the older members of the community, including Seniors Card holders, pensioners and their dependants, is a bold initiative of this Government with which ambulance officers in my community are proud to be associated. They and residents, however, believe that provision of a community health centre in the electorate which would deliver affordable services, particularly for the low income earners, including dental services, counselling and a drug clinic, is desperately required and I support their concerns.

Access to railway stations is difficult for the disabled and for mothers pushing prams. There are no ramps or lifts for these people to use to access their public transport system at Oxley or Sherwood Railway Stations. The Sinnamon Park Residents Association seeks an improvement to the coordination of bus and rail services across the electorate and I applaud their determination and tenacity to resolve this issue. The Centenary Highway is steadily increasing in traffic and noise is now a major problem for those residents living along the highway. It is one of the greatest sources of stress to some people in the electorate, but others appear to be unaffected by it. Maximum protection must be provided to those who need it and they should be the people considered when noise level minimisation occurs along the highway. Speeding is also an issue and this needs to be policed at every opportunity.

Parkland is a rarity in the Centenary part of the electorate. Most of our green space has been developed and we must preserve every inch of what we have left. Our remaining wildlife is being driven out and there are very few places where residents can walk their dogs or take in a breath of fresh air. In Mount Ommaney we are fortunate to have the dedicated support of various groups, including the Centenary Riverfront Advisory Committee, the Jindalee Bushland Care Group, the Westlake Riverhills Bushland Care Group and the Oxley Creek Environment Group. These groups maintain and enhance our parks and riverfront walkways. They meet regularly to discuss programs to educate the community in bushland rehabilitation and organise working bees to plant trees, clear weeds and shrubs and consult with local and State Government bodies.

Areas of environmental concern to residents in the electorate include flooding of Oxley Creek and the need for rehabilitation and regeneration of the area, an improved funding base for these groups to successfully maintain our creeks and waterways, the physical development of walkways and picnic areas to enable the public to enjoy our bushland, and noise from the highway and industrial area. Focus On Youth is a group of hardworking residents who selflessly donate their time and resources to provide care and friendship to physically and mentally disadvantaged young people. With all these committed groups assisting Government and private organisations it is obvious to all that Mount Ommaney is a caring electorate.

The emphasis placed upon support mechanisms within extended families is always brought home to me when I visit ethnic Vietnamese, Chinese, Indian and other similar communities. The industrious nature which these communities display is matched by their sense of responsibility and care towards their families, particularly their aging relatives, their State and their new chosen country. We are indeed fortunate to be able to sample their cultures while knowing that these people deliberately chose Queensland as their new homeland, as did our forefathers, the original immigrants.

Will we have lived up to the original immigrants' aspirations? At the end of this century, Mount Ommaney will be a responsible, environmentally aware, multicultural society with a modern high school, modern police station, adequate ambulance and other emergency services, sufficient parkland and open space for children to play in and, I believe, a solid economic base supporting both the local community and the region. Mount Ommaney will not be burdened by more adjoining prisons, it will not have a massive unemployment or drug problem; nor will it be a featureless dormitory area for city workers. It will be a community with heart, spirit and drive, and I am determined to do everything possible to assist all in my community to achieve their goals.

Communication with the community, compassion and consultation are what make good government, not encouraging divisiveness, intolerance and discrimination. Today, it is obvious that some Queenslanders have defaulted on their obligation to tolerate minority groups, to assist the weak and to listen to the legitimate concerns of the electorate. As Martin Luther King said, "Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred." I am appalled by the behaviour of the intolerant sections of our society. As I said before, communication, consultation and compassion are the keys to good government. It does not hurt to be kind to others, but it does hurt when people behave as ignorant barbarians with little regard for others. It is clear to me and others present in the Chamber that the people of Mount Ommaney—indeed, the people of Queensland—want a better deal from their politicians, and I believe that they deserve a better deal, which I am determined to deliver.