




Speech By  
**Barbara O'Shea**

**MEMBER FOR SOUTH BRISBANE**

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**MAIDEN SPEECH**

 **Dr O'SHEA** (South Brisbane—ALP) (3.03 pm): I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Yagara and Turrbal people. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and to any First Nations people here with us today. Mr Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker of the Queensland parliament and extend those congratulations to the other new members of parliament.

As we all know, the most important people in Queensland are not in this chamber today. They are the members of our communities who have elected us to represent them in their state parliament. I am standing here today because the people of my electorate, South Brisbane, have placed their faith in me, their trust in me and, most importantly, their hope for the future. I first came to South Brisbane over 30 years ago as a young doctor to work in emergency at the Princess Alexandra Hospital, the PA. In all the years working for my community, whether crawling through car wreckages to rescue people, fighting to save the lives of heroin users or treating psychiatric patients in the locked ward at the PA, in all those roles I realised that the most important thing I could do was give people hope. Hope, because there was someone in their corner who cared about them and who would fight for them. Right now with the housing crisis, many people in my community have lost hope. When I hear of families living in cars and tents it reminds me of when my family had to live in a car when I was a child. Being offered public housing gave my family hope for a better life. With stable housing I was able to get a good education, work hard and become a doctor, but I never forgot my early years and all my life I have fought for fairness, whether for my patients, for young workers or for my community, and I will continue that fight now as the state member for South Brisbane.

My electorate of South Brisbane lies just across the river from here and is an important part of our First Nations history. The lands south of the river, with its succession of waterholes, was the site of permanent Aboriginal camps and meeting places. Our electorate also bears reminders of the injustices of our colonial history. In the mid-1800s, Boundary Street in West End marked the southern perimeter of Brisbane with Indigenous people banned from crossing the boundary and entering the city in the evenings and on Sundays. In modern times South Brisbane is a busy, vibrant electorate, home to South Bank, site of the 1988 Expo with its beach and lagoon, the world-class Queensland Performing Arts Centre, the Queensland art galleries and museum, the famous Gabba stadium and the stunning Kangaroo Point cliffs.

Although South Brisbane is Queensland's smallest electorate by size, it is densely populated with over 65,000 residents in the last census. It is a diverse and eclectic community, with waves of migrants making their homes there over the years from, among other countries, Russia, Italy, Greece, Lebanon, China and Vietnam. Coming from all different backgrounds, these new Australians worked hard and built a tolerant, welcoming community. South Brisbane has particularly benefited from the hard work and strong community focus of our large Greek community who have contributed so much to the life and businesses of our electorate. South Brisbane has always been a safe and accepting space for the LGBTIQ+ community and, renowned for its creative soul, has been home to some of Australia's most

celebrated authors and artists like the legendary David Malouf and Margaret Olley. Our strong, supportive community in South Brisbane is testament to the hundreds of thousands of hours given by countless volunteers, people who give freely of their time in our school P&Cs, sporting associations, church groups and community organisations, to run school fetes, coach children, run barbecues and look after the homeless, the lonely and the elderly. These volunteers are the true heroes of our community.

From a political point of view, South Brisbane is one of the oldest electorates in Queensland and has a long Labor history. Our electorate has the proud legacy of electing the first Greek-born member of an Australian parliament, Jim Fouras, who was elected to this parliament in 1977. From 1983 to 2020 the seat was held by three extraordinary women: Anne Warner, Anna Bligh and Jackie Trad. They all worked tirelessly for South Brisbane as ministers, treasurers, deputy premiers and, of course, with Anna Bligh, our first female premier. Among their many achievements, they were instrumental in supporting more women to enter political life and they fought to end domestic violence and for abortion law reform, culminating in decriminalising abortions in 2018, ensuring that in this state termination of pregnancy is treated as a health issue and not a criminal issue.

I would like to acknowledge Amy MacMahon, who served as the state member for South Brisbane for the past four years. I thank her for all her hard work for the community during that time. I wish her well for this next stage in her life.

I come from a large extended Irish family that, like me, has formed part of the Irish diaspora, with family members spread all across the world. I would like to pay tribute to my father, Tom O'Shea, who died last year, for his work ethic and commitment to family. He grew up in rural Ireland, in County Tipperary. Due to illness he missed out on an education and left school unable to read and write, but he headed to England and worked hard as a chef. All his life he worked double shifts to provide for our family and for his mother and siblings back in Ireland. With my mother's help, he learned to read and write and became a prolific letter writer. His most treasured possessions were letters from prime ministers and presidents, from 10 Downing Street and the White House, and he would have been very proud to have his daughter represent her community in this House. I thank my mother, Mary O'Shea—who even at 89 still has more energy than anyone I have ever met—for her absolute focus on ensuring that my siblings and I received an outstanding state education that set us up for life.

Two years ago I heard that there were children living in tents and cars in my electorate. I decided I could not live with myself if I did not try to do something to help so I made the decision to enter politics. I joined the Labor Party because my values are Labor's values. I am a lifelong Labor voter because I believe in Labor's values of fairness and access to safe, affordable housing, a good education, quality health services and safe work at fair pay. Those are the values I have lived my life by and they are behind my decision to become a doctor and work with the most vulnerable in my community as well as the causes I have chosen to champion over the years.

I am a strong supporter of the union movement and all they have achieved for workers in this country. A by-product of their success is that the very rights that unions fought for are often taken for granted by young people, who are genuinely surprised that their penalty rates, annual leave, sick leave and paid parental leave were all brought about by the work of unions.

I would like to thank everyone who helped on the campaign to win back this seat for Labor, particularly my extraordinary campaign director, Sasha Marin, who took on so many roles and cheerfully worked tirelessly for months on end; my mentor, the Hon. Dr Mary Crawford AM, for her invaluable practical advice, her sense of humour and her unwavering belief in me; Cath Rafferty, Helen Abrahams and Tim Quinn for their energetic, enthusiastic support and wise counsel; David and Peter Kington for all their support and hard work throughout the campaign; and Julian, Andrew, Gabe, Jen, Kane, Doug, David, Shane and Mitchell, among others, who kindly gave up their weekends to help. I am very grateful for the guidance and skills I gained through QUT's Pathways to Politics Program for Women, which is a truly exceptional nonpartisan program, as well as the advice and support I received from Emily's List.

I would also like to thank my incredibly supportive family. My husband, Mel, and my son Henry are in the gallery today. Our sons Elliot and Darcy are overseas. My husband and I met as flatmates in South Brisbane 33 years ago. I actually put an advert in the *Courier-Mail* and I was very lucky when he turned up. We have had the privilege of living, working and raising our family in South Brisbane. Our sons were extremely fortunate to attend Brisbane State High School. I would like to thank Mel, Darcy and Henry for all their help on the campaign: Darcy for the weeks he spent out in the community with me; Henry, who told me that coming doorknocking had given him back his faith in humanity as people were much more pleasant in real life than on social media; and Mel for enthusiastically donning a sandwich board to walk along beside me and meet our amazing residents.

Over the past two weeks during our parliamentary induction process I have had the pleasure of getting to know not only my new Labor colleagues, the outstanding members for Ipswich West and Sandgate, but also the 21 new LNP members of parliament. We may be sitting on the other side of the chamber from each other now, but I have a great deal of respect for their motivations in standing for parliament. It is the role of the government to make decisions in the best interests of Queenslanders and it is the opposition's role to hold them to account, but I hope that we can collaborate and negotiate with each other to get the best outcomes for our communities and for Queenslanders as a whole. I believe that we can make this a workplace that, in terms of our behaviour and interaction, can be the gold standard for other workplaces so that when schoolchildren come to visit this is a place of inspiration where they experience respectful informed debate. When I speak to people in the community they tell me that is what they want to see in their parliament.

As I listened to residents in my electorate over the past six months, it was clear that the greatest challenges facing them are the cost-of-living and housing crises, which are inextricably linked and, as we know, are not only national but also global issues. I spoke about hope earlier. I stood as the Labor candidate for South Brisbane because I believe in hope and what Barack Obama would call the audacity of hope—that, faced with what may seem insurmountable challenges, we have the courage to go forward together, united in a common belief in a better future.

For the past few years in South Brisbane we have seen increasing numbers of people sleeping under bridges, in parks, in cars and in doorways. That is unacceptable in a rich state like Queensland. Homelessness takes away people's dignity. It leaves them vulnerable to violence, drug and alcohol dependency and mental illness, and it leads to generational disadvantage. I believe that safe, stable, affordable accommodation is the cornerstone for people to hold down a job, educate their children, access health services and build a good life for their family.

In the 2021 Census, 62 per cent of our residents in South Brisbane were renters. That is more than twice the national average. In Brisbane, rents have increased by 50 per cent since the start of the pandemic, with increasing numbers of people experiencing rental stress. Although the housing crisis is affecting everyone, young people in particular are getting a raw deal. As I went around our electorate I met many young people in distress who often broke into tears when telling me of their most recent rent increase and of how they were scared of raising any maintenance issues in case they were evicted. Our young people are often coping with HECS debts and juggling study and multiple jobs to try and make ends meet. With ever-increasing rents, there is despair and anger out there.

I remember when it was normal practice to put a deposit on a house in your 20s or 30s. Now, our young people worry if they can afford the next rent increase, never mind buy a home. That is wrong and it needs to change. With home values in Brisbane having gone up over 56 per cent since the start of the pandemic, I have had young professionals in their 30s telling me how they have given up hope of ever buying a home and are either putting off having children or raising their children in a share house. We hear a lot about the 'bank of mum and dad', with parents helping their children out with deposits and their mortgages; however, many families are not in a position to do that. As a society, we cannot accept that the only way to afford a home is if your parents can buy you one. That will just further exacerbate intergenerational disadvantage.

Right now, we have a housing market that is broken and unfair. We need a housing market that works for everyone—for us, for our children and for our grandchildren. I believe that our housing crisis is the biggest problem facing Australia but it is not insurmountable. We need all three levels of government working together on it. We need to get the politics out of the way because it is too important. We need urgency—we cannot wait a generation for this to be solved. We have to work with all stakeholders, be inventive, look at all possibilities, including international experience, and focus our energies on solving this. We need to invest in transitional housing to get people out of tents and then into permanent housing with onsite services, if required. With so little green space in the inner city, this will also allow residents and their children to use the parks and the amenities at the river again.

I hope this government will continue Labor's policies of training tradies through free TAFE courses, of increasing housing supply by building more homes, including modular or prefabricated homes, and of investing in public housing and in affordable rental properties for low- and middle-income workers. Supply is obviously the answer to the crisis but, in the interim, I ask the government to look at short-term measures of repurposing anything that is already built to take pressure off the rental market.

We need to look at ways to get more people into their own home. First home buyers are struggling to compete in the housing market against investors and overseas buyers. I would ask that the government consider building homes specifically for first home buyers and ring fencing those properties so they can only be sold on to other first home buyers so that the stock is retained and increased further by continued building.

Growing up in public housing, I understand the strain that many people in our community are feeling with the current cost-of-living crisis. I know the worry of living week to week with no savings and the fear when bills come in and there is no money to pay them. As a child, I remember the sadness and panic of watching our car being towed away when we did not have the money to repair it, knowing that, without transport, my father would have to work and live away from home.

I want our residents to be able to live without the constant worry of how they are going to pay their rent, fuel and food bills. We need to show by our actions in this House that this parliament understands the stresses people are under and is prepared to help. Labor's cost-of-living relief included \$1,000 off electricity bills, 20 per cent off car registration, free kindy and free TAFE. It provided Queensland with the biggest cost-of-living relief package in Australia. Labor's policy of ensuring rents can only be increased once a year has helped renters but we also need to support them by exploring ways to stabilise rents. The 50-cent fares have made a real difference in people's lives and I trust that they are here to stay.

I made a promise to myself when I was out doorknocking the electorate that I would not forget those young people I met who were in so much distress due to the housing crisis and that I would stand up for them, if elected. So many of our young people feel forgotten. Our message from this parliament to our young people has to be that you are not forgotten, that you will not be left behind, that there is hope. In the words of Labor great Wayne Swan, Australia is—

... a land of hope and dreams, but they must be hopes and dreams for everyone, not just for a fortunate few.