




Speech By
Bisma Asif

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms ASIF** (Sandgate—ALP) (2.27 pm): Fittingly, the Aboriginal name for the Sandgate area is Warra, meaning ‘the expanse of open water’. The Turrbal people are the traditional owners and custodians of the land in the Sandgate area, and I would like to pay my respects to the elders past, present and emerging.

Friends, I stand before you today as the elected representative for the people for Sandgate. With a heart full of gratitude and hope, I am humbled by the trust my community has placed in me and inspired by the journey that has led me here. I would like to pay a special tribute to my predecessor Stirling Hinchliffe. Stirling served Sandgate for nine years and before that served as the state member for Stafford for six. Stirling, thank you for being my local member, campaign director and for the time you dedicated to introducing me to the people of Sandgate and showing me the best our community has to offer. In your first speech to parliament, you said this place allowed you to explore and serve your three passions—your local community, the Australian Labor Party and our democracy. I have no doubt that you will look back on your 15 years of service and be proud of all you have achieved. You and I both agree with the words of Bob Hawke: Australia is the land of opportunity and we must make sure that opportunity is available to everyone.

My family and I are migrants. In 2004, my parents, Asif and Shabana, left everything they knew behind when they left Pakistan for Australia in search of a better life. I was eight and my sister, Aamna, was just four. As an adult, I am now able to appreciate the strength and courage it must have taken for my parents to make the decision to move their young family across the world, away from family and friends to a very different country. They risked everything in search of a brighter future for us and their strong belief that Australia offered this opportunity. They arrived with little more than a dream and the belief that with hard work, education, opportunity and determination, we could build a better life. This journey was not easy.

When we arrived I did not speak English, and neither did my mother or sister. We had no idea what the future would hold. We moved into a small townhouse in Blacktown, western Sydney, and embarked on our Australian story. On many days I stood in front of the classroom not understanding the words around me, struggling to keep up. I remember that feeling of isolation. The one thing that kept me going was my English as a Second Language class and my teacher, Mrs Dux, who was always patient and warm. Knowing I was not alone, that every kid around me, no matter where they came from, was facing their own struggle, three years after our arrival, on 28 June 2007, our small family with big dreams put on our best clothes and headed to Bowman Hall in Blacktown, where we received our Australian citizenship. After this we went for a family dinner at the Blacktown Workers Club. We had the buffet—it was a good day. Eventually we moved to Queensland, living in Crestmead and Manly West, where I graduated from Wynnum State High School. In 2015 I had to move out of home, taking my sister with me.

I am often asked why I became politically active and why Labor. This is why. I was 19, studying full-time, trying to navigate our welfare system to gain legal guardianship of my sister and working three jobs—in a call centre, a kebab shop and a pizza joint—to keep a roof over our heads. There were days where, despite working three jobs, I had just 70 cents in my account and we did not know where our next meal was coming from. We relied on social workers, our welfare system, public health care and grocery coupons from the University of Queensland Union. I share this as my story, but I know there are many others out there who are struggling. I also know that only Labor addresses inequality in all its forms. This is why I was motivated to get active in the Labor Party during the 2016 federal election. I campaigned for Wayne Swan, who remains a source of support and guidance today. I campaigned because I was passionate about saving Medicare, which was threatened by a federal coalition government. I decided that I could not just sit back and let things happen around me; I had to get involved.

My upbringing and life experiences have given me my Labor values. I am all-in for universal public health care and workers' rights and a proud union member. I was the victim of wage theft when I worked in hospitality. I have been proud to see the Labor Party live out our values in government and criminalise wage theft, but there is more work to do to provide more secure, well-paid jobs where workers are treated with respect.

I am proud to have completed my education and to have received my economics degree at the University of Queensland. Since working my way through university in various hospitality jobs, I have dedicated my working life to electing Labor governments and enacting progressive policies. I am proud to have spent several years working for Senator Anthony Chisholm, and after the election of the Albanese Labor government in 2022 I was able to contribute to historic aged-care reforms, working as a policy adviser for Anika Wells, Minister for Aged Care and member for Lilley.

As the member for Sandgate, I intend to do everything I can to make a difference. My top priority will be fighting to deliver more investment to ensure there are more secure, well-paid jobs to help families pay the bills and provide for a better future. I will be a fierce advocate for protecting and improving our universal public healthcare system—the issue that got me involved in politics. Access to quality health care should never be determined by your postcode, income or background. Health care is a right for all, not a privilege for the few. Our world-class public health system needs to evolve to stay ahead and meet the needs of our growing and diverse communities. This means more funding for our hospitals, more investment in mental health services and greater access to affordable medications. It means making sure that no-one is left behind.

My first political memory is from 2012 when, along with the rest of the world, I watched a girl my age in Swat, Pakistan—a seven-hour drive from where I was born—speak out publicly for her right to an education. Speaking out for her right to learn made Malala Yousafzai a target and got her shot in the left side of her head by a Taliban gunman. At 16 I watched in horror the reality of what was happening back home. It was then that I understood the privilege I was afforded when my parents made the decision to move here to give my sister and me a better life. From then on, I have never taken anything for granted. A good public education changed my whole life. Education is the foundation of our future. Education opens doors. We need to strive for a future where no child misses out and every young person has a chance to shape their destiny, no matter their background.

I am proud to represent our modern multicultural state. I am proud to be the first Pakistani and Punjabi elected to the Queensland parliament. I am proud to speak three languages of my family and ancestors: Urdu, Punjabi and Hindi.

The member for Sandgate then spoke in languages other than English—Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi.

I am proud of these values because they represent all Queenslanders who, like my parents, came here seeking a better life while contributing to society—the diverse, hardworking and vibrant people who come together to make Australia a beautiful multicultural society. I am also proud to be the first Muslim elected to the Queensland parliament. My faith has taught me the value of service to others, the importance of justice and the belief that we are all part of something greater than ourselves. Just like Labor's values, it is about building a fairer, more inclusive society. Faith is not just something that is practised in private; it is something that guides how we live our lives, how we treat others and how we contribute to the greater good.

The promise of Australia—and, I believe, what makes this the best country in the world—is that, no matter where you come from, no matter your circumstances, with hard work and opportunity you can build a better life. Our country believes in the power of aspiration—the power to dream big, to reach for something greater and to know that, if you work hard, your dreams are within your grasp. I was always taught that if you work hard enough you could succeed, but success does not come from hard work

alone. It comes from good governments, systems, teachers, doctors and healthcare professionals and a strong community. As the member for Sandgate, I want to help leave a legacy where health care, education and equal opportunity are not privileges but rights for all.

Like many, I love our great state of Queensland and nowhere more than my electorate and home of Sandgate. Sandgate is a special place characterised historically as the seaside retreat for Brisbanites. It includes the older suburbs of Sandgate, Brighton, Deagon and Shorncliffe. Urban growth has added the suburbs of Bracken Ridge, Taigum, Fitzgibbon and Bald Hills, helping to build a vibrant, multicultural and strong community. The sun shines bright, the beaches stretch for miles and the dream of a better life is always on the horizon.

It is the bustling foreshore where families from across our community enjoy their Sunday picnic while having fish and chips from Doug's or Shelley's. It is the serenity and peacefulness of the Brighton Wetlands, where Daniela is proud of the lush garden she has grown from scratch. It is home to Ann, five, who likes Barbie, cats and dancing, and Chloe, seven, who is bound to be a famous author one day. She is currently working on a piece about a crab called Carl, for anyone who is interested!

In Bracken Ridge, busy families like Pariwesh and Anju rush to get their groceries done at the plaza before Anju heads to care for our most vulnerable at the Brighton Health Campus as a nurse. In Fitzgibbon, Krrish takes his younger sister for a skate around Hidden Wells Playground and Pushkar and Ritu arrive early to open the Night Owl to provide support to our community. In Taigum, Emma and Andrew are renting but hope to buy their own home one day and hundreds of devoted Sikhs arrive at the gurudwara to perform matha tek and seva.

In Deagon, where Amy and Brent bought their first home and welcomed their first baby, beautiful August loves pointing at the trains as they go past their backyard and yells out 'Dada' because he thinks it is Brent heading to Bowen Hills, where he works at Queensland Rail. In Shorncliffe, Rod and Karen walk along the Shorncliffe Pier recounting over 60 years of memories, including moving into their home and raising their three children in the community they still call home.

These are the stories of Sandgate. They are all different but at their heart they are all the same: families from different backgrounds who are fighting to build a good life. I want to help you in that fight. Together for you and thousands of Sandgate locals, I promise to be bold in my ambition for our community and unwavering in my commitment to help build a better, fairer, more equal future for all. I am proud to serve you and I am grateful to everyone who helped support my campaign.

James Carville once said of political campaigning—

Outside of a person's love the most sacred thing they can give is their labor. Labor is a very precious thing you have and any time you can combined labor and love you've really made a match.

Many people gave endless hours of their time, their love and their support along this journey. To my campaign managers, Tom Hinchliffe and Gabriella Dawson: Tom, you have always been a trusted friend. Your loyalty to me and the Labor Party and your commitment to help the average Australian is undefeated. Thank you for putting in the countless hours and sweat and I am sure there were tears in the very end, which helped our victory in Sandgate. Gab, I am so glad to have met you, mainly because I know one day you will do great things. Your ability to 'sponge' is incredible. In all seriousness, you went above and beyond in every way to make our campaign a success. I know I did not make things easy at times, but you took everything thrown at you and just made things work. PS I am still waiting on those painted signs.

To my campaign director and the most hardworking local councillor Jared Cassidy: your commitment to our community inspires me. You never think twice before considering how you can help others and you truly care about the community we live in. Thank you for your wise counsel.

To my former employers and friends, Anika Wells and Anthony Chisholm: few candidates have had the mentorship and guidance I have been privileged to have had from you. This, the opportunity of working for you gave me a unique experience of working on target campaigns, which of course came in very handy in Sandgate. Thank you. Anika, thank you for your ever so honest advice and for showing that combining authenticity with hard work can go a long way.

To our team at party office, our relentless campaign director Kate Flanders, assistant secretary Zac Beers, and target seats director Mitchell Kingston: thank you for your years of friendship, support and guidance. You ran a strong campaign in tough circumstances and my only complaint was that Mitchell, as my husband, frequently reminded me that Sandgate was, in fact, not a target seat, but more on him later.

To my organiser, Isabella Scattini: Bella, I have always been able to count on your advice no matter the situation, from how I should walk down the aisle to how I should deal with tough questions on the campaign. I will never forget standing in Daniela's backyard. You have kept me humble and honest. Thank you.

I also want to extend my gratitude to Megan Hinchliffe. It is no easy task to devote yourself to public life, but it is even harder to be the partner who has to problem-solve the unsolvable problems. I know how well you did that on my own campaign. Thank you.

Thank you to my friends Rachel Limpus, Finbar Fuller, Jill Molloy, Jane Webster, Luke Richmond, Riley Williamson, Alex Elliot and in particular my longtime friend and supporter Josh Millroy from the Transport Workers' Union. All your support and friendship over the years, and especially in the past 12 months, has been worth more to me than you know. To the Australian Workers' Union, led by Stacey Schinnerl, Mark Raguse and Joseph Kaiser, thank you not just for your support but everything you do for workers and our party in this state. Thank you as well to my parents-in-law, Anita and Greg Kingston, and to Ben Rillo, Rachel Brimblecombe, Sam Lynch, Sam Rae, Ali Kadri, Bahzad Aslam and to the Pakistani community.

To our Sandgate team, Usama Shafiq, thank you for your countless hours of doorknocking in scorching heat with me. Thank you for being there with me every weekend and helping knock on thousands of doors. To Tim Tyrell, Paul Taylor, Declan Duff, Julie Miller-Morrison, Will Henderson, Jen Henderson, Emily Jones, Harry Thorn, Jared Noble and all of the Sandgate branch, thank you for your dedication and endless hours of work. To mama G and papa G, thank you.

The member for Sandgate then spoke in a language other than English—Urdu.

Thank you for your courage in leaving your homeland to give us the best opportunities. Your hard work and determination have helped shape the path I walk today. To my sister and best friend, Aamna, from playing our games in the yard to the last 12 months on the campaign trail, you have always been there for me and have always cheered me on. We have been through so much together, and your dedication, encouragement and strength have meant the world to me. I am proud of the young woman you have become.

Finally, to my husband, Mitchell: I may be biased, but I am yet to meet anyone who is more dedicated to seeing Labor governments elected. Mitchell, your devotion towards seeing a positive change for our society and the vigour with which you work has shown me I absolutely made the right call in asking you to give me a lift in 2016 to Wayne Swan's doorknock to save Medicare in Stafford Heights and then again asking you to come doorknocking with me for the now member for Mansfield in 2017. Little did I know that a doorknock in Wishart would lead me to find someone I would fall in love with, someone with a strong character. You are honest, compassionate and, simply put, the best husband I could ask for. I could not have done this without your support. You were there with me in my toughest times reminding me that we could have a better life together. I am here because of your belief in me. Every sacrifice has brought us here to this very moment. Thank you and I love you.

I ran for parliament because I know what it is like to struggle. I know what it is like to have just 70 cents in my account and not know how I was going to make ends meet. I know that my story is common: a lot of people out there are working hard and doing their best but doing it tough. I am here to do what I can to make a difference and to play a small part in making your lives a little bit easier, to ensure you have the opportunity to have the life you dream of for you and your family. I stand here proud to be a member of the Queensland parliament, as a girl born in Lahore, who grew up in Blacktown and who now calls Sandgate home. I promise now and every day to fight for the people I represent and fight for working people everywhere. I will not let you down.