




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR MURRUMBA**

---

Record of Proceedings, 5 May 2015

**MAIDEN SPEECH**

 **Mr WHITING** (Murrumba—ALP) (3.50 pm): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we stand today and the traditional owners of the land on which I stand as a parliamentarian. I also acknowledge elders part and present. I pledge my loyalty to Australia, Queensland and its people. I congratulate the Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, and the Deputy Premier, Jackie Trad, on being commissioned to form a new Labor government. I have known both of them for many years, I have seen their strength and clarity of purpose and I am glad to serve under them. I congratulate the Speaker, Peter Wellington. Before the 1998 state election, former ALP Assistant Secretary Peter Shooter spoke to me of Peter Wellington's qualities and, in his time in parliament, he has lived up to that positive endorsement. I extend my congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition, Lawrence Springborg, and to all members of the 55th Parliament. I acknowledge my predecessor in Murrumba, Reg Gulley, and extend my best wishes to Reg and his family. In particular, I acknowledge the Hon. Dean Wells, who is truly a legend of this parliament, having served the people of Murrumba for 26 years in this chamber. He is a man of immense wisdom. Dean is not lost to us; he works as a barrister and uses his prodigious legal knowledge on behalf of those in our community without a voice.

I have been chosen by the electors of Murrumba to represent them in the 55th Parliament of Queensland. The 103-year-old electorate of Murrumba is a distinct area framed by the sea, creeks, rivers and the transport stream of the Bruce Highway. My communities have in common strong aspirations for a better future, a search for a better lifestyle and a desire to create a better place to live. Our residents can live in new housing in stylish urban centres, in quiet semi-rural areas or in comfortable affordable houses close to the sea. My hometown of Deception Bay has always been a haven for working people; it is an undiscovered gem by the sea. It has always embraced people from everywhere and I have always felt safe and at home in 'the bay'. Rothwell and Kippa-Ring, the proud suburbs of Redcliffe, are great locations for families wanting a better lifestyle. At the centre is North Lakes, which is increasingly the retail and community hub of the Moreton Bay region. It is a marvellously planned community that hosts a swag of attractions. We have new estates being constructed at Mango Hill and Griffin around original villages and suburbs that are, once again, perfect for young families. The rural-residential lifestyle of Burpengary East still attracts many families who yearn for a  $\frac{3}{4}$  acre lot. Now our lifestyles, work opportunities and aspirations will be opened up by a new piece of transport infrastructure, the new Moreton Bay Rail Link. This is the long awaited rail to Redcliffe that was initiated by state and federal Labor governments and local government. To my electors, those long ribbons of transport infrastructure are more than just broad job generators; they are the pathways that tie them to employment and education. That is why advocating for road and rail, schools and jobs will be at the centre of what I do here as a parliamentarian.

To all the residents of Murrumba, I say this: I live amongst you, I understand your ambitions and I share your wishes. I reflect those aspirations, I pledge to work on your behalf and I thank you for this humbling honour. It is also an honour to be here as a Labor member and to perhaps fulfil some of the hopes, desires and aspirations of my forebears. One such ancestor is Arthur Binstead, one of

Queensland's earliest ticket of leave man who was transported from England to Van Diemen's Land in 1831 for taking part in the Captain Swing Riots. The Captain Swing Riots was a movement of 19th century rural workers who destroyed the new threshing machines that they believed were taking their jobs. It is an early example of workers not accepting the economic structures forced upon them, but resisting them and acting to redress them. I assure the House that Arthur Binstead's descendants have moved on from sabotage as a means of redress.

However, I have inherited a burning desire to fight injustice, speak out on what is right and stand up for what is fair. Traditionally, for working people the labour movement has been the best way to express this and the best way to achieve economic justice. The labour movement is more than a vehicle for the ambitions of one section of society. Organised labour is a pillar of society and the economy. The push for wage justice is central to the labour movement and it should be more widely recognised that our economy is based on fair wages. The economy needs the spending power of wages. I can find no better way to express the centrality of decent wages than to reiterate the principles of the Harvester Judgement, an event of underestimated importance in our history.

In 1907, Henry Bourne Higgins ruled from the Commonwealth Court of Conciliation and Arbitration that a worker is a 'human being in a civilised society'. That is even more relevant today when workers are seen as a cost input or as passive consumers. The Harvester Judgement said no wage can be 'fair and reasonable' if it does not allow a worker to marry and raise a family, which are aspirations dear to many Queenslanders. The judgement formed a crucial bipartisan plank in the creation of our nation throughout the 20th century, but it has dropped out of favour at a time when wages are stagnating and I believe the judgement and its principles should be embraced once again. The labour income share, or the amount of our national wealth that is turned into wages, has dropped from a high of 62 per cent to 65 per cent in 1974-75 to between 52 per cent to 55 per cent today. The growth of average weekly earnings is now at an historic low. We are at a stage where the federal government has to make direct supplements from our tax collection base to allow workers to raise a family and meet their household budget. By reducing the capacity of the labour movement to achieve wage equity and decent wages, our whole economy is diminished.

I have been blessed enough to develop this political outlook and philosophy through my experience and through the taught wisdom of others. At university, for the first time I experienced a class overlay where people were judged on where they went to school. I acknowledge the wonderful tutelage of Ray Evans and Kay Saunders, ground-breaking Queensland historians who showed me the unseen history of Australia, that is, a history of struggle over the frontier and possession of the land. It was in my time as communications officer for the Australian Services Union that I discovered that collective action of people is the only truly effective method to achieve social and economic justice. When employees combine with unity of purpose and then find common ground with employers, a solution can be found to the most knotty of problems. I acknowledge the strong women leaders at the helm of the ASU: Janice Mayes, Julie Bignell and Mary-Anne O'Neill, a former member for Kallangur and now the electorate officer for Murrumba.

It was my 12 years as a councillor on the Caboolture Shire Council and the Moreton Bay Regional Council that allowed me to discover the enormous collective wisdom of everyday Queenslanders. They very rarely get it wrong. Whenever they have been empowered to make decisions on behalf of their community, they put self-interest aside and reach eminently sensible decisions. Through their lead, I decided to forgo my last pay rise as councillor and donate it to community groups. As a councillor, I developed a tremendous respect for local, everyday Queenslanders. For 12 years, they continually taught me. It was during my time as a real estate agent in recent years that I came to fully appreciate that small and medium business is the engine room of economy and jobs. I found business owners who would pay their staff first before paying themselves, because their staff all had families and mortgages. My support for private enterprise and organised labour is not inconsistent. Firstly, as the Hon. Ken Hayward, a former member for Kallangur, said to me, you have to look after business because that is what employs people and pays wages. Secondly, you can exercise entrepreneurship and individual liberty only when you have an economic foundation created by an economically active government. Government should not be afraid to create economic instruments that wield power to better the lives of citizens, yet still work within market forces.

We have in our hands government bodies and corporations that generate profit and economic power. These are owned by the people and should work on behalf of Queenslanders. I reject the notion that government gets in the way of business and the economy, and that government should be small and unobtrusive or that many functions could be simply performed by the private sector. In Queensland's history, the government has been an economic actor. It has provided a platform for private enterprise and been an active partner in our economy.

Our biggest infrastructure project in the 19th century was our railways system. Between 1887 and 1893 the Queensland government borrowed £7 million to construct 3,000 kilometres of rail line. We had the highest per capita debt in the British Empire but our wealth was reliant on this transport infrastructure. At one stage in the 19th century the pastoral industry accounted for 95 per cent of the Queensland economy, but the industry could only survive through the railways and ports. My point here is that I believe government is a cooperative venture amongst all of us and provides the foundation for the generation of wealth by local businesses and local enterprises.

An issue I must raise is that of climate change. I want to say this: it is happening. There is no doubt, and for the sake of Queensland's future we can have no doubt. The overwhelming consensus is that it is caused by humans. The Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change was released on 18 March 2015. It said that climate change is extremely likely to be man-made—the level of certainty being 95 to 100 per cent. Some 97 per cent of the 4,000 papers on the subject published over 20 years agree it is anthropomorphic—man-made.

If you are still claiming there is some doubt, I give you this story. When the first atomic bomb was exploded in the Trinity test at White Sands in 1945, it is said some scientists theorised that it could possibly crack the crust of the earth. Yet, even with that doubt, the scientists and military still went ahead. Necessity overcame uncertainty. There was some uncertainty about what the first atomic bomb would do. There is almost no uncertainty about what is happening with climate change. So why is a tiny level of uncertainty overcoming necessity? It is because there is a necessity to take action. This is what we are facing in Queensland if we do not act.

In Murrumba by 2090 average temperatures will rise between 1.9 and 3.7 degrees Celsius. The sea level rise in the bay in that same time will be between 47 centimetres and about 65 centimetres. There will be more extreme rain events and they will be more destructive. In January 2011 my area experienced a one in 1,000 year rain event. On Friday, we suffered a one in 2,000 year event.

Our \$5 billion beef industry may well decline by 19 per cent by 2030 and 33.5 per cent by 2050 due to heat stress causing slower growth, lesser breeding success and reduced appetite. Rising seas place \$31.3 billion of Queensland roads, commercial buildings, industrial sites, houses and railway lines under threat in the next 100 years. Some 2,250 properties in the Moreton Bay region are under threat from sea level rise. The loss of workdays in Queensland due to heat stress will increase sevenfold within 100 years.

I am not wanting to be alarmist; I want to be a realist. I do not ask members to take action today. I simply ask them, for the sake of future Queenslanders and our future economy, to recognise that we have a problem and we must act.

Beliefs such as this have come through observation, but others have come from the taught wisdom of others, including family antecedents. My learned and inherited values and attitudes—hard work, strength through struggle, the primacy of family and study, self-belief, and an innate optimism—were passed onto me from my mother and her mother. My mother, Margaret, was a girl from Banyo high. I cannot think of my mother without seeing a smile on her face. Her school marks in a different time would have seen her studying medicine. But as the eldest in a family with a single parent, she chose to study teaching as it paid a bursary.

My mother and father moved to Mackay in their mid-20s and bought a small three-bedroom home built on the reclamation area at the edge of town. When Margaret became a single parent, she took her three children from Mackay back to Brisbane. There we were, the four of us in a big city, existing on the pay of a teacher with one year's training. Tertiary education for all of us was the only path forward, so the four of us went to university and worked. Sometimes we had to stretch the last \$20 into a week's worth of meals. Mum sometimes took in boarders and tutored local kids for extra money.

We could not have done it without the study support and free education introduced by Labor, and that is the defining personal and political experience of my life. My mother's mother was Nancy Jean Burchall, an indomitable woman who both worked and raised three children alone in the 1950s and 1960s. She inveigled her way into working in a shoe store and ended up as the first female manager of a Mathers shoe store. My father, Richard Whiting, was a charming and charismatic man and a brilliant sportsman. Although our closeness was diminished by divorce and death, I found he bequeathed me his special gifts—the ability to speak freely and to make those easy connections with my fellow citizens. If he were not taken by cancer, I know he would have taken immense pride and joy in my elevation to parliament and in the grandson that he so wanted to meet.

I mention these because I am the distillation of their hopes, the beneficiary of their lessons and the product of their perseverance. I am determined not to let them down in this House—including Arthur Binstead. I am determined to repay the faith placed in me by my campaign committee, led by

Jenny Foster. I also thank the other members—some of whom are here today: Rob Shore, Mick Denton, Brendan Waite—who is now my assistant electorate officer—John Rodgers, Dayne Rodgers, Michael O'Brien, the O'Brien family, Trevor Andrew, Glenn Smith, Judi Griffith, John Holmes, Gail and Rod Schoettler, Cindy McKay, Tom and Pat McLoughlin, Jan MacIntyre and others. I thank ALP State Secretary, Evan Moorhead, ALP Campaign Director, Anthony Chisholm and my organiser, James Gunn.

Thank you to all our ALP members, especially from the Murrumba East branch and my Deception Bay branch. They worked without end and without flagging, investing their hope in a Labor government, believing that Labor would, as in the words of Ben Chifley, not focus on just putting a sixpence in someone's pocket, but be a movement bringing greater happiness to the mass of the people.

Thank you too to the members of the trade union movement, especially the ASU/Together Union, where my colleagues, under Irene Monro and Julie Bignell, came out strongly and without question for me. Thank you to the CFMEU Construction & General division, especially Michael Ravbar, Jacqui Collie and Andrew Ramsay. This union represents some of the most at-risk workers in Australia. In 2014, 26 Australian construction workers did not come home from their work site. I hope I can use my influence to help stem that fatal flow.

I acknowledge the Reverend Paul Bland, an inspirational teacher, who taught students, such as me, to believe in themselves. Thanks also to Mark Ryan MP. He and I go back a long way and it is a pleasure to stand beside him here in this parliament. Special thanks go to my close colleague Jeff Hopkins-Weise. A man could not ask for a better friend.

I also acknowledge my two wonderful sisters, Elizabeth and Jillian. I have always regarded us as an indivisible unit. In the toughest times, we always formed a three-sided rock. I pay tribute to my wife, Sian Whiting, who is patient and hardworking and loving. Until I met her, I never knew how a simple smile can lift you up and make your soul sing. I acknowledge her parents, Pat and Joy O'Callaghan, who are ever present, ever loving. All of us will carry on providing an example to my children, Guy and Rebecca.

The ultimate aim as a parliamentarian, as I see it, is to conduct ourselves in a way that would make our children proud. Let us all show our children how to live life selflessly, act together and work at creating a better world, or in the words of Robert Kennedy: 'Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.'