




Speech By
Corrine McMillan

MEMBER FOR MANSFIELD

Record of Proceedings, 22 March 2018

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (3.07 pm): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and may I extend to you my warm congratulations for your election as Speaker of the House. I am confident that you will preside over the deliberations in this chamber with wisdom, forbearance and respect for the time-honoured conventions that have served this parliament so well in the past.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this great building stands. I particularly acknowledge two parliamentary colleagues: the member for Algester and the member for Cook. It is a significant moment in the history of this parliament and in the history of our state when our House of democracy is representative of the people we serve. Hearing the member for Cook's maiden speech last month reminded me of the strength and courage that the member for Algester and the member for Cook possess. It also underscored for me the responsibility that governments have to ensure the human rights of all citizens. Every decision has consequences, and lifting outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be at the forefront of every decision we make. We must take seriously our responsibility to advance reconciliation in each motion, in each debate, in each bill.

As a new member of the 56th Parliament, at a time when the human rights of all Queenslanders are set to be enshrined in legislation, the gravity of this moment is not lost on me. This is truly a great moment in history, and I am proud and excited to be here for it.

It is also a historic moment when positions of great responsibility in this state are held by women. Much has been said about the leadership styles of women and men, and many have theorised about how the world would be different if women held the reins of power. Now with female leaders on both sides of the House we feel many eyes upon the parliament. A window of opportunity has been cast open for the women of Queensland, and there is a real chance to challenge the traditional understandings of leadership. There is an opportunity to approach complex issues, such as the impact of technology on employment, factors affecting our future economic and social prosperity and domestic violence, differently and to forge a new discourse. We trust that the legacy of this parliament will stand to credit us all for years to come, and will inspire the dreams and journeys of future generations of Queensland women and men.

I congratulate all new members of this House, my parliamentary Labor colleagues and, in particular, the Premier, the Deputy Premier and ministers on achieving majority government. Contest is a vital part of our democracy, but there is also much to be said for stability. I believe most Queenslanders share my optimism that a fertile ground for progress has been laid.

Like other new members of this chamber, I find myself in this House because the good people of my electorate of Mansfield have placed their faith in me to represent them. I do not take their faith for granted, and I intend to spend every day as their local member representing their interests both in this place and in the wider community.

The electorate of Mansfield, like many seats in the south-east corner and, indeed, around the state, has changed greatly over the past half-century. Encompassing suburbs from Mount Gravatt in the north-west across to Burbank in the east and down to Rochedale in the south, Mansfield still retains some of the semirural land that once characterised this area but has largely been populated with urban residential development. Significant gentrification is abound.

Best described as middle-class aspirational, Mansfield is an area that many families have chosen because of the lifestyle it offers, excellent access to high-quality health services, good public transport and an abundance of recreational facilities. We are proudly multicultural with almost one-third of all residents in the electorate born overseas. The 20 outstanding schools in the electorate offer residents a great choice of both state and non-state options for their children, and it is often referenced as the reason families move to the area. I note that my electorate is home to Sinai College, the only Jewish school in Queensland. Cultural diversity is well and truly alive in the southern suburbs of this great city and we are all the richer for it.

The concerns, interests and hopes of my constituents are not dissimilar to those experienced in other suburban electorates. The decisions that are made by governments at all levels are felt in communities like mine, and decisions made with care, respect and foresight are what the people of Mansfield ask of those who they select to represent them.

Progress is inevitable, and for the most part it is beneficial for the people of Mansfield, but, of course, there are costs associated with progress and the thoughtful management of change is what makes a difference to people's lives. While new development has brought economic prosperity, my constituents rightly want to ensure sustainable development, livability, the maintenance of green space and that essential infrastructure keeps pace with growth. We eagerly await Cross River Rail, but in the meantime traffic remains an issue of concern for many residents. I sincerely thank the Minister for Transport and Main Roads for his ongoing attention to this issue, which has already resulted in reduced heavy vehicle traffic in the area.

In this country, lamenting the quality of politicians is something of a national pastime. A common criticism over recent years has been that politicians are increasingly out of touch with our general communities, that the political class does not live in the real world and that politicians have never held a real job. Public life is, or should be, a calling, and for some the calling comes earlier than for others.

There can be no doubt, though, that diversity of real-world experience enriches the perspectives of any elected official and helps one to better understand the needs, aspirations, frustrations and fears of the constituency we represent. Real-world experience tells one to tread thoughtfully, to listen, to ask questions in order to critique and to better understand, to resist punitive measures in response to complex matters, to act discerningly, to consider consequences and to appreciate the impact that our decisions will have on real people.

Prior to my election I had devoted my entire working life to education. I began my teaching career with my head full of ideas and my heart full of passion as a health and physical education teacher at Boonah State High School. After gaining experience as a teacher and an adviser on curriculum and education policy, I took on my first school leadership role as head of department at Beaudesert State High School and was subsequently appointed deputy principal. In 2006 I was appointed foundation principal of the newly established Illaween campus of Stretton State College. From there I took on a series of principalships at Wellington Point, Bremer State High School in my home town of Ipswich, Glenala State High School and my most recent position proudly as principal of Cavendish Road State High School.

The Cavendish Road State High School community and I are proud of many achievements, including the introduction of philosophy from years 7 to 12 where students learn how to think critically and creatively, the substantial improvement in student performance and an increased enrolment from 1,250 students to nearly 1,900 students today.

I have served with wonderful people and have been honoured to have my achievements recognised through several formal awards, including admission as a Fellow to the Australian Council for Educational Leaders in 2014, studying abroad as the recipient of a Churchill Fellowship in 2015, and a scholarship to study at Harvard University in 2016. These experiences position me strongly to support the needs of my schools and to respond to the aspirations of my families.

It was my grandparents who first insisted on an education. Education, they said, was insurance for a better standard of living than they endured. Education was not something that my mother, who is in the gallery today, nor my grandparents were afforded. It was simply out of reach for my maternal grandmother, a war widow raising her family of five. On my paternal side, my grandmother was one of nine Irish Catholics who took great pride in rearing her family and my grandfather was an Ipswich railway worker. They both sacrificed all to send their children to local Catholic schools in Ipswich. Equally over

the years I have witnessed the sacrifices that countless parents and grandparents have made not only financially but in time, effort and emotional support to nurture their children's education in our Catholic, state and independent schools alike.

My move from educator to politician has been an interesting one, not least because while teaching is widely held as a noble profession my parents suggest the same may not be true for politics. Yet any experienced teacher or school leader knows too well that the decisions made by politicians are felt at every level of the school and community.

Decisions made by us can be strings to uplift us or strictures to disempower us. Being a teacher is not a preparation for political life because teachers know the value of education. That is something that most people in our community know. Rather, it is a preparation because, through a teacher's eyes, you see all of the factors outside of the school gate that impact upon families that either help or hinder their child from participating fully in education. Public education is the pillar of our democracy. It is the only medium to progress greater equality for all Queenslanders regardless of one's birthplace, nationality, disability, religion, socioeconomic status or gender. It really is the great social equaliser, but only if it can be participated in on an equal basis.

Throughout my life, I have been highly attuned to politics. A working class family like mine feels the impact of political decisions and it certainly feels the difference between ill-conceived changes and thoughtfully crafted reforms. Whitlam's abolition of university fees allowed me to become the first person in my family to complete a tertiary education, twice. Proudly, my two siblings, Larelle and Craig—and Larelle is in the audience today—followed, twice. Keating's compulsory superannuation allowed my father to retire with income security. Hawke's Medicare now provides my family with access to free, world-class health care. The legacies of good governments are felt for generations, and it is a source of pride to me and all members of the Australian Labor Party, some of whom are in the gallery today, that the most significant reforms in our lifetimes have been from Labor governments.

Unfortunately, as a school leader, I was also witness to the unintended consequences of poor decisions made by an ill-informed government. The impact of past government cuts to TAFE's was devastating, not only for those employees but for the current and prospective students in my community who suddenly had their ticket to a better life revoked.

As a principal, the decision to suspend or exclude a student from a state school always weighs heavily because one needs to ensure the safety and good order of the school community whilst also considering the life consequences for the young person facing the disciplinary consequence. When funding was cut from the community programs that had allowed me and my fellow principals—and there are 1,250 of them across Queensland—to ensure that an excluded student, who typically would be a young person with a complex and difficult home life, would have support for their safety, wellbeing and ongoing learning while not at school, that decision could no longer be driven solely by the factors it should.

While parliaments should focus their efforts on areas of their own responsibility, in this era of unprecedented constitutional creep I cannot avoid commenting also on the federal negotiations underway in relation to funding for our schools—Catholic, state and independent. At their best, schools are the beating heart of the community. The benefit of a school's work extends beyond its students to their families and our Queensland towns. When you cut the blood flow to a school, you cut the lifeblood to a community. Despite the rhetoric, educators—and there are many in the audience—know who values education, not from slogans, but from policies, projects and decisions that we see when a Labor government is in office. For the sake of our students and the future economic and social prosperity of this state of Queensland, I urge all members in this House today to fight relentlessly for our schools to receive the funding they need to do what they do best.

Another of the unexpected lessons learnt from a career in school leadership is that politicians are not all bad and that some of them are in fact very fine people. It was during my time as principal of Glenala State High School that I first met the honourable member for Inala, now the Premier of Queensland. From the moment we met, I admired her ability to lead a complex community intelligently and with grace, dignity and integrity. She was of the community and for the community. She saw the good in its people and took every avenue available to her to improve people's lives.

I quickly found that the Premier and I shared two things: an intolerance for prejudice against our community and a crusade against low expectations. Glenala was a school of 400 students from 24 different nationalities—the most prevalent population being Pacific Islander students, followed by Australian Aboriginals and Vietnamese. Glenala students were drawn from the lowest socioeconomic indicator and quartile, and many students were living in postcodes that are identified as some of the most disadvantaged in our country. Abhorrently, in January 2011, soon after I started my principalship, the popular press chose to single out Glenala as the fifth worst attending school in Queensland and, sadly, in 2012 it was flagged for potential closure.

Few of former president George W Bush's lines are memorable for the right reasons, but a notable exception was his statement about 'the soft bigotry of low expectations'. When I worked with universities to provide tertiary experience programs for students from my feeder schools, I had a nine-year-old girl sadly repeat the advice that she had been given: 'University isn't for people like us.' Low expectations allow people in positions of power and privilege to be comfortable with keeping children, families and communities in poverty. High expectations set the challenges that nurture hope and inspire confidence. High expectations force people to rise up and deliver. It is hard to turn a ship against this current of low expectations, but it can be done when a leader genuinely believes in the children, their families and the community they serve.

By the end of 2012, the then Prime Minister of Australia recognised Glenala as one of the most improved schools in the country as measured by student achievement. It is now a bustling and thriving school of more than 820 students, a community of immense pride and hope, one that I continue to be proud of. School leadership is a challenge and the wins are sweet fruit, because when you are deeply invested in a school you become part of the fabric of that community.

Some moments in life irrevocably change a person. I have to say the morning of 24 August 2011, when I was awoken by a phone call at 4 am to say that three of my students could possibly have been killed in a house fire at Logan, was a moment that changed my life. Glenala State High School deeply grieved the loss of those three beautiful children from our community, and our hearts were heavy with sadness for their family who lost 11 members.

Leading a school and a community through an indescribably tragic event was the hardest thing I have ever done. I was embraced and supported at every step of the way by the two local members who I am now proud to call my parliamentary colleagues—the member for Inala, the Hon. Annastacia Palaszczuk, who has just entered the chamber, and the federal member for Oxley, Milton Dick. I will never forget what they both did at that time, quietly and respectfully, to support me and lead with me the extended community through a time of unimaginable sadness, and I thank them.

There are others to whom I owe special thanks. To my campaign management team, who are in the gallery, Ian Lang, Tricia Ryan, Richard Cleal, Shane Warren, Adam Obeid, Paul Childs and Bisma Asif, thank you for being great strategists and true believers. We were all grateful for the intelligent and considered leadership of my campaign director, Sarah Mawhinney, now the assistant state secretary of Queensland Labor and one of two women who now lead our great state Labor team.

Mr SPEAKER: Member for Mansfield, your time has expired and I have allowed some additional courtesies of time. Would you like to move that, subject to my approval, the remainder of your speech be entered into *Hansard*?

Ms McMILLAN: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I would like to move that the remainder be heard. There are only a couple more paragraphs.

Mr SPEAKER: Member, I am unable to give you a lot more time. It is almost two minutes over.


Ms McMILLAN: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to have the remainder of my speech incorporated in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

The remainder of the speech was not incorporated.

ADJOURNMENT

Member for Mansfield, First Speech

 **Ms McMILLAN** (Mansfield—ALP) (6.04 pm): I would like to thank a range of people. I thank Ian, Victoria and Ben, who ensure the smooth operations of my office and for their tireless commitment to the people of Mansfield. I thank the tenacious and hardworking members of the Mansfield branch and for their commitment to the great Labor cause. I acknowledge previous members representing the seat of Mansfield. Phil Reeves served the people of Mansfield for 14 years. I also would like to recognise and acknowledge more recently Ian Walker. I thank him for his contribution.

I thank the broader education community for placing its faith in me and for recognising my capabilities before I saw them myself. Our Queensland schools' deliberate and precise performance agenda and the leadership of education in Queensland is as strong as it has ever been. To the hundreds

of teachers and school staff who supported my campaign and to the 45,000 teachers and thousands of non-teaching staff across Queensland schools, I say to them that I understand what they do, I value what they do and I will always support them. To my wonderful colleagues and thousands of students over the years, I say to them that their support was a gift that allowed me to achieve more than I could ever have imagined. Now, I want to do the same for them.

To the mighty Queensland Teachers' Union, of which some members are in the gallery today, which over 23 years has been my voice and the voice of my colleagues, I thank it for supporting my leadership of more than six school communities and its continued support today.

Finally, I thank my family for bestowing on me the values and beliefs that have guided me through life. The constant love, support and understanding of my family and closest friends has been my greatest companion in my life as a school leader as I know it will continue to be as a busy politician.

I come to this role with a deep respect for the parliament of Queensland and the democratic function it serves. I take seriously my responsibility as a member of this House, both in representing the needs of the people of Mansfield and contributing thoughtfully to the deliberations that will shape a legacy of which this 56th Parliament can be proud.

All of us aspire to leave the world a better place than we found it. Doing so takes will and courage. It also takes capability and opportunity. I thank the people of Mansfield for their faith in me and for this opportunity. Like their child's teacher, and their child's school principal, I will not disappoint them.