



Speech by

Ms Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

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WORKERS' COMPENSATION AND REHABILITATION AND OTHER ACTS AMENDMENT BILL

Ms GRACE (Brisbane Central—ALP) (4.03 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation and Other Acts Amendment Bill 2007, which maintains the balance in the workers compensation scheme between employer costs, the lowest average premium rate in the country and worker benefits, and I am thrilled to be supporting a bill that provides much-needed increased benefits for injured workers and their families. I am also very pleased, humbled and honoured today to rise to deliver my first parliamentary speech, forever grateful to the voters of Brisbane Central for giving me the opportunity to represent them as a member of state parliament. It is with a deep sense of pride and responsibility that I accept the challenge to serve the people of my electorate to the utmost of my ability and to address their needs and concerns.

I acknowledge the traditional owners and express my very deep desire that full reconciliation is one day achieved with Indigenous Australians where we can all live in harmony free of any form of discrimination and treated as true equals.

At the outset I believe it important to pay tribute to the former member for Brisbane Central and Premier, Peter Beattie, who is obviously well known in this House. There is no doubt that I have big shoes to fill as the new member for Brisbane Central. Peter Beattie was an outstanding member for the area and a great Premier. Although I cannot list here today all of his many achievements, what stands out most for me during his term in state parliament is that he has taken Brisbane and Queensland into the new millennium and has made this great state the envy of other state governments. Brisbane has truly come of age—a thriving, vibrant and cosmopolitan city right up there with the very best Australia has to offer, and I am proud that much of Brisbane city is in my electorate. I have known both Peter and Heather Beattie for many years and on behalf of the electorate warmly thank them both for their hard work and commitment in representing the residents of Brisbane Central. I wish all of the Beattie clan the very best in the future.

It would be remiss of me not to mention how excited and proud I am not only of being elected to the Queensland parliament but also being part of the Bligh Labor government and serving with Queensland's first female Premier, Anna Bligh. Becoming the first female Queensland Premier is indeed a great achievement. I put on record my congratulations and clearly state how much I am looking forward to working with all of my parliamentary colleagues during my term. I am also very excited at being part of the ever-growing number of ALP female members of parliament, which is a great achievement for the women of the ALP and Queensland.

By-elections are very interesting indeed. They have been known to produce a number of mixed results ranging from resounding wins for governments to devastating losses. But clearly one message is clear: they cannot be taken for granted, even when your opponents do not run a candidate. This is the message my hardworking campaign team and I took into the by-election held on 13 October 2007 and together we worked the seat of Brisbane Central as a marginal—not taking one vote for granted and working hard for victory, always mindful that large swings and protest votes may add up to an easy defeat with voters sending a clear message to the government. I was delighted on the night to have won the seat

of Brisbane Central whilst maintaining Labor's primary percentage vote. But, more importantly, I believe this win represented a ringing endorsement of Premier Anna Bligh's leadership and government. In addition, it also demonstrated that playing the union official card, which was often used heavily during the campaign, does not pay off. But more on that later.

There are many hard workers who I must thank and who did more than their share during the campaign. But firstly, it would be unforgivable of me if I did not make special mention of the support that I received and continue to receive from my husband, Michael, and daughter, Alexandra. I have been truly blessed. Many members in this House already know that it is often family members who suffer from us being in public life and appreciate the sacrifices that they have to make. Alex celebrated her 13th birthday during the by-election campaign at a Politics in the Pub event with no complaints and full of support for her mother. My husband, Michael, worked tirelessly during the three weeks of the campaign, and without his unconditional support throughout my career it would not have been possible for me to be here today. I express my deep love and appreciation to both Michael and Alex. I could not do it without you both.

In addition, I wish to sincerely thank those workers who assisted me during the campaign. In particular, special thanks to Paul Crowther, who is in the gallery, my campaign manager who worked nonstop and whose company I greatly enjoyed. Not only did we work hard, but we also had fun. I am forever grateful for the almost full-time help from Claire Atkinson, Don Secomb, Julian Kotiw, Peter Sherman and Angela Bell as well as all of the hardworking branch members who turned out not only on polling day but at the various booths conducted during the campaign. I could not have done without their dedication to the task at hand and they have all contributed to the successful outcome for Labor. I look forward to working with all of you during my term as your state member.

I must also thank very much Milton Dick, Chris Forrester, Jenny and all at the ALP head office who assisted during the campaign with the development of materials and did all that was necessary to secure a good result. No job was too great or too small. I also warmly thank my ex-staff at the Queensland Council of Unions for their help on election day and thank all who contributed to the campaign, including unions, friends and supporters. Their kind donations were greatly appreciated. A warm thankyou is also extended to my fellow MPs who took the time out to assist during the campaign and for their good wishes, support and general sound advice.

It would be inexcusable of me not to also make special mention of my parents, Salvatore and Concetta Farfaglia, my five sisters and all my immediate family, whose support knows no boundaries. Team Grace, as they were often referred to, did an outstanding job working on booths and in the office and running around on polling day. Many thanks to my sisters, Maria Giufre, Silvana Varricchio, Luisa McKay, Mirella Torrisi and Rosana Farfaglia, all of whom worked equally hard and whose support I deeply cherish. Special thanks also to all my nieces and nephews, Daniella, Giselle, Sophia, Mark, Ben, Stephanie, Isabella, Matthew, Madeline, Izac and Zander, who helped in their unique ways and whose excitement rubbed off on everyone. I must also mention my brothers-in-law, Tony, Maurice, Patrick and Leo, for their help, good wishes and support.

It is also particularly pleasing to have my father-in-law, John Grace, in the public gallery. He arrived last night from Hobart, Tasmania to be present for my swearing in and my first speech. I am deeply touched that he has taken the time to travel on this occasion and I thank him for his loyal support and wisdom. I also know that if my mother-in-law, Barbara Grace, were alive today she would also have been here offering guidance, support and good, sound advice.

My parents, Sam and Connie Farfaglia, arrived in Australia from Sicily, Italy in the early 1950s. My father came first and my mum followed a couple of years later. Together, and with the support of their immediate family, they worked tirelessly to raise their family and find a better life for themselves and their six daughters. They make no secret of the fact that they tried six times for a boy, in the true Italian tradition, with no success. Dad went cane cutting in north Queensland to afford the fare for my mother's arrival and then worked in various jobs, including at the Golden Circle cannery with my mother, and also at a tannery where he was the victim of a severe industrial accident that rendered him unable to work again. He was incapacitated in the prime of his life, but thank goodness he is well in retirement and, together with my mother's hard work, his family did not suffer and they have done extremely well. My mother is probably one of the most intelligent women I have ever known, and I often wonder what heights she may have been able to reach in her life if she had been awarded the same opportunities as I was. I know that my parents are proud on this day, and I thank them for instilling in me the benefits of true family values.

It is this background that I believe attracted me to my career in the union movement and my passion for occupational health and safety and workers compensation. I think my father's experience shaped my desire to fight for, improve and ensure safety in the workplace with fair injury compensation. I stand here today as a proud member of parliament, but I am equally proud of being a union official and being elected on 8 October 2000 as the first woman general secretary in the QCU's 120-year history. I feel privileged and honoured to have headed the union movement in Queensland for the last seven years and I thank my union colleagues for their support and the opportunity to work hard to represent Queensland workers and their families. Consequently, no-one would therefore be surprised at my total distaste for the vendetta

currently being waged against union officials during this federal election campaign. This new millennium 'reds under the bed' scare campaign being promoted by the Howard government, where union officials are being demonised and vilified for no reason other than their position, is a tactic of gutter politics that I think will backfire, just as it did during my by-election campaign.

I was also saddened and annoyed to see in the media recently a similar scare campaign raised in this House. I mean, can anyone from the coalition utter a sentence these days without saying the words 'union boss'? As I stated earlier, the attempted 'union official' slur was used during my by-election campaign many times. The terms 'union hack' and 'union boss' were often used in the media. I thought this country prided itself on the law of freedom to join a union, but not so for those on the other side of the House as it may be used against you. However, if this is the best that politicians and candidates can offer during an election campaign, then they deserve to lose. Voters in Australia want to hear about good policies, visions for the future and how they will be delivered, not some discriminatory scare campaign directed at union officials whose only crime is to fight for and defend workers' rights and entitlements. I have fought all my life against discrimination as I believe it unfair to generalise against anyone due to race, colour, creed, occupation or gender. How do the members of this House feel when politicians are tarred with the same brush due to the actions of a few? Most resent it and claim it to be unfair. I hope this current scare campaign is viewed by the voters of Australia as nothing more than a yawn, and I look forward to a Rudd Labor victory on 24 November to prove my point.

I believe that fundamentally the union movement is built on three pillars: there will always be conflict between capital and labour; there is an imbalance of power between employer and employee; and collectivism balances that power. This is why cartels are formed, employers associate and workers unite. Yet no such demonisation is being vented against officials of employer unions, such as the AIG, ACCI and MBA—only against unions of workers. Their hypocrisy is breathtaking: eager to have employer union groups advertise to support WorkChoices but vilifying workers' unions for fighting against laws that have stripped away their hard-fought rights and entitlements. Who defended those workers affected by the James Hardie tactics? Ask Bernie Banton. The Ansett collapse? When the Borbidge government wanted to remove journey claims from the Queensland workers compensation system? And who introduced the most successful policy of compulsory superannuation for all workers in this country? In every case it was the union movement.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the QCU's executive and senior officers: President John Battams, vice-presidents Gay Hawkesworth and Dick Williams, Treasurer Ron Monaghan, vice-presidents Andrew Dettmer, Michael Ravbar, Alex Scott and Owen Doogan, and Assistant Secretary Chris Barrett. They are all good friends and comrades and I thank them for their loyal support and inspiration. They have played an important mentoring role throughout my career. In particular, I also wish to thank sincerely all the QCU staff. A better group of workers you will not find and I will miss them all greatly. Thanks for coming today. These officials and staff are all hardworking, committed and dedicated, sharing a passion for justice, equality and defending the rights of working men and women. Together, the Queensland and Australian union movement have run an outstanding campaign against Howard's extreme industrial laws, and I think we are hearing the swansong that governments often sing when they make unfair industrial laws to the detriment of workers and their families.

I have been fortunate to have gained great experience and many skills during my 27 years working in the union movement and I am eager to use this knowledge for the betterment of the constituents of Brisbane Central. I learned a great deal whilst serving on many boards, namely Sunsuper, where I was chair for two years in 2005 and 2006, and until recently I was chair of the investment committee. Sunsuper is a true Queensland success story, with over \$13 billion in funds under management. It is one of Australia's fastest growing and largest superannuation funds. I also gained much experience on the Energex board, and I thank the current acting chair, John Dempsey, for his friendship and guidance. I was also on the Southbank board, where I had the opportunity to work with Chair Steve Wilson and directors Steve Ackerie and Eleanor Davidson, who have become good friends and colleagues. I thoroughly enjoyed working with my very dear friend Sarina Russo, the chair of the Jupiters Casino Community Benefit Fund, and my other fellow directors where we had the pleasure of distributing much-needed funds to the community. So much for union officials being anti business.

On a personal note, I was born and have lived all my life in the Brisbane Central electorate, growing up in Spring Hill in the 1960s, which was not the Spring Hill of today, and then moving to New Farm in the early 1970s where I have lived ever since. Michael and I decided to remain in New Farm when we married 22 years ago. I am a local through and through and love living in the Brisbane inner city, where I have witnessed many changes over the years. I believe these changes have greatly enhanced the inner city into a place where people can work, live, shop and play, with many inner-city suburbs such as Spring Hill, New Farm, Wilston and Kelvin Grove morphing into very desirable places to live. However, with any change that involves great gentrification of suburbs there are those who suffer due mainly to the loss of low-cost housing and affordable accommodation.

Recently, I was very pleased to attend the opening of Tom Burns Place in the Kelvin Grove Urban Village, which provides much-needed public housing through the Brisbane Housing Company initiative.

The Kelvin Grove Urban Village is a master-planned community that endeavours to demonstrate best practice in sustainable, mixed-use urban development and includes the educational facilities of QUT. The vision is one that I wholeheartedly endorse and I look forward very much to working with the community and business in the area to deliver the master plan and vision. I have already attended meetings at the Community Hub where I have witnessed firsthand the enthusiasm of all those involved in this community development, which has been greatly assisted by the Queensland government. Similar initiatives for the inner city would also be welcomed and I look forward to working with Minister Schwarten to deliver these outcomes, which I know he is also passionate about.

There are many other red-hot issues such as water, health, education, climate change and infrastructure that concern the people of Brisbane Central and they endorse strong leadership and good government to deliver real outcomes in addressing these concerns. I firmly believe that on this side of the House we have the team and policies to deliver on these red-hot issues and I have no doubt that the opportunity will not be squandered. On the issue of climate change, I firmly believe that only Labor governments will deliver a solution as one does not have to scratch very deep to find the sceptics on the other side of the House.

I am eager to work with all the relevant ministers to deliver on my vision for Brisbane Central, which includes an improved quality of life for inner-city dwellers by delivering on road and traffic management plans, law and order, water and other infrastructure, improved health and education. I would also like to see an increase in green open space in the inner city, together with improved pathways for pedestrians and cyclists which will make it easier to get around in a pleasant and safe manner without the need for the motor car.

I applaud the rejuvenation of the Fortitude Valley area into a vibrant cosmopolitan entertainment precinct that, of course, includes Chinatown where some of Brisbane's best Chinese restaurants can be found. I have already met with many business representatives in this area who are very enthusiastic about their plans and passionate about wanting to offer a professional and safe experience for all their patrons, young and old alike.

Inner-city living does have its unique issues, mainly involving harmonising the interests of those who want to live and those who want to play in the same area. I am pleased to report that the police force working in the area does an excellent job in balancing all the interests and is taking a proactive approach to law and order in consultation with business and the community to ensure that Brisbane city can be enjoyed by all. This is by no means an easy job but one that must be done. I look forward to working with Minister Spence and the men and women of the police force to address problems in a proactive, professional and efficient manner.

I also have a passion for the arts and I look forward to working with the creative industries and artists in my local area, assisting them wherever possible. I must confess that the Powerhouse is one of my favourite Brisbane buildings. It was fantastic to witness this once-derelict building being transformed into a modern arts precinct.

One of my favourite quotes is by Martin Luther King Jnr, the American civil rights leader, who said, 'Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.' I certainly do not intend to become silent about the issues that matter for the electors of Brisbane Central and I look forward to making a contribution in this House on many occasions. Brisbane is a great place to live thanks to the efforts of this Labor government. I intend to continue this good work and commit to working hard to ensure that Brisbane, Queensland is the place to be with a lifestyle that matches our beautiful environment and surroundings, but to do it in the Labor tradition, building a fair and just society for all Queenslanders.

I conclude by once again thanking the voters of Brisbane Central for putting their trust in me and supporting me. I will not let them down. I cannot thank all my family enough for their love and support. It is an honour to be here today because of the efforts of so many. A special thankyou goes to all of my friends and colleagues for their good wishes and congratulatory letters and cards. I am determined to live up to this honour and work hard for all the residents of Brisbane, Queensland now and into the future.