



Speech By **Jonty Bush**

MEMBER FOR COOPER

Record of Proceedings, 26 November 2020

INAUGURAL SPEECH

Ms BUSH (Cooper—ALP) (2.17 pm): Mr Speaker, I add my congratulations to you on your re-election and reappointment to the role. I recognise the privilege that comes with the role of being a parliamentarian and stand here today with pride and gratitude to the people of Cooper who have placed their confidence in me. I also stand here with great wonder. This is an incredible place. It is an institution complete with tradition, heritage and ceremony. It is also a marvellous container for change; a space for ideas to be brought forward, contested and ultimately sanctioned—or not—to change the way we live here in Queensland.

One has only to look at what our Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, has been able to achieve being the first female leader in Australia to win three elections in her own right. I am proud to join her government as we navigate Queensland through its health and economic recovery over the next term. Importantly, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, who are also the traditional owners from my electorate of Cooper, the Jagera and Turrbal people. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging and to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples present today.

I acknowledge my parliamentary colleagues from across all political parties and persuasions. Undoubtedly we have had different journeys to be here. Perhaps we have different values and beliefs, but I would hope we all are here with a shared focus of making Queensland a better, fairer and safer place. I look forward to contributing my unique perspectives, lived experience and the voices of my electorate to ensure that we continue to make the changes that Queenslanders want for our shared future.

The people of Cooper and before then Ashgrove have, for the most part, had strong representation from political leaders, two of whom have played an integral role in enabling me to represent the electorate for the next four years. Jim Fouras was the member for Ashgrove from 1989 to 2006. Jim was an essential part of my campaign. At 83 he is tireless and if you met him you would know that. He came out daily to stand beside me during pre-poll and sang my praises to anyone who stood still.

This parliament will remember with great fondness Kate Jones. Kate was first elected to parliament in 2006. Kate has left such an extraordinary legacy to our electorate. When people talk about Kate, they speak of her deep love of and commitment to the community. This is a legacy I aim to continue. On a personal level, I would not be here without her. I would like to thank her for giving me the confidence to run and for being a constant source of strength and advice. Every new candidate should have someone like Kate Jones in their corner.

As someone who has held quite public and nonpartisan roles before entering parliament, I was often asked during the campaign why I joined the Labor Party. For me, the answer is simple: because Labor, at its very core, is about fairness. I have an unquenchable thirst for justice. I believe that society

is only advanced when those who are our most vulnerable enjoy the same privileges as everyone else. I have spent my entire life at the coalface of community and I believe wholeheartedly in the words of Martin Luther King: ‘Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.’

Like many, I come from humble beginnings. I was born and grew up in Austins Ferry, an outer suburb of Hobart, in the late seventies. My mum worked as a secretary for a retailer when she fell pregnant with me, her first child, in her 20s. In that era, Mum had no option but to resign prior to my birth. There was no maternity leave and no flexible working practices, you certainly could not breastfeed at work and, even if you could return to work, there were no childcare options. Going back to work as a new parent was simply not a choice for the primary carer, at that time mainly women. Accordingly, my mum spent the next 15 years juggling both parenting and numerous part-time jobs. She worked hard in retail and administration as well as fruit picking and aged care, often long hours with challenging conditions, scraping through with just enough money to pay the bills.

My experience of pregnancy 34 years later was far more fair and dignified. Working in the Public Service, I had the opportunity to take paid parental leave and returned to my job, a role with value and meaning, at the same classification on a part-time basis, enabling me to fulfil both roles—being a mum and maintaining the career I had fought hard for. I would not be standing here now without those working conditions. Whenever someone challenges me on the relevance of unions, I use this as one example. Paid parental leave is something many take for granted, but it and numerous workplace entitlements only exist through the continued and tireless advocacy of our unions.

My dad was a tradie—a painter. My earliest memories are of him dripping with paint and the smell of turpentine. He wore overalls that were so worn and caked with paint that we joked they would be able to stand up on their own. He, like my mum, graduated from school in year 10. The opportunity to go further simply was not there for working-class children at that time. Despite this, or perhaps because of this, he was determined that I would get a good education. When I wanted to pull out of school in grade 10, 11 and 12, he said, ‘Just give it another year.’ I stand before you now, a lifelong learner with a master’s degree—proof of what persistent encouragement and sound education policy can achieve. My father survived on a diet of apples and cigarettes. He was quiet, a deep thinker and a gentle man who forgave easily. To paraphrase Mark Twain, my father never told me how to be a good person; he showed me. He was a man of integrity who stood up for what was right, no matter the opposition. His quiet and steady influence made me the person I am today.

I have spoken now to a number of members about their motivation to enter the halls of parliament. While we all have different stories, consistently there is a message of being called to service—a drive, you might call it, to stand up for our local communities and to leave this world a better place than we found it. I, too, share that passion. My personal background and drive to be here has been well documented and does not need to be detailed again here today, but I do want to speak briefly about some of the challenging moments in my life and how they shaped me and prepared me for the next chapter.

Some 20 years ago my sister and father were murdered. Their deaths came five months apart—different offenders—and both would be categorised as incidents of domestic and family violence. There was no warning, no storm clouds or crash of lightning. The conditions on the days they died were otherwise benign, but life since has been anything but. While most people view homicide through the lens of a news camera at six o’clock in the evening, more than 400 families a year nationwide experience the absolute tragedy of losing a loved one through violence, often at the hands of someone they know, particularly for women and girls.

The deaths of my sister, Jacinta, and Dad were life altering. I changed careers and focused on supporting victims, offenders and their families as they navigated the criminal justice system. I have since worked with thousands of families that have experienced trauma and loss through a range of social challenges throughout Queensland. I have been fortunate to work in both the not-for-profit sector and the Public Service for more than 17 years, giving these Queenslanders a voice.

Something I know is that a person’s experience of social justice is not just about the outcome they end up with from a department or an agency; it is also about how they were treated throughout that process. No matter what our backgrounds and life experiences, the minute we in this room walk through these doors and take our seats on the green leather, we have power. I undertake to use this power to consider not only what we can do for people but also how we will do it, because the ‘how’ really matters.

A lot has changed in Queensland in the 17 years I have been working within the criminal justice system. Successive Labor governments have passed legislation enshrining victims’ rights. Victims can and should expect to be believed when they report to police. They have the right to be treated with dignity and to be given information about their case. It sounds simple, but it was not always this way.

In the domestic and family violence space we have seen great reform. In response to the landmark report of the Special Taskforce on Domestic and Family Violence, a 10-year reform program to eliminate domestic and family violence in Queensland is underway with initiatives like GPS monitoring for people using violence, specialist domestic and family violence courts and, as recently as this week, committing to legislating against coercive control as a form of domestic violence.

Ultimately, however, the greatest way to support victims of crime is to do everything in our power to stop crime from occurring in the first place. Throughout my working life, I have advocated for evidence based policy and for investing in early intervention with those individuals, families and environments we know are at great risk. The fence at the top of the cliff is far greater than the ambulance at the bottom. I hope to use my position here to continue to improve our criminal justice system to save lives and spare other families the experiences that I and others have endured.

I have spoken about my story and what has driven me personally to want to play a greater role in policy development and shaping the Queensland of the future, but I understand that we are a representative democracy and, first and foremost, my responsibility in this House is to the people who elected me, the people of Cooper. My community cares deeply about education and environmental policy. They want to ensure that our suburbs continue to be a great place to live, work and raise a family.

In the electorate of Cooper we have more than 20 incredible public, Catholic and independent schools. Each punches well above its weight when it comes to delivering outcomes for students. I am a proud product of the state education system and a firm believer that a world-class education should be accessible to everyone, not just those who can afford it and not just those who can access it. World-class education is not just about what happens within the classroom; it is also about ensuring our children and young people are supported to learn. Throughout my career I have worked with young people who sadly do not feel welcome in mainstream schooling. Perhaps their family cannot afford the uniform or they are exhausted from living in a home with violence and cannot concentrate. It may be because they feel the shame of falling behind. While I am proud of the election commitments we have made to invest in additional infrastructure and classroom upgrades for schools in my electorate, what really excites me is the opportunity to work with our school communities to identify and address any barriers so that all of our local children have the opportunity to reach their potential at school.

Mr Speaker, it would interest you to know that about half of the kilometric footprint of the Cooper electorate is declared national park. In fact, it was my predecessor, Kate Jones, who declared the D'Aguilar National Park in 2009. As I doorknocked the electorate it was clear that the protection and safeguarding of our places of ecological significance, including the D'Aguilar National Park, were of critical importance to locals. I love that the Palaszczuk Labor government has a 10-year plan to expand and protect national parks, to preserve our native wildlife and vegetation.

Protecting the environment has always been a priority for Labor, especially this government which has already introduced a number of bold reforms banning the sale of single-use plastic bags and straws, establishing the wildly successful container refund scheme and setting a 50 per cent renewables target by 2030. I am extremely heartened by the way these initiatives have been embraced in my community. That is not to say this is mission accomplished. There is still more to be done. I give my commitment that I will continue to advocate for stronger environmental protections.

When I reflect on where we were this time last year—2019—how blissfully unaware were we of the year we were about to have. As we come through this period, I turn my mind to the learnings and opportunities. One of those is that we as a society have really embraced new ways of working. With so many of us working from home during the peak of COVID-19, we all benefited from a reduction in travel times to work. We walked our dogs, picked our children up from school, mastered technology—some of us mastered it more than others—and still managed to hit our corporate KPIs. We demonstrated just how possible it is to work differently.

Additionally, this year has shown what we can achieve when we focus our efforts, expertise and funding towards the wicked problems of the world. We all have a big task ahead of us to lead the state through its economic recovery. I challenge us all to consider our concepts of recovery. Recovery is so much greater than bouncing back to the way things were before. It is about capturing those learnings and deliberately designing them into any future recovery plan.

A little known fact about me is that I am ceramicist. I am pretty amateur, but let us not label it. One technique in ceramics is that of kintsugi which is the reparation of broken ceramic bowls, vases and cups. It is a Japanese tradition that rather than concealing the cracks in broken pieces they use gold lacquer to emphasise the broken parts. It is a philosophy that I think is applicable to many situations, including this moment in time and how we manage the aftershocks of COVID-19. My hope is that, rather than seeing recovery as a method to just stick things back the way they were before, we

choose to closely examine and understand the parts that were broken and emphasise how we will do things differently and that we choose to reconceptualise how we see ourselves and our society in a way which is more inclusive, wise and courageous.

I have so many people to thank. First and foremost, the people of Cooper for putting your trust in me. It is a responsibility I do take seriously. I will work hard every day to repay it. Secondly, my campaign team—Kate Jones, Hamish Greenop-Roberts, Jake Araullo, Greg Moran and Evan Schwarten—who kept me sane and smiling. I thank the many volunteers who came out for me during the campaign. We have seven active Labor branches throughout Cooper. Each one is different, but they are all flanked with people who care about democracy and human rights and who choose to invest their time, ideas and energy into the Labor movement. Thank you particularly to the Ashgrove branch who really drove our campaign, Terry Evans and Arch Bevis particularly. To Dennis Williams, Clare Webster, Paula Ridler, Bob Hill, Linda Christenson, Christopher Allen, Pema Bastin, Ella Craig and Tyler Rolls, your loyalty and friendship has meant the world to me during this—thank you.

I acknowledge and thank my union—the United Workers Union—Garry Bullock, and the many young men and women who advocate for the rights of workers and particularly our vulnerable workers, those who are in casual work and those in precarious employment. Our unions exemplify the work of standing up for the voiceless. I would like to thank John Battams, the party's president, and Jules Campbell, our state secretary, for their support.

Finally, thank you to my friends, former colleagues and family who have supported me. I am blessed to have a number of loyal and loving people in my life who are guaranteed to keep me grounded throughout the next four years. This includes my brother, Jason; my niece, Lydia; my mum, Marlene; and Will Hansen who have loved and supported me. I am also blessed to have had my partner, Matt, and his daughters, Grace, Annie and Ella, who have become our daughters, in my life for the past 10 years and, of course, our biological daughter, Albie, who tells me every day that I am the best mumma in the world. My intention is that after the next four years she will still be saying that.

A final acknowledgement goes to the people I have loved and lost along the way, and who I know would have given the world to be here: my father, Robert; my sister, Jacinta; my stepmother, Barb Hansen; and my two nannas, Junie and Bev. Sometimes in life's quiet moments I can feel you all tugging me towards a certain direction. My being here is a result of that intervention. I firmly believe that.

I appreciate in this role I will be judged for what I do and what I do not, and I hope that never stops, because the alternative would be so much worse. The alternative would mean we have stopped believing that one person can in fact change the world. I stand before you as one person who will do everything in my power to live up to that promise.