



Speech By
Kendall Morton

MEMBER FOR CALOUNDRA

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms MORTON** (Caloundra—LNP) (2.09 pm): Good afternoon, Mr Deputy Speaker and my new colleagues in the chamber. With humility, I rise today for my first speech in the chamber as the newly elected member for Caloundra. In this speech I wish to place on the record my journey to getting here and my values and passions, and thank those who have helped me get here.

My path to this position starts in a small town in north-west Tasmania. One of my greatest influences was my Pa. A career Army man and Vietnam vet, he taught me a love of learning, particularly English and mathematics. I am pretty sure I was one of the only six-year-olds running around quoting mathematical formulas, simply because he made me learn them and love them. He also taught me that there are no degrees of honesty and that mistakes are a part of life, and he instilled in me a work ethic based on values. I learned from him that if something is not right you must say something, otherwise things never get better. He was very definite that his granddaughter should get an education, and when I became a teacher—the first in my family to attend university—he said it was the greatest day of his life.

Along with my Pa, my family taught me a great love of reading, learning and maths. We always read. At one point I had read every book in the primary school library. It probably does not take much to figure out that back then I was a very shy kid. Shy or not, it was in that library that I discovered there was a world out there that was big and that big goals were achievable. I had amazing teachers and I loved to learn, to understand and to see how things could be done better. It is not a straight road from East Ulverstone Primary School to representing Caloundra in the Queensland parliament, but in hindsight the reading, the numbers, the thought, the yearning and the drive were all bricks along that path.

After moving to Queensland and a career in teaching, I started my home care business in 2016, with four kids under seven. I was absolutely devoted to creating a space that provided a better service to clients than they had ever experienced before. I loved my time in business and absolutely see a direct correlation between doing what you love, fulfilment and overall happiness. Working with people who are elderly also shows you what the concept of a lifetime really means, and it is extraordinary to work with people who have lived so much before you.

My life experiences are varied, and I feel this helps me to serve my community. I have experience with children, business, volunteering, sporting clubs, P&Cs, marriage breakdowns, teaching, nursing, accounting, eating disorders, dementia and addiction. I have experience working as a casual, a part-timer and a full-timer and being self-employed, from working in retail, to a primary school teacher, to an accountant and to a business owner. As I said, it was not a straight road. There have been plenty of ups and downs and bright and dark scenery along the way, but these are the experiences that have enriched my life, diversified my views and connected me to so many different people.

You can probably tell from this story that I hold a few personal values closely: honesty, because things cannot get fixed if we avoid them—avoiding hard truths simply moves the problem down the path; and loyalty, once earned, is an honourable trait. It goes hand in hand with honesty—a respectful relationship with those closest to you where you do not run at the first sight of trouble but roll up your sleeves and get involved. Together these amount to integrity—something that is tested in all professions but, I am sure, in few more than the one I have just entered. I believe that without integrity you do not have much else. The trust that others place in you can only stand on the bedrock of integrity.

I also believe deeply in reward for effort. I joined the Liberal National Party over seven years ago because this core value aligned with the values of the party. I believe wholeheartedly in reward for effort and that the choice of the individual is sacred. I believe in a reduction of government intervention and an outcome focused and solution driven. All of these values I put in my first speech because I want them to resonate through every speech and action of mine in this House.

Given my background, there are specific issues I am passionate about that will be discussed and debated in this place. As a former teacher and a mother of young people, education is very close to my heart. As a small business owner who grew a business from scratch, I am passionate about government getting out of the way of small business. And of course, above everything else, I love Caloundra, its people and the vision that we have put forward for its future.

I led this speech with my love of education, how it shaped me and how I started my career there. I have so much respect for our teachers and schools who are doing an exceptional job in often trying circumstances. What I have witnessed even as a parent are teachers who have far too much of their time robbed through data entry, administration, reporting, behaviour management and risk assessment. If people are able to do their jobs with more flexibility, I believe we will have better outcomes for what I consider to be the most crucial policy area of all. In recent weeks I have visited our three state high schools in Caloundra—Beerwah, Baringa and Caloundra—and I pledge here today to do whatever I can to support them. The future of Queensland is in our schools. Children need a balanced education, focusing on the basics and moving to all of the things that will make kids contributors to our economy and to society.

When I moved to Caloundra almost 20 years ago, I experienced the greatest town on earth that opened up its arms and said, 'Please live here and you can have every opportunity you've ever dreamed of.' When I started my home care business in Caloundra, I had the chance to serve some of the most vulnerable people in our society. As a result, I grew more and more connected to this community. It was a great honour.

In my business our team grew to 140, and I have worked with some of the most incredible businesspeople in Caloundra as well. Many of us had the same things to say: that government intervention and regulation was making it impossible to do business in this country and it was stifling innovation and creativity, meaning the employee lost, the employer lost and ultimately the consumer lost. I witnessed the gap between reality and policy get wider and wider, and it would not be my maiden speech without giving testament to the brilliant businesses we have in Caloundra that often do not ask government for anything other than to stop making it harder. I would like to acknowledge Jen and Nic from Saltwater Medical as business owners in our community who took the incredibly brave step during the campaign of speaking out against things that had a direct impact on the way services are delivered. I thank them for doing that.

I am so grateful to be standing here today to represent the people of Caloundra. Forty years ago it was a beachside town with a small population. It was beautiful and the source of many memories for people all over Queensland who had holidayed there over many years with their families often as a tradition. There is something so magical about Caloundra that people started to move there, and move there they did. The population increased at a rapid rate, and over the past 10 years it has grown to over 100,000 people. As a result we have an electorate made up of people from all over the country and the world.

The thing that makes Caloundra different to other parts of this state and makes it so uniquely special is that the second you move to Caloundra you instantly become a local. Caloundra will welcome you and provide you with opportunities. The people of Caloundra are special and fiercely protective of where we live. We are the home of community groups, social groups, sporting groups and people who are devoted to making Caloundra the greatest place to work, live and play. Unfortunately, Caloundra has always been treated like an afterthought by all levels of government. When the population grows so rapidly, it is crucial that there are services and infrastructure in place to match that population growth. Instead, we have been neglected and we have watched our livability suffer as a result. But with the greatest opportunity I have ever been given, and being given that opportunity by the people of Caloundra, I can assure them that I will ensure Caloundra does not miss out any longer. It is our turn.

During the campaign we made a lot of promises to Caloundra. What makes me so proud is that these promises were dictated by an engaged and dedicated community. After doorknocking on over 10,000 doors and my team and I making 17,000 phone calls, we collected enough data to really truly demonstrate what the people of Caloundra want and what they have missed out on. These engagements saw enough people telling me that they were so worried about the state of the Pumicestone Passage since the Bribie Island breakthrough that we put on a community forum attended by 140 people. We had people like Ken Newburn and John Groves talk us through the history of the Pumicestone Passage and the impact the breakthrough is having. They pulled in other local experts, including Les who has lived on the passage for 70 years. They shared with me the frustrations of dealing with the layers and layers and layers of bureaucracy to get absolutely nowhere. The locals drove the issue of the Pumicestone Passage with passion and dedication, and were so generous in sharing their time and their knowledge that there was simply no way that this issue could be ignored. As a result, an LNP government committed to funding the Sunshine Coast Waterways Authority so waterways like the Pumicestone Passage can be taken seriously.

I had people that were not only concerned about youth crime but also about a culture of young people. Over and over again, people in Caloundra told me that they felt the pathway for our young kids was not as clear as it used to be, that the opportunities were not as obvious for them to get skilled, to get motivated and to get excited by the possibility of their whole life in front of them. So, we committed to building a TAFE centre of excellence with a focus on construction trades which is also critical because of the 90,000 tradies we are short for the million homes we are also short.

I spoke to sports clubs. They are at capacity once again because of our population growth. When you are a sports club that is at capacity, it means no more people can come and play sport at your club because you do not have the lighting or the facilities available. These clubs are run by volunteers, volunteers that are passionate about giving back to community and once again frustrated by a lack of investment which makes it harder for them to operate. We have committed to funding lights at four Caloundra clubs which will completely change what they can offer our community. We have committed funding for early intervention programs, investment into the CBD, and an organisation called Roofs to Recovery that has a fast way to provide a roof over the head of someone who is facing homelessness. When I met Cass at seven months pregnant with her second child living in crisis accommodation, it really hit home that we are in crisis. This young mum has been on the social housing waitlist for seven years and now faces life with her newborn and no place to call home.

But here is the big one. The people of Caloundra, above everything else, have had enough of one thing. What is that one thing?

Mr Bleijie: Congestion.

Ms MORTON: They are sick of sitting in traffic and sick of not being able to move around the place that we call home. There has not been a conversation in the last 12 months where I have not dropped this in. The complete mismatch of investment into our road network when compared to our population growth has put Caloundra in a critical position where, if something is not done very soon, people will cease to enjoy living there. There is one road into Caloundra and unsurprisingly named Caloundra Road. The number one issue across the entire electorate is Caloundra Road. If there is one thing I want for our Caloundra, it is a better road network that keeps traffic flowing. We have committed to the Caloundra traffic congestion busting plan which is made up of five key road projects. Nothing like this has ever been delivered before, but I can assure the people of Caloundra that there has never been a thing in my life that has been either too big or too hard that I have not been willing to tackle.

I can promise the people of Caloundra that I will advocate every single day for the projects that set us up for the future and ensure Caloundra does not continue to miss out. This place changed my life and I owe it, and I owe the people of Caloundra who have given me the opportunity with their vote. I can promise you I will remember that every single day.

I know I would not be here today without the support of others. I certainly would not be here without joining the Liberal National Party. I am thankful that the members saw something in me to take on this challenge.

I would like to thank my parents, all four of them, and my Gemma particularly, for their support during pre-poll and the last 25 days of the campaign. I would like to thank my campaign volunteers, my SEC and all of the people who have helped me along the journey, in particular my campaign team of Rob, Sam, Mary, Deb, Ben and Michael; my Sunshine Coast fellow MPs who were my biggest supporters; former MP for Caloundra Mark McArdle; Senator James McGrath; as well as acknowledging Sam Tarou and Andy Longmire for their guidance. Lastly, to one of the most incredible people I know, my campaign manager Frangie, I could not have done this without you.

I would also like to recognise the other 33 women in this chamber as I recognise the significance of women in leadership and influence and how seriously we all take it. Despite having the support and encouragement of this institution, and for me a leader and deputy leader who have been instrumental in my pathway here, it is not necessarily representative of the broader society, and data does not lie.

I have four children of my own. I am a single mum to Coty, Rafe, JJ and Tula. They are 15, 13, 11 and 9—and giant. True! People often wonder how I can parent effectively and still focus on a demanding career which is a question I very much doubt any of my male colleagues in this chamber have ever been asked. My advice to them is do something you love and you can do anything, and as long as everyone keeps talking, we are all winning. I do wish to acknowledge those children, though, who are mature, socially aware, politically aware, good company and proud of their mum, as I am of them.

I want the energy and sentiment of this first speech to guide me in this House. I will use the long and winding road to here and all of the experiences along the way to keep me grounded and give me perspective. I will hold my values dear and pursue my passions, passions that I now have the privilege of being able to pursue in this important arena. I will always remember it is Caloundra that is my home, it is Caloundra that has my heart, and it is the people of Caloundra that entrust me with this position and I will do my absolute best for them. Thank you very much.