



Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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ELECTORAL DISTRICT OF CURRUMBIN

First Speech

Mr SPEAKER: Before calling the honourable member for Currumbin, I remind members that this is the member's first speech and it should be listened to with the courtesies reserved for such occasions.

 **Ms GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (3.16 pm): I rise today in this chamber humbled, grateful and privileged: humbled by the confidence the people of Currumbin have placed in me, profoundly grateful for all of the support of those who have worked so hard to get me here and deeply privileged at the opportunity given to me by the people of Currumbin—an opportunity that has been bestowed on only four members before me, one of whom was the former member for Currumbin, who served our community for 16 years. I am here to be a strong and persistent voice for the people of Currumbin. I am cognisant of the trust they have placed in me and of their rightful expectation that I will work tirelessly on their behalf and I am aware of the enormous responsibility that now rests with me as the member for Currumbin.

The Currumbin electorate is a fusion of natural beauty and exciting growth, which creates a lifestyle like no other. Currumbin is home to so many important landmarks, including the Currumbin Wildlife Hospital, the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary, John Flynn Hospital, the Gold Coast Airport, the Southern Cross University and family operated businesses such as Freeman's Organic Farm and the Neumann Group, which is one of the largest employers in the electorate. Set amongst the beautiful beaches and the bush, Currumbin hosts a world surfing reserve and breathtaking hinterland, all of which must be preserved for the next generation and generations to come.

It is easy for me to be passionate about Currumbin. I grew up on the Gold Coast and Currumbin is the jewel in the crown. My mother moved from Sydney to the border town of Terranora at the age of seven. Her parents took up farming. We were known about town as the 'city farmers'. Mum and Dad bought their first house in Carrara and I was born in the Allamanda hospital in Southport, the eldest of four children. Although we were a working-class family, we were rich in so many ways, surrounded by love and strong family values. My parents sacrificed a lot for us to have that childhood. Dad worked seven days a week as a mechanic to put food on the table and provide all four of his children with a Christian education. We spent many summer afternoons at Rainbow Bay, Greenmount or Coolangatta Beach. My father taught me to surf at Rainbow Bay Beach. It is because of this experience that I went on to achieve my bronze medallion at the Currumbin Beach Vikings Surf Life Saving Club as a teenager and volunteered my time as a surf lifesaver. From my upbringing I learnt the meaning of hard work, sacrifice, family values and determination. I know that nothing comes easily and that if I am to represent the people of Currumbin I will need to work hard, listen to their concerns and support them to the best of my ability.

I feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude to my parents for everything they have done to support my siblings and me. They selflessly committed to providing all of their children with opportunities in life. Mum tells the story of how, from the age of six, I told her I wanted to be a lawyer. I do not know what it

was that planted that seed, but I was determined to achieve this dream. I worked my way through university as a waitress in several of the local restaurants in Tweed and Coolangatta. I enjoyed learning and gained an appreciation about the importance of education. I firmly believe all children should have opportunities to achieve their dreams. As the member for Currumbin, this will certainly be a focus of my work. We need to plan for the future and ensure our children have opportunities to experience clean beaches, world-class education and local jobs.

In 2008 I attained my Bachelor of Laws with honours from Southern Cross University. A local Coolangatta firm, Attwood Marshall Lawyers, employed me in my first legal role. I owe a lot to my beginnings at Attwood Marshall Lawyers and the friendships I forged there.

After three years as a litigation lawyer, I accepted a position as a federal prosecutor with the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions in Brisbane. As a federal prosecutor, I was part of a team of prosecutors who prosecuted bikies, people smugglers, drug importers and paedophiles. I heard the witness accounts of victims of organised crime, of refugees put in danger by people smugglers and of children exploited by paedophiles. All too often the argument made to mitigate online offences against children was that online child pornography is a victimless crime. Every day across the world, children are exploited to produce this material to meet the demand of paedophiles seeking to download it. It is not victimless, yet the legislation allows the judiciary to go soft on these types of offences. To me this is wrong. The law should prioritise victims over criminals. I welcome the opportunity in my role as the member for Currumbin to work with my colleagues to be tougher on crime and to be a voice to keep children and our most vulnerable safe.

During my work as a disciplinary prosecutor for the Office of the Health Ombudsman, I completed the Bar Practice Course through the Bar Association of Queensland. I used to tell people that sitting the bar was the most difficult career achievement I had undertaken. I can no longer say this. This by-election was also one of the most challenging yet rewarding achievements I have undertaken in my career. I worked as a prosecutor for nine years because I want to make a difference, because I want to uphold community standards and because I want to protect our most vulnerable. This accumulated experience has shown me the dark underbelly of our society and the failures within our system. I used to prosecute the law-breakers to protect the public. Now I join the lawmakers to continue to preserve and protect my community.

I owe my community spirit in part to my mother. My mother's contribution to Currumbin is admirable. My mother, after being a stay-at-home mum and raising four well-adjusted children, went on to attain a Bachelor of Social Science and become a counsellor. For over a decade, she worked in mental health and homelessness services and currently works in Tugun, housing the homeless, youth homeless and victims of domestic violence. My mother provides a great service to the people of Currumbin and I want to uphold these values within the Currumbin community.

My upbringing and my values inspired me to join the LNP and run for Currumbin because my beliefs accord with this party. The political traditions of liberalism and conservatism are well preserved and defended by the LNP. It is the party that has the security and prosperity of society as its highest priority. It is the party of lower taxes and strong economic management. It is the party for greater freedoms for the individual and is the party that understands the importance of family.

Family is so important to me. I met my husband, Dan, in Coolangatta and we married five years later on Currumbin Beach. Dan is a mechanical engineer by trade, operating his own small business for a time. He has witnessed firsthand both the challenges and opportunities small businesses across the state are presented with. There are just under 5,000 small businesses in the Currumbin electorate, the large majority of which are family owned and operated. These are the backbone of our economy—hardworking people, making sacrifices and giving back to the community. We need to do more to support them. The small businesses of Currumbin need our help now more than ever. I plan to be their voice as we negotiate our way out of COVID-19.

Together, Dan and I have two beautiful children—Lily, who is six, and Thomas, who is two. They are a strong motivating force for me and part of the reason I put my hand up to serve in this role. I aspire to be the best version of myself, to act with kindness and to show my children by example that no door is closed to them. I have always had the courage to seize the moment and open doors. This is also part of the reason I am fortunate enough to be standing in this parliament today. That is not to say I have not experienced failure, but I believe he or she who does not fail does not learn. We speak about success all the time. In my view, the ability to use failure is of more value. I will proudly fight for the people of Currumbin, risking failure, but aiming for great success.

I will not sit by while the southern Gold Coast is neglected. I understand my community's frustration with the M1, for I, too, have lost productivity and valuable time with my loved ones as a result of the impossible congestion on the M1 and surrounding roads. I will fight to build the second M1 to

reduce congestion for those commuting. I will lobby for the government to deliver on the LNP's policy to air-condition every classroom in every state school. I will lobby for improving local road infrastructure, including Currumbin Creek Road.

We also need to improve our public transport capacity by connecting our community to the heavy rail network. Over the last four years, capacity building on the Gold Coast heavy rail network has been neglected. I will fight for a heavy rail station at Elanora and the preservation of the heavy rail corridor to the airport. The government desperately needs to connect Gold Coast Airport to local public transport. The airport is the sixth busiest in the country, welcoming over 6.5 million passengers annually. It seems archaic that it is not connected to a form of rail transport.

There is also a strong sense in the community that we need to start more detailed planning for stage 3B of the Gold Coast Light Rail and beyond. My constituents want to know what specific routes are being considered, what the government's preferred option is, and they want to be genuinely consulted as this major infrastructure undertaking moves forward.

We need to tackle the increasing prevalence of crime in our local community, especially youth crime. As a mum with two young kids, I have a strong instinct to protect my family. I know families right across the Currumbin electorate feel the same way. From my experience as a prosecutor, I know our approach to crime must be multi-faceted involving both the government and the family unit. Governments that are weak on crime increase the rate of crime as criminals become emboldened, so the first step is that governments need to get tough on crime. Additionally, and particularly relevant for reducing youth crime, the government needs to support families in addressing the causes of crime at home before it gets out of control. People in our community are increasingly feeling more and more unsafe and it should be the government's highest priority to secure the safety of its citizens.

The Currumbin electorate is very special to me. I firmly believe we need to preserve our pristine beaches, gorgeous hinterland and their environments. The Gold Coast will continue to grow—that is to be expected—because it is an amazing place to live, work and raise a family. We need to ensure that, as we grow, the developments being approved are in keeping with our community standards. We need to end the inappropriate development spree so that we can preserve the southern Gold Coast lifestyle that our residents enjoy. We need to balance this with our obligation to protect the environment and our native fauna. We have an unparalleled resource in Currumbin Wildlife Hospital. The state government needs to work with the hospital to protect our wildlife, including expanding the hospital's capacity for koala rehabilitation.

I believe that values matter—values like preserving our natural assets for future generations, upholding and enforcing the rule of law, respecting the innate worth of every individual and the need to encourage personal responsibility and the importance of family and the fundamental role family plays in raising and nurturing children. For my community to prosper and stay vibrant, we must turn these values into actions. We need to build the infrastructure our community needs and crack down on crime to keep our citizens safe. We need to support innovators and small business and take real steps to protect the lifestyle that makes Currumbin unique.

The opportunity I have to use this platform to improve our community would not be possible without a long list of people who deserve my thanks placed on the record. To my family—Riss and Alec, Brent and Aimee, Peter and Sue Hudson; Caryn, Justin, Christine and Paul Gerber—you keep me grounded and I could not have done this without your constant support. Special mention to my cousin Jenna Fearnley, who planted the seed of the possibility of this path for me and to my mum, Maree Hudson, and my little sister, Jesinta Hudson, it takes a village to raise a child and they are always there for me, Dan and the kids.

To my good friends, Debbie and Benny Morison, Ange Harry, Jaime Millar, Deb Workman, Kelli Edwards, Lisa and Benny Hathaway, Terri and Pablo Millane and Trent Thompson, you have always been there for me and supported me without fear or favour. Your friendship is so important to me, thank you. To my career mentors, Jeff Garrett and Liza Marshall, thank you.

Most importantly, to my husband, Dan, who has supported me unwaveringly in everything I do. Walking away from a stable career as a prosecutor—a career that I loved—was not an easy decision and one I did not make lightly. I have absolutely no doubt that I am standing here today, with the great privilege of representing the people of Currumbin, because of Dan's belief in me and encouragement. I love him and our children more than words could ever convey.

I thank my LNP colleagues. So many of them have contributed, in one way or another, through their time, enthusiasm, confidence and sometimes just a word of encouragement. Thank you Deb Frecklington, Leader of the Opposition and member for Nanango. Your strong leadership and counsel has helped me so much. You are an inspiration to me. To all of my LNP colleagues in this chamber who

supported me during the campaign, thank you. Thank you senators James McGrath, Paul Scarr and Amanda Stoker for giving me so much of your time and counsel. Also thanks to federal members Karen Andrews and Angie Bell for their words of encouragement and effort.

The last two members I make special mention of because without them I know I would not be standing in this chamber today. I sincerely thank the member for Surfers Paradise, John-Paul Langbroek, for showing me the door which I had the courage to open and walk through. Without you I could not have dreamed of achieving the great honour of representing the people of Currumbin. I sincerely thank the member for Mudgeeraba, Ros Bates. You mentored and supported me, and I will be forever grateful. I am proud to stand alongside you.

Thank you to all the volunteers in the LNP who supported me and thank you to those volunteers who committed to supporting me in the campaign but were unable to due to COVID-19. I am grateful to everyone. However, I am going to be bold and name a few special volunteers. Thank you Peter and Mary Flynn, you both did more for me personally and throughout the campaign than I could detail here. Thank you Paul and Sheila for tirelessly road siding. Thank you Josie Kay for standing up for what you believe in and helping the LNP retain the seat of Currumbin. Thank you Jenny Sinclair for being a friendly face in the campaign office every day. Thank you Andrew Rowe for letterboxing and manning pre-poll with me. You were a great support to me. Thank you Brett and Alyson Hannam, Nerida Smith, Brad Carswell, Greg Young, Cynthia Hardy, Lincoln Folo, Malcom Cole, David Hutchinson and Michael Leighton for being so involved in the campaign. You are all appreciated.

Thank you to the Young LNP, including Anna Harris, Jackson Franks, Taylor Birtchnell, Ben Naday and Chris Manwaring, who were always ready and willing to doorknock, letterbox, roadside and pre-poll with me. I am fortunate to have the support of such a passionate and hardworking group of young people.

I would also like to thank the many community organisations that are the heart and soul of the Currumbin electorate. The volunteers that run these organisations put in countless hours of community service, and what better time to acknowledge them than during National Volunteers Week. The many groups include, but are not limited to, the following: Tugun Leagues Club, Friends of Currumbin, the Tugun Progress Association, the Currumbin RSL, Currumbin Beach Vikings Surf Life Saving Club, Coolangatta Senior Citizens, Southern Beaches Community Garden, the Alleygators Rugby Union Club, the Carpenter's Workshop at Elanora Uniting Church, BeachCare, the Rotary Club of Currumbin Coolangatta Tweed, Volunteer Marine Rescue Currumbin and the Greater Southern Gold Coast Chamber of Commerce.

Finally, I give my commitment to the people of Currumbin. Your issues are my issues. I will use this platform to improve our community. I will not waste a single opportunity to represent you. I am here for those who voted for me and for those who did not. I will work hard for the whole of the Currumbin electorate to ensure our community remains the best place to live, work and raise a family for many generations to come, so help me God.