



Speech By
Hon. Leeanne Enoch

MEMBER FOR ALGESTER

Record of Proceedings, 27 March 2015

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. LM ENOCH** (Algester—ALP) (Minister for Housing and Public Works and Minister for Science and Innovation) (12.15 pm): It is an honour that I, the first Aboriginal woman elected to this place, be given the opportunity to move—

That the following address be presented to the Governor in reply to the speech delivered by His Excellency in opening this, the 55th Parliament of Queensland—

May it please Your Excellency—We the members of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland wish to assure Your Excellency of our continued respect for the Crown and loyalty to the system of government in this state and to tender our thanks for the speech with which you opened the first session.

The various measures to which Your Excellency referred and all other matters that may be brought before us will receive our careful consideration and we shall strive to deal with them so that our endeavours may contribute to the advancement and the prosperity of the people of this state.

Let me begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and, in doing so, let me acknowledge the more than 3,000 generations of the Turrbal peoples and the Yugerra peoples, who have performed ceremonies, conducted trade and maintained cultural practices on this land. May I also acknowledge all of our elders, those who have passed and those who are still with us, guiding us into the future. Let me also pay special respect to my family: my mother, Lyn; my aunts Evelyn Parkin and Merle Cashman; and members of the Logan elders, Aunty Peggy Tidyman and Aunty Betty McGrady, who on my swearing in to this parliament performed a moving blessing, a ritual of support. It is this way of beginning that fills me with incredible pride and provides me the grounding from which to speak my words in this place.

I am a proud Nunukul/Nughi woman of the Quandamooka nation, which takes in the islands and waters of Moreton Bay. As my grandmother was a Kanjuu woman, I also have ancestral ties into Queensland's far north. I pay tribute to all of my ancestors, including those of my mother's people from European nations. I come to this place as a member of this parliament, recognising the profound role that I play as a representative of the people of Algester. Being chosen by your local community to represent them is an incredible act of trust and I thank the people of my electorate for putting their trust in me. I remind myself every day of that trust and I hold it in the highest regard and with the desire to honour that trust in all I do.

I also recognise the significance of this moment in our state's history. I acknowledge that, as the first Aboriginal woman elected to the Queensland parliament and the first Indigenous minister in this House, I have an additional responsibility: one that holds the expectations and hopes of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and of those who value and seek out diversity in our civic society. But, of course, I am not alone in this responsibility. I acknowledge also the new member for Cook, who follows in footsteps created more than 40 years ago by Queensland's first Indigenous state parliamentarian, the earlier member for Cook, Mr Eric Deeral. Uncle Eric lit the beacon for people like me and other aspiring politicians, like Cheryl Thompson, a Iningai woman, who also ran at

the last state election in the seat of Gregory. Although not elected this time, I hope to see Cheryl sit in this place in the future.

The beacon lit by Uncle Eric has been joined by beacons lit by women in my own community—women like Aunty Kath Walker, or Oodgeroo Noonuccal as she was later known, an internationally renowned poet who, the year after my birth, became the first Aboriginal woman to ever run as a Labor candidate in a state election. Or Aunty Rose Borey, who talks about the important role the union movement played in issues of equality on North Stradbroke Island during the late 1960s, which saw Quandamooka women taking action against unfair conditions. Or Aunty Margaret Iselin, who has carved out a path of self-determination with other elders on North Stradbroke Island. Seeing those beacons on the horizon has guided me to this place and, in doing so, has now lit the path for many more to follow—something I personally hope to support into the future.

I had the privilege until elected to this place to work on behalf of people in many walks of life in my role as a teacher, a public servant in both local and state government, a national manager of the Australian Red Cross and, in the most recent of months, as an official of the Queensland Council of Unions. I wish to acknowledge the many talented and hardworking public servants I have had the opportunity to work with as we supported the most vulnerable in our communities.

People like Kelly McKellar Nathan and Suzanne Thompson who I worked with in Brisbane City Council as we developed whole-of-sector business development programs and innovative social policy solutions, or Sharon Kinchella who I worked with in the Department of Communities as we built cultural competence solutions and community engagement frameworks. I would also like to acknowledge the incredible work that our state's teachers do to prepare and nurture the adults of the future. As a former high school teacher of more than a decade in our state schools and for a number of years in the United Kingdom, I worked side by side with truly talented educators. People like Jane Flynn who I taught with in an East London school, where going the extra mile to help students and their families was essential, or many of my friends from university, such as Helen Radvan, Amanda Johnson, Lowanna Dunn and many others who are still teaching with the same passion as when we all began in the early 1990s.

The schools in my electorate: Algester State School, Boronia Heights State School, Grand Avenue State School, Pallara State School, Forest Lake State High School, St John's College and St Stephens are all working incredibly hard and in very innovative ways to meet the needs of students in our community and I look forward to contributing to their hard work.

May I also recognise the incredible humanitarian work that the Australian Red Cross does in supporting Queensland's most vulnerable. I had the privilege to contribute to this work during my nearly seven years working with the Red Cross as one of their Queensland and later Australian managers. The ability to understand the needs of others, to share power inside our solutions and build trust are fundamental principles I sharpened when working with people like Greg Goebel, Matthew Cox and Leann Wilson and they remain principles I carry into my role as a local member. I have had the opportunity to work with many different people with many different views on the world. We did not always agree, of course, and there were moments of debate, but it was in our diversity of views that the seed of creativity blossomed to unite us in seeking to make our communities, our state and our country a better place.

But it is one aspect of the work I was engaged with at the Queensland Council of Unions that I wish to bring to the attention of the House and in doing so I acknowledge the support of Ron Monaghan, Ros McLennan, John Battams and other members of the Queensland Council of Unions executive. In my role I had carriage of the stolen wages campaign. Honourable members may be aware that this campaign has been underway since last century when many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders were compulsorily sent out to work in a variety of domestic and labouring roles. They worked long hours for months on end and often many hundreds of kilometres from their family and their lands. They had no say in the matter. Because of the colour of their skin and the policies of the day, many were never paid in full for their work. Through the stolen wages campaign I got to meet and represent many elders who as young men and women had their whole economic base taken from them, something that they and generations after them are still recovering from today.

On election day I was handed a small ziploc plastic bag. Inside that bag was \$8.25. It was a gift from one of those Aboriginal elders I had been working with in the stolen wages campaign, a woman who as a young person had her wages stolen from her and as a pensioner had very little to call her own. She had scraped together all that she could spare because she wanted to contribute to my campaign. Think about what \$8.25 means for those of us fortunate enough to be in this House today. Maybe a cold drink or the loose change floating around in your car or at the bottom of your handbag.

For that elder, it was what she had managed to scrape together after covering the costs of her essentials: her food, her housing, her medical needs. That is how important this election was to her.

I have thought a great deal about that \$8.25 since the highs of election day. It represents a great deal of hope to that elder, hope that things could be different, that the generations after her could be saved from the terrible discrimination she experienced and the pain of being treated as less. That \$8.25 has galvanised my belief that every generation faces its own challenges and that we face those challenges with the hope that we can make things better for the generations that follow us. And it has left me thinking a great deal about the generations in my own family who have faced their fair share of challenges. I think in part of my parents, my mum, Lyn, a non-Indigenous Australian woman who grew up in Inala, and my dad, Douglas, a dark-skinned Aboriginal man who was born and raised on North Stradbroke Island—Quandamooka country. They married when they were both still teenagers in 1967, the year of the referendum, and remained married until dad's passing last year. I am sure honourable members can imagine what kinds of challenges they faced in the 1960s as a couple from two very different cultures. They faced discrimination in all its forms from all parts of our society and they battled inside poor government policies that worked against them and their dreams. They worked hard all their lives and they taught me and my three younger brothers Wesley, Rodney and Andrew, how important a good education and a decent job is when you are raising a family, something I am proud to be now teaching my two wonderful sons, Callum and Ethan.

Mum and Dad moved the family from North Stradbroke Island to the suburb of Woodridge in Logan City in the early 1970s. I went to Woodridge State School and Woodridge State High School, where I was fortunate enough to be taught by incredibly talented and dedicated teachers, something I have been very grateful for all of my life. We did it tough. Dad drove bulldozers for a living and Mum picked up unskilled work until later in life when she took up further study and completed a psychology degree. I wonder lately what \$8.25 would have meant to my mum as she and Dad worked hard to keep our family's collective head above the poverty line. My mum and dad's generation faced the challenges of creating a more equitable society where, no matter your wealth or your background, every person should have access to good health care and quality education and experience the dignity of work—things that I have been grateful to receive in my life and things I defend at all costs today.

But mostly I think about the struggles of the generation before Mum and Dad, and in particular I reflect on the stories of my two grandfathers, one a proud and powerfully strong Quandamooka man, the other a fiercely independent non-Indigenous man with English heritage. They both served and saw combat in World War II and as soldiers were treated by and large as equals. They both received the same pay and they both operated under the same conditions, more or less. Even looking at some of their photos from the war I see that there are so many similarities: soldiers, black and white, shoulder to shoulder, brothers in arms. When they returned to Australia and to Queensland, however, their stories took very different paths.

My non-Indigenous grandfather returned to an Australia and a Queensland that provided him with assistance to restart his life as a civilian. He was free to travel the country, work where he desired and was paid accordingly. He married, had four children, of which my mum is the eldest, and he has lived out his 88 years as, quite frankly, a genuinely grumpy old man, albeit quite ill at the moment. My Aboriginal grandfather, however, returned to a very different Australia and a very different Queensland. After putting his life on the line for our country he was never provided the same assistance as non-Indigenous soldiers. He technically had no control over where he could work or where he could travel. That was all controlled by the government. For many of his generation, their wages were not theirs to control and for the most part were never paid to them in full. He was never regarded a citizen of Australia even though his family had lived on the same lands for more than 3,000 generations and he never in his life held the right to vote. Yet today, his granddaughter is on her feet in the Parliament of Queensland speaking not only as a member but also as a minister commissioned by the Governor of this state. He married and raised his 15 children until a massive heart attack took his life at the age of 41, subsequently throwing his family into extreme poverty. For my grandmother, my father and his siblings at that time, \$8.25 would have literally made the difference between starvation and survival.

My two grandfathers and their vastly different stories remind us of their generation's struggle with the notion of equality, where people were treated differently because of their skin colour or their cultural background. We have come a long way since then, but there are still challenges for our generation to face if we are to ensure that we never return to the times of my grandfathers where inequality was the norm, or the earlier years of my parents' generation where discrimination went unchecked and where your wealth determined the kind of access you could have to front-line services like education and health.

I am committed to facing our generation's challenges with the hope of making Queensland a better place for all of us, black and white, rich and poor, Australian born or recently immigrated. For me, that gift of \$8.25 illuminates that guiding principle. It might not sound like much. In fact, for many people it might represent nothing more than a coffee and cake with friends. But I know that for my grandmother \$8.25 would have seemed like a fortune, and for my mother that would have made all the difference to our family in the lean times.

I know that even today for many families and individuals in my own electorate \$8.25 is the difference between putting a meal on the table tonight or not, ensuring that a child can attend the school excursion or simply having enough petrol in the car to get to work. For the Aboriginal elder who donated to my campaign, \$8.25 was a significant amount. It was all she had and she wanted to put it towards my campaign in the hope that one day, such as today, I might be taking a seat here in this place and facing the challenges of our generation with the hope of a better future. That is an incredibly humbling act of trust and I feel that sense of responsibility every day.

Though my presence here today represents many firsts in this House, this will not be the last time I stand to represent those in our community without a voice. In large part, I stand here today because of the many people who supported me during the campaign and, of course, there are too many to mention every one of them. However, I pay special acknowledgement to my campaign leadership team of Claudia Whitton and Doreen Awabdy, who are both in the gallery, Michael Foster and Milton Dick, and the many wonderful young women such as Clare Manton and Jess Tibbitts who formed what is now known as the Algester Girl Gang, along with the dedicated members of the ALP and the union movement. It was their collective dedication, patience, love and support, along with that of my family and friends, that carried me across the line on election day and I will always be grateful to each of them.

I also stand here because of the many people who have said to me, 'I trust you and I want you to make a difference': be it the father from Hillcrest who wants more opportunities for his family than he himself has been given, the mother from Algester who wants to work for a living wage, the small business owner at Forest Lake employing recently arrived migrants, the elder on a pension or the child who looks at the world and sees the potential to achieve if they are given a fighting chance. I stand here for those people and I stand here facing the challenges of our generation on their behalf, hoping to make things better for the generations that follow us.

Mr Speaker and honourable members, it is my great honour to be a member of this parliament. I thank the people of Algester for the opportunity to represent them and I promise to work hard to deliver on that responsibility.