



Speech By
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MEMBER FOR LOGAN

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr POWER** (Logan—ALP) (5.04 pm): It is an honour and a humbling privilege to rise to speak as the representative of and on behalf of the fantastic people of the Logan state electorate. The state electorate of Logan has much diversity and represents many of the strengths and challenges that the state of Queensland faces. From the suburbs of Browns Plains, Heritage Park and Crestmead—which are on the edge of Brisbane and provide not only more affordable housing but also the space to build the Australian dream home—to the growing satellite future city of Flagstone to the historical settlement of Logan Village and the rural, residential and farms of Stockleigh, Munruben and Park Ridge in between, they are all great communities. They each have their strengths and their challenges.

The electorate of Logan has both farmers and factory workers, the Crestmead Industrial Estate and the Berrinba wetlands. It has a large section of the Logan Motorway and also a large section of the Logan River. It is the difference and diversity that defines this as a great place to live. We in this place need to maintain the value and character of existing communities and answer to the needs of young families for housing, jobs, services and education that only new development can provide. This is the balance that defines outer Logan City and is the challenge for many areas of Queensland. It is our challenge in this place to build strong communities and give every family the best chance of success through the path of education and on to jobs. We must be champions of the new sports clubs striving for their first flag or even struggling to field their first senior team and the new schools seeking to build a culture of success and a new generation of self-reliant, inquisitive young adults. We must support, not cut, the local services that bind these communities. We must increase public transport by restoring cut services and build on the health and education services that are so vital for young families.

In this place we come not to a new parliament but one with significant tradition. Though we are a new country and we were a new colony, if we were to compare ourselves to other democratic parliaments we would be one of the older continuous democratic parliaments in the world. I want to recognise the previous member for Logan, Michael Pucci, for his commitment to public service and especially to his family, who actively supported him on the campaign trail. I also want to recognise former Speaker John Mickel, who has taken so much of his time to be a mentor for so many, and none more than me. He has taught me so much about what it means to be a representative of the Queensland people in this place. Although he is now the former member, he still works to support local organisations. He deeply cares for, fights for and stands for the struggling families who are seeking to make Logan their home and seeking success for their families. I am really inspired by his commitment to care—not for the trappings of this place or for his former roles as Speaker and minister but to help out, either through legislation or electoral support, someone struggling more than most or a person appearing at the office as a last resort with a problem that for them seems insurmountable. ‘That’s who you’re there for,’ he will tell me, and he is right.

I also recognise the former member for Logan and Premier Wayne Goss. Always a Labor supporter, it was Goss's first re-election campaign in 1992 that prompted me to finally join the Australian Labor Party. I could not let the state slip backwards. I had to act. His role in the history of Queensland is enormous. He redefined Queensland from a backwards-looking, mates-and-cronies-run state into one where Queenslanders could have pride in their state. He had the vision to make Queensland more than many other Queenslanders could even imagine. Wayne was passionate about Logan too, delivering services to a growing city, including a new university campus, expanded health services and the beginnings of a public transport system. After his retirement from state politics, he worked privately, looked after his health and spent time with his wife, Roisin, and their two children, yet occasionally he would take the time to give quiet support and advice.

After the state election in 2012, when the Labor Party and I were so comprehensively rejected by Queenslanders, I invited supporters to my then home in Regents Park to share a barbecue and to thank them. Wayne rang and asked if he, too, could come along and say a few words. Wayne quietly took the time to speak to each of the branch members. Some were friends of decades; others he was meeting for the very first time. He inspired all of us to keep our focus on what really mattered for Queenslanders, to remember for whom and why we wanted to make a difference. At that point, during that speech, he had more confidence in Labor than we felt ourselves. He knew that if we reconnected with Queensland we could once again win. After all, this man knew what it was like to beat Joh's malapportionment and gerrymander. I felt deeply moved and, like all Queenslanders, I was deeply saddened when we lost Wayne. He still had so much to give our state.

As I am guided by Wayne and John, I am also the product of my family and their experience in coming to this country and also helping to shape it. My first ancestor born in this country could not have been born in more humble circumstances. Mary McCarthy was born in 1845 in the Parramatta women's factory after her mother requested to be re-admitted to get support for her child as her husband was away working. A 57-year-old colony had little in the way of social support. Most of the rest of my family came as a result of the social and economic disaster arising out of the failure of the potato crop in Ireland from 1845. The Power family were the residents of the small market town of Ennistymon in West Clare, which, like most of Ireland's west, was devastated by An Gorta Mor, the great hunger. Ennistymon's poorhouse has some of the most comprehensive records of the period and they make for very sad reading. The poorhouse records the deaths of hundreds of local residents who died within the poorhouse under the responsibility of the government, including in 1850 a nine-year-old Pat Power—undoubtedly a close relative. In West Clare the population was over 30 per cent less in the five years after the start of the failure of the crop and to this day has never recovered. This is not just a piece of family history but also a reminder in this House of the extremes of government failure, the lack of democratic representation and the free market extremism that directly caused these deaths. When we make cold economic decisions in this place, we must recognise how they can devastate the lives of those who can least afford them. Another ancestor of mine, again from West Clare, determined in this new country to make it more democratic. Michael Hanrahan, while working on the new gold diggings near Ballarat—diggings called Eureka—dropped his tools and took up leadership and the pike to make a stand. As captain of the pikemen, he missed the attack as he led a party to the Geelong road to engage the soldiers. However, his cousins in the stockade received bullet and bayonet wounds.

Again, this is not just an interesting piece of family history but why I hold to the belief that Australian democracy and the fairness that we value so much was something that we built together, something that we have fought for and something that we must continue to fight for. It was only after the stand at Eureka that the Australian colonies together made laws that were far in advance of those made by the corrupt and illegitimate parliament that they had left behind. As Australians, we built and preserve our democratic traditions. There could be no better way to honour the diggers of Eureka than to build on that tradition by having a truly Australian head of state.

No-one who has a family who were present during the majority of the period after 1788 could reflect on their family history without reflecting on that group of Australians who have a family history that runs some more than 40,000 years before 1788. Aboriginal Australians have not shared in the success of the Australian system in the same way that other families have. This is in large part because this place failed. Another Australian with an Irish background, Paul Keating, reflected on this in his landmark Redfern speech when he said—

We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life.

We brought the diseases. The alcohol.

We committed the murders.

We took the children from their mothers.

We practised discrimination and exclusion.

It was our ignorance and our prejudice.

And our failure to imagine these things being done to us.

On our failure to imagine, for many Australians Keating got it a bit wrong. Many Australians, including many Irish Australians, did not have to imagine these things being done to them. For many in Ireland or the working class of industrial England, many of these things had been done to them. Yet it is almost worse than those who could use memory rather than imagination. We still failed Aboriginal Australians through action and inaction. Together, we can and must work together to ensure that this parliament cannot be accused of the same failure. In this spirit, I recognise that this parliament meets on the traditional country of the Turrbal people and I wish to acknowledge them as the traditional owners. Further, I want to recognise that the Logan state electorate is on the traditional country of the Jagera and Yugumbir language speakers. I wish to pay my respects to their elders, past and present, and the elders who may be here today. In Logan, community elders play an important role locally in providing a continuity of culture, educating children and, I think, inspiring local representatives.

My father, Des Power, instilled in me a compassion for others. He was intensely proud of Australia, his family and especially his children. He championed education, being the first of his family in this country for over a century to go to university. He never stopped learning, teaching and valuing an interest in ideas and values. He taught his children—Lucy, Ben, Peter and I—a passion for fairness and a belief in the value of every human, especially those who have a disability. He was a champion of deaf education, deaf culture and especially of Auslan, Australia's own sign language. He lived through a time when the deaf were hidden away and regarded as dumb to a time where deaf culture thrived and celebrated its place in society. My father celebrated the deaf graduates of Griffith University. He was as proud of those deaf graduates and their successful careers post graduation as he was of his own children. Dad died recently and at his funeral I met not just his most recent deaf students but also students he had taught in the 1960s. He passed on a strong sense of faith that I hope to practise and pass on to my own children. Dad's sense of justice and fairness meant that he taught us that we had a responsibility, perhaps being drawn from *Rerum Novarum*, to support and be active in workers' organisations. I remember that at his retirement he wanted to be remembered not for what he had achieved in teaching and research but how he had always been part of the union and stood for other workers to build a fair place to work for all.

I despair that some in this society and this place attack unions. Unions built a safer, fairer society that gives value and dignity to work and workplaces. Workers are not simply an input into the economic system; they are the final product. Unions fight to make sure that that principle is recognised. I want to acknowledge Ben Swan, Mark and Charis of the Australian Workers' Union and the district secretaries such as Troy and Cowboy; Peter, Scott, Sarah and others at the Transport Workers' Union, who fight for the safety of drivers who deliver the products that we use; and Chris, John and others at the SDA who share my belief that every worker deserves respect and safety in the workplace. I also want to acknowledge all the hardworking delegates and organisers who joined the labour movement in the hope of making workplaces fairer and safer and our country greater.

Although Dad cannot be here tonight, I think of him often and the lessons that he taught me. Mum is right when she reminds us that he left the world a better place. I hope that one day someone could say the same of me. I want to recognise my mother, Mary, who is here tonight. She has given so much to her children. Mum gave so much to us, taking so much time away from teaching to be with us as young kids. Despite our annoyances, she completed her studies, showing us an example of dedication to a single research question. We kids all have mum's determination to stand up to anyone for what is right and fair. I thank Ben, Peter and Lucy—my brothers and sister. We have shared so many experiences as siblings and I value our continued closeness as our families grow.

I wish to thank my wife, Jacki, for her endless support. I would be a much lesser person without her and I value her determination and dedication to our children. I wish to thank my three children, Jack, Caitlin and Lucy. They are wonderful and fascinating. Their growth and ideas truly make life greater for Jacki and me.

No member of this place is ever elected here by themselves. It may be that their name appears on the ballot, but behind them there is a fantastic team of volunteers and supporters. I want to thank Nina, Hazel, Jim, Cheryl, Bev, Jess and Keith, Teresa, Pierce, Stewart, Lisa, Max, Cherie, Terry and Joan, Terry and Patricia, Amijid, the O'Mara family and so many more people who helped out in so many ways. So many people gave support but also they gave ideas locally, not least the best little volunteer, Jack. I would like to thank the ALP team, especially John, Anthony and Evan, who did so much behind the scenes to make our party a more responsive, active and accountable party for members.

In this place, each generation who has their names etched on the wall outside bear a great responsibility to recognise the greatest challenge that confronts the wellbeing of the people and places of Queensland. Often to those outside this place seems reactive to events and not looking to

the future. That means not looking to tomorrow's headlines but working for future industries, anticipating trends and change. We need to listen to those who inform us of the future.

We all value Queensland's lifestyle and the natural beauty of our state, not to mention our economy, yet when those who study the science of global warming due to greenhouse gases let us know that these things are most likely to slowly erode those values then we should listen. However, the convenience of today often means that these things are ignored in favour of more pressing problems. Instead, we must act sensibly and pragmatically and with the best advice to take smart action and avoid the risks of warming to our state and nation. This is a conservative, sensible course of action and this parliament has to play its part in the global problem. I look forward to all of us doing that in this place.

Our nation is ageing as our birth rate is consistently low. These are in a bigger sense both good things. Our nation and our planet do have a finite capacity even though it is probably higher than we think. Australia's children per woman, a measure called total fertility, is 1.9—obviously not at replacement level. Without immigration we would slowly lose population in Australia. At the same time this nation and state has collectively and steadily increased our life expectation to 82.1 years. This is a triumph, yet it provides a challenge as more workers age and the proportion of taxpaying workers to the proportion of retirees decreases. We need to consider this challenge and frame policy that reflects it and saves for the future for the dignity of both workers and the retired. The compulsory superannuation guarantee policy, a triumph of the Keating government, was one such policy that saved money from 1992 that we can now rely on. Even though it should be noted that the Howard government undermined the policy, the challenge for this parliament is to be as farsighted as the architects of the superannuation guarantee.

Looking again at the board outside, we see an enormous change of names. Never in the history of the Queensland parliament has this place seen so much change in its members than over the last two elections. At the same time, public confidence in politics and politicians is at a consistent low. While I will not reflect on what lessons the members of the last government may have learnt from the experience, I will note that the 2012 election was an event that made all members on this side of the House deeply consider the purpose of being an elected representative—especially a Labor representative. Labor members have reconnected and recommitted to the democratic principles of listening, consulting and fighting for those in need. We have stronger, more representative branches, we have better processes of listening and we have connected better with the grassroots organisations. This will make for a better government, but just as importantly, it might lift regard for those who engage in public service and representation in this chamber. This is led from the top by the Premier. At each of our meetings she demands that we continue to actively listen. The Premier is continuing to do this herself.

I know we all take lessons and inspiration from our constituents. A few years ago doing relief teaching at St Francis College, a fantastic school within the state electorate of Logan, I attended the weekly staff prayers. The teachers there were asked to make their own reflection on a prayer. In this case some of the younger teachers had taken the prayer of St Paul contained in the first letter to the early Corinthian Christians. Members may have heard this prayer at weddings as it is often taken as a reflection on love, but they would not have thought deeply though that St Paul has a radical challenge in this letter to show Christian love in the everyday things we do. These young teachers revealed that to me. The young teachers adapted the prayer to say about their own profession, 'If I have advanced teaching theory in the classroom but have no love, I am nothing; if I use the latest online teaching apps but have no love, I am nothing; if I speak well on the curriculum but have no love, then I am'—and members will remember this—'but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.' This prayer inspired me. If we come to this place with great rhetoric and speeches yet fail to focus on the real reason for being here—the respect and care for ordinary Queenslanders—then truly we are nothing; we simply fill this hall with noise, bereft of real meaning; we will be nothing.

I cannot promise that in every speech we shall fill this place with Christian love, but we would do well to reflect on the values of those young St Francis College teachers to help us keep focused on our true purpose in this place lest we be but a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. Members, this is our calling. Let us in this 55th Parliament live up to this great calling.