




Speech By  
**Hon. Dr Steven Miles**

**MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA**

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### **MOTION OF CONFIDENCE**

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (7.30 pm): I rise to support the Premier's confidence motion in the new government on behalf of the people I represent in Mount Coot-tha. The voters of Mount Coot-tha expressed their confidence in this new government on 31 January, and I am pleased to be supporting their wishes here today.

Over a period of nine months in the lead-up to the election, my team and I spoke to thousands of voters. We knocked on more than 23,000 doors to hear firsthand from voters their concerns and priorities for the future of their community and the future of Queensland. In these conversations I learned of the hopes and aspirations of the people I now have the honour to represent. They told me about their personal circumstances, their work, their businesses and their families, and I was made very aware of why they intended to vote the previous government out.

Of course except for the last term, Mount Coot-tha in its current form has been a Labor seat for more than a quarter of a century, but Mount Coot-tha voters are not what is usually considered 'traditional' Labor. In fact, most of the workers' cottages of Paddington and Petrie Terrace and the university share houses of Toowong and Red Hill made famous by John Birmingham and Nick Earls have given way to educated professional families who appreciate both green spaces and a short commute to the CBD. They have raised and renovated and made their way up in the world. As a political constituency the voters of Mount Coot-tha are highly engaged. They vote with their conscious; they vote progressive. They are doctors, lawyers, public servants, teachers, actors and nurses. Some of them thought they would give the LNP a go in 2012. They just could not believe that the government they elected—for many, it was the first time they had voted LNP—set about from day one attacking them, their livelihoods and the very character of their suburbs. On 31 January they did not just vote Labor—they campaigned for Labor in a way that I have not experienced in my almost 20 years in the Australian Labor Party.

In relation to health care, I welcomed two senior doctors to the ALP and my campaign. A senior doctor's time is normally so valuable that they struggle to engage in grassroots politics, but not this campaign. The previous government's war on doctors and the ongoing attacks on our health system motivated thousands of health professionals and our community to work together to elect a government that put patient safety first. Not a single voter that I spoke to bought the then health minister's line about waiting time guarantees.

**Mr WALKER:** I rise to a point of order. The honourable member is now going into contentious areas, and we on this side of the House regard him as having moved outside of the conventional area.

**Dr MILES:** It is not my intention to be provocative, but it is very hard to describe the act that the voters I now represent took on 31 January—

**Opposition members** interjected.

**Dr MILES:** Not a single voter I spoke to bought the then health minister's line about waiting time guarantees. They all saw straight through it; I did not need to tell them. They already knew—

**Mr Nicholls** interjected.

**Mrs MILLER:** I rise to a point of order. My point of order is that the member is being interjected on, and this is against your ruling earlier this morning. I would ask you to please reiterate what you said earlier today.

**Mr SPEAKER:** Member for Clayfield, would you temper your comments, please. I call the member for Mount Coot-tha.

**Dr MILES:** They already knew that the LNP policy was simply to throttle outpatient appointments and to make sure that people did not know what operation they needed, so they could not be counted as needing an operation. I am proud to be part of a government that has axed that program and redirected the millions of dollars spent on self-promotion advertising towards patient care. I am also proud to be part of a government that will treat health professionals with the dignity that they preserve. We will end unfair and unreasonable individual contracts for senior medical officers and reinstate collective bargaining and unfair dismissal rights for doctors. That is the kind of government I have confidence in and it is the kind of government that the voters of Mount Coot-tha have confidence in.

It is education that triggered my political activism. As a young man, I could see how the opportunities before me were thanks to Labor's investment in education and the hard work and determination of my parents to make sure I got a good one. When it looked like I might not be able to attend university in Brisbane, it was Wayne Goss and the Labor government that stepped in and awarded me a scholarship aptly named after another great Labor Premier taken from us too young: TJ Ryan.

On 31 January, teachers and parents of school-age children expressed their confidence in Labor to prioritise our schools. For many families in my electorate, education is the most important service delivery area of government. In their busy lives, schools are the community hub in the way that they interact and organise as a community. That has certainly been my family's experience. We have been very fortunate to be well served by a fantastic local state school. Just last week I attended my son Sam's parent-teacher interview at Bardon with Mrs SK. I was so impressed with the education that he is receiving and the overall experience, and of course I am very, very proud of him.

I made a series of commitments to make our local schools better, and I know that was one of the reasons I was elected. I promised that I would deliver a new car park, playground and oval at Bardon State School. I know any parent who has had car seats covered in dried mud after a rainy day pick-up knows how overdue sealing that car park is. Parents at Petrie Terrace State School told me how frustrated they were that education services were being stifled by slow broadband and a lack of wi-fi. I committed to help them fund a major internet upgrade and to repaint their iconic mural wall, which many members may know from their trips to Suncorp Stadium. Rainworth State School said they needed cricket practice pitches, and I have promised to deliver the funds to build them. The principal at Ithaca State School spoke to me of his concerns about kids having to use the driveway to enter the school, so I have committed to deliver a proper pedestrian entrance. The P&F at St Joseph's in Bardon told me that their community hall could be better used by groups and organisations if it had a better kitchen and new chairs, and I am pleased that I will get the chance to help them do just that. The Bardon Community Kindy were looking to improve the kids' outdoor play area, and I have pledged to help fund a water playscape that I expect will be a big hit amongst the Bardon kindy kids. When it comes to schools, one of the things most commonly expressed to me by parents is that they are worried about how effectively their kids can concentrate and learn in stifling classroom heat. Particularly during the election campaign period, with those 39 degree Brisbane days as I lobbed up on their doorsteps, I heard it a lot and, believe me, I understood. So I committed to help fund classroom air conditioning for Rainworth and Milton state schools, and I am sure this will provide an even better learning environment for those students.

A key part of the package of funding commitments Labor promised for Mount Coot-tha schools is the \$320,000 earmarked for IT. Labor has always seen the extraordinary potential opened up by advances in information technology—we are, after all, the party of the NBN—and this potential starts right in the classroom. Local schools like Toowong State School will decide how to use these grants to best meet their particular IT needs.

Providing the best possible educational opportunities is my priority, as a father as well as the member for Mount Coot-tha. Education triggered my political activism, but the issue that has sustained it now for two decades is the environment. A key part of my campaign locally and a key part of my work now as a minister is the imperative to do better to protect the Great Barrier Reef. It was

apparent very early on that residents of Mount Coot-tha were concerned by the failure of the then state government to properly look after the reef. These are concerns backed up by science. The Australian Institute of Marine Science, for example, has found that coral cover on the Great Barrier Reef has declined by an astonishing 50 per cent over the past 27 years.

The Great Barrier Reef is an iconic natural wonder—a World Heritage listed area recognised for its outstanding universal value. As Queenslanders, we are custodians of this incredible living asset. But now UNESCO is considering listing its World Heritage status as ‘in danger’, and the reef itself is perilously close to being in danger. None of the voters I spoke to in Mount Coot-tha wants to be part of the generation of Queenslanders that oversees the demise of the Great Barrier Reef. The previous government was concerned about the optics—the embarrassment of an ‘in danger’ listing—but Queensland Labor took to the election a series of detailed commitments that will not just help Australia avoid an ‘in danger’ listing from UNESCO but also help prevent the reef from actually being in danger.

The greatest short-term threat to the reef is the dumping of spoil from capital dredging at ports along the reef coastline. Already, only five weeks in, the government has acted to address that threat. The greatest medium term threat to the reef is water quality. We have set aggressive targets to improve water quality and we have promised \$100 million to help reach those targets. We will convene a high-level task force with representatives from regional communities, agricultural groups, conservation organisations, industry groups and leading scientists to determine the best possible approach to water quality improvement in key catchments. And in the long term there is climate change, something the previous government refused to even acknowledge existed. Climate change is real and, by causing the ocean to warm and acidify, it poses the greatest long-term threat to the Great Barrier Reef. This is a global problem best addressed through an international agreement with binding national targets implemented through an emissions trading scheme. Queenslanders voted for a government that takes the threats to the reef seriously and is committed to real action to address those threats. My own electorate might not rely on the reef directly for jobs and economic opportunity, but across Queensland there are plenty of people who do—about 69,000 in fact. I am proud to be part of this government that puts jobs at the centre of everything we do.

Another remarkable thing about the recent election campaign was the sense of unity we saw in often disparate parts of the community. Shared experience is such a unifying force, and the Queensland community was united around the shared experience of Campbell Newman’s job cuts. Everyone was touched by it. Everyone had their own story to share, whether they had lost their own job or a family member or close friend had lost theirs. Queenslanders knew in their hearts and their heads that you do not create jobs by sacking people.

In my own campaign, people from a range of professional backgrounds came out to volunteer, often having never been politically active before—doctors, lawyers, TAFE teachers, teacher aides, paramedics, community sector workers—all motivated by their own experience of job cuts and attacks on their particular profession. Many of these people became active in the election campaign through their union. I know that the Queensland Council of Unions, Together the public sector union, the Queensland Nurses’ Union and my own union, United Voice, all made targeted efforts in the Mount Coot-tha electorate for which I am both grateful and humbled.

To represent the interests of working people in this place is a responsibility I carry with pride. My union, United Voice, has supported my political aspirations for many years now. While those opposite might see this as some kind of slur, the fact that thousands of hardworking union members have supported me to enter parliament is incredibly humbling. I will work hard to do justice to their faith in me.

Many Mount Coot-tha residents feel that too often the LNP led Brisbane City Council makes decisions in consultation with developers and not the community. They feel that the pendulum has swung too far in favour of a development-at-all-costs approach. In just the past week I have attended three packed-out community meetings on developments under consideration in my electorate. We literally cannot find community venues big enough to accommodate these meetings.

At Newmarket we have a retirement village operator wanting to knock down its existing low-density property and replace it with a high-density facility in a low-density zoned area that is ill equipped to handle the increased traffic and demand for infrastructure. This is not even to mention the impact of the proposal on the elderly residents of the village. On the old ABC site at Toowong we have a developer who wants to put a unit block on a piece of land with only one access point on to Coronation Drive, one of Queensland’s most congested roads. There is something special about the character of our inner-city urban areas, with old-style Queenslanders and workers cottages. Clearly, density must grow as the population and popularity of these areas increase. But it must happen in a way which is consistent with the character and livability of our suburbs.

I am sure that all of my colleagues here today from both sides of the House will agree with me that to be elected to this place, to be entrusted by the people of Queensland to represent them in this House, is an extraordinary honour, a great privilege and a great responsibility. Every three years the people of Queensland come together to choose their leaders, and every now and then, as they did on 31 January, they peacefully and purposefully choose to change their state government. Democracy is a vibrant and rare thing not to be trifled with. If there is only one thing we have learned from the feedback of the electorate on 31 January it is that Queenslanders will not tolerate a government that is not responsive to the needs and views of the people. Queenslanders want a government that is not arrogant. They want a government that does not think it knows best and refuses to heed the advice of experts and stakeholders. They want a government that does not see electoral victory as an imprimatur to impose an extreme ideological world view on the rest of us. They want a government that is not going to pick fights with any individual or group that dares to disagree with it. Queenslanders want and deserve a government that is responsive to the people—that listens, consults, acts with reason, has a positive plan for the future and, above all, is respectful. On 31 January Queenslanders expressed their confidence in Labor to deliver that kind of government.

Premier Palaszczuk has demonstrated what is possible for a leader who acts with integrity, listens, is genuinely interested in what the community has to say and is responsive to that feedback. Under her leadership the Labor Party made history on 31 January, and I am proud to be part of a government that listens, responds and, above all, acts with integrity. That is the kind of government Queenslanders voted for and the kind of government they will get.

Mr Speaker, given your ruling this morning, can I ask the House to indulge me briefly. Given that posterity will record this as my inaugural speech I must take a brief moment to record my thanks to the great Australian Labor Party, my local branch members and supporters, my friends and my extended family. Without all of them I would not be here. Most of all, to my wife, Kim, and our three beautiful children: thank you for backing me, for bearing with me and for being with me. They are watching tonight online. I make these thanks briefly now and hope to do so more fully and cover more of the territory customarily included in an inaugural speech at some time in the future. I commend the motion to the House.