



Speech by
Di Farmer

MEMBER FOR BULIMBA

Hansard Wednesday, 22 April 2009

MAIDEN SPEECH

Ms FARMER (Bulimba—ALP) (4.16 pm): Thank you, Mr Speaker. May I congratulate you on your election. Like many of us here, I have always admired your wit, wisdom and generosity of spirit, and I am proud to enter the parliament at the time that you have been elected Speaker. The House has done well.

I rise today to firstly acknowledge the original owners of the land on which this great house of parliament now stands. I also acknowledge the honour and responsibility conferred upon me by the people of the Bulimba electorate and I recognise the great histories, traditions and responsibilities that come with being a member of this House.

It will always be a personal reference point for me in years to come that as a member of the 53rd Parliament I have become part of the dynamic story of parliamentary democracy in Queensland in this the 150th anniversary of statehood. Robert Herbert, the first Premier of Queensland, would be astounded, I am sure, at the changes which have occurred in and to Queensland over the last century and a half, as would William Hemmant in the time that has passed since his election as the first representative for Bulimba in 1873. There have been 17 members for Bulimba since that time, including me. Labor has held the seat continuously since 1932, with auspicious names such as Jack Houston, Ron McLean and the inimitable Pat Purcell peppering the honour roll.

Irene Longman, the first female ever elected to the Queensland parliament, was the member for Bulimba between 1929 and 1932. There were no female toilets in Parliament House in her time, and as a woman she was forced to eat her meals on the veranda. Now—in 2009—I stand before you as the only other female politician and the first female Labor politician ever elected to the seat of Bulimba, in the same election that Anna Bligh became the first female to be elected in her own right as an Australian Premier. I am proud to be part of Anna Bligh's government and to be joining the men and women on the Labor team, many of whom I have known for a number of years, who are doing their best for Queensland.

While we can only speculate at what our founders may think of the changes over the past 150 years, we do know that they began this state with a clear vision of improving the lives of Queenslanders. Today we face vastly different challenges that need vastly different solutions, but some things do not change. One is Labor's own clear vision of improving the lives of Queenslanders. The other for me is the importance of a sense of community. With a strong community spirit we can deal with anything that comes our way. In the face of economic hardship, community spirit will pull us through.

I was raised in a small town in Central Queensland, growing up in the country town of Gladstone. Gladstone, which was then only just starting to look like the industrial powerhouse that it is today, instilled in me a sense of belonging, trust and reliance upon family and community.

As many members know, a small tight-knit population has real community spirit. In a close community, people look out for each other. They know the highs and lows of their neighbours and their community, and they laugh and cry for both. They cheer for their neighbours' aspirations and achievements, and they rally to help in their misfortune. It is just this strong sense of community that is very real in the Bulimba electorate. It might sound strange to say that of an inner urban community and one that many people know only for its busy shopping, cinema and cafe precinct, but I assure the House that the community spirit is strong and true in Bulimba.

It is not possible to talk about community, particularly in the Bulimba electorate, without talking about my predecessor and friend, Pat Purcell, who personified the very essence of the word. I have heard many stories about Pat's community spirit. There is the story about Pat coming out with his own chainsaw to cut down a tree for a pensioner after a wild storm; the one about him buying a trolley full of groceries for a family who had lost their home, or the one about him fixing the tap of an elderly lady who lived in a public housing unit and who could not manage the job herself. Pat set the standard.

The early Aborigines of my local area called Bulimba Toogoolawah, which means 'heart'. Although I understand this was probably a reference to the heart-shaped piece of land that forms the peninsula of Bulimba, I like to think that it very accurately describes the community that I now represent. This is not just because the electorate has physical boundaries that circumscribe it and make it a place that people go to and not through, with the Brisbane River and Norman and Bulimba creeks forming a significant portion of its boundaries; it is also because of the history of the place as well.

One need only walk through the Balmoral Cemetery, cared for so passionately with the support of the Friends of Balmoral Cemetery, and read the tombstones to understand the history of the place and of the families who worked to make it what it is today—families such as the Wrights, who were the first boat builders in the area and still have their business in the electorate; the Marconis, whose Bulimba forefather Joe invented goanna oil; and the Loves, who have lived in the electorate for seven continuous generations, with five of those generations attending Bulimba State School. I am proud to say that Chris of the seventh generation of the family was a keen helper on my election campaign. There is also the Hardcastles who donated the land that is now Hardcastle Park, from which the Hawthorne ferry terminal operates and where parents take their children to play. Millie Hardcastle, who lives around the corner from me, only recently retired as president of the Catholic Women's League after spending 46 years helping the needy. There are many, many families like those who have lived generation after generation in our area because they belong to the place and it belongs to them.

However, when we talk about community, the almost 200 community organisations that are active in the Bulimba electorate also contribute to our closeness. Despite my own involvement in community organisations like the Morningside Development Association, the Bulimba Meals on Wheels, the Balmoral Local Area Ambulance Committee and the Morningside State School P&C, it was not until the last six months as a candidate, when I had the opportunity to meet all the incredible people of those 200-odd organisations, that I truly understood the meaning of the phrase 'social fabric'.

Those organisations include the kindergarten associations, schools, P&Cs and P&Fs of all the electorate suburbs of Murray, Cannon Hill, Hawthorne, Carina, Camp Hill, Bulimba, Norman Park, Seven Hills, Balmoral and Bulimba; seniors groups such as the Bulimba Senior Citizen's Club and the Morningside Pensioners and Superannuants League; the bushcare groups like the Bennetts Road Bush Defenders and the Perrin Creek-Seven Hills Bushland Rehabilitation Group; the sport and recreation clubs, ranging from the Queensland Hockey Centre, the 16 footers sailing club and the Morningside Flyers Swimming Club, to every football code in existence; the neighbourhood watches like the one at Murarrie that has overseen a consistent downward trend in break-and-enters in its catchment area; the RSLs and associated groups; the Morningside CWA and service clubs like Lions and Rotary; the Villanova Players; the South East Brisbane Chamber of Commerce; the social welfare groups like the Cannon Hill Family Support Centre and the Gateway Community Centre; the east bicycle user group; and the churches like Saints Peter and Paul's and St Thomas', the Bulimba Uniting Church and St John the Baptist, which is most recently famous as the regular place for the media to look for the Prime Minister if he is in Brisbane on a Sunday morning, and many others. All of them make up the social fabric of the Bulimba community. If even one of them ceased to operate, our local community would be a lesser place. Each one of those organisations looks after its own and contributes to the richness of our lives.

Without a doubt, an important part of my role as the member for Bulimba is to support those organisations and to create as many opportunities as possible for them to prosper. However, as the member for Bulimba I must also attend to some of the pressing issues facing our community if we are to retain the quality of life we so enjoy. It is both the established and the new inhabitants of the Bulimba electorate—and I am still considered new, even though I have lived in the local area for most of the past 15 years—who told me quite clearly during the election campaign and in the months preceding it that one of the very top issues for them was that we do not lose our quality of life and that we always do more to help people interact as a community. It was a great encouragement to me to be exhorted to do something that is at the heart of my core values.

However, along with this there are key issues that people are concerned about. The people of Bulimba have put their trust in me and given me the task of preserving and improving the social and economic quality of life in their community. This will be the foundation of my work in the coming years as their member of parliament. The first of those key issues is jobs protection and jobs creation. The Bulimba electorate is diverse, incorporating some highly affluent suburbs as well as suburbs where life can be a struggle. However, in spite of the affluence, the effect of the global economic crisis is clear. Not a week goes by that I do not meet three or four people who have just lost their job or who have applied for a job

that 300 or 400 other people applied for so that they did not even get a look in, or who are applying for jobs so that they can earn at least something, even if it means working at a level many times lower than they are used to.

In electing the Bligh Labor government, the voters of Queensland made a very clear choice about the economic development of their state, the need to protect and create jobs and the need to invest heavily in skills development. The Gateway Upgrade Project is a key piece of infrastructure for the Bulimba electorate and will create thousands of jobs over its life. However, it is the government's Skilling Queenslanders for Work initiative that is making an immediate impact in the electorate, and I am excited about what this will be able to achieve for us in the future.

Using the funding available under this initiative—\$80 million in the 2008-09 year alone—training organisations such as CES and the great team at our own local organisation, Career Employment Australia, are providing important skills to our young people such as building, painting, planting and so on, to benefit not-for-profit organisations in our community. Recently at Cannon Hill State School I was able to show the Treasurer the vegetable gardens, chicken coop and specially designed tuckshop kitchen that trainees have constructed. I know the significant sprucing up that will be carried out by trainees at the Morningside and Cannon Hill schools of art buildings, which will benefit an enormous range of community organisations and community members who utilise those facilities. There are a number of major employers in the Bulimba electorate, as well as many thousands of small businesses that are the backbone of our local economy. I will be working closely with employers at both levels to ensure they are able to avail themselves of the policies, programs and services of the government that have been put in place to support them.

Another major priority is education, and this is a passion for me. My father was one of the small number of local GPs serving Gladstone and the surrounding district. Unfortunately, he passed away in my first year of university and I was not mature enough to engage with him properly to benefit from his wisdom. However, what I do remember most clearly, which has influenced me in an absolutely fundamental sense, is his philosophy on education. He would say to my sister and I, 'Education is the tool for social change.' He was a true believer in the power of education and, through education, improving opportunities for individuals and the community to grow. I share this view. It is one of the many reasons that I am proud to be part of this Labor government and to lay claim to the legacy of previous Labor government decisions.

I am proud of initiatives like the roll-out of 240 kindergartens across the state to shore up learning foundations for our children in their early years; the introduction of the prep year, which so many teachers in my electorate tell me has made a real difference to the quality of learning by the time our children reach year one; and the high retention rates in our senior schools achieved through deliberate government measures like the significant investment in school based apprenticeships and traineeships. We all know that the longer our young people stay at school, the more opportunities they will have in life. Now we have the opportunities created by the federal government for new and revamped school facilities through Kevin Rudd's Building the Education Revolution and National Schools Pride initiatives. There is ample evidence to show that opportunities for learning are vastly improved when students are in good quality facilities. The icing on the cake is the commitment all schools have made to ensuring that new facilities are available for community use. I am excited already to hear of the plans many of the local schools in the Bulimba electorate have for this very purpose.

Delivering on fast and reliable public transport and tackling traffic congestion will also be high on my list of priorities. Many of us in the Bulimba electorate are fortunate to be able to avail ourselves of every mode of public transport on offer, not only bus and train but, given our position on the river, also the CityCat services. However, like many areas in South-East Queensland, we are feeling the pressure of increased population density and the effect this has on transport services. There is no doubt that it has also had an effect on traffic volume.

I am looking forward to the completion of the Gateway Upgrade Project and to the delivery of the much needed Eastern Busway as real and practical measures to address our traffic issues. The government's commitment to encouraging active transport through building more cycleways and walkways will also assist. I am excited, for example, that provision has been made on the new Gateway upgrade for cycle and pedestrian paths. I look forward to creating many more local opportunities of this nature.

Lastly, we must not fail on issues such as climate change. The economic crisis will pass but climate change is long term and the greatest threat to our future and to what we leave to our children. The federal and state Labor governments have made clear their commitment to addressing climate change. Locally I know there is the same commitment. Our residents, businesses, community organisations and schools are already making their own significant efforts towards creating a sustainable community.

I think of the new project, for example, which Boeing International has funded in our Gateway Learning Community schools to work with Greening Australia to develop environmental projects in those schools. And I am heartened by the work from the Beelarong Community Farm and Transition East to

develop community gardens. There are many other excellent examples. I will be working closely with my friend and colleague Shayne Sutton, the Brisbane City councillor for Morningside and opposition leader in council, to harness the collective enthusiasm around such initiatives and to develop our community further.

But now is the time for thankyou's. Many more times than I can count over the last six months, and certainly even before then, I have felt overwhelmed and humbled by the generosity of the people around me—Shayne, Craig, Bernice, Brian and Barb, Carlien, Susan and Milton, Anthony, Claire, Tim, Kendall, Ross, Shaun, Shaz, Annette, Teisha, Trish, Adam, Di and many more. They know how I feel about them but I want to put my thanks on the public record. There are the special community people like Vilma Ward and Laurie Latham, who are inspirational in their commitment to the community and who have provided so much moral support. And there is a special thankyou to the other Sharon, who is the most astonishing person and who is the reason I am standing in this chamber today.

I must particularly thank our Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, who has found time in his incredible schedule over the last six weeks to check in to see how I was going and to provide advice. I am looking forward to working with him as my federal member. I of course would also not be here without the support of Pat Purcell. I could not have asked for more encouragement than he has given me. He has left a wonderful legacy in the Bulimba electorate which I am honoured to continue. I want to particularly pass on my thoughts and regards to Pat and his family and wish them all the very best.

Most of all I thank my own family. I was fortunate to have been born into a loving family, with a mother and father who nurtured and encouraged my sister and me and who instilled in us strong values of hard work, respect and care for others. My father was a wise man who worked hard for his family and for the community. My mother was the most remarkable woman I have ever known. If I inherited even a tiny fraction of her energy and capacity to love, I would be grateful. It is a great sadness to me that neither of them is here today, as both have passed away. However, I still have my sister, Su, whom I count as one of my closest friends. She, too, is a remarkable woman. She and her husband, Peter, and beautiful daughters, Kate, Ashleigh, Georgia and Bronte—of whom I am so proud—are always close, no matter what I do in my life.

However, it is my husband, Ian, stepdaughter, Lucy, and daughter, Millie, to whom I owe the most. Ian is my soul mate and the other half of me. He has always helped me to be the best person I can be, and I know I could not have got to this point today without him. Lucy and Millie are simply magnificent human beings, and I often cannot believe how much I love them. Millie in particular has been so patient throughout this campaign, putting up with her home being taken over and never, ever having as much time with her mummy as she wanted to. Ian and I took a leaf out of Barack Obama's book and promised a kitten to Millie once the campaign was over, and afterwards I realised how clever Barack Obama is. Kitten Toby is now in place and has taken charge of our household.

Mr Speaker, all of us here in this House have been given a huge responsibility to represent Queensland in these unique and difficult times. It is a trust I will not take lightly. I thank the House.