



Speech by

Mark Ryan

MEMBER FOR MORAYFIELD

Hansard Wednesday, 22 April 2009

MAIDEN SPEECH

Mr RYAN (Morayfield—ALP) (7.47 pm): It is with great honour and humility that I rise in this place for the first time. In doing so I congratulate Mr Speaker on your election to the position of Speaker of the 53rd Queensland Parliament. All elections are historic in their own way, but the election of members to the 53rd Queensland Parliament is especially important as this election occurred in the year when Queensland celebrates its 150th birthday and the people of Queensland elected the first female Premier in Australian history. I extend my congratulations to honourable members on their election to this place and their contribution to the history of our state, Queensland.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today and the traditional owners of the lands on which the Morayfield state electorate is based. I trust that this parliament and the state government can continue to work in partnership with our Indigenous brothers and sisters to effect real and positive change throughout our state.

At the outset I extend my thanks to the people of the Morayfield state electorate who put their faith in me to serve them as their representative. My commitment is to serve you, the people of the Morayfield state electorate, to the best of my ability, to involve you in the political process and to represent your views in this parliament. You should expect me to be a person of ethics, integrity and honesty. I expect you to continually remind me of the great privilege and responsibility that you have entrusted to me. At this point, I must acknowledge the support and encouragement that enabled me to be in this place today.

To my family who are in the gallery this evening, thank you for supporting me, empowering me and challenging me to achieve great things. Whilst politics does not really run in my family, my late grandmother, Edith Ryan, was a long-time supporter of the Australian Labor Party. She would call me every Sunday afternoon to discuss politics and current affairs. She would always end her phone calls with the words 'Up the workers'. I honour her memory today and thank her for inspiring me to make a difference in our world.

To Ken and Janet Hayward and Michelle Burgett: thank you for encouraging me to seize opportunities and teaching me to never blink when confronting adversities.

To my campaign team, members of the Australian Labor Party and to all those who assisted with my campaign: thank you for your tireless support. In particular, I acknowledge the exceptional work of my friends, some of them in the gallery tonight: Kelley Rogers, Rebecca Pennicott, Mitchell Lawrence, and also Wendy Turner, Murray Daniel, Ellen Heath, Patrick Maher, Gary Taylor, Chris Whiting and John and Monica McCullagh. I am truly grateful to all who were involved with my campaign and am overwhelmed by your generosity of time and spirit.

To my friends from the union movement, especially Gary Bullock, Scott Zackersen and the LHMU; members of the AMWU; the RTBU; the CFMEU; the QPSU; and the CPSU: I thank you for your support.

The Morayfield state electorate is a new electorate created in the growth corridor between Brisbane and the Sunshine Coast. It includes the suburbs of Caboolture South, Upper Caboolture, Rocksberg, Moorina, Morayfield, Burpengary and Narangba. It is a great area with great people and I have lived there for most of my life. The Morayfield state electorate was created from parts of the Pumicestone state

electorate, the Kallangur state electorate and the abolished Kurwongbah state electorate. I congratulate my colleague, the member for Pumicestone, on her re-election. I acknowledge the hard work of the retired member for Kurwongbah, Linda Lavarch, and wish her well for her next adventure. I also pay tribute to my good friend and the retired member for Kallangur, Ken Hayward.

The use of the word 'Morayfield' dates back to the 1850s when George Raff, who was the first member for Brisbane in the first Queensland parliament in 1860, bought some of the land held by the failed Caboolture Cotton Company and called it Moray Field, although it was often written as Morayfields. The word 'Morayfield' has never been used as a name for an electorate before. So in this 150th year of Queensland's existence, it is with a sense of history that I come to this place as the first member for Morayfield. Let the history books show that it is not just my presence in this place as the first member for Morayfield that should be recorded but the fact that the first member for Brisbane in the first Queensland parliament named the place which is now represented in this 53rd Queensland Parliament.

On another historic note, it is with great pride that I serve as a member of this parliament alongside the honourable the Premier, who is the first woman elected to that position in Australian history. I emphasise this history not only because it has taken our parliament 150 years to reach this point but because it is the Australian Labor Party with its commitment to fairness, equality, opportunity and social justice that has contributed to this defining moment in the history of our state, Queensland. Through you, Mr Speaker, I extend the congratulations of the electors of the Morayfield state electorate to the Premier on her historic achievement.

The state electorate of Morayfield is one of the fastest-growing areas of South-East Queensland. This growth presents the community with many challenges but also many opportunities. For instance, let us consider transport in the Morayfield state electorate. As a long-time resident of the area I have experienced firsthand the demands on local road and public transport infrastructure.

I am proud to say that the state government, through its record \$17 billion infrastructure building program, is responding to these demands. As a result of this record building program, local people in the Morayfield state electorate will see more road and public transport infrastructure and services in future years. This is important because transport, especially public transport, is crucial to regional communities. Public transport links people and provides people with opportunities to work, study and be active within their communities. Reliable, accessible and affordable transport alternatives are some of the best antidotes to marginalisation, isolation and disadvantage in communities. Put simply, good public transport services empower people.

As a long-time resident of the Morayfield state electorate, I have witnessed the dynamic growth of the area. Today, there are more traffic lights, more people, more shops, more houses and more cars in the local area. There is no denying that our neighbourhoods and localities, and to that end our state, have experienced tremendous population growth in recent years. Managing and responding to population growth and increased demand for government services and infrastructure is core business for Labor governments. I am proud to say that successive Labor state governments have responded to population growth in the Morayfield state electorate.

Recent achievements for our area include a new police station at Burpengary, new primary and secondary schools at Burpengary and Narangba, new buildings and facilities for primary and secondary schools in Morayfield and Caboolture South, a new ambulance station at Narangba with intensive care paramedics on staff, a new fire station at Burpengary, and additional car parking facilities at Morayfield and Burpengary train stations. As our population continues to grow, so will the demand for government services and infrastructure. I look forward to contributing to the proud tradition of successive Labor state governments of delivering government services and infrastructure for the people of the Morayfield state electorate.

Let us now consider the importance of supporting local businesses and local jobs. Key industries in the Morayfield state electorate are the retail and commerce industries. Many people in the electorate are employed locally in these industries. However, these are tough economic times and businesses and workers, not only in the Morayfield state electorate but also around Queensland, may be experiencing hardship. At this time, more than ever in our history, Queensland does not just need strong and experienced leadership, Queensland needs compassionate government. We need a government that invests in its people. We need a government that truly cares for its citizens. We need a government that is committed to protecting and creating jobs.

I am proud to say that only the Australian Labor Party has the record, the commitment and the compassion to help people through these difficult times, and only the Australian Labor Party has the vision, the plan and the experience to invest in local jobs and continue building vital infrastructure projects. Locally, there is great potential for governments of all levels to work in partnership with community and business groups to promote and support local businesses and in turn support local jobs.

For at least the last few years I have been involved with a number of community organisations that assist marginalised and disadvantaged people. Those organisations include Rosies—Friends on the

Street, the Homeless Persons' Legal Clinic, the Welfare Rights Centre, and the Catholic Justice and Peace Commission. These organisations are just a few of the many organisations that provide assistance and support to people in our communities. I acknowledge their hard work and thank them for all that they do.

In 2002, the ABC produced an episode of *Compass* called 'Saving Claymore'. In that program, Paul Power from the Society of St Vincent de Paul said—

... if things are ever going to change you don't look at people for their disadvantage, for their negatives, for the things that are going wrong in their lives. But you look at everyone, every single person as a person brimming with potential, as a person who has a commitment, potential commitment to change if the circumstances can be created where that change can occur.

I am passionate about empowering communities and the people within them. I see the role of government as one not of compelling communities to travel in certain directions or take certain paths but one of support and empowerment. Every person has the potential to change and the potential to make a difference in their community. It is the role of government to support, encourage, empower and harness that potential.

I am proud to say that the state government has a strong record of supporting and empowering local people and community groups in the Morayfield state electorate. The Community Renewal Project in Caboolture South, the investment in our young people to ensure that they are learning or earning, and the financial assistance provided to local sporting clubs are some examples of how the state government is encouraging people in the Morayfield state electorate to realise their full potential.

I am a member of the Australian Labor Party because the Australian Labor Party is the party of potential and opportunity and because I truly believe that the Australian Labor Party, with its commitment to social justice and proud history of support for working and marginalised people, is the only political party that has the capacity and willingness to deliver fair and equitable government for all members of the community.

In his award-winning book *Profiles in Courage*, which was published in 1955, former President of the United States of America John F Kennedy wrote—

Today the challenge of political courage looms larger than ever before. For our everyday life is becoming so saturated with the tremendous power of mass communications that any unpopular or unorthodox course arouses a storm of protests ... the idealist who dreams of independent statesmanship is rudely awakened by the necessities of election and accomplishment.

He continued by saying—

For democracy means much more than popular government and majority rule, much more than a system of political techniques to flatter or deceive powerful blocs of voters ... The true democracy, living and growing and inspiring, puts its faith in the people—faith that the people will not simply elect men who will represent their views ably and faithfully, but also elect men who will exercise their conscientious judgment—faith that the people will not condemn those whose devotion to principle leads them to unpopular courses, but will reward courage, respect honor and ultimately recognize right.

Perhaps this is why I find it hard to understand why it is often said that the Australian public are angry and dissatisfied with the performance of their political representatives. In fact, Dr Sally Young from the University of Melbourne has written a paper called *Why Australians hate politicians*. In her paper, Dr Young suggests the current cynicism towards politicians represents a crisis of confidence in our political system.

Irrespective of whether these views are ill founded or not, it is important for honourable members to appreciate the basis for these views. I do not believe that these views are based on a default acceptance that politicians represent a lowest common denominator position. Rather, these views represent a desire of the electorate that its political representatives be role models. The electorate wants its political representatives to do better. The electorate wants to be engaged by its political representatives in political discourses. The electorate puts its faith in its political representatives and in doing so the electorate expects us to be leaders, to make hard decisions for the greater good, to show courage and to exercise conscientious judgement. These are worthy expectations. Whilst the burdens of public life may be heavy, we are challenged to do better, to reach new heights and to implement good public policy.

As members of parliament, we cannot expect people to be miraculously interested in the political process just because this place exists. Our role as political representatives is to engage, inform and involve the electorate, especially young people in our respective electorates, in the political process. Young people have many experiences. They have enthusiasm, energy and an openness of mind. They look to the future and have a strong sense of community. To that end, engaging young people in political discourses is not only important for our democracy, it is essential to its continued relevance.

I commend the Queensland parliament on the Everyone's Parliament and the e-democracy programs as positive and constructive engagement strategies. However, more can be done and I would encourage the parliament to consider the possibility of lowering the age for provisional enrolment, keeping the electoral roll open up to and including election day and including an enrolment form on driver's licence application and renewal forms as options for strengthening our democracy. Encouraging participation in our democracy through participation in the electoral process is just one of the many challenges facing governments in contemporary times. Access to the law and access to government services are other challenges.

Our lives are rapidly becoming increasingly complex. For most people, navigating legal problems is expensive and time consuming. As a lawyer, I have experienced both private commercial and pro bono community practices. In both practices, I realise that the issues relevant to engagement in the political process are the same issues relevant to access and involvement in the legal system. All citizens are assumed equal under the law and all are deemed to know the law. According to longstanding legal precedent, ignorance of the law is no defence. Nonetheless, some citizens are less than equal and some citizens do not in fact know aspects of the law and therefore do not appreciate the extent of their rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities.

I am concerned about this reality—not just because our society is structured on adherence to certain legal constructs and frameworks but because people cannot be fully empowered in their communities if they do not appreciate the extent of their rights, duties, obligations and responsibilities. This issue goes beyond mere awareness of the legal, governmental and political processes. This issue is about engagement and empowerment and we need to continue the strategies which take government to the people. I commend the state government on its community cabinet and regional parliament initiatives.

Earlier, I quoted from John F Kennedy's book *Profiles in Courage*. I would like to conclude my first speech in this place by referring to him once again. He said—

To be courageous ... requires no exceptional qualifications, no magic formula, no special combination of time, place and circumstance. It is an opportunity that sooner or later is presented to us all. Politics merely furnishes one arena which imposes special tests of courage. In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices he faces if he follows his conscience—the loss of his friends, his fortune, his contentment, even the esteem of his fellow men—each man must decide for himself the course he will follow.

I trust that my time as the member for the state electorate of Morayfield will be characterised by uncompromising service to the people who have put their faith in me and by opportunities to show courage, to stand up for principle, to assist those in most need and to work for the greater good of our communities. I hope people will look upon my time in this place and acknowledge the courage, honour, integrity and conscientious judgement which I intend to display in my role as not only a person who is focused on those great and lofty aspirations of empowerment and opportunity but as a person who dared to inspire difference through hard work and example.