



Speech by

**ANITA PHILLIPS**

**MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA**

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### FIRST SPEECH

**Ms PHILLIPS** (Thuringowa—ALP) (12.08 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, I begin by seeking your indulgence to let me acknowledge the inspiration I have received which has resulted in my standing here in the parliament of Queensland delivering my first speech as the member for Thuringowa. My parents, Anita Kerridge and John Phillips, who are sadly no longer alive, provided the primary inspiration and motivation for me to choose a political path. Both my grandfathers were seamen. One worked on the wharves in Melbourne during the waterfront strikes of the 1930s, which crippled workers and badly scarred a generation of families. He was a strong union man who refused to give in to the pressure that was applied for them to accept appalling conditions and return to work.

My mother's father was a Scottish seaman who had travelled all over the world from his native Edinburgh before he arrived in Australia. He also became involved in a strike for better conditions which left him without work or a passage home. He found work as a labourer constructing Parliament House in Canberra. He brought his wife and eight children, including my mother, out to a new life in Australia. So both my parents came from backgrounds of working class struggle for survival. They grew up in the Great Depression, when there was never enough to eat, let alone a job for the breadwinner or money for decent housing or the luxury of an education. They met and married, like so many other couples, during the uncertainty of the Second World War, with my father being sent off to fight within days of their marriage. Five years later, when the war ended, they set up home in temporary housing that was hurriedly provided for the thousands of returning servicemen. Not long after I was born we moved to live in a housing commission estate in the outer suburbs of Melbourne, where my parents lived for the next 40 or 50 years of their lives.

So I grew up in a community of low working class with issues that still hold true for similar communities today. We went to schools struggling to cope with the huge influx of families moving to outer suburbs. We were socially isolated. There was high juvenile crime and poor community image. We were never proud to tell anyone outside where we came from. There was minimal public transport. My father rode his pushbike many kilometres to link up with a train to take him to his job on the waterfront. My mother stayed at home to care for me, my three sisters and my brother.

But both my parents were already teaching me about social justice. I went with my father to political rallies, where we listened to speakers on the back of trucks. My mother was determined that I should continue at school, even though the family could not afford it. Luckily, I won scholarships that allowed me to go right through school and on to university. I and a school friend whose family were refugees from Czechoslovakia were the only two in our entire region who went on to university.

My parents inspired me to believe that I could experience a better world. My mother assured me that anything was possible, even for girls. My father showed me that it was possible to struggle out of the stranglehold of poverty and class. During my school education I encountered other people who provided inspiration, in particular one or two Catholic nuns—women who encouraged me to believe that there are no barriers to achieving our dreams.

And so I came to live in Townsville in 1969, seeking to set up home in this tropical paradise where I could fulfil these dreams. And there I met up with another remarkable woman, who was an inspiration to me. I first met Joan Innes-Reid when she came bursting into our shop in Shaw's Arcade and said, 'I need you!' At the time she was the only social worker in Townsville, and she had heard that

I, newly arrived from 'down south', was also a qualified social worker. Within weeks I had abandoned my retail business and, six months pregnant, joined her as the second social worker at Townsville General Hospital.

Joan had come to Townsville from a sheep property in western Victoria via the United States, where she graduated as a social worker in Chicago. The sort of social work she practised would even today be described as radical and cutting edge. We worked as much in the community as in the wards of the hospital, much to the frustration of the hospital administrators, but there just was no-one else to deliver services and programs in the entire community.

Over the ensuing years Joan was instrumental in establishing just about every community organisation in Townsville, many of which have become institutions. She was also an alderman at the same time, and in 1976 she stood for election as mayor of Townsville, losing the contest to Perc Tucker. Ironically, as head of the council's arts committee she was later instrumental in establishing Townsville's first-class art gallery, which was named after the man who beat her. Joan lobbied for years to persuade James Cook University to commence a social work course. We were eventually successful and Joan became the first field work lecturer there.

In 1986 Joan suffered an horrific car accident, which fractured her spine, but with her characteristic determination she rehabilitated herself and showed very little residual disability— probably due to her habit of swimming in the sea near her North Ward home every day until quite recently.

Joan influenced the lives of thousands of people in Townsville, not least of all mine. It was her inspiration that persuaded me to graduate from community work into the political sphere. She said to me, 'This is where you can really change policies to reflect people's needs. You can really make a difference.' She followed my campaign closely, collecting all the newspaper cuttings and giving me advice on everything from policies to what I should wear. Very sadly, Joan died just 10 days before I was elected to parliament, but I know that she and my parents were all celebrating.

Here in the gallery today I have friends and former colleagues who also contributed to my developing realisation that the only way to true social justice was through taking social action. Anne Brennan's father sat in this House as the member for Toowoomba from 1918 to 1925. I am very proud to welcome her here today.

So with all of this powerful inspiration spurring me on, what is it that I hope to achieve for the people of Thuringowa? Thuringowa is a diverse electorate, part of and on the fringe of the greater Townsville region. By 1879 the division of Thuringowa formed a very large triangle from the Burdekin to Rollingstone and west to the ranges past Mingella. The present day electorate is much smaller and was established only in 1990. It had been held, up until this election, by only two members, both of whose names were Ken.

Thuringowa has developed its own character and identity. It has some of the same vitality, youth and untapped energy of the outer suburbs of other cities, but it comes with its own unique pride. This helps to make it such an attractive place to live, as many young couples and families are increasingly finding. It now has the highest percentage of population under 25 of any municipality in Queensland, at 38 per cent. It has one of the highest population growth rates in Queensland.

More and more people are choosing a relaxed, semi-urban lifestyle among the northern beaches that stretch right up to the Paluma rainforest, along the beautiful Ross River right up to the dam, or in the multitude of new housing developments in the suburbs. However, as the local member my task is to make it an even better place to live for all of the community.

During the election campaign, I doorknocked and listened and talked and consulted with people across the broad spectrum of the community. This has helped me to identify what I believe are three priority areas that will be the focus of my endeavours in this, my first term. These are: to give power to those people in the community, particularly families, who have become marginalised by our society so that they can take control of their own lives; to investigate, find and then support ecologically sustainable economic development projects for the electorate that will create employment and viability; and to help to expand people's lives through fun and enjoyment by encouraging diverse arts, leisure, entertainment and sporting pursuits and opportunities for all age groups. I shall expand a little on each of these three priority areas.

Many people in our community are not able to fully participate in the wonderful things that are happening around them. They cannot access the 'good life' of Thuringowa. They include people on very low or fixed incomes, some of our senior citizens, people with disabilities and families who are struggling to cope with their everyday existence.

In Townsville, as in many cities, the inner suburbs are now home to trendy apartments, boutique shops, great restaurants and leisure and entertainment centres. People on low incomes, especially those who are unemployed, are moving out of their traditional inner-city areas. They are moving to the outer suburbs, where housing costs less but, on the downside, they are then isolated from social infrastructure.

I am not talking about the many young families who are choosing to live in the burgeoning new housing estates in Thuringowa, I am referring to those who do not have a choice, who are being pushed out to the margins of society in both a physical and symbolic sense. Increasingly, these people are moving either towards the Upper Ross or the northern beaches areas. Once they get there they find unexpected problems. Sadly, these problems are similar to the ones I encountered as a young person growing up in what were then the outer suburbs. One such problem is the lack of public transport and, alternatively, with the escalating price of petrol, the expense of driving into town. Others are the lack of nearby resources and infrastructure, especially for youth, and the social isolation.

I am proud to report that this Labor government is not going to let these problems go on for future generations. I am very excited that the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing has announced that one of these areas in the Thuringowa electorate, Rasmussen, is to be the location for a Community Renewal Program project. This is a remarkable program that actually changes communities from within.

I have asked the minister to begin with a public information/consultation process and then invite community representatives to form a reference group that will develop an action plan which will, in turn, become the blueprint for the complete reforming of that community. I am very pleased that this process has been agreed to by the minister. I look forward to keeping honourable members informed as we embark on this eventful journey.

My second priority is to work with stakeholders in Thuringowa to investigate opportunities for economic development. To a very large extent, we are a dormitory community from which those who have work commute. We need to build the community, to create jobs, to become much more self-supporting. And I believe that such development will survive only if it is ecologically sustainable. That means that we must consider the opportunities and threats to the total environment when we are looking at development. Maybe we can explore the possibilities offered by our unique local resources. We have fertile river flats that could perhaps be developed for small crop industries. We are ideally situated to develop new initiatives in partnership with the nearby James Cook University. We can look at developing and supporting small business ventures that will provide opportunities for further local employment. I will be working with others, such as the Department of State Development and the Thuringowa Chamber of Commerce, to identify how this can be achieved. I am sure that we can be innovative, and put the Smart State ideals into practice.

And finally, but by no means last, I believe that I can make a difference by encouraging the development of better leisure, art and sporting pursuits, putting more fun and enjoyment into the quality of people's lives. Thuringowa is already proud to be the home of the North Queensland Cowboys and the regional centre for junior Rugby League. We need to expand and encourage other sports and facilities. The jointly funded skateboard facility in Pioneer Park is so well patronised that we now have to build more. We need other activities and events, not only for young people to enjoy but for all age groups.

In Thuringowa, we have the magnificent Ross River Dam and, if we were an inland city, we would focus all our attention and resources on that beautiful asset. In our region, however, we are blessed with so many attractions, such as the Strand, the rainforest areas and the islands, that we tend to ignore that fabulous river. I believe that the people of Thuringowa deserve to have this become the focus of leisure and entertainment that is locally accessible to them. We can improve and promote the delightful walking tracks by the river. We can explore developing a first-class rowing course perhaps. We could look at performing arts ventures and venues, or a heritage village to display our fascinating history. I will work with organisations such as the Thuringowa council and the north Queensland water authority to make this possible.

I could not conclude this first speech without at least mentioning the bridge across the Ross River at Condon. This will be part of the bypass of Townsville, part of the National Highway system which was declared by the federal government in 1991. Controversy has raged in the local media as to who is responsible for the funding of the bridge. A solution will be found, and I can assure the people of Thuringowa that I have already lobbied very hard, and the Minister for Transport and Minister for Main Roads has agreed to contribute \$7.3 million to fast-track what is a federal government project. So I know that we will achieve a satisfactory and successful outcome.

On that note, I assure the electors of Thuringowa that I will repay them for the faith that they have placed in me by electing me as their member. I thank them for this, and I commit to being accessible, approachable and hard working.

I had a very short election campaign period, having been selected just on Christmas, and a couple of weeks later we were into election mode, with only a three and a half weeks campaign. Like the other four colleagues who were selected at the same time, we went from pre-selection to parliament in six weeks. So the entire campaign was compressed into a pressure cooker environment. We could never have won Thuringowa without the marvellous support of a very small but hardworking team—the team of Bill Marklew, who was my campaign manager, David Bell, Leanne Bell, Gerd Johannsmann,

Evol Keane, Jeff Clelland, Denise Thompson, Adam Curnock, Linda Toll, Mick Keane, Mary Marklew, Kris Hunter, Robbie Stout, Paul Kelly, Linda Ogilvie, Mary-Anne Clelland, Ginnie Hall, Dalma and Gordon Buckby, Ray Goodmanson and Gary Hallatt—and the support I received from my colleagues Mike Reynolds and Lindy Nelson-Carr and their supporters.

I also wish to acknowledge the fantastic support of Emily's List and my mentor, Joan Kirner. There were times when I felt that only Emily's believed that we could actually win Thuringowa for the Labor Party. The financial and emotional support they gave me was phenomenal. I was also spurred on by support from other sources, such as the staff of the Australian Services Union here in Brisbane, especially Julie and Mary-anne, and from other unions and individual members.

Finally, I could not have achieved this honour without the love and invaluable moral support of my three wonderful daughters, Rebecca, Melanie and Keinton, and I could never have done it without the divine grace and guidance with which I was blessed.

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