



Speech by

CHRIS CUMMINS

MEMBER FOR KAWANA

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FIRST SPEECH

Mr CUMMINS (Kawana—ALP) (11.47 a.m.): It gives me enormous pleasure and it is with great pride that I rise to give my first speech in this House as the first member for Kawana. I assure His Excellency of my constituents' loyalty to the system of government in this state and, indeed, our proud nation. I congratulate the Speaker on his election to his position. I also extend my congratulations to the Premier, his fine and positive cabinet, all Labor members who were returned at the February election and, naturally, to all other new members.

It is very pleasing to know that I was favoured by the constituents of the new state seat of Kawana to be their voice in Peter Beattie's Queensland government. In this historic 50th Parliament of Queensland, I intend to serve to the best of my ability all the citizens of my electorate, regardless of their political persuasion, race, colour or religious beliefs. One of the main messages that I and all members on our side of the House heard is that we are here to be strong, positive voices in Peter Beattie's government on behalf of the people in our electorates who demand to be heard. This is one of their basic democratic rights.

I sincerely believe that the consultation process adopted by the Labor government embraces the community and gives citizens a chance to put forward their grievances or positive suggestions. Such consultation is well received, appreciated and recognised as a great way of remaining in touch. This was clearly evident on the weekend just passed when both Kawana and Maroochydore electorates hosted the first community cabinet for this term. I thank the Premier, his ministers, advisers, staff and assistants and I can assure them of another warm welcome on their return.

I sincerely thank those Sunshine Coast residents who have placed their hopes, expectations and faith in me. This is what I find the most daunting aspect of the new challenge: the expectation that I can bring home the bacon and improve the lives of those not only in our electorate but also of those right across the Sunshine Coast and, indeed, our great state. Let me place on the record that I am up to the challenge and that I will not disappoint those people who have put their trust in me to be their voice in this parliament.

Firstly, my thanks must go to my loving wife, Donna. I never understood what people meant by 'soul mate' until I met Donna. After proposing to her on bended knee on Warana Beach on a rare rainy, overcast day on the Sunshine Coast, our lives have never been the same. We have shared and experienced both good and bad times, and her ongoing support for me is always greatly appreciated. Just over two years ago God gifted us with a son, whom we called Daniel. I trust Donna and Daniel realise I love them more and more each day. A family's love and support is essential and they are my greatest asset.

I remember that much was made of a 'maiden' speech some years ago as it was claimed to be the first by a maiden. I believe that this speech may also be a first. It is obvious that I cannot claim to be a maiden, but I would proudly like to announce to the world, via this House of course, that my wife and I were informed only last week that we will be having an addition to our family in early December. During the nerve-racking post-election stresses, God chose to bless Donna, Daniel and I with another child, something we are greatly appreciative of and looking forward to.

Without being accused of any bias, I do truly believe that a problem has arisen with the influx of new members, many of whom are, may I dare say, of the fairer and more attractive sex. The issue of

child care within the parliamentary precinct should be seen as a clear and positive reflection of our changing society and not as a difficulty or nuisance. I hope we embrace the challenge and improve child care access and facilities right across our great state. I have no doubt that similar improvements will be implemented after the coming federal election.

I do have immense faith in our society and I wish to put on the public record the faith and hope I have in our youth, both now and for the future. The pressures, temptations and even burdens of responsibility that our youth face today can be frightening. There are many negatives that I will not mention here today but that do need addressing. I, like many of my colleagues, do not have all the answers, especially those pertaining to the problems facing our youth, but I have no doubt that we will tackle head-on the issues facing our youth.

I believe that communication can go a long way towards finding a cure to many of the concerns and issues we face, and I hope the youth across Queensland and, indeed, Australia realise that we require, we need and we welcome their input and assistance. I know there are some very positive programs under way, and I realise that in coming years more positive and proactive initiatives will be implemented to ensure that our next generation of adults, our future community leaders, will be included in our positive and caring society. There is and always will be faith and trust in the youth in our society.

At 38 years of age, I have been fortunate to have had a great deal of contact with the elderly. My electorate of Kawana is made up of a large number of self-funded retirees and pensioners alike. All levels of government—local, state and federal—have a long way to go to improve the lives of our more senior residents. I do not know where in some parts of western society we have gone wrong by not including to the degree we should our elderly family members. Some tribal or more traditional societies are undoubtedly far more thoughtful, respectful and caring of their ageing family and friends. As Australians, we recognise that we are an ageing society, and this is one thing we all have in common: we are all growing older. When we speak of improving family values, this should include our respected elders, who can be and should be a valuable asset to us and not a liability.

I have been very fortunate in my upbringing—not one of lavish wealth or fortune, but one of love and respect and support from both my parents, Kevin and Priscilla. They have been the greatest role models one could ask for: hard working, committed, successful, loyal, giving, proud, humble and loving. Obviously, there are many more descriptive words I could use, but I am limited by time. I will always remember my father's and mother's fine work ethic from an early age. Dad rode a pushbike to the North Ipswich railway workshops. On that bike was a small padded seat where normally my elder brother, Brady, or sometimes I would share our family's first and only mechanical means of transportation. I also vividly remember my father often sacrificing his leisure time by working a second job on weekends or even on his holidays, whether it be driving a truck or travelling to Sydney to work in a machine shop in his trade as a fitter and turner. Both Mum and Dad have made huge sacrifices for our family, and I will always be indebted to them.

Dad's father, Tom Cummins, was a crane driver in the North Ipswich workshops. He was a proud and well liked man who enjoyed the simple things in life. I can remember Tom and my nanna, Gladys, and their love of the family, both immediate and those distant. Many of the people to whom as a child I referred as aunt or uncle were often distant cousins or others who had been unofficially adopted by our clan or who lived under the same roof. I can recall many family gatherings at Liverpool Street, North Ipswich, where my grandmother Gladys was born. It was just down the hill from St Joseph's Primary School, which I attended from grades 4 to 7. Gladys Cummins, who was a proud Maxwell, was born, lived and died in the same home.

Flannery's Ulster Hotel in Ipswich also holds a special place in our family's heart. Dan Dempsey was best mates with my grandfather Tom and was also his cousin. Dan's daughter, Norma, my godmother, is still the mine host of this fine establishment along with Dennis Flannery, who was a proud Australian Rugby League Kangaroo, as was Dan Dempsey's father-in-law. Both men are true legends.

Dad's two brothers, Max, the elder, and Warren, the younger, also learnt their trade in the railway workshops—as did many Queensland residents—realising that, of course, Liverpool Street was within earshot of the 7.20 and 7.30 railway hooter. It will be of great interest to me and many of my family to inspect the North Ipswich railway museum workshop. I will suggest that traditional hooters be continued as a mark of respect to many of the fine railway people right across Queensland and Australia.

In 1978 I was fortunate enough to begin my working life at the age of 15 as an apprentice electrician, becoming the third generation North Ipswich railway worker. Like now, jobs were hard to find, especially apprenticeships. That is another reason why I fully support the continued apprenticeship and training programs that the state Labor government has improved and implemented.

Tom, my grandfather, had passed away many years before I entered the railways and by this time both Dad and Max, his elder brother, had established careers in the Royal Australian Air

Force—careers and lifestyles their families enjoyed. My father proudly served for just under three decades in uniform, retiring as a warrant officer. Max also achieved the same rank within the RAAF, serving over two decades. My Uncle Warren served in the police force and later operated, along with his wife, Noela, a successful small business in Ipswich until recently when he sold his interests. He is now an unpaid political adviser. Many in this House still know Warren as the ringmaster at the Ekka. Also on the RNA board, Warren is proud to call many honourable members on both sides of this House good friends. My brother, Brady, has also served in the Royal Australian Air Force for over two decades and is presently a squadron leader serving in Canberra where he resides with his wife, Angela, and daughters—my two beautiful nieces—Elise and Tegan.

I want to mention Angela's parents, Bill and Irene McCrea, both dear family friends. Bill is a proud life member of the Australian Labor Party and yet another former North Ipswich railway workshop man who was always of great assistance to me over many years. To the entire McCrea family: thank you very much. I have always remembered my mother as an intelligent, hardworking, loving and truly devoted person from whom I hope I have inherited some fine traits. She was a Townsville girl who, in her year, was in the top five at scholarship. Mum's family could not afford further education, as was the case for many in those days. My mother put this behind her, went out to work, married my father, had a family, went back to work and continued learning and improving her education through reading and various night courses. Many of us refer to her as a quiz champion because of her proud successes on *Pick A Box*, *Concentration*, Tony Barber's *Temptation*, the forerunner to *Sale of the Century*, *Casino 10* and numerous other quiz competitions.

As I said earlier, I am very proud of my family and hope they realise how much I love them. They are the people who made me who I am today. My parents—indeed, most of my family—have always been actively involved in voluntary community work with the Koorinal Aged Care Facility, the local church, St Vincent de Paul and other community organisations. In this the International Year of the Volunteer we should realise that many people receive enormous fulfilment and tremendous benefit by getting in and having a go. When we help someone by becoming a more active community member and getting involved and when we can give to others who may be in need or who may not be as fortunate as ourselves, that is when we can receive many non-financial rewards, which are often more pleasant and beneficial to the soul.

The Kawana electorate, and indeed all of the Sunshine Coast, is a rapidly growing area with continuing increases in population. Families and retirees are attracted to our beautiful area for numerous reasons. One is the possibility of more affordable housing. A healthy social fabric relies on security and shelter. Having a roof over our heads provides a family with basic yet vital security. Affordable homes and rentals are essential to enable middle- to low-income families and seniors to retain some disposable income with which to enjoy a reasonable standard of living and quality of life. I look forward to working with the Minister for Public Works and Minister for Housing to continue to improve this situation.

I sincerely feel that my success in Kawana can be attributed to a number of factors. Firstly, there were the dyed-in-the-wool long-term Labor supporters who, after many losses over the years at various levels of government, never gave up. That included numerous family and friends not associated with the party. Without the benefit of being able to list everyone here, I wish to thank every single person who committed time, effort, money and resources to this our successful election campaign. Having said that, I do, however, need to acknowledge some of my campaign team, including James and Mary Gardner, Mark Lawrence, Leon Bolton, Elizabeth Scott, Len Cooke and of course those members of both the Caloundra and Maroochydore branches. The professionalism and assistance from Labor Party head office was first class. Without it many of us, myself included, would not be here today. To Cameron Milner and the whole team of organisers, assistants, et cetera, I offer my heartfelt thanks, especially to Simon Finn, a true party asset and someone who has been of tremendous assistance to me from before my preselection in November last year until the declaration of the poll. In fact, he is still helping to set up the new Kawana branch. Yes, at this point in time Kawana has a state Labor member but no Labor branch!

The Australian Labor Party is a political party that has outlasted and will continue to outlast all other parties. It continues to clearly demonstrate that it is an institution with high principles. This was no more evident than at the recent state election. Following the overwhelming endorsement of our policies, our government now has a vital role to ensure that all people are given every opportunity to reach or achieve their full potential, irrespective of their sex, race, colour, religion or disability. I can proudly say that I believe the Australian Labor Party's greatest assets are its members and supporters. These women and men are the heart and soul of our party and, indeed, our state and nation. It is these people who I hope and trust will continue to assist me and my colleagues to perform to the maximum of our ability and achieve positive results for our communities. We should never stop listening or fail to hear what the people are saying. That is what good government is all about.

Labor was overwhelmingly endorsed and returned to the state government benches because it is a positive and progressive government. I sincerely believe that very soon we will see the return of a positive and progressive federal Labor government. The Sunshine Coast and Queensland will have yet another group of strong voices for the people in the next federal Labor government. The people of Queensland and Australia deserve and need to be put before profit. Government is for the people. We are here to provide the necessary services to ensure our community—the people of Queensland—can live, work and survive in a healthy environment.

My congratulations go to the new Minister for Environment. I have the utmost confidence in him and his ability to ensure that the excellent work that has been started with a proactive stance in relation to environmental matters will continue. I appreciated the good work and assistance my community and I received from him in his former role as Education Minister. As a former board member of the regional tourist authority, Tourism Sunshine Coast, I have been fortunate to develop a positive rapport with the Minister for Tourism and many within her department. I have the utmost confidence in the Minister for Education when I say that the state government will deliver an education system that will continue to become the flagship for education across the country. As leaders we will be setting the pace and achieving the highest standard in our society. Queensland will indeed be the Smart State.

Prior to the successful February election, I served as a councillor on the Caloundra City Council from March 1997 until February this year. I want to mention some of those with whom I worked and gained experience from. Former Mayor Des Dwyer is one of the most respected, caring, fun-loving, good-hearted, honest, loyal—the adjectives are too numerous to continue. However, it is an honour and a privilege to be able to call him a friend. Des was a father figure to many. On the day he announced his retirement, I told him that the City of Caloundra would be worse off. However, every one of us is replaceable. After Des Dwyer retired, Mayor Don Aldous was elected. Many, if not all, of the adjectives I used to describe Des could aptly be used to describe present Mayor Don Aldous.

Whilst I have never pretended or professed to be a brain surgeon or Rhodes Scholar, and with all due respect to those who are, I am lucky enough to be able to communicate with people. Yes, I have kissed the Blarney Stone and I have the gift of the gab, but I realise God gave me two ears and one mouth and I will attempt to use them proportionally. I am ready, willing and able to attempt to assist the people of my electorate to achieve the best for the community and their families. I cannot and will not try to be someone else.
