



Speech by

# CHRISTINE SMITH

MEMBER FOR BURLEIGH

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Hansard 4 April 2001

## FIRST SPEECH

**Mrs SMITH** (Burleigh—ALP) (3.47 p.m.): Since the earliest Queensland elections, conducted over 140 years ago, the people of what is now the electorate of Burleigh have never been represented by a member of the Australian Labor Party. It is therefore with a great deal of pride and satisfaction that I deliver my first speech in this House as the very first Labor member for Burleigh. I can hope only that it takes at least another 140 years for this situation to change.

I believe my success in this election is testament to the strength of Premier Beattie's leadership and the acknowledgment by the voters of Burleigh that Labor offers stable and accountable government. I am aware of the responsibilities inherent in my position and will undertake to discharge them faithfully. I look forward to being a part of the momentous occasion of this 50th Parliament in the year of the Centenary of Federation. I would like to acknowledge the Kombumerri people as the traditional custodians of the land on which the electorate of Burleigh is based. We live in a country of many families and I am proud to represent both indigenous and non-indigenous members.

My journey to this point in life has not always been smooth but it has helped shape my view of social justice. As a child, I grew up in a single parent family from the age of four. This was during an era in which there was no financial assistance for single parents. My mother, Val Tucker, worked to feed and keep a roof over the head of my younger sister, Vicki, and me. She took employment as a cleaner. In those days, that was the only type of work she could find where she could take her children with her. There certainly were no child-care facilities available. We survived without any of the support structures that are now in place because of her courage and determination. I thank my mother for providing a loving and stable environment during my childhood. It was only later in life that I realised how difficult it was and what an exceptional person she is. As I grew to adulthood and became more aware of the hardships many women faced, my interest in the Labor Party was heightened because it seemed to me to be the only party with a social conscience.

I would not be in this place today without the love and support of Robert, my husband of 33 years, who is in the public gallery today. Although Robert is of a generation where husbands do not always understand their spouse's desire to follow a career path outside of the family home, he has always supported my interest in politics, encouraged me to expand my horizons and allowed me the freedom to pursue my ambitions. Robert is the owner of a small business. Despite the demands of his own career, he has been willing to take on a fair share of the household tasks. He is a genius at washing and cooking, although his ironing skills leave something to be desired. My sister, Vicki, has been a constant source of love and support throughout the whole of my life, and I thank her for that.

I also want to mention my two sons, Justin and Stuart, whom I consider to be my finest achievements. Although they have chosen different paths, I am proud of the fine young men they have become. I thank them for accepting a mother who often followed her dreams even though they may not have understood them at the time. I hope I can contribute to their lives in a positive way now that they are starting their own families. To their partners, Mehi and Tamara, whom I love as if they were my own daughters, I say: thank you for your encouragement. From watching my sons I am constantly aware of the challenges they face in supporting their families, and I know I can bring this knowledge to the discussion table.

I want to share an overview of the electorate of Burleigh with the House. However, I will not go into a detailed account of the region and its history because I know that my respected predecessor treated this House to a very thorough account only a few short years ago. The electorate of Burleigh is one of the smallest geographically but has the highest number of enrolled voters in the state. Burleigh stretches from Mermaid Beach in the north to Palm Beach in the south, taking in Miami, Andrews, Stephens, Burleigh Waters, Burleigh Heads and a small part of the newest section of Robina. Burleigh itself is an interesting mix of the beach and the bush, the old and the new, the affluent and those less well off, the young and the elderly.

Although covering only 12.5 kilometres of coastline, the electorate is well serviced by seven surf-lifesaving clubs. As with much of the Gold Coast, Burleigh's lifesaving clubs have a long and rich history and make a significant contribution to the community and the lifestyle of the region. With the importance of tourism to the livelihood of the people of Burleigh, I acknowledge the wonderful work done by the many lifesavers in protecting interstate and overseas visitors as well as our own locals. However, beaches are not our only asset. We are blessed with many protected natural areas, such as Burleigh Heads National Park, Fleays Wildlife Park, Tallebudgera Creek and the Burleigh knoll conservation parks. These parks provide not only protection of our environment but also education services as well as beautiful walking trails which entice many visitors each year.

Many parts of Burleigh still retain their natural beauty whilst new developments are closely monitored to ensure that they enhance rather than dominate that beauty. I have had many discussions with local community groups on this issue and know that this is as important to them as it is to this government. I will continue to work with them to ensure that outcomes are informed and in the best interests of the wider community. Burleigh residents have a broad range of needs—from the reportedly top two streets in Queensland in terms of property prices to the laid-back qualities of a family-oriented holiday spot. The community groups that serve them reflect these varying needs. The strength in these groups is in their commitment to a broad range of topics. They provide a good forum for such issues to be brought to the attention of the government.

In this the International Year of the Volunteer it is reassuring that so many people are prepared to give their time for no financial reward. I am able to say that Burleigh has a proud record of community service, and I pledge to assist them in their work. Although it had been generally accepted that older people were the largest population group of the electorate, census figures now show that a significant proportion is under the age of 30. As this is Youth Week, I make it clear that together with the Beattie government I am committed to recognising the contribution our young people make to our community. This government believes the best way to tackle the increasing challenges facing young Queenslanders is to provide them with real employment opportunities, support youth arts and increase the participation of young people in the political process.

One area of concern to me relates to the needs of early school leavers. Research has shown that young people in this group have the greatest difficulty in securing employment and are more likely to become long-term unemployed than are most other groups. There are programs already in place implemented by the Beattie government which assist young unemployed early school leavers with intensive and specialised employment and training assistance. I will work with employers and young people in order to help them access this resource. To also aid in tackling this situation, an alternative schooling program is currently being trialled by school principals of the Gold Coast South district. Students who have experienced difficulty coping with mainstream schooling will learn social skills and the work ethic needed to contribute to the community. I will continue to monitor the outcomes of this program with great interest.

Our young people are the leaders of tomorrow. Their enthusiasm for life and what it brings and their concern for others less fortunate than themselves, for the environment and for the future gives me confidence that our great country will be in good hands when I am frail and aged—quite some time from now, of course. It is vital that we nurture our youth and provide strong and positive role models. My grandson, Jordan, is only 15 months old. I hope that when he is a young man he finds a world of peace and tolerance, employment and prosperity, a world where concern for our fellow human beings is a priority and not just lip-service.

As with all of the Gold Coast, Burleigh's viability relies largely on tourism. Consequently, there are many small businesses in the electorate. Further to this, small business and light industry are, in their own right, a major force in the employment sector. I am quickly becoming educated about the particular issues faced by small business in Burleigh, specifically the challenges faced since the introduction of the GST. I am aware that many of these businesspeople voted Labor for the first time in the expectation that the government will continue to support them. I hope to be able to justify the faith that they have placed in me and the Labor government. I am determined to assist and promote small business in the region wherever possible.

As the population rapidly expands in our area, public resources will need to be reassessed and developed to service the requirements of the larger community. We already have the new Varsity Lakes

College which, although not located in the Burleigh electorate, has its catchment area of students largely drawn from the electorate. This school demonstrates the commitment of this government both to quality state schooling and to addressing the needs of the growing population in the area. Figures predict that by the year 2005 the population will have grown by many thousands more. This is already being reflected in the growth of the building industry in the Stephens, Andrews and Robina areas, where many new homes are currently being built.

I anticipate that my task in this term of government will be to ensure that adequate resources are available to service the Burleigh community. The issues which concern the people of Burleigh and which impact on their lives are as diverse and as intriguing as the people themselves. The wide range of natural resources, the importance of business and the strength of community groups are just some of the facets of this fascinating region. I am on a steep learning curve and expect to continue learning more and more about the electorate, which I am so proud to represent.

Finally, I could not have made it this far without the support and encouragement of the members of the Burleigh branch of the Australian Labor Party. They have been there in good times and bad, stuffing envelopes, doing letterbox drops, selling raffle tickets, handing out pamphlets on polling day—many of them for the whole day—and anything else that was asked of them. While they are too numerous to mention personally, I want to specifically thank Mark Whillans and Norm Reidy for their unwavering belief in me. When the going got tough, as it sometimes did, they were always there. I also want to thank my campaign manager, Liz Pommer, whose energy was boundless and her commitment unwavering. I express my gratitude to my former work colleagues at the Centrelink office in Southport. Although of many different political persuasions, they were united in their support of me. For that I feel very special.

I realise that my win in Burleigh in this instance was mostly thanks to a strong and positive campaign headed by Peter Beattie. In three years time, however, I will face the polls again and hope that, because of my hard work and commitment to the people of the Burleigh electorate, I will win the seat in my own right, with an increased margin. I thank my parliamentary colleagues for their understanding and support as I undertake my new duties. There is a saying that you can't teach an old dog new tricks, but I hope to prove that wrong. When I leave the parliament, I hope I will be remembered as someone who listened to her constituents, achieved outcomes in line with their expectations and in some small way made the world a better place for all.

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