



Speech by

DIANNE REILLY

MEMBER FOR MUDGEERABA

Hansard 3 May 2001

FIRST SPEECH

Mrs REILLY (Mudgeeraba—ALP) (11.30 a.m.): I rise to talk about my electorate and myself for the first time. I am honoured to be the foundation member for the new seat of Mudgeeraba, and with that honour comes the good fortune to be a member of Peter Beattie's Gold Coast team—a member of the magnificent seven who have made the Gold Coast the new Labor heartland.

It is significant that the seat's first member is a Labor member. Many people voted Labor for the first time in what was considered a true blue, blue ribbon seat. There was a field of six candidates, including three Independents, with varying degrees of conservative campaigns and ideas. We enjoyed a happy camaraderie, and most of us made the effort to meet our constituents face to face, even in the shadow of controversial proposals and issues which had split the community.

I attribute the massive swing of almost 19 per cent to the Beattie government's positive policies and achievements over the past three years. But what also became obvious during the campaign was the extent to which my electorate has been neglected and ignored. As a hinterland seat, it has been deprived of much of the infrastructure, spending, glitz and glamour heaped on the high-profile surfside seats only a few minutes but, in many ways, a world away. The constituents have been crying out for attention, and I know that in three years time I will be re-elected only if I am entrenched, visible and active in my community, and that is exactly what I intend to be.

I am particularly honoured to be a member of the 50th Legislative Assembly of Queensland and of the Beattie Labor government—a government of which I am fiercely proud and which daily provides me with inspiration and hope.

I wish to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the region of the electorate, the Kombumerri. Mudgeeraba is a Kombumerri word meaning 'place of tall stories'. Some may say it is an apt name for politics and, as such, I hope I will not be adding any unnecessary weight to this claim. I have recently learned that the Kombumerri were a matriarchal society; and so perhaps it is fate that has delivered a woman as the electorate's first political representative. Geographically, it is the largest of the Gold Coast seats, extending south from Nerang to the New South Wales border, west to Springbrook and Lower Beechmont and has, as its eastern boundary, the Pacific Highway. Incidentally, and unfortunately, that highway is also the boundary for most public transport, all but cutting the electorate off from the rest of the Gold Coast for many residents.

The Mudgeeraba electorate is very diverse, having a large industrial area, high-density housing, acreage and primary producers. The area has enormous historic significance to Queensland and the Gold Coast, being the site of one of the largest timber-getters' camps established in the area when white Australians first came to the Gold Coast. Mudgeeraba is an electorate which is greatly aware of itself and its assets, and it has many of which to be proud. It has community and progress groups, heritage groups and a local heritage festival, sporting clubs, pony clubs, some of the world's best golf clubs, arts and crafts and farmers markets, and its own showgrounds in which to display them all. It is the green behind the gold, and I will boldly promote it as such.

The Gold Coast hinterland is rich in natural assets, national parks, magnificent waterfalls, walks and picnic grounds; and Springbrook, on the verge of the Lamington Plateau, is the jewel in the crown which is my electorate. Lower Beechmont is a gateway to the unique tourist destinations of Binna Burra and O'Reilly's and new ventures, such as the Canungra Valley vineyards and other wineries.

It is interesting to note that I received my highest support in Springbrook, a community which fought tooth and nail over several years against a development which it felt was inappropriate and environmentally unsound. Well, this government heard their voice, noted their protests and rightly rejected that unwelcome proposal on solid environmental, ecological and economical grounds. Far from recoiling from development because the locals wanted to keep that magic place to themselves, the people of Springbrook want only to preserve, protect and nurture their paradise so that they may share it with their families and tourists alike for generations to come. In my very green electorate, 'greenie' is not a dirty word. I look forward to working with my constituents, members of the tourism industry and the Gold Coast Tourism Bureau to promote and develop sensible, responsible and sustainable genuine ecotourism projects in that delicate region along with the necessary infrastructure to support them.

I was born in Brisbane in 1969, the year of Woodstock, the year that man first walked on the moon. I am an Aquarian born in the age of Aquarius, so there was little doubt then that I would be drawn to the progressive and social side of politics. I am the only child of a Hungarian migrant who escaped Hungary during the bloody uprising of 1956, and the fourth child of a Yugoslavian who came to Australia with her young family during the federal push for migrant workers from the Balkans. This mix made for a volatile and passionate household.

My parents were pioneers, taming their own little scrubby patch of bush—now known as the Brisbane suburb of Chandler but then very far from the big city—and making their way in a rural community despite the constraints of having English as a second language. I formed a strong attachment to the land, the trees, the dam and the bush that surrounded our property. As a child, I preferred to rush home from school and stay at home on weekends to ride my horse and swim in swollen creeks than play organised sport or go to movies.

Growing up in a multilingual home, I spoke Hungarian before I spoke English. I was taught to read and write two languages, and I could sing the anthem of the Hungarian revolutionaries before I knew the words to *Advance Australia Fair*—which I do know. Sundays were spent at the home of Brisbane's Hungarian patriarch, Father Istvan Miklos, a Catholic priest who opened his home to Brisbane's Hungarian community—and my guardian and mentor for much of my early years. In an atmosphere rich in emotion, tradition, worship and culture, we talked, laughed and sang, learnt traditional folk dances, poems and music, drank homemade red wine and ate goulash from steaming big pots suspended over open fires. And I was privileged to be a member of the Hungarian Dance Troupe, which performed at the opening ceremony of the 1982 Commonwealth Games in Brisbane.

This, to me, was a normal Australian childhood. However, it is only now, as an adult and as a mother, that I realise and appreciate the richness and magic of that childhood. Living it, as a Brisbane teenager attending a Catholic girls school, I was more often made to feel embarrassed rather than proud. 'Dianna Erdelyi' wanted nothing more than an Anglo surname like Smith or Jones and parents who did not have funny accents but, instead, wore suits and went to work at their office every day.

Now, perhaps, members can begin to imagine how proud and moved I am to be a member of this Beattie Labor government—a government which made, on its first day at its first sitting of parliament, the introduction of racial vilification laws its first priority. So to stress my commitment to multiculturalism and anti-discrimination may be somewhat superfluous, because I am fiercely proud of my ethnic background; it is what makes me so uniquely Australian. For me, it is what it means to be Australian.

My parents taught me to stand up for what I believe in. They believed in justice and fair play, and they fought for equality and opportunity. They instilled in me a great sense of self-worth, always encouraged me to do my best and supported me in all my endeavours. They never told me that I could not, only that I could do anything. Most importantly, they gave me the two greatest gifts I believe any parent can give their child: confidence and self-esteem. And for that I say 'kosunem'—thank you.

I want to say a special thankyou to my dad, Tibor, and to my mum, Anna, and my brother Jim who babysit often and willingly, my brother Greg (Dragutin) and his family and my sister Penny (Agnes) and her family, my campaign director, friend and electorate officer Kellie Trigger and my other friends who I am so fortunate to have and are too numerous to name, but you all know who you are and how special you are to me.

I wish to acknowledge some major influences as well. Julian Foley, who some of you will know; Paul Braddy, who I miss greatly when I look across at our ministers; and Harry Hauenschild, who has been a friend and mentor for many years and was a pleasure to work and travel with when we toured regional Queensland promoting the Queensland Training Awards.

I wish to thank also the branch members and the party organisers, Di Farmer, Andrew Fraser, Simon Finn and Michael Dart, and the many community members and supporters who believed in me and supported me.

I must make special mention of Emily's List and the support I received from Joan Kirner, Molly Robson and my appointed campaign mentor, Margaret Gray. The arrival of early money from Emily's

List and the advice and support of these extraordinary women kick-started what would otherwise have been a very ordinary campaign.

But I save the highest accolade for perhaps the greatest influence of my adult life, my best friend and my rock, my husband, Bernard. I met him when I was 17. He has watched me and helped me grow and mature. He has nurtured, supported and, at times, challenged me, but only to do better and aim higher. I would not be here today without him. Thank you, darling.

I have always been a career oriented and work focused woman. It took me some time to adjust to motherhood and domestic life, but I have been learning to sew, taking baby to swimming lessons, baking, cooking, cleaning and becoming quite familiar with my washing machine, mop, broom and all things *Bananas in Pyjamas*.

At the same time I continued writing freelance on issues relating to occupational health and safety from my home computer—when I could keep the toddler, Louis, away from the keyboard. Yet winning this election and returning to work to what is more than a full-time position has been quite a shock, as I have spent the past 18 months putting my career aspirations aside in favour of home duties. So I not only relate to working mothers and those trying to run a business from home but I know what it is like to be a full-time domestic engineer. And I can tell you, yes, it is rewarding, it is wonderful, but it is not easy—even when you have a healthy child, a supportive husband and a good income and family and friends around you. Imagine then doing it as a single mum or one whose partner is unemployed. Imagine having more than one child and imagine that they are not healthy. Imagine that one or more of your children has a disability, you have no job, no transport, no support and no money to pay next week's rent.

Can you imagine yourself in this position? Well, many in my electorate do not have to imagine it, and that is why I am here. They live it and they need help, and I am going to give it to them. This government is going to help them because it is committed to families, young people and the future. If you think these are 'women's issues' and I am just a stereotypical 'woman's' politician, well then, think again. These are everyone's issues because, if we do not support women, families and young people, we all suffer. Without education, opportunity, care and commitment, young people become disfranchised and disenfranchised and when that happens they are at risk of becoming involved in self-destructive behaviours, juvenile crime and drug abuse.

My local business community, like many others, is constantly fighting vandalism, petty theft and graffiti. To them I say: I will do everything I can to protect, promote and support your business endeavours. But I ask a favour in return and that is to help me to help our young people by providing employment, training opportunities and supporting programs for children at risk and diversionary programs. We need to acknowledge that our children are Queensland's most valuable assets and that every one of us ends up living with the results if positive steps are not taken.

Certainly prevention is better than cure, but we have to do all we can for those already caught in the trap of crime and drug abuse. Addicts need proper and effective programs which break the cycle of using and provide positive long-term outcomes. Parents of young people using drugs are crying out for help. They need support and they need answers.

My rural farming childhood as the daughter of a chicken farmer growing up in what was then an isolated area with little or no public transport and without town water or sewerage means that I do understand and empathise with the needs of my constituents.

I trained and worked as a journalist. In fact, I once envisaged an illustrious career as a political reporter. To my friends in the press gallery who I know are watching, even if not from the gallery, I salute you because I alone do appreciate and understand the demands of your job. Journalists, like politicians and lawyers, get a bad rap within the community, are the butt of many jokes and are constantly criticised, often undeservedly. I was a casual reporter with Prime Television on the Gold Coast for a number of years. In my time at Prime I was impressed by the professionalism, dedication and principled approach of my colleagues. They were not in it for the glamour, because there was very little of that, nor the money, because there was even less of that.

I joined the Media Arts and Entertainment Alliance because I saw my colleagues treated like commodities by media magnates more concerned about the bottom line than the news. I saw them hired and fired, and hired and fired again, their entitlements threatened and their careers stifled or destroyed.

In such an atmosphere I, like many of my colleagues, sought an alternative career path in which to utilise my skills. So for much of the past 10 years I have worked in marketing and communication roles within the public sector. I have watched the wheels of government turning. I have had a range of experiences from the inside, many of which were deeply gratifying, but many more of which left me frustrated. I have worked in a number of government departments, in policy development, planning, funding and public relations roles. I have worked in community services, disability services, domestic

violence, youth and juvenile crime prevention, child care, training and employment programs and university and workplace health and safety.

What I have learned from all that time is that I want to be involved in building—building communities and building a better society for everyone, not just the privileged few. I want to be involved in growing, nurturing and improving through education, employment, health, public transport, support for families, the unemployed, women and people with disabilities and their carers. I believe that the Beattie government has put people and service back into the public sector and I want to be a part of that system and indeed to play a leading role.

How? As a woman, a mother and a writer, people and communication are my fortes. I will work with community groups, business owners and all stakeholders in the electorate. I will be available and accessible to all my constituents so they know that they can approach me and talk to me. I ask them to tell me what they want so I can put their needs forward. I will work to ensure that Mudgeeraba and everyone within it reach their full potential. 'Impossible' is not a word in my dictionary, in my vocabulary. I will consult and discuss, I will negotiate and renegotiate, I will consider and compromise, but I will not quit. I cannot promise my constituents the world but I promise to fight for their rightful share of it. Thank you.
