



Speech by

**KAREN STRUTHERS**

**MEMBER FOR ARCHERFIELD**

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Hansard 22 March 2001

**ADDRESS IN REPLY**

**Ms STRUTHERS** (Algeria—ALP) (5.40 p.m.): As I said this morning, it is great to be back but, as all members in this House know, we get here not by our own efforts alone. Behind every member of parliament is a hardworking local team. This team for me includes family, friends, staff and hardworking and committed rank and file Labor Party members in my local area. I am indebted to my team. They worked tirelessly to get me re-elected. I am also indebted to my fellow community members in the electorate of Algeria. They gave Peter Beattie, the Beattie platform and me as their local member their overwhelming support. I am determined to get on with the job of being a strong and fair voice for our local community. The Beattie blueprint for action gives us a clear direction, and I will surely be following our jobs strategy and other things to the best of my ability.

Following the redistribution of electoral boundaries, my former electorate of Archerfield was renamed Algeria and reduced in size. Sadly, I lost responsibility for my childhood stomping ground of Salisbury and neighbouring areas of Coopers Plains, Rocklea and Archerfield. It was very satisfying to represent that area well, particularly the area I grew up in, because people knew me in my former life, before I was a member of parliament. I think it is always satisfying when people can know their local members from when they were very young people to adulthood.

I am very honoured to be the member for the newly named seat of Algeria. I will continue to serve the new growth areas of Parkinson, Calamvale and Forest Lake, as well as the established suburbs within my electorate, including my own suburb of Algeria. I have not lost my good mates at Acacia Ridge Sixty and Better—June, Ngaire, Doreen and others—who took me to the heights of fear when they took me abseiling at Kangaroo Point a year or so ago. That was my initiation into the job, they said. Nor have I lost the courageous computer buffs at Forest Place Retirement Village and the many other community groups that have welcomed me into the area over the past two and a half years or so.

The electorate of Algeria is both an economic hub of south-east Queensland and a major growth area. Hundreds of new families each month are choosing to live in our local community. Our suburbs are affordable and well serviced. Most importantly, there is a tremendous community spirit throughout the electorate of Algeria. I am particularly impressed with the way in which residents of Acacia Ridge, many of whom have lived there for more than two or three decades, help each other out and work together to build local facilities and services. The emergence and growth of ARTIC, the Acacia Ridge Technology and Information Centre, a grassroots service running on the smell of an oily rag, is testament to this.

Another example is Forestdale. I do not know of any other community locally in which residents go out to dinner together en masse at least once a year. They have an annual dinner. I know that you, Mr Deputy Speaker Mickel, and I have put on our dancing shoes and enjoyed the annual dinner that Forestdale hosts. Forest Lake also can proudly boast an annual 'Lark at the Lake' festival and many other activities which all of the local schools—Forest Lake State School, Grand Avenue State School, the Forest Lake college and others—churches, community groups and businesses get together to plan and run so successfully.

I developed and promoted my plan for the electorate of Algeria and put it to the local residents during the election campaign. The plan contained many solutions and strategies to address local

problems that residents raised with me. It also contained strategies to build on the very positive services, facilities and businesses we already have.

One of the key messages in my plan was that all people need to feel secure in their homes and their jobs. Young people also need a secure future to look forward to. I firmly believe that governments have a key role to play in enabling people to feel more secure in and brighter about their future. We have a key role to play in making sure there is a redistribution of resources and opportunities so that all people in our community get a fair go.

In my plan for the electorate of Algeester I also focused on the three areas of community safety, jobs and education and gave my commitment to local people that these would be three of my top priorities. In relation to community safety, I have always believed that we have to strike a balance in how we deal with crime, and I have been very pleased that we in the Labor Party and the Labor government over recent years have focused on being tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. There is no use spending millions of dollars building prisons if we are not tackling the problem at the source, that is, with programs that work with young people and other innovative programs that help to nip crime in the bud and get people back on track before they get into an ongoing life of criminal activity.

My home was broken into last year. I know how that feels. I know how people feel when they do not want to go home. Property has been touched, clothes have been taken out of cupboards and property has been stolen. It is a terrible feeling. It is not the first time it has happened. I know that many people in my local area have suffered the same sort of frustration and problems. We will not win that war against criminal activity, though, by focusing on being tough on crime and seeing which party can be the toughest. We have to have getting tough on the causes of crime as a major priority. It has been pleasing to see that both coalition parties and our own government have been working closely on these issues and promoting some bipartisan strategies in relation to these sorts of issues. It is very pleasing also to see the emergence of community renewal programs and drug prevention and other activities that will deal with these problems at their source.

Locally in the area we have achieved an increase in police numbers. There were five new police appointed to the Acacia Ridge police district only last month. We have a new allocation for a police station in Calamvale. I have already written to the minister to make sure that this station contains a lot of new officers and not just a shift of resources from other stations. One of my immediate priorities will be to ensure that that happens.

I was successful in getting a youth crime prevention worker in Acacia Ridge during the year 2000. That work enabled a lot of young people to get together to take action locally against criminal activity. I will continue to support crime prevention programs, including Business Watch, which is emerging in our area. A lot of local businesspeople are saying to me that they are not necessarily losing thousands of dollars in goods and property, but the frustration of being regularly broken into and the costly damage that results is more of a problem to them. So we need to be more diligent in how we deal with those sorts of problems.

In the area of job security, we have had some tremendous local achievements under the Breaking the Unemployment Cycle initiative. I have been particularly pleased with the focus on mature age people, people who have been displaced from the workplace and are looking to be retrained and find new opportunities, new businesses or new work. The new announcement with which we went to the election was particularly pleasing—that is, the \$4,000 incentive—and I look forward to the implementation of that policy over coming months and years.

Locally, though, we have benefited from jobs programs at Forest Lake and Nyanda State High School. I have seen the benefits and spoken to mature age people in our program Into Work at Acacia Ridge. Those people have said that they are real jobs. There has been a lot of criticism of intervention by government in the jobs area, but I have had reassurances from local people and have witnessed the very positive developments that are gained for people in not only their personal confidence but also their job readiness and ability to then get secure, permanent work. It is certainly important that we continue with the very important Breaking the Unemployment Cycle program.

In relation to family support we have seen some great work happening locally. A lot of it is about people doing volunteer work in our neighbourhood centres—good community work at the local level. I am very pleased that we went to the election with a good policy on balancing work and family. I took the initiative last year to make sure that the then minister, Paul Braddy, was aware that some very positive things can happen in the industrial relations area to promote a better balance for people between their work and family responsibilities. I am pleased that we took that to the election and we will now be implementing that through the very exciting and energetic new minister we have in Gordon Nuttall.

In relation to education, we have had some tremendous gains locally over the past couple of years. We have a new state-of-the-art high school under way at Forest Lake. I congratulate Heather

Varcin, the principal. She has a very positive attitude. There have been some teething problems there getting that school up and ready on an interim site, but she has the right sort of attitude and approach to things, and I am pleased that she and her staff team and the P&C members have all put in a tremendous effort there with the regional staff of Education Queensland to make sure that that school is going to be one of the best in Queensland.

Similarly, the growth area of Calamvale has needed a new school for a long time. Construction on a new school started a couple of weeks ago, and the Minister for Education, Anna Bligh, went out there and turned the first sod amongst the big tractors, graders and other machinery. That is a \$32 million project for that area. It is a P-12 school—preschool to year 12. I also congratulate Sue Bremner, the principal, her staff and members of the reference group, which includes parents and others. They have been planning for probably two years now to get that school up and running. It is also going to be a tremendous model of what public schools in the future will offer to kids and families in our community.

In relation to roads, as I said earlier, my electorate is an economic hub. That also means that it is a transport hub. Many heavy vehicles use the roads in my electorate. Over the coming months and years, it is imperative that we continue to upgrade the roads in the electorate and look at issues relating to the use of the toll road—the Logan Motorway, with which you, Mr Deputy Speaker, would be familiar. I have advocated a reduction in the toll paid by heavy vehicles that use that road in an endeavour to get them to use it more, but I do not think that the answer is as simple as that. A comprehensive study needs to be undertaken. I am pleased that, over recent months, and in the time that he has been the Minister for Transport, the minister has really been turning his hand to how he can ease those traffic problems. A southern suburbs traffic study is under way, and I expect to see some very positive changes over the coming years in relation to traffic flow and heavy vehicle usage in my local area.

As an MP, I have a very special opportunity to speak up and go into bat on a range of issues of importance to me and to the people I represent. There are a few issues that I want to touch upon which I believe deserve ongoing attention. Some are federal issues, but they require state government cooperation and involvement as well.

One issue that concerns me is superannuation and early access to superannuation. I have received representations from a number of local constituents—people in their middle years—who are displaced from work and who are trying to re-establish themselves. This week one fellow, Stan Meyers, once again came into my office distressed. He feels that he needs about \$10,000 of his superannuation. He is in his early fifties. He wants to get established in another business or retrain. He cannot access any of that money, even though he is a self-funded superannuant and has been working in his own business all his life. In 1997, the Howard government tightened the provisions of the superannuation regulations, making it even more difficult for people to gain early access to their superannuation on grounds of financial hardship. This is an example of the mean-spirited activities of the Howard government. I am working with our federal colleagues to try to have early superannuation access provisions freed up. I support the ACOSS—Australian Council of Social Service—proposal for lifelong savings that allow people to gain partial access to their superannuation early in their lives, or in their middle years, when they experience some sort of difficulties, as Stan Meyers has.

In relation to drugs, the National Drug Strategy needs to be backed up with significant levels of resources for treatment programs and rehabilitation programs, and we need a wider availability of safe treatment options. At a state level, we are on the right track, and over the coming years we need to put more resources into that sector as they become available. It is a significant problem. We all see it. We all see those kids and adults in our own communities. I have met many adults in their forties and fifties who are heroin addicts and who have been on heroin for 20 or 30 years. They still function, but it is a major cost to them and a major problem for their families.

In relation to industry policy, again at a state level, we could be doing a great deal of work in relation to industry policy, and we are. Again, this is a national issue that needs our cooperation as state members. I have been very pleased with the work that the Metal Workers Union has done on the fair trade not free trade policy and the campaign that it has been running. We need to support our strong, vibrant industries and make sure that they stay that way. We are part of a global economy. We need to trade with our partners and make sure that they have good access to trade with us. But we are also part of a community, and unless we promote and support better wages and conditions in some of the underdeveloped countries, the big major and multinational companies will continue to look for cheap options for labour overseas. Therefore, as part of our global economy, we also have to maintain a global humanity and continue to support improved wages and conditions in those countries not only so that those people can be treated with fairness and dignity but so that our workers in Queensland and throughout Australia will not be undercut.

I mentioned at the outset that all members of parliament get here because we have good teams behind us. I want to pay tribute to members of my local team. We are always at risk of naming some and leaving out others, but I know that all the people who have helped me are aware of the value that I place on them. I give a special mention to Thelma Noe, the talkback radio queen, Daphne

Dianne, Rita and Doug Harris, Joy Boyle, George Campbell, Frank Freemantle, Len Ardill, Charles and the Forest Lake branch members, my good mate Amanda Currie and my electorate staff Wendy and Dave. They do a tremendous job.

As many of us would know, our electorate officers are de facto members. They are the front line. If they do the right thing, they create the good impression that we are also doing the right thing. It is very important to have good staff, and I am very fortunate to have loyal electorate officers working with me. I have a superb loyal team behind me, and they tell me that they are going to stay there. All of those branch members and my staff are sticking with me. We have another few years in which to do some continuing work—hopefully, more than a few years. I am glad to be back, and I am here for the long run.

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