



Speech by

RACHEL NOLAN

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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FIRST SPEECH

Ms NOLAN (Ipswich—ALP) (12.26 p.m.): I rise today to speak in support of the Governor's statement of the Beattie government's second term agenda and to make clear both who I am and what contribution I intend to make. People often ask me why I have gone into politics. The answer is simple. It is because I believe. I believe that, together, we as a community are greater than we are as individuals. I believe that, with the guidance of good ideas, the cooperation of good people and the integrity to do what we believe is right, we can make the world a better place.

I begin today by thanking the people of Ipswich for the tremendous faith that they have placed in me and their endorsement of the Beattie Labor government. The people of Ipswich are good people. On 17 February, they were encouraged to vote for negativity—for anger, disillusionment and a bitter yearning for the past. They overwhelmingly rejected that call. Ipswich people voted for decency, for a clear plan about a positive future, and they voted to work together rather than to fragment. I will serve the people of Ipswich honestly, always with integrity and to the best of my ability.

While I am, I believe, the youngest woman ever elected to the Queensland parliament, many people will know that I have been involved in politics for some years. I have lived in many parts of the world and have worked in politics both here in Queensland and in the Northern Territory. Still, I would never have wanted to go into politics and to represent people anywhere but in Ipswich.

I am very proud to say that Ipswich is my home. Like many Ipswich young people, I grew up with a sense of negativity about the place—with a sense that the grass was greener just about anywhere else. As I have grown up, I have well and truly grown out of that view. Ipswich is a complete community. It is not a housing estate or an arbitrary area defined by the Electoral Commissioner's line on a map. It is a community with a brave history, a defined centre and people who identify both with the place and with each other.

Ipswich is on the traditional lands of the Jagera, Turrubul, Yuggera and Urapagul people. Many of those people ended up at the Deebing Creek and later Purga missions. Ipswich has a complete class spectrum. It includes wealthy families, many of whom made their money from the mines and associated industries in the last century. It also includes commuters, industrial workers and a new underclass who, in the absence of work, rely on welfare just to get by. It has significant cultural diversity and, I am well aware, it has a range of opinion.

I believe that Ipswich is characterised more than anything by its sense of community. People in Ipswich are disproportionately contributing to the community—whether it is by going to the P&C, volunteering at the hospice or caring for someone in need. Our defining characteristic is our commitment to the town and to each other. In these community projects, we are led by people like Hilda des Arts, Rocco de Pierri and Margaret Illingsworth—people who work tirelessly and embody the spirit of community.

Ipswich has a history of punching above its weight in political affairs. Well before the previous red-headed representative from Ipswich, we were represented by Dr Cameron, a Health Minister in the Menzies government, and by Bill Hayden, a federal Labor leader. Neville Bonner, the first Aboriginal member of the federal parliament, was from Ipswich, and the last two state members for Ipswich have been state treasurers. I believe that that record is no coincidence. Ipswich is a microcosm of Australia

as a whole. It is rural and urban, rich and poor. It is largely Anglo-Saxon but diverse, and it is, like all of Australia, in the midst of enormous change.

Ipswich was established as a white settlement in 1827 and its limestone was quarried for use in the Moreton Bay penal colony. It was open to free settlement in 1842 and was settled by English, Irish and German free settlers with a significant Welsh contingent mining the coal from Blackstone to the east.

The area's traditional industries are coalmining, woollen milling and the railway, with Ipswich being the birthplace of Queensland Rail. My grandfather worked in the railway, moving from Cairns to Ipswich in 1947. The solidarity of railway people is close to my heart and, while I agree that change is inevitable, I will continue to fight for their security.

Now the work patterns, if not the social patterns, of Ipswich have changed significantly. More than 30 per cent of Ipswich's workers commute to Brisbane, around 7.4 per cent are unemployed and the big industries are the RAAF base at Amberley, the meatworks at Dinmore and Churchill, state and local government and still, but to a lesser extent, the railway.

Ipswich is increasingly becoming a high-tech city with an aerospace industry developing at Amberley and a gas-fired power station at Swanbank. Our future lies in services, tourism and in high-tech industry both in Ipswich and Brisbane.

All around Australia there is an increasing divide between the capital cities and the regional and rural parts. While many people want to take the political path of blaming government for the change, it is quite simply fact that first world economies are becoming increasingly service and decreasingly agriculture based—and the services are easier to provide in the cities. Ipswich, being a regional town close to a capital, sits on the hinge of that divide. It must ensure that its links to the growth area—Brisbane—are strong.

In Ipswich you can live in a wonderful Queensland, you can know your neighbours and you can be part of a real community while still accessing the jobs and services of Brisbane. Our economy would be enhanced by improving the link to Brisbane, by more express trains, which would make the commuting more attractive, and—vitally—by fixing the Ipswich Motorway. Every morning on the radio you hear about the traffic built up at the Goodna merge, the slow crawl and occasionally the major accident. Each morning from 7 a.m., the tow trucks wait to pick up the pieces.

The Ipswich Motorway is used by 80,000 vehicles every day. It is an absolute disgrace. It is potholed, ugly, congested, dangerous and slow. Traffic is a fact of modern life, but for thousands of workers to sit in traffic every day when they are still 30 kilometres from the Brisbane CBD is not acceptable. It hinders Ipswich's economic development and it affects our quality of life.

The Ipswich Motorway is a federal road. In recent months the federal coalition government has spent billions of dollars patching the rural roads used by the occasional farmer. I acknowledge that rural roads are not exactly in a great state, but when we look at the number of people affected by the quality of a road, it is abundantly clear that federal road funding policy is about shoring up shaky National Party electorates much more than it is about genuine need.

Again and again we hear about the plight of the bush, but we should realise that when it comes to public infrastructure and quality of life issues it is those in the regional areas and in the urban fringe who often silently miss out. On petrol prices, for instance, it is the low income earners who travel 80 kilometres a day to work in a factory because there is no public transport who really pay.

When it comes to providing the public infrastructure for jobs and the services that ensure quality of life, government will always have a legitimate role. While I am the member for Ipswich, I will ensure that that role is fulfilled.

In Ipswich the Beattie government is making a big difference. Surrounding suburbs have been transformed by community renewal; for the first time we have a university; we have ensured the future of workers in our meat industry; we are building a rail museum, which will bring jobs and restore our industrial heart; and we are, along with the Ipswich City Council, developing a Smart City. These types of projects must be supported and they must continue.

Like many towns in regional Australia, Ipswich has more old people than it does young. Young people leave Ipswich to get an education or to get a job. Each time I have come home after living elsewhere, I have found that more of my peers have left. This trend is socially and economically devastating—socially because it leaves older people in the community without the support of families and economically because the spiral of skilled workers leaving and industry locating elsewhere is an interminable one.

For me, jobs for young people will be an absolute priority. Young people need to grow up in safe households and in strong communities, with respect for others and the self-respect that comes from knowing you have a future.

In Ipswich, a lot has been said about groups of kids who hang around the streets at night. The community has made it clear that harassment of people as they walk down the street and violence are not ever acceptable. Last Thursday night I went out on the streets with Drug Arm to find out for myself just what was going on. To be honest, I found little action. Ipswich's streets have already become quieter as a result of the increased police presence initiated by the Beattie government early in the year. This is a drop in crime that was recorded in today's *Queensland Times*.

However, the long-term solution will not be found through police and courts alone. We need a concerted effort which involves law enforcement, which involves the fantastic, largely voluntary organisations like Drug Arm and Teen Care that are getting to know the kids, which involves parents, and which involves proper support from the Families Department.

Some of these kids are coming from backgrounds of serious disadvantage, but we cannot give up. The problems even of the toughest kid cannot be too hard. We need to work together to ensure that all our kids have futures and that our streets are safe.

I want to turn now to the political debate. In the public arena, we find ourselves at a time of too few ideas and too much cynicism about politicians and the political process. It falls to all of us, both in the broader community and directly in politics, to lift ourselves from this depressing state. It falls to all of us to look beyond narrow self-interest to the public good, to accept our responsibilities as well as demanding our rights.

Already I have heard from those who believe in public housing—indeed, who call themselves socialists—but do not want the Housing Commission in their street. I have heard from those who believe that jobs are the highest priority but do not want industrial development in their backyard and I have heard from those who want special treatment in the education system for their kids. Each case requires a specific judgment, but I want to make it clear that for me it is a matter of principle to act in the interests of the whole community and not just in the interests of the vocal few.

I believe that we in politics would be respected more if we ceased to cower from conflict, if we more often stood up and justified what we believe in. If we believe the right answer is no, we should say so. There is nothing people hate more than being fobbed off by a government or a bureaucracy that will not give them a straight answer.

Having said that, I concur with the member for Cunningham who recently called for a less partisan political debate. Nothing is clearer than that people are tired of the *Dumb and Dumber* approach of poll-driven politics. Poll-driven politics turns the political process into a mirror where we simply reflect what we know people want to hear. Used excessively, it removes the capacity for leadership. Our debate must focus on coming up with the best vision or the best solution, not scoring the most points.

I want to speak briefly about the diversity that exists within the Ipswich community. On Sunday I attended Ipswich's Link Up Multicultural Festival. It rated right up there with election night as one of the occasions that I have enjoyed most in Ipswich politics. At Link Up there were Aboriginal, Filipina and Armenian dancers as well as groups including one from my old school, Ipswich East. There were hundreds of people there and there was nothing pretentiously middle class or elite about it. It was a down-to-earth representation of Ipswich people and Ipswich culture.

I believe that there is, in all of us, a resentment of change and, particularly when times are tough, a resentment of difference. A celebration of that difference is a celebration of the better part of ourselves—of the optimism and good will within us.

I want to place on the record my heartfelt commitment to multiculturalism and reconciliation in Ipswich. Recently I was upset by the debate about Lowitja O'Donoghue's acknowledgment that she was not, as she said, 'stolen'. I was upset partly by the political opportunism that followed her comments but more by the fact that in this, like in many areas of politics, we did not seem to be mature enough to have an honest debate about the facts.

The point should not be whether Lowitja O'Donoghue was taken away or given up by parents who had little real choice; the point should be to genuinely understand. When we look at the past, whether it is about the practices of Australians in the war, the institutionalisation of orphans or stolen children, we should not try to judge the past by the standards of today. We should not try to divide whole events into a simplistic game played out between forces of pure good and evil. We should try to listen and to sympathetically understand before making our judgment. Without that openness, we cannot learn the lessons of our past.

I would like to speak briefly about my background. I was born in the Ipswich General Hospital in 1974, that is, in a public hospital, and to young parents, Rhonda and Denis, both of whom went to university as a result of Gough Whitlam's policy of universal public education. These factors have shaped who I am and what I believe. My parents are here today. It is difficult to explain this fully, but I know the hard times they have experienced and I wish to express my genuine thanks for their hard

work, for the opportunities they gave me, for the intellectual rigour that has always surrounded me and for the genuine belief that we can, through Labor values, make the world a better place.

In Ipswich we ran a tremendous campaign, including doorknocking around 2,500 houses. The campaign, I believe, was professional but it was also passionate, characterised by a genuine understanding of Ipswich and a desire to ensure the future of its people. I wish to sincerely thank my campaign director, Shayne Neumann, for the support he has shown me over many years, for his almost pathological organisation and for his friendship. To Wayne McDonnell, who is here today, I have been touched by your support for me as a candidate and as a person. I want to thank Andrew Fraser for his professionalism; Margie Doran, who I know will always keep me philosophically honest; Cormac Stagg for his good humour, intellect and patient doorknocking; and David Hamill for his honesty, friendship and support. David is a person of the highest integrity who has taught me always to do what I believe is right. While I will always endeavour to keep those around me separate from public life, I wish to sincerely thank my good friends Alan, Anna and Paul for their faith in me and for their support of my decision. I wish my friends Peter and Annabelle and their new son, Edward, all the best.

I will do my best now to stay true to who I am and what I believe in. I will work hard to satisfy the expectations of my friends, those who have supported me and, of course, the people of Ipswich.
