



Speech by

Michael Choi

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr CHOI (Capalaba—ALP) (12.51 p.m.): It gives me immense pleasure to rise today and deliver my address-in-reply in this, the 51st Parliament of the Queensland Legislative Assembly. In doing so, I cast my mind back to a little more than three years ago when I stood here as the member for Capalaba for the first time delivering my maiden speech. I spoke of my heritage as a Chinese Australian and the contribution of those before me to the wellbeing of this nation. I spoke about and committed my loyalty to this nation and her people. I spoke of the love I have for the Labor Party—the political party which has given me my education and its policy which has made me who I am today.

I spoke of the agonies I felt as well as so many others in the community when stereotypical, ill-informed populist views of a few almost destroy the fabric of a multicultural society. I spoke also of the inspiration that I have and the country that I want Australia to be—the land of many and yet as one great, fair and proud nation. I spoke of my personal faith and how important God and my family are to my being.

The last three years have been both challenging and rewarding. The saying of putting your ear to the ground, nose to the grindstone and shoulder to the wheel—a very awkward yoga position indeed—took on a new meaning but it is all well worth the effort. My late father taught me many valuable lessons about life, and one thing he did was to sit down with the family once a milestone was reached to talk about the success and failure of him as the man of the house. It is basically a self-evaluating exercise and it does help the family to take stock, check costs, count our blessings and refocus our vision.

In fact, since the taxpayers of Queensland are my real employer, I think it is only fair that I give them a brief account of what I have done and where I have failed during the course of the first term of my contract. This is what I intend to do this afternoon. As an engineer specialising in project management, I cannot do anything without a plan. I firmly believe that if one fails to plan then he plans to fail. During the first three months of my first term, I set out to listen to my constituents and ask them specifically if they could tailor-make their local MP what kind of a person they would like him or her to be. Should that person be able, articulate, smart or hard working? It was a bit like reverse engineering, where the product is already on the market shelf and then questions were asked of the buyers as to what they want. But I was prepared to change my mode of operation to cater for their demand.

The majority of them told me that they do not really care how smart we are as the local member or how well we can articulate an argument. They want their MP to be available and to care because they believe we are neither available nor care. The fact is that I believe most honourable members in this House from both sides of the political divide do care. Clearly, the market acceptance of us as a product is not very high and there is some repositioning to do.

A corporate plan was devised and a mission statement from my office was created as the outcome of those surveys. Our mission in Capalaba is that we want to be one of the most friendly, available and efficient electorate offices in Queensland. It was a big ask, but I am so thankful that my team and my members share the vision. Objectives were formulated and activities were carefully developed to deliver the intended outcomes. For example, everyone in the office, including me, is constantly reminded that the negative perception of an MP's office is that we are a public institution and therefore we are cold,

institutionalised and clinical. We have to change that perception and show that we are in fact friendly and that nothing is too much trouble for us.

Although I do not subscribe to the saying that customers are always right, I do however believe they all have the right to be listened to and to be treated with common courtesy in the same way that we would like to be treated. We created a mission statement for my office titled 'Because we care'. We really want to tell the constituents that the only reason for my existence as the local MP is not to fulfil part of the political process but that we do care about the issues that bother them. We care about what they think and we care about what they want.

Although we cannot promise to deliver what they desire all the time, one thing we do guarantee is that we care enough to listen to them and go into battle for them. I want the community not only to know that we care but also to know that there are many people working in the community who care as well. There are many volunteer groups in my electorate who are doing wonderful things, but their efforts at times are hampered by the lack of resources and funding.

In response to the needs in the community, a utility was purchased without the use of any public funds so that nonprofit organisations in my electorate can use the vehicle at no cost besides nominal expenses for insurance and petrol. The maintenance of this vehicle, now nicknamed the 'choice mobile', is generously sponsored by the business community of Capalaba. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the generous support of the Capalaba Park Shopping Centre, Retail First, Yu Feng Group, Alan Lucas and Partners, Mortgage Bureau, C & C Printing, National Bus and Sciacca lawyers for their support.

Another objective to satisfy the mission statement is that I make myself more available. I was in a shopping centre two years ago and a constituent approached me and said, 'Michael, I would like to make an appointment to see you but you are too expensive for me to see.' I said, 'What do you mean? I do not charge anybody to see me.' She said that as she is employed full time she has to take time off to see me, which is a cost in loss of income, or a day taken from an accumulated holiday, which erodes into her hard-earned time for rest and being with her family, or she has to lie about being sick. All of these scenarios serve as a hindrance for a constituent to visit me.

I am pleased to report to the people of Queensland that my office is now open on Thursday night to 9 p.m. So I am available to my constituents who are not available during office hours, except of course during sitting days in parliament. I also undertake house calls for those who have physical difficulties or other circumstances that prevent them from visiting my office. Yes, we care and we are available.

Another objective of my office is being efficient. I advise that up to 70 per cent of correspondence is being replied to within the guidelines I set for the office, which is one week, but I believe this is not good enough for me, let alone my constituents. I apologise to those who have waited for too long for my reply, and I undertake to improve this area of my service delivery. I thank my staff, Shaun Hipkins and Emma Parnell, for keeping up most of the time with my demanding requests for excellence in providing timely and professional services to our constituents. As I have to remind myself many times, to us it may be a mere routine request, another task that we have to do; to our constituents, more often than not it is their last port of call.

Shortly after my first election win in 2001, one of my booth workers queried me as he noticed I never asked anyone to vote for me during the campaign; I asked them to vote for the ALP and the Beattie Labor government. I told him that I could not bring myself to ask anyone in Capalaba to vote for me because at the time—three and a half years ago—I had done nothing for them. I could only ask them to reaffirm their trust in the ALP and to re-elect another Labor government because of the good governance of the Beattie Labor government.

This election is different. Not only have I asked my constituents to vote for the ALP and again the Beattie Labor government; I have asked them to vote for me as their local member. I believe my team has worked hard for the community, but there is so much more to be done. I want to continue with my work as a proud member of the Beattie Labor government and, as they say, the rest is history.

I would like to thank my campaign director, Linda Plint, my comrades and friends Alan Roche, Ruth, Jack and Eddie Bennett, Richard and Diane Tetley, Susan Burke, John Hoggs, Joe Ludwig and the AWU for rendering valuable assistance to me. Thank you to all of you, as you delivered to the ALP the biggest swing of primary votes—an increase of over 15 per cent in my seat.

As for the constituents of Capalaba, I undertake to work hard, as I have done before, to fight for the wrongs in our society and for the rights of my constituents. I am totally disgusted with the federal budget last night, which gives tax relief for those on high incomes and absolutely nothing for anyone earning less than \$52,000 a year. I would like Mr Costello to come to my electorate to count how many people in my electorate earn \$52,000 a year. I suspect that would not take very long. On the other hand, queuing up at a

doctor's surgery that still bulk-bills will take a lifetime, not to mention the waiting list for public housing for which the federal government has totally abandoned its responsibility.