



Speech by

Judy Spence

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Hansard Thursday, 21 May 2009

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Ms SPENCE (Sunnybank—ALP) (7.44 pm): It is a great honour to represent the newly created seat of Sunnybank, which takes in almost half of my old seat of Mount Gravatt and adds new suburbs such as Acacia Ridge, Coopers Plains, Archerfield, Salisbury, Durack and Sunnybank Hills. The Sunnybank electorate is the multicultural hub of Queensland, with 39 per cent of its citizens born overseas—way above the state average of 17 per cent. In the Sunnybank electorate, 33 per cent of people speak languages other than English at home. In Queensland only seven per cent do so. I have no hesitation in claiming my electorate as the most vibrant, diverse, culinary blessed centre of our state. My supporters reflect that diversity and I was proud to have blue singlet, thong-wearing Aussies standing side by side with new Australians from China, Taiwan, India, Sri Lanka and the Middle East on election day.

The Sunnybank electorate also reflects the socioeconomic diversity of this state. From the multimillion-dollar residences at Robertson to the Housing Commission homes in Coopers Plains and Acacia Ridge, we represent the occupational and educational diversity of our state. There are 13 state schools, three Catholic schools, a Muslim school and an independent school in the Sunnybank electorate. There are 40 sporting clubs ranging from football, netball, hockey and basketball, athletics and bowls to round dancing, speedway and ice skating. There are thousands of businesses in the Sunnybank electorate, particularly in the industrial precincts of Acacia Ridge, Coopers Plains and Salisbury. Historically, this precinct has been the industrial centre of South-East Queensland and today remains a vital economic zone. The Sunnybank electorate has a number of environment groups, including the Oxley Creek Catchment Association, which has been looking after and educating others, including the government, about the importance of this water catchment since the 1970s.

I have had the privilege of meeting many wonderful people in this job, including the decent men and women of my own Sunnybank Lions Club, Rotarians, sporting volunteers, the members of the Sunnybank RSL who are doing wonderful work in our schools, tuckshop volunteers, hospital volunteers, people from the Sunnybank and Acacia Ridge Meals on Wheels, groups such as the St David's Neighbourhood Centre that provide support and fellowship and add enormously to our social capital, and, of course, many church workers.

One of the goals of this government is to increase volunteerism. The only upside I can see from our increasing unemployment rate is that more people will have the time to contribute some volunteer hours. Volunteers provide our community with an important social fabric that we should never take for granted.

Recently I visited God's Little Acre, a little treasure at Archerfield. Like Queensland, this cemetery celebrates its 150th birthday this year. The first burial on this site took place in 1859 in what was then New South Wales, so it has the graves of our earliest settlers and is a fantastic resource of local history. It has been lovingly looked after by a voluntary committee. Now, the Q150 money and the Skilling Queenslanders for Work program has provided the opportunity for 10 long-term unemployed people to learn some new skills as they do some much-needed restoration work. This program will also help these unemployed men gain a certificate I in construction, help them write resumes and prepare for interviews and research jobs. This year the government will invest \$81 million in the Skilling Queenslanders for Work

initiative to give an estimated 15,000 long-term unemployed people job related assistance and skills training.

Despite the economic downturn, the government's continued spending on infrastructure is designed to ensure that we keep as many people employed as possible. This year alone, the state government is spending more than \$8.5 billion on infrastructure.

We went to this election promising to focus on jobs, not budget cuts, because, as we continue to chart a course through this global economic downturn, we believe government should do everything it can to stop job losses, create new jobs and promote community confidence. We should also encourage our children and others to undertake some study so that they are job ready when our economy improves.

I am enjoying my new role as Leader of the House which is affording me more time to help constituents and work in the electorate than I have had for the past 10 years as a minister. During the election campaign I was diagnosed with a type 2 melanoma, which I have recently had removed with good results, but this experience has made me appreciate not only the importance of regular skin checks but also the importance of providing all Queenslanders with quality health checks. The QEII Hospital, which is in the electorate of Sunnybank, is providing quality health care. The QEII Hospital provides medical and surgical services to patients including anaesthetics, emergency and general medicine, rehabilitation, general surgery, gynaecology, orthopaedics, intensive care, gastroenterology and urology.

The most recent data available indicates that for the December quarter QEII treated 8,874 patients in the emergency department, admitted 4,457 patients to hospital and provided outpatient services to 14,157 patients and ensured 889 patients underwent elective surgery, an increase of 7.7 per cent on the same quarter the year before. The Goss government, acting on the advice of health bureaucrats, was wrong to close down ward after ward of the QEII Hospital in the 1990s. The Beattie government and now the Bligh government have systematically re-opened wards and repositioned the hospital to not only service our suburbs but also provide specialist services for our region. We have recently expanded the outpatient services and we are now investing \$95 million to build and operate a new 30-bed elective surgery centre on the 8th floor allowing more long-wait patients to get the operations they need more quickly. For the first time in its history, all five floors of the QEII will be dedicated to medical purposes.

I am grateful that the suburbs I represent have relatively low levels of crime. When I talk to many doctors who have come here from all over the world about why they have chosen Queensland to live and work when clearly their skills would give them the choice to live in other countries or other states of Australia, I am told by many that they did some research and were impressed by Queensland's low crime rate and on that basis alone they were attracted here. We who are born and bred Queenslanders take so much of what we enjoy about our lifestyle for granted. But for many people it is not about the weather or the beaches but about the fact that they can live in their own house, their children can walk or ride to school by themselves and they can have free hospital care. Basic freedoms make our lifestyle very special.

I have publicly expressed my opposition to the application by the Sunnybank Hotel to extend its liquor licensing hours until 5 am. I do not believe that any venue should trade after 3 am, but our laws allow this hotel to make this application. I have said in the past that I oppose these laws. We could create a level playing field and require every venue to close at 3 am. This would minimise the harmful effects of excessive alcohol consumption that we see in every late-night venue in Queensland. While this law remains, it befalls elected representatives like myself and community minded individuals to oppose applications such as this on public interest grounds. I am pleased that a number of Sunnybank residents will join me in the objection to this application. We are also joined by the Police Service and the Ambulance Service, whose members understand only too well the harmful effects of excessive consumption of alcohol.

We are well served by the 50 officers of the Acacia Ridge Police Station and over 100 officers of the Upper Mt Gravatt Police Station as well as our police beat at the Sunnybank Shopping Centre and the school based police officer at Sunnybank State High School. We also have an effective number of Neighbourhood Watch committees that assist police officers and their neighbours. This government has always kept the police-to-population ratio better than the national average. I believe that we have given police the power and the tools they need to solve crime and keep our community safe. And we have been rewarded because for the past seven consecutive years the rates of crime in almost all categories have declined.

As many members would be aware, I was a social science teacher before entering parliament and I am a passionate believer that education is the pathway to a fulfilling and successful career. One of the principles that defines the Labor Party is the commitment to quality universal education. It is one of the reasons I was attracted to Labor many years ago. The schools that I have represented for the last 20 years have benefited from almost 20 years of Labor governments putting money into infrastructure, maintenance and resources. I look forward to ensuring that the schools in the newer part of the electorate receive my

attention. The Rudd government's commitment to enhancing our schools is unprecedented. It will be putting \$2.2 million into round 1 of the National School Pride Program alone. Schools in my electorate are set to get more money for maintenance and new buildings. Not since the Whitlam government built science blocks in our high schools have we seen this kind of federal government commitment.

While the built environment is important, it is the teachers and the students who make successful schools. I continue to be impressed by the dedication of our teachers. I have not forgotten that it is a rewarding but often tough profession and our teachers put in their own time to enhance the educational experiences of our children. We have many of the best schools in the state in the Sunnybank electorate, and it is motivated parents and their wonderful children and our quality teachers who produce this first-rate education.

I was disappointed that during the election campaign the opposition LNP candidate chose to oppose the upgrade of the Mains Road and Kessels Road intersection. Locals know that we have been advocating for this upgrade for a long time. Over the years we have had a federal Liberal member who promised everything but delivered nothing. It took the election of the Rudd Labor government and our new federal member for Moreton, Graham Perrett, to finally get a federal government commitment to fund the project. I am regularly briefed by the project team and, after years of community consultation and design teams coming up with engineering solutions, we are now months away from the final design being given approval. I believe we will see the project beginning in the next 12 months.

I am very impressed by the final design and the plan to deliver the project with minimal disruption to local traffic and businesses. Last year I initiated six-monthly meetings with local businesses and the project team, and these are now occurring more frequently. While there will no doubt be some adverse consequences to business during the construction phase, the final product will enhance movements to and from Kessels Road and the business precinct and will benefit business in the long term.

I was also surprised that the LNP candidate criticised the joint plan by the state government and the Brisbane City Council to upgrade the intersection of Padstow and Warrigal roads. I use this intersection every day and I know that the existing roundabout has outlived its purpose because of the increased volume of traffic. In peak periods it is becoming dangerous. Similarly, I was also puzzled at the LNP's opposition to proposals to upgrade another intersection—that of Logan and Padstow roads. I also use this intersection every day. The waiting times are getting worse and the planned upgrades are overdue.

I will continue to support the upgrade of our roads and I will also continue to advocate for better public transport. The government has recently completed the \$256 million upgrade of railway stations at Coopers Plains, Banoon, Sunnybank, Altandi, Runcorn, Fruitgrove and Kuraby and has added a third railway line along this track. These new, modern stations are well lit, disability accessible and better for seniors. We are rolling out one new train on the city network every month. We have improved bus services to the Sunnybank electorate, and many areas in my electorate now have access to buses on a 15-minute basis. We continue to increase the number of buses, and more commuters are choosing them as their preferred method of transport. This year alone we will put \$74 million into the Brisbane bus network.

More commuters are choosing to ride to work, and we are fortunate to have some very good bikeways. It is our government's policy to make sure bikeways are included in the new and upgraded roads. As a regular cyclist—I try to ride to the city for work at least once a week—I have noticed the increase in the number of cyclists and the enthusiasm with which people are embracing the new and improved bike paths.

The long-awaited Acacia Ridge rail crossing is an \$113 million road-rail project funded by the Queensland government with a \$25 million contribution from the Australian government. This project involves lowering a 1.4 kilometre section of the Brisbane to Sydney freight rail corridor by about 10 metres and building two, three-lane, 140-metre long road bridges. The project involves eliminating the existing open level crossing on Beaudesert Road including the removal of signals and boom gates. Work is well advanced and is expected to be completed by mid-2010. It will improve safety for motorists, pedestrians and cyclists. Motorists will no longer experience delays of up to 15 minutes while kilometre-long interstate freight trains pass through the crossing at low speeds. I look forward to opening the first stage of this project next month.

All members need support networks and volunteers to help them get elected. In my case, my husband, Heinz, and sons, Lucas and Jack, have seen me through eight elections and almost 20 years as a member of parliament. Heinz and I have just celebrated our 30th wedding anniversary, Lucas is now a veterinarian and Jack is a university student.

Representing an electorate needs more than just a local member of parliament; it also needs dedicated electorate office staff. I am very fortunate to have two dedicated, hardworking staff members, Chris Pidgeon and Jodi Brown. Over the years I have also had some wonderful ministerial staff and more recently, as Minister for Police, Corrective Services and Sport, I received great support and assistance from John Francis, Kerry Humphreys, Simon Tutt, Neva Woolmer, Fred Gwinn, Catherine Searles, Sandy Dunn, Judy Kidcaff, Liam Ferney and Lucy Becker.

A number of other wonderful people worked on my campaign this year, as they have done in the past—my mother, Gwen; my sisters, Cate, Sue and Kerryn and their partners; and Bernie Dawson, Julia Malone and Melita Bates are always there. I thank my campaign managers, Ian Lang and Tracey Crosby, who did a great job. Other volunteers not to be forgotten and who are always with me include Ron and Shirley Wilmott, John and Margaret O'Donnell, Brian and Mary Dutton, Anil Verma, Hazel Shields, Gina Hickman, Maureen Turner, Myrna Stevens, Barbara McIntosh, Sheila Smith, Chris King, Peter Hollis, Leo Corazzol, Ken Taylor, Lorraine Gorman, Marcos de Orleans, Jose Franco, Brendan Crotty, Paige Armstrong, Len Ardill, John Wheeler and Sue Copeland to name a few.

I thank the Abdul family, who are magnificent. I thank Tina, David and Ade and all their volunteers from the Voice of Australian Chinese Radio and the Happy Seniors for their support. And to the many, many others who worked tirelessly on booths on election day—a huge thankyou. A number of young people volunteer in my office and work on my campaigns, and I would like to thank Joy Chou and Abdul Obeid in particular. They are wonderful to have around and keep me in touch with youth culture.

My door is always open to the people of the Sunnybank electorate who want assistance or who want to share their ideas with me. I do not believe the government has all the answers and some of the best ideas I have taken to government have come from my constituents. We are all going to face tough economic conditions in the next two years. Now, more than ever, governments will be required to show leadership, courage and vision. I am committed to working for the people of the Sunnybank electorate over the next three years as we find solutions to the important challenges of our time.