




Speech by  
**Grace Grace**

**MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL**

Hansard Thursday, 7 April 2011

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**HAWKSWORTH, MS G, OAM**

 **Ms GRACE** (Brisbane Central—ALP) (10.01 pm): Along with the Minister for Health and all my Labor colleagues, I rise to pay tribute and to extend my sincere congratulations and best wishes on the retirement of an outstanding union official, Queensland Nurses Union Secretary Gay Hawksworth OAM.

**Government members:** Hear, hear!

**Ms GRACE:** It gives me great pleasure to wish Gay, her husband, Peter, and all her family a long, happy and fulfilling retirement following her distinguished union career. And I take all the interjections from the members wishing her the best.

Gay Hawksworth retired from the QNU on Friday, 1 April 2011 after almost 29 years service to the QNU, including the last 16 years in the leadership role of QNU state secretary following her election in 1995. She commenced her union involvement as a workplace activist whilst a charge nurse in the Coronary Care Unit of the Royal Brisbane Hospital and began working for the QNU in 1982. Gay played a significant and instrumental role in the formation of the QNU, campaigning for university education for nurses which ensured nursing became a profession in its own right. Equally she has pursued recognition of the profession of midwifery and recently modernised the rules of the union to unequivocally cement the QNU as the union for nurses and midwives.

Throughout her career Gay has never lost the passion for nursing and midwifery and has worked tirelessly as a senior union leader in this state and at a national level, fighting for improved safety, rights and conditions for her members. She has played a significant role in shaping the professionalism of nursing and midwifery in this country.

Long gone are the days when Gay first started nursing when male nurses earned more than female nurses—today the pay is the same regardless of gender. Although I am sure Gay would admit that caring occupations such as nursing are still undervalued, under her leadership she charted a steady course where Queensland public sector nurses and midwives are amongst the highest paid in Australia in most classifications.

Gay's achievements are too numerous to mention at both the QNU and as a respected QCU senior officer but were recognised when she was awarded on 14 June 2010 the medal of the Order of Australia for services to industrial relations through the QNU. Her skills were such that she bucked the general trend of declining union membership and membership of the QNU grew from 24,000 members in 1995 to 44,000 current members, making the QNU the second largest union in Queensland.

On a personal note, I have had the privilege and pleasure to work with Gay for many years in the union movement and I have always admired her as a person of immense integrity, commitment and loyalty. She is an inspiration to me and others. She is my mentor and confidant. On many occasions Gay's wisdom, commonsense, support and counsel have been invaluable to me. I am proud to be able to call her my friend and comrade and, on behalf of all of my Labor colleagues, I wish her and her family the very best in retirement.

Gay has left big shoes to fill and I congratulate her capable successor, Beth Mohle, who I know will continue the hard work to maintain the strong position of the QNU. Thanks for everything, Gay. You are a wonderful person. You will be greatly missed.