




Speech by
Desley Scott

MEMBER FOR WOODRIDGE

Hansard Thursday, 31 May 2012

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mrs SCOTT** (Woodridge—ALP) (11.50 am): I would like to respectfully acknowledge the traditional custodians of this beautiful land and pay tribute to their elders both past and present who have nurtured this land for thousands of years. They now share their stories and traditions with us. I would also like to congratulate Madam Speaker on her elevation to the important role of Speaker of this House. I believe she will fulfil this role in a fair and fearless way. It is, as many have noted, the first time in the history of the parliament of Queensland that a woman has been elected to this position. Sadly, with the loss of the electorate of Bulimba—with the count finally favouring the LNP—this House now has just 17 women representing the 89 seats in this state, a fall from 33 in the previous parliament, 26 of whom represented the Australian Labor Party. Why should this be significant? While men are perfectly capable of performing all of the requirements of a member of this place, women bring their own perspective. In a country where we talk about equity and equality this should be reflected in the place where legislation is enacted affecting the whole of our communities.

At a time when a government is slashing jobs, some of which will be in single-income households, we need the plight of vulnerable families and vulnerable women to be represented. I hope there will be a concerted effort for relocation and/or retraining to recognise the importance of employment to all of those affected. Voices within cabinet were obviously silent when a decision was made to cease funding to Sisters Inside for their work with Aboriginal and Islander women imprisoned in Townsville. There is ample evidence of positive outcomes and financial benefit to turning lives around to enable women who may not have had an opportunity in education and training to be set on a path that will secure them a future far removed from their former life. I am aware that there is no money tree nor bottomless pit in government, so the decisions are ones of priority. I strongly believe in a safety net for those who require help, but I also believe one of the most important roles we can play is to keep improving our education and training programs and inspiring our young people and others to reach and strive for higher goals. I will address this issue further on in my speech.

There have been many accolades for our previous Speaker, the Hon. John Mickel, who has been acknowledged by all who served in this place during his time as one of the finest. He brought to this House a style of his own, always even-handed and wise in his counsel, allowing robust debate but always in control. However, for me it was always the personal interest he took in young people, such as our student leaders when they visited this place, or the multicultural community, the multifaith services he held or the children's choirs who sang carols at Christmas time. John never forgot the needs of his community and will always be remembered as a true people person, warm and friendly, committed to high family values, a champion for education and opportunities for all, and for his wise advice to members such as myself when we needed to find a way through a difficult issue. He is a sad loss to this place.

I wish to now turn to issues within my community of Woodridge, a place that I love, where the colourful mosaic of people from many different lands immediately captures your attention. Here you will find former refugees from African nations, Asia and the Middle East, including many war-torn countries from where some have embarked on dangerous journeys to flee the fighting and unrest to find a place where they can live in peace. We are a migrant nation with a sad history, much of which is even now being

revealed for the first time. Our knowledge of Australian history has suffered from being ignored, sanitised or, worse still, misrepresented. Whether a person is part of our ancient original inhabitants or part of the many waves of migration to this country, we want to see a society where respect is given to all, where we are each one prepared to listen and hear another story leading to greater understanding and where we give opportunity for education, employment, services and support where hopefully each one can find a place of meaning and acceptance by those around them.

As I represent an area which has long had a high level of unemployment, I have witnessed over many years the pride, self-esteem and change in life direction brought about by financial independence for those who have undergone many of our training and skilling programs resulting in jobs, be they highly skilled requiring ongoing study right through to manual labour or in our government departments, our service industry or in myriad other jobs. I want to commend many of our organisations that work tirelessly to reclaim young lives, train workers needing to reskill, assist mums, carers, people with disabilities and long-term unemployed into jobs. Others work with our former refugees to assist them through such issues as learning English, financial management, obtaining a driver's licence or undergoing training that will lead to meaningful employment.

There are many partners involved in these diverse aspects of ensuring our community members have the opportunity to fully engage in daily life, be it in paid employment or volunteering, and I would be remiss not to mention many other of our government departments, both federal and state, whose workers play such an important role in ensuring communities such as Woodridge offer residents opportunities for advancement, such as Immigration, Police, Communities, Education, Training and Employment, and Economic Development to name but a few.

The non-government sector has an equally important role and I pay tribute to organisations such as Boystown, the YMCA Flexi School, Kingston College Continuing Education Centre, Career Keys, Max Employment, ACCES Services, ADRA, Sarina Russo, Sally's Place, NOVA Employment, Youth & Family Services, Red Cross, Mission Australia and our Metropolitan South Institute of TAFE. Now as I listen to news of our impending labour shortages and then hear of workers being brought into the country on special visas I want to remind our federal government of the many potential workers who may not at this moment have the required skills but would willingly be trained to fill some of these positions, not to mention those who will be needed to backfill the jobs left vacant by the rush of workers to the mining fields.

The huge gaping hole in our education and training programs is seen in our New Zealand community members who have now made Australia home, those who have come since February 2001 and find themselves locked out of so much, such as HECS-HELP for university. It is a huge disappointment to a student and their family to work hard at high school, and gain entrance to university only to be told they have to pay upfront fees and that no HECS-HELP is available under the trans-Tasman agreement nor are Centrelink payments possible for unemployment, disability, rental subsidy, carer payments and nor is there access to public housing. So we find in my community, and those similar, overcrowding in houses because of job losses, young people taking on jobs way below their capacity and, for those who have left home and are unemployed, no income whatsoever. Thus we find a youth service on the Gold Coast handing out tents and food and some of these young people living rough or couch surfing and, even worse, entering a life of crime.

Yes, we now see some of our former refugees in higher education and entering our professional ranks, but sadly few are from our Pacific Islands and they are the largest ethnic community group in Logan. Thanks to the leadership of Dr Judith Kearney at the Logan campus of the Griffith University, Glenda Stanley, Va'a Alofipo and the many members of our churches and organisations such as the Voice of Samoan People, along with many other strategic partners such as our school principals, progress is being made on a number of fronts. When we see a whole section of our community settled in Australia, working and paying their taxes, making a huge contribution to community life, their youngsters taking on leadership roles in our schools and adding a great vibrancy and colour to every aspect of life, how can we, in all conscience, lock them out of full participation and, indeed, access to citizenship of our country? I believe this to be unconscionable and wrong and I will continue to advocate strongly on behalf of this very disadvantaged community. Their plight in Australia should attract the urgent attention of both state and federal governments, including the New Zealand government.

The most fertile ground in any electorate is in our schools, where we see youngsters being nurtured and inspired to reach high and lofty goals. Being part of the national partnership scheme with additional funds and resources from the federal government, along with the new facilities built during the economic downturn, we have witnessed, and continue to do so, great increases in results in all facets of learning. The principals, teachers and other staff have risen to the challenge and, when viewed as distance travelled, I believe that the revolution in education is well and truly evident in all schools in the Woodridge electorate. Crestmead, Kingston and Woodridge North primaries now have C&K kindies onsite, built by our state government. Those programs will result in higher standards of learning, laying a strong foundation when the young ones enter prep.

For many in the community, volunteering in Logan City is almost akin to living and breathing. It is a community of great heart and magnificent services. Our business community and in particular our chamber of commerce are great community partners. Time does not permit me to mention all I would wish to. You will find volunteers wherever you go: in our Meals on Wheels; our hospital; SES; PCYC; sporting clubs; churches; musical, arts and theatre groups; garden and seniors clubs; service organisations such as Lions and Rotary, Soroptimist International and Zonta; P&Cs; Neighbourhood Watch groups; Volunteers in Policing; and so many more such as our Mission Possible group, which sews for our hospital; aged-care facilities; Camp Quality; and Child Safety. In recent years, our students have adopted volunteering in many ways such as fundraising activities, visiting aged-care facilities and the like. In fact, volunteering underpins so many of the functions in our community. Today, I wish to pay tribute to each one who gives unstintingly of their time to help others.

Perhaps one of the more public demonstrations of love and care within a community, which ultimately led to a huge volunteer effort, was in the aftermath of the tragic fire in Slacks Creek when 11 precious lives were taken. The shared grief within our community was poured out in many ways and is still the memory that invokes tearful recollections for many. Both our Samoan and Tongan communities were cloaked in grief and our entire community was profoundly affected. Our police, fires, emergency services officers, SES officers, Salvation Army officers, church leaders, Logan Funerals and many others were magnificent in the sensitive way they supported and assisted this community. Both Logan City Council and the previous state government were heavily involved, both financially and through offering support. We walked their journey every step of the way and, finally, it led to the rebuilding of that home involving many partners. I pay tribute to my former colleague Evan Moorhead, who played a major role in that effort, as did Dave Hanna and many volunteers from the BLF, Hutchinson Builders, Mirvac and many other contractors and community partners. That home will always remain as a sentinel of the care of a community for their own. It has been constructed with much symbolism, such as the 11 pillars in the front fence, the flowering shrubs that were carefully selected and every aspect that went into its construction. To Tau, Treicee, Ierimiah and Misi: we can never understand the depths of your pain and grief, but your story will forever be woven into the history of our city and remain in the hearts of many.

To continue the theme of volunteering, during election campaigns many join together in a cause they strongly believe in. While we always have a veritable army of volunteers, for this election we had people volunteering who had never before taken part in a campaign. While we have seen a devastating result for our party, change was forecast for several years before and many had lost faith in our government, which had failed to listen and give heed to the issues that were troubling to our electors. In Australia, few governments are given a mandate beyond three or four terms and it is now up to those of us who remain in this place and out in the wider community to rebuild and rejuvenate. The long history and traditions, the sense of social justice for all, the concept of fairness and equality, of standing shoulder to shoulder with workers as over the years our unions have fought and won so many of the conditions that all workers enjoy today—those are the reasons for the existence of the Australian Labor Party. There is a sense that we may see some of those hard-won conditions eroded away and on this side of the House, although small in number, we will be ever vigilant.

There are many whom I would like to thank for their support and sacrifice of time and effort. Families bear a huge burden when a member enters political life and that has been an experience particularly for my husband, Lee. He keeps our home going while I am absent and sacrifices so much personally. There are many sacrifices of our own personal time and the inevitable absences when we simply cannot join in family events. In this House we all understand that and attempt in some way to balance our personal and working life, but at times it is very difficult.

There are many people who during the recent campaign sacrificed much of their own personal time. Now I would like to pay tribute to just some of them. First are my electorate staff, Sandy Boyd and Chris Harkins, both of whom carry a huge load serving the electorate. Sandy has been with me since 2001. She keeps me on track and has a wonderful network of partners to call on to solve issues. Chris comes with a great wealth of experience, both in the housing and social welfare sectors, and her ability to case-manage and solve personal issues is greatly appreciated. Michael Eborn has taken a major role in every state and federal election since the early 1970s. Once again he was there with me, organising booth rosters and ensuring that all was in readiness for election day.

Thank you to Sandy and Hank, Lonnie and many from my Samoan community who assisted with our signs and the army of workers who manned booths and assisted in many other ways. My thanks go to Richard Justice, Elizabeth Copson, Paul Wincen, Mick and Caitlin Noble, Leif Bremmerman, Jim Sykes, Julie Holden, Kerri Alexander, Teresa Lane and others from Craig Emerson's office, Joy Wright or 'Tilly', John and Judy Wilson, Louis Noronha, Barry Ramsay, Ron Robison, Gordon Coulson, Robyn Caffery, Josephine Aufai, Ivan Bicanic, Sandy Willett, Hank Lewis, Daphne Godden, Daniel Zingifuaboro, Auntie Betty McGrady, Neville Scholes, Luca and Elizabeth Camay, Geoff Greenfield, Hazel Hubbard, Craig

O'Leary, Don Frew, Geoff and Catherine McGregor, the Maori Warriors, Juan Santa Cruz, John Ruthenberg, Jeremie Heri, Gota-A-Bahanibanje and many others.

While we retained the seat of Woodridge, as a party we are bruised but not without heart. Many now want to help us rebuild, some who have been Labor voters and now wish to be more involved. While seven members may be not much more than a handful, we come to this place each sitting week with great heart and a firm resolve that we will be the solid base upon which this party will once again rise to be the upholder of our strong Labor values. Thank you to those who have stood by us. We will need all of your support and help in the years ahead.