




Speech by

Hon. Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Tuesday, 15 May 2012

ELECTION OF SPEAKER

 **Madam SPEAKER:** Honourable members, I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet. Audax at fidelis—bold but faithful is the motto of our great state of Queensland which appears on the walls of this magnificent parliamentary building and on our coat of arms. It calls us to actions of courage but with trustworthiness and integrity. It reminds us to stand up for what is right and to speak truthfully with hearts submitted to the service of others above self.

Courage without care can damage. Boldness tempered with faithful love for others empowers and unleashes greater opportunity for all. That is why I am truly humble to take this chair and the position of Speaker of the 54th Parliament of Queensland, as you asked me to fulfil a role to fairly adjudicate within this chamber and to defend our parliamentary democracy outside of it. I acknowledge and thank the Premier and Deputy Premier for the words in nominating me and the House for its support in my appointment.

Let me also extend my congratulations to Premier Campbell Newman as the first to contend and win this role from outside of parliament and to the Leader of the Opposition, Anastacia Palaszczuk, who becomes the first woman Leader of the Opposition. I acknowledge all members of parliament—the Liberal-Nationals, Labor, Katter's Australian Party and Independents. I particularly congratulate our 50 new members in our 89-seat parliament. You are part of an extraordinary class of 2012.

As members know, I am a member of the ruling party and I hold the seat of Maroochydore, which I will continue to strongly and passionately represent. However, my role as Speaker is an appointment of the parliament, not of the executive, and hundreds of years of convention dictate that in this role I must act in the interests of all parliamentarians, not partisan interests, to defend the rights and responsibilities of the parliament as a whole. You have been elected to this parliament to be the voice of your electorates and to deliver good government. As members of parliament, you will quickly find that some people assume you only work while in this chamber. But a member's duties in and outside of the chamber are inextricably linked, as they are in my role as the new Speaker.

Last year there was public controversy when laws were passed to significantly alter the duties of the Speaker by transferring the powers over the precinct and its services as well as oversight of ethical policy issues, such as the code of conduct and the register of pecuniary interests, to a Committee of the Legislative Assembly and making the Speaker's role and office subject to the deliberations of a committee rather than in the first instance the scrutiny of the whole House. I believe the Speaker's role needs to be unambiguously restored in keeping with Westminster conventions to ensure that there is respect for the parliament as a whole and an understanding that it is not an arm of executive government so that fairness not only occurs but is seen to occur.

As this state has no upper house, the role of Speaker is arguably even more important to ensure proper and fair dealing with scrutiny of legislation and the delivery of services which support a parliamentarian in the course of their work—services such as the library, office space and support staff—as well as oversight of the setting of the standards of ethical policies for parliamentarians for the benefit of all Queenslanders. The fact that the current legislation provides no effective protection or safeguard for the

Speaker's own staff and office could be viewed as an unacceptable mechanism for compromising a Speaker's independence and the oversight of fairness in this place.

Eminent constitutional and parliamentary legal expert Gerard Carney, now the Dean of the Faculty of Law at the University of Queensland, provided a learned insight into the impact of these laws upon the multifaceted rights and responsibilities of the Speaker. In his advice to the former scrutiny of legislation committee on 28 June 2011, tabled by the Committee of the Legislative Assembly on 2 August 2011, Mr Carney remarked 'that the Executive should not be allowed to intrude on the control of the House or its management'. He went on to say—

The position, in which a Speaker will find himself or herself under this Bill, will be one of reduced status and unwarranted compromise in terms of his or her ability to perform the functions of office. This in turn will impair the effective management and functioning of the House. It also threatens the maintenance of an appropriate level of separation between the House and the Executive by undermining the delicate role of a politically appointed Speaker who must try to retain the trust of both government and opposition.

He summarised by saying—

... the management of the parliamentary service, which is there to serve all members of the Assembly, is now vested in a committee which does not adequately represent the vast majority of the members of the Assembly. So long as that role is vested in the Speaker, there is a tradition and expectation that the Speaker will act in the best interests of all members. That tradition and expectation cannot be translated to the CLA constituted as it is with "executive" members.

The parliament must operate fairly, and thus the Speaker's role needs to be re-empowered to ensure this occurs without executive interference.

Today you have honoured me with the opportunity to serve as Queensland's first female Speaker of the Parliament. In turn, I wish to honour a great Queensland woman—Eliza O'Connell, who proved decades before women had the vote here in Queensland that leadership is about legacy, not a title, and great leadership impacts for the good of others beyond a generation.

Among other things, Eliza started a training school for women to help them gain employment and an orphanage in the 1860s and 1870s. She was a founder and president of a maternity hospital which later became the Royal Women's Hospital and was also the founding vice-president and later president of the Hospital for Sick Children, which is now the Royal Children's Hospital. Eliza was responsible for choosing the scripture Psalm 127, which is written in stained glass behind the main staircase of this building. It says—

Except the Lord build the house, they labour but in vain that build it.

Except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain.

I believe that she was the very epitome of our state motto, boldly and faithfully reaching out of her comfort zone for the love of others. She is an inspiration we can all draw upon—audax at fidelis, bold but faithful.

It is a great privilege to be elected as Speaker. I will seek to ensure that every voice has the opportunity to be heard and that we value our democracy enough to respect its operation so that we who have been chosen to watch this state and labour for the benefit of all Queenslanders do so not in vain but for lasting good.