




Speech by

Freya Ostapovitch

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Hansard Thursday, 31 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mrs OSTAPOVITCH** (Stretton—LNP) (4.17 pm): It is indeed awesome to see the enthusiastic faces of my colleagues sitting here, in particular the candidates who ran with me in 2009. Only a few candidates ever try a second time, so we are either very determined people or a fork short of a cutlery set! But it is my absolute joy to be with my friends from neighbouring Springwood, Algester, Sunnybank, Mansfield, Waterford and Albert—colleagues who I know will take the responsibility placed upon us seriously, with a diligent and sensible attitude.

I joined the LNP when it was formed in 2008 and soon after ran for Waterford. After an unpleasant defeat, which was later proven to be the result of an overall deceitful campaign, I was so impressed with LNP leaders Lawrence Springborg, John-Paul Langbroek, Bruce McIver and Gary Spence that I decided to stay on and help the LNP cause. I found in them a great integrity and deep desire for a better Queensland—inspirational leaders that you just want to follow. Of course, there is no denying the Newman factor in my victory, but I pledge that next election I will win on my own merit because I will have done a great job for my Stretton, a community that is culturally diverse but very much Aussie and has the most wonderful, generous and friendly people you could wish for. I knocked on over 14,000 doors over 12 months and not an ill-tempered person did I ever meet. To the 2,000 households I missed: I promise you I will get to you over the next few months. I made a commitment and I plan to deliver on it.

I am also responsible to the thousands of animals and flora of Karawatha Forest, and never in my wildest dreams did I think I would be saving frogs in my first week. It sounds funny, but it was actually a very serious threat to the \$60 million council investment. I would like to thank the Karawatha Forest Protection Society for bringing it to my attention and to LinkWater for finding us a solution. If only frogs could vote.

We all know that no-one gets to this place on their own so I want to thank the people who stood alongside me. In particular, I thank my campaign managers, David Lin and Vivien Ouwerkerk. Likewise, I thank mentors like Mayor Pam Parker, Mayor Graham Quirk, Don Cameron, Senator Sue Boyce and the ever passionate Senator Barnaby Joyce. To a true lady with a big heart, Lisa Newman: you have my absolute admiration.

I thank my friend, Nina Schrunner, who was always there to encourage me, especially when the Labor candidate stooped to sending out vile letters to my large ethnic community attempting to link me to the racist philosophy of another party that I have never even belonged to. I cannot describe how offensive that letter was to me, but it backfired because my ethnic community had already come to know me and they knew that I have a genuine love and interest in all people regardless of race or religion. The Labor candidate even replaced Anna Bligh with Kevin Rudd in all of his advertising. I think he must have had too much sun and forgot who his leader was. What an insult to the intelligence of the Chinese community. Hence, I was given even more encouragement and help by the Taiwanese, Chinese, Vietnamese and Indian communities, and I am truly grateful for their friendship which just gets stronger.

Of course I must thank my husband of 36 years, Don, and my two sons, Senior Constable Kyle Ostapovitch and Dr Michael Ostapovitch. Witnessing their servitude under difficult and dangerous

conditions has inspired me to want to make things better for Queenslanders. They choose to serve the community but I am sad because that servitude comes at a price. For their own mental wellbeing, they have to put aside their emotions when they don the uniform because they both see more pain, suffering, cruelty and death every day than anyone should see in a lifetime. That is particularly timely on this very day, as we all remember the life of Damian Leeding that was cut short. As the mother of a detective, it is particularly confronting. So today I want to publicly in this place commend and honour all the police officers, nurses, doctors, paramedics and social workers out there and give them my thanks—and I am sure the thanks of this new parliament—for their unselfish, daily sacrifice to protect and heal their fellow man. We should never take their service for granted.

There are a lot of things I hope to achieve during my time in parliament. I hope to make life better for people living in the electorate of Stretton. I hope to be useful to the team sitting in this chamber in the important job of getting Queensland back on track. I hope as a member of the Finance and Administration Committee that I can help make wise decisions with the taxpayers' money and pass sensible laws that make life better for Queenslanders—laws that encourage people to work and contribute to society and, most importantly, laws that discourage idleness, selfishness and crime.

I also really want to be a voice for those who are vulnerable—that is, our elderly and our children. The truth is that kids need very little to be happy. It is not things they need; it is the love of their parents. I have been to places where families live in dirt floor shacks and I have seen children leave those shacks in pristine clean and ironed school uniforms and skip down the road with big smiles on their faces.

Parents in developing countries sacrifice what little they have with the hope that an education will give their children a better life. Indeed, hope is vital to good mental health. My experience is that a frightening number of Australians have lost hope. It has always perplexed me as to why Australia has the highest rate of teen suicide per capita in the world—a disgraceful statistic. We need to be proactive in finding the root of the problem of youth suicide. Why are so many of our youth troubled? By and large, most parents love and protect their children but perhaps we indulge our children too much. Do we protect them from sadness and disappointment to the extent that they grow up not learning how to cope with these things? There is a saying that to experience the rainbow you must first embrace the rain. Do we need to allow our children to stand in the rain? They need to learn that they are strong enough to get over sad times, that it is not the end of the world when they get a pimple and, sorry to be trivial, that things always get better with time and that people need to have that hope.

I have always found it helpful to have an attitude of gratitude. Even though my father abandoned my mother and me when I was 10 and I have not heard from him since, I know that experience has made me the empathetic person I am today. To say I grew up with emotional baggage is an understatement, but by the grace of God I found a good and loyal man when I was only 19 which probably saved me from myself. I also replaced my wayward father with one who will never abandon me.

What I did determine while still young was that I would not let my past dictate my future. You cannot move forward if you are always looking back at the past. Indeed, after training as a psychiatric nurse at a large psychiatric hospital, I chose a career in sales and business where rejection is an everyday occurrence. And fancy someone with rejection issues running for parliament—twice. Talk about facing your fears.

A wise man once said that the secret of happiness is to find contentment whatever situation you are in. Be it in times of need or times of plenty, just accept it and be as happy as you can be. Indeed, I have seen this in action as I have travelled the world—people who I would call poor but are happy and content. I have seen the real poor; I have seen children living by garbage tips because that is where they find food and items to sell.

When I was a child, my friend's mother had a plaque in her kitchen that said, 'I used to complain I had no shoes until I met a man who had no feet.' It is funny the things that stick in your head throughout your life, but that little saying has always come to mind when I have allowed myself to wallow in self-pity. It is all about attitude. There is always someone worse off than you. Sometimes I find it hard to listen to an able-bodied person complaining, but I remind myself of what I learnt while I was a nurse—that everyone just wants to feel they are important enough to be listened to. I wish we could all listen to one another more because that would make a significant difference to our society.

A number of years ago I decided to take a break from my school and sports photography business to volunteer in the community. During my time as the president of a large community centre and volunteer on many associated social welfare association committees, I witnessed the best of humankind and the worst. Firstly, I witnessed the generosity of my fellow volunteers who gave so freely of their time. I encourage anyone who wants to find some purpose in their lives to contact Volunteering Queensland which offers an incredible variety of opportunities to suit all.

But I am sad to say that I saw some very sad cases of child abuse and neglect. There is an epidemic of selfishness out there. We all have bouts of selfish behaviour at times, but it is shameful when a parent continually puts their own desires above the wellbeing of their child. When a government neglects to

discipline a youth who has made a bad choice, they neglect their duty to them as well as society. It is indeed cruel to set in motion a dysfunctional future for a child. The statistics are that 6,500 children appeared on 19,000 charges in 2011 and that 200 kids were responsible for one-quarter of the crimes.

Pam Dowse, Queensland's only dedicated children's magistrate, tells of offenders who are malnourished, ill clad, neglected, abused and unloved products of dysfunctional parents. She continues in the *Courier-Mail* story that they are often children crying out for rescue rather than retribution. What a disgraceful legacy the Labor government has left Queensland. For almost 22 years it has failed our children and hence failed the basic needs of our society, which has the right to expect safety in their homes and businesses. I almost fell to the floor when I heard the member in the corner here cite success in child safety as a Labor achievement. You have got to be kidding! I say spend some time in the real world!

I have seen parents send their children to school without breakfast or lunch. I have heard of teenagers who did not know how to use a knife and fork because they had only ever eaten from a takeaway wrapper. There are parents who tell their kids that they are stupid. There are parents who spend any money they get on themselves and expect their working neighbours to feed, clothe and give Christmas presents to their children. There are parents who see their children as a burden and tell them to get out of the house so they can spend time with their new boyfriend. There are parents who expect day-care centre staff to toilet train their child. Some parents even drop off their children in filthy nappies. There are parents who beat their child and parents who rape their child and there is even a mother out there who sells her child as a sex toy for the perverted.

These are hard things to hear, but they need to be said because we cannot change what we do not know of. I believe there are things we can do as a government if we approach the task from a prevention point of view. We are now raising children to become adults who will suffer from depression or a need to escape in a world of binge drinking and substance abuse, or an adult who habitually hurts others and spends their life in and out of jail. This is the result for most kids who grow up unloved or undisciplined. A month ago two teenage girls mercilessly bashed a seven-year-old girl in the toilets of a cinema while her mother was outside. Kids are taking knives to school and stabbing each other—kids, not adults! We are failing our children. When are we going to say enough is enough? The relative slap on the wrist is not working. We need to show tough love, with an emphasis on the love. It is a sad fact that we have more programs available to train our dogs than our children.

I also believe we need to take the reins back from children who are more and more realising they have power over authority. How did we get to the situation where youths are calling the shots? Right now there is a culture that encourages children to disrespect authority of parents, teachers and police. For example, a 15-year-old who had been an extremely smart student had become so addicted to computer games that he was sneaking back to his house instead of going to school. His grades were failing and so was his quality of life. His mother took his computer to a store to have all the games wiped. Her son was angry and found a sympathetic ear in a so-called school social worker, who then confronted the mother that this was an abuse of his right to have whatever he wanted on his own computer. When his mother strongly objected to that, the son was encouraged to leave his mother and told he would get money from the government so he could live independently. Fortunately the mother convinced her son to live downstairs in the granny flat to stay close to his family. However, he was still given government assistance. He fended for himself the whole time he lived under his mother's house until he left high school. Thankfully, he pulled his socks up and was given a scholarship to UQ, but what an insane story that is—an example of waste.

Stand outside any Children's Court and watch the youths leave laughing and mocking our judicial system due to bad policy that does nothing to curb an appetite for crime and violence. Recently we have heard of youths abusing the no child left behind legislation and forcing bus drivers to take them without payment. To me it is child neglect to set children up to disregard authority and our laws. No good can come of it—not for society and not for the child. So what are we as a society going to do about it? It is a problem we all pay for, so we should all think about what we can do to help. I want to see discussion about this on the TV and radio, at P&Cs and coffee shops and over the back fence. When society bands together and says that it will no longer accept child neglect, then we have a real chance to reduce it.

Most of the time it is not about taking children away from their mother; it is about showing the mother how to be a mother, a father how to be a father. Some of them never learnt that from their mothers or fathers. Any life we save from the cycle of the abused becoming the abuser or a life of mental illness or a life of crime is worth the effort. Our children deserve it and society deserves it. The best way we can all help is to change behaviour by changing attitudes. Mentoring is the way. I know that all it takes is one significant adult in a young person's life to change it—just one person to care. I also think that governments have got to stop enabling people to self-destruct by giving them money without conditions. We all know that many handouts to families do not reach the children. It disgusts me that a parent would spend money on alcohol, cigarettes, drugs and gambling and not on feeding, clothing or educating their own child—and society, in many ways, pays for it.

Billions and billions goes towards putting bandaids on youths and adults with gaping wounds—a wound that could have been avoided if treated when it was just a sore. Imagine a Queensland where there were fewer people in jails, less crime, fewer people on welfare, fewer people with mental illness, fewer people in hospital, fewer people self-medicating on drugs and binge drinking, less cruelty, less abuse and neglect. In fact, there probably are not many areas that our taxes go to now that could not be reduced if we took more notice of how we raise our children. It is time we all talk about it instead of sweeping it under the rug because it makes us uncomfortable. Perhaps when selfish parents recognise their behaviour they will seek help to change. We know that people can change. Humans have the ability to change. We are not trees. Anyone can make the decision to say, 'Today will be a new day. Today I will change for the sake of my family and for my own sake,' and there are thousands of success stories to prove this. People just need the courage to take the first step.

So let us have the conversation and let us all figure out how we can help someone who is struggling with life, and here is an idea: what if we taught children in school about self-esteem or life and parenting skills, how to budget, anger management or—heaven forbid—some manners and moral lessons too? What is wrong with developing a conscience in a child that how you treat others matters? A teacher told me recently that there was no time to do that because the focus is on academia and that those things are meant to be taught by parents and/or churches. I agree, but that does not help the child who has a parent who does not think those things are important. It seems to me that if we can make time for sex education we can make time to teach children life skills, including how to be loving and responsible parents.

I hope that when I review my maiden speech in 10 years time I will feel proud that it was my LNP government that had the foresight to plan for the future of our children. After all, we have a leader who had the foresight to build bridges and tunnels because they are cheaper and less disruptive to motorists. I remind those without vision that 20 years ago when the Gateway Bridge was first built we heard the same complaints. Well, can anyone imagine not having that bridge today? Of course not! In fact, we even needed to duplicate it. So, Premier, I look forward to looking back when my time on earth is done and feeling proud of what we did. There is no doubt in my mind that we will do it. During my time in office I will quote my favourite saying—

I ask God to grant me the peace of mind to change the things I can

Accept the things I can't

And most importantly the wisdom to know the difference.

Thank you.