




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR GYMPIE

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VALEDICTORY

 **Mr GIBSON** (Gympie—LNP) (12.46 pm): Whilst the opportunity for a maiden speech is provided to all MPs, the valedictory speech is a privilege extended to only a few. Hansard has advised me that it can identify only 38 MPs who have chosen to retire in the entire time of the Queensland parliament. Today I find myself in great company with people like my mate Vaughan Johnson, the unflappable Rosie Menkens, Peter, Ted, Desley and the father of the House, Howard, in joining that list.

Our maiden speeches are often full of excitement and praise, with lists of hopes and ideals, and grand plans mapped out to be achieved during our time in office. The valedictory is, by its very name, more measured and reflective as you take a moment to pass a critical eye over all that you have been able to achieve, your successes and your failures as you recognise your friends and worthy adversaries and muse upon the things that really matter and those things that didn't but nevertheless robbed you of valuable time. Like two bookends, the maiden and valedictory speeches provide a reflection on what we hope to achieve against what we were able to accomplish during our time in this place. It has been a great honour to serve the people of Gympie in the Queensland parliament in its 52nd, 53rd and now in its 54th Parliament. I have always viewed each day as an MP as an incredible privilege. That a lad growing up in a housing commission estate whose parents were deaf and whose old man worked as a garbo for the local council could end up as one of only 89 Queenslanders who are empowered to represent their community in this House has never ceased to amaze nor inspire me to do my best.

As I said in my maiden speech, I am only the 18th person to represent the seat of Gympie since it was formed in 1873, over 141 years ago. That means my eight-year service is spot on the average, although I recognise there were multimember constituencies for a while. I note that I join with another former member for Gympie, Andrew Fisher, on a dubious honour board for having the shortest term as a cabinet minister. Andrew Fisher was the minister for railways and public works for only seven days in 1899. I am glad that I could double his time. As I have reflected upon my time in public office, you become aware of the truth that, regardless of how long we serve, we ultimately become just a memory. Hopefully I have used my time to serve in such a way that the memory is a good one until that day when we are no more than just a name in the parliamentary record.

I would like to acknowledge my colleagues around this chamber and those who are no longer here. In my maiden speech, I stated my desire to work with all colleagues in this House, regardless of where they sit, to achieve the very best for Gympie and for Queensland. I believe I have honoured that, and in doing so I have been able to achieve things from both opposition as well as the government benches—although I will say it is a whole lot easier to achieve things from government.

Some of these achievements have been as follows. I brought sign language interpreters into the Queensland parliament—initially for my maiden speech and then for question time during the National Week of Deaf People for several years. I thank the Clerk, Neil, and his staff for their support

in facilitating this to happen. I was involved in the smoke alarm subsidy for the deaf and hearing impaired from opposition, and I want to thank my colleague the member for Lockyer for his assistance in bringing this about. I engaged the first deaf student as a parliamentary intern, and I wish to put on the record my thanks to parliamentary education for facilitating this.

I was also involved with my community in the successful fight to stop Labor's Traveston Dam debacle. This was the experience upon which I cut my political teeth, first as a candidate and then as a local MP. I recall I sat very close to where Kerry Millard, the member for Sandgate, sits today, and in front of me was the then member for Aspley. She gave me the nickname 'The Gympie Rattler' for my vigorous and loud contributions on that issue in this House. Once I moved closer to the Speaker, I found myself getting kicked out on this issue on numerous occasions because of the noise that I would create. I have also had the satisfaction of being the chair of the Mary Valley Economic Development Advisory Group and seeing the renewal of the Mary Valley, with projects like Cedar Hill, the Australian quarter horse and HoneyBee Farm—a facility that provides farm stay accommodation for people with a disability and their carers.

There was also the great pleasure of developing in opposition with Jeff Van Groningen what has become this government's highly successful Get in the Game policy. I knew that with the right incentives we could help families get their kids into sport and help sporting clubs grow. I thank the then shadow cabinet for supporting the policy and the minister, the government and the department for implementing it so successfully.

None of these achievements would have been possible without the guidance and assistance of fellow MPs, and I would like to take a moment to acknowledge but a few. To the Premier, thank you for having the confidence in me to extend me the privilege of serving in the cabinet of the first conservative government since 1998 and then as chair of the State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee. To the Deputy Premier, thank you for your ongoing confidence and support, not only in me but also in the people of Gympie and the Mary Valley as it rebuilds after the Traveston Dam debacle. To my fellow MPs whom I served with and did the hard yards with in opposition—to Tim Nicholls, Scott Emerson, Andrew Powell, Andrew Cripps and others, I watch you now as ministers, immensely proud of what you are achieving in your portfolios. I make special mention of Lawrence Springborg, who I know worked so hard to form the LNP which then resulted in us being able to achieve government and who is now doing an outstanding job as health minister.

To those LNP MPs who joined us here in the 53rd Parliament and in doing so helped us form government, can I say thank you. I regret not getting to know more of you better. I see within you such talent and potential that will benefit the people of Queensland for years to come. To those who I have served with on the all-powerful State Development, Infrastructure and Industry Committee, can I thank you for your support, your friendship and your assistance. In speaking of the committee, I must thank the outstanding committee secretariat.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of the non-LNP members who have served with me in my time. To Tim Mulherin, the title 'honourable' is one that you truly deserve. I have enjoyed our discussions and the way in which you have held the parliament and its processes in the highest of regard. I would only hope that your colleagues would follow your example. To Rob Katter, you are a person of incredible decency and of good humour and you are a person you can always rely upon, especially to be at least five minutes late to a committee.

I would also like to mention the former Speaker, John Mickel, with whom I worked closely as the Leader of Opposition Business for a while. He was a man who, despite being treated appallingly by his own party, always conducted himself in the office of Speaker with respect and dignity. He would provide advice, wisdom and insight and I have become a better MP through knowing him. I wish to thank our current Speaker for her assistance and concern and that of the parliament extended to me this year. I also wish to put on the record my thanks to the Leader of the House and to the Clerk. Without your assistance, I would not be on the journey of recovery that I am today.

During my time in parliament I have tried to increase my knowledge and understanding of the parliamentary processes. This has resulted in my involvement in the Australasian Study of Parliament Group over the years. I have given two papers about disability engagement with democratic processes at various ASPG conferences and I have had one published in the *Australasian Parliamentary Review*. As a student of parliament, I would urge all MPs not to be afraid to reform our parliamentary processes and procedures. In my time, we have done that both with reforming the committee process and then with the estimates process this year—both of which in my opinion are far superior to what was in place before them. Two full days for the examination of portfolio expenditure is clearly better than just one, but I acknowledge that perhaps it was an idea before its time with such a small opposition and the demands that are placed upon them.

We must go further in reform. In my opinion, some of the more productive work that is now done in the parliament occurs within our committees, and I see no reason why more time should not be allocated to committee work—say, two mornings in a sitting week. This could easily be achieved by limiting debate on bills in the House to no more than two hours. The concept of a bill being truly debated is well and truly gone, with members' speeches now making tenuous links to the bill while they then speak about matters in their electorate, and I am as guilty as anyone else in this House of doing that. Another area worthy of consideration of reform is question time—#DeathtotheDixer is something I will be tweeting when I am no longer an MP. I also support the idea that we can adapt this parliament to embrace electronic voting in divisions—again, saving time and the work of the whips. I wish to take this opportunity to thank all of the staff at Parliament House. You have fed me too much, made my speeches read well, helped me travel, sourced books and undertaken research, as well as making sure that I felt safe at all times.

I would now like to reflect upon the people who have supported me so well through my time here. Firstly, to the people of Gympie—you have invited me into your lives, shared with me your hopes and fears and, in doing so, touched my life in such a way that I am a better person for having known you. I wish to share some of my highlights. One was having afternoon tea, using her mother's good china, with Charlotte Hurford who at 104 years old—which makes you realise how old the china might have been—showed me that life is to be lived to the fullest. Other highlights have been the times where I have enjoyed a quiet ale with a dairy farmer as they shared with me the challenges they faced from the pressures of rising electricity prices and water charges and then as farm gate prices were being put down by pressure from the major supermarkets. I have witnessed individuals display serenity as they have faced their mortality in palliative care. I have had the privilege of seeing the dignity displayed by the parents of Corporal Ashley Birt. I visited them shortly after they learnt of the great sacrifice their son made as he was serving in Afghanistan in October 2011. There are no words that can comfort or recognise the ultimate sacrifice that they gave through their son in his service of our country. I have enjoyed visiting all of the 27 schools both state and private in the Gympie electorate and seeing the students who are our future and recognising the great teachers and principals who guide them. I have also enjoyed kicking a soccer ball with kids who really did not care who I was as long as I passed the ball to them.

To the people of Gympie, you have displayed such confidence in me that after just one term I went from a seat that we did not expect to win to the safest seat in the Queensland parliament. I will never forget the trust that you first placed in me and I hope that I have served you well. Since making the decision not to contest the next election, I set myself five goals to work towards achieving before I left office. The first was to finish the work to assist the iconic Gympie Rattler to return it to operations. I want to thank the Gympie Mayor, Ron Dyne, for helping to establish the Rattler Railway Co., and the government for \$2.6 million in funding to see the Rattler get back on track.

The second goal was the master plan for the Gympie Hospital including an onsite CT scanner, and I thank the health minister for his support and the work of the department in preparing this master plan over the past two years. I look forward to it being released in the near future and seeing a CT scanner being located at the Gympie Hospital.

The third was the removal of beach fees. This was a partial win, with the removal of beach fees for Rainbow Beach residents but, as they say, 50 per cent of something is better than 100 per cent of nothing. I want to thank Minister Dickson for his assistance on this because it would have been easy to let this issue drop after I announced my intention not to contest the next election. It is a mark of his integrity and commitment that he made sure it was followed through.

The fourth was the Hope Dairies announcement for the Mary Valley that was just made at the G20—truly a transformational project not just for the Mary Valley but for the dairy industry in this state. It will no doubt become a vital plank in this government's plan to achieve its target to double agricultural production in 2040. I thank the Deputy Premier and his departmental officers for working on this. I also put on the record my thanks to Ms Gina Rinehart for having the confidence to invest in our state and having the confidence in Australian and Queensland farmers. This is something that takes leadership and she has displayed that strongly in this proposal.

The one item of my goals that is not finished is to progress the Corella range complex. Gympie has an opportunity to establish a site for a future world-class shooting complex not only for Gympie but for the region, with both the Sunshine Coast and Fraser Coast councils identifying this hard-to-locate sport as being ideally located in Gympie.

I say thank you to my electorate officers, who have worked so hard behind the scenes—to Janell and Daryll who have made the office literally hum over the past 2½ years and to those who

served before them, as well as the trainees I have employed over eight years, including Miranda, Hayley, Daryll, Ellen, Jessica, Matthew and the very first trainee, Kylie. I have had some great staff over the years. I have never asked my staff which way they vote because they are not employed for their politics but, rather, their abilities.

To the majority of the members of the LNP branches in Gympie, in the whole I wish to thank you for your support and kind words. Unfortunately, I know of people who have now left the party because of the way in which I have been treated. It is unfortunate that a very small pathetic group bent on power and having control have done so much to damage the party locally.

I would like to think that because of my Christian values I am a forgiving individual. Whilst I struggle to understand why some individuals on my own side would attack me in such a way, I can accept that as part of public life. However, what I cannot forgive is what they did to my family and, in particular, what they did to my children. As a result of their quest for power at all costs, this year has been one of the most difficult that I have ever faced in my life. I must thank all those people I like to call ordinary angels—people who reached out to me at exactly the right time. There are so many but I am so thankful for your compassion and kindness.

The unrelenting attacks on me about my past, the resulting nervous breakdown and my journey of recovery have all taught me things about myself and have given me a perspective that I would like to seek your indulgence to share with you. Firstly, nothing is more important than your health, both physical and mental, so look after yourself. I am proud to say I have lost 20 kilos this year and have a much healthier outlook on life. I am not quite at the weight I was when I came in, but I blame catering for that. Secondly, no-one is more important than your family. They pay a price for our involvement in political life and you need to ensure that you make time for them. Thirdly, you can have friends in politics. The support that you have shown me through difficult times has proven that. Next, never forget to treat people the way you would like to be treated. Every person has a story worth listening to and remember, as an MP, you have the ability to change someone's life. Don't ever waste it.

Finally, be true to yourself and those beliefs you hold. One occasion that I am proud to say I held true to my beliefs about how people should be treated was during one of the worst debates in which I have ever been involved in this House, that of the Civil Partnerships Bill back in June 2012. I had no intention of speaking on that bill that night as I supported the position of the bill to make Queensland's laws consistent with other states. However, as I watched both sides of this House descend into political rancour, it was evident that we had forgotten that we were talking about people. Cheap political shots were fired and couples were being used for base political purposes. I could not stand by on such a debate and do nothing. So I rose to give what was the shortest speech I have ever given in reminding everyone that it is not appropriate for us as legislators, who are tasked to represent all Queenslanders, regardless of their sexual orientation, regardless of their faith, to use language that is so politically charged that it becomes disrespectful to the people involved on either side of the debate. I would ask that you remember that going into the 2015 state election, because the 2012 one was particularly grubby, as was the Redcliffe by-election.

Dealing with failure is not easy, particularly when it takes on a life in the media. But no matter what, you have to get up and try again. I have had no regrets from my time in politics, just lessons learnt. The past cannot be changed, forgotten, edited or erased; it can only be accepted. I realise that mistakes make us human, failures help us grow, hope keeps us going and love is the reason we are alive. My final thanks, therefore, must go to the most important people in my life whom I love dearly: my family. My wife, Alicia, who has supported me through the roller-coaster ride of the past eight years, did not want to be, nor has ever really become, a politician's wife—and nor should she; she is successful in her own right. I am blessed to have found someone as an eternal companion who brings out the very best in me. To my children, Tim, Luke, Izaak and Hana, I apologise for the times that I was not there, but I want you to know that I am immensely proud of the young adults that you have become.

I gave my first speech in this House in sign language to recognise my deaf parents and to give my thanks to them. In what may be my final speech, I use sign language to remind us all that we come here to give a voice to those who elect us. We must be true to them (*signed using Auslan*). I hope I have done that for the people of Gympie and for those Queenslanders with a disability. All the best and God bless.