




Speech By
Bruce Saunders

MEMBER FOR MARYBOROUGH

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr SAUNDERS** (Maryborough—ALP) (5.05 pm): It is a great honour to be here. I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your election to the position of Deputy Speaker. I would like to acknowledge the Turrbal people, the traditional owners of the land we meet on today, and pay my respects to elders both past and present. It is a great honour to be elected the 26th member for Maryborough, which includes eight dual members. Maryborough is one of the older electorates in the state. It is an honour to be part of the 55th Parliament and in the Palaszczuk government. I would also like to thank Mrs Maddern, the former member, for her efforts on behalf of the Maryborough electorate during the previous parliament.

I have said it is an honour to serve the people of Maryborough and it is. Maryborough is my home. I was not born there, I was born in the dusty town of Longreach when shearing was still the main income for the working person in the west. My wife, Jenny, and I moved to Maryborough in the eighties and started our family. I was a young radio announcer with a driving ambition to forge my own path and to one day be my own boss and own my own business. We relocated to Mount Isa, Longreach and Yeppoon and then back to Maryborough—I can't get away from the great city of Maryborough! The legacy of living in the west and the country has given me a passion to make sure regional Queensland survives—more than that: it thrives.

My father, Gordon, fondly known to all who knew him throughout the central west and north-west as 'Popeye', taught me the importance of Labor and the labour movement. It was only we, the people, who could create the change we needed; it was only us who could make the difference. I will tell honourable members about Popeye. There was only one thing he loved more fiercely than my late mother, Lola, and his family and that was the Labor Party and the labour movement—that and, of course, a day at the racetrack. My father was one of the longest serving bookmakers in Queensland. We come from a racing family. He was a card-carrying unionist until the day he died and a member of the Labor Party until his passing in 2004. Popeye was an influential force in Longreach. My daughter Ashleigh is still referred to as Popeye's daughter when she visits the central west as part of her work with the Together union.

My father helped make me the man I am today. It was his and my mother's guidance and tuition that shaped my beliefs and character. Popeye was a hard man when it came to social justice but soft as butter when helping those in need. I watched my father debate many decisions in party rooms, conference halls and town hall meetings. He was tenacious in his views on fairness and equality for all. When I was a young man my father explained to me the true value and meaning of what it is to be Labor. One of the things I remember him saying is, 'Bruce, Labor is for the people. It is a party that fights to protect the rights of workers and believes in a fair go. It is our responsibility as individuals to ensure everyone is treated with respect and dignity regardless of their colour, age, race or gender.' He said to me, 'Bruce, we must always help and protect our fellow people so no-one gets left behind.' As soon as age permitted I signed up to be a member of the Australian Labor Party. My father's beliefs did not just impact on my character through words but through actions. As I said, I

witnessed him fight to stop Longreach from becoming a dying town. I watched him work hard to bring tourism and opportunity to an area everyone else had started to give up on. I see this now in my home city of Maryborough.

As I walked into my small business in the heart of the city counting the empty shops, as I listened to the heartache being poured out across the counter of the gelato store, as I heard stories of parents living in their cars just to ensure their children can be fed and had some sort of roof over their head, as I watched health services being torn from our hospital, friends being knocked off waiting lists with life-threatening illnesses and their lives being destroyed because they could not afford alternative health care, as I watched public sector workers, many of whom were my friends, sacked and their houses go up for sale and people being forced to move away from a city and town they had devoted their lives to, I knew, like the people around me knew, change had to happen.

Just as my father taught me, it was up to us to bring Maryborough back to life. Only we, the people, could put Maryborough first. During the election campaign, you could feel the energy in the air. We opened the campaign office as a point of contact for people. It was somewhere they could go and share their concerns and ideas, have a cup of tea and talk about moving forward the great electorate of Maryborough. Harry Goodwin is a life member of the Labor Party. Next month, he will turn 90. He is a really good bloke. He is a man who, for all of his life, has put Maryborough first. Harry volunteered to look after the office. Poor old Harry got really swamped. Within a fortnight, we had over 170 people sign up to help the campaign. It was quite humbling to see the support and confidence those volunteers had in my vision for the future of the Maryborough electorate.

Twice in the 26 days of the campaign we letterbox dropped thousands of homes. That was all done by hand and on foot by our many dedicated volunteers. I ask members this question, and it is a sixty-four dollar question that has been in my head for the past five months: who calls an election campaign in the middle of a Queensland summer? If we were not battling 35 degree heat, we were trudging through the soggy land during torrential rain, doorknocking to spread the message. The only reprieve we had was the early morning sign waving before the harsh sun came out and burnt the noses of those who worked tirelessly and endlessly, but for a purpose. We were putting Maryborough first.

Without the constituents casting their votes, I would not be here today; but without the help of our volunteers, I would never have had the opportunity to represent the Maryborough electorate in this House. Election day was a blur of faces and people, booths and media, people everywhere, sunburnt faces. On that day, no-one worked harder than my volunteers. They were called the Saunders Soldiers. On election night I was touched when all the red, sunburnt faces greeted me with broad smiles. They were exhausted but excited. It was a constant fight to see over the hundred heads all crowding around the TV to watch the booth results. However, it was never ever perfect. There were times when I thought, 'What am I doing this for?' Then I would be greeted by an enthusiastic bunch of volunteers who would drag me out to the local markets and show me exactly why I was doing it. I was standing up for Maryborough.

No words can describe the gratitude and appreciation I have for the tenacious and dedicated team of volunteers I had during the campaign. Without their belief and support, I would not have made it through and I thank them from the bottom of my heart. The different people who enter our lives can show belief and support in many different ways. I would like to make a note, a thank you of sorts, although 'thank you' does not cover it all. My father, who raised me to be bold and strong and to fight for what I believe in, was right. Although he is not here today, I appreciate the life he and my mother shaped for me. I know he would be proud, although he would be turning in his grave this time, because I forgot to back my brother's horse which won the Magic Millions in the middle of the campaign. I say to my father, I am sorry I forgot to back the horse.

Another significant person in my life is not my brother by blood, although he is by loyalty. Jim Nilon believed in me and he believed in my vision for the future and all I stood for. He saw me through dark days and days of victory. I cannot express how much his friendship, mentoring and guidance have meant to me. The impact—and I do mean impact—Jim's influence has had on my life is not something I can put into words. When we speak about shaping a life it is hard to single out people, but Jim has been with me since I started campaigning in 1995 in the seat of Keppel and again in 1998 in Keppel. Jim has been with me all the way. It has been a great effort and I cannot thank him enough.

Thank you to Ron 'the General', who is working in my office at the moment. I would not have been able to get up at 4.30 in the morning without Ron texting me and ringing me to wake me up. As everyone in my campaign office knows, I am not an early morning riser. To Ron, better known as 'the

General': thank you. To Paul 'the Cob', Adrian, Terry, Kath, Cas, Karen—and there are so many Saunders Soldiers that I could name—thank you. I will keep thanking you from the bottom of my heart, because you put Maryborough first. Paul gave up his job to work for about six or seven months on the campaign without pay so that we could win the seat of Maryborough.

Support comes from those closest to you. When I look back now, I suppose my wife, Jenny, and I were pretty young when we got married. I have spoken of the people who have shaped my life, helped me, driven me and guided me. My wife, Jenny, was always the glue that held the threads of knowledge together. She was a quiet whisper to keep me calm when I was doing my nana. She was a loving smile when I needed a friendly face. Without her, I would not be in this place today. I love her from the bottom of my heart and with all my heart. I have three great children and in those three children I see reflected the skills and values that I love so dearly in my wife. Her unwavering support during the campaign was a significant component in my success. I will not even try to say thank you to her, simply because words will never be enough. I thank my three children. Robert works overseas at the moment and could not be here. With the amount of texts and emails I received, I do not think Telstra or anyone else will go broke. My daughter Melina and her partner Sean came up and worked tirelessly on my campaign for weeks. To my youngest daughter Ashleigh, who is a union organiser for Together: thank you very much, Ash. You were the glue that held the campaign together and moved us in the right direction. As a father, I am extremely proud of my three children and very proud of my youngest daughter.

There were a number of things that stood out to me during the campaign. One of them, in particular, was a day that was not going well. I was tired and agitated, which seemed like the whole 26 days. I was hot from pounding the streets, talking to constituents. I had a sore throat because, as everyone in Maryborough knows, I talk a lot. I was trying to catch a moment in a local coffee shop to have a cup of tea. I saw a teacher from the TAFE college, who walked over to me. I smiled and introduced myself to him and we spoke of many issues and concerns from around the Maryborough electorate. He said to me, 'Bruce, Maryborough has a proud history. We can build anything here in Maryborough.' His words resonated with me because it is true. We can build anything in Maryborough. We have built warships and trains. We were an engineering hub at one time. I looked at that man, who is highly skilled and extremely undervalued. He is facing losing his job with the closure of TAFE, which will mean years of knowledge and experience stripped away from our electorate. He made me straighten up and I felt wash over me a new wave of motivation about the electorate. That is why I am doing this. We can build anything in Maryborough; we have and will again. We will build a future. It may not be warships—it may be something new—but it will be done with a government that cares and knows that regional Queensland needs and should have jobs, skilled jobs and jobs for young people. That is what my team and I were working towards.

Throughout the last couple of weeks of the campaign, time and time again I reflected on those words of a teacher better known as Franco. Thank you, Franco. Franco managed to put into words exactly the motivation of and pride I feel for the Maryborough electorate. It was motivating to see that he felt it, too. Maryborough does have a proud history. Curra in the south, Sherwell River in the north and all the towns in between make up chapters in the history book that is the Maryborough electorate. The history of Maryborough city is a history of Queensland that includes immigration and wealth from the goldfields of Gympie, from the cane fields, from the timbers of Fraser Island and from the manufacturing of warships and trains. We have a vast skill set for a vast electorate, rich with knowledge and experience. It was once the second biggest port in Australia behind Sydney, with over 20,000 immigrants passing through the port. Today, people in Maryborough still fondly talk of how at one stage it was rumoured to be the new state's capital. Thank you, Harry.

Maryborough has a diverse economy with tourism, one of the state's best engineering works run by Downer, the MSF Sugar factory, timber, grazing and other primary production industries. Before European arrival, for thousands of years the Butchulla people lived in Maryborough and they lived in harmony with the land. Today, I pay my respects to the Butchulla people. Maryborough has been called home to the dreamers such as PL Travers who dreamt up the life of Mary Poppins. It is home to brave men such as Duncan Chapman, the first digger to set foot on the soil at Gallipoli. On 24 April, we witnessed the unveiling of the Duncan Chapman statue. It is home to revolutionaries such as William Halliwell Demaine, fondly called 'Billy' in Maryborough. The life and work Billy injected into Maryborough continues today. He was a radical for his time, a trade unionist, a Labor member and a community campaigner. Billy Demaine formulated change that would be his legacy. He challenged conscription and fought for a better way of life for his colleagues. His was one of the first workplaces in Queensland to be granted an eight-hour working day. Billy was instrumental in

providing a modern health facility and was the mayor who led the council in sewerage Maryborough city. He was also the oldest person to ever be elected to the Queensland parliament, winning a by-election.

The people of Maryborough have always been fighters—survivors. They know when to move with the tide and resist when their way of life is under attack. The Together union ran a town hall meeting last November where 500 people came to hear the state election candidates' vision to make Maryborough thrive again. I knew the gig was up then for the austerity politics of Mr Newman and his government.

There is a theme here; a theme of the people. My father knew it, Billy Demaine knew it, I knew it and so did the people of the Maryborough electorate. That is why a Labor government must look after the people. We must provide solid community services, health care, child safety, housing and health. We must ensure that workers have fair and equitable employment conditions and public sector workers have job security. Do members realise that every public service wage in a regional town supports private sector employment? It ensures that money still circulates throughout the electorate during hard times.

We have talked about the history of Maryborough, the great achievers and movers who shaped my life and the lives of the people of Maryborough. But let us talk about the future. We learn from the mistakes of the past, as I am sure the electorate of Maryborough has. We must always reflect on what has been, to help us build a better future. I have said we knew it was time for change. But what does that change look like?

I stand here with my colleagues. We may have different electorates with different priorities, but there is one thing we all have in common. That is our beliefs. Labor is for the people. No-one gets left behind. Madam Deputy Speaker Grace, I know that, like mine, the faces you see in this chamber will reflect this belief across our great state.

I will work tirelessly for the people of Maryborough, and at times that may make me unpopular in this place, but so be it. There is only one way to move Maryborough forward. That is to put it first—restoring our essential services like pathology at the local hospital, growing opportunities with development, training our young people in TAFE, ensuring no child goes without, improved social housing services.

During the election campaign the main concern that resonated throughout the crowds in the city and throughout the electorate was jobs. In the past few years that is something we saw stripped away from our electorate—employment and opportunities. Businesses which had been in town for years were forced to close their doors—shutting their doors on employment for people and closing up family legacies. This was all done due to a struggling and dying economy. The electorate was ignored and public services were ripped away.

For those workers who managed to keep their jobs, we saw their employment conditions stripped away—those long fought for and won conditions that people like Billy Demaine, my father and many strong activists fought to achieve and retain—and threats to their basic right to employment, security, consultation, workplace health and safety and threats to their unions. For businesses that managed to keep their doors open there was slow trade, a shortfall in takings and no other option but to close their doors or walk away without pay.

I will always stand up for public sector workers—the people who care for us when we are sick, teach our children, maintain our water supply quality and protect us in emergencies. We have the best people to assist with disaster relief, as Maryborough has experienced firsthand. We have hardworking public servants who roll up their sleeves and help—people like our SES workers and fireies, transport workers, child safety workers, disability support workers, nurses and ward clerks who care for the elderly, cleaners who make sure our hospitals and schools are clean and school officers who maintain our school buildings, grounds and facilities. I include also the very people who work here in the Parliamentary Service. I could spend my whole speech talking about the vital roles our public servants play in our communities.

As a proud member of my union—and I am a proud Together union member—I will always stand with them. In fact, I will always stand up for any worker from any industry. It is the workers who make up our electorates, who grow our crops, who drive our buses, who maintain our roads, who ensure our communities function. A worker comes in many forms. Whether they are a small business owner, a sole trader, a volunteer, they are a worker who contributes to their electorate and their community.

On 31 January the people of Maryborough voted for this change. They cast their votes, not just for the Labor Party but for their great electorate and for change. It was time to put Maryborough first. They voted for change with compassion and they rejected austerity and the privatisation of government assets, the closing of TAFE colleges, the ignoring of young people and the ignoring of the need for jobs. I am proud to be part of that change and belong to a party that will restore the legislative rights that were taken away from the workers of Queensland.

It is time to move Maryborough out of the shadows and show the people of Queensland what we have to offer. On 31 January I stood in front of the Maryborough people and asked them to stand with me and put Maryborough first, and they have. I promise that I will put them first. I will help my community rebuild with compassion, fairness and equality and to thrive and be the dynamic electorate it is meant to be.

President Obama once said that one voice can change a room. If a voice can change a room, it can change a city. If it can change a city, it can change a state. If it can change a state, it can change a nation. The people's voice in Maryborough has succeeded in doing this—it has changed the state.