




Speech By
John-Paul Langbroek
MEMBER FOR SURFERS PARADISE

Record of Proceedings, 21 May 2015

VACANCY IN SENATE OF COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA: ELECTION OF SENATOR

 **Mr LANGBROEK** (Surfers Paradise—LNP) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (2.50 pm): It is my pleasure to speak on the motion to select a candidate to fill a casual Senate vacancy. I want to welcome Joanna here today, as well as John and Gloria Lindgren, Kerry Lee Lindgren-Smith, Peter Anderson-Barr and Bruce Smith, the family members. It is also fitting that tomorrow is the anniversary of the first calling together of the first 26 members of the Queensland parliament in 1860, and they met where the Myer Centre now is. It is interesting to think that those 26 members were selected by about 2,000 voters, which is something that not many of us are aware of. So 2,000 voters chose 26 members, but to have the franchise in those days you had to be male, over 25 and a landowner. That shows how far we have come. I think today's motion reflects that in the choice of Joanna Lindgren. I spoke to Joanna earlier this week when I asked for a copy of her speech from last week—what a whirlwind it has been, Joanna. She said she was going into Education House to resign, to tell them she would not be going back to my former department. That certainly has been a whirlwind.

As I have already mentioned, Queensland formed its first parliament 155 years ago tomorrow. Subsequently after federation, under our Constitution we have this system where we nominate a casual vacancy in the way that we do. As the Leader of the Opposition, the Premier and the member for Algeester have already mentioned, we think Joanna is a wonderful choice. She certainly did well amongst the eight other candidates all day last Saturday at the convention centre.

I also want to pay tribute to Dr Brett Mason, the former senator whose vacancy we are here to fill today. He is a great friend of mine; he was one of my first supporters when I ran for the seat of Surfers Paradise in a fruitless attempt at the time. He used to ask a question when interviewing potential staff: 'As a senator I have many stakeholders,' he would begin, 'but which stakeholder is my most important: the Senate itself, the people of Queensland or the members of the LNP?' To some extent, this question could be asked in relation to any elected representative, because to some extent we must have due respect and consideration for the party we represent, the people who elected us at polling booths and the institution to which we are elected.

The process of the convention of this motion which we take part in today—slightly refined from that which may have taken place in this House when the House considered these questions in decades past—highlights the balance and relationship between these three important influences. Strictly, of course, senators are elected by the people of Queensland when we place a number above or below the line on that unwieldy white sheet that looks more like a tablecloth than a ballot paper. In this respect, senators are no different to the House of Representatives members who are elected in those same booths. However, when voting above the line in the Senate, a citizen is voting for a party and not an individual. They are endorsing the process undertaken by a party in ordering their candidates and in allocating their preferences, despite having the option to order those preferences themselves.

When a senator resigns, it is convention that the party which the resigning senator was a member of at the time of their election may choose their successor and that this House endorse that choice. In this respect, even though the state parliament has ultimate power—which is appropriate given the person being endorsed will represent Queensland in the state's house in Canberra—in practice the power is with the body that chooses that new senator from within their party. To this extent, the new senator should perhaps have a greater eye to their own party as a stakeholder, while still recognising they are in Canberra to represent Queensland. Joanna has already said to me that she is already thinking about her next preselection, which I think is due in November next year. I think she will be okay.

In relation to the Senate itself, once there, the senator should have a necessary respect for the Senate and the important role it has to play in being a house of review for the passage of legislation. The important role of an upper house, with essentially equal powers to their lower house counterparts, is in acting as an effective restraint on the excesses of majority government in a two-party system and the improvement of proposed policy by a broader base of elected representatives.

I have mentioned the fact we had nine candidates last week in the LNP—the party of democracy, merged and founded democratically, built and sustained by members in branches across the state. This nomination today is the culmination of a democratic process—a process that has produced a thoroughly deserving candidate with the credentials to suggest she will be a strong and effective representative for Queensland in the Senate.

Joanna Lindgren was born to Roman Catholic factory workers and grew up in Inala in Brisbane's south-west. She became a teacher and worked in Queensland schools with high proportions of students from low socio-economic backgrounds. It was here that she developed an understanding of challenges facing children from disadvantaged backgrounds and then a passion to do something about it. As I have mentioned, she worked most recently in the Department of Education, Training and Employment, dedicated to improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It is a matter of great pride for me that, since the national apology was made, Queensland has made greater advances, even though there is a long way to go, than any other state amongst the 50,000 Indigenous students we have in our system. This was acknowledged by former minister Peter Garrett, Bill Shorten and of course the current minister, Christopher Pyne, and it is something that the relevant section in the Department of Education, Training and Employment was very proud of. These achievements were made thanks to a lot of hardworking people, and the other states have been looking at the things we have been doing as well.

In 2010 Jo was appointed to QCAT and is one of only a few teachers who assist that body in dealing with teacher disciplinary matters. She has a political pedigree, as has been mentioned today. Her great-uncle, former Liberal Party senator Neville Bonner, was the first Indigenous representative to sit in any parliament in Australia when he was chosen to fill a casual vacancy by this House 44 years ago. It is worth noting that the casual vacancy was to replace Dame Annabelle Rankin, selected by the Liberal Party 24 years earlier as the first woman from Queensland to sit in the Parliament of Australia. I asked my wife, Stacey, about her memory of Neville Bonner. She said that, even though she was not particularly aware of who he was at the time, he came to St Joseph's at Bardon and she got his autograph. She said she did not know why she got it but she knew that he was a very nice fellow.

Jo has shown the same commitment to public service as both these Liberal Party icons and she sought to represent the seats of Inala and Oxley in 2012 and 2013 respectively, pushing the now Premier to preferences on the former occasion. I remember walking around the Inala civic shopping centre with Jo on that day before that election. I was not really expecting that I would be in the seat of Inala campaigning, but I was working hard on the south side with candidates there and we were certainly copping a bit of grief from other people in the shopping centre who were saying, 'What are you doing here?' It is interesting that at the election that seat did actually go to preferences, so it just shows how volatile the electorate can be and that Jo was prepared to put her hand up. At that stage, I think she was teaching at Woodridge state high and she was prepared to stand up in a seat that we would not traditionally think we would have a chance in.

This motion seeks endorsement as a Queensland senator for the daughter of Roman Catholic factory workers from Inala—a teacher who identifies as Aboriginal and has worked throughout her career in low SES schools and on Indigenous education policy. Jo mentioned in her preselection material that a prominent Labor figure had at one point approached her to join and run for the ALP. With a CV like hers, those opposite would be salivating at the prospect of ticking their diversity boxes. But as Jo said to preselectors on Saturday, 'Don't vote for me just because I'm a woman. Don't vote for me just because I'm an Aboriginal.' She implored people to vote for her because she is passionate about education and wants to improve educational standards, particularly for disadvantaged students.

She implored people to vote for her because she understands the pressure of a working family. She implored people to vote for her because she shares hopes and aspirations for this state and this nation with people just like her—Howard's battlers, the same people who are members of our party and the same people who voted for the person they wanted to represent them in the Senate in that room on Saturday. They did just that. They voted for Jo because the sum total of her experiences had brought her to believe in a set of beliefs and built a set of expertise that they thought would be valuable in the Senate. They did not vote for her because she was diverse; they voted for her, as the Leader of the Opposition said, because she told them her story, she told them what she believed in and they saw that she was willing to stand by it.

The Jo Lindgrens of this world—people with her background, her CV, her passion and her connection to the beating pulse of Australia—are increasingly finding a home in the Liberal National Party. We have preselected—and we will continue to preselect—candidates who, in other times, may have been considered typical Labor stock. We will continue to be a home for people with an ambition and commitment to providing energy and ideas that will keep this state and country as great as it is or make them greater than they are. Jo will make a wonderful contribution to the Senate for the remainder of the term of this vacancy. I give her a commitment to stand with her as she recontests her seat at the next election. I commend the Liberal National Party membership for their astute and democratic choice of a candidate.

Before I conclude, I want to pay tribute to a man whom I recognised in my maiden speech to this place as a mentor, the retiring senator, now Dr Brett Mason. He will leave a mark on the Senate as an outstanding orator and fierce defender of intellectualism and classical liberalism in Australia and overseas. His contribution consistently reminded us of the freedom we enjoy and should fight to preserve. Others have had longer on the front bench and have been recognised more. It is perhaps a shame that Brett's talents were never fully realised. In my view, his greatest contribution has been as a mentor to the next generation of young party members, and this legacy will endure. He is loved by the youth wing of the party because of his passion, his beliefs and his ability to engage them in the idea that there is value in public service, honour in ambition and pride in civic contribution. This is manifest in his mentorship of his former staff, which includes the current federal members for Moncrieff and Bonner, the deputy mayor of Brisbane and the former member for Mount Coot-tha in this place. I wish Brett all the best in his new role as Ambassador to the Netherlands, a role close to my heart. His previous diplomatic experience and outstanding credentials make him well suited to the role. With that, I commend the motion to the House.