




Speech By
Hon. Shannon Fentiman

MEMBER FOR WATERFORD

Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2015

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Hon. SM FENTIMAN** (Waterford—ALP) (Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, Minister for Child Safety and Minister for Multicultural Affairs) (10.08 pm): Mr Speaker, I start by congratulating you on your election to such a pivotal role in this House. It is a pleasure to be supporting this motion. As this is the first time I have spoken in this place, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to elders past, present and future. In the address-in-reply debate I will be speaking about my personal story and what has motivated me to run for parliament and represent my community of Waterford. I will use that opportunity to thank members of my family and my community for their support. However, in this debate I am pleased to put on record why the Palaszczuk government is a government for all Queenslanders and why my community of Waterford will thrive under this Labor government.

We are a government who is listening to Queenslanders and taking action on their concerns. The Palaszczuk government has the commitment and drive to improve the lives of everyone in the community, to bring Queensland together and to deliver real change. I stand here as a proud member of the Logan community. I am proud and immensely privileged to represent the people of Waterford. I thank the residents of Waterford for their support and for the confidence they have placed in me.

Logan, and Waterford in particular, is a rich and diverse community which is a microcosm of urban life in Queensland. Any changes in economic and social policy by government are felt first in the Logan community. Any change in the government's direction has a direct impact on the people who live in Beenleigh, Meadowbrook, Bethania, Waterford, Waterford West, Loganlea, Tanah Merah, Loganholme, Slacks Creek, Edens Landing, Kingston, Holmview and Logan Reserve. People whose stories I heard every day on the campaign trail.

In the lead-up to 31 January, when my team and I doorknocked over 9,000 homes in these suburbs and phoned another 5,000 households, Waterford residents were acutely aware of the government they had and the government they wanted. The residents of Logan have a very well developed radar that cuts through politicians' spin and sees it for what it really is. Waterford locals were telling me that what Campbell Newman was telling them was not the reality of life in Logan. The cost of living had not gone down, they did not feel safer in their homes, they knew family and friends who were still waiting for lifesaving surgery, they could not find work and, worst of all, their government was not listening.

On the night of the election and for days after commentators kept expressing surprise at the size of the swing and the polling figures. But that is not the message I received as I talked to thousands of local families. The people of Waterford knew what they were doing at the ballot box and they wanted to be heard. They told me that they had been badly misled by the Newman government and did not want another three years. What they wanted was a government that would listen.

For many Waterford residents they voted LNP for the first time in 2012. That decision had been hard for them, but I do understand their reasons. In 2012 people in Logan were telling me that they were angry about the sale of assets and wanted a fresh start. That is what the LNP promised them. Campbell Newman promised that the cost of living would come down, job creation would go up, there would be more teachers and smaller class sizes, front-line services would be strengthened and the Public Service had nothing to fear.

Logan residents hoped that a Newman government would deliver. Unfortunately, after the election the LNP started junking promises. Job creation projects were jettisoned, schools were sold, nurses and doctors were sacked, our TAFEs were gutted and community groups were gagged from speaking out about government decisions or their funding would disappear. So while the LNP government was picking fights people in Waterford were struggling day to day with reduced front-line services and no way to get their message heard.

I saw firsthand the impact of these cuts through my work at the Beenleigh Neighbourhood Centre and the Logan Women's Health and Wellbeing Centre and as secretary of the Centre Against Sexual Violence in Logan. This experience drives me every day to achieve better outcomes for women and their families—women brave enough to speak out about mistreatment and violence.

The impact of the LNP government's policies was a constant theme whenever I doorknocked people's homes in Waterford. There was Jon in the Woodlands Estate who lost his job after cuts to mental health or Mike and Linda, my neighbours in Bethania, whose daughter was sacked as part of the Public Service cuts. Jerome, a pharmacist whom I met at pre-poll, voted Labor because he was concerned about the cuts in health services which affected his business. Rachel at Loganlea supported Labor's plan to reduce youth unemployment because so many of her friends could not find work. There was Gina in Tanah Merah who was struggling with the increased costs of home care after she suffered a stroke which left her with limited use of her left arm and leg.

Working locally I also had the opportunity to work with the most dedicated local midwives at the Logan Hospital. These midwives were so concerned about the closure of our community midwifery clinics, they spoke out about the LNP's cuts and ran an incredibly successful community campaign to raise the issue with the public. When the issue appeared in the local paper, the LNP simply attacked the Nurses' Union for having the temerity to raise the issue. This shoot-the-messenger reaction was part and parcel of the LNP government's method of operation.

While at the same time LNP ministers were opening infrastructure projects funded and started under the previous Labor government, they were rushing ahead with their only major building project—Newman's tower of power; a purpose-built office building to house the Premier and all his 18 ministers at 1 William Street, Brisbane. At the same time services were being cut in my community of Waterford Premier Newman and his ministers were eagerly reviewing the plans for their plush new offices.

Another theme that came up time and time again when I spoke to locals at community events was the lack of accountability and integrity in the last government. Many locals, colleagues and community organisations raised with me their concerns about a government who raised donation disclosure limits, overreached on legislative reforms, failed to consult on judicial appointments and cut the rights of working people.

In Meadowbrook I doorknocked Abbas Ahmed, the principal at Waterford Law, and he told me, like many of his colleagues, he was concerned about the attacks on the judiciary, the dismantling of the independence of the corruption watchdog and the general disrespect for the legal profession. Anyone who spoke out against the former government was criticised. All of this shows a complete disdain for longstanding Westminster conventions.

As a practicing solicitor with a firm representing working Queenslanders with a strong reputation for protecting their rights, I had the immense privilege to work with the salaried medical officers representatives on the 'Keep our doctors' campaign—a campaign that those members opposite might remember. The campaign came about to fight the unfair doctors contracts being pushed on these senior medical officers by the former LNP government. These doctors took a strong stand against the government because they were determined to protect their patients and they had had enough of not being listened to. This was yet another example of the arrogance of the entire LNP government, not just Campbell Newman. And yet the LNP and political commentators were still surprised at the size of the swing on 31 January.

While the attitude of the LNP government certainly had an impact on the election result, people should not discount the calm, measured approach the Labor Party took during the campaign. It was not flashy but it touched on all the important issues that people in Waterford had raised with me. They wanted more nurses, teachers and other front-line services so they could be confident that their families had access to the best services when and where they needed them.

I am so proud to be part of a Labor government that will employ an additional 2,500 teachers across Queensland as well as more guidance officers to provide much needed support and career advice. In Waterford that means that Marsden high, Loganlea high and Beenleigh high will all get extra teachers and our kids will get the one-on-one attention they deserve.

I am proud that a Labor government will reinstate 70 nursing positions in my region. I am proud that a Labor government will keep our assets in our hands and use the proceeds to pay down debt responsibly. As Queensland's Minister for Youth I am proud that a Labor government has a plan to reduce youth unemployment by investing in our TAFEs and creating secure jobs for the future.

In Logan, youth employment is running at 16 per cent. During the election campaign I met a young student Daniel Wood, a Loganlea resident who wants to become a teacher aide. Under the Newman government's TAFE changes, the fees for this course increased fourfold to \$3,500, putting it well beyond Daniel's reach. Labor's reinvestment in TAFE means that Daniel will once more be able to realise his dream like thousands of young people in Logan. There were stories like this right across Queensland—we listened and now we are acting.

I am proud that a Labor government will also reinstate Skilling Queenslanders for Work because it delivered. According to a study by Deloitte Access Economics, this employment and training program generated billions of dollars in revenue and paid for itself within 12 months. It helped people find work, particularly the most disadvantaged in our community. Why the LNP decided to axe this successful program is beyond belief and another example of their campaign to axe anything that was linked to Labor.

I am also extremely proud to be the Minister for Communities, Women and Youth, the Minister for Child Safety and the Minister for Multicultural Affairs in the Palaszczuk government. Let me be clear about my title—communities, women and youth. And who is my counterpart shadow minister for women? Well the LNP does not have one. Maybe if they had a shadow minister for women they may have thought twice about hosting their International Women's Day event this year at a men's only club. This is to be expected from an opposition that saw fit to have only two women ministers in the previous government and now five women in their 18-member shadow cabinet. In contrast, I am so proud to sit around a cabinet table with a majority of women, led by a woman Premier and woman Deputy Premier. It is a first for Queensland and a first for Australia too—and together we have hit the ground running.

I was so proud to work alongside my colleagues in our first few weeks in office as we supported our communities to recover from Tropical Cyclone Marcia. Premier Palaszczuk and my cabinet colleagues were there on the ground within hours of the cyclone passing and we responded as quickly as we could. After visiting the devastated areas I was moved by the tenacity and resilience of the residents who had lost everything and the genuine compassion shown by those who came to support their unfortunate friends and neighbours.

Whilst in Biloela I met some inspiring women from the Queensland Rural, Regional and Remote Women's Network. They teamed up with Baked Relief and Givit to cook and distribute food for their neighbours, friends, workers and local families, even though many of them had been personally affected. It was an honour to meet them and hear their stories firsthand, and it drove home to me the importance of our recovery efforts in Central Queensland.

I would like to thank the hundreds of community recovery workers, both within government and working with our NGO partners, for doing an amazing job under very trying conditions. Many of these workers work in other departments across government and leave their families to travel to these areas, to put up their hand as ready reservists to support these communities rebuild their lives.

I would also like to put on record my thanks and pay tribute to the local members in the affected regions who worked day and night to support their community: the member for Keppel, Brittany Lauga; the member for Rockhampton, Minister Bill Byrne; and the member for Mirani, Jim Pearce. It was so impressive to see how the community came together to support each other in any way they could. I know many people appreciated the Lions Club running a sausage sizzle to feed the community and other local restaurants providing free meals for affected families.

During the election campaign Labor committed to continuing the child safety reform agenda as outlined in the Carmody report on child protection. I am determined to improve the early intervention and prevention services to ensure families and children get the support they need to stop them from entering the formal child protection system. I am especially committed to doing everything possible to reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids in care.

The Carmody report provides a 10-year plan for improvements to the child protection system and builds on the work before it by successive Labor governments. While early intervention and prevention is a key area to strengthen, we cannot forget our commitment and funding for the more than 8,600 children and young people who are currently in out-of-home care. Since becoming the minister responsible for child safety, I have had the pleasure of meeting with some of our fantastic foster and kinship carers. I launched Foster and Kinship Care Week at the foster care conference in Toowoomba this year and was proud to be surrounded by such wonderful people providing such a vital service. The work they do to care for some of our most vulnerable children cannot be forgotten. I look forward to the challenges that lay ahead and I will continue to meet with and listen to those families, carers, children and young people and the workforce that supports them to make sure these reforms stay on track.

One of the key issues I want to focus on in my role as Minister for Communities and Minister for Women is domestic and family violence. If there is one thing I want to be remembered for it is being part of a government that took on the insidious crime of domestic violence. Alarming, there are 180 incidents of domestic violence reported every day in Queensland. That is one every eight minutes. It is my goal that by the end of this term there are far fewer women living in fear, and I want to make sure there are more places for women and children to go when they reach out for help.

Dame Quentin Bryce and her task force has given us the road map to achieve that aim. It is a powerful, insightful report and everyone who contributed to the task force's work should be congratulated. The Palaszczuk government is currently working on a detailed response to the *Not now, not ever* report, and I look forward to working with the Premier and my ministerial colleagues in developing a plan to wipe out domestic violence. My work with the Centre Against Sexual Violence in Logan has shown me how this problem reverberates through our society and I know that everyone has been touched by it in some way. Domestic and family violence just cannot be allowed to continue as it has. It is the responsibility of each and every one of us.

I am also committed to restoring the importance of multiculturalism and valuing the role of our more than 220 different cultures here in Queensland. Again, I want to listen to their views. Already I have participated in numerous events as part of my role as Minister for Multicultural Affairs—Harmony Day, Lunar New Year and I had the pleasure of hosting the Georgian Ambassador and his wife on their recent visit to Queensland. These are just some of the examples of the cultural celebrations I have enjoyed.

But it is not just about the celebrations. Our multicultural communities must be acknowledged and supported by government. Many different cultural communities live and work in my own community of Logan—in fact we have over 200 different cultural groups in the community—and their role in growing a better Queensland should be recognised. That is why the Palaszczuk government is committed to a multicultural recognition bill and charter—to recognise and explicitly confirm the important role these cultures play in building a better Queensland and to set out a plan to address the unique issues that face these communities.

This is a key point of difference between our side and the LNP members opposite. We want to hold a meaningful conversation with all Queenslanders. We have to build on the trust that Queenslanders have placed in the Palaszczuk government. The trust is fragile and has to be constantly reinforced by our actions. We are not afraid of the things that community groups have to say. We want to hear their ideas and their feedback. That is why one of our first acts upon coming into government was to remove the appalling gag clause imposed upon NGOs by the previous government—a government so arrogant that they not only did not listen to the community but also prevented community groups from speaking out and advocating on behalf of the very members they are trying to represent.

The Palaszczuk government recognises the important link between advocacy and service improvement, and we are ready to hear the views of everyone in our community. The relief amongst the community sector is apparent. Everywhere I go I am told that the sector is enthusiastic that they are now to be consulted and listened to. I am proud to be a member of a government that will listen and act, and I wholeheartedly support this confidence motion.