




Speech By
Hon. Dr Steven Miles

MEMBER FOR MOUNT COOT-THA

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. SJ MILES** (Mount Coot-tha—ALP) (Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef) (7.43 pm): History and the parliamentary record will show my speech on 26 March, when I had the honour of expressing my confidence in the new Palaszczuk government, as my inaugural address, but I am delighted to rise tonight to make the observations more commonly associated with a first speech. At first I was disappointed that I was not able to properly thank everyone I wanted to thank in my inaugural speech, but now I realise that I am actually getting to do it twice, and all those stuck on the roster have to listen to me again! So there are silver linings, at least for me. I start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather and pay my respects to their elders, past and present.

What a truly humbling experience it is to stand here in this place, steeped in heritage and our democratic traditions, entrusted by the people of Mount Coot-tha with the responsibility of representing them in our parliament. It was during the election period that the world was visited by the horror of the *Charlie Hebdo* massacre. I made the observation at that time what a fragile thing democracy is and how, underneath the pageantry, the news cycle, the bunting and the sausage sizzles, the democratic elections we have here in Queensland are remarkable and, by global standards, rare. I put on the record my respect and thanks for the contributions made by all of the members of this House, past and present and those who will follow us, and the countless others around Australia of various political colours and creeds who all work to sustain and build our vibrant democracy. To the people of Mount Coot-tha I pledge that I will always respect our democracy.

I am sure all members here feel strongly about the relative merits of their electorates. It is not the area I grew up in, but I love Mount Coot-tha for its character—the old Queenslanders, the winding hillside streets interspersed with patches of modernity and the urban villages of Paddington, Rosalie, Bardon, Caxton Street and Toowong. It has some wonderful schools and genuinely iconic green spaces. It has Lang Park, home of the Broncos and the mighty Maroons, and it has the best coffee of any electorate in Queensland.

I grew up in the northern suburbs of Brisbane. Growing up, I was lucky to have a close relationship with my grandparents. When I think about the values that drive me now in politics, I can see their foundation in my grandparents. I am so pleased that I had the chance to get to know them, and I dearly love seeing my kids develop a similar relationship with my parents and in-laws. My grandparents were hardworking, caring, thoughtful people who encouraged me in everything I did. Their values shaped me and the way I think about the world. I was so glad Grandma was able to join me at Government House for my swearing-in as a minister, and I think she is here in the gallery.

Reflecting on the lives of my parents, my grandparents, my sister and me, I think it is a story of the kind of social mobility Labor believes in—of the power of education, of the social safety net, of a society that rewards hard work with the chance for one's children to get a better life. My grandparents were working class: my mum's parents lived in housing commission while my dad's parents paid off a house over 50 years working in the railway. My dad finished an apprenticeship at Golden Circle

before moving into management roles and eventually starting his own business. My mum started as a clerk in the Public Service and finished her career as a workplace health and safety inspector.

We were never wealthy growing up, but my sister and I had a very rich upbringing because my parents worked their guts out, always putting us and especially our education first. Mum worked full time when we were both at school. Dad never knocked back an overtime shift. We did not see much of him at peak season in the cannery. They both encouraged us to aim high and to take every opportunity to learn. I might have been the first person in my family to go to university but my sister quickly became the second, and we both now have postgraduate degrees.

I look at my own kids, and their experience is so different from ours and light-years from those of previous generations. I did not fly in an aeroplane or eat at a real restaurant until I was out of school. The highlight of my childhood was sitting in the old outer at Lang Park for a State of Origin match. My boys, Sam and Aidan, now have their own season tickets to the Broncos. I hope I can instil in them the same values. I hope they avoid the sense of entitlement that can so often develop amongst those who want for little. They are great kids and I am very sure they will.

My story is also a story about education, like that of so many Australians. One generation gets good jobs with decent pay. The next generation gets trade qualifications and skilled jobs. The third generation goes to uni. While we would hope that good policy can have immediate benefits, it is across generations that we can really see economic advancement.

Education and good jobs are the necessary ingredients. Thanks to my parents, I got an excellent school education. With the help of a state government scholarship, I got the chance to go to university. I often describe the University of Queensland St Lucia campus as my spiritual home. Up until last year I had been there in some capacity for nearly 20 years studying, teaching or researching. It is an honour now to represent so many other students, researchers and teachers. In politics I will always do what I can to support policies that will make high-quality education available to every kid like me. While the transformative power of education is often discussed in politics, the value of good jobs can sometimes be ignored. We tend to count jobs at an economy-wide level and we talk about them in broad percentages without much regard for how many hours a week they provide, how secure they are, how safe, how well paid or whether they provide a chance to develop skills and get ahead. That is why I am proud to have spent a substantial part of my career working at two great unions. All jobs are not created equal. Union jobs tend to be better paid, more secure and safer. It is very hard to build a secure life, to buy a house and to raise a family if you wake up in the morning hoping for a text message that will tell you if you have a shift that day.

In my union career I had the chance to work with so many smart, strategic people—officials who had dedicated their lives to working people and working people who serve our community every day. My last role at United Voice was campaigning for decent wages and recognition for early childhood educators—childcare workers. It was in that role that I met the member for Mundingburra. Neither of us imagined down the track we would be sitting in cabinet together. Coralee was the director of a fantastic community run centre in Townsville. I spent a day there and met the educators. How anyone could argue that the people who care for and educate our littlest kids should be amongst the lowest paid in our economy is beyond me.

There are three issues that drive me in politics. I have talked about education and jobs; the third is the environment. I came to the environment much later in life. For a long time it seemed to me that economic development, the chance to make a good living and provide for a family were the highest needs that should be the priority of government. But when Kim was pregnant with our eldest son, Sam, I started to turn my mind more to the future. I started to reflect more on how I wanted the world to be when my kids grew up. I started reading and learning about how pollution was changing the planet, usually in bad ways. That is when I became passionate about campaigning to limit carbon pollution and about finding ways to grow the economy and create jobs that do not rely on polluting our atmosphere. I began working with Al Gore and his Climate Leadership project. Since then, there has been much good news. Many countries have decoupled economic growth from carbon pollution, renewable energy is getting cheaper and storage options are becoming available to consumers. There is good reason to be optimistic that later this year in Paris countries of the world will agree to do what it will take to limit global warming. I dearly hope that the Commonwealth plays a supportive and committed role in those negotiations.

It was concern about climate change that brought me to study the Great Barrier Reef. I was sad to learn that, even though ocean warming and acidification were the long-term threat to the reef, other more immediate threats were already having a devastating impact. When I was preselected for Labor last year I set out to campaign for government action that would reduce those three threats—dumping of capital dredge spoil, nutrient and sediment run-off, and of course climate change. It is fantastic to

have the opportunity now to implement those policies, many the work of the Deputy Premier, in my portfolio. I am grateful to the Premier for giving me those responsibilities. During the election I found most voters in Mount Coot-tha were interested in statewide issues—integrity, jobs, the economy, the environment and the reef. But there were local issues that were important and I am equally committed to delivering on them. I said I would work with local residents to make sure they had a say on local developments affecting their suburbs and I promised a million dollars to make our great local schools even better.

To represent my community in parliament is an honour and to have the additional honour of being Minister for Environment and Heritage Protection and Minister for National Parks and the Great Barrier Reef in a Labor government really is a dream job for me. There are a great many people I must thank for helping make that possible. First and foremost, I acknowledge the great Australian Labor Party. Inspired by former prime minister Paul Keating and former premier Wayne Goss, I joined Labor in 1994 when I was 16 years old. In fact, I had just gotten my learner's permit. I recall this because my driving instructor happened to be the president of the local Labor branch. He picked me up that night in the driving school car and took me to my first ALP meeting. I joined because I could see how important Labor policy had been in delivering the opportunities that lay before me. I passed the point a few years ago when I had been in Labor longer than I had not been. Of course I will admit that there are lots of days I question the sanity of that, but it is in my blood. I love the Labor Party, I love what we stand for and I love fighting against those opposite for the things I believe in.

I was deeply honoured and humbled both times that Labor members selected me to represent them at an election and especially pleased when I was able to return that faith with an election victory. To all of the branch members who have supported me during the preselection process and on the campaign hustings, there are too many to name but I am grateful to each and every one of you for your support and faith in me. In particular I thank Gary Bullock, Evan Moorhead, Andrew Fraser, Jackie Trad, Anthony Chisholm and Murray Watt for your friendship, advice and campaign guidance.

During my election campaign it was a privilege to be joined by so many supporters and volunteers, many of whom were getting involved in an election for the very first time, who shared my passion for creating a better future for Queensland. One thing about running a successful grassroots campaign is that there are just too many people involved to thank everyone and inevitably I will have left off someone I should not have. I want to acknowledge my campaign team and campaign 'heroes' as they were known: Peter Nisbet, Ariane, Danielle Cohen, Ian de Lacy, Peter White, Therese and Jim McDonald, Peter Cossar, Justin Walch, Helen, Kym Mayes and Carolyn Burrows, Alan Chenoweth and the Ketters. Thank you to the amazing Sharron Caddie, Matt Lawrence, Scott Zackereson, Kegan Scherf, Lisa Chesters, Anne Fuchs, James Stewart, Jesse Richardson and Karen Skinner, all of whom have made me the beneficiary of their skills and talents. I have previously mentioned that my campaign was funded mostly by small donations from a great many people, but there are some people whose generosity I particularly want to acknowledge: Maggie Magafakis, Dr Olivier Ramuz, Peter Axelrod, Barbara Cross, Patrick Went, Michael and Vicki Henry, Carline Binns, Gerard Nelson, Genief and Peter Koutsoukis.

To my union, United Voice: I am humbled by the support you have extended to my political aspirations and I am proud to be able to continue to stand up for the rights of working people as a member of parliament. Thank you to my mum, Christine, and my dad, Bruce, who, along with my father-in-law, Ross, were the formidable team on the campaign trail known as 'the dads'. Thanks also to my mother-in-law, Jan, and also my friends Alex Scott, Gary Allen and Troy Burton, who have always provided wise counsel. Coming straight to the ministry as a first-term MP is no easy transition, and so I want to thank Leslie Shirreffs and Joe Begley for getting my ministerial office up and running; Philip Halton, who has taken on the unenviable task of keeping it that way; and Ellie Ketter and Cat Milton, who are doing a terrific job in the electorate office.

Finally, I have talked a lot about my parents and grandparents, but I want to finish on my immediate family. Kim and I celebrated our 10-year wedding anniversary a couple of weeks ago. She has been a constant, unwavering source of support, even when I am at my most unbearable. To our three children Sam, who is seven and smart and fast; Aidan, who is four and insightful beyond his years and cheeky; and Bridie, who at 12 months can give a look and a smile that makes you melt from across the room: I love you guys and I hope I can do some things in this place to make you proud.