




Speech By
Hon. Grace Grace

MEMBER FOR MCCONNEL

Record of Proceedings, 21 March 2018

VACANCY IN SENATE OF COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

Election of Senator

 **Hon. G GRACE** (McConnel—ALP) (Minister for Education and Minister for Industrial Relations) (2.22 pm): I rise to speak in support of the motion to nominate Amanda Stoker to replace George Brandis as a senator for Queensland. I, too, acknowledge Ms Stoker in the chamber this afternoon with her family. I would like to add my personal congratulations and best wishes to those that she will receive today.

It is a rarity to be nominated for a casual Senate vacancy by the parliament of Queensland. Since 1901, there have been only 17 such nominations. They include some notable individuals, such as Neville Bonner, who was mentioned by the member for Everton, and, of course, the late Florence Bjelke-Petersen. I am sure Ms Stoker will be feeling a tremendous sense of pride today and perhaps also a touch of trepidation at the prospect of representing our great state in Canberra.

As the Queensland Minister for Education, I note with some enthusiasm that Ms Stoker has spoken of her intention to work for better educational outcomes for our students. Ms Stoker is already on the record in the *Brisbane Times* announcing her intention to fight to improve the international competitiveness of Australian students' school performance and to ensure that there are high-quality education opportunities available in regional Queensland. I certainly share those sentiments and I wish her well in her advocacy. On this side of the House, we welcome any initiatives in Canberra that will bolster and improve educational outcomes in this state, as I am sure will those opposite.

I am sure Ms Stoker recognises that Queensland's size and decentralised population brings unique challenges for the delivery of equitable educational services. I welcome any advocacy that she can provide on behalf of Queensland to persuade the federal government to take those challenges into account when negotiating funding models. I hope, too, that our new senator will share my view that, after 10 years of operation, it is time for a systemic re-evaluation of NAPLAN. It is timely to re-evaluate any unintended consequences to ensure that NAPLAN delivers outcomes in the best interests of all.

I am sure Ms Stoker will be in Queensland's corner fighting to secure long-term funding certainty from Canberra for early learning education centres. As a mother of three young daughters—we have heard their names today but I will repeat them because they would probably like to hear their names—Mary, Jane and Emma, I am sure Ms Stoker fully appreciates how important it is that all Queensland children have access to high-quality early learning opportunities.

Having another female representative in the Senate can only be a good thing. I would like to congratulate—yes, congratulate—the LNP on following Labor's lead in promoting women and working towards—

Opposition members interjected.

Ms GRACE: Sorry, I could not help myself—a more equitable gender balance in its parliamentary representatives. On a serious note, Ms Stoker has already proved herself to be a proud high achiever surrounded and supported by a loving family. In addition to being a working mum, which a lot of us in

this House are, we have heard that Amanda is a barrister, a university lecturer and the vice-president of the Women Lawyers Association of Queensland. That is a proud record. We look forward to seeing her prosecuting Queensland's case, advocating for Queensland's advantage and standing up for Queensland's interests. I commend Ms Stoker's nomination to the House.