




Speech By  
**Peter Russo**  
MEMBER FOR TOOHEY

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### ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr RUSSO** (Toohey—ALP) (11.58 am): I want to start by firstly acknowledging the traditional custodians on whose ancestral lands we are gathered—the Turrbal peoples north of the Brisbane River and the Yuggera peoples to the south. I acknowledge their elders past and present and acknowledge all who are present today. I want to take this opportunity to pause and reflect on the millions of footprints that have travelled the Dreaming pathways and to pay homage to the ancestors who have walked and cared for this land for thousands of years.

I give my warmest congratulations to Cynthia Liu on her election to parliament as the member for Cook—the first female Torres Strait Islander to be elected to the Queensland parliament. I would like to thank my children, James, Katy, Grant and Joe, and my wife, Kerri, for their love and for supporting me in all my endeavours.

My election as the first member for Toohey in the election held in November last year is due in no small way to the combined efforts of many volunteers: the people who worked for me on polling day, made phone calls, manned street stalls, erected street signs, and did the hundreds of other things that may not be visible but are essential to a successful campaign. Those volunteers included Elijah Buol, Annamarie and Ray Newton, Annie Sun and Richard Huang, Trent McTiernan, Jennifer Elvery, Graeme La Macchia, Ashwina Gotame, Lewis Lee, Ben Driscoll, Sasha Marin, Terry Wood, Doreen Awabby and many others. Although time does not permit me to name all those who assisted, I ask them to please know that I am grateful for all of their hard work and to please forgive me if I have not mentioned them by name.

I wish to thank the electorate staff of my office, John Prescott and Janet Ren, for their hard work for the people of my electorate and for their contribution and assistance to me daily. Janet has recently married Jeff, so has started a new phase of her life. I now have Mandy Awabby and William Wu helping me in my electorate office. I would also like to thank everyone who donated to my campaign, who attended my functions, who made bids at auctions and bought tickets. Every little bit helped. I would like to thank my campaign committee, which was skilfully led by Jules Campbell. I congratulate Jules on being elected the state secretary of the Labor Party. Jules is a remarkable person and has a very bright future ahead of her. I would also like to thank the support of my union, the AMWU.

I feel very privileged and humbled to have an opportunity to serve the people of Queensland in this second term. I am sincerely grateful that the people of the new electorate of Toohey have put their trust in me to represent them in this place. Under the electoral boundary changes preceding the election, my electorate gained Salisbury, Nathan, part of the Rocklea and the Moorooka suburbs, and the balance of Eight Miles Plains. I lost Archerfield, Willawong, Acacia Ridge, Sunnybank Hills and Runcorn. I will miss the people with whom I had formed relationships through my work in those suburbs and I thank the constituents of those suburbs for the opportunity to have represented them in my last term.

Although many have claimed that the Toohey electorate is named after the beer of the same name it, in fact, takes its name from the Toohey Forest Park. The park was named after an Irishman, James Toohey, who purchased the land in 1872 from the spoils of the Californian gold rush. That land was held by his family for a very long time until Toohey Forest Park was acquired by the Brisbane City Council in 1945.

William J Metcalf recorded the following in the journal of the Royal Historical Society of Queensland—

Brisbane has two Toohey Streets, a Toohey Road, a Toohey Avenue, Toohey Forest Park and even a Toohey Village. All are named after James Toohey, one of Brisbane's most interesting 19th century pioneer land speculators. The impact of his man, and his descendants, can be seen in much of the suburban design of the inner south side of Brisbane, yet it is a story largely untold.

James Toohey's story is an early story of the success of our past immigrants and their impact on the development of our city and our state. Metcalf also writes that Toohey's story was one of a—

Poor Irish Catholic, peasant family who made their way to Australia ... a dramatic rags to riches and back to rags story, spanning most of Brisbane history.

Somewhat ironically, it would seem that Toohey's desire to create and preserve an estate for his family inadvertently caused their financial ruin. Large landholdings were held up by the terms of his will. The land comprising Toohey Forest Park was pristine and undeveloped when it was finally able to be sold in 1946.

As I said earlier, fortunately, for all those who use it, the Brisbane City Council had the foresight to secure that land as a forest park. The forest is managed by the Brisbane City Council as a bushland reserve. It is 260 hectares of beautiful bush, 10 kilometres south of the Brisbane's central business district in the suburb of Nathan. The forest is a sanctuary of sandstone outcrops and eucalypt forests, with grass trees and banksias scattered throughout the understorey. There are koalas, echidnas and gliders and many species of birds, reptiles, butterflies and frogs.

The forest also contains the Mount Gravatt Outlook Reserve. The incline of that road to the reserve makes for a challenging ride that many cyclists attempt while trying to improve their fitness. I have ridden this road many times and I am always glad to reach the top. The forest also has mountain bike trails and picnic areas. It is a remarkably beautiful asset within 10 kilometres from the Brisbane CBD. We are fortunate to have such a wonderful place for the people of Brisbane, and visitors to our city, to enjoy. I am fortunate indeed to have such a beautiful asset in my electorate. I take great pride in being the last member for Sunnybank, and the first member for Toohey.

I would like to use this opportunity to highlight a few matters of importance to my electorate. In the address-in-reply speech that I made to the 55th Parliament on 5 May 2015, I spoke about issues that were important to the former electorate of Sunnybank and now the electorate of Toohey. The two major infrastructure projects that I spoke about were the Coopers Plains crossing and the drop and go for MacGregor State School. I will deal with each in turn.

The Coopers Plains crossing has been a big issue for the south side for nearly 40 years. As I said in my first speech in this House, Coopers Plains crossing is one of the most dangerous level crossings in Brisbane. The people of Coopers Plains—business owners, students, mums and dads and retirees—have had enough. People and businesses in the surrounding suburbs have also had enough. Almost everywhere I go in my electorate the Coopers Plains locals tell me that one of their top priorities is fixing the Coopers Plains crossing. I can assure members that it is one of my top priorities. I was proud to announce that, after years of talk from the LNP, the Queensland Labor government committed to funding the first ever business case for an overpass at Coopers Plains crossing. I would like to thank Minister Bailey for making this important commitment.

The Brisbane City Council, Lord Mayor Graham Quirk and the LNP do not share my view of the need to fix this crossing to protect the road users and enhance road traffic. I understand that the Brisbane City Council and Mayor Graham Quirk have refused to fund their fair share of the project, with that refusal coming before the business case has even been completed. That is astounding. I intend to keep up the fight on this issue, to keep it on everyone's radar. I intend to work with the department and the Minister for Transport to make sure that locals have their say on how to fix the crossing. I intend to hold forums and feedback sessions for locals to have input into the business case.

On 1 September 2016 in this House I spoke about issues affecting the drop and go at MacGregor State School. The main problem seems to be that the Brisbane City Council was doing everything in its power to inhibit funding drop and gos in the areas for which Brisbane City Council is responsible. It seemed that Steven Huang, the councillor for MacGregor, did not know what was happening. I wrote to the councillor asking him to advise what was happening with the drop and go and I am still waiting for a reply.

I want to thank the hardworking former minister for education, Kate Jones, for her public recognition of the issue. In answer to a question without notice, the minister told this parliament that she had had the privilege of attending the school and seeing firsthand the issue whilst also speaking with representatives of the school and the parents and citizens who have been campaigning on this issue for the past seven years.

I became aware very early in my first term that neither the former LNP member or Councillor Huang had made a request for funding to remedy the safety issue at the MacGregor State School. A basic ask had never been asked. A commitment was made by Minister Jones to fund the feasibility study, something that the Brisbane City Council was unable to do. A commitment was made to fund the construction of the drop and go zone. All we ever got from the Brisbane City Council and Councillor Steven Huang were broken promises and the playing of politics with the safety of the children at the MacGregor State School.

The council attempted to walk away from a longstanding arrangement that has been in place for approximately 20 years where drop and go zones were funded on a fifty-fifty basis. The Palaszczuk Labor government has committed to the building of the drop and go zone and a memorandum of understanding has been signed to that effect with the Brisbane City Council. The parents, teachers and I eagerly await the beginning of construction on this project.

During my first term I was involved in helping some of the schools in my electorate get funding to complete major building projects. I again want to thank Minister Jones and her hardworking staff for getting these projects off the ground. The first was the redevelopment of the manual arts building at MacGregor State High School. The building was essentially falling down around the students and teachers. I was fortunate enough, with the help of the minister, to secure funding to have a new building built, which is currently under construction and due for completion in October 2018. Construction is also well underway at the Sunnybank Special School, which is due for completion some time in 2019. I have had the opportunity of viewing the temporary hire buildings while the existing buildings are being demolished to make way for the new buildings for the junior, middle and senior school.

I am excited about this second term and the prospects of what I and this government can deliver to the people of Toohey and to Queenslanders at large. In my time working in my electorate I am proud to have built respectful relationships across the fantastic diverse part of Brisbane that is the electorate of Toohey. I am privileged to have been part of bringing about substantial improvements and positive change to resources within our community.

Since being elected I have also had the good fortune to have worked as the chair of parliamentary committees where I have used my legal training to serve both my constituents and the people of Queensland generally in the scrutiny and development of new laws to govern the state. I thank the Premier for the opportunity to serve in this way. After serving as acting chair of the Parliamentary Crime and Corruption Committee, I became chair of the Finance and Administration Committee and served in that role from 18 February 2016 until 24 November 2017. During that time the committee prepared reports on the Labour Hire Licensing Bill, the State Penalties Enforcement Amendment Bill, the Trading (Allowable Hours) Amendment Bill, the Farm Business Debt Mediation Bill, the Rural and Regional Adjustment (Development Assistance) Amendment Bill, an inquiry into the practices of the labour hire industry in Queensland and last but not least a report on the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability (Renewal of Mining Leases) Amendment Bill and the North Stradbroke Island Protection and Sustainability and Other Acts Amendment Bill.

I did a bit of soul-searching about what to include in today's speech and decided that I would like to use this opportunity to continue my story which I started to tell in my first speech. I do this in part because of the question often asked of me, and no doubt of very many others in this place, 'Why go into politics?' To seek to answer that question I thought about the influences on me in my younger life which led me here and what I have a passion for outside of politics. Those thoughts led me back to the values I was taught by my parents, which they inherited from their parents: hard work, compassion, embracing people no matter who they are or where they come from and taking care of the vulnerable. I am very grateful that opportunities have been presented to me to live out my parents' values. They were hardworking, loving people.

I was lucky enough to be born in Townsville and grow up in Ingham in North Queensland. I was educated at Lourdes Convent, Cardinal Gilroy College and finished my senior schooling at St Teresa's Agricultural College, Abergowrie.

**Mr Costigan** interjected.

**Mr RUSSO:** I take that interjection. My story is a migrant story. I am an Australian of Italian heritage. Dad was born in Giarre in Sicily, a small seaside town clinging to the coast under the shadow of Mount Etna. My nonno came to Ingham from Sicily in about 1922 and my dad and my grandmother

followed in about 1927. They grew cane at Bemerside just outside of Ingham and as a kid I loved my visits to the farm. Nonno worked with the cane-cutting gangs and was also the cook for the gang and I have no doubt my love of cooking and gardening has something to do with my nonno. My Dad, Giuseppe Russo, known as Joe, was a small business owner, hairdresser, canefarmer—and my dad. My mum was a homemaker and nursing sister who worked at the Ingham Hospital after Dad passed away leaving behind six of us for mum to feed, clothe and educate. I became aware of what life is like when you have very little.

The story of my grandparents and my parents has had a lasting effect on me in many ways—some I can articulate and some I cannot. My Italian heritage has had a big bearing on how I view the world. The rich contribution that immigrants to this country have made and continue to make is something I strongly value. Somewhere along the way I developed my own ideas about politics and governance and eventually the urge came to take a role in the political life of our state.

A driving force behind both my career as a lawyer and now as a member of parliament is my commitment to the rule of law and my respect for true democratic government. Last year marked 30 years since the commencement of the Commission of Inquiry into Possible Illegal Activities and Associated Police Misconduct. The Fitzgerald inquiry changed Queensland forever—or so we thought.

For years it seemed that we had moved away from the dark days of corruption and repression, from politicians who valued absolute power and control over democratic values and the rule of law. This shift towards proper democracy occurred when the Goss Labor government swept into power in 1989, bringing wideranging reform and progress to this state. Labor governments which followed built on that legacy. Then in March of 2012 everything changed. For many of us it seemed like a return to the Joh days. The sheer arrogance on display was extraordinary. The government went to war with our judges, flouting the doctrine of the separation of powers and with it the rule of law. Laws protecting the rights of vulnerable and often marginalised groups in our society were singled out for devastation at the hands of a group of politicians drunk on power.

The experience of watching the Newman government go to town on the legal system I had worked in for over 25 years was a radicalising one for me, as I know it was for many. I could not, in good conscience, stand by and do nothing. It was time to stand up and do something about it. My commitment to that cause is long held, guiding me through my years representing vulnerable Queenslanders in court. It was now important to pursue it on the floor of the parliament.

I am so proud of what this government has achieved. The starting point for me is that the Palaszczuk Labor government restored the rights of children and young people in our criminal justice system. We got rid of boot camps, of naming and shaming and returned to principles of youth justice based on evidence, based on respect and based on a desire to see young people truly rehabilitated and able to lead ordinary lives in our communities. At the heart of all of these policies is a commitment to building stronger, safer communities and to providing opportunities, both in education and employment, for our young people.