




Speech By
Ray Stevens

MEMBER FOR MERMAID BEACH

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr STEVENS** (Mermaid Beach—LNP) (6.20 pm): I rise in the 56th Parliament to again thank the voters of the Mermaid Beach electorate for putting their faith in me to represent their interests over the next almost three years. At the outset, I congratulate Mr Speaker on his rise to the best seat in the House—a position that I know he will carry out with dignity, fairness and the appropriate diligence for the wellbeing of Parliament House. As someone who shared this House with Pitt the elder, whom I respected through my local government and business career, it is pleasing to me to be under the considered watch of Pitt the younger, the member for Mulgrave.

I congratulate all members on their election to this House for being the privileged few—93 members—representing the interests of Queenslanders, particularly the new members of the House. I advise them that their destiny and longevity in this House is in their own hands and will be measured by Queenslanders in October 2020 by their efforts in their own electorate and by outcomes perceived by Queenslanders as being the direct result of their participation in this House.

Again, the people of the Gold Coast gave a ringing endorsement of their preference as to who best represents their interests, with 10 LNP members being re-elected to represent the Gold Coast community in state parliament. With over 10 per cent of the seats in parliament, that gives testament to the importance to the Gold Coast region of LNP policies and direction. I am already looking forward to the 57th Parliament when the rest of Queensland can get in step with the world-famous Gold Coast, where 90 per cent of the seats are held by LNP members.

I give hearty congratulations to our newest and youngest dynamo to join the LNP representative ranks in parliament from the Gold Coast, Mr Sam O'Connor—‘Slamming’ Sam O'Connor—the member for Bonney. Against a massively overconfident, big-budget Labor onslaught to try to win the new seat of Bonney, ‘Slamming’ Sam showed the people of Bonney what a hardworking, well-principled candidate can bring to the table. I am sure the member for Bonney has a long and fruitful career ahead of him fighting the dreadful left-wing union organised Labor hordes as they destroy the economic and lawful future of Queenslanders.

I also congratulate Deb Frecklington, the member for Nanango, and Tim Mander, the member for Everton, as our new dynamic duo leadership team who can and will provide a real and genuine alternative to the incompetent, do-nothing union-beholden leadership that the state government will suffer for the next 2½ years until the next election. The LNP will not need a gerrymander to win the next election; it will win with a ‘Frecklemander’.

Again, under the Palaszczuk Labor government, we see the rise to power of the union movement, with the unhealthy propaganda programs foisted on our youth through the school system by the propagation of socialist thoughts by the CFMEU union around rebellion and uprising. In the past, schoolchildren were off limits to political persuasion and interference but, under the Palaszczuk Labor government, it is no holds barred in its attempt to influence the mindsets of our young people through the incursion of union thuggery into our school system.

Already on the Gold Coast we have seen this Labor government's shameful treatment of the enormously successful and well-received community program of Neighbourhood Watch. Thousands of hours of voluntary, well-meaning service by community members involved in Neighbourhood Watch has been snubbed by the Palaszczuk government's slashing of the Neighbourhood Watch budget from \$500,000 per year to \$75,000—slash, slash, slash. The effectiveness and awareness created by Neighbourhood Watch in communities has been spat upon by a Palaszczuk Labor government under the direction of police minister Ryan, who coincidentally shares the surname of the last guy who was hanged in Australia.

The Palaszczuk Labor government should hang its head in shame over this penny-pinching slap in the face for the many Neighbourhood Watch community members across the Gold Coast. Again, that underlines the Palaszczuk government's undeniable soft-on-crime mantra, which ignores the sentiments of the people of the Gold Coast and, in particular, the constituents of the Mermaid Beach electorate.

I have always abided by the philosophy that self-praise is no recommendation. However, as Mr Speaker would be aware, as leader of the House in the 54th Parliament I did some heavy lobbying to him and another member of his very small team—a Tarago springs to mind—to see the four-year parliamentary term come to fruition. I continued that lobbying in the 56th Parliament in opposition, with the result that we now face a four-year term at the next election. Queensland is the big winner in that outcome and I look forward to joining Mr Speaker in the 57th Parliament.

In the 54th Parliament, under my oversight as leader of the House—and I notice the apprentice, the Manager of Opposition Business, is paying attention—we introduced a new voting system for members that we enjoy today, saving time and confusion. As leader of the House, I also introduced a 12-month sitting calendar, which was very important, and which I am pleased to observe has continued under successive governments. That calendar provides proper planning and regimen to members and particularly staff.

Of great pride to me was the passing, under my urging, of the party house legislation to make life more bearable for residents in my electorate who are affected by the debauched and unreasonable behaviour of people behaving badly in otherwise quiet residential suburbs. I am told that, in several instances, the Gold Coast City Council has wavered in its insistence on this law being enforced. I shall make further comment on that disappointment at a later time in this parliament.

That brings me to the point of this trumpet-blowing exercise. I have witnessed the installation of the so-called family-friendly sitting hours to the parliament, which I started lobbying for through the CLA in the 55th Parliament. Although I may not agree with the final outcome of those sessional orders, I am chuffed that the Queensland parliament has finally been dragged into the 21st century with meaningful sitting hours to hopefully produce meaningful outcomes in a respectful and driveless forum. The moral of this dialogue is that we must always look for change for the better in this parliament and relentlessly pursue the betterment of the parliament in the interests of better government for Queensland.

While I am on the subject of better government for Queensland, I believe it is time for Queenslanders to have the conversation about compulsory voting in Queensland's state elections. In the last triennium, the Labor government changed the long-held practice of optional preferential voting to compulsory preferential voting for obvious political gain. Despite the change not delivering the great electoral advantage—and I thank the member for Sandgate for that change—that the Labor Party was hoping for, it delivered an undesirable outcome in the Mermaid Beach electorate of a seven per cent informal vote. Whether that was due to confusion, laziness in filling out ballot papers, or just a plain rejection of this new, time-consuming exercise, we will never know—

An honourable member: Nothing to do with the candidate.

Mr STEVENS: I am here, am I not? This unacceptably high number of informal votes reinforces my opinion that it is time to adopt a true democratic process and let the people decide whether they want to vote or not.

Queenslanders should not be told by their governments that they have to vote or they will be financially punished. The right to vote is an undeniable right of Queenslanders to exercise at their own discretion and if they choose not to vote that should be their decision which should go unpunished. When one stands at a polling booth one cannot help but feel embarrassed for those voters who turn up without any idea of who to vote for, any idea of what the candidates of all parties represent and are only there to avoid the fine. That does not deliver a worthwhile vote, a meaningful outcome or, indeed, represent the views and direction of the electorate at large.

The vast majority of developed countries—87 per cent—enjoy non-compulsory voting. Even our much beloved Kiwi neighbours, who we borrow much parliamentary standard from, enjoy true democracy through non-compulsory voting. I urge the government to have the conversation with Queenslanders this triennium so any possible changes may be introduced to coincide with our new four-year term starting in 2020.

Which brings me to the hot issues facing Mermaid Beach constituents and the Gold Coast at large. The number one issue for Gold Coasters is, without a doubt, the disaster that is becoming the car commute from the Goldie to Brisbane. The M1 is chock-a-block now and there are no plans by this Palaszczuk Labor government to do anything constructive about it. I hark back to the Goss Labor government of 1995, which had a parking lot situation as well on the old four-lane highway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast. It tried to solve it by promising a koala highway alternative and did a \$2 million study on whether an alternative was needed or not. That just shows that in 23 years Labor has not changed with its do-nothing-but-have-a-study modus operandi. I remember 'Big Bill' Ludwig of AWU infamy telling me what a waste of money a study was. There are some AWU members here I hope. He said, 'As any mother with two kids in the back of the car could tell you, we needed a new highway.'

As we all know, Goss got knocked off his perch from that election and the Borbidge LNP government committed to an eight-lane highway costing around \$1 billion to be opened in 1998 with a vehicle capacity lifespan of 20 years. Guess what? That 20 years and the 160,000 cars per day is up this year. What has Labor done about it for most of the 20 years since? Nothing! The interregional transport corridor is reserved now for implementation and whether it is a toll road like the Ipswich Motorway or a government funded project as promised by the LNP, it needs to be prosecuted right away.

Failure to act will bring tourism and industry on the Gold Coast to a grinding halt. Promoting public transport is not the effective and all-encompassing panacea to the connectivity problem between Brisbane and the Gold Coast that this Palaszczuk government hides behind. No more studies, no more alternatives, no more excuses, no more hidden emails; in the words of Nike, 'just do it'.

Another local issue that really is a bee in my bonnet because of the lack of action by the Department of Transport to what is really a relatively small problem is the disgraceful state of the dividing fence on the Gold Coast Highway from Broadbeach to Burleigh in my electorate. It really is an eyesore that has been a failure since its controversial installation. I have had recent discussions with officers from the department who agree that it is in unacceptable condition. I respectfully request that Minister Bailey look into the problem and perhaps find the funding that will be needed for, as his own departmental officers suggest, a staged program to fix a glaringly obvious eye-sore.

Finally, I would like to say a very special thank you to my lovely wife, Ruth—she is here tonight and joining me in the Strangers' Dining Room—my kids, Jessie and Louis, and their partners and families for their unmitigated support and understanding for the job that I do. I have loved my public life job for many, many years through my local government and state parliament careers. As members would know, it is not always easy on family and friends to put up with some of the negativity that is unfortunately associated with a political career.

Speaking of friends, they say if you want a friend in politics buy yourself a dog. I did better than that, I got myself a duck—a Plucka Duck, to be precise. I did have a special friend in this parliament who came with me to this House in 2006. I would like to pay tribute and say thank to you my special friend Glen Elmes, the former member for Noosa, who will be a friend of mine to my dying day. Glen contributed greatly to this House over his tenure as the member for Noosa and I am sure members from all sides of politics will agree that his fairness and gentlemanly behaviour was a hallmark of his respect for his privileged position. I wish him and his wife, Lesleigh, happy travelling on the journey post politics.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr STEVENS: I reiterate my enthusiasm for the 56th Parliament by quoting from my maiden speech in 2006 with deference to Banjo Paterson—

And the stockhorse snuffs the battle with delight.