




Speech By
Aaron Harper

MEMBER FOR THURINGOWA

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr HARPER** (Thuringowa—ALP) (5.35 pm): Madam Deputy Speaker Lui, I start by congratulating you on your successful re-election in your beautiful electorate of Cook, which our former health committee was able to visit. I am looking forward to giving my contribution in the address-in-reply debate for a third time. I hope members enjoy it as much as I am going to.

I would like to start by acknowledging our fantastic Premier. Despite the knockers from the state LNP who included many former frontbenchers—some sitting a little further back this time and some still there with the same arrogance and negative attitude and those down south, the likes of ScoMo, Hanson, Palmer and the New South Wales Premier, who all lined up to push us to open the borders; some 64 times, as we know, by the member for Nanango—the Premier was resilient and withstood the push, which I see as bullying, and on the sound advice of our fantastic Chief Health Officer, Dr Jeannette Young, kept us safe.

Our Premier does not mind a fight. She steadfastly took them on and stood her ground in Queensland and, along with her Deputy Premier, listened to that advice. I think Dr Jeannette Young should also be commended. She definitely helped keep us safe from COVID-19. When the rest of the world continues to suffer the dreadful effects of COVID-19, Queensland is in an enviable position because we acted early and put our people first. I have said many times in this House that you cannot have an economy if you do not have your health. Now a year later here we are rolling out the vaccine. What an achievement!

I recall a speech I made during the previous term in March 2020. I remember following the contribution of the member for Glass House, who said at the time, ‘The worst is over.’ ‘Good grief,’ I remarked. How could he say that when millions since have died or been affected by this global pandemic?

The arrogance remains in the LNP—zero humility. Nothing was learnt after the election—some things stay the same—despite the predictable knifing or demise of the former leader of the opposition for the ambitions of Newman’s former minister, the bloke who cut and run from Mundingburra. He has form. He took out the former female member for Broadwater to suit his insatiable appetite to be leader. Only time will tell if he has the stamina to last four years because, as we know, the LNP have plenty of form when it comes to replacing their leaders. Isn’t that right, member for Clayfield? The member for Broadwater is a pretender. He is the great pretender in Mundingburra. He used to say that he stood up for North Queensland; these days he wears a Titans jersey—but I digress.

I must acknowledge the good people of Thuringowa who put their faith in me for a third term. I will continue to deliver. I have 108 million reasons to stay the course this term including, Minister, the infamous Riverway Drive stage 2! I will be busy over the next four years ensuring that all of the commitments are delivered and making sure people in my electorate have a strong voice in parliament and get their fair share.

I would like to acknowledge and thank: my campaign team, my strategic advisers Steph Naunton and Dolan Hays; campaign manager Roslyn Mellon; my electorate staff Thelma Richards; my ALP organiser Jane Webster; my core team, including Young Labor, who brought a real enthusiasm and energy to the team; my field organiser Adam; my assistant doorknocker Dillon; and Alex, who I am sure is still No. 1 phone caller in the state and who literally made thousands of calls. I thank you each for your amazing dedication and drive to succeed. We did it! I also want to thank the nearly 100 volunteers and branchies who helped doorknock, make phone calls and volunteered to hand out how-to-vote cards.

Speaking of branchies, I will digress for a moment because it turns out that one of our branchies is quite the wordsmith. Everyone in Thuringowa knows that the *Townsville Bulletin* does not like to print my stuff. After the last election I tried to get a letter printed on Riverway Drive stage 2 talking about the \$95 million we were able to secure for it. We would send it weekly and they still would not print it, but they always published the LNP chief letter writers who put in all of the usual negative stuff with their negative spin. That is what they do. I thought I would entertain members with a poem that John Mellon, a branchie, has written for us. It is called *And the Wheels Keep Turning*—

In 2012 they sat on the wall
In 2015 they had a great fall
All Rupert's printers and all Rupert's men
Couldn't get the Tories back up there again
2020 comes up and the promises flow
And all Rupert's army are go-go-go
The word's got around, there's strife on the street
Rupert's army in overdrive with deadlines to meet
The printers are printing with hardly a spell
The election is nearing, it's easy to tell
More teachers, more coppers, more nurses as well
Delivered by Labor and there's much more to tell
But Rupert's prime print omits all these things
It's on with the stories with negative stings
The common sense governing ... on show by Labor
Outshone Rupert's negative ... churned out by his paper!
The worker can rest and plan well ahead
Their job is still safe and their kids have a bed
But Rupert continues to print based on fear
It's all that he knows ... it's all that he'll hear
I thank God for the sense displayed by the masses
We are once more safe from the government's slashes!

I thought that was the axe he experienced after the Newman government, when we saw thousands of people lose their jobs in so many industries and services across our state. As I said, together we did it. I have to say that, compared to 2015 and 2017, it was one of the lowest campaign periods I have experienced. It was truly gutter level stuff by the Katter party candidate, the One Nation candidate and the LNP. They went incredibly low, but do you know what?

An opposition member: You got lower.

Mr HARPER: We went up. I am back here for a reason. I will take your interjection, because the LNP on that side are over there for a reason. No-one is listening to them at all.

I also want to thank the United Workers Union; Gary Bullock and Matt Lawrence, thank you for having faith in me. I have been a union member now for 35 years—31 in that particular union. They put their faith in me to get the job done, and I will continue to get the job done to represent our hardworking members. Thanks also to the RTBU and QCU for your support. To Jules Campbell and the entire team at the ALP office I say thank you. To the entire team in the Premier's office I also say thank you. We did it in Townsville against all odds.

I want to acknowledge the former member for Mundingburra, Coralee O'Rourke. Thank you for your personal friendship, which will continue. My 'little mate' is tougher than many people know. She is one of the most compassionate and kindest people I have ever met. It is great to see that Mundingburra is still a Labor seat, and I congratulate Les Walker, the member for Mundingburra, and Scott Stewart, who is now the Minister for Resources. That is an excellent portfolio for North Queensland because we have direct links with the mighty North West Minerals Province and coalmines in Central Queensland. The member for Mackay recently opened the Olive Downs mine, supporting our hardworking local miners. Congratulations on winning your seats, but I congratulate all new members here in the House.

Madam Deputy Speaker, as you know, you simply cannot do this without the love and support of your friends. I have some great friends, and I would like to place on record my thanks to a couple of fellow ambos, Jason Dutton and Mark Hancock. They come up from Brisbane and help out each time. Mickey Paulsen and Dave Cole, thank you for helping me and my family get through that recent election and travelling up to help me win. It means so much that we keep delivering for Thuringowa. Ken and Shirley McElligott, thank you. I have often said that I just wanted to match Ken's three terms in government as the member for Thuringowa. You both continue to provide great counsel and support, and for that I am extremely grateful. To my former ambulance mentor, Eddie Blain, and his wife, Heather: even as you both head to your 80s you just keep turning up. I thank you for your continued support and friendship.

To the people of Thuringowa I say thank you. I am humbled. Thank you for entrusting me again with the opportunity to keep delivering for our community.

I want to talk about one of my favourite projects, one that has been a catalyst for development and delivered \$50 million in job-generating projects. You would not believe what that particular project might be. It is in the Upper Ross and of course it is Riverway Drive. Stage 1 is something I am very proud to have delivered. I did not do it without the amazing support of Minister Mark Bailey. We delivered further election funding to get stage 2 done. You are my favourite roads minister, Mark Bailey, because working with the Deputy Prime Minister, Michael McCormack, you got a further \$75 million for that critical infrastructure project, taking it to a total of \$95 million.

There are actually going to be two major infrastructure projects because Townsville's main water pipeline, which delivers 70 per cent of Townsville's water from the mighty Ross River Dam in Thuringowa, is nearing or at the end of its operational life. Members may recall that part of that section of pipeline burst last year and our entire North Queensland capital city of 200,000 could not even shower for a couple of days as Townsville made urgent repairs to the pipeline. We could not do the road without fixing the pipeline. We are working very closely with Townsville City Council, but I am going to put a call out. I had a meeting with the federal member for Herbert just before the election after we got the funding for the road, and what a waste of time that was. He was about as handy as a hip pocket in a singlet. He did not even know about the pipeline. He had no knowledge of it.

Mr Saunders: An ashtray on a motorbike.

Mr HARPER: I take the interjection from the member for—what is that place you are from? Maryborough, where you build trains. Thank you, mate.

It was only weeks out from the failed Thuringowa LNP candidate spruiking that they got \$75 million from the federal government when in fact it was our hard work that did it. Let's be honest about this federal member. He has little knowledge of anything in Townsville. This is the same bloke who promised \$195 million for the Haughton water pipeline yet did not deliver it and we had to fund it. The irony is that this is a critical pipeline and it delivers 70 per cent of Townsville's water, so I am putting it on record again and I say to the federal member: stump up. The minimum I want to see out of the federal member out of the \$195 million he promised for Townsville is \$20 million to help fix that pipeline. Work with council. Work with us. Let's get that done.

As we have seen, the federal member would rather play in local government and state government matters to deflect from his own poor performance. Stump up! He writes letters on issues relating to crime, blaming the state government, pulling cheap stunts just days out from Christmas, doing videos in front of my office trying to blame us for everything. It was all deflection and nil substance. He is all bark, no bite; all swing, no punch. Weak as water. Well, stump up and follow up on what we are doing in the electorate.

I have committed to a number of election commitments in Thuringowa. Something that is very important to me—and I will speak to the others in a moment—is to get the work finished we are doing around end-of-life care and voluntary assisted dying. With our former health committee doing stacks of work, having interacted with thousands of Queenslanders and after 40-odd public hearings, we heard they just want to have a choice, so I welcome the QLRC review update which was tabled recently. Let's finish this important work.

I want to finish on a high, on a positive. Thank you, Thuringowa. Let us get on with delivering the following projects. The Kirwan Health Campus will receive a \$40 million redevelopment. I look forward to working with the health minister on that. We have some great ministers in this place. They just want to help deliver these very important projects. The police minister, Mark Ryan, is delivering the new Kirwan Police Station, with \$30 million committed for that. I thank Minister Grace for the Thuringowa hall.

We heard the member for Maryborough say all the good things that the schools in his electorate were getting. There is \$5.7 million for a new hall for Thuringowa, and I look forward to seeing that delivered. The Weir State School is getting a new fence and tuckshop. The Townsville Ring Road is a massive job-generating project—with 400 jobs and \$230 million going into that. I am waiting for a business case to come back on the 1300SMILES Stadium to see if it stacks up so we can deliver something very special for our emergency services. They are all job-generating projects.

I always put my family last. If I started with family, I probably would not get through these speeches. I really have to thank my wife, Amanda, and Michael, Mitchell and our beautiful daughter, Ashleigh Kate. 2020 was a crazy and intense period. Right near the election period we also had a school graduation for Mitch, he turned 18 and I had the election to get through. I love you guys. I think the world of you. This week I am actually not going to be home for my wife's 50th, which I will make mention of on Thursday. I would love to be there and celebrate that, but we will do something special. All of the members here know that it is our families who stand behind us in times of great challenge and we would not be here without them.

Mr Hart: Go home for your wife's birthday.

Mr HARPER: I will take the interjection.

Mr Hart: I'll give you a pass out to go to your wife's birthday.

Mr HARPER: I will try to get there. That is one of the nicest things I have heard him say. Words alone cannot express my gratitude to my family. I know I say each year that I will try to find more time, but I want to put it in context. The year before last—because last year was all about COVID—I was away 29 weeks with the sittings that we normally do and then adding the health committee work, which was a massive body of work. That is a long time to be away from your family. You often know that because when you go home the dog starts growling at you. I have to say, 'It's me. It's me.' If the dog does not recognise you, you are in big trouble.

There is a seemingly endless demand on me to help so many in my community. The work in the electorate office piles up, and of course we have our very important work that we do in the various committees in this place. That is what I signed up for, but it should not mean putting my family second. I feel like I have already missed out on watching my kids grow up over the last six years or missed out on things like birthdays, as we all do, and I am really sorry for that. I cannot promise that I will deliver more time to be with my family in this term, but I am certainly going to give it a go because we need to find balance in this place. They are always put second. There is always something going on in our electorates that puts our families second.

We all need to strive a bit harder in this place to try to find time for a work-life balance. I see Madam Deputy Speaker Lui nodding her head. We are all like that, but we are doing important work here that means jobs for people in our communities, it means addressing the issue of homelessness and it means making sure our schools have all the right facilities in them. I am so proud to see that my former school, Heatley Secondary College, got \$12 million worth of work that QBuild was also working through. That is all done now so they have a new performing arts centre.

I have spent a bit of time with QAS in my volunteer capacity so that takes up some hours as well. I thoroughly enjoy that. Madam Deputy Speaker, if you are ever down there, I invite you to come along and have a look at the new ambulance station. There would not be too many MPs in this place—albeit the almighty Bruce, the member for Maryborough, who mentioned fire, ambulance and police in his contribution—who could say they have delivered stations for all three of those services. I might be a little biased here when it comes to emergency services, but I got a new ambulance station, I got a new police station and I got a new rural fire station. We have the ability to deliver more for our electorates over the next four years.

I look forward to working with all of you, particularly those members on this side of the House. We have great ministers and we are led by a great Premier who continues to put people first and put our safety first. We have the vaccine to roll out throughout the year. I would like to get all members up to my electorate on a bus at some point and get along the infamous Riverway Drive stage 2 when we deliver that over this term. I see the transport minister nodding. We are going to do that. It means supporting jobs in our electorate. I thank the people of Thuringowa. I am here to humbly serve them, and I look forward to working with them over the next four years.