




Speech By
Brittany Lauga

MEMBER FOR KEPPEL

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Ms LAUGA** (Keppel—ALP) (5.46 pm): I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Turrbal and Jagera people, and pay my respect to elders past and present. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land which I represent in this place, the Darumbal people and also the Woppaburra people. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the two longest ongoing cultures in the entire world and that is something of which I think we as Queenslanders and indeed Australians can be very, very proud.

I start by congratulating you, Deputy Speaker Kelly, on being elected as Deputy Speaker in this place and can I congratulate Mr Speaker Pitt on being elected for a second term to the high office of Speaker. It is wonderful to again have a North Queenslander as Speaker of the Queensland parliament.

It is a great honour and privilege to rise in this place for the third time, now in the 57th Parliament, as the member for Keppel after the 2020 state election. Since I was first elected in January 2015, the good people of Keppel and I have endured a lot together. Category 5 Tropical Cyclone Marcia crossed the Capricorn Coast only 10 days after the 2015 election results were declared. We have had one major flood, two major bushfires, the most severe drought in recorded history, a severe hailstorm and now a global pandemic.

The trail of destruction from each of the natural disasters has been significant. Each time our community experiences the stages of grief: shock at first, anger, anxiety, frustration, irritation, depression, hopelessness, then vocalising, sharing stories and finally acceptance and recovery. We have been beaten down, homes demolished, powerlines down, tourism impacted, roads torn apart, huge trees ripped from the soil, animals and livestock perished, crops which take years to grow were destroyed, businesses devastated and livelihoods shattered. The physical, financial and emotional toll of these disasters has been significant.

Only a matter of weeks after the Cobraball, Lake Mary and Woodbury communities were devastated by a ferocious bushfire in 2019, when 16 homes and sheds were destroyed, the Queensland government activated a state of emergency as COVID-19 hit our shores. After years of tragic natural disasters, a global pandemic was beyond belief. How much more can we take? We were exhausted. When do we get a break? How can we recover if we keep being beaten down? We know that the human spirit is stronger than anything that can happen to it. If whatever does not kill you makes you stronger, then Central Queensland certainly is a tower of strength. We are strong, resilient, brave and fearless. We are selfless and caring, community minded people.

When first elected to this place in 2015, I was the youngest member of the Queensland parliament at the time, at just 28 years of age. I was a young, passionate, energetic and hardworking local member. Almost seven years on, I have fought and won three elections, become a mother and become a single mum. I am now also a volunteer rural firefighter, an avid member of the Rockhampton Mountain Biking Club, a proud patron of the Emu Park Surf Lifesaving Club and a Legacy legatee. I also have a few more wrinkles.

Over the past seven years I am proud to have fought for and delivered the iconic Yeppoon Lagoon and important road upgrades like the Rockhampton Northern Access Upgrade and the ring road and secured important funding for upgrades on Rockhampton-Yeppoon Road and Rockhampton-Emu Park Road. We have built more classrooms, halls, amenities and training centres at our schools. There is Parkhurst State School's \$9 million new classrooms, which are opening soon; over \$20 million in improvements at Yeppoon State High School; upgrades at Byfield and Mount Archer national parks; and new health facilities like the cancer care ward and car park at the Rockhampton Hospital and a new 42-bed detox and rehab centre. I have fought against multinational corporations like Glencore that have jammed workers. I have proudly stood side by side with my community through thick and thin.

Keppel and I have grown together over the past seven years. We have become stronger together. We have learned from our weaknesses, seized on opportunities, sharpened our skills, connected with each other, learned from one another, laughed together and cried together. We have developed our local knowledge, collaborated better, built infrastructure back better and fought against the forces of nature together. We have opened our hearts and our minds to each other. We have rolled with the punches. As Elizabeth Edwards said—

She stood in the storm and when the wind did not blow her away, she adjusted her sails.

In Keppel we have adjusted our sails and we are soaring. I am proud that over the past seven years my community and I have grown together. We have developed a thick skin together—an unshakeable sense of self and a commitment to compassion. We have become more resilient and stronger together. I am proud as punch to represent the best electorate in Australia, my home of Keppel.

At the 2015 election Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk promised to stop the cuts, stop the privatisations and begin building Queensland jobs again. We made steady progress over the following 2½ years. When we came to government, confidence in the Queensland economy began to recover from the cuts of Campbell Newman. Many of those opposite sat around that cabinet table—in fact 40 per cent of the Crisafulli front bench were Newman ministers—and they cut 14,000 public servants' jobs.

In my first term I fought against the LNP's compulsory acquisition of prime grazing land near Shoalwater Bay, stood up to Aurizon against job cuts, stood up for better Buy Local policies, stood side by side in solidarity with mine workers who had been locked out by multinational company Glencore and have continued fighting hard against the casualisation of workers.

In my second term the Palaszczuk government grew tourism with a new Yeppoon foreshore, Rockhampton Riverbank precinct and revitalised Mount Archer and Kershaw Gardens. We started building a detox and rehab centre so that local people can get the treatment they need close to home. We built new classrooms and training facilities; employed more teachers, doctors and nurses; opened a manufacturing hub to drive growth in this important sector; and built new roads and more sport and recreation facilities.

At the beginning of 2020, no-one could have imagined the challenges we would be facing. 2020 brought hardship, loss and tough days for so many of us: our healthcare workers who kept us safe; the retail workers, truck drivers, cleaners and construction workers who kept our economy going; and the small businesses who worked around the clock to keep their head above water and found new ways to do business. Being part of a Labor government, being part of an Anastacia Palaszczuk and Steven Miles team, is an extraordinary privilege—never more so than now.

Our Premier's inspiring ability to listen to everyday Queenslanders, to carefully consider the stories they tell her, to put herself in their shoes, to empathise and make tough decisions is why our Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk is admired by many Queenslanders. Deputy Premier Steven Miles is exactly the person Queensland needed as health minister in a global pandemic. His intellect and his ability to understand epidemiology, science, medicine and clinical practice and then turn that complex knowledge into everyday language which was clear, concise and accurate was a welcome relief for many Queenslanders each day as we navigated the health response together.

I also acknowledge and thank Dr Jeannette Young as our Chief Health Officer for her professionalism and determination to act early. I look forward to attending the swearing-in of Dr Young as Queensland's next Governor next week. Dr Young, our Premier and the Minister for Health made for a formidable trio.

It is true that in moments of crisis you do not get a dress rehearsal. You do not get the luxury of making the wrong decision once, let alone 64 times. The story of the past 20 months has been a collective effort across our great state. We made it through the worst of the pandemic, not because of any one person but because five million Queenslanders did the right thing. Queenslanders have looked after each other. We put the health of our community first. We made sacrifices for the long-term good of our state.

In the 10 months prior to the election, the Queensland COVID attack was in full swing. The political doubters were also in full swing. Sportsbet had the LNP as favourites in Keppel, as it has in the last three elections. Every poll that came out said that I would lose Keppel. James Ashby, Pauline Hanson, One Nation and the media fuelled the rumours that Labor would lose Keppel. Even some within our party thought I was done and dusted. Trucks with my face on it calling me a murderer were driven around my local neighbourhood. Nasty and defamatory One Nation billboards were posted around town which caused distress in the community—so much so that I had children write to me and ask if I was okay. One young man wrote to me—

Adults are constantly telling us that bullying is not acceptable and yet adults are putting up the bullying signs. It's hypocritical of them to put those signs up.

He was right. The Keppel One Nation candidate was very bold to say at the Peter Gleeson Sky News debate that he would hold the balance of power in the Queensland parliament! I reminded him that there was only a very slim chance of that happening, only for him to spit back at me that there was a better chance of him holding the balance of power than me being re-elected. Well, winners are grinners. I am proud that in Keppel Labor's primary vote increased to 46.22 per cent, up from 43 per cent at the 2017 state election. One Nation's primary vote absolutely plummeted in Keppel, from a height of 25 per cent in 2017 down to just 15 per cent. The LNP's primary vote mellowed at just 29 per cent.

There have been many reflections on the state election results since October. Those opposite such as the member for Mermaid Beach have claimed in this place that it was an election based on 'unusual emotional health parameters'. I know, having called and doorknocked four times as many people in Keppel than in the last two elections combined, that people in my community voted Labor because they wanted a safe economy amidst a global pandemic, a clear recovery plan and a safe Queensland. We know that the best form of economic security as the globe battles COVID-19 is keeping our people safe. A healthy community is best for our economy. In a healthy and safe economy, our shops have remained open, tourism has skyrocketed, construction is booming and manufacturing is reviving.

Labor's plan is to come out the other side of this global pandemic stronger and fairer by rebuilding our economy, training our people, growing our regions and reinvesting in schools, hospitals and services. The last election was a choice between the stability of a Labor government that has made the tough decisions and the right calls in hard times and the chaos of an unproven, untrustworthy opposition which has been wrong every time it has mattered. Queenslanders had a choice between jobs or cuts; a choice to build and grow or slash and burn; stability or chaos; strong leadership from our Premier, Annastacia Palaszczuk, or reckless behaviour from those opposite. The people of Queensland had a choice between Labor's economic recovery plan or the LNP's plan for cuts; a majority Palaszczuk Labor government or a One Nation-Palmer-LNP rabble; Annastacia Palaszczuk or Deb Frecklington as our state's Premier. That is what was at stake at this election. That is what was on the line for Queensland.

On the same day I was sworn in by the Governor His Excellency Paul de Jersey as Assistant Minister for Education for a second time, my mum, Sharon McKee, was awarded a certificate of service for 30 years service as a Queensland state schoolteacher, signed by Minister for Education Grace Grace. My whole life I have been taught by my mother about the importance of education—to individuals, to our community and our economy. One of my first memories is living at the house next door to the primary school at Thangool when I was about two years old. I was jumping on the trampoline and teasing all the students playing in the schoolyard on their lunchbreak. I remember seeing my mum, then a young 23-year-old teacher only two years into her teaching career, on playground duty.

My mum is a great teacher. When I see her in the classroom in practice, I see a different side to her. She is a change maker, passionate about making a difference to the lives of young people using the power and magic of education. Mum says that every day she gets to touch 50 little lives using creativity and learning. Her work is tiring, but every day she has her fast shoes on.