




Speech By
James Martin

MEMBER FOR STRETTON

Record of Proceedings, 31 August 2021

INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Mr MARTIN** (Stretton—ALP) (2.55 pm): Mr Speaker, I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners and pay my respects to elders past, present and future. I place on record my thanks to the people of Stretton for their support. My commitment to you is to always be your faithful servant. I rise today as a proud member of the Palaszczuk Labor government and the new member for Stretton, but the feeling is bittersweet. The reason for this by-election was a sad one. We lost our good friend Duncan Pegg, the former member for Stretton.

For over 20 years I was proud to count Duncan as one of my closest friends. We first met at Griffith University and we came up through the party together. We started our careers together at the same time, me at the AWU and Duncan across the road at Sciaccas Lawyers. We were side by side; we shared ups and downs and everything else that life throws at you. It does feel strange not having Duncan around. Duncan loved being the member for Stretton and loved the people there. Over the last few months during the campaign I have spoken to many local residents who have shared their stories about Duncan and what is clear to me is that the community loved Duncan back.

Working with Duncan taught me the importance of putting the community first, caring about the lives of the people we represent and being there for people when they need it most; that the MP is there to serve the community not the other way around, that being an MP is not about seeking accolades or rewards for yourself, but about what you can do for your community. Before he passed, I promised Duncan that I would work every day for the people of Stretton to continue his legacy as part of the Palaszczuk government. This is the standard that I aspire to live up to.

Duncan first announced his diagnosis in this House in November 2019. This revelation changed the personal worlds of so many of us sitting here and so many people beyond this chamber. About a month after his announcement reports started emerging about a new contagious viral infection. It is hard to believe, but it has now been over 18 months since COVID-19 first emerged. This period has driven home the profound influence that global events can have on our state and community. In my own electorate, the global impacts of the pandemic are felt on a very personal level. As the most multicultural electorate in Queensland, many in the community have friends and families overseas. So many people in our local area have told me about how COVID has ravaged the communities of their loved ones overseas. During the campaign one message from my community was loud and clear. Over the phones and through the flyscreen doors I heard the same thing over and over again: Annastacia has kept us safe; we trust Annastacia; we have done great in Queensland. I agree with the people of Stretton. Queenslanders rightly expect their leaders to put human safety first, act consistently and not shirk from the tough calls. I am proud to stand in this chamber as a member of the Palaszczuk Labor government and I am proud to serve under a Premier who continues to rise to the challenge and stand firm in her determination to keep Queenslanders safe.

The Stretton electorate is a multicultural success story. It has the highest proportion of people born overseas in the state and the highest proportion of people who speak a language other than English at home. People have come from all over Queensland, from all over Australia and all over the

world to settle in our vibrant, diverse and multicultural community deep on the south side of Brisbane. While we are a diverse community, there are so many points of similarity. In our diversity we have a lot in common. People in Stretton value hard work, family and education. For a new community on the outskirts of Brisbane we punch above our weight, with above average outcomes in education and job prospects. Indeed, the reason that so many people have settled in Stretton is to secure a better life for their children.

What I consistently hear from parents of all backgrounds is their pride in their children studying medicine, law, dentistry, engineering, pharmacy, IT or accounting, or their pride that their children were at TAFE pursuing a trade or setting up a small business in our local area. This is the key common unifying factor across the community. All parents want the best for their children and want to see them succeed in securing a decent job, pursuing their chosen career and carving out a future for themselves and their future families too.

Many locals come from countries where a decent education is not a guarantee, where getting sick can cost you your life savings, where the air and rivers are polluted, where the economy only works for a privileged few or where politics might not be stable or, if it is stable, not particularly free. Over the years many new Australians in the Stretton community have commented to Duncan and I about how strange it is that they could get close to a politician; how strange it is that a politician could be walking the streets but not surrounded by rings of security and police; how strange it is for people to be able to access their local politician through meetings at the office, in the community or on the phone. This democratic access is something that we should protect. The experience of so many in my community illustrates that we can never take this or the sanctity of free and fair elections for granted. As the local member for Stretton I will always have my door open to the community.

As a Labor member of parliament I will always work to build in Queensland an economy and society that provides opportunity to all, whatever your background; a place where Queenslanders have the opportunity to succeed on their merits; a path from home to school to higher education to a decent job; and a means to provide for your family and, if you can, give back to the community where you live. The people of Stretton certainly give back. One distinguishing feature of the Stretton electorate is the level of community engagement as evidenced by the diversity and number of community groups. I am sure Stretton must be the electorate with the most community groups and we benefit so much for it. In addition to local P&Cs there is the Calamvale Runners, Meals on Wheel, Pinelands Lions, Calamvale Lions, Sunnybank Hills Rotary and neighbourhood watch groups. Our area benefits from the many multicultural groups that are based there such as the Taiwan Women's League, the Indian Senior Citizens Association, the Islamic Women's Association of Australia, the Queensland Chinese Forum, the Pakistani Australian Community Association and WAMCI, just to name a few. All of those groups run off volunteer power and there is no shortage of it in Stretton. The cumulative effect of this is a vibrant and engaged local community where groups working in one area lift the rest and benefit us all.

When I speak about families coming from all over the world to live in Stretton I am also talking about my family. When I talk about the values of study and work in our local community I am also talking about the values that were imparted to me by my own family. My parents, Bob and Lesley, who are here today, migrated from England in 1989 and settled in Acacia Ridge. We went to the local school and mum and dad, who are retired now, still live in Acacia Ridge. They are proud that they have paid off their house and they get by on their pension, with a little bit of savings from their super. Mum worked in the Queensland Health warehouse at Richlands and dad was a mechanic and worked at Hastings Deering in Archerfield. He was a proud trade unionist and served as a union delegate in hanger 3 for the AMWU for many years.

I have to say that dad never passed on any mechanical skills to me. I have no idea how to fix an engine, but I do think I have picked up a few union skills along the way. From an early age dad taught me the meaning of solidarity. Mum and dad were proudly working class. They taught me that we have a duty to stick together to improve conditions for working people and for those less fortunate. Most importantly, this means joining your union and voting Labor. For our family and many others from similar circumstances, election nights felt like a grand final. For working families across Queensland elections were not an academic matter. A Labor win meant that your local school got more teachers and more funding. It meant that there were more nurses at the hospital and more cops on the beat. Most importantly, a Labor government meant that working people could be sure they would be treated fairly at the bargaining table with their boss. These are the values that I have held for my entire life. I still feel that way and I will continue to work passionately for those values.

Today I am also joined by my beautiful wife, Stella, and our son, Oliver, who are in the gallery. I am lucky to have them as my biggest supporters. Stella was born in Australia and is a first-generation Aussie. Her father is well-known local GP Dr Rod Chiu, who is of Chinese heritage. He ran the Coopers

Plains surgery for 45 years. In 1958 he arrived in Australia aged just 13 years and knowing no English. Through hard work and determination Dr Chiu went on to complete a Bachelor of Medicine at UQ where he met his wife, Laima, whose own parents had migrated from Eastern Europe after World War II.

The story of our multicultural community is very personal to me as it is also my own story and the story of my family. Stella and I have parents who came from the four corners of the globe and settled locally. They started families and had children. Stella and I grew up, met and started a family of our own. Our wedding was held in Stella's childhood Catholic church and we had a traditional Chinese tea ceremony at the reception. Now our son, Ollie, is growing up in the same community that his grandparents settled in all those years ago. There are not many other countries in the world where you could tell the same story. That is the great success of multiculturalism in Queensland and it is why I am proud to represent the seat of Stretton.

I see my role in this place as making sure that the opportunities I had growing up are continued and expanded. One area in which I take a particularly keen interest is secure work. For me that is the core of what a Labor government stands for. When I was growing up our family could rely on dad having a secure job. We were not rich but we could plan for the future. I want others to have that security and opportunity. A good job means that mum and dad can plan for their family's future. It means they can pay for their kids to go on school camp, afford an instrument or take a holiday every couple of years. It means that they can save a little bit extra for retirement.

The emergence of the gig economy over the past few years has brought to public attention the fact that secure full-time employment is unfortunately for many a fading dream. Casualisation has been growing in Australia for some years now, but there is nothing particularly new about it. During the Great Depression many workers would head out each morning to line up at the factory gate, hoping to get a shift. These days that task is performed by a smartphone notification. Of course, tech disruption brings with it immense opportunities to improve our lives. It brings immense economic opportunities as well. We should take neither a simplistic nor nostalgic view of the past, but we must be clear-sighted about the broad and long-term impacts on jobs and employment. If we want to sustain the egalitarian and moderate political system that we have built in Australia then we cannot afford to leave large parts of the community behind.

How can we manage this change? First we must be clear that industrial relations laws and workplace laws in this country are set by elected governments of Australia, not foreign tech companies; likewise, that workplace conditions and pay are collectively bargained between employees and their employer and not imposed from Silicon Valley. Secondly, we need to continue to deliver world-class education. Over the past six years the Palaszczuk Labor government has delivered record education funding in Stretton, including for new classrooms, performing arts centres, science labs, air conditioning, solar panels and more. A good education will give our kids the confidence to navigate the new economy. It is no surprise that the education minister, Grace Grace, is very popular in Stretton. It has been great to have her recently visit both Stretton State College and Autism Queensland, which are two of the many projects that the Palaszczuk government is funding for our local students to give them the best start in life.

Finally, we need to recognise that different solutions may be required at different points in somebody's life or career. Younger people entering the workforce will have careers that are more fluid than in the past and they may need flexible skill sets. As policymakers we need to think about innovative ways to preserve the types of benefits and security that their parents took for granted. For older people affected by disruption we will need to invest in lifelong training opportunities or they may need other support to re-enter the workforce. My view on this is simple: if someone is willing to work, able to work and wants a job then we should help them find one. This core belief can be seen in the government's response to the pandemic: on the one hand, responding to the health crisis by putting the safety of Queenslanders first and, on the other hand, bringing forward funding and investment for schools, roads, hospitals and public transport to improve services and, just as importantly, to create jobs and ensure our economic recovery.

When it comes to secure work we must also remember that opportunity alone is not enough for everyone to compete on an even level. People who live with an intellectual or developmental disability face barriers that limit their ability to socialise, work and play. Our fellow Queenslanders often face barriers that others can take for granted. I am passionate about assisting people with an intellectual or developmental disability to enter the workforce. That is fundamentally about inclusion. Meaningful employment gives people self-worth and dignity, it improves mental health and confidence and, importantly, it helps build lasting friendships and networks. In Stretton we have many fantastic organisations that work to make this happen, including Kuraby Special School, Multicap, Help Enterprises and the Kyabra Community Organisation. I look forward to working with those organisations to improve employment outcomes for people with intellectual disabilities. We have a long way to go and I hope that I can use my parliamentary position to champion that cause.

I now turn to some final words of thanks. Firstly, I owe a debt of gratitude to my wife, Stella, and the rest of my family for their support during the campaign and over the years—Patrick dropping off leaflets on his trusty electric bicycle, Mum and Dad driving around the campaign truck, and Stella, who was by my side the whole way whilst also keeping Ollie and me in line. With the campaign rolling on as Duncan's health deteriorated, I could not have dealt with the situation if it were not for Stella's love and support. Stella, you really are one in a million.

I am indebted to the union movement. The advocacy of my dad's union meant that my parents could guarantee a good upbringing for their kids. When I left university I went to work for the Australian Workers' Union, and I hope that my own efforts had a similar impact on the lives of those members. I also want to thank the mighty United Workers Union for their help on the campaign—state secretary Gary Bullock, Greg Moran, Jake, Connor and the whole UWU team. It is great to be part of a union that has such an impressive capacity to campaign for their members.

My journey to this place is a continuation of Duncan's journey. Looking back, it is amazing how many of my closest friendships were formed during our years in student politics—Merric Foley, Clinton De Bruyn, Monique Bielanowski, David Shaw, Annette Curry and my brother Patrick teamed up all those years ago with Duncan. In fact, I think it was one of Duncan's standout abilities: to assemble a team of people passionate about the Labor cause and to work together to win and to remain loyal to each other.

I also want to thank all of the Labor members in this place who helped on the campaign. There were a lot of you. The Labor family really rallied around the Stretton campaign, helping me but also doing it for Duncan. They rallied their own volunteers to the cause, and on election day you could not walk five metres without bumping into a Labor MP or a minister. In particular, I want to thank the members for Mount Ommaney and Logan for their moral support and help on the campaign.

I have also been fortunate to have two local federal members as great supporters and important sources of advice: the member for Rankin, Jim Chalmers, and the member for Moreton, Graham Perrett. They are well loved in our local area and I look forward to working with them for the benefit of our community.

To all the elected members who helped on the campaign: your help and support during this past few months has meant a lot to me. To my campaign manager, Kerrie Kahlon: there is no more well-organised or motivated person I know, and I am lucky that party office sent you. Duncan would be very proud of your efforts on this campaign. I would also like to acknowledge the party president, John Battams; state secretary, Jules Campbell; and the whole team at party office. It is great to be part of a party that is so united.

To the Pegg family—Graham, Lindsey, Grant, Cameron, Lachlan and Graham Jr: your support during this difficult time has meant so much to me and Stella. I know that you are still grieving and I hope you know that we are all here for you. You will always be part of the Stretton Labor family.

Campaigns do not happen without the hard work of local supporters and volunteers. I was so fortunate to have so many working on this campaign helping with letterboxing, doorknocking, phone calling and handing out how-to-vote cards on election day. The support I received from party members across the state and even the nation was overwhelming.

I particularly want to thank Emily Kim, Adam and Ryan Chappell, Gail MacPherson, Jude Hardy, David Pass, Don and Vicki Mitchell, Michael Glaros and the Glaros family, the McDonagh family, Celine Xi, Conner Rutherford, Emme Muggleton, Fahima Ahmadi and the Ahmadi sisters, Tirat Achal, Mohammad Sultani, Neha Pauly, Frank Plunkett, Ella Craig, Jack Hughes, Adrienne and Neil Cremin, Tony Castiros, Logan Mete, Tess O'Reilly, Lee Ash, Noel Higginbotham, Mattie Sellars, Ali Kadri, Sandy Thomas, Shaji Theckanath, Nick Thaqi, Martin Young, Sherif Keryakes, Sukhjinder Singh, Hardeep Wagla, Prakruthi and Lucky, Teng and Michael, John Prescott, Richard and Annie, the La Macchia family, Daniyal Mian, the Obeid family, Lisa Banyard and her 'Logan Westies', Aleko, Daniel Gan, Sam Zhou, Sam Zhu, Allen Ding, Tari Dambo, Kylie Slater, Rachel Stanley, Alex Asher, Jasmine Bulman, Lisa Wilder, Michael Eborn, John Chirgwin, Hamish Bright, Samantha Fuller, Terry Gobert, Byron, the Wood family, William Wu, Nayda Hernandez, Pema Bastin, Sam Jones, Lucy Collier, Hannah Herrmann, Brendan Williams, Jason McKenzie and Renee Coffey. There were a lot of you!

I also want to thank community leaders Ben Chen, Galila Abdelsalam, Esther Stuart, Lewis Lee OAM, Alan Chen, Ricky Chen, Pearl Chen, Gurlal Singh, Reena Augustine, former member for Capalaba Michael Choi, Janeth Deen and Jitendra Deo for all of their help and advice on the campaign.

Finally, I want to once again thank the people of Stretton for their support. As I said before, I will always be your humble servant. Thank you.