




Speech By
Lachlan Millar

MEMBER FOR GREGORY

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr MILLAR** (Gregory—LNP) (12.28 pm): I take my place in this 57th Parliament, proud to be representing the wonderful people of Gregory for a third term. I confirm my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II and her representatives, His Excellency the Governor, Paul de Jersey, and my loyalty to this parliament and to the electors of Gregory.

I congratulate the Labor Party on being re-elected to the government benches. I congratulate the Premier, Anastacia Palaszczuk, her ministers and all of her members of the Labor Party. I would also like to pay tribute to a magnificent woman in this parliament, and that is the member for Nanango, Deb Frecklington. I have never seen a more determined person go through what the member for Nanango had to go through during her term as our opposition leader. She did it with absolute distinction. She was an absolute privilege to work with and for, and she will always have my support.

I would also like to pay tribute to the member for Everton, Tim Mander. He was a very strong deputy leader to the opposition leader. He held that position with absolute grace, and he has become a good friend and well liked not only in the electorate of Everton but by the people of Queensland. He is well liked out in Gregory, even though we have a lot of North Queensland Cowboy supporters out there.

I congratulate David Crisafulli, the member for Broadwater, for taking on the leadership. He is a good man. He is a man I have known for a very long time and a good mate. I also congratulate David Janetzki, the member for Toowoomba South, for taking on the deputy's role. He is doing an absolutely fine job. I am looking forward to taking the member for Toowoomba South back out to Yaraka. We had such a great time last term. We were running a little late—I know the police minister is in the House—for our next meeting going from Yaraka to Longreach. We did stop at Isisford for a steak sandwich which was great. A steak sandwich at Isisford is very simple: two pieces of white bread and a steak—no salad.

Mr Ryan: That's how it should be.

Mr MILLAR: It is how it should be.

Mr Ryan: And deep fried.

Mr MILLAR: Yes, exactly. Madam Deputy Speaker, you cannot be a member in this place without a strong family. I pay tribute to my beautiful wife, Peta—whose birthday it is today—and my children, Lucy, Ellie and Poppy. I would like to pay tribute to my parents, Cameron and Joan Millar, and my two brothers, Hamish and Dougall Millar, who support me all the way. Family is very important.

You cannot be a good member without good staff. I have the best staff. I pay tribute to Nicki Heslin in my Longreach office, Laura Nolan and Mike Burns in my Emerald office, Kerry-Lee Ferguson and Lachie Little. We call him 'little Lachie'. He is in the Longreach office. He is a wonderful addition to

the team and he will be a great advocate for Gregory down the track. He has just finished school. He is taking a year working with me and then he is off to university. I think he is heading down to QUT. You will meet Lachie Little if you come to an event on Thursday—but he is not little; he is about this high! He is a lovely boy, and I am so thankful he has come on board.

You cannot win your seat without the people who support you. I want to pay tribute to a bloke who has had a hugely successful time in the party winning elections for us, and that is Mike Burns, our Gregory SEC chairman. Mike has been involved in the party for over 40 years and he has won around 17 elections. Mike is also a tragic Broncos supporter. I have suggested that Kevvie Walters might want to bring Mike down for a few chats with the Broncos. Mike Burns is a lovely person, and I could not have done this job without him. He is a loyal friend and a father figure to me. He has known me since I was a little boy.

I thank Andrew Cowper from Aramac, Sonja and Peter Doyle from Blackall and Ross Drayton, my Gregory branch secretary. He is a wonderful bloke, a true champion and a very strong advocate for the people in the bush. He does a wonderful job. Ross is taking over the chairman's role of the Gregory SEC, and he will do a fine job.

I thank Graham and Lyn Johnson from the Emerald branch; Tim and Stevie Eversham; a beautiful lady called Rosemary Champion and her husband, Warwick, in Longreach—they do a fantastic job for me; Josh Adams in Emerald; Brett Walsh in Barky, along with Peter and Roberta Doneley and family in Barky. They do a wonderful job. Barky is the home of the Labor Party—I understand that—with the Tree of Knowledge. For the first time the LNP actually won the Barky booth. I am very proud to be representing Barky.

I understand the traditions of Barky to the Labor Party. It is respected and they do a good job, but I ask that we give a little more help and a little more funding to the Australian Workers Heritage Centre. It can be a true advocate for tourism, showing the history of not only the Labor Party but also Western Queensland and the shearing industry and the grazing industry. I ask that we put a little more money towards it. They have a great new CEO there. He is doing a great job and will do a great job.

I also pay tribute to Sean Dillon from Alpha; Sonia and Guy Burton from Emerald; Bruce and Helen Collins from Winton; John and Katrina Payne from Winton; and most people know this person—he is well liked—Vaughan Johnson, who was on my pre-polling booth for two weeks and on the polling booth in Tambo on election day. Vaughan does an absolutely great job. I wanted to thank those people first.

I would like to quote from Colin Boyce's speech during the last address-in-reply debate. It is exactly what I felt we did when we were growing up. He stated—

I grew up on my parent's brigalow ballot block and I remember the big tractors pulling the scrub—a government requirement of the day. The wheel has turned, and now we have proposed government regulation which will inhibit agricultural development in Queensland. It is time that people understand that our graziers and our farmers are the true practical environmentalists—the custodians of the land who look after it, nurture it and make it productive and sustainable. Australia was born on the back of agriculture and it remains at the forefront of our economy ...

Agriculture is so important.

Being the member for Gregory is a privilege and an honour. There have only been four members for Gregory since the mid-1950s and I am the fourth. The first was Sir Wally Rae, then Bill Glasson Senior, then Vaughan Johnson and then me. It is an absolute privilege. Every member in this House is proud of their electorates, but Gregory is particularly special. It is literally the beating heart of Queensland. It is also the parliament's biggest electorate running right across the centre of the state from an hour out of Rocky to the borders with the Northern Territory and South Australia. Gregory is more than a quarter of Queensland's land mass. It is basically bigger than many countries in Europe.

It has 13 major river systems which find their release in settings as different as Lake Eyre and the Great Barrier Reef. It has lakes, both natural and man-made, including Queensland's second largest lake—Lake Maraboon, or Fairbairn Dam, as we know. Thank God we have had a little bit of rain. Capacity is now up around 25 per cent. We have 100 per cent allocations until the end of June. I can guarantee that there is going to be a massive chickpea crop in the Central Highlands which will boost the economy around there. I ask anybody to come out and have a look. It is fantastic. We have natural lakes such as Lake Galilee near Aramac and other lakes all over the place.

With magnificent natural landscapes from Carnarvon Gorge to the channel country, world-class museums and 'bucket-list' events, Gregory is a magnet for our tourists from around the country and from overseas. Our tourism season will be starting very soon. If you are looking for a holiday, come west. We would love to have you out there.

It also produces much of Queensland's export earnings. In resources it produces coal, gas and renewable energy, as well as some of the finest sapphires and opals in the world. Gregory's farmers, too, are key export earners for Queensland. They are innovative, competitive and famous for producing quality produce. For instance, it takes only 10 days from being harvested on the Central Highlands for our chickpeas to reach consumers in India. This is a true 'coals to Newcastle' story and should make us all proud that Queensland chickpeas are renowned for their quality in India—home of the chickpea curry and dahl.

Gregory also produces wheat, sorghum, rice, mung beans, citrus, melons, grapes and macadamia nuts. We are big in textiles, with some of the world's finest cotton and wool which is widely sought after right around the world.

Lastly, Gregory produces premium and organic kangaroo, beef and sheep meet. Once upon a time you could go to the Brekkie Creek Hotel and see a sign saying they sourced their steak from Marion Downs. That is in Gregory and is a premium and organic operation. The beef industry in the Central Highlands is the biggest in Queensland and it produces massive economic opportunities for us.

Nowadays beautiful steakhouses such as the Black Hide and Cha Cha Char allow you to pick your meat by origin, breed and even pasture. I have long been of the opinion that Gregory's beef industry should be marketed this way. We offer feedlots and organic grass-fed from native Mitchell and Flinders grasses, to buffel pastures. Each produces a different dining experience.

It is heartbreaking to stand here and tell you what I told you at the beginning of the 55th Parliament: Gregory is hurting and for the same reason as in 2015. We are still in the grip of the same drought. Even though we have had a little bit of rain, we are still in the grip of drought. For some of my constituents it has been nearly nine or 10 years since they have had decent rain. We really have not had decent rain between Longreach and Barcaldine. There seems to be a cone over those areas where we have not seen those pastures rebound.

While there have been some falls, the promised La Nina rains have not come to all of Queensland. We have had big rains down here and of course in New South Wales, but in the Central Highlands and in the central west we are hoping for proper drought-breaking rain to end this drought. It has been going on for far too long.

I am sure that the member for Warrego and the member for Traeger share my concerns about the poor response of pastures in certain parts of Western Queensland, especially up in the north-west. We are also battling a grasshopper infestation, so the pastures that did respond were devoured within weeks. I ask that the government be sensitive to the plight of people in Western Queensland. We need to make sure we get on top of this issue when we get into the wet season around October or November because those grasshoppers have been an absolutely devastating story for Western Queensland.

I also note the government's rightful focus on the COVID-19 pandemic and the economic and health impacts of that, but I also respectfully ask the Premier, Treasurer and minister for agriculture not to forget us out in the west. All of Western Queensland is still drought-declared and we need special consideration from our government. Drought wraps around communities slowly and squeezes the life out of them. Western Queensland's population is falling, jobs are being lost and businesses are closing because of the drought.

In his speech the Governor outlined the Labor government's plans for major infrastructure upgrades in Queensland schools. Please remember the boost this gives drought-affected areas. Emerald State High School needs a trade centre and staffing for rural education. This is vital for the Central Highlands; I implore the Minister for Education. We need to have a trade centre at Emerald State High School because that is where the Bowen Basin is centred. We need to have those trades for the mining and resources industries. We would like to keep our kids in town so they are able get their education there and then move into the mining industry and buy a house and start a family. That is how we keep our populations going.

Blackwater State High School should be excelling at offering the trade qualifications needed by the mining industry. Capella State High School should be able to prepare its students for farming and mining, and western secondary students need to be able to qualify to take up jobs in the expanding tourism and wool industries. When this drought breaks we are going to need shearers and associated industry skills to see the wool industry come back to what it used to be. I implore the government to put some effort into the education of our children. We have to keep our students. Once they leave grade 10 or 12 and if they want to do a trade—if they do not want to go to university—we have to ensure they can get trade skills in the local area.

The Central Highlands desperately needs a kindy support hub to help children and families with special needs. Children with special needs are a big issue in the seat of Gregory. We do not have the services we need to enable special needs children to stay in the area. What we find is that when these

children reach a certain age, and certainly high school age, some parents are forced to move to the east coast or down to the South-East to meet the special needs requirements of their children. Right across Gregory's 54 schools we have issues with acting staffing levels. I have worked with the minister on many of these issues in the past, and I look forward to continuing to work with her on behalf of my constituents. I do plead with the minister, the Premier and the Treasurer to remember that the education dollars spent in Gregory do double duty in times of drought in terms of sustaining communities in Western Queensland.

Gregory earns a great deal for the state, and in our time of need we ask only for our share. I would like to specifically mention the Governor's reference to the Labor government's commitment to invest \$171 million in palliative care to ensure Queenslanders get the highest quality care at the end of life. I have helped Central and Western Queenslanders to support loved ones in their dying days, and I can tell you from personal experience that there is nothing more distressing than not being able to secure adequate and dignified care at this time. While the government made a promise around voluntary assisted dying, the blunt truth is that only a very small number of Queenslanders will use voluntary assisted dying but 100 per cent of us will need palliative care. It is only a question of when. Consequently, I will be jealously fighting for Western Queensland's share of the expansion of palliative care.

Another area where I have been fiercely advocating for my Gregory constituents is renal dialysis. The previous health minister was out there and we did talk about it. I know there has been the promise of a dialysis machine in Longreach, and I congratulate the Labor Party for putting that forward. Hopefully we will get a dialysis machine in Longreach, but we need a dialysis machine in Emerald as well. We do not have a dialysis machine in Emerald, and when people need dialysis treatment they have to go to Rocky. Sometimes people have to move away because they need dialysis treatment.

Another thing I would like to put on the record I will be fighting very hard for is a new hospital for Blackwater. Blackwater is a fantastic town just 70 kilometres east of Emerald, but it is the heart of the mining industry with mines such as Curragh and South Blackwater. The hospital in Blackwater was built back in the 1960s and basically has not changed. We have a population of 6,000 in Blackwater but really it supports a population of 12,000. I call on the health minister and the Palaszczuk government to replicate the Blackall Hospital that has been built and put one in Blackwater as well. You have the designs. We have land available. We really need to make sure that we have the Blackwater hospital on the budget list coming up in the next couple of months, because the people of Blackwater need it. It would not only help the people of Blackwater but it also services the valuable mining industry. You have drive-in drive-out and fly-in fly-out workers coming in, and if something happens they use the local facilities, so we really do need an investment in the Blackwater hospital. I hope we can see that happen. No doubt the budget will come up, but we really do need to put that on the budget list.

I really am truly honoured to be the member for Gregory. This is my third term, and to be the member for Gregory is an absolute honour. The people of Gregory are absolutely fantastic. Whether you live in the Central Highlands around Emerald or you live in Duaranga or Blackwater, towns like Tieri or Springsure, or even Bauhinia—which is a wonderful community on the Central Highlands—or in the central west where you have great places like Longreach, Blackall, Winton and Barcaldine but also Windorah, Birdsville, Bedourie and Boulia—

Ms Leahy: Beautiful towns and beautiful people.

Mr MILLAR: I take that interjection from the member for Warrego, who has similar communities. They are beautiful communities and they do a fantastic job. It is an absolute privilege to represent them. Being the member for Gregory is not a hard job because you have so much support. Whether they voted for you or not, they do support you when you advocate for them.

I just want to see you turn up. If you are looking for a holiday through the winter I implore you to head west and come and see the Qantas Founders Museum, Australian Stockman's Hall of Fame, Waltzing Matilda Centre or the Australian Workers Heritage Centre—you can even go past the Tree of Knowledge—or you could head out to the back country down to Birdsville. We also have the Big Red Bash coming up and the Birdsville Races. You also have the Boulia Camel Races and the Betoota races. I would really encourage you to come and spend some dollars out there.

Ms Leahy: Come and see Queensland.

Mr MILLAR: Come and see the real Queensland. There is more to Queensland than just the Great Barrier Reef: there is the outback. I agree with closing our international borders, but we need to look at a reef and beef tour, where we fly them into Cairns to the Great Barrier Reef and then we get them into the outback and down to Brisbane to the South-East so we all get a bit of a share. When we eventually open up to international flights and tourists return, we have to remember that the tourism industry is the outback as well. We have to promote both the Great Barrier Reef and the outback to make sure that happens.

Ms Leahy: We grow the best beef in the world.

Mr MILLAR: We grow the best beef in the world. We also have the friendliest people and the coldest beer, so head out when you are ready. Madam Deputy Speaker Bush, I would also like to congratulate you on your role and your election to your seat. I look forward to working with everybody in this House and doing good things for Queensland.