




Speech By
Laura Gerber

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mrs GERBER** (Currumbin—LNP) (5.15 pm): It is such a great privilege and honour to continue to serve as the state member for Currumbin in the 57th Parliament of Queensland. I give this speech almost one year to the day that my Currumbin community first elected me to represent them. In my short time serving in this chamber I have stared down two elections: the by-election in March 2020, a bitter fight and a tough election battle from which I was fortunate to have emerged victorious; then, seven months later, I geared up again to jump into the state election in October. Being here in this chamber once more is a true privilege. The faith and trust the people of Currumbin have placed in me to represent them not once but twice in the one year is not lost on me and never will be.

I am not a career politician. I did not grow up with this in mind as my end game. I turned my back on a successful career in law—not an easy decision to make nor one that I made lightly. Ultimately, I took the leap of faith twice in the one year and I am standing here today with the great privilege and honour of representing my Currumbin electorate. I care deeply about my community and I want Currumbin to have a strong and fierce voice in this chamber. I will be that voice. I will do everything humanly possible to deliver for my community.

There is another reason I decided I must put my hand up and take that leap of faith and represent my party, the Liberal National Party, for the seat of Currumbin—a reason I have not yet voiced in this chamber. As a conservative, as a hardworking professional and as a young woman, I felt under-represented. This is as much a reflection on our society as it is on party politics. I was not involved in party politics before I took this leap of faith. I am glad that I said yes. I am glad that I am standing here in this chamber today, thanking the Currumbin electorate for electing me twice in the one year. I hope to raise up other women in politics and within my party so that we see many more women across Queensland who can be supported to join our ranks and become strong voices in this parliament, representing their communities. Now, more than ever, it is important to have women involved in the decision-making processes of government.

I am lucky that I have had such strong women around me to encourage and support me in the initial stages of my journey in this place. It is at this point that I want to thank the former opposition leader, the member for Nanango. Winning the Currumbin by-election is testament to her leadership. The member for Nanango, as the former opposition leader, and the member for Everton, as the former deputy leader, could not have worked harder in their roles and I thank them for their efforts. I am so fortunate to have had the encouragement and guidance of the member for Nanango throughout 2020, and I am grateful to continue to be supported by her.

To the future, to the member for Broadwater, I congratulate our unopposed party leader—a leader I greatly admire and respect. Many of your words ring true for me. We will be a team that will be respectful and humble in opposition. Time and time again you are showing that you are a politician of conviction, continuously espousing LNP core values of a just and humane society, that family is the primary institution for fostering the values on which a cohesive society is built and equal opportunity for all Queenslanders.

I have always also been particularly impressed by the grassroots way in which our leader approaches policymaking and politics in general. I will never forget my first time doorknocking with our leader, the member for Broadwater. It was not for show. We did not knock on a couple of doors, take a photo for Instagram and then hang up our joggers. We split up. He took one side of the street and I took the other to maximise our efforts. We doorknocked from house to house for hours. The member for Broadwater literally sprinted between houses so we could talk to as many people as possible in the suburb. I still use his technique to this day. It means I arrive at people's doors a little sweaty, but boy do I get to talk to everyone!

I am grateful to the leadership for appointing me the shadow assistant minister for justice, youth, culture development and the night-time economy. I am passionate about each and every one of these portfolios. I will work hard to assist to develop policies within these portfolios—policies that will benefit all Queenslanders.

Most of all, the majority of my time will be spent serving the Currumbin community that elected me. That is what is most important to me. My greatest joy in this honoured position is that I have had the privilege of being involved in the majority of our local community and sporting groups. These groups make up the fabric of our community. They are filled with hardworking volunteers who spent hundreds of hours of their free time volunteering. Each and every one of them truly inspires me.

I want to place their names on the record. I wish I had the time in this chamber that would allow me to share all of their achievements as I am so proud of all of them. In no particular order, here goes: Alligators Rugby Club, a special mention because they have developed a fantastic program for girls to participate in; Coolangatta Bowls Club; Tweed Coolangatta AFL Club, I love your fighting spirit; Currumbin Eagles Junior Rugby League Football Club and Currumbin Eagles Senior Rugby League Football Club; Kirra Surfriders Club; Tugun Bowls and Community Club; and Tugun Rugby League Football Club—go the Seahawks.

Also, I give a big shout-out and accolades to: Palm Beach Currumbin Cricket Club; Coolangatta Croquet Club; Gold Coast Pickleball Association; Friends of Currumbin; Tugun Girl Guides; Bilinga Neighbourhood Watch—Anna, you and your team are doing a great job; Tallebudgera Valley Football Club, I love your passion; Currumbin Valley and Tallebudgera rural fire brigades, what can I say, you guys are absolute legends; Currumbin/Palm Beach RSL Sub Branch and Women's Auxiliary, beautiful and kind, an abundance of love, currently knitting and crocheting hundreds and hundreds of poppies for Anzac Day; Currumbin Creek Paddlers Club; Country Women's Association at Coolangatta, not your average CWA, focused on health education; Tugun Theatre Company, I love your shows; Fight 4 Youth—Leisa, you are one in a million; Carpenters Workshop at Elanora Uniting Church; PBC Chaplaincy Service, so valued by all who cross paths with you; Surf World Gold Coast, great tour guides; Youth Music Venture—Ian, you are an extraordinary person; Tugun Neighbourhood Watch; Marlin Waters Neighbourhood Watch; and Coolangatta Senior Citizens Club, affectionately known as the Cooly recreation centre, your resilience through COVID has not gone unnoticed.

There are more: Southern Beaches Community Garden, a shining example of promoting sustainability and passing on important life skills to the young; The Lioness Club of Palm Beach Currumbin; Rotary Club of Currumbin Coolangatta Tweed, passionate fundraisers; the Currumbin Volunteer Marine Rescue, never-ending sausage sizzles, more importantly providing a vital service and saving lives; Tugun Progress Association, I admire your commitment to engaging the community, giving residents a voice; and U3A, the University of the Third Age, building friendships, keeping the brain active—Gail, you and your team are making a substantial contribution to the lives of mature people and your energy does not wane, and I can only wish to match it in my retirement.

As members know, I was lucky enough to spend my childhood within the beautiful surroundings of the southern end of the Gold Coast, having earned my bronze medallion at Vikings Surf Life Saving Club. Along with my parents, who instilled in me the importance of community and giving back, the mentors at the club cemented this philosophy: kindness, friendship, teamwork and, above all, service is the cornerstone of building a resilient, safe and connected community for everyone, regardless of position.

I make special mention of all the surf lifesaving clubs in my electorate: Currumbin, Tugun, Bilinga, North Kirra, Kirra, Coolangatta, Tweed Heads and Coolangatta and Rainbow Bay. Collectively last year they gave over 45,000 patrol hours, saving the lives of well over 60 individuals. On behalf of all my constituents, I say thank you for your service.

I would also like to take this opportunity to highlight the incredible work and dedication of the staff and volunteers at the Currumbin Wildlife Sanctuary and the Currumbin Wildlife Hospital. Not only is the sanctuary the Gold Coast's most popular tourism destination; they are a shining example of a world-leading ecotourism experience.

My Currumbin community is also blessed to have the best little club in the world, the Currumbin RSL. It is loved by all who go there and they are leaders in sustainability. They are also supported by a large team of volunteers. Their veterans support centre plays a key role in providing meaningful services and programs for service and ex-service Defence Force members. The establishment of the Currumbin Young Veteran Support Services program is the first of its kind in South-East Queensland offering social, education and employment opportunities for young veterans—surely inspiring work.

Now, turning to the challenging job of opposition. Unlike the government, I do not get to deliver things for my community. I have to fight for them. Over the next four years I will work hard for my Currumbin community. I will keep this Labor government honest. I will fight to ensure the government delivers on its promises.

Government members interjected.

Mrs GERBER: Whilst all this might seem like the impossible while those on other side of the chamber jeer and laugh, I will apply every ounce of my spirit to that task, without fear or favour. We cannot allow the arrogance of a long-term government to prevail unchecked. This is particularly evident here in this chamber where my speeches, like just now, advocating for my community, are all too often met with rebukes and petty interjections from Labor members across the aisle. That just spurs me on to fight even harder for my community and for what I believe in.

In my maiden speech less than a year ago I said I would not sit by while the southern Gold Coast is neglected. This still rings true today. I am committed to seeing congestion on the M1 busted. Considering the time Currumbin constituents spend on the M1 to get to their workplaces, schools and homes, it is no surprise that Currumbin residents are frustrated. You would be too if you were losing hours each day, which equate to excessive amounts of productivity and valuable time with loved ones, and because of a government that cannot build vital infrastructure when it is needed.

This is why building the second M1 is so important. It is perhaps the most important congestion-busting project for our city. I am pleased that the state government has also committed to it. However, I am bitterly disappointed that it is set to be drawn out over eight years. The budget papers show that hardly any funding is allocated until 2022-23, with about half the project cost not being spent until 2025 and beyond. Ultimately, this means that under Labor's watch the second M1 will take eight years to build and meaningful construction will not start for another 18 months. Currumbin locals are facing eight years of unbearable congestion. Labor continuously plays fast and loose with the truth of its commitments, rolling them out at each election, but in reality it is the community that suffers when its promised commitments do not happen for many years.

We see the same delay with capacity building on our heavy rail network. Overwhelmingly, the Currumbin community wants heavy rail connected to the airport and yet this vital piece of infrastructure continues to be neglected. I will continue to fight for heavy rail to be connected to the airport and for a station at Elanora. We are also seeing this same delay when it comes to light rail. Light rail stage 2 finished construction in late 2017 and, years later, we are only now seeing the commencement of stage 3, whilst stage 4 is still in its planning phase. My office is inundated with inquiries, all saying the same thing: why has the Currumbin community not been consulted? They want to know the impact of light rail on their neighbourhood and the specifics of the route it will take. I am listening to my community and I will continue to fight hard for proper community consultation when it comes to light rail.

I will lobby for improving local road infrastructure including Currumbin Creek Road. The government has committed to upgrading the intersection at Bienvenue Drive and Currumbin Creek Road, but much more is actually needed. The industrial estate of Currumbin Creek Road is in desperate need of an upgrade. The road itself services three schools in the Currumbin electorate, and it is dangerous for pedestrians and the children who make their way to school. Further, the intersection of Traders Way and Currumbin Creek Road is an accident waiting to happen. I will fight for this vital road upgrade.

I am committed to tackling crime in our local community, and this starts with fighting to keep the Elanora police beat in Elanora. Our local police beat at Elanora has been instrumental in curbing crime for more than a decade. The success of the program cannot be underestimated. The primary reason for their success is that the same police officers have taken responsibility for their area consistently and over a long period of time. Ultimately, the community trust those officers. It is this partnership with key stakeholders within the community, built by these officers over a long period of time, which makes the neighbourhood police beat at Elanora so successful. It is not acceptable, and very near negligent, for the state government to remove such a successful police beat from the Currumbin community.

At the last election I advocated for \$2 million to be invested in the Currumbin Beach Vikings Surf Life Saving Club to upgrade their clubhouse. I am glad the other side agreed with me. However, I am still waiting for the government to give specific details as to when the funds will be forthcoming—just another fight I am happy to take up for the Currumbin community.

I will always advocate for the safety of our community. I will protect our beautiful lifestyle and the way of life in Currumbin. I will fight alongside locals to stop inappropriate development. I believe my community understands that we must accept development, but I have heard loud and clear that any development must be in keeping with community expectations, meaning developments must have appropriate setbacks and the height and density of developments must be in keeping with the area.

Many of the schools in my electorate urgently need upgrades. The principals, teachers and support staff work tirelessly, particularly so during the last 12 months, and they should not have to put up with substandard infrastructure. I will continue to work very closely with these school communities as well as attend P&C meetings to hear firsthand concerns from the local parent community. For example, Elanora State High School deserves at least \$100,000 to purchase tools and equipment to provide vital skills for current and future students. I will fight for Elanora State School to ensure play areas are shaded. Just recently, I have led a school community driven initiative at Elanora State School to plant hundreds of trees, working collaboratively with Transport and Main Roads.

As I conclude, I want to take a moment to thank all of the amazing volunteers—easily 150 or more who supported me in seeking to represent my beautiful home of Currumbin and, in many cases, campaigning in an election for the very first time. To each and every one of you, I say thank you. You are greatly appreciated and I would not be standing here today without your support and dedication. I wish I could name you all. We had so many laughs which, at the end of a very long campaign, gave me so much strength.

There are a few I would like to put on record as going above and beyond—the glue, keeping everything ticking along. Your friendships are invaluable to me. From the bottom of my heart thank you so much Ben Naday, Roger Emerson, Murray, Mary and Peter Flynn, Jackson Franks, Chris Manwaring, Maryanne, Joe Nowak, Robyn Pierce, Zac Revere, Andrew Rowe, Rene, Diana Traversi, Derek and John Williams and collectively the assistance from the Tweed National and Liberal branches, along with support from Senator Amanda Stoker and Senator James McGrath and their volunteer teams.

To my electorate office team of Josie Kay, Aaron Payne and now Bronte and Amy: they go above and beyond, regularly helping out at community events and initiatives in their own time. Josie Kay deserves special mention. She has been with me since the beginning. I give thanks every day for how lucky I am to have her on my side. She is unparalleled in her commitment to serve our community and I could not do this job without her.

To my parents, my sisters, my brother, my cousins, my aunties, my uncles and my best friends—you all know who you are—thank you for being so proud and happy to be wearing a Laura Gerber T-shirt on the campaign trail, for stepping in and supporting my children when Dan and I could not be there and for campaigning alongside me through rain, hail and sunshine. There is literally no better asset on a campaign than your family and best friends, and I am so blessed to have an abundance of both. I would not be here today without their love and support.

Finally, to my husband—my task of representing a whole community is not easy on those who matter the most to you. At times I am away from my husband and my children more often than I am with them. To Dan, Lily and Thomas, you will always be my world. I will always be just a mum trying to be a politician, trying to be of service to my community—and that would not be possible without their support.

Finally, I reiterate the commitment I made to the people of Currumbin in my maiden speech. I will use this platform to improve our community. I will not waste a single opportunity to represent you. I will work hard for the whole of the Currumbin electorate to ensure our community remains the best place to live, to work and to raise a family for many generations to come, so help me God.