




Speech By
Michael Berkman

MEMBER FOR MAIWAR

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mr BERKMAN** (Maiwar—Grn) (4.37 pm): Before anything else, I want to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we all live, work and play, both here in Meanjin and across this continent. I pay my respects to elders past and present as we meet here in this place of particular significance to First Nations women.

Each and every day that this parliament sits, we acknowledge that this is Aboriginal land. We acknowledge the deep cultural and spiritual connection and the countless generations of custodianship. What we do not acknowledge is that First Nations sovereignty over this land was never ceded, that this is stolen land. We do not acknowledge that, to this day, the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has not been recognised by our state or its institutions. We do not acknowledge that, to this day, and since the very inception of the colony and this parliament, this institution remains responsible for dispossession, racism and violence against First Nations people.

It is very encouraging that in the last parliament we began taking steps towards treaty, and I acknowledge and very much appreciate the work of the Eminent Panel and the Treaty Advancement Committee. We, both as a community and as elected representatives, must not mistake the formation of panels and committees for the deep, fundamental changes that must underpin a genuine recognition of First Nations sovereignty. We cannot undo the centuries of dispossession, violence and trauma inflicted since invasion, but we have to start with an honest reflection on this history and the acknowledgement of its continuing impacts on the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

At the outset, I would like to offer my congratulations to every member elected to this 57th Parliament and, in particular, to the member for Mulgrave for his election to the Speaker's chair for another term. I am so very humbled to have been returned as the member for Maiwar. It has been an incredible privilege to represent the people of Auchenflower, Bardon, Fig Tree Pocket, Indooroopilly, St Lucia, Taringa and Toowong as the inaugural member for this seat. I am so grateful for their endorsement at the last election.

It is also an incredible privilege to be returned here to provide a voice for the more than 270,000 Queenslanders—almost 10 per cent of us—who voted Greens in the election and to be joined by the member for South Brisbane, Amy MacMahon. I have heard the member for South Brisbane acknowledge a number of times that she has big shoes to fill, but I have seen already—as has anyone paying attention in this place since November last year—that she is absolutely the right person to represent her electorate and to shake up an institution that is profoundly ill-equipped to represent an increasingly disillusioned and progressive voter base, both in South Brisbane and across the state.

The two most recent election campaigns in South Brisbane were, frankly, brutal and tell us a lot about the sense of entitlement the old parties seem to bring to this kind of contest. Rather than taking a good hard look at why they have continued to lose progressive voters, their instinct is to lash out, bully

and smear. Even since Amy has taken her seat here, I have been truly staggered at the response of Labor members and ministers to the simple fact of her presence in this place. I feel incredibly proud and privileged to work alongside the member for South Brisbane in our small but growing party room.

What an experience it has been to see Amy observe the inner workings of this place up close and come to understand the countless ways in which it fails to deliver on the promise of transparency, accountability and genuinely representative democracy. As a unicameral parliament, we are clearly at a disadvantage compared to our interstate counterparts, but I reflect and remember how genuinely shocked I was throughout my first term to learn how dysfunctional this place is as a forum for genuine debate. It is clear that neither of the big parties have a real interest in making this place work effectively for the people of Queensland. Despite having spent all but five of the last 30 years in opposition, the LNP seems to have no real interest in making it work better. Instead they will cling to their dream of running an unaccountable government in some future term.

The Queensland Greens took a bold platform to this election—one that I am incredibly proud of. We called for big corporations to finally pay their fair share. We fought for climate justice and a good life for everyone, regardless of their background, postcode or bank account balance. We stood up to billionaire bullies and their backers in the major parties. The results for the Greens, in those seats where we managed to have conversations directly with voters about this vision, proved it is popular.

Some—plenty of people—called our plans extreme. Major parties, far-right lobby groups and the fossil fuel industry spent thousands of dollars relentlessly attacking our supposedly extreme policies. I do not think it is extreme to say that, in a wealthy state like Queensland, no-one should go hungry or be homeless while multinational corporations export billions of dollars worth of our resources. I think the real reason our ideas were labelled extreme is that the political establishment and their powerful donors were finally forced to question their entitlement to unchecked power.

What they did not understand was that for every billboard, every flyer and every attack ad they placed, we were having hundreds more conversations with residents on the phones and at their front doors. We cut through the nasty politicking by talking to people one on one about what really mattered to them. That is what made this campaign truly radical and powerful—a record-breaking grassroots movement of people fighting for something bigger than themselves. This was the biggest state campaign in our party's history. We tripled our campaigning capacity from 2017. We were talking to thousands of residents each and every week.

On the ground in Maiwar we built a campaign team of almost 500 volunteers who all played an essential part. There was a core group of around 150 active volunteers. We had 8,730 conversations with voters, knocked on around 16,000 doors and made around 12,000 phone calls. We installed about 750 yard signs, including 100 of the really big ones—megaflutes as everyone loves to call them. Despite the smear and misinformation circulated by our opponents, we achieved a 13.5 per cent primary swing and received 41.3 per cent of the primary vote.

I cannot possibly thank everyone I would like to, but there are some folks who I absolutely must. First of all, the Maiwar campaign committee—Ginny, Roxie, Ben and Gemmia—thank you for your guidance, but also for the trust you placed in the campaign team. There was a dedicated core office crew who gave up endless time to help pull off such an enormous campaign. To Sean, Stirling, Hira, Samantha, Esther, Rusty, Seb, Zoe, Emily and the Debs, I say thank you. I will name just a few of the doorknocking and phone banking superstars who gave up time every single weekend and between them had thousands of conversations with Maiwar residents: Libby, Michaela, Max, Tyson, Andrew, Carmen, Kathy, Ann, Becca, Liz, Julie, Sophie, Neridah, James, Marian and Allen. That really is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to my gratitude. I want to single out Nick McKinnon—a relatively new and very enthusiastic campaigner and doorknocker whom I know had a really challenging six months since the election. Thanks to you, Nick. I look forward to catching up again really soon. Whether you have given up weekends to talk to voters, walked the streets delivering letters or put up yard signs at the crack of dawn, I cannot thank each and every one of those volunteers enough. The outstanding result we achieved in Maiwar belongs to all of you.

This is also an important opportunity for me to express my deep personal gratitude for all my staff and their efforts over the last three years. So many others have made this claim in their speech in the address-in-reply, but they are all wrong—I am sorry, my staff are absolutely the best in the business, both the folks in the electorate office and those in the election campaign. It is such a privilege and a pleasure every day to work with such amazing people. I am still feeling sad to have recently lost some absolute superstars from the team. In no particular order, I want to thank: Clare Scrine, Emerald Moon, Abe O'Neill, Monika Correa, Clare Quinn, Steph Moss, Michelle Duncan, Hira Fatima, Sophie

Perissonotto and Hannah Wright. You are truly some of the best people I have ever known and had the pleasure of working with. I cannot tell you how much I value each of you as friends and as colleagues. I have felt consistently supported by each of you throughout the last term, both professionally and personally. It often feels like there is no end to what I have to learn in this role, and so far I have learnt virtually all of that from or alongside one of you.

It is telling to me how routinely someone out in the community will comment to me on how impressed they have been with one or another of my staff. It is absolutely true that we could not have done the work we have done for Maiwar residents without the extraordinary effort that you have all put in. From the bottom of my heart, thank you.

Last, but certainly not least, I want to thank my family for their love and support and for their endless tolerance of all this job requires of me and imposes on them. My parents, Jan and Craig, deserve special mention for being the warm, devoted Nanna and Grandpa that all our kids love so dearly. They have always been on call and willing to step in to help, which has meant the world to us, especially as our family grew with Juniper's arrival nearly two years ago now.

When I gave my first speech I was looking up at only two of my gorgeous kids in the gallery, Bonnie and Noah, and thanking them for tolerating such a busy dad and getting me out of bed every day—literally and figuratively. Since the arrival of their beautiful baby sister, Juniper, she has taken up the mantle of getting me out of bed in the literal sense. The littlest Berkman is an absolute delight. Juniper is one incredibly lucky little person to have such a doting brother and sister as you two, Bonnie and Noah. And Daile, my love: it has been a pretty wild ride at times over the last few years, and you have borne the brunt of me having this gig more than anyone else has, but you decided to marry me anyway—sucker. Thank you for your steadfast support. I love you with all I have.

My first term in this role was a challenging but eye-opening experience. Both in the local community and here in parliament I am so proud of what our movement has been able to achieve. From day one my team and I have set out to do the job of local MP differently. We wanted to put local voices and everyday people at the heart of everything we do. Instead of sitting back, focusing on incremental change or photo opportunities, while watching governments and council make poor decisions for our community, we actively mobilised residents to campaign and take action on the issues that were impacting their lives. We have proved that one does not need to be in government to serve one's community well and to deliver for them. In just three years we were able to successfully campaign and secure a commitment for a new school to address critical overcrowding issues that had left kids at Toowong, Ironside and Indooroopilly state schools scrambling to find classroom space and dividing up their lunch time to play on the ovals.

Alongside an enormous community campaign, we mobilised residents to fight against Brisbane City Council's proposal to privatise parts of Mount Coot-tha with an ill-conceived plan to build mega zip-lines down the mountain. Having a Greens MP in the community meant residents concerned about this project had an ally, and we were able to help thousands of residents make submissions, rally and write to decision-makers. In the end, after more than 18 months of campaigning, the pressure was too much and the council scrapped the idea altogether. That is one moment in the last few years that I will never, ever forget.

We led an enormous community campaign to return the ABC site to public hands and land a green bridge from Toowong to West End there—which council is now doing. We secured new bus routes for families struggling to get their kids to school on public transport and new pedestrian crossings to ensure everyone can get around safely.

We are still campaigning for accessibility at all of Maiwar's train stations, for better public transport and against useless road-widening projects. Over the next four years, we will continue to work towards making sure new development is sustainable and accompanied by necessary infrastructure like new parks and bikeways, and we will be working to ensure Maiwar's new school is in the best location and meets the needs of locals.

I have also been proud to represent my electorate, and the thousands of people across Queensland who want a better future for all of us, on big issues in this place when the major parties have refused to. After years of fighting to clean up politics, I introduced legislation to ban all corporate political donations in Queensland. I cannot say that I was at all surprised when both Labor and the LNP voted against this proposal to shut off a major funding stream for their campaigns. But we secured a ban on developer donations and caps on donations and electoral spending, and I have no doubt that my presence here and our stubborn refusal to shut up about the corrupting influence of big corporate money in politics pushed these reforms forward.

Similarly, I was proud when the provisions in my bill for improved justice for survivors of institutional child abuse, including access to redress for physical as well as sexual abuse, and scrapping the 'Ellis defence', were belatedly incorporated into the government's bill. At numerous points during my first term I was the only voice in parliament pushing back on the major parties' environmental destruction, pandering to conservative commentators and disgraceful infringements on civil liberties.

I was the only one voting against the internationally denounced anti-protest laws and mandatory sentencing for young children. I was the only MP opposing Adani, openly supporting the students striking for climate justice, pushing to treat drugs as a health, not a criminal, issue. At first I was the only one calling to fix the absolutely broken estimates process and make things in this place more transparent and democratic. Last year the LNP even started joining those calls.

Alongside the wins there is so much more to fight for. Day in and day out, my electorate office hears from those people who have been let down by the system—people struggling to make ends meet or for whom our social services and security net does not cater like newly arrived migrants or international students; or people with a disability struggling to navigate complex government bureaucracy; or renters afraid they will be kicked out of their home for no reason under our broken tenancy laws.

That is why we are not happy to settle for the status quo. It is why we took a plan to the election to fundamentally transform Queensland politics and improve the lives of ordinary people genuinely doing it tough—a plan to build 20,000 new public homes every year so we can actually make a dent in the government's 47,000-person strong social housing waiting list; a massive investment in publicly owned renewable energy to reach 100 per cent renewables by 2030; reviving public manufacturing by building green steel, solar panels and wind turbines here in Queensland—it is great to see the government picking up these ideas further down the line; abolishing public transport fares; meeting our SRS funding obligations so state schools have smaller class sizes, better resources and no fees; giving every single state school kid in Queensland the opportunity to have a healthy breakfast and lunch each day.

The government do not hate it because they think it is impossible; they hate it because they know it is possible if we get the big banks, developers and mining corporations to contribute a fair share. It may seem impossible to them—and it does because they cannot imagine putting the people of Queensland ahead of their big corporate donors—but that is our job, and it is what I will continue fighting for every day in this place.