




Speech By
Hon. Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Hon. YM D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (Minister for Health and Ambulance Services) (4.34 pm): I rise to make a contribution to the address-in-reply, moved by the member for Stafford. I am very proud of the fact that I am the last member to make a contribution to this debate and this will be the end of the address-in-reply. I am very pleased to make this contribution today.

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we gather, the Jagera and Turrbal people, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I want to acknowledge the past Governor and the new Governor for their oversight and important roles in our state. I wish our new Governor all the best in her role going forward.

I want to acknowledge the Speaker on his re-election as Speaker—he does a tremendous job—and acknowledge all of the members on the Speaker's panel.

Since 22 February 2014 I have had the absolute privilege to be given the opportunity to serve the people of Redcliffe in their house, the people's house, for another term. The 2020 election was the seventh election in which I have been a candidate since 2007. With every election, I am still learning. I am humbled by my community's support for me to represent them and their views and to advocate for positive change for our community. At last year's election the Palaszczuk government and I ran on a platform of positivity and growth, and I am proud that we are getting on with the job of delivering on our election commitments.

There are so many great things happening in and around the mighty Redcliffe electorate, but time does not allow me to list them all. However, some of the investments include a business case to undertake a multimillion dollar upgrade at Redcliffe Hospital, community consultation to design and shape the Scarborough Harbour now and into the future, a \$4 million investment to create a homelessness hub and support service in Redcliffe, and further investment in our local schools and NGOs. We also promised funding to upgrade the lights at the Dolphins' stadium. I am pleased that the Palaszczuk government's investment will help the mighty Dolphins as they continue to go from strength to strength and join the NRL. This, on top of our record investment in health, education and frontline services such as police, fire and ambulance right across Queensland, will also benefit the people of Redcliffe and the wider Moreton Bay region.

As we all know, we do not get to stand in this chamber without the support and dedication of our friends, family and supporters. I have faced many elections during my lifetime—as I say, seven since 2007—and I am amazed that on each occasion my supporters—Labor members, Labor life members and community members—have come out in droves to help me secure the faith of our community to represent them in this House. I would like to thank all of my hardworking and dedicated volunteers, community members, members of the Redcliffe ALP, Labor members and members of the union movement who have always come out and supported me and, in turn, the Palaszczuk government.

I could not do my job without my electorate staff. I want to thank my electorate staff, both current and past. In particular, I want to thank Jenny, Eddie, Olivia and Karl—and I want to congratulate Karl Winchester on going on to become a councillor in the Moreton Bay Regional Council—for all of their

support, guidance and dedication to not only their job but also the people of Redcliffe. I want to welcome Joelle to my electorate office since the election. While time does not permit me to read out each and every name—if I do, there is always a chance that I will miss someone—I have just two words to all my supporters: thank you.

I thank my community for a positive campaign and the many thousands of voters who supported the decisions and handling of COVID-19 by the Palaszczuk government at the election in Redcliffe. Many voiced their approval as they went in to vote. At pre-poll, a number of people stopped, turned and just said, 'Thank you. Thank you for keeping us safe.' We heard that over and over again.

While many in this chamber get up and acknowledge their opposing candidates and thank them for a fair contest, I unfortunately cannot do the same. For many elections the LNP candidate, Ms Dooley, has run against me as either a Family First or an LNP candidate. Unfortunately, on each occasion, her team and the LNP have become more desperate which has resulted in a more negative, personal and nasty campaign. While it is acceptable to put forward an alternative policy and call out the perceived faults in your opponent's policies, it is not acceptable to be personally nasty, borderline abusive and malicious against your opponent when talking and dealing with members of the community.

Put simply, Ms Dooley has a non-exclusive relationship with the truth. The recent election was the nastiest of them all—from the LNP putting out misleading and ill-informed material about me and the government to the LNP candidate spreading vicious mistruths and rumours about me. I have also been informed that the LNP candidate and the federal member bullied and intimidated local business owners simply for engaging with me and the government. This behaviour is utterly shameful and a reflection on the individuals but it is not surprising, because we saw this in 2014, 2015 and 2017. Now, with the federal member Luke Howarth coming out and referring to mandatory vaccinations as 'segregation', the behaviour continues.

We live in a democratic society. We all have an opportunity to run for parliament and put our ideas forward. I acknowledge the hard work and goodwill of every candidate who puts themselves forward, no matter what party they come from or whether they are independent. However, that does not give anyone a licence to do anything to win at all costs.

I am proud that my community put their faith in me and the Palaszczuk government to continue to provide more services, infrastructure and support to our community for another four years. It would be remiss of me if I did not spend some time speaking about my ministerial role in the previous term. When the Palaszczuk government came to office in 2015, I was appointed as the attorney-general and minister for justice. I had the opportunity in the first term to also be minister for training and skills. I served in the role of the attorney-general and minister for justice from the 2015 election up until the 2020 election.

As we know, being a minister in any government is a challenging role but one that you do not carry out alone. For many years, I have been surrounded by great advisers and staff. I acknowledge the member for Stafford and congratulate him on securing the support of his community to represent them in this place. It is no secret that the member for Stafford and I have a long connection. He was my first chief of staff, remained my chief of staff right to the end and is the longest serving—some may say 'veteran'—chief of staff. I know that he brings a wealth of public policy experience and enthusiasm for his community to this House.

While they are knocked around a bit, particularly by those opposite, our hardworking and dedicated public servants are truly remarkable. I take this opportunity to thank all of the staff in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General for their dedication, passion, wisdom—

Mrs Frecklington interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bush): Member for Nanango, I ask we get through this final address in reply without interjection. I also find what you said to be unparliamentary, and I ask you to withdraw.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I take personal offence and I ask that the speaker withdraw.

Honourable members interjected.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Nanango, I have asked you to withdraw what I find to be unparliamentary language.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Thank you.

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: I rise to a point of order. I found the member's statement personally offensive and I ask her to withdraw.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: The member for Redcliffe?

Mrs FRECKLINGTON: Apologies, yes, the member for Redcliffe.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, will you withdraw?

Mrs D'ATH: My comments were not in relation to any one individual. They were in relation to those opposite. My understanding is that if it is not addressed particularly to an individual they cannot take personal offence.

Madam DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member, I have sought clarification and you cannot take personal offence in relation to a group comment and remark.

Mrs D'ATH: I take this opportunity to thank all of the staff in the Department of Justice and Attorney-General for the dedication, passion, wisdom and advice they gave me and my office for over five years during my time as attorney-general and minister for justice. As the longest continuing serving attorney-general since World War II—most do not do two terms in a row; I wonder why!—I had the pleasure of working alongside some of the greatest public policy minds in our government to ensure Queenslanders have the laws and programs in place to protect and serve them. On a personal note, I thank the director-general, David Mackie, for his unwavering and strong leadership of the department for many years.

While time does not permit me to mention everyone by name, I take this opportunity to thank Leanne Robertson, an intellectual and policy powerhouse, and her team from SPLES; Jenny Lang, who oversees our courts; Victoria Thomson for Liquor, Gaming and Fair Trading; Corynne Scott, the CFO; Greg Cooper, Crown Solicitor; Peter Cook, head of Corporate Services; Carl Heaton, the head of DPP; all the heads of jurisdictions and members of the judiciary; heads of all of the statutory authorities; and many more. I give a special shout-out to the ECQ for running the local government elections just as COVID was hitting its stride and then a general state election during COVID-19. It was certainly a challenge but the ECQ rose to the occasion. Working with them all on behalf of the people of Queensland was truly a highlight of my career to date. On behalf of my staff and myself, I thank them for their support in discharging our important duties. I wish them all the very best, personally and professionally, for the years ahead.

I also acknowledge that since 2017 I have been the Leader of the House, and I want to acknowledge my staff for their support and particularly Darren Cann for his support. I thank the Speaker, the Clerk, the Speaker's panel and all of the staff here at parliament for the great work they do.

Turning to my current portfolio, health is the most human portfolio. Nowhere has that human dynamic been more evident than in the challenges COVID-19 has presented to our health system and the dislocation it has inflicted upon our way of life. I consider it an absolute privilege and honour to take on the role of health minister at this very challenging time. It has been widely acknowledged that Queensland has fared better than most jurisdictions around the world, and I would like to add my appreciation to that expressed by so many Queenslanders to the Premier and our former chief health officer, Dr Jeannette Young, now Her Excellency, for their firm and steady leadership throughout the pandemic.

That success, however, was only possible because of the commitment, diligence and professionalism of our frontline health staff and the patience, compliance and resilience of the Queensland people. I take the opportunity to once again express my gratitude for their contribution to all we have accomplished in the most recent trying two years. From the cape to Coolangatta, from Brisbane to Goondiwindi and from Townsville to Longreach, our frontline public health staff have done an amazing job each and every day to protect the people of Queensland. As Her Excellency Dr Young, now our Governor, has said, we could not have done it without them.

The pandemic has demonstrated what we can achieve when we work together in the face of a common threat. Multiple teams working in multiple labs across multiple countries have delivered multiple options in response to a challenge that just 18 months ago was thought to be impossible: viable effective vaccines against a coronavirus for the first time in human history. Our instinct for discovery, driven by the power of research, has pushed back the limits of our knowledge. The development and progressive rollout of the vaccination program has triggered hope that better days are just ahead, and Queenslanders are turning out in their droves to get vaccinated. I thank them. For those who have not, I put out a call again: time is running out. Please come forward today, roll up your sleeve and get vaccinated. Getting vaccinated will help protect you, your friends, your family and your community. I encourage all eligible Queenslanders to get vaccinated today.

COVID-19 has had an impact on both people and systems. I want to acknowledge my community and businesses. I acknowledge how hard it has been since the start of 2020 on our school students, on the parents doing homeschooling and on our teachers, who had to so rapidly adjust and modify their

teaching programs to ensure that our children did not fall behind in their learning. I acknowledge the cancellation of swimming carnivals, sports carnivals, school formals, graduations and other special events and celebrations.

Everyone thought that 2021 would be so different—and it has been, but not in the way we thought. We did not think of delta. We did not think the virus would become even more contagious, more infectious and a much greater risk; nor did we think it would find our children and spread so easily among our children and through schools. I want to acknowledge all of my local schools and say how amazing they were during that time, both last year and this year.

I want to thank our businesses and acknowledge the challenges and difficulties our businesses have had—those that had to close their doors, those that have not reopened and those that lost a lot of income and some staff. I know that the tourism industry was hit very hard. Tourism is such an important part of the Moreton Bay region. We know that tourism businesses have done it tough and I acknowledge their hard work. It was wonderful to see some of those businesses and their efforts recognised as nominees at the Tourism Awards the other night. They have done a tremendous job.

So many amazing festivals were cancelled as well as big events. It is not easy as the health minister to come into 1 William Street on a Saturday morning to get a briefing from the Chief Health Officer knowing that you are about to ask for a major lockdown—the biggest one we have had in the state—and know that it is also the start of one of the biggest festivals in your own community that had been cancelled last year but that had started the night before and had record numbers of people expected over what was a beautiful weather weekend. Not only did they shut down, and our announcement was that at six o'clock that afternoon we expected everything to be shut; the moment they heard that announcement at 10 o'clock in the morning, they heeded our advice which was, 'Please go home now,' and they just cleared everyone out at 10 o'clock and said, 'This is the advice of the Chief Health Officer and our government. We are going to listen. We want to keep everyone safe. Go.' I thank them for their efforts.

To everyone who has worked so hard, I thank all of the people who have got vaccinated already at Redcliffe. We have really good numbers. Our seniors have come out in droves—fantastic vaccination numbers—but we have not got the whole community over 90 per cent double dosed, and that is what I want to see to keep us as well as the rest of the state all safe. I want to acknowledge the work that we did when I was the attorney-general working with QPS, health and DPC setting up the enforcement and compliance unit. That has stood us in such good stead because that allowed us to ensure that we could support the thousands and thousands of people who have home quarantined since April last year but also ensure their compliance which made sure that we contained the virus and kept people safe and ended up with the amazing numbers that we have today.

To all of the hotel quarantine workers and the hotels, thank you. I thank the hotels that became our hotel quarantine sites. That is not easy. It is not good to have your name up in lights when there is a breach or an outbreak in the hotel. They have done such a tremendous job and we would not have been able to contain this virus without them. To all of the testing and pathology teams—the public and private pathology teams—thank you for what you are doing and continue to do. For those in the COVID wards and putting yourself on the front line, thanks is not enough and you are absolute heroes to all of us. To every health worker in preparing and being ready every single day for that positive case that could walk in your door no matter where you are in Queensland, I thank you. To the vaccination teams that are doing such a great job, I know we have asked so much of all of you and we are still wanting you to do those hard yards because you are part of making history in keeping our community safe.

It is an absolute privilege and honour to work with each and every one of you every day. I know we have our challenges. I know taking on this portfolio was not going to be easy. I know that we have a lot of pressures on our health system and that is only going to be exacerbated by the virus coming through our community, and it is going to be such a trying time. We think we have had it tough in the last two years. It is going to be a trying time to start living with a virus that we just have not had widely spreading through our communities.

I checked the numbers yesterday and Victoria has had over 86½ thousand positive cases since mid-July. It has overtaken the number of cases that New South Wales has had since that first case on 16 June. There have been over 167,000 positive cases collectively in New South Wales, the ACT, Victoria and New Zealand—all from that one person back on 16 June—so we know what can happen. We know the devastation that can happen to health workforces and I thank the health workforce for coming out and getting vaccinated because they understand that this is about keeping them safe, our patients safe and the community safe and making sure they are there to do their jobs when the time comes when this virus starts moving through our community.

Throughout this most challenging year the Premier has made it clear that the health and safety of the Queensland people is the top priority of her government—our government—and we are so proud of the decisions she made. This was not politically easy. It was difficult. It was hard and these decisions have kept a lot of people awake at night, but that was all so that we could keep the death rate and the positive cases as low as we possibly could, and we have achieved that so far. On 31 October last year Queenslanders reaffirmed their faith in the Premier's leadership and as we work to address the challenges that our health system continues to confront in the face of rising demand we reiterate the Premier's message to them: we will not let you down.

I have said this before, but Redcliffe is not just a collection of suburbs; it is truly a community—a community which we have seen support each other each and every day, particularly during COVID-19. I am truly thankful for all of our community members, our not-for-profit organisations and community organisations that have continued to work together to support each other during the past year. I thank everyone who comes up to me in the shopping centre, everywhere I go—sporting events, community events—just to say thank you and to ask me to pass on their thanks to the Chief Health Officer and ask me to pass thanks on to the Premier and saying, 'Thank you to your government for what you're doing. Stick with it. We know it's the right thing and we support you in doing it.' I am proud to be the member for Redcliffe and I will continue to work each and every day on behalf of the people of Redcliffe and all Queenslanders.