



Speech By  
**Samuel O'Connor**


**MEMBER FOR BONNEY**

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## ADJOURNMENT

### Bonney Electorate, Spinal Cord Research

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (6.20 pm): There is a real chance that paralysis, spinal cord injury, could be cured by research happening at Griffith University Gold Coast in my electorate of Bonney. I have visited the labs at the Clem Jones Centre for Neurobiology and Stem Cell Research a number of times, and tonight I want to acknowledge Professor James St John and Associate Professor Jenny Ekberg, who lead the team there. It is also being led by my good friend Dr Dinesh Palipana, who has a leading role in the clinical trial aspect of this. He is, of course, the first quadriplegic doctor in our state's history. He also is a qualified lawyer and medical researcher. There is not much he has not done. He clearly has a personal interest in making this succeed as well.

The way they are doing this is by using olfactory cells from the nose to repair the spinal cord. They use these cells, which are normally involved in your sense of smell, in a 3D printed nerve bridge. The cells help repair other parts of the nervous system by forming a glial bridge to hopefully restore neural connectivity. James says it is about helping people suffering from spinal cord injury to regain motor, sensory and autonomic function. It is all of the things that many of us take for granted. He says it is like breathing independently of a machine or regaining bladder and bowel function, or it could be the ability to regain function of a limb.

James was mentored by the recently passed Professor Alan Mackay-Sim, a giant of Griffith University who pioneered stem cell research and was the deserving recipient of Australian of the Year in 2017. He also had the most incredible moustache. The work that James and his team do every day is a testament to Professor Mackay-Sim. It is a fitting tribute to his legacy. I know that his decades of research will forever be remembered by what they achieve here.

I also had the great privilege of visiting Making Strides down in Burleigh. That is where the rehabilitation component of this trial comes to fruition, which is an essential part to help those cells make the connections they need. Over the weekend the main supporter of this trial, the Perry Cross Spinal Research Foundation, held their gala ball, and I was honoured to sit at the Griffith University table there. The event raised a massive \$480,000, which was matched by Nicola and Andrew Forrest, meaning we got nearly a million dollars towards this clinical trial in one night. I did my small part: I bought a bone. That is what I have on my jacket; it is my vertebra pin. It is very confusing. A lot of people have asked me what it is, but it is a cross-section of a vertebra. I have checked with the researchers that it is the right way up. Madam Deputy Speaker, \$3.5 million is the amount they need to get this trial underway to get 10 people taking part, and this is what the future of our city looks like. It is medical care, it is research and it is innovation. This will put us on the world map.