




Speech By  
**Christopher Whiting**

**MEMBER FOR BANCROFT**

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**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

 **Mr WHITING** (Bancroft—ALP) (4.48 pm): Speaker, talofa lava. I stand here today and once again pledge my loyalty to Queensland and her people and that is the most enduring and profound pledge that I can make, with due respect to the sovereign of Great Britain. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that I represent in this parliament, the members of the many First Nations that live in my electorate. I thank you for your careful custodianship of the land that we all share. I congratulate all new and returning members and the new Premier and his team. I particularly want to acknowledge all my colleagues in the state parliamentary Labor Party. I think it is rare to have such a large body of MPs who have more or less served contemporaneously. Many of us did come back here in 2015. We have all become a tight unit with tight bonds.

I am standing here in my ula fala, which I was humbled to be presented with by the Deception Bay Samoan community and the hands of Sitinata Hanamenn Hunt. I am very aware of the status that this signifies in fa'amatai, which is the Samoan way of governance. They are usually worn by tulafale, who are the orators at important events. They are made of segments of pandanus fruit and are painted red. I am wearing my ula fala because I want to start by talking about the values of my community and the values of the Samoan community.

One of the things that distinguishes our Samoan citizens is how their strong values guide every aspect of their lives. The main values that I have discovered or seen are these: respect for elders and women, especially mothers; kindness and caring; looking after the elderly; taking care of people who are in trouble, homeless or parentless; and faith. Samoan spiritual values are exemplified by their willingness to forgive and their practice of the principle of restorative justice. Forgiving is very important and, as Hanamenn said to me, this can be a very difficult thing to do. They value the raising of children. The communal raising of children is a central Samoan community value. Any child who misbehaves can be disciplined by one of the close members of the community, which is crucial to the Samoan way of life. Many Samoans see that as missing in our broader community.

The point I want to make is that those are not just Samoan values; they reflect the values of all in my community. I see those distinctive values at work in my community at all times. All you need to do is look and listen. I especially see those broader community values in our high schools. At speech nights I hear principals talking about them and the values of acceptance and tolerance. No matter who you are, where you come from or what your sexuality is, you are embraced and you are welcomed. You are included; you are not rejected. Diversity is embraced and is a strength of a community; it is never a weakness.

Secondly, I see the key values of collaboration and cooperation in our community corporations and organisations. A Samoan saying that demonstrates the importance of collaboration is—

*The member for Bancroft then spoke in a language other than English.*

**Mr WHITING:** That means, 'The more lanterns we have, the more fish we catch.' When Samoans fish at night, lanterns can make underwater visibility clearer and they attract fish. More lanterns means more fish are caught. The lesson is that with collaboration and cooperation, if we all bring our lanterns, we can catch what we need and we can achieve what we must. The third value is respect, and I will talk more on that later.

The fourth values are equality and equity. Equality means that we all have equal rights, liberties and opportunities. There are no class distinctions and there is no discrimination. It means that a kid from Deception Bay or North Lakes State College can get ahead in life. Equity means that you have access to the resources that you need to get ahead in life so that you can catch up with those who have favoured or fortunate lives. It is about putting everyone on a level playing field. Equity means there is not a favoured few who have risen and control all the decisions and the flow of resource to themselves or their people.

I talk about these Samoan and community values because they are the values I hold. They are the values that animate me in this position. They are the values behind the work I do and the work that I will do in holding this government to account. You can see those values in what Labor has achieved after nearly 10 years in government. If you believe in equity and equality then you believe in the importance of a government helping out people with the cost of living. Under Labor, Queenslanders were provided with the biggest cost-of-living relief package in the nation: \$1,000 off electricity bills, 50-cent fares, a 20 per cent discount on car registration, \$200 vouchers for kids sports, and free kindy, free TAFE and free apprenticeships. Our nation-leading cost-of-living relief package is a living exemplar of the values of equity and equality.

Those same values of equity and equality can be seen in our investment in creating a health system that looks after all Queenslanders, no matter who you are or where you live. Labor has always been the hospital builder in Queensland—the only one. We commenced the construction of three new hospitals, at Coomera, Bundaberg and Toowoomba. We started expanding 11 of our busiest hospitals in places such as Townsville, Mackay, Cairns, Hervey Bay, the Gold Coast and Brisbane. Our plan was to deliver more than 3,500 hospital beds for Queensland, and this was backed by a mammoth recruitment effort to add thousands more doctors, nurses, midwives, allied health workers, practitioners and paramedics to our health system. Our health plan showed respect for ordinary working Queenslanders, who deserve the best health care.

People can see that respect for ordinary working Queenslanders in the actions that we took on housing. We believe that every Queenslander deserves a safe place to call home, which is why our last budget delivered more than \$3 billion to build more homes to help renters and first home buyers and to deliver the social and affordable housing stock our state needs. More than \$1 billion in social and affordable housing projects were under construction or contracted to be delivered. More than 900 social and affordable homes have been completed since the member for Murrumba launched the Homes for Queenslanders plan. That is more than 1,100 homes currently under construction and more than 2,200 social and affordable homes contracted to be delivered.

On our side, we think respect in politics is crucial. An example of that is listening to Queenslanders and letting them tell their stories, including First Nations people. It is a respectful act to listen. It is respectful to take the time to hear someone's story. It is disrespectful to not meet and to not listen. It is disrespectful to commit to the truth and to listening but then to back away. I know that the LNP have listened to many Queenslanders, especially victims, so let me put this into language that the LNP can understand: listen to those Queenslanders who have been subjected to criminal acts, who had their wages stolen and who were subjected to the most horrific and degrading abuse in institutions. Let them have the opportunity to be heard, which is an opportunity that those opposite have extended to other Queenslanders. Let me be clear: I do not see our First Nations people as passive victims. They fought, they negotiated and they never ceded sovereignty of this land.

**Mr STEVENS:** Mr Deputy Speaker, I rise to a point of order. The member is anticipating debate of a bill before the House.

**Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER** (Mr Krause): Thank you, member for Mermaid Beach. I will take some advice. Member for Bancroft, it is my view that you are beginning to anticipate debate on a bill before the House on two fronts. I would caution you to please not do that.

**Mr WHITING:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. I had just finished that bit anyway.

The values of my community are at the core of our efforts to confront and resolve the most intractable and difficult of social issues and crises. For example, you will not solve the problem of youth crime if you are a community that sees those kids as someone else's kids. The Samoan value that we

all have a responsibility for raising children is reflected in our approach locally to youth justice. We do not say, 'These are not our kids. Government, come in and solve this problem. Take it away.' In Deception Bay we see them as our kids, not as outsiders. They belong to us. It is not for someone else to fix.

The Deception Bay doctrine contains this. We need wraparound, long-term solutions that respect the community and give the community agency to resolve them. People in my community already know how to fix this and, in fact, the solutions are already there. We have been doing it for over 20 years. I say to the LNP: forget the sloganeering; just fund the solutions that we are already doing.

The LNP have largely focused on one issue—youth crime—and have put forward a proposal to solve it or fix it but our local programs are already in place and they are working. They are not the programs that focus on the retribution and punishment end of action after a serious crime has been committed. They are the long-term programs that address the root causes of economic and social dislocation. They are the wraparound services that are provided by the community in partnership with government.

I will list some of these programs. Skilling Queenslanders for Work—this is the gold standard intervention and diversion program in all of Queensland. It trains people. It puts them into work. It changes the lives of whole families and has put thousands of people on the right path. In my electorate alone, it has delivered 80 community-driven projects, trained 3,300 people and put 2,200 people into work. Most people who have gone into these programs have been referred by other community organisations when they have reached out for help on other issues. If the government wants to invest in gold standard intervention programs, it must keep funding Skilling Queenslanders for Work at the current level.

They should also invest in programs like the Glugor House program in Deception Bay. This is the earliest intervention program of all—young mothers and their children are supported at yourtown, and that is when true prevention starts. Younity, a corporation in my area, runs three programs in the diversion and intervention space. There is YAMBI, funded by Youth Justice, which has been run successfully by Younity for many years and includes intense engagement and case management for young people who have already been in contact perhaps with the youth justice system. It rebuilds their relationships with their family and the community.

There is the Push! program which puts these young people into a bicycle workshop. Young people, diverted from offending, get their own bike to repair or build and they do it with mentors. It is a really successful program but it has no funding. Schools are constantly referring students to it and a lot of First Nations people have done that program. Younity finds the money to do this program somehow.

Younity also has an Indigenous Pathways program funded by the Ganbina Foundation from Victoria—no government funding, once again. They do case management in schools where young people are mentored by First Nations role models. It is a three-year commitment for each student and there is a bursary involved.

In North Lakes, the YMCA runs the Queensland Youth Partnership Initiative. It is a diversionary program that runs on a Thursday night with the support of Westfield, QPS and local community partners. Once again, that initiative helps divert young people away from the justice system.

These are just some of the programs that already exist that protect and divert. We have a strong values foundation in my community and those values are the basis for many successful programs run by the communities. I say to the government: sloganeer all you want but the gold standard programs are already there. Fund them; do not cut them.

I want to finish by paying tribute to all those people who have joined me on the Labor campaign in Bancroft. Like all of our volunteers, they did it with good grace, with humour and from a basis of serious determination. They were led by Jenelle Head, our campaign manager, and there are so many—too many to name—and I do thank you all from the bottom of my heart. They believed and they acted.

I do want to pay special tribute to Jenny Foster. I first came across her when I was doorknocking for my first election campaign for council in 2000 and I made a note that the lady with the stone driveway in Claverton Drive was a supporter. This was our eighth election together and it is true that I could not have done it without her.

Of course, I want to send my biggest thank you to my family. Sian is an extraordinary woman, accepting all the drawbacks, disappointments and absences that come with a political life and she has done that with incredible grace. I am so proud that she now gets to start a new career as a teacher.

Now it is her turn to follow her dream. My children have only ever known a political life. Guy was literally a babe in arms in 2012 when I announced I was going to run for mayor in Moreton Bay, which I will point out as an aside is the only election of those eight I have ever lost. I also thank my campaign manager, the member for Morayfield—

**Mr Ryan:** It wasn't my fault!

**Mr WHITING:** No, it was not his fault; it was mine. Guy is now as tall as I am, as typical as a 14-year-old as one would expect.

**An opposition member:** And a hockey player.

**Mr WHITING:** Yes, we all love hockey in my family. I am now starting to see some real thoughtfulness and depth to his character and I am starting to glimpse the man that I hope he can become. Rebecca starts high school next year. She has started on make-up and sassiness far too early for my liking but I secretly admire her way with words. She cannot be beaten in an argument. She is relentless and she has the ability to make a sharp point in just a few words. Maybe politics will be her calling. Arabella was the first of our caucus babies from 2015 and she is a free spirit. We tell her she is our woodland sprite and she embraces that carefree identity with a beatific smile that makes my heart sing.

A big thank you to the other side of our three-sided rock—my sisters, Jillian and Elizabeth. I have spoken of them in my addresses-in-reply many times before. To my mother, Margaret, who stood on a booth with me again—she is 83 and needs a walker; she was behind me every single time—I thank you.

I want to quickly finish by thanking my electorate staff: Jenelle, Nicolina Wroblewski, Huxley Vavrosky, Lachie May and the volunteers, as I have said. There are so many of them there but I want to point out people like Marx Smith, Colin, Jennifer Whitlock and Vern Feeney. There are far too many. I should not have really started on that.

I have talked about values today. I started talking about the Samoan values and moved into talking about community values and Labor values. All of those are reflected in what I do every day. All of those are included in what we do here in Labor and we will exercise those values as we continue to hold this government to account. I thank you.