




Speech By
Julianne Gilbert

MEMBER FOR MACKAY

Record of Proceedings, 12 September 2024

VALEDICTORY

 **Mrs GILBERT** (Mackay—ALP) (5.52 pm): I would like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which parliament meets. I also pay my respects to the Yuwi people—the traditional owners of the land of the Mackay electorate. The Mackay region is a beautiful place because of the Yuwi's many generations of custodianship of our land, water and sky that we all now share.

Back in 2015, Mackay was doing it tough. We had high unemployment, a downturn in the economy, and businesses in the city centre and the industrial centre at Paget were closing. People left our city in droves, leaving behind many empty houses. We had suffered badly from the cuts of the Newman years.

In my first speech I gave a commitment to the Mackay electorate to work for the entire region, with tireless effort and steadfast determination for the betterment of Mackay, and to continue to build on Labor's proud legacy to improve opportunities for the people of Mackay. Thank you, Mackay, for putting your trust in me for the last three terms of parliament. It has been an honour to serve you.

During these lean years, we started a campaign to let people know that we were open for business and ready for visitors. This campaign was started because we do not lay down when the going gets tough. The campaign was #Mackaypride. It was with great Mackay pride that I became the fifth state member for the seat of Mackay.

Winning elections can only happen with the support of many family, friends, branch members and volunteers. There are too many volunteers to name and I do not want to leave anyone out because that will get me into trouble. My sincere thanks and gratitude go out to each and every one of you.

My husband, Frank, stepped up to be my campaign manager for my three elections. He walked the journey with me in between elections, supporting me all the way. Thank you, Frank. Being a parent is one of life's true blessings. My daughter, Catherine, and my son-in-law, Ian, along with my stepsons, David and Edward, make life worthwhile. The joy only doubles and triples when you become a grandparent—Kia, Kieone and Sienna. They also jump on the campaign trail with gusto. It is always good to get a young person's perspective.

My parents, Bev and Jim, worked tirelessly at campaign time. Mum loved hitting the phones and having those persuasion conversations—the poor people at the other end. She also loved being down at pre-poll. Dad each election got out his trusty trailer, and he had a Jim-designed frame that he attached election signs to. He spent many hours driving around Mackay ensuring everyone had seen his trailer. When he talked about what he had been up to some days, I am sure I lost a few votes along the way. It was all done with such pride and support for me. Sadly, our hearts broke when Dad lost his battle with cancer in January last year. He is a big loss to my family and also the ALP campaign family. Thanks, Dad: your trailer might come out for a run for Belinda's campaign this year.

I have a big family. Thanks to my sisters, Michele, Susan and Caroline, and my brothers, James and Anthony, their partners and their kids—I will not name them all because we will be here all night—who have stood on booths and letterboxed. Thank you to my wonderful family. As others have said, I do not know how you can campaign without a family behind you.

The Labor Party is built on the back of the union movement. I am proud to be a unionist and standing up for workers. Thank you to my former colleagues at the QTU and the team at UWU. I am a member of both unions. Our unions work tirelessly for fair and safe workplaces. When workers negotiate collectively they get the best working conditions.

Our frontline workers are our community heroes—our teachers, health workers, paramedics, police, firefighters and public servants. Thank you to their registered unions for looking after their professions and conditions. Thank you to the team at party office. You are all legends, led by Kate and Zac.

No member of parliament can do their job effectively without good staff. Thank you to Suzanne, who has been with me since 2015; Kerry, who worked for Tim and stayed with me until I was fully set up; and also along the way Rainee, Vicky, Jane, Casey—who is here tonight—Phil, Emily and Evan. You have all brought your own valued talents and personalities to the office and shared the ups and downs.

Together we saw some challenges. You helped me support our community through Cyclone Debbie and the long haul through COVID. Every time I drive past Queens Park and see the playground and barbecue areas packed, I smile with pride, because our Labor government funded and rebuilt the historic park after Cyclone Debbie. We did not just fund the replacement; we made sure that the council built it bigger and better, with modern infrastructure. It is now a true community space, making happy memories for my community.

The response to COVID by our Labor government kept my community alive and growing. There were immense personal difficulties for people and some businesses but, at the same time, strong leadership from then premier Anastacia Palaszczuk and then health ministers Steven Miles and Yvette D'Ath and the supportive cabinet meant our sugar industry did not miss a crushing season. Our mines and engineering sector kept their doors opened. Money flowed through our community. Mackay would have been one of the few places in the world advertising for apprentices at the peak of the pandemic. It was a tough time for the whole world, but we are alive to tell the stories.

Since 2015, Mackay has gone from strength to strength through the strong economic policies of our Labor government under two strong premiers—Palaszczuk and Miles—and their cabinet ministers and also the best backbenchers in political history. My first campaign for the seat of Mackay was only three weeks long due to the retirement of Tim. I campaigned for the replacement of the Vines Creek Bridges in my first election and I was proud to have them funded in the very first Palaszczuk government budget—and thank you to you, Mr Speaker, because you were the treasurer at the time. Over \$1.4 billion of other roadworks quickly rolled out soon after the bridges were complete: the Mackay Ring Road and approaches, with stage 2 in the planning phase; the Walkerston bypass; plus kilometres of overtaking lanes to the north and south of Mackay on the Bruce Highway.

As the member for Ipswich West would attest, our showgrounds and equestrian centre are the envy of regional shows across Queensland because Labor rebuilt them. Our local Port of Mackay has continued to have wharves upgraded and now we host the largest cargo ships in the world to our port.

I was able to secure a rescue package for Mackay Sugar so the board could do some major repairs to their facilities to attract an investor. Nordzucker, as a new shareholder in Mackay Sugar, is going from strength to strength. Our sugar industry has been the backbone of our economy and will continue to be so into the future.

For those of you over there who are green energy deniers, a third of the electricity needed for our city has been generated from the cogeneration plant at Racecourse, fuelled by the by-product of the sugarcane harvest, for years. Green energy is not new. It is not scary. So relax—nothing strange happens when we turn the lights on!

Our Labor government has supported the sugar industry to diversify through our innovation grants—pilot plants developing biofuels for aviation, marine diesel from bagasse and biofoods through precision fermentation of sugar to make protein. The future of the cane industry is bright.

A local family, the Townsends—Graham, Gary and Ryan—are true pioneers for the future of our cane industry. They are researching a range of products that can be processed from sugar cane. Biodegradable packaging, plastics and building materials are only a few. I wish them all the success for

their research and development, and the realisation of production of product into the market. I would like to thank Professor Ian O'Hara for his many years of research and determination to see the diversification of the cane industry. He is a champion of the industry.

These new industries will need industrial land to establish their factories, because they all want to come to Mackay. We are developing two new industrial sites, at Racecourse and Rosella. Thank you, Minister Grace, for your leadership in getting these sites up and running.

Mackay is a service centre for the Bowen Basin coalmines. Our engineering workshops are buzzing with innovation and determination to be the best. Mining is an important part of our economy and future. One of my 2017 election commitments was funding for the Resources Centre of Excellence. The centre will ensure we are leaders of best practice for training and research in the mining industry. The centre has been so successful under the management of Steven Boxall that we have committed to funding for stage 2 in Mackay and stage 3 in Moranbah.

There was a lot of work to do for our mining communities and workers when we came into government in 2015. For me, this work is personal. It is my family, friends and locals who work in the industry. I am proud of the work that we did on the black lung inquiry. We are saving lives.

We have protected our communities with the Strong and Sustainable Resource Communities Act. We employ locals first. Our industrial manslaughter laws now cover the mining industry and were recently pressed into place with the first charges being laid on a company after the death of a miner. We need to keep all workers safe. I thank the MEU for their advocacy for workers.

The township of Glenden has been saved from demolition. It was the great work of the then mayor, Anne Baker, and her community to get legislation into parliament to save those homes.

Ms Pease: And Scott Stewart.

Mrs GILBERT: And Scott, sorry. He is a legend as well. Thank you, Scott. We have also brought in legislation to make sure that after mining the mine pits are rehabilitated. This is also growing new local jobs.

In Mackay we love our outdoor activities. The Great Barrier Reef Arena brings big cricket matches, AFLW games and entertainment to our first-class professional facility. When you see this arena on television, you see that the Mackay arena is pitch perfect. We have lots of small clubs like City Brothers Football Club, which has been funded to extend their clubhouse. There have been so many lighting upgrades across so many sporting grounds that it is just like the stars are shining. We have resurfaced and doubled the netball courts to 16 for the Mackay Netball Association. We have also funded first-aid certificates for parent volunteers. The BMX track has also been resurfaced. These are only some of our grassroots clubs that have had upgrades. Thank you to all of the parents for being there for your kids and for being the cheer squads. A lot of families in my community are taking up the FairPlay vouchers.

Some Mackayites like to get out on the water. The new boat ramp at Slade Point is a great hit. Thank you to the ministers for the floating pontoon safety upgrades to make sure it is safe for our boaties to get out and wet a line.

Our young people are the future of our communities. We have been supporting them through programs so they are able to make the best education and career choices and to look after their health. Project Booyah, Transition 2 Success and our youth co-responder programs are all kicking goals. We have our very own special assistance school Kutta Mulla Gorinna. I thank our ministers for helping to support this school. This school is under the leadership of Justin Gibley, and he is shaping the lives of disengaged students, getting them back into education and training. Mackay is a great place.

I wish everyone on both sides of the House all the best for your future lives. Thank you to the parliament staff for your service. I am so proud and honoured to be the fifth member for Mackay following William Forgan Smith, Fred Graham, Edmund Casey and my good friend Tim Mulherin. The Palaszczuk and Miles governments have helped me to build a Mackay community that is resilient, robust dynamic and diverse. The future of Mackay is built on a solid Labor-built foundation of persistence, passion and pride—#Mackaypride.