




Speech By
Russell Field

MEMBER FOR CAPALABA

Record of Proceedings, 10 December 2024

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr FIELD** (Capalaba—LNP) (12.19 pm): I dedicate this first speech to the memory of Balin Stewart, Keyhill Gibbs, Bradley Smith, Michael Warburton, Emma Lovell, David Connolly, Scott Cabrie, Robert Brown, Kelsie Davies, Michale Chandler, Sheree Robertson, Vyleen White, Rosemary Franzidis, my beloved son Matthew Field, his loved partner Kate Leadbetter and their treasured unborn baby, my grandson, Miles. With respect to Miles, I would like this House to know that, despite an autopsy, a death certificate and a funeral, the Queensland justice system did not recognise his life or his death. He was not classified as a statistic on that day. We know that he was, and he needs to be acknowledged. For all those deaths since Australia Day 2021, juveniles have been either convicted or charged. I acknowledge that there are many more victims, including others before that dreadful day, and I dedicate this speech to them also.

Some members are elected to the Assembly not knowing what they believe or who they will fight for. Some discover that on their journey here and others never quite do, but I stand here knowing what I stand for and knowing what I believe. I stand with victims. I believe in justice. I am here, in this body of lawmakers, because lawlessness can never be accepted as the norm. It is what I feel in the depth of my bones. To the names I have spoken I dedicate not just today but every day I sit in this chamber. Politics is not a game to me; it is real life. I know that the consequences of what we decide, of what we do, really matter. As I have found in my life before parliament, sometimes what matters much to citizens is also what governments choose to ignore, play down, let fester or turn a blind eye to.

I am the most unlikely member of parliament to have ever sat in this chamber. I am 69 years of age. Until recently I owned just one suit, which I dusted off for weddings and which shrunk before every event. My most recent occupation was 'retired', and I was pretty good at that. I am a typical Aussie grandad who thinks the best thing in the world is spending time with his grandkids. We talk footy and they tell me about their teachers and adventures. They teach me about Taylor Swift and the Kid Laroi and I learn their lingo, too. A day off school? Well, that is 'slay'. See, kids, I knew I could put that into a speech!

If you approached me on my 65th birthday and offered me the choice of a Powerball ticket or the odds on becoming a member of parliament I would have picked the Powerball ticket, because there was more chance of that happening. But life took a turn—a turn that most Queenslanders now know. When my life turned, I remember the example of my mum and dad who, when facing adversity, simply sought to make the best of the cards that fate had played. This is an approach that seeks to make a better life for others, even when it hurts. On good days, bad days and terrible days, that is what my wife, Ann, and I have tried to do. To prevent crime and lawlessness, to deliver justice, to keep our community safe and strong and to make life better for others—that is why I am here.

Today I want to speak of three things: the party I belong to; the community I serve; and the family I love. I am but one of 24 new members of parliament across the political divide. I have gotten to know them in recent weeks and they are all extraordinary people with broad life experiences. Almost all are

LNP. I believe that one of the reasons we were so successful and why the people of Queensland voted for the Crisafulli LNP government at the last election is that the then opposition leader, David, sought out people with experiences that matter: police officers, nurses, teachers, councillors, small business owners, farmers and someone like me.

The Premier knows that you make the best decisions when you are close to the community. Connection to community, to people's real-life experience, matters. You know what is happening with the kids in school; teenagers and young adults in TAFE; those travelling in utes or in buses to work; those visiting loved ones in hospital; and those paying bills that only seem to get bigger. I know that matters to the Premier because he is a genuine, caring and compassionate man. He is a man of his word who wants to change Queensland for the better. He is my boss, but he is also a friend. He is more than a boss and a friend; he is a leader, and he leads by example. He supported us—me, my family and Kate's family—from the very beginning of this stage of our lives, and I want to thank him. Fifty years ago I did a four-year apprenticeship—hard times, great times, mates for life. This is my second apprenticeship, and I want the Premier to know that I will work hard—put my head down and bum up—and master this trade as well.

Karen Williams, the former Redlands mayor, and Katerina Carroll, the former police commissioner, also supported us from day one, and they have been steady rocks of support. They are two people who have served their community. They know it and have delivered for it.

I was not a candidate for long—we had only eight weeks to make a difference—and the local LNP membership embraced me from day one. Winning Capalaba was a team effort, a massive volunteer effort. Seeing all those volunteers throughout the campaign and on election day was very humbling—people freely giving their time, putting their trust in me. There are too many to name, but without my current campaign manager and team I would not be here. I want to give a special thanks to those guys: Robin Archer, Gary Hindle, Bob Neich, Jack Barton and Peter Linde. We share some of those old-fashioned but timeless values: mutual respect, hard work, reward for effort, giving back and being able to raise a family in a safe community, believing that Australia—actually Queensland—is the best place on earth, and it is. On that we all agree.

I know that most are familiar with the former member for Capalaba's comment on youth crime, and it was a reaction that inspired me to stand to run, but if I left the story there that would be unfair to him. He and I disagreed on the direction for Queensland, but I learned in that campaign and in the handover that he is sort of a decent man. I wish him and his family well for the future.

There are many things you learn in a campaign, and I discovered that through meeting locals at their front door. Often I would knock at the door, hear a dog barking and see the door behind the screen open. People would squint their eyes and say, 'I know you,' and I would say, 'What, Australia's most wanted?' That would break the ice. I said that because I was in the media so often advocating for victims of crime. The media do not often get a good rap, but they have treated me fairly and kindly and I thank them. At one house, a lady came running down the hallway when she saw me knocking on the door. She pushed her screen door open and gave me a hug. She was in tears. The memory of our family's tragedy never left her. This happened two more times, except those ladies asked if they could hug me first. Funnily enough, I knew I had this effect on women 50 years ago, but it just goes to show I have not lost it! More seriously, in those conversations on porches people told me what mattered to them. Yes, they wanted justice for victims past and present—and I thank the community for their support of this priority; it is a shared priority—but they also want to see better infrastructure throughout Capalaba, better transport services, more social housing, more policing and health services that can appropriately support our growing community.

Capalaba is the best of Queensland. Our Redlands region was known for its farms. As our population grew, the farms made way for family homes with a backyard, homes filled with aspirational families working to build a good life. It is a community filled with small businesses that employ locals. I know it is not easy for small businesses. We must deliver ways of cutting red tape, reducing their taxes and making it easier for them to invest and employ more people to help strengthen the local economy. I know as a former builder that small businesses are not only the engine room of the economy; they embody the heart and soul of their communities, too.

We will also deliver in the area where people know I have the most passion, youth justice, as well as getting our schools and community services working better so fewer people take the wrong path. Many of these kids will benefit from early intervention programs. Unfortunately, some may not. Those who commit crimes must face them squarely—with punishment but also with gold standard rehabilitative programs, using the time behind bars to face their conscience and in turn make better choices.

I want victims in the justice system to be valued, to be consulted and to be listened to. All too often our justice system knows how to clear the wreckage and the debris from the site of a crime but it does not know what to do with the victims and their families. We feel as if we are the wreckage discarded at the side of the road. This must stop. I want perpetrators of crime to understand the pain they have caused. If they did so, it might just prompt them to change. If judges understood the importance of justice to healing, they would deliver more appropriate sentences. Too many victims lose their joy and happiness when they lose their loved one. They lose faith in Australia and their hope for the future when the system ignores their cries for fairness and justice.

To the people of Capalaba, I want you to know I am about justice and justice in all its forms. If your bank is giving you a hard time, I am for you. If the council is not listening, I am on your side. If your loved one is not getting the care they need, I will stand with you. We will make Queensland a greater place by making it fairer for everyone.

Now I want to speak of my family. I am going to do my best to not get too emotional. I am a sentimental old guy. I wear my heart on my sleeve. I realise as I get older what wonderful parents I had. Dad's name was Roy Field and Mum's was Violet—Violet, not 'violent'! Dad was a large, solid, typical policeman and was in the force for over 37 years before retiring at Woolloongabba in 1971 as a detective inspector. He would be amazed today, but then again, maybe not. He spent his life keeping people safe, putting himself in situations that were difficult. He believed in policing as do I. To the police in Capalaba and around the state I want to say one thing: I have got your back and I thank you for supporting our families. I know what you do, the sacrifices you make and I respect it so much.

At 69, I am still a copper's kid. We grew up all over the place, spending time across parts of Queensland as far back as I can remember. Dad was stationed in Rockhampton, Cairns, Townsville and Longreach and finally ended up in Brisbane at the end of 1967. Mum supported Dad every bit of the way. I know life was difficult for Mum, moving house every couple of years. Once she had gotten to know the locals, it was time to move again. She enjoyed cooking, as mothers did in the day. We all gave it a go when we could. I have an older sister, one older brother and one younger brother. We were scattered all around Queensland at times, but we are all back in Brisbane now. Coral, Hume and Grant have always been wonderful supporters of mine.

The biggest moment in my life occurred in October 1976. I went on a footy trip, an end-of-season cruise with all my mates around the South Pacific. Yes, I was a bit of a lad then. On that cruise I met Ann. Ann was with her mum who was somewhat suspicious of the footy lad who had taken a liking to her daughter. It took a few months, but I won her over, too. Kit was a wonderful mother-in-law and Charles as a father-in-law. We were married in 1980 on 15 March. For those who know Shakespeare, there is a turn of phrase relating to the assassination of Julius Caesar, 'Beware the ides of March'. I have to confess I did not 'beware them' and I am so grateful for the wonderful life Ann and I have built together. We are each other's rock.

We have now been married for over 44 years. We have raised three wonderful children: Andrew, Matthew and Kimberley. We are an Aussie Rules family. Andrew and Matthew played Aussie Rules for years and Kimberley played for a couple of seasons when she was younger. At one point, our weekends were spent balancing three different kids in three different football teams—chaotic and wonderful. Ann was always involved in the canteen at the footy club or the school tuckshop. I would run boundary at whatever ground the boys were playing at. As well as football, Kimberley took up dancing, but Matthew and Andrew were always AFL players. Andrew did go on to play a couple of years of Rugby League but realised he was going to get hurt if he did not stop.

Our Easters were spent camping; we would go away with all our friends and families. In some years the numbers would be between 70 and 80. During those times, there were no portable fridges, solar panels or even batteries. It was all campfires. Now we are proud grandparents and I want to give all our grandchildren a shout-out. There are Olivia, Molly and Duke, Andrew and Nicole's children. Olivia and Molly do dance most days. I say this as someone not biased: Olivia and Molly are beautiful dancers and I always enjoy watching them. Duke loves soccer and bike riding. He is a dynamo and my little mate. He looks spiffy in his soccer gear. There are also Jasper and Vann, who are the children of our beautiful daughter, Kimberley, and her wonderful husband, Alex. Jasper starts preschool next year and Vann is still at kindy three days a week. They play soccer on Mondays, go swimming every Friday and like bike riding as well.

I know the grandkids groan at my bad dad and grandad jokes, but I know they love coming around to Papa and Granna's place. The girls like sewing with Ann and cooking and making a mess. Duke, Jasper and Vann all like playing on their bikes, running around the yard, kicking the ball and making noise. Can I let you in on a secret? We love having them around more than you can imagine. The joy,

the innocence, the hope—it is like an elixir for Ann and me. Kids, it is your love and your parents that keep us going. The lesson for life, when you might look at this speech years from now, is that in tough times it is family that keeps you going.

Now I come to the hard part: talking about the four members of the family who are not in the gallery but who are in our hearts. Queen Elizabeth was right when she said that grief is the price we pay for love. We lost our eldest son, Andrew, this year to brain cancer. Diagnosed and operated on in May last year, he passed away in June 2024. Andrew was a mighty man. He was an electrician in the commercial sector. We would sit down, have a beer and talk about work, play and everything in general. He was a hard worker and a good family man. He was a strong, superfit lifesaver. The Point Lookout Surf Life Saving Club only recently competed in the 2024 world lifesaving championships. They dedicated their efforts to him with a T-shirt that read 'Racing for Ratty'. 'Ratty' was his nickname. He would be so chuffed. Olivia, Molly and Duke, your father was a great man.

As members know, we lost Matthew, Kate and Miles on Australia Day nearly four years ago in very different circumstances—a terrible crime committed by an out-of-control, selfish juvenile. We did not just lose them; Kate's parents did too. Kate's parents, Jeannie and John, and their spouses will always be part of our family. If any members in this chamber had met Matthew they would have liked him. Matthew was working in the domestic housing market and employed apprentices to pass on his knowledge. Together with Kate, he was in the process of renovating their home. Kate was an interior designer and decorator, so it all went hand in hand. They had completed all the upstairs, and the nursery was all decked out ready for Miles. What a wonderful job they had done. Matthew was besotted with Kate. They were the perfect match for each other. They were so looking forward to welcoming Miles. None of us ever met Miles, but he lives in my heart and Ann's too. I can see him in my mind's eye. He sustains me, and we will meet one day.

There is sadness and there is grief, but there is love too. I have been carried by that love in my family, by the strangers I have met and by the people across the community and politics and Queenslanders who have shared their kindness and support with me. My job is to leave a legacy for Matt, Kate and Miles and, in a different way, Andrew. My job is not to let them down and I will do my best not to let the good people of Capalaba down either, and I promise you that.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr McDonald): Congratulations to the new member for Capalaba. I extend my sympathies and thoughts on the tragedies that have motivated you to be in this place.