




Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (4.25 pm): I thank the Speaker very much for the opportunity to attend today and give my address-in-reply speech. In previous years, my address-in-reply speeches have been very considered, written out and read word for word; however, in my third term I have come to the startling realisation that no-one is actually listening too much to what we are saying in here. The reality is that it is all about what we do outside rather than inside this place.

Saying that the last term was a bit of a roller-coaster would be a bit of an understatement. I thank the House for its indulgence of my leave arrangements to date, and I take this opportunity to thank all of my colleagues and those around me whose support has been invaluable in the last six months. As I said, the last term for me was a bit of a roller-coaster in terms of life throwing many things at me that I had very little control over, resulting in having to take leave for the last six months. I now have the opportunity to start my full return to work program.

Members may be aware that in June last year I was diagnosed with a brain tumour. It caused a certain level of anxiety, one could say—not that we had much on last year! I had regular scans to check on how the brain tumour was going. On a quiet Monday in October last year, as our Octobers were generally fairly low key, I was told that the tumour was growing at a rate that would require surgery. I did advise my surgeon that I had some things to do that I wanted to finish. With his approval, I was able to delay surgery until earlier this year. Firstly, I had a job to do and, secondly, I wanted to spend my Christmas holidays with my kids rather than being laid up in hospital.

I successfully had the surgery earlier this year, and the most recent scans are very positive. I am now at a point in the process where I have to have annual scans to make sure the tumour does not come back. I am extremely lucky and fortunate, apparently, as my surgeon told me that the tumour I had was not cancerous so it was not going to spread and that many people do live entire full lives without even knowing they have the presence of this particular meningioma. However, the growth necessitated surgery. As someone who has always played sport and been very active, where the meningioma was located was right at the back where my cerebellum is, and that is where you get your movement, balance and coordination. That might explain some of those bouts of vertigo I had last term. With the thought of not being able to have that full and enriching engagement and being there for my kids to drive and to do all of those kinds of things, I opted to go for the surgery. The surgeon said I was lucky in terms of where it was located in that I would potentially have issues returning with balance and movement but that my cognitive functions would not be overly impacted, much to my children's distress.

I stood here in my first term giving that very considered first speech that we do. Every single word is considered because you think it is going to be transcribed somewhere and reflected on. I thought my 2017 campaign was going to be hard. I had a newborn and people said, 'That's going to be very difficult.' In my first speech I did reflect that when I welcomed her into my family I said, 'From here on, life is going to be a bit of a roller-coaster with this job.' I also said that we were experienced roller-coaster riders. I did not put that out to the universe as a dare to see what else it could throw at me!

I would certainly like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my family and my close supporters in terms of what it takes to get through some of the things that life does throw at you and the support that you need to have around you. Last term, I was going through some mental health issues, going through a divorce and then, 'Here's a brain tumour,' on top of it. Sometimes it can get a little bit too much. Your cup can sometimes be full and it can overflow, and then people give you more cups.

My family has been a source of strength for me—my three young kids. To my eldest, Luka, who at 15 years old is an absolute force of nature whether it be debating, public speaking or the whole works. Nothing has ever been or will ever be outside her grasp—in the way and with the passion that she takes on things, even if all of her feedback in both debating and public speaking is that she is the most non-conformist public speaker they have ever heard—nothing to do with me!

To my boy, Ronan, who many of you here in the House will be familiar with Ronan's exploits over the last six or seven years. I was absolutely proud to accompany him during the last sitting week when his school came in here. He has just come on in leaps and bounds. One of the biggest things that I have missed this year is my opportunity to provide my annual speech that I do for Autism Awareness Month. He was in here with his grade 6 class, and he had the biggest smile on his face his teachers had ever seen when he got to come in here. It is the most that they have ever heard him talk in a school setting. He just likes showing off now that he is taller than me, and he is going to have a growth spurt soon!

To my youngest daughter, Mackenzie, who has only ever known this life, and that comes with a lot of parent guilt in this House because there are a lot of things that you miss. It has turned her into a bit of a force of nature as well, but she makes me aware that I am alive every single day. She makes me work for it, that's for sure! I have to say that in my recovery the hardest thing I have had to do is to get her to school every morning when she knows I am going to be home because she does not want to go any further than two feet away from me when she has the opportunity. I would like her to sleep in her own bed. That is a goal.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the people of Macalister, my electorate, who have put their faith and trust in me for the third time. On the scale of elections, putting my name on the ballot paper this time was probably the hardest in terms of what I felt I could actually do in terms of campaigning. Certainly I have my staff and my team around me to thank. The overwhelming support that I have had since the beginning of this year from my electorate has been amazing. Schools have reached out to me, as have my sporting clubs and my local businesses. The support that I have had, even just going out for a coffee, has been overwhelming. I want to make sure that the work that I do over this term really does advocate and put forward the need that we have, to make sure that our places in Logan are not forgotten.

I joined the Labor Party and I only became interested in politics when the Campbell Newman government was in power, and that is because I had a son who was born with a disability and our child health services were cut. I joined campaigns because, well, that is what you do. If you want things and if you want change, you can sit back and wait for someone else to do it or you can put your hand up and you can get in there and do it and fight for it yourself. That is how I got involved in politics.

I can lightheartedly say that before that time I could not even possibly tell you who I voted for because I was just living my best life, but when I had kids everything changed—the legacy, what is left behind and the services that kids need, particularly our kids in Logan who are often left behind. We have some of the lowest child health check-up rates in the state. We have some of the lowest health vaccination rates in the state. We have some of the highest rates of undiagnosed conditions in the state. Many of our kids rock up to prep on day one and they have never even been in an organised classroom before. They have no idea about sitting on a spot on the floor. It is about making those opportunities available like the Free Kindy program that we had. That was a really big game changer, particularly in places like Eagleby.

The people of Macalister voted for increased service delivery. I have not heard anything yet about the timing of the new Beenleigh Police Station, the new Beenleigh Ambulance Station—

An honourable member: Not in the budget.

Mrs McMAHON: Thank you. They were also looking forward to a hopeful future for Beenleigh. What they do know is that the last time that the LNP were in government Beenleigh got nothing. It will be my job to fight for and advocate for services in my local area over the next three years to make sure that we are not forgotten, to make sure that the families who are moving to my area, as well as the long-term families who have been there as part of farming families for many years, do not have the legacy of Beenleigh abandoned. I thank the people of Macalister for their support, for their faith and for their trust. I will be advocating for them whether it is locally or in here.

I thank my team, whom I have had around me more so than ever before. We all talk about our electorate teams and our campaign teams. I made my immediate office team aware very early on what I was going through because they were the people closest to me. They made sure I could still do the job I had to do. They were touchstones for me. We went into this campaign with an unknown outcome, and I thank some of my mentors and key people in Queensland Labor like Kate Flanders, whom I spoke to really early on about this to make sure I had the support and the team we needed to make sure I could get through to the end of October still standing upright. I think I was mostly standing upright by then. I certainly thank my team in the electorate office, including Michael, Stella, Sophia and Portia, who has gone on to bigger and better things.

That is the key to what we do in Macalister. I look for young, passionate people, people who want to change, locals who want to see big things happen. I give them that chance and we give them the opportunity on the proviso that this is a stepping stone in their career. They go on to bigger and better things, and I expect all young Macalister people to embrace that opportunity. They are not allowed to give up their studying while they are in my office; they have to keep studying. My office and what we do is about broadening their world view, broadening their horizons and turning them into better people. That is one of the legacies I would like to see continue for Macalister as well as the infrastructure I have been able to deliver, including high school halls, intersection upgrades and new classrooms.

Those are great infrastructure legacy pieces, but for me it is what I can do to transform young people in my electorate who will make the biggest difference. Whether it is the staff who come through my office or my youth advisory committee, which is now up to its fourth iteration, many of them have used those opportunities to go on. Whether it is in politics or out of politics, it has given them exposure and the opportunity to see how to change things and to be that next generation of people who, rather than seeing someone or clicking on a petition, actually goes out and does something. To me, that is the biggest legacy I can leave the people of Macalister going forward.

To the Labor movement and my 'branchies', thank you very much for wrapping around me during the campaign and in the months since then. I thank the team at Queensland Labor and my organiser Meredith—who was always popping in to check on me to make sure I was still standing upright—the mighty Queensland Labor union movement and the team at the United Workers Union, including Jake. This is the first year I have not had Jeanette Temperley standing by my side going into a campaign, but she was on speed dial and we texted frequently, so she was always there and has always been a good sounding board. As I said, I thank my wonderful Beenleigh branch and my volunteers, who have been there since the very beginning in 2015 and are still going. They are in their 80s now and probably not as spritely as they used to be, but I am talking about the likes of Marlene, Fran, Betty and Judith. As the member for Woodridge said, it is the lifelong true believers who make everything we do in this House special.

Thank you once again to my family for supporting me over these last six months. My brother moved in with me to cook me food and drive me everywhere and all that kind of thing. Believe me, when we were last living together when he was a teenager I never would have seen that happening. Because I have acknowledged him in several speeches previous to this, I have to acknowledge Leigh, my now ex-husband. One of the hardest things to do, but one of the things I am most proud of having done as an adult, is to still be on good terms after a divorce. It is not as easy as some people think. When your relationship is based on respect and mutual love for our kids, making sure that we are still in this together—even if we are not technically married anymore—that is one of the biggest lessons I can leave for my kids. Not everything is going to go to plan, but it is how you roll with it.

If anything, I rolled with quite a lot last term. I am proud to say that I intend to keep on rolling right through this term as I work through my return to work with the indulgence of the House, the Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the House. I thank everyone in this House and I congratulate everyone in this House for being here. I try to be a person who only stands up when I have something to say. I am a person who believes in brevity, but I am also a person who will stand up when I do have something to say. And you will hear me when I do.