



Speech by

MARGARET KEECH

MEMBER FOR ALBERT

Hansard 5 April 2001

FIRST SPEECH

Ms KEECH (Albert—ALP) (2.30 p.m.): I am honoured to speak in this House for the first time as the member for Albert, the first woman ever to do so. In standing here today, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this House of the Queensland people stands. I also respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and the present indigenous people who call the electorate of Albert home. The magnificent win by Peter Beattie's Labor team nearly seven weeks ago was not only a victory for the Australian Labor Party but also a celebration of strong leadership, unity and integrity. Labor's policy priorities of jobs, health and education are the very same priorities of the working families in my electorate.

The people of Albert—and most of them are present in the public gallery today—recognised the fact that Labor has delivered in the area and as a result registered a two-party preferred vote to Labor of 63 per cent. This is even more historic when, for the first time in 114 years, Labor won every booth on primary votes. I say this to the people of Albert: thank you for the trust you have bestowed in me and the Beattie Labor government. I will repay your trust by working hard every day and every night and by giving you a strong voice in government.

I place on record my thanks to Cameron Milner, who was my initial organiser but later went on to become the ALP State Secretary and director of the successful election campaign. I am also grateful to Milton Dick, who later filled the role of organiser in Albert. To ALP office staff, particularly Simon Finn for his hard work, encouragement, friendship and support, I say thank you. In addition, I pay tribute to other men who, as great unionists and friends of the Labor Party, contributed to our significant win. To Peter Eather, who is in the gallery, together with his mate and mine, Brett Landers, who letterboxed almost every house several times in Albert, and to Peter Shooter, the former Labor candidate for Albert, who shared so generously his wisdom, energy and friendship over the two years of the campaign: I salute you.

To my campaign organiser, Lindsay Jones, who taught me that hard work, Labor values and consistent communication of the government's message is the key to a successful campaign, I thank you and send you best wishes for a speedy recovery. To my campaign manager, Terry Wood, thank you for motivating me to work just a little harder each and every day, for your policy advice and for running such a professional campaign. I learned something else from Terry during the campaign—that is, it really is possible to use a mobile phone whilst riding a motorbike at 100 kilometres per hour down the motorway. To Kathryn, my electorate secretary, thank you very much for coming on board. We are going to make a great partnership. To Premier Peter Beattie, I thank you on behalf of the people of Albert. Your very presence on my campaign encouraged me and my supporters to lift our game. I am also indebted to Mrs Heather Beattie for her support in Albert.

I thank the Honourable Anna Bligh and her staff, especially Jackie Trad, for their support and expertise in the Albert campaign. As Leader of the House and member of the Cabinet Budget Review Committee, Anna Bligh is the first woman in any Australian Legislative Assembly to reach such a high position. I am also indebted to the strong assistance of the member for Waterford and the member for Currumbin who, until seven weeks ago, were Albert's nearest Labor neighbours.

Being born and raised in Bundaberg, I was brought up in a family which valued hard work, loyalty to family and community service. It was those values which supported my mother when, as a

young 29 year old woman, my father, Edmund Kirkwood, died. His death left my mother a widow with four children under the age of six and pregnant with her fifth child. Although the years as a single parent were hard for my mother, it was her hope and trust in her Catholic faith, her community and the Australian Labor Party which supported her through those long, lonely years.

Paul Keating claimed that it is the Labor Party that makes the political heroes in this country. That was certainly the case in my home. It was a Labor and union household through and through. Being the oldest daughter in the family and before the introduction of TV to Bundaberg, long nights were spent listening to my mother's proud stories of her father, Joseph Walker. I heard of his work of leadership and service as a loyal member of the Labor Party and railway union and as the President of the Bundaberg Trades and Labour Council from 1929 to 1933. I listened to stories of his fight against injustice on the railways. I heard of his vigilance during the Depression in protecting the weak from authorities who sometimes took the law into their own hands. With each story my mother told, I was reminded that the Labor Party—and only the Labor Party—stands for a fair go for all, for equal opportunity and for giving others a helping hand when they need it.

To my brothers and sisters, Peter, Paul, Kathryn and Marie, and to their spouses, Ann, Fiona, Ian and Len, and their children, Matthew, Cameron, Lillie, Ben, Claire and Ned: thank you for your friendship and love. To my newest nephew born six days ago in Melbourne, Robert McGregor Kirkwood Jeffrey—what a beautiful name—you are the product of the real love of two families. I know you will have a great life. To my stepfather, Vic Rogers, the only father I have ever known, thank you for your patience with us five children and for the loving kindness you have shown my mother every day. I acknowledge my mother's brother, Kevin Walker, who has travelled by train today from Bundaberg to be here for this historic event. I thank you for your confidence and loving support of me and the campaign. To Kevin's twin brother, Bernie, and his wife, Phil Walker: your generosity and loyalty to the great Australian Labor Party has always been an inspiration to me.

Whilst talking about inspiration, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the man behind the woman, my husband of 23 years, Peter Keech, who is in the public gallery today. In the past few days we have heard of the domestic skills of the partners of many members. I can boast that my husband can not only cook, clean, iron and sew; he will even do the shopping! But more than domestic skills, Peter is my strength and my mentor, my inspiration and my best friend. Peter, I am a far better person for knowing you and a far better member. Thank you for your integrity, friendship and love. It is my honour to carry your name into this the 50th Parliament. My promise to you is that I will always do your name and the name of our children proud.

The Albert electorate has a long history, having been established in 1887. This was some four years before the Australian Labor Party was formed. Today, Albert stretches from the Logan to the Coomera Rivers—from Eagleby and Beenleigh in the north to Coomera in the south; from Logan Village and Logan Reserve in the west to Jacobs Well and Woongoolba in the east. On their way to the Gold Coast many honourable members may have enjoyed a famous Yatala pie, a drink at the Beenleigh Rum Distillery, an ice-cream at the Pimpama strawberry farm or a visit to the Carlton & United Brewery and rounded it off with a few rides at Dreamworld.

My connection with Albert started 20 years ago when my husband, Peter, and I chose to purchase our first home in Beenleigh. We chose this location for the same reason hundreds of young couples each year decide to settle in Albert—cheap but good houses, excellent location and a lifestyle to die for.

Albert's greatest strengths are its central location, its potential for industrial and commercial development and its community spirit. However, these strengths can also be its greatest weaknesses. The real estate agents tell us that the real key to attracting customers is the three Ps—position, position and position. If that is the case, then being located south of Brisbane, east of Logan and north of the Gold Coast may not be such an ideal location.

When we cast our eyes to Logan we see the well-funded and resourced Logan Hospital. When we look to the Gold Coast we see community infrastructure such as public transport and other services. Then when we look to Brisbane we see, compared to Albert, a great big lolly shop of all a community would ever want. Long before I even accepted the invitation to become Labor's candidate in Albert I asked myself the same question the Leader of the House asked yesterday: why is it so? Why are other adjacent regions powering ahead and achieving so much? Why does Albert seem to miss out every time?

It is clear that Albert is at a crossroads in more ways than one. There comes a time in the life of communities such as mine when we are faced with only two choices—submit or fight for survival. I can assure honourable members that we in Albert are used to fighting for everything we get. Our community spirit is our greatest strength and, like the Premier, we love to win.

The reason for Albert missing out on all things bright and beautiful is found in the electoral statistics I quoted earlier. One hundred and fourteen years of loyalty to conservative state members of

parliament has been repaid not by neglect but something a lot worse, that is, indifference—indifference to addressing the difficult and complex issues such as developing a strategic plan to attract jobs and services to Albert by working in partnership with the three tiers of government, business and local residents. I am angry that the National Party has taken Albert for granted all these years. Our youth have missed out on jobs, our families have missed out on services and our kids have missed out on schools.

The last decade has seen unprecedented growth along the coastal strip. This will continue as the new eight-lane Pacific Motorway attracts new residential estates and commercial development. Up to now, and despite its growth, Albert has been able to keep its quality lifestyle and its social and cultural opportunities. But growth also brings challenges and responsibilities. For example, the expanded M1 has brought noise problems to residents living alongside it. The constant noise has disrupted family life and destroyed for many their once peaceful homes. I thank the Minister for Main Roads for visiting the home of a resident, Linda Coleman, at Ormeau last year to experience first-hand the conditions her family has to endure. I will be working hard with the minister's department to gain some flexibility in the siting of sound barriers on the highway in an attempt to give families like Linda's relief from the noise.

The Yatala enterprise area is one of the most exciting and significant industrial and employment land resources in the whole of south-east Queensland. The 3,000 hectare area of Yatala has the potential to create over 10,000 full-time and permanent jobs in the manufacturing and services sectors. Over the next three years I will be focusing all my energy on working in partnership with business, government and the community to play a leadership role, together with the Minister for State Development, in seeing this project realised.

As the new member for Albert, what do I stand for? For the honourable members of this House and the people of Albert, let me place it on record. I stand for social justice and a fair go for all. I stand for real permanent jobs and services developed in partnership. I stand for sustainable development that respects Albert's fragile ecosystem. I will be available, accessible and visible.

I was taught as a child that working together brings results, whether it be in the family, at work or in the community. Before 17 February I was a language and learning adviser at Queensland University of Technology, and I welcome members of the staff to the public gallery today. As a QUT delegate for the Australian Services Union, Clerical and Administrative Branch, I know how effective a workplace organised through the union delegate system can be in gaining better working conditions and job security for its members. In fact, I believe that workplace delegates are one of the key strengths of the union movement. My admiration goes to Julie Bignell, state secretary of the ASU, and Mary Anne O'Neil, assistant state secretary, for their leadership in modelling the successes of working and organising collectively and for their focus on energising the delegate system.

It is important for the younger generation to be taught, as I was, that it is the union movement which gives our community the standards of living that so many families enjoy and take for granted. To workers I say: join a union. It is good for you. It is good for your family, your community and your nation. Do it today.

I am humbled by the support of the many unionists who rallied to win back Albert for Labor. In addition to my own ASU, I am indebted to Dave Harrison from the AMWU; Shirley Mellor and Ron Monaghan from the Miscellaneous Workers Union; Claire Moore from CPSU; Greg Simcoe, Jaimie McHugh and Dave Hanna from the BLF; Hughie Williams and Peter Biagini from the TWU; and Mick Carr and Dave Perry from the mighty MUA. I am deeply honoured that many of these representatives of the Queensland union movement are here today in the public gallery.

Just as organised workplaces hold our unions together, it is organisations of volunteers which hold our community together. I want to place on record my appreciation to a resident who knows the value of working in partnership. Senior Sergeant Craig Hintz, officer in charge of Beenleigh Police Station, is a role model I aspire to. His professionalism, cheerfulness and focus on solving police issues by involving the community motivates me to higher levels of service.

I would now like to mention three of my strongest supporters who, rather than being volunteers, were conscripted to my campaign whether they liked it or not. I speak of my three darling children, James, Joshua and Helen Keech, who are here in the gallery today. They endured with good grace and maturity a home in almost continual campaign mode for almost four and a half years. Yet I am proud to say that never once did they complain about the disruption to their lives because, as they told me, the community needs their mother more than they do.

I am humbled that so many of the supporters of Labor in Albert have travelled to the House today. To members of Young Labor, to the Beenleigh-Mount Warren Park and Eagleby Labor branches and to all my friends and supporters: I love you and I thank you. This victory is yours. Your hard work has been richly rewarded.

To my mother-in-law, Beverley Keech: thank you for those delicious meals you cooked, which almost makes me look forward to the next election—almost! To the Keech family, Tony, Paul, Christine,

Rosemary and Mark, and their spouses and families: I appreciate your unfailing love and support. To Sean Leader, who took his annual holidays so that he could work in my campaign office: your organisational ability contributed so much to the campaign. To Joan Kirner, Molly Robson and Judy Spence from Emily's List: your early money was like yeast. And to Lindy Nelson-Carr as my Emily's mentor: thank you for your time and support.

As I look up into the public gallery I realise that although some faces are missing they are looking down from an even higher place. I know that my father-in-law, George Keech, my uncle, Len Walker, and a dear friend of the branch, Heather McLellan, would be very proud of us today.

I am excited about Albert's future. I am excited about the prospects for working in partnership to bring jobs, jobs and more jobs to Albert. Having been given this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, I believe that every opportunity implies an obligation. The electors of Albert can be confident that my focus over the next three years will be clearly on them and their issues.

There is much work to be done, but I will not be deterred because, as anybody who knows me is aware, I relish hard work. People's expectations of me may be high, but I can say that my expectations of myself are even higher. I am encouraged by Tennyson's call to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield. Working together, the people of Albert and I will live the life we have imagined.
