



Speech by

**JO-ANN MILLER**

**MEMBER FOR BUNDAMBA**

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Hansard 15 March 2000

### FIRST SPEECH

**Mrs MILLER** (Bundamba—ALP) (5.17 p.m.): I second the motion. Mr Speaker, as member for Bundamba I would like to thank the people of Bundamba for their faith in me to represent them. I acknowledge the love and commitment of my family: Neil, Stephanie and Brianna, Mum and Dad, David and Karen, Uncle George and Auntie Kay, my in-laws and my extended family, including the Kitching, Miller and Pringle clans. I acknowledge the support of the community groups and churches of Bundamba and of the Australian Labor Party branches and members who worked tirelessly on the campaign.

I particularly thank those on the campaign team: Linda Holliday, the assistant State secretary of the party; Peter Allen from the Missoes; Luke Forsythe; Gus Doung; and Chris, Mitch, John, Michelle, Allan, Greg, Mike, Victor, Daryl, Conrad, Steve Axe, Michael Bertram, and many other branch members. The trade unions provided great assistance, particularly the CFMEU and Wally Trehear, the Missoes, my union, and the Queensland Nurses Union.

I pay tribute to the previous members for Bundamba, Bob Gibbs and Evan Marginson, and also to the former member for Oxley, Bill Hayden, and his wife, Dallas. Evan Marginson introduced me to the Labor Party when I joined the Dinmore Riverview branch at the age of 13. I was in awe of him and Bill Hayden. Bill Hayden has been a great mentor to me over the years and I thank him for his advice and support and his unshakeable belief that I could, as a community Labor candidate, win the seat for Labor.

Others who encouraged me over many years but who have passed away include Brian and Bubby Plunkett and Cecil Peck. My grandmothers, Gramps Kitching and Cindy Pringle, miners' wives who struggled all their lives and who had enormous influence over me as family matriarchs, would have been rejoicing amongst the angels in heaven.

The level of support I was able to achieve was, I believe, due to the fact that I have worked in the community for a long period of time, that I am a fifth generation local and that I am well known in the community for helping people from all walks of life.

In Bundamba there are four main groups—the have everything, the have, the have-nots, and the have absolutely nothings. In many ways, I have concentrated my effort, and the efforts of the community groups I work with, in the last three categories. Areas that I have a particular interest in are employment, youth and adult homelessness, the drug and gambling problem, housing issues, transport, architecture, urban redevelopment, crime prevention and education.

These issues need Government at all levels to work together with the community of Bundamba to implement innovative solutions for the benefit of our people. It is my view that Government policy, without community input, has a mediocre chance of resolving issues. Indeed, the best solutions are where the solutions are found in the community, by the community and owned by the community and the community then consults the Government for its assistance in policy and funding matters. I am proud to be a part of the Beattie Labor Government that prides itself on this philosophy. The Community Cabinet meetings held in the Ipswich and Bundamba electorates have been supported strongly by our community. Direct access often results in direct action, and I know that in many cases in Bundamba our people have been grateful for the Community Cabinet process.

However, if Governments get the policy and implementation wrong, then not only does the community suffer, but the reality is that it costs the Government money—a lot of money. If, for example, the poker machine impact in the community were underestimated, it costs the Government in terms of family and individual support and counselling; in terms of welfare handouts; it costs in terms of emergency housing if a family loses their home; and it costs in terms of family breakdowns with legal aid and Family Court actions. It can also cost in terms of extra police resources as some may turn to crime to meet commitments.

The poker machine industry is having an impact in the Bundamba electorate, particularly around Goodna and Gailles where there are numerous clubs and hotels. I am against any further expansion of poker machines in this area as too often community groups, churches and welfare organisations report the negative impact on families from poker machine addicted parents.

Whilst Governments over the years have put in place economic impact statements, environmental impact statements and social impact statements, it is my view that in the year 2000 community impact statements should be a part of this process. The previous impact statements are, usually by their very nature, macro in context, giving a broad-brush approach to changes in the way Governments think and make decisions. However, it is the community and indeed the family unit, the fundamental basis of our society, that often bears the brunt of Government policy gone wrong. I cite again the proliferation of poker machines in the community as a classic example of family breakdown, of poverty, of homelessness and of desperation.

Community impact statements should by their very nature incorporate the impact of various policy outcomes on the family unit, however defined. They should examine the different family units, including single households, the nuclear family, single parent families, and especially the families increasingly looking after elderly relatives and elderly people living alone. These statements should be given equal status to the economic, environmental and social impact statements in any decision on Government policy and ultimately in the implementation of that policy by Public Service departments.

Community impact statements should assess the intended and unintended consequences of Government policies and programs on family stability, family relationships and family responsibilities. Government departments should consider adopting proposals that strengthen the family unit through community impact statements. Some departments are already implementing Government policy at the community level in partnership with the local community. The Queensland Police Service is a leader in this area with more and more community police beats, such as Riverview, with police shopfronts such as Redbank Plaza, and with police in local high schools, such as Redbank Plains State High School.

These initiatives should be encouraged, as the community wants police to be local and accessible. They do not necessarily want multi-million dollar police precincts towering over the community and not being part of that community. They want to know that a "copper" is in their locality and working for them, working with them, and to protect them. Similarly, it is my view that community courts should be examined as a real option in the justice system in Queensland. If a person is charged with minor offences, it makes no sense to send him to a court often miles away if he intends to plead guilty to the charges. Following the police initiative of local police beats, I believe that local community courts could be set up, administered by a part-time registrar, and the judicial duties handled by a duly qualified Justice of the Peace (Magistrates Court).

These community courts do not need to cost a lot of money to establish. An ordinary house could be modified as a community court, Justices of the Peace (Magistrates Court) could be used in a voluntary capacity as has been done for over 100 years throughout Queensland, and justice could be quickly and easily dispensed. It would save time and money in terms of building new court buildings and result in a real community-based justice system.

Many in the community feel alienated by the justice system. Apart from lawyers and police officers, these days only high school legal studies students seem to have any understanding of the judicial system unless they have had the experience of going through the court process. Community courts would harness the many Justices of the Peace (Qualified) allowing them, by a rigorous selection process, to upgrade to Justice of the Peace (Magistrates Court) and sit on the bench. Whilst further policy analysis would need to be undertaken in this area, I am sure that many Justices of the Peace (Qualified) in the community would welcome this concept.

Unemployment in the Bundamba electorate has been significantly reduced during the term of the Beattie Government, with the last unemployment figures showing unemployment in Ipswich East—which takes in most of the electorate—down to 9.1%, which compares to 12.5% a year ago. Whilst this has been an excellent achievement, the current rate of unemployment in Bundamba is still too high and I will be pursuing a range of initiatives to see that further jobs and training opportunities are provided for people in the Bundamba electorate.

The Government's Breaking the Unemployment Cycle programs have been very successful in tackling unemployment and I would like to see the continuation of this initiative that has provided

apprenticeships, traineeships and other jobs in the electorate. In the coming months I will be contacting businesses in the electorate to brief them on the assistance measures that are available to enable them to employ additional apprentices and trainees.

The Community Jobs Plan that provides funding to community organisations to employ local job seekers and develop projects that benefit the community should be continued. The work that is being done in rehabilitating the old Westfalen Mine at Redbank is a fine example of what Government and the community can do to create jobs and develop facilities that benefit local people. I will be working to ensure that further job opportunities such as those being created at the Westfalen project are secured for the people of Bundamba.

The Bremer Institute of TAFE plays an important role in Bundamba, developing the skills of our young people that are so important for their future careers and job prospects. I would like to see the excellent work of the Bremer TAFE expanded with additional strategies put in place to reach out to the people in the electorate who currently are not accessing this valuable community resource. I am particularly keen to see additional strategies that enable women and the many people of a non-English speaking background in the electorate to access training and skills development opportunities through Bremer TAFE.

In recent weeks we have seen a number of major firms in Queensland—including the electorate of Bundamba—retrenching skilled workers. There is, I believe, a real and genuine unrest in the community about these retrenchments and justifiable calls to protect local jobs. I am pleased to see that the Beattie Labor Government has brought in local content policies to help businesses get opportunities from major Government projects. This initiative should be expanded to ensure that local job seekers and unemployed people are able to access the jobs created on these projects. I would also like the Government to explore avenues that would facilitate significant private sector projects also incorporating local content and local labour provisions. We must ensure that local communities obtain the maximum benefit from major public sector and private sector projects.

A couple of years ago in Goodna, the community was concerned at the increasing drug trade, particularly in heroin. It is still a problem, but the community and the Government in a partnership called the Goodna Outreach Project has made substantial progress in addressing these issues. Three community organisations, The Base, the Goodna Youth Accommodation Service and the Peace Centre, all work together to work with adults and youth to respond to the drugs issue.

However, the drugs problem is not just a youth problem. There are plenty of middle-aged people out there who have brought up another generation of drug users. Some of them are responsible, some are not, but it is difficult to tell young people that they should not be using drugs when they see mum and dad, and sometimes their grandparents, using drugs. They see it as a normal part of everyday life. To them, it is as normal as dad having a beer after work, only dad smokes dope.

I am keenly interested in the drug initiatives in New South Wales and the proposed impact on the community, but I am a long way from being convinced that shooting galleries are an answer to the drugs issue. I would want to see clear evidence of their success before I would support shooting galleries in Bundamba, and I know that the community of Bundamba think similarly on this issue.

I cannot pretend to have solutions to the epidemic of drug use in our community. The Goodna Outreach Project is working well. People know where to go to get help, they know that they will not be judged by the outreach workers, and they know that rehabilitation is offered. Perhaps the key is to educate our community members before they have tried the hard drugs like heroin and have TV campaigns similar to road carnage ads on the effects of drugs.

I am hopeful, however, that the drugs court trial in Ipswich will break the cycle of drug addiction and drug-related crime. This legislation is important as it means that drug-addicted offenders facing a jail sentence can instead be diverted into intensive rehabilitation programs. I will be closely watching the Ipswich drugs court and looking forward to positive results in the wider Ipswich community.

There are many Department of Housing homes in the electorate of Bundamba. There are significant levels of private rentals, yet there is still a high proportion of people who either own their own homes or are in the process of paying them off to provide a future for themselves and their families. The Department of Housing has, since the early 1990s, led the way in our area through the highly successful urban renewal process in Riverview. The department has officers working with community reference groups to enhance these suburbs. Homes built 30 years ago as basic, box-style houses are being opened up with decks, new kitchens are being built, laundries are being renovated and bathrooms are modernised. Fences to allow for family privacy are an integral part of this urban redevelopment and limited landscaping encourages tenants to take pride in their surroundings. This great initiative of the Goss and Beattie Labor Governments has now been extended to Goodna and the tenants are delighted.

But the Government is not only assisting tenants. The amendments to the housing legislation to provide for a better loans scheme to allow low-income families to borrow money to purchase a house

are also very important. The Department of Housing provided Neil and I with our first housing loan. When the bank refused our housing loan application, we thought we were out of the race in providing a roof over our heads. We applied to the Department of Housing for a loan and went on the waitlist for several months. When the bank said "No", the Department of Housing said "Yes", and we were on our way.

Community renewal projects, combined with urban renewal programs in suburbs, lift the community spirit, create pride in the area and, combined with employment programs, apprenticeship and trainee opportunities, have a beneficial social, economic and community impact. You can not only see the difference but you can feel it. The Department of Housing and the Department of Employment, Training and Industrial Relations need to work more closely together in these areas, however, to ensure maximum benefits in the community.

Combined with these programs is the tenancy management of the Department of Housing. Much of the goodwill in the Bundamba community has been as a direct result of its tough tenancy management policies. It is not every person's right to a department house if they cannot pay the rent, look after the house and be a good neighbour. I wholeheartedly agree with the Minister's tough tenancy policies. Our tenants have a great pride in their community. They know the rules and abide by them.

As a former public servant, the key to any Government's success or failure is in the service delivery of Government programs. Too often a great idea gets lost in the wording of the Bills, is inappropriately resourced and may lack the commitment of the public servants charged with the delivery of the program. Public servants are, by and large, a dedicated group of people in our community who work hard to serve the Government of the day and the people of Queensland. Many work long, hard hours and are committed to the programs they are delivering, particularly those in the Bundamba electorate. However, more can be done to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service. It is my view that there should be more lateral recruitment into the Public Service and there should be more cross-departmental recruitment strategies.

Over the last 10 years, the Public Service has changed remarkably. There have been very many public servants put out to pasture by forced retrenchments, voluntary retrenchment, early retirements, resignations and officers moving into the private sector. I was on the famous coalition hit list. My sin was that I was Labor and that I had to go. Well, I was on the hit list. I am proud to be Labor, and here I am. I have hit back. And let me tell you that I intend to be here for a very long time and I will be doing everything in my power to ensure that the Opposition never, ever returns to the Treasury benches in Queensland. After the way I was treated in the Department of Justice before being put out into the spelling yard, I can assure you that I do not want the wanton vindictive behaviour bestowed upon me to be put upon any other public servant in Queensland. It was morally and ethically wrong and no Government of whatever political party they belong to should sanction such behaviour.

People like Barry Dittmer and others encouraged me to move into the political arena. I took their advice, and here I am today. And the real delight is standing here looking around the Parliament. On the Government side, there are all the new breed of members: young, vibrant, enthusiastic members of Parliament. On the other side, there are the old breed of members: the worn out, ossified timber of National and Liberal Party politics. As the member for Bundamba, I am proud to be the 100th Labor woman elected to an Australian Parliament. I am proud to be a fifth-generation local and a coalminer's daughter and grand-daughter. I will represent the people of Bundamba with gusto, with every breath in my body, to ensure that our people get a fair go, that our people are considered in the processes of government, that our children can aspire to and achieve their goals, that we have a community tolerant of each other, and a better quality of life.

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