



Speech by

Robert Cavallucci

MEMBER FOR BRISBANE CENTRAL

Hansard Thursday, 31 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr CAVALLUCCI** (Brisbane Central—LNP) (12.10 pm): I rise here today to speak for the first time in this House. I do so proudly and with the greatest honour present my address-in-reply to Her Excellency the Governor of Queensland's speech at the opening of the 54th Parliament. I pledge my loyalty to this parliament and to the electors of Brisbane Central.

I would firstly like to pass on my sincerest congratulations to the member for Maroochydore on becoming the first female Speaker in Queensland. I would like to make particular mention of thanks to Madam Speaker for the many occasions during my campaign when I required the voice of wisdom, knowledge and fair judgement—attributes no doubt which will be administered to this House from the highest and most respected of roles which she now occupies.

Mr Deputy Speaker, today I stand before you as the proud middle son of Italian migrants. Our family story is not unlike most immigrant stories following the Second World War. Our family is the cornerstone of all our strength, our successes and our values. Why is it that strength and family are all too common qualities when we refer to Italian immigrant families? I believe it is because our bonds with this country initially were forged through struggle and hardship. Our families fled to a place which seemed to provide equality of opportunity and where you could be rewarded by the efforts of your labours.

Both of my grandfathers came to this country alone and by sea, armed with nothing more than optimism and an unstoppable work ethic. Their means may have been meagre but their dreams were not. They worked as labourers on projects like the Roma Street tunnel and, like most immigrants of the time, when the work concluded they followed the work to the cane fields of North Queensland, where still even today the results of immigrant labour is legendary. They were foreign men and women in a foreign land trying to speak a foreign language, and it would be two years before they sent for the rest of the family to join them, eventually settling in boarding houses in Bowen Hills and then homes in New Farm.

It was this work ethic, the value inherent in the principle of individual responsibility and the belief in the concept of reward for effort that allowed them to seize their second chance at life. That struggle and hardship that I referred to earlier ultimately went on to define the success of many immigrant families who settled here and that now leaves my 88-year-old grandfather with a genuine feeling of gratitude to this country he now calls home.

It was these very beliefs instilled in me that ultimately led me to the Liberal Party many years ago. I was always a believer in small governments which provide efficient services that ensure equality of opportunity, not equality of outcome, whilst providing a safety net to those who lack the capacity to take care of themselves. I do not believe, like those who sit opposite do, that human nature is some form of social construct that an all-knowing government is required to reshape with the ideal of achieving earthly perfection.

With my proud multicultural heritage, it makes me even prouder to be afforded the honour and the privilege of the role of Assistant Minister for Multicultural Affairs. I am absolutely passionate about celebrating the diversity which exists both in the electorate of Brisbane Central and across Queensland.

There is so much to be gained through cultural understanding, tolerance and acceptance of those who differ from ourselves, and it can be achieved through actions as simple as the recognition of the positive impact one's cultural and economic contribution have made to the fabric of Queensland's society.

Brisbane Central is a spectacular place to live, to work and to raise a family. It is spectacular because of its diversity. Woven into the fabric of Brisbane Central are a string of unique characters that make their way around the unique places which traverse the electorate. The Fortitude Valley heart has spent the last 20 years searching for its own renaissance, from what was sometimes a dark and gloomy place into a glowing entertainment and shopping precinct second to none. The only thing missing was the inertia supplied by the political will of its local representatives to unite the stakeholders. I am pleased that this is now occurring. Any efforts to improve the Valley's broader commercial appeal in order to help solve its social outcomes must ensure that in every way we retain the character and the charm which makes the Valley a crucible of artistic expression.

In discussions at a recent Valley Chamber of Commerce meeting that included venue owners, support services and music lovers, more than anything else, the stakeholders recognised, as did I, their good fortune in being involved in what was described as the most energetic and pulsating entertainment precinct in the nation. The levels of fun, entertainment and night-life that are being delivered are extraordinary, and we recognise the challenges but we must work together on the areas which need addressing.

When you look at a map, directly to the right of Brisbane Central you have the electorate of Clayfield and to the left you have Ashgrove. I could not think of a better place to be—located between the Treasurer and the Premier. Whilst I do not see any metaphors there, I do see opportunity for the people of Brisbane Central.

Brisbane Central has the CBD at its heart, the centre of trade and commerce for all of Queensland. A significant number of small to medium businesses populate the city fringe through the Valley, Newstead, Spring Hill and Bowen Hills. Without question, these businesses are suffering and were simply not protected from the stranglehold of regulation and taxation imposed on business by the previous Labor government. The LNP government makes its pledge to you that once again your entrepreneurial spirit will flourish as this government will get off your back.

We have Chinatown and its mall, the Queen Street Mall, the Valley Mall, the James Street precinct, the spectacular New Farm Park and the Powerhouse, Newstead Riverpark, the Kelvin Grove Urban Village and the iconic RNA showgrounds and home to the Ekka. We have two Queensland University of Technology campuses; the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital and the Royal Children's Hospital; the botanical gardens; and the 46 hectares of parklands from Downey Park to Spencer Park, which is one of the most utilised sporting grounds in Brisbane. There is even an 18-hole golf course at Victoria Park in Herston. Finally, there is this House, where the Premier, Campbell Newman, will restore good governance to this state once again.

We have amazing community groups, working with a common purpose and common effort so that we can all share the benefits of this community together. We have the National Association of Immigrant Families, Casa Italia, the New Farm neighbourhood community centre, Rotary clubs, outreach and drop-in centres for homeless like the 139 Club and Footprints, and many more.

My affection and bond with the electorate is immeasurably strong. So much so—and to the horror I am sure of some of my regional parliamentary colleagues—I have never resided more than 2½ kilometres from the Brisbane CBD. I have, by and large, lived my entire life in Wilston. My mother still lives there in the family home that her and dad bought in 1969 when they were married. My grandfather, who I spoke of earlier, still lives beside her. My older brother, Paul, and his family live a few metres away from me. In the four or five years that I happened to venture out of Wilston, I lived in one of the most stunning and historic parts of the electorate and which is even closer to the city, and that is Teneriffe. Each July over 30,000 people join to celebrate Teneriffe's history, cultural diversity and beauty at the Teneriffe Festival.

As a youngster, like many locals, I was taught to swim at the Spring Hill Baths, which have stood since 1886 and which adjoin the Brisbane Central electorate office on Boundary Street. Both of my grandmothers worked in the Villa Maria Convent in Spring Hill and for many years assisted elderly nuns while working in other nursing homes in New Farm.

Our family business has always operated from Windsor, where I have worked for the last 15 years, and it recently celebrated its 30-year milestone. I went to primary school at St Patrick's College in Fortitude Valley. I went to junior and high schools at St Joseph's College, Gregory Terrace in Spring Hill. This amazing school, now 136 years old, had one of the most profound influences on my life, as it has on just about all the young men who have passed through its gates, which is why I enrolled my son in the school when he was just one week old, where he will join his cousins as third-generation Terracians.

Terrace has a proud tradition of service to others—initiatives such as Eddie's Van play a critical role in the electorate, providing food and support for the marginalised and to those who are sleeping rough. Manned by Terrace students, old boys and volunteers, it helps students understand the mechanics behind personal poverty and the development of empathy for those less fortunate than themselves. Brother Damien Price deserves particular mention as being one of the most inspirational characters one could ever hope to meet. The outcomes delivered to the poor and those on downside of advantage through his involvement with the Edmund Rice Foundation is nothing short of remarkable.

Post high school I did manage to venture out of the electorate as I undertook studies at the University of Queensland in St Lucia. However, this was offset by the student jobs I took which included years as a barman at Dooley's Irish Pub in the Valley and in the stands of Ballymore during rugby season.

I am compelled to speak about and recognise those individuals who sacrificed so much in order to provide me with every opportunity to be in this House today. Very early in the campaign we made the decision to knock on the door of every home in the electorate, a task which I completed 1½ times during the campaign. I did so in order to engage directly with the constituents about the issues which mattered to them and to deliver the LNP's positive plans for change in Queensland. I walked every street in Brisbane Central many times over, and what I found were parts of the inner city of Brisbane that had suffered the indignity of inaction and in some parts slow decay—the clear markings of a government that had stopped listening to its people.

As a consequence of their passion for change being equal to mine, most of the people I am about to mention made that walk with me. First and foremost, my heartfelt thanks must be conveyed to my amazing wife, Carlyn, who joins me from the gallery today. It has been 10 years since we met and our love for each other has never been stronger. Our commitment to raising our two young children and sharing parenting's many trials and joys has never been clearer. In my absences during the campaign, you have been the most amazing mother and wife, and I am grateful that we have undertaken this journey together. I am also acutely aware of the fact, as it was reported to me on many occasions, that whilst out on the campaign trail with me you were far more of a drawcard than I was. In what can only be described as the second historic feat of the last election, despite the commitment and time dedicated during the campaign we received the news barely a week prior to polling day that we were expecting our third and very much final child. I have since been informed that election babies are a rare occurrence indeed.

To my immediate family, my mother, Maria, and my brother Paul, who joins me from the gallery today, and my young brother, David, on what was an immeasurable sacrifice you have all had to endure over the last few years through my absences at work and other family commitments, I offer my sincerest of thanks. Disappointingly, my mother could not be here today as she is in Toronto where she is enjoying the recent arrival of her fifth grandchild and the first for my younger brother, David. His temporary relocation to Toronto, where he is learning a pioneering procedure in his liver transplant surgical specialisation, I think was specifically timed in order to avoid the campaign. However, congratulations on the birth of your son and come home soon.

This is the first time ever that the community covered by the state seat of Brisbane Central has chosen to be represented by conservatives at all three levels of government. The same team of people who set out only a few years ago worked on all three of these campaigns to deliver this change and only recently was this dream realised with the successes achieved at the recent Brisbane City Council elections. I thank the federal member for Brisbane, Teresa Gambaro, for her support and give my heartfelt congratulations to Vicki Howard, the councillor for the Central Ward, for her success. She joins us from the gallery today.

For the last four years the three of us worked tirelessly as a united team. On a daily basis we worked together for the issues that mattered most to those we now all represent. Obviously I am overjoyed to be a part of this new and energetic LNP state government, but when I consider the possibilities which lay ahead for the people of Brisbane Central, now that such a cohesive team represents their interests across all levels of representation, I am truly excited for what outcomes might be achieved.

To Queensland's Senator, the Hon. Brett Mason, who on countless occasions over the last four years gave of his time, guidance and friendship to help me chart a course to this House today, thank you. To Tony Gleeson, the man who after my preselection in November 2010 was out on the side of the road with me, a place to which he remained as the sun was setting the night before the election in March 2012 and every week in between—for that commitment to me, to the party, and to the Mount Coot-tha and Ashgrove campaigns, I offer my heartfelt gratitude.

To Mitch Redford and James McGrath, for the friendships formed and for the fun times during what should have been otherwise stressful ones, I offer my sincerest of thanks. To the rest of the team—Darren Black, Liam Moorthead, Brad Carswell, Robert Lambeth, Adam Stocker, Robert Collins, Jordie, Luke Barnes, Ben Riley, John, Nathan, Alessia, Kate, Emily, Tom, Patty and Raj—there are too many to mention—thank you. Finally, to my colleague and dear friend the member for Mount Coot-tha, as always, thank you for being part of the journey.

People tend to refer to effective leaders as born leaders. I believe leaders are not born. I believe that great leaders never intend to be. They are made in the moment by the choices they make and defined by the reasons they make them. The member for Ashgrove's leadership qualities stem from the fact that his desire to strive, his desire to fulfil his vision for Queensland comes from his passion to deliver better outcomes for all. You can tell the true quality of the leader he is by the standards he sets for himself and his team—an ordinary man with extraordinary determination. I thank him for his leadership during the campaign and, in particular, during the times when those who sit opposite in the most disgraceful of fashions chose to attack the integrity of his family for personal gain.

I have one last person to mention and I have purposely left this till last and that is to recognise my late father, Joe Cavallucci. Growing up we were given as much responsibility as we could handle. My father understood the delicate balance of guidance versus independence. As an adult he gave me the perspective that success in life requires initiative, individual responsibility, winners and losers, and demanding standards.

Joining the family business seemed like a very natural process and I, like my older brother Paul, was drawn by the character that my father was. He was an energy—a force. He simply made dreams come true. He was one of those characters of the electorate I mentioned earlier. He kept us grounded in our daily lives, leaving our motivations for success firmly bound by the desire not to outdo others but the desire to outdo ourselves. He used to say, 'Whatever you chose to do in life, be the best at it and be happy.' It was this loss which made me reflect on my life, and I have come to the conclusion that I had only partially understood the lessons he had taught me. Dad, for so long I was either chasing your shadows or standing on your shoulders. However, today I now understand what you meant.

In closing, to the residents of Brisbane Central, I am very much aware of the privilege that has been afforded to me as your elected representative. I also acknowledge the trust which many of you have placed in me as you may have voted for the LNP for the first time. What I pledge to you is that I will always give my best with the values and the drive I bring with me. I will focus always on representing the whole community and I will make the effort to listen and to seek the truth. I will not stop in my cause to ensure that the Queensland parliament never stops hearing about the concerns of the people of Brisbane Central. As part of this amazing LNP team, which almost fills this House, we have already commenced on the path that will once again deliver for the people of Brisbane Central and we will get this state back on track.