



Speech by

Mary-Anne O'Neill

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

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MAIDEN SPEECH

Ms O'NEILL (Kallangur—ALP) (12.01 pm): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am honoured to make my first speech as the new member for Kallangur—the first woman to do so. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I also respectfully acknowledge the traditional owners and the present Indigenous people who call the electorate of Kallangur home. I also acknowledge the hard work and dedication of my predecessor, Ken Hayward, who served the constituents of Kallangur for more than 22 years. Ken was generous with his time and support, and an excellent and popular member.

It has been a long journey for this dairy farmer's daughter from Talbingo in the Snowy Mountains in New South Wales to being elected to the 53rd Queensland Parliament. Not only am I proud to be the first woman to represent Kallangur, but I am extremely proud to serve in the first Bligh government. It was my early years as part of that community in a beautiful valley in the Snowy Mountains, and later in Wee Jasper in another beautiful valley, that I learnt the values that are still with me today.

As part of farming communities, everyone knew that their prosperity depended on their collective approach to both work and the use of available resources. As a young teenager even I was involved. The community showed me that I was an important part of the collective. They gave me jobs to do. One of the jobs I was given was in the bush fire brigade, where I was responsible for relaying messages that I received by walkie-talkie on to the control room by phone. That sounds simple enough, but in this case to receive the radio messages I had to climb a ladder up on to the roof to get clear reception. But everyone did their bit.

Each individual farmer worked hard in their own right to care for and manage their property but was always available in busy times to assist their neighbour with such things as hay carting, harvesting or taking their produce to town. In times of illness, the community worked selflessly to assist and in times of flood or fire or other emergency came out not only to alleviate the effects of the emergency but to provide practical assistance, not least in the form of delicious food and good humour. From them I learnt that, no matter how efficient or fortunate we are, we will always need our community and that even the biggest job can be done when we all pitch in. They taught me compassion, empathy and that sharing both sadness and celebrations binds us together.

When my parents and their friends gathered at meal times, their conversation taught me about fairness and equity and that we are all entitled to fair treatment regardless of our station in life. My brothers had great attitudes and protected me, as well as pushed me to be independent and to protect myself. And they have grown into inspiring men whom I look up to to this day. I was lucky to have such good role models. My family placed great emphasis on manners, courtesy and discipline. These attributes not only create harmony but assist in all relationships and roles.

But sometimes it is random events that leave a lasting impression. One of these events that left a lasting impression on me occurred at a local festival in Tumut one autumn evening when I was about eight or nine. I saw a man standing on the back of a truck speaking to a growing crowd of people. My family stopped to listen to him. He was easy to understand, friendly and was obviously engaging. I thought he

was terrific and asked his name. He had an unusual name and afterwards I always looked for him in the news or other events. His name was Gough Whitlam.

Eventually this man, whom I admired when just a child, became one of my heroes for the far-sighted and wide-ranging legislation he introduced. Some examples are: Australia's first federal legislation on human rights, the environment and heritage; welfare payments to single parent families; the abolition of the death penalty for federal crimes; his government commissioned inquiries into Aboriginal land rights; equal opportunities were given to women in federal government employment; free tertiary education; the setting up of legal aid and Medibank; and not least the introduction of *Advance Australia Fair* as our national anthem. What a difference one person can make.

Another life-changing event for me was my move to Queensland in 1995. My late husband, Jim, and I came to Brisbane from Canberra. I had worked in Canberra for more than 20 years, but the great weather and lifestyle of Queensland was always tempting us, particularly on icy winter mornings. Canberra is a wonderful city and, though I have many fond memories of my life there, I am thankful every day that we made the move here. I came to Brisbane to work for the Australian Services Union Clerical and Administrative Branch as an organiser. Janice Mayes and the late Chris Woods interviewed me and offered me the role, and I thank them for their faith and for the opportunity to join the best union in Queensland.

Mr Speaker, I am a proud unionist. Of course I am a proud unionist. I am proud that I have worked with and for members who believe in fair, equitable and dignified workplaces and, further, who understand that it is through a collective approach that these aspirations can be achieved. And they demonstrate their commitment to that collective approach by joining and being active in their union. The working lives of thousands of admin workers in Queensland have been improved because of that commitment. Of course I am a proud unionist.

I have been privileged to work in unions for more than 20 years and for eight of those years as Assistant Branch Secretary of the Australian Services Union. I can think of no better training ground for being a member of parliament. I learnt to listen, to explore issues and to seek solutions. I learnt that open and frank discussion solves many issues and that courtesy makes for productive negotiations and meetings. I learnt that many people understand that their issue may not have a solution but that an opportunity to seek advice and reassurance can give them confidence and solace.

I witnessed that our attitude, our enthusiasm and small demonstrations of leadership can make a huge difference to a difficult work situation—that not all leaders are out front; some are firmly in the centre of the crowd, leading by example. I saw firsthand that genuine consultation improves outcomes, that giving men and women the opportunity to be part of the solution, to have a role no matter how small, inspires and strengthens them and that involvement leads to understanding and action. Union activism has also taught me that with rights come responsibilities and that these responsibilities must be accorded the same attention and energy as our rights—that all of us have a responsibility to do whatever we can to enrich and enhance our working lives, our environment and our community.

I am extremely grateful for these lessons and experiences, and I am eager to use my experience to represent and engage the constituents of Kallangur. I am enthusiastic, I work hard and I will work with my constituency to resolve issues that concern them, and I will use our combined collective experience to find workable solutions for our community.

The electorate of Kallangur includes the suburbs of Kallangur, Whiteside, Kurwongbah, Petrie, Murrumba Downs, Dakabin, Burpengary South and parts of Lawnton and Narangba. Some of these are newly part of Kallangur, welcomed since the redistribution from the seats of Kurwongbah and Murrumba. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the retired member for Kurwongbah, Linda Lavarch, and Dean Wells, the member for Murrumba, for their efficiency and generosity in introducing me to the constituents in those redistributed areas.

In Kallangur, we are fortunate to have a varied and vigorous retail and business sector, some semirural areas and beautiful green spaces and picnic areas. Kallangur includes access to fabulous recreation areas like Lake Samsonvale, Lake Kurwongbah and the Pine River, and of course Lakeside Park, formerly known as Lakeside International Raceway—what Wikipedia describes as the spiritual home of Queensland motorsport. Lakeside has been the site of international premier racing events and played host to such names as Jim Clark, Jackie Stewart, Jack Brabham, Graham Hill and others—not forgetting Dick Johnson and Peter Brock and five-time world motorcycle champion Mick Doohan. Lakeside is also used for developing smart road technology for Queensland Motorways. It is a family oriented venue, providing many forms of entertainment apart from racing, from model boats to fishing, pocket bikes and go-carts.

Kallangur also has many war memorials. One in particular, Anzac Avenue, goes through the suburb of Kallangur and finishes in Petrie. The drive along Anzac Avenue reminds me every day of the sacrifices and service of all who have served in war. It makes me think of my own father, Bowman Morris, who was

based at Sandgate for training and then served as a Spitfire pilot in World War II in Britain, Italy and Africa in the RAAF while attached to the RAF.

As the member for Kallangur, I plan to meet with the business community and discuss the revitalisation of the retail and business sector by using innovative ideas to take advantage of the great community spirit in Kallangur and to provide community services and events. Constituents will be invited to meet with me, to take part in community forums and to suggest other means of engagement. I will meet with and consult with our Indigenous community through elders Uncle Lenny Johnson and Uncle Lloyd Hornsby and their organisation Bunyabilla. This is an organisation to be proud of which works tirelessly to progress its mission statement of 'sustainable practices for the community'.

As the Labor member for Kallangur, I aspire to all the aims of a just society: social justice, affordable housing, accessible quality education, youth engagement, reconciliation and dignified and fair employment conditions. When I look into the future for Kallangur, I see a vibrant community with frequent popular community events; I see business and retail returning to revitalise our business precincts; I see an increase to social housing availability; I see a coordinated and integrated transport system that has reduced congestion on our roads; I see an enhanced and revitalised volunteer register that allows for regular assistance to our aged and infirm; I see our schools flourishing and receiving the recognition they deserve; I see improved resources for young people to enjoy themselves safely and legally—for example, safe and accessible trail bike riding trails, a youth space and a community centre.

Our communities in Queensland are full of selfless, hardworking people, doing their best and dealing with their triumphs and tragedies with dignity and fortitude. In every school, there are heroes changing and enhancing lives. In every hospital, there are wonderful staff dealing with every kind of emergency and heartbreak with compassion and efficiency. In every sporting club, there are parents and friends devoting hours to the enjoyment and development of our kids. These people are usually unnoticed until we have personal need of them. Then they truly assume their rightful place as heroes.

During my husband's terminal illness, we were astonished and touched by the services available to support us and to provide medical and personal assistance, not least from our community of friends. I was able to care for him at home until he died but only with the wonderful assistance provided by government services, the Blue Nurses and the palliative care teams of Mount Olivet, and our local GP.

We would all be uplifted if we heard more about such unselfish service or stories of triumphs. Too much attention is placed on the negative in our country, our state and our community. How can we have hope and motivation if all we hear about are the crimes and brutish behaviour of the minority? We should instead share the tales that inspire us, that lift us up when our energy flags and our enthusiasm wanes. I want to collect those stories of the everyday achievements and successes in Kallangur. I want to publish and promote them to encourage optimism and enthusiasm for what I believe to be a wonderful community. We must take every opportunity to celebrate and congratulate each other.

In all campaigns, there is a team of dedicated, unpaid, overworked people who generously and selflessly support the candidate. Thank you to them all. Thank you especially to Julie Bignell for her friendship, her sense of humour, her leadership and her unflinching clarity—and for having the vision.

Thank you to my union for their generous moral and physical support. Thank you to my friends and family for their support and congratulations. Thank you to my colleagues in the union movement who gave up their own time and money to help, particularly the ASU, the LHMU, the ETU, the TWU, the RTBU, the CEPU, the MUA and the QPSU. Thanks to the Australian Labor Party branch members and their families for their hard work. Thank you to my campaign director, Chris Whiting, for his wise counsel, hard work and unflinching enthusiasm.

I particularly thank my partner, Craig, for his support, his belief in me, his great ideas and his practical nature. He proved to have an instinctive talent for campaigning, and his huge capacity for hard work was invaluable. He of course fitted it all in around family responsibilities and full-time work. And a big thank you to Jordan for all of his hard work and great ideas.

My friends travelled from as far as Canberra, Sydney, England and Germany and worked on the election campaign—not to work on it, but they did work on it. I must make special mention of Matt Stein from Berlin. He gave up his long-awaited holiday in Australia to work tirelessly on my campaign—early mornings, late nights and very energetic letterboxing. It was not quite the holiday in Queensland depicted in our wonderful tourism brochures.

Thanks to Barbara Byrne and Harold Logue from Canberra who came and worked during the campaign, and I know they had hoped to be here today. They have been with me through many significant events—some happy, some tragic. They have provided me with great food, drink and conversation. They now have their own significant issues to deal with but still find the time to support me and I thank them.

Thanks to the many people who believed I could do it and gave me the confidence to try: to my mum, who has always told me that I was special and who taught me to be compassionate and that the

feelings and rights of others are as important as my own; to my father, who taught me to question and that I deserved to have my opinion heard; and to both my parents for never teaching me that there are some things a woman just cannot do.

To my many mentors who have taken the time to teach me and to guide me: without you all, I would never have had the confidence to try. Thanks to the union movement, particularly my first union, the ATPOA, which gave me the opportunity to be involved, recognised in me the seeds of an activist and took the time and resources to teach me and train me, inspire me and motivate me.

To all the people who gave me time, good advice, inspiration and much needed motivation: thank you. To Jo Justo, Kate Ward from Canberra, Sharon Valles, Ian McCarthy, Tom Brown, Carl Ratana, Dave Anderson, Bob Macintosh, Shane and Angie King, Iris Ashton, Terry Armstrong, Michelle Burgett, Graeme Russell, Joy Seiffert, John Targuse, Bob Kline, Senator Claire Moore, Emily's List and every other fabulous person who donated money, stuffed envelopes, did endless letterboxing or bought a raffle ticket or other ticket for fundraising: thank you.

In every working woman's life, there is another woman they rely on to assist in family emergencies and tribulations, and for me that woman is Chris Scarcella. She always steps in to help me in any situation and we could not manage without her. Thank you, Chris. It is not only me that relies on you, and you never let us down.

Thank you also to Kevin and Michelle in my electorate office. I literally could not manage without you, your hard work and wealth of knowledge and your unfailing good humour.

Lastly, may I congratulate all the staff here in Parliament House for the friendly, efficient and professional assistance they provide me. This is a great comfort to me as I look forward with pride and a sense of privilege to representing the constituents of Kallangur. My message to the people of Kallangur is that the values that have animated and strengthened me in my life—compassion, empathy and collectivism—the values that have been instilled in me by my friends and family, now impel me to work hard to build our community.