




Speech by

Mark Stewart

MEMBER FOR SUNNYBANK

Hansard Thursday, 31 May 2012

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr STEWART** (Sunnybank—LNP) (4.39 pm): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. May I first congratulate the member for Stretton on her maiden speech and begin by extending through you my personal congratulations to Madam Speaker on her election to that office. I have every confidence that she will continue to serve this parliament and the people of Queensland with the utmost dignity and integrity as she has throughout her parliamentary career. May I also extend to you my congratulations on your appointment as Deputy Speaker.

I also extend my congratulations to our Premier, the Hon. Campbell Newman. When it was confirmed that he had joined the state campaign team, I was very excited, but not primarily for the benefit that he would bring to the state campaign but for the long-term benefit of Queensland. My excitement has been vindicated by the whirlwind of change and progress since the day he was sworn in as Premier. I believe that Premier Newman will lead Queensland from the dismal state of unemployment, missed opportunity and financial insecurities to prosperity and bring back a government of which we are all proud. He will lead and inspire us to a decade that will be remembered as the golden years of Queensland—a time of economic prosperity, social cohesion and a return of fundamental values of honesty and integrity in public office.

My congratulations are also warmly extended to Premier Newman's cabinet colleagues for not only their election or re-election to their seats but also on their appointment as ministers of the Crown. In particular, I extend my personal appreciation and that of my campaign team to the Hon. Premier, the Hon. Fiona Simpson, the Hon. Tim Nicholls, the Hon. Dr Bruce Flegg, the Hon. Scott Emerson, the Hon. John-Paul Langbroek and the member for Gympie, David Gibson, for their personal assistance in visiting the electorate of Sunnybank during and before the election campaign. To all the other members of Her Majesty's government and opposition, I congratulate you on your election. I believe that we have been gifted with great responsibilities and opportunities at a critical time in the state's history. I would also like to extend my appreciation to the unsuccessful candidates for the electorate of Sunnybank for their contribution to a fair but extremely hard-fought campaign.

Our state campaign was executed with great precision and to Bruce McIver, Gary Spence, Michael O'Dwyer, James McGrath, Matt McEachan and Mitch Redford and the remaining LNP team, their efforts to ensure that we had an honest, clean and coordinated campaign with results-driven policies was critical to the success of the government in Sunnybank.

It is also appropriate at this time that I recognise the contribution of the previous member for Sunnybank, the Hon. Judy Spence. As one of Queensland's longest-serving female members of parliament, her efforts in serving the people of Sunnybank are well recognised. On a personal level, I have many recollections of her presence at annual Anzac Day ceremonies at the RSL hall at Lister Street, Sunnybank from the early 1990s until last year and on other occasions within the electorate. Her service as police minister was highly regarded by serving police and employees and I wish her all the best in her retirement.

After being in this place for just a few weeks, it was obvious that every honourable member believes that his or her electorate is the jewel in Queensland's crown. It would come as no surprise to members that such is my view of the Sunnybank electorate. Having lived and attended school in Runcorn, I have many memories of bicycle rides on gravel roads, walking to school past market gardens and horse paddocks—a much slower pace of life than is generally the case today. My schooling and upbringing in this wonderful area has profoundly contributed to my belief and values and to the characteristics and standards by which I have lived my life to the present time. This will be the basis upon which this new and exciting phase of my working career will be based.

If asked in future years, 'Who do you work for?' my answer will not be the Jimmy Durante one-liner that was often repeated on local radio stations as I travelled to school—'The same old bunch; the wife and the kids.' Rather, it will be, 'I work for the people of Sunnybank.' I am committed to working tirelessly for all of those who were privileged to have been born here and for all of those who have taken the bold step in choosing to live here. I work for those who are privileged to be employed and those who are not as fortunate. I work for those who are healthy and for those who are not and also those who suffer disabilities. I work for families and I work for the young as well as those who deserve every respect and dignity as they enjoy their years of retirement. It is my pledge today that I will do so for every elector in the years ahead who seeks assistance through my office regardless of their station in life and regardless of how they choose to vote.

To demonstrate my commitment to the electorate, I promised months before the campaign started that I would move from my home in Mount Gravatt, which was only a few kilometres from the electorate, to live in it. I did this as I intended to be a local member who works in and with the community that I will represent as a backbencher in this parliament. I wanted to hear what is of concern first and to see the reality of problems and the impact on my community. I have kept this promise and the weekend before I was sworn in in this very chamber my family moved to our new home at Eight Mile Plains just over a kilometre from where I lived for my first 18 years and just down the road from my first school and the sports fields where I played cricket, soccer, basketball and rugby. I am a man of my word. I will keep every other promise that I have made to faithfully serve as a member of parliament. Without our word and our reputation, who are we? It is shameful that this was not the standard that was adhered to and believed by our predecessors in office.

Allow me to return to the Sunnybank electorate for just a few more moments. Sunnybank is a unique electorate—a mini city within a city. Contained within its boundaries are QEII Hospital; Sunnybank Private Hospital; Archerfield Airport; a major road and rail transport hub at Acacia Ridge; and a large industrial corridor in which many small office, commercial, retail and industrial outlets and buildings are located. There are business owners and proprietors who provide great opportunities for other small businesses and large businesses throughout Brisbane. They provide employment and common wealth to our economy. There is also a vibrant retail and restaurant sector that is a tribute to the many thousands of Queenslanders who are able to bring diversity of culture and food to the streets and suburbs. The Sunnybank electorate has a great sense of energy and vibrancy that is demonstrated each and every day. In a transport sense, Sunnybank is serviced by both the Queensland Rail network and major roads such as Logan, Beaudesert and Mains road and the South East Freeway.

But all of this is not what makes Sunnybank truly great. Sunnybank is unique, with a diverse multicultural community that is questionably larger than in any other electorate with a real sense of community. It is a place where the dignity of all people is by and large respected. All of those who live in Queensland are much better for this outstanding example of Queensland in the 21st century.

There is a fantastic community centre in Acacia Ridge led by wonderful staff who go that extra mile every day for the residents, working with other community services to ensure that the needs of others are met in the community. But they are not alone. Rotary and Lions clubs work together to serve the community. This was extremely evident during and after the floods, when the community groups and individuals worked together to help their neighbours. Some residential and industrial parts of the electorate were directly affected and many other residents were affected through their employment. This level of community support is one of the features that makes me very proud to be a Queenslanders. Another is the string of success of the State of Origin series.

There is one statistic that I must share with the honourable members today and it is one of the reasons I am so proud to be representing Sunnybank. Whilst QEII Hospital is only a relatively small hospital by Brisbane standards and has limited services, it has around 140 volunteers providing great services like patient visiting, craft, reading and, with the Red Cross, providing much needed medical equipment hire.

One of my first functions as the member for Sunnybank was to attend the service awards for the local Meals on Wheels where three members of the community had over 40 years of service and another eight members had over 30 years of service. There are many community groups in Sunnybank and there is insufficient time for me to preach their good deeds today, but rest assured that I will do so both in this

place and throughout the electorate in the months and years to come. The same can be said about the vast group of sporting bodies, schools—both public and private—and the range of business, arts, religious and cultural bodies that breathe life and a sense of community throughout our suburbs.

A sound education is one of the greatest benefits provided to my generation and previous generations. It is a hallmark of civilised communities and one of the greatest legacies of a government in this state. Sunnybank has many of the best schools in the state, including the state's first and only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander private school. Throughout the last 18 months I have attended many hundreds of events and gatherings in the electorate in many different venues. Throughout that time it was abundantly clear to me that Queensland families are doing it tough and struggling to make ends meet and that is why they have given this government an historic mandate to help them and to support them.

May I extend a sincere thank you to the voters of Sunnybank. I know that many of you voted for this side of politics for the first time and while Sunnybank received the second largest swing to the government—over 20 per cent—I realise that this tide of support will well turn against me unless I deliver what was promised and that we continue to talk, walk and act straight, precisely as we have promised. I can assure this House that I will work constantly to ensure that we keep those promises, that the voice of the people in Sunnybank is heard and also that Sunnybank gets its fair and reasonable share of resources.

There are many issues that are of concern in my electorate over and above those that have been dealt with during the election campaign. Student accommodation in suburbs close to universities is a challenge in many locations, as it is in Mount Gravatt. Additional police resources that are used to provide more rapid local responses are critical given the current climate in which the commission of criminal offences has apparently increased. Rail crossings, additional front-line nursing staff and the delivery of infrastructure with minimal disruption to business activities are further issues genuinely and properly raised with me and are ones that I shall pursue through the most appropriate channels to achieve the best outcomes.

Prior to seeking preselection for the state seat of Sunnybank I was not active in party politics. Out of a deep sense of frustration that real people were not getting fair treatment and that there was a better way of government delivering services, I put my hand up to signify that I was ready to fight on behalf of the community. From my experience in the community and having worked in both public and private sectors, my belief is that government can learn much from industry and, in return, there are aspects of government from which the private sector can learn.

Many people have contributed to my taking a seat in this 54th Parliament. I would like to particularly recognise my campaign team, local supporters and their families. My team was led by Duncan Maclaine, my campaign director, and supported by Ken Browning, Reg Marshall, Juan Alvarez, Bill and Shirley Tree, Imelda Spoljarevic, Luke Manning, Tony Meredith, Jacki Clayton, Ben Faint, Brian and Kathleen Marsden, Marie Jackson, Angela O'Neale, Loretta and Brian Stewart with additional help from Ian Ollsson, Natasha, Vivian, Sheena, Mike, Andrew, Daniel, Claire, Julia and many more. I would also like to particularly thank the recently elected Lord Mayor of Brisbane, Graham Quirk, whose initial support and advice was paramount to the good start that we had in our local campaign.

To my fellow elected representatives in both state and local government in adjacent as well as overlapping electorates, the team work that was evident in our campaign was also key to the success that we received and I thank you for your support. The support did not stop there. While we had fantastic local support, friends and family came from Beaudesert to Pine Rivers—and I must confess to the Premier that I did have some volunteers who came from Ashgrove. In fact, many of the people who offered and gave assistance had no allegiance to any particular political party and some said that they had previously done everything possible not to vote and they had lost faith in the accountability of government and in their elected representatives. This is one of the most important things that needs to be restored.

As far as in-laws go I consider myself very fortunate, not only for bringing up my wife with a strong work ethic but for their dedication and willingness to drop anything to lend a hand. To Janette and Geoff Bladin, I thank you for your much needed support. I was raised in Runcorn, not far from where both my grandparents lived, with my two older sisters, Angela and Rosie. My parents worked hard to ensure that we were all brought up with good principles, a strong work ethic and, most importantly, became a strong and united family. After all, the family is the most important thing. To Brian and Loretta Stewart, Mum and Dad, thank you for all that you have done for me and my family. You are both an inspiration to me. If it was not for your help I would not be able to serve the good people of Sunnybank.

Mr Deputy Speaker, as you and other members know, running for public office is not a decision that can be taken lightly. It is a decision that impacts on family and friends greatly. I cannot pretend that the past 17 months have been smooth sailing. During my campaign there was someone by my side every step of the way, my wife, Kareena. I owe my appointment to you, my well organised and dedicated wife. There are not many women out there who could run and organise an election campaign while juggling employment

and being a fantastic mother to two young children. In fact, my youngest child was only two days old when the election was called. You are my friend and my rock. Thank you for your love and support. To my sons, Bradley and Nathan, while you are too young to understand why your father is unable to spend a lot of time with you now, please know that I do this with you in mind and that the time we spend together as a family will be all the more special.

In closing, I feel privileged to join the ranks of many experienced members and I am honoured to be able to represent Sunnybank, Queensland, and this great democracy that many take for granted. I will play my part to ensure that it is safeguarded for years to come and for future generations.

I have been guided for many years by the companionship of many Cub, Scout, Venturer and Rover leaders and have been shaped by my friendships in the scouting movement as well as my family. Many remain my closest friends to this day. I have also been guided by these words by Lord Baden-Powell, the founder of scouting, whose vision for the future was so precisely stated many years ago—

Try and leave this world a little better than you found it and when your turn comes to die, you can die happy in feeling that at any rate you have not wasted your time but have done your best

I will do my best as I have solemnly sworn to do in the days and years ahead. Thank you.