




Speech By  
**Sandy Bolton**

**MEMBER FOR NOOSA**

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### VALEDICTORY

 **Ms BOLTON** (Noosa—Ind) (8.44 pm): It is again a great honour to deliver the Valedictory speech on behalf of the crossbench in wrapping up a year that could never have been foreseen and one that no-one would wish to see again any time soon. For the six of us who were here in the 56th Parliament, it is good to be back. For our newest crossbencher, a warm welcome. In the back row you are in good hands. However, with the doubling of Greens up here, we could be in trouble!

Previously the word ‘pandemic’ had been just that, a word. The reality is that its impacts and enduring changes to our communities, Queensland, across Australia and the globe have forever changed us. It has brought both sorrows and progress, many tears and, yes, some cheers. Out of every challenge we have been confronted with there has been action and opportunity for refinement and betterment. COVID-19 has been a mirror. It has reflected our shortfalls as well as our enormous strengths. Importantly, it has highlighted what is relevant and what we need to concentrate on.

Throughout the year the members of the crossbench have continued to bring forward exactly this: priorities from our electorates, as well as the broader state, whether COVID related or not, unfiltered and raw in true grassroots style. This has included the consistent call for harnessing water to drought proof or the sun and wind for power; raising awareness of the flaws in our systems, including a committee process that requires an independent chair, which is no reflection on our committee chair—where are you, Mr Russo—to function objectively; the issue of red and other tapes that stops or slows the ability to resolve longstanding issues, and we have a number of those; the voices from our communities that seek the simplicity of straight answers and some common sense; a needed review of sessional orders, and I have brought that up before, to ensure that all in this chamber have opportunities to speak; and seeking the basics that all Queenslanders should be able to access, such as affordable housing options.

As members of parliament, just like all Queenslanders, we seek this simplicity and yet, at times, the most basic of questions and efforts lead to our scarce resources being used to end up where we started. Going in circles is a waste. That is not the fault of anyone. It is the very system itself, the culture that has pervaded where reasons why we cannot override the very reasons why we must. Is this from fear to step outside the tick boxes? Whatever it is, we shelved that culture during the COVID emergency and we need to leave it on the shelf where it was put. We need solutions and resolutions, not absolutions.

The Katter boys—we have one here—presented several private member’s bills. Even though those did not get across the line, they have demonstrated again how very diverse coast-to-country needs and thoughts are. Here in the south-east corner we are blessed by not living and working in constant extremes. Our access to health and other services are a given and, by sheer volume of numbers, have a majority. We must always look after our bush folk. They are good people, living and working where the majority would not be prepared to.

The member for Maiwar brought forward injustices. Even though as a crossbench we may not agree on some of those, the intent is always honourable and in the very best interests of the sectors being fought for. There is a fine balance when discussing freedoms, including the right to protest, and vastly differing viewpoints have been brought forward. Taking away someone else's freedom to get across the message of freedom and rights could be considered an oxymoron. It is an interesting debate and one that may not be resolved for some time to come.

The members for Mirani and Whitsunday brought unique aspects to this chamber as has our newest addition, the member for South Brisbane, this week. This should all be celebrated. Diversity of thought from a diverse Queensland is essential to capture all viewpoints versus the homogenous process of the block vote. Independent MPs and minor parties bring texture and objectivity to debate, and it is this that we must always retain as part of the decision-making process. Even though in this new term we have been separated in the rejigging of our office space, we will always share that place of relatively apolitical and non-aligned debate, regardless of what is touted incorrectly during election time.

The work of crossbenchers is extensive, as every bill must be covered and speeches prepared; in addition, tackling the underpinning frameworks and processes that no longer serve us well, causing a collective raising of eyebrows across Queensland. This includes when bills are introduced not in accordance with the *Notice Paper* or have extensive amendments issued at the last moment. This is not conducive to informed debate from lack of investigation and consultation time. Then speeches written through the night are not able to be delivered due to those time allocation restrictions.

Even though I have been a lone soldier amongst my fellow crossbenchers in the 56th Parliament by supporting the business program motion as a method of efficiency, I find it now difficult to do so. We query why sessional and standing orders are not amended to ensure all members have opportunity to speak. This is not difficult and we cannot imagine why anyone in this chamber would object in the aims of equity and fairness.

One of the greatest successes of the crossbench was the finalisation of our successful private member's motion to see parliamentary staffing resources determined by an independent authority. This will bring parity across the political landscape and benefit future MPs and their communities. It has only taken 30 years, but I thank all of the crossbench members for their united efforts and thank one of my interns, Dom, who worked with me on this.

There are many questions that remain unanswered from the 56th Parliament that I trust will be resolved in the 57th. Why do we speak of equality and multiculturalism and yet not give time at the start of parliament for differing beliefs and reflections to be honoured? Why is it not considered appropriate to extend sitting hours to accommodate extra debate on important bills? When will we reach a consensus to move beyond what does not work effectively? We need to lead the way in how we can debate, legislate and mitigate without the wasting of much time arguing on matters that are irrelevant to Queenslanders. To create jobs, why do we import product when we can build, make, grow and sew our own?

If we are genuine about eradicating homelessness and home stress and duress, why do we not just get on and construct affordable accommodations to community design and management, not to outdated views? We have said it before and we will keep saying it until this is resolved. Fifty years ago we addressed this, yet now in our smart, innovative and learned world we struggle with the basics. Should we be embarrassed? Absolutely.

For all of these questions that are unanswered there are many that have been. Communities across Queensland have benefited from decisions, finances and implementations during and in the COVID recovery that would be up there with the best in the globe at all levels of government. National cabinet was of enormous benefit, and I trust that into the future the bipartisan collaboration that is sought becomes more the norm versus the exception.

To all who have been on the front line during this pandemic, you have our deep gratitude. Our health workers, police, paramedics, SES and way beyond, teachers, supermarket staff, childcare workers and so many more—all who did not have a choice to work from home or to not work at all. These essential Queenslanders never complained in going above and beyond. How do we ever say thank you without it sounding trite?

Across Queensland there was consideration when there were concerns about the decisions being made—what was really happening which may have not been apparent. We had nurses sleeping in their cars in order to keep their own vulnerable at home safe and those in industries that we did not foresee as being at risk now dealing with their own physical and mental health. Whilst we are celebrating the opening of borders and a return to normality, we must now look after those who looked after us.

To the Premier, all ministers, parliamentary staff and departments of the 56th Parliament: your tireless work and efforts during one of the toughest years will not be forgotten. So many would be unaware of your sleepless nights, taking phone calls from MPs at the oddest hours, the tolerance of our demands during the emergency and covering in the most dire of situations—the trauma of lost jobs and businesses, how ineffective we felt as we tried to console the thousands that lined up outside Centrelink or could not bury their loved ones with a proper service, facilities shut down, social isolation, increased trauma. Only every single member in this chamber understands the lengths they have gone to and the cost to them personally and to their families.

To our newest MPs and additions to ministerial roles: congratulations and go well. We need you to be real and accessible and to fight to create greater efficiencies so our dollars go further and our efforts are realised. Just because something has been done a certain way in history does not mean that you need to follow.

To our Clerk, Neil: again, how would we have survived the pandemic, the famous telephony rollout and then the disruption of elections without you and your team?

Mr Speaker, there were some funny moments and, even though you did not laugh at them, I detected a curling upwards at the corner of your mouth. I am not mentioning any names, however, the call to withdraw unparliamentary language when we were all scratching our heads as to what the unparliamentary word actually was may still be being googled. To do what you do with a House full of what at times seem like unruly teenagers can only be attributed to the patience that not many have. It was an honour to second your nomination to be our Speaker of the 57<sup>th</sup> Parliament.

To everyone from IT to catering, library services, security and housekeeping: your efficiency, assistance and smiles are deeply appreciated and we hope that you always see that, even if we do not say it enough.

To my fellow crossbenchers: thank you. To think that in our often deeply opposing views we managed to get through another year without denigration, agitation or litigation is remarkable and testimony to what we set out to do: demonstrate that you can have differences and robust debate without getting personal.

To all who have been returned to your seats: hearty congratulations. To those who retired: celebrations for your contributions to your communities and chambers. To those we lost: our very best wishes. Only those who have stood for and lost an election can understand what it feels like. We hope that you will continue to do great works in your community and run again. To all who ran their campaigns with dignity and respect for the electorates contested: thank you. To those who did not: misinformation and deceptive advertising is disrespectful to voters and to yourselves.

How humbled and honoured we as crossbenchers are to stand in this chamber of the people's house, united in our efforts to resolve issues confronting our communities and across the state and build that future sought by the people we represent. We send heartfelt wishes to all on both sides of the House for the Christmas season and the New Year, and blessings to you and your families, your communities and your staff. May Santa bring rain where needed, without added flooding, may the summer storms have less ferocity than the Speaker when his back is niggling and, most of all, may we bring the certainty sought in Queensland and across Australia regarding our borders into the future. Merry Christmas, everyone. Bring on 2021!