




Speech By
Hon. Coralee O'Rourke

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

Record of Proceedings, 26 March 2015

MOTION OF CONFIDENCE

 **Hon. CJ O'ROURKE** (Mundingburra—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland) (11.03 pm): I rise to speak in support of the Premier's motion of confidence in the Palaszczuk government. I start by acknowledging the Turrbal and Jagera people, the traditional owners of the land north and south of our beautiful river. I thank the elders past and present and acknowledge that this land continues to be sacred to them.

I would like to take this opportunity to speak to the motion of confidence, leaving my own personal story and thanks to my family and friends to my speech on the address-in-reply. First, may I congratulate Mr Speaker on his appointment.

Compared to many of my esteemed colleagues in this House I am fairly new to the world of politics. I have, however, been told on good authority that my work in early education and my skills in dealing with tantrums, children not listening or sharing and inappropriate behaviour holds me in good stead for my political career.

What led me to give up my career as an early childhood educator and run for political office was seeing the way the previous LNP government treated Queenslanders. In my electorate of Mundingburra, what I saw over the past three years was a great divide between the LNP government and the people it was elected to represent. What I saw in my community was suffering because of the loss of jobs resulting from economic uncertainty that was the trademark of the previous government. What I saw in my community were people who were never consulted about radical changes that were being thrust upon them. Even worse, I saw that my community's thoughts and views were blatantly ignored by a government that did not want to listen. It is for that reason I could not stand idly by and watch this continue. On 31 January the voters of Mundingburra did not stand idly by either. They rejected the LNP government's approach of governing by stealth and put their confidence in the stable, consensus-building approach offered by the Palaszczuk government.

I am honoured to stand in this House as the member for Mundingburra and Minister for Disability Services, Minister for Seniors and Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland. I proudly take up the baton as Labor Minister for Disability Services from previous Labor ministers the current Premier and Treasurer. It is a very exciting time to be disability services minister, with the monumental level of change that is taking place with the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme in Queensland from July next year.

The NDIS is a prime example of the leadership shown by Labor determination. The NDIS shows the power of real leadership. Queenslanders with disability and the broader disability sector can have confidence in this government, that we will work closely with them to ensure the transition to the NDIS is as seamless as possible. I have already met with a number of groups including Queensland disability advisory councils, UnitingCare Community, Queenslanders with Disability Network and other advocacy groups. I look forward to the coming months when I will meet with many more of these important champions including the families and individuals who live with disability.

The NDIS is the most significant investment in social welfare since Labor Prime Minister Gough Whitlam established Medicare in 1975. Labor governments have always been the real reformers, because we take the people with us on that journey. Nationally, investment in the NDIS will total more than \$22 billion by 2019-20. For Queenslanders this will mean an additional 13,000 jobs by 2019. Queenslanders can have faith and confidence that for this Labor government the most important and exciting facet of NDIS is the human face of the scheme and the level of change that it will mean for people with disability. The number of Queenslanders receiving disability supports is expected to double to 97,000 by 2019. Choice is one of the underpinning principles of the NDIS that this government is deeply committed to. The NDIS will empower people with a disability with the dignity to make choices about their own lives.

The Palaszczuk government will keep its election commitment to continue to offer accommodation support and respite services to its existing clients with high and complex needs. This means that, unlike the Newman government, we will keep our promise and will not force almost 1,000 people and their families to abandon the service provider they may have used for years for another service.

Importantly, hundreds of disability services staff working across accommodation support and respite services will be able to continue in their current roles under their existing conditions. I recently visited one of the accommodation support and respite services in Townsville and the pride that radiated from the young woman who lived there spoke volumes as she escorted me around her house. It was her home—the place where she is able to make decisions about what she wants to do. A necessary aspect of the NDIS will be the expansion and development of a disability workforce through a range of programs and training. This government is well on its way to implementing a vital component of this—the vocational educational and training investment plan. That is the difference: Labor invests in our future by investing in jobs and training and by investing in our community.

To ensure a smooth transition, this government has been on the front foot working with the Commonwealth government and the National Disability Insurance Agency to negotiate and finalise the bilateral agreement between Queensland and the Commonwealth. The bilateral agreement is crucial in the NDIS process because it is the document that will outline how the NDIS will be rolled out, providing certainty to Queenslanders. Queenslanders have been contributing to the NDIS Medicare levy since 1 July 2014. People with disability in Queensland are entitled to full and fair access to their share of the NDIS levy to ensure a smooth transition into the scheme. Meanwhile, preparations for the NDIS are underway in the community. Workshops, seminars, one-on-one meetings and other activities are giving people with disability, their family and carers the right information to help them make the choices and to take control of their support services. Considerable preparedness activity with the sector, including work to help small rural and remote and discrete Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities develop local approaches, is gaining momentum.

Sadly, the previous LNP government played politics with the NDIS. The best preparedness activity would have been to have had an NDIS trial site in Queensland. Every state and territory in this country is running an NDIS trial site except Queensland. Other state leaders, most from the conservative side of politics, recognised an NDIS trial was an opportunity to make sure that the full rollout of the scheme was as efficient as possible. When the federal government announced a billion dollars in 2012 for the NDIS, every other state and territory made people with a disability a priority and allocated their share to the trial. Sadly, the previous LNP government did not make people with a disability a priority and Queensland missed the boat. That is why we made an election commitment in opposition to establish a launch for the NDIS and why I am now working with the department to keep that commitment. This government believes that the establishment of a launch to test the process for participants in a Queensland context will ensure a more streamlined and effective transition into the NDIS. This government is equally focused on delivering and improving disability and community care services in Queensland in the lead-up to the NDIS. Our commitment is to an inclusive Queensland where people—all people—are participants in all aspects of community life.

I also stand before honourable members as the Minister for Seniors. The Palaszczuk government appreciates what our seniors have contributed, and continue to contribute, to the development of our state and the richness of our communities. As the only child of ageing parents I understand that while there are challenges for some older Queenslanders I also know their contribution to the state makes them some of Queensland's most valuable assets. This government will not sell out our seniors. I have started working with my cabinet colleagues and their departments on our seniors commitments for a one-stop shop for government information for seniors and the establishment of an advisory task force for residential transition for aging Queenslanders. I have already met with a number of seniors organisations and have personally given them my commitment to work with them to create age-friendly communities, responding to an ageing population and helping

to address economic concerns. The Palaszczuk government will invest in Queensland's seniors so that their wealth of knowledge and expertise continues to be valued.

I am a North Queenslander by choice and I am very proud to be the Minister Assisting the Premier on North Queensland, honouring the commitment the Premier made in Townsville during the election campaign. The North Queensland that my family and I chose to live in already has great industry diversity with construction, manufacturing, mining services, tourism, agriculture and education and training. Unlike the previous LNP government, this government is taking the north seriously. Unfortunately, North Queensland felt the full force of the LNP's cruel, heartless cuts and was largely ignored. Under the LNP government, unemployment in my home town of Townsville grew to 8.5 per cent and youth unemployment is an appalling 17.4 per cent. The Palaszczuk government wants to see North Queensland flourish, with local business and industry prospering and creating jobs while our assets stay in government hands. This government recognises the fantastic opportunities for North Queensland, including opportunities to work with Asia and the development of the agricultural, education, tropical medicine and tourism sectors. This is about creating highly skilled, highly paid jobs into the future—the jobs that I want for my children, their friends and their children in years to come.

The Palaszczuk government will reopen the North Queensland office of the government in Townsville, an office that was closed by the previous government. This small but significant government presence in the north was established and maintained by successive Labor governments for 14 years until the Newman government packed up shop and retreated down south. Paul Keating once said that when you change the government you change the country. The people of Queensland chose to change the government and this Palaszczuk government will work hard every day to change our state for the better. My portfolio may seem disparate to some, but I know what connects the people of North Queensland, people with disability and our seniors. The previous LNP government did not rate them and did not listen to them. I can guarantee that this government will be very different. I commend the motion of confidence in the Palaszczuk government to the House.