



Speech by

Vicky Darling

MEMBER FOR SANDGATE

Hansard Wednesday, 11 October 2006

MAIDEN SPEECH

Ms DARING (Sandgate—ALP) (4.48 pm): Firstly, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Speaker on his appointment. This Assembly has chosen well. I know that he will provide excellent guidance to the new members of parliament. I feel honoured and proud to be the representative of the people of the electorate of Sandgate in this Assembly. I thank the voters of Sandgate for putting their faith in me and I pay tribute to my predecessor, Gordon Nuttall.

The electorate of Sandgate is a truly special part of Queensland. It takes in the suburbs of Taigum, Bracken Ridge, Fitzgibbon, Deagon, Brighton, Sandgate and Shorncliffe. It is bounded by Bramble Bay to the east, the electorate of Aspley to the west and the electorate of Nudgee to the south. I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land which makes up the Sandgate electorate. The local Turrbul people have lived in the region for thousands of years. They referred to the land we now call Brighton, Sandgate and Shorncliffe as Warra, which means an open sheet of water. Lieutenant John Oxley first sailed past Warra and saw its people on 29 November 1823. The first government auction of land occurred in 1853, and by the summer of 1866 Sandgate was a growing seaside holiday village with three-bedroom seaside cottages renting for three pounds a week. Sandgate State School, which my children now attend, was opened in 1873 and in 1882 the Sandgate rail line opened.

Of course, the Sandgate electorate is much more than just the suburb that bears its name. While Sandgate and Shorncliffe were developing as seaside retreats, the areas of Brighton, Bracken Ridge, Deagon, Fitzgibbon and Taigum centred on farming and grazing. The first school opened at Brighton in 1920. Bracken Ridge and Taigum each established schools in 1957. If members are interested in the history of Queensland, I would encourage them to visit the Sandgate Historical Museum, which is operated by our wonderful Sandgate and District Historical Society.

While my electorate has a proud tradition of providing education to local children for over a century, like a lot of other areas of Queensland the school buildings are also very old. It was exciting to be able to recently announce to my electorate significant infrastructure funding under the new School Community Development Fund for each and every state school to modernise facilities. Our schools need to progress to equip our young people with the skills to compete in a global workforce when they reach adulthood. I look forward to working with educators, parents, carers and students to ensure that the Queensland education and training system is the best in Australia.

There are so many skills and experiences we want for our children, but we must also keep them safe and healthy as we teach them to think. We need to ensure certain core learning outcomes as well as encourage the innovative thinking and reasoning that will discover the solutions to problems that we have not yet even identified—the sorts of thinkers that we need for our new Smart State Medical Research Centre, for example. We need to make sure that we are building the skills to provide for solid work and career opportunities into the future.

I am pleased to represent a mix of cultures, religions and socioeconomic backgrounds. I am proud that at the heart of the electorate beats a pride in and respect for community and a drive to help those in need. Some examples of this diverse mix include the Evergreen Taoist Temple and accommodation units;

the Taigum Community Church, which established Victory Community Services providing a range of education, counselling and support services; and the many local Catholic schools and top-class colleges like St Patrick's College at Shorncliffe and St John Fisher College at Bracken Ridge. I am also looking forward to working with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, groups and service providers to progress initiatives and services to help support a thriving Indigenous community.

The Sandgate electorate has special family businesses and small businesses that give back to the community. They not only provide excellent goods and services to allow people to shop locally, they put in their time, energy and money to support community programs and events. The people of Sandgate take their community responsibilities very seriously, and I am proud of the many organisations and individuals dedicated to the welfare of older people, people with disabilities, people with health concerns, and children and young people. For example, the Sandgate and Bracken Ridge Action Group, the Sandgate RSL subbranch and the Hindu Society of Queensland are all active community supporters in my electorate.

Our community groups nurture and support family, culture, faith, art, environment, sport and recreation and wonderful community festivals. Festivals such as the Einbunpin Festival, the Sandgate Bluewater Festival, the Music by the Sea Festival, the Yarrageh Drama Festival and the Greek Affair Celebration have made their mark on Brisbane's events calendar. The Sandgate electorate is also full of beautiful old Queensland houses as well as new residential estates and the demography is just as mixed, with families and older people enjoying living side by side. We have some world-class facilities for aged people, including the state-run Eventide Nursing Home, which has just celebrated 60 years of service to the community. But members should not think this is a quiet, retiring bunch of senior citizens. I have never seen such active seniors. It must be the therapeutic sea air that invigorates our thriving seniors clubs.

The sporting and recreation clubs are thriving also, but I understand the many problems which have been brought about by the drought, rising property prices and time-poor volunteers. Sport and exercise are essential for our physical and mental health, and I will be working with sport and recreation clubs in my electorate to ensure we can continue to provide affordable and accessible sports.

The electorate contains secret pockets of wetlands and paperbarks which have been preserved. I will fight to keep them just as they are for future generations as well as contribute to policy to improve water quality in Bramble Bay. The previous member for Sandgate, Gordon Nuttall, deserves recognition for preserving many parcels of environmentally sensitive land in the electorate.

I am very pleased to see so many women representing the people of Queensland in this place. It is only right that Queensland is represented in approximately equal proportions by men and women to reflect the population balance. But I also believe that women bring another dimension to political and policy debates. Women know the many facets of strong leadership. Strength involves compassion and intelligence and the ability to consider the past while looking to the future. I was born and grew up in Nudgee in Brisbane's northern suburbs. I was involved in my local church as a teenager and was always thinking up ways to help my community, particularly other young people. I joined the Australian Labor Party at the age of 20. I was determined to have my say, determined to be involved and determined to make a difference.

In my 20s the travel group Flight Centre was booming and growing and was able to offer me career challenges to match my appetite for self-improvement and change. Flight Centre taught me a customer-focused work ethic that remains with me to this day. Also in my 20s I met and married the person who would become my greatest source of encouragement and share my enthusiasm for politics. John also grew up in a household where current issues were hotly debated around the dinner table and the nightly television news could launch us into a diatribe of how we would right the wrongs and restore justice.

I grew up in a family of strong women and gentlemen. As I campaigned around the Sandgate electorate I heard many warm stories about my grandfather, Jack Melloy, who was the member for Nudgee from 1960 to 1977 and spent his entire time on the opposition benches. He was a gentleman, everyone said, and that is my firm memory of him. He passed away in January this year at the age of 97, and many members of this Assembly paid tribute to him at that time.

In my grandfather's maiden speech of 1 September 1960 he raised issues of the day including a housing shortage, rising building costs, the price of meat, the impact on families of low wages and high housing prices, and the need for the state to encourage industry. These are the so-called good old days of the sixties, but they sound like the struggles of so many families today. I will continue the fight to find ways to help ease the burden of the rising cost of living and protect the rights of workers. Many constituents in my electorate are feeling the pinch, and the lack of affordable housing coupled with a deterioration in job security is a real problem. It is the Beattie government that has stepped in to provide relief for home owners and will abolish stamp duty for first home owners who purchase a house under \$320,000 and many other measures to assist families to put cash back in the pockets of Queenslanders.

It is also the Beattie government that has stood up to the unfair workplace changes and will continue the battle on behalf of Queensland workers. The Queensland government must continue to provide a safety net for people who are left high and dry by the Howard government. I will not comment further on the

responsibilities of other jurisdictions today, but I will quote a line from Jack Melloy's maiden speech. He said—

The Australian Labor Party is one day going to prove the salvation of this country.

Other parts of Jack Melloy's 1960 speech demonstrate how times have changed and how the economy has improved under the Beattie Labor government. Let me quote a little further from his maiden speech where he states—

... the fact is ... that neither Brisbane nor Queensland is developing industrially as fast or as greatly as they should. We are losing population, one of the reasons being that we have not enough employment in the State to hold the people. They migrate to the South in search of employment ... Unless the Government gives greater attention to the problem and provides better facilities for industry, we shall continue to lose population to the southern states.

Today, our Smart State strategy continues to attract the best and the brightest. People are moving here anyway, so let us make sure that we can attract the industry and skills to match our needs.

Our understanding of the environment has certainly improved since 1960 when members on both sides of the chamber referred to the precious wetland environment in my electorate as 'swampland'. We must continually keep abreast of modern thinking on the environment. Climate is changing and it has been caused by humans. That is why our government is establishing the Queensland Climate Change Centre of Excellence. We must continue to protect green space, save sensitive environments, seek energy alternatives and assess our impact on the natural world. We should also listen to the custodians of the land and learn from the wisdom of the traditional owners.

My grandfather openly and passionately loved his wife and family. I have a lot to live up to, not the least of which is his contemporary sense of fashion. A story that became something of folklore among his grandchildren was an episode set in this very place in the 1970s when Jack decided to challenge the ruling that required members to wear a long-sleeved jacket while in the chamber. One very hot day, in an Assembly with no air conditioning, he decided to make a stand and wear his safari suit into the chamber. We think it was blue. He was tossed out of parliament for such defiance but made the front page of the *Courier-Mail* the following day. I have been told that women members do not have such a tight dress code so one day soon I may just settle some unfinished family business and dust off that safari suit.

I was also favoured with many warm stories about my mother, Elaine Darling, as I travelled around the Sandgate electorate. Elaine was the federal member for Lilley from 1980 until 1993. She was the first female member of the House of Representatives from Queensland and in the year that she was elected a new record was set for the number of women in the House of Representatives: three. Elaine also served a term on the Caloundra City Council. So not only am I a proud third-generation representative of the people of Queensland but also I am a second-generation female representative. I congratulate the Labor Party and EMILY's List for encouraging and supporting women in politics.

Elaine was a true representative of the people and she was a mother so, of course, she knew how to do several things at once: make decisions, listen to conversations, fix problems, be everywhere she needed to be and still have time for her children. She took me with her at every opportunity and I ate my fair share of burnt sausages and coleslaw at backyard fundraisers. But that gave me an opportunity to see decision makers at very close quarters. It gave me hope as among our representatives were some very smart and understanding people with pure motives and high morals. Of course, I also witnessed others less reputable, but so did the voters and I was once again assured that the democratic process was working well.

My mother established many innovative ways of truly serving and reaching the people of her electorate. Many of these are now commonplace procedures for any representative of the people. She produced the first plain language entitlements guide for pensioners which she called the *Pensioner Information Kit*. She moved her office out of the city and chose to locate it in a suburb that was in the middle of her electorate so that constituents could easily come to see her. She held the first mobile office. This was not just a table and chairs at the local shopping centre like we see today; she bought a HiAce van and had table and chairs fitted in the back so it truly was a mobile office.

Elaine followed in the footsteps of my grandfather and continued to fight for the have-nots. In her maiden speech to the House of Representatives in March 1981, she described the then government as 'having divided Australia between the haves and the have-nots'. She talked of 'the growing number of citizens just fighting to survive rather than thrive in the midst of all our advertised bounty'. I share those concerns. I do not want to see the gulf between the haves and the have-nots widening. The Queensland economy under the Beattie government and the excellent guardianship of Anna Bligh is in the best shape that it has been for a very long time. We are spending on the necessary infrastructure and services. We will deliver the water grid. We will deliver the Health Action Plan. Of what use is prosperity if we cannot share it among the needy—if we cannot direct funds for the benefit of all, not just some. So to those people who feel that they have fallen under the radar, I make my commitment to continue the family tradition and fight for the have-nots. I will fight for those who do not have the strength and I will speak for those who do not have a voice.

To the people of Brighton, Bracken Ridge, Deagon, Fitzgibbon, Sandgate, Shorncliffe and Taigum, thank you for your confidence in me. I love my community and I look forward to rolling up my sleeves and getting down to work. I have been inspired by the selfless giving of community members. They have taught me so much.

During the 26 days of the election campaign, I played lawn bowls, watched boxing training, picked up rubbish, learnt about the native vegetation, sung along, lost several raffles, remembered the fallen, congratulated the winners, made speeches, listened to concerns, heard some great ideas and heard some injustices, read reports, knocked on doors and answered phone calls and emails late into the night. I have been encouraged by my wonderful campaign team and branch members. Their enthusiasm made the campaign fun and their great ideas and reliability made the campaign a success. We are a strong team in Sandgate with brilliant and insightful members. The Labor Party will do a lot of great things for our community.

I thank especially Phil and Diane Hay for their genius and calm guidance and Milton for his big-picture strategy. I thank my champion doorknocker, Maurice; my sign aficionado, John; the campaign hotliners, Lyn, Elaine, Margaret, Lisa and Julie; the street stall devotees, Vicki, Don, Vyvyan, John, Bill, Jared, Glen, Graeme and David; my muse, Enda; John who organised my first trophy giving; and Tom, who kept the money on track. To Eileen, Thea, Lewis, Norm, Michael, Gordon, Steve and all the team who worked on polling booths, thank you so much. Some of them were manning those booths all day. I thank the many Labor Party mentors who gave me advice, especially Neil Roberts. Neil, it is just like having a big brother watching over me and I value your support enormously. I thank my supportive colleagues Wayne Swan and Victoria Newton for a strong and unified campaign. I also thank Dave Hanna, a true believer, and the Premier for his faith in me.

I would like to pay tribute to my supportive extended family. I am proud to be part of the Melloy clan and the Darling clan. I thank mum and dad and my brothers, Russell and Mark, and their families. I give a special thanks to my cousin Liz for our many phone calls during the campaign. It made a difference to be going through it together.

I give thanks for the love and support of the McDermott clan. I lost two special men this year: my grandfather, Jack, and my father-in-law, Ray. Both loved to quiz me, tease me and challenge my thinking. I make a special mention of my patient and wonderful friends, including the parents from the Sandgate State School. I thank them. I will be having barbecues at my house for the rest of my life to make up for their patience. But the most special people in my life are my husband John, my son Jack, and my daughter Billie. My mother always told me that I could do anything I set my mind to. She was a living example of that. My children are very special human beings and I hope that they will always see in their parents the best example of responsible community members and know that the joy of a vibrant community comes from individuals willing to back their words with actions. They will certainly see their mother fighting for the have-nots.