




Speech By  
**Don Brown**

**MEMBER FOR CAPALABA**

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**MAIDEN SPEECH**

 **Mr BROWN** (Capalaba—ALP) (4.13 pm): May I start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather here in this place, the Jagera and Turrbal people, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and future. I would also like to acknowledge the first people of the land I represent in this place—the Quandamooka people. I have met with many of the members of this community of first people over the months of the campaign and in my short time as a member. I know it is this part of my community that I must do better for.

When I was working in Alice Springs as a pathology scientist, every day through the microscope I would see diseases and parasites that I would never see in a career working in Brisbane. It told me something was terribly wrong. For me this inequity has a root cause: it is distance and isolation, but it is much more. It must be a reminder of the original sin of our nation. This land belonged to someone else. We convinced ourselves it was unoccupied and convinced ourselves it was ours. We owe a debt and we cannot pretend that the problems of today for our country's first people do not have a heritage in this fact. I am proud to be part of a party that delivered the apology. I am proud to be part of a party that started a reconciliation process. I am proud to be part of a party that delivered the first female Indigenous minister, Leanne Enoch, from the first people that I represent—the Quandamooka people.

We lessen ourselves if we do not recognise this first error. In the words of Paul Keating, we need to make a basic human connection about how we would feel if these things had been done to us. I do not believe in division. We are a migrant nation. We are a nation of people moving for a better life, a better future, a better job, a better situation for our families. Our mission in this chamber, I believe, must be to be the custodians of that dream and the bearers of that hope. We must in all things make that basic human connection on every decision: how would we feel if this had been done to us.

I am humbled to be speaking in this chamber today in front of so many members from both sides who have contributed so much to the Queensland that we live in today. I would like to acknowledge those who have come before me. I have been taken aback by the quality of maiden speeches that have been made in the infancy of the 55th Parliament. I would also like to acknowledge the previous members for Capalaba. The first, and hopefully last, LNP member for Capalaba, Steve Davies has a big frame and a big heart to match for the constituents of Capalaba. Even though he did not leave this place in an ideal fashion, Jim Elder, along with federal counterpart Con Sciacca, put Capalaba on the map and transformed it from a sleepy farming suburb to the industrial hub of Redlands. Last, but definitely not least, is Michael Choi. What can I say about the man? Not a day went by on the campaign trail that I did not hear someone's personal story about how Michael helped and changed their lives for the better. It was not only his hard work and passion for the electorate that made him such a great MP, but more so the manner in which Michael conducted himself here in this

parliament and in the electorate. You would find it hard to meet a nicer man. I am fortunate to have such an outstanding mentor and I would like to thank him for the faith he has shown in me by spending so many hours by my side during and after the election.

The economy is talked about a lot and it is the root of our dream. I am a Labor member and there is dignity in work. A good job resolves so much. Too many in my community were made redundant under the previous government, too many lost out to this economy and that must be our No. 1 priority. The economy is a tool to achieve positive change. But my constituents do not trust it and they do not trust government. We must respond to this by restoring their faith and rebuilding communities broken by the economy. Our job is to tame the forces of the economy, to make it our tool and not our master.

I am humbled to be here. It is something I never expected. Growing up on the bayside meant I got to experience an idyllic lifestyle people in other countries probably presume all Australians enjoy. Whether it was fishing and crabbing with my younger brother and mates in the mighty 'Tinny' creek and Moreton Bay or learning how to competitively swim at Birkdale Breakers, bowling leggies at Muddies Cricket Club, getting picked up and driven on the rugby fields of Judy Holt Park or shooting hoops at the Capalaba PCYC, I could not have asked for a better start in life or a better place to make that start than the community I am now fortunate enough to represent.

My dad, Don Snr, and my mum, Helen, are my heroes and my inspiration in public life. My report cards from Birkdale State School tell me it was pretty unlikely that I would ever be a member of this parliament. My argumentative tendencies and my constant need to always question my teachers led to my year 7 teacher, Mrs Boss, moving my desk away from my mates and next to five of the brightest girls in my class. In fact, 22 years on Mrs Boss is still teaching at Birkdale State School and I understand she is still using the same techniques for problem students. I am also fortunate that Birkdale had a reading program that allowed me to have one-on-one sessions with a teacher aide or a parent volunteer. Without this I would have been severely disadvantaged heading into high school and probably would have ended up like my old man: being politely asked to leave high school before receiving his year 12 certificate—actually, he got asked to leave two high schools.

The help given to me by education professionals such as Mrs Boss at Birkdale State School and later at Iona College helped me to do things that I would never have been able to do but for them. I acknowledge and congratulate the member for Stafford for pipping me to the post by becoming the first Iona old boy to enter this parliament. It is no shame to be in second place to you, my friend. I acknowledge Birkdale State School. I feel a great honour and privilege that, as a student, I attended the 75th anniversary and that I will be returning next year, as the state representative, for the 100th year anniversary, which is a testament to a great school and its surrounding community. However, as I was a troublesome student, I am a little concerned at what I left or wrote in the time capsule, which is to be opened next year. Nonetheless, I will be proud to return to my school; the school where my mum was the P&C president and established the reading program; the school that gave me so much.

Without that education, I would not have been able to attain a Bachelor of Applied Science from QUT and become a pathology scientist or later attain a Bachelor of Laws while working full-time at United Voice. United Voice or what I, along with many others, still call the Missos, has been my union for nearly my entire working life. The Missos has always been the union for those who did not have a union. It was always willing to represent workers such as school cleaners, teacher aides, ambulance officers, security guards, hospitality workers, radiographers, aged-care workers, early educators and even the members whom I refer to as 'God's own' at XXXX Brewery. Those workers, who pay their weekly dues, have given my family and me everything: a roof over our heads, our health and education. During his time as president and secretary of the Missos and during my childhood, my father was predominantly the sole breadwinner. Those workers have given me so many opportunities in my life and I will always do my all to ensure that I am listening and delivering for their needs and those of their families.

I know a lot of people say this but I truly mean it: my father, Don Snr, is my hero. He is a man who has dedicated nearly his whole working life to the betterment of other workers, whether fighting for his members as secretary of the Missos, as president of the Queensland branch of the Labor Party to ensure the Beattie Labor government was led to victory, ensuring workers and employers could reach speedy resolutions to their disputes as Commissioner of the Industrial Relations Commission or the support he gave to workers as the Queensland Workplace Rights Ombudsman during the dark days of WorkChoices.

For me, the proudest moment of my father's career occurred in this place, even though Brownie was never a member. During the school cleaners' dispute under the Borbidge government, we saw over 3,000 school cleaners sacked on a Friday afternoon. Brownie and the Missos embarked on one of the first community-driven political campaigns by a union. The fight was taken to the steps of parliament. Not satisfied with just the steps, Brownie kicked down and barged through the door of the then education minister, the Hon. Bob Quinn, to convey the importance of restoring those workers' jobs and their dignity with the man himself. That night, my family and I tried to catch as much of the news coverage on as many channels as possible.

There is an important lesson that we, as a government, can learn from this dispute. It was a bad decision by a minority government. I would like to acknowledge those on the crossbenches such as the former member for Gladstone, Liz Cunningham, as well as the National Party members for Keppel and Southport, Vince Lester and Mick Veivers, for taking an active stand against their coalition colleagues to reverse the decision and restore those vital jobs.

As many have already acknowledged, it takes a dedicated team of supporters to get you elected. I could have not asked for a more dedicated army to march alongside me. My campaign team members had 29,840 conversations and we spoke to 91.8 per cent of Capalaba voters. In four weeks of the campaign, I had 3,552 telephone conversations with undecided voters and 1,122 conversations on people's doorsteps. During the campaign, team Labor Capalaba conducted 145 street stalls and, on election day, rolled out 187 people to staff 10 booths across the electorate. I am impressed by those statistics, which reflect the hard work of my volunteer team of supporters. I know many of my colleagues in this place achieved numbers several orders of magnitude higher than this and I commend them as I know how hard that much contact was.

People put their lives on hold to elect Labor and to elect me and I would like to acknowledge a few of them. Michael, who came from across town each day, and Lisa, who gave every day of every week to the campaign, have both kindly stayed on as my assistant electoral officers and I thank you. Owen Wrangle came from Victoria to direct our telephone campaign. To Dave Martin, who is in the crowd: thanks for accompanying me on all those mornings with your trustee trailer and your dedication to win the seat. Dave is a man who hates losing to the Tories more than he loves to see Labor win. To Pam and Barry: thanks for overseeing the branch and rolling out the volunteers on pre-polling and polling day. To Marj: thank you for being such an inspiration. I know you would have loved to have been more involved in the campaign, but you had your own fight to take care of. To Richard, Di, Mrs Kaliotsis, Carol, Dave and Kris, Callum and Alex: thanks for your belief and dedication. Thanks to all those members, family, volunteers and mates who came out of the woodwork to donate, put signs in their front yards, man street stalls, make phone calls, doorknock and staff booths.

I am glad many of the volunteers in the campaign took the next step and joined the party, including the 26 volunteers who, since the conclusion of the election, have joined the mighty Capalaba branch. Thanks also to Con Sciacca; Darryl Briskey; the CFMEU; the RTBU; the ETU—I am not going to get the record, don't worry—Wendy and Melissa Warren and the team from the FSU; John Payne and everyone at Hall Payne; Maurice Blackburn and, in particular, Murray Watt; Billy Welsh; the member for Bundamba, Jo-Ann Miller; Dick Williams; Anthony Chisholm; Jon Persely; and Evan Moorhead and everyone from party office. A special thanks to Annastacia and the previous caucus for never giving up the fight. I thank my federal comrades: Anthony 'Albo' Albanese, for launching my campaign; and Terry Butler and Tanya Plibersek, for attending my campaign events.

A special thanks goes to my union, United Voice and, in particular, Blocker, Sheila, Sharon—I understand that it is Sharon's birthday today; happy birthday, Sharon—Zed, Matty, Chicko, Fi, Mel, Sharpie, GD, Mass, Malley and all the comrades I have had the pleasure of working with over my 10 years at United Voice. To the members for Springwood, Mount Coot-tha, Pine Rivers, Mundingburra, Barron River and Thuringowa, it is reassuring and rewarding to share with you this journey into these hallowed halls and I thank you so much for your support. Special thanks go to Kegan and Damien Davey for your support and belief in me, particularly during the preselection process. They were trying days and I am glad that I had both of you to bounce ideas off over a good old team meeting.

To my mum and dad: thanks again for having me. I know I was not the easiest kid to raise, but I am glad you saw it through. Also, thanks for not killing each other in the final week of the campaign. To my brother Lachlan, his wife, Bec, and my nieces, Arabella and Luica: thank you for giving me the inspiration to make a better Labor Party. My brother is a proud ETU delegate and, along with 450 of his mates at the Redbank rail yards, is about to be made redundant because of a Labor government that had abandoned its ideals and, therefore, abandoned its base.

To my great mate and campaign manager, Reece: none of this would have been possible without you, mate, and without your guidance, your dedication and your patience with me. I am glad we were able to deliver your first campaign victory since you entered the party in 2004. I am also thankful that you have knocked back one of those fancy ministerial staffer gigs to continue to direct the good ship that is the Capalaba electorate office.

To my fiancée, Mel: who would have thought a burrito at La Quinta would have turned into this? Thanks for your unwavering support and faith in me during the past 18 months. Thanks for putting up with me pacing up and down at the end of the bed in the early hours of the morning as I played political chess in my head. I thank your family—Ian, Michaela, Katherine, David and Gradey—for warmly welcoming me into the O'Toole family. I look forward to our wedding next year and to raising children in our home. You have my promise that I will work to ensure that their childhood will have the same love, support and opportunity that our community has given me.

Recently I met a woman named Kerrie Keeper. Her family has been impacted with the tragic circumstances of mental health's worst outcome. Kerrie has lost five close family members, including a son, to suicide. Now she is campaigning for better education, understanding and awareness. Half of all people will suffer some form of mental health issue in their lifetime. It does not discriminate; it affects young and old, poor and well off, urban and rural people alike. We need to do more on this as a society. I congratulate Kerrie on her ongoing campaign. I also congratulate the health minister, Cameron Dick, for being proactive on this, with new legislation restoring the cuts to services. This is an epidemic and we should respond to it with the seriousness it deserves.

All this was brought home to me last week in the most terrible way. A Capalaba resident, a comrade, a mentor and the person who first suggested that I should run for parliament, Jacqueline King, lost her son to this horrible epidemic. Dillon had been missing for three weeks and was found last Wednesday. Jacqueline, I am sorry for your loss and I mourn with you as I mourn with all those who suffer. Political words are no fitting response to a tragedy like this, so let me say this in this place, where I would not be except for Jacqueline: I stand with you in the only way you and I know how, comrade; I stand with you and all those who mourn, in solidarity.

Finally, and most significantly, I thank the community of Capalaba. You have placed your faith in Labor and me. You have given me the honour of the faith that I can do as good a job as Steve and Michael did. I committed to you in the campaign to do my best, and I will. Every day I will work with you to build our community because that is what you deserve and it is what I owe to the community that has given me so much.