



Speech By
Jennifer Howard

MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

Record of Proceedings, 5 May 2015

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (9.29 pm): I wish to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land that we are gathered on, the Turrbal and Jagera people, and pay my respects to elders, both past and present. I am deeply honoured to be the newly elected member for Ipswich and I wish to pay my respects to the traditional custodians of my electorate, the Jagera, the Yuggera and the Ugarapul people. Ipswich and surrounds has a strong Indigenous story to tell and there are many people and many organisations that do good work to both preserve Indigenous culture and to close the gap on disadvantage. Indigenous people experience that disadvantage each and every day. The fight for equality is one of the things that drives me and one of the key reasons I am speaking in this historic and beautiful place this evening. And it is why I am a member of the Labor Party.

I grew up in Mackay, the youngest of three children. My mother, Barbara, was a strong, smart and gracious woman, but she became seriously ill when I was four. My mother and father separated and divorced around that time and, because it was before the days of Gough Whitlam's no-fault divorce and supporting parent benefit, mum had to work doing whatever she could, even though she was often sick and in pain, just to keep a roof over our heads. In our society, we are all just one step away from needing help. Even though most of us do everything we can to stand on our own and live comfortably, when things go awry it is the role of a government to step in and lend a helping hand. Labor governments have always done that and continue to do that, and it is one of the reasons that I am a proud member of the Labor Party.

I have lived in Ipswich for more than 30 years. I raised both my children in Ipswich and have worked closely with the community through my work as a veterinary nurse, running a small business and then working in local politics. I am a member of the Zonta Club of Ipswich and the recently opened Ipswich branch of Soroptimist International and I was one of the founding members of the Ipswich Women's Development Network, which fundraises to provide a scholarship for a woman to study at university.

With the population of Ipswich set to more than double in the next six years, it is imperative to ensure that the projected growth is managed and managed well. One of the strengths of my electorate is its strong sense of community. It is fashionable for leaders to talk of building community and I agree with them, but in Ipswich we already have community. In fact, it is one of the things that makes people want to stay in or move to Ipswich. I see my role and the role of all community leaders as ensuring that the people moving to our area are connected to that community. That connection has to be not just physical through appropriate infrastructure and public transport; it needs to be social and spiritual as well. It is widely acknowledged that when people are connected within their community they are less likely to practise discrimination and prejudice, which brings about a more equal, progressive and desirable society for us all to live in.

It is not just up to governments to manage that connectivity. The Ipswich daily newspaper, the *Queensland Times*, now has an editor who actually lives in Ipswich. Peter Chapman, his wife and family moved to Ipswich because they understand that to be editor of a town's newspaper requires a

level of engagement in that community. We all know the influence daily newspapers have on their readership and I commend Peter for his commitment to his important role in our community.

We have many church leaders, such as Mark Edwards from Cityhope Church, who are actively engaged and connected to the greater community. In Ipswich we have a strong Catholic community led by wonderful priests such as Father Chukwudi Chinaka and Father Peter Dillon. I met Father Peter at, of all places, a yoga class. I am grateful to him for his wisdom and his personal support during my campaign. I am also grateful to him for his wonderful sense of humour, which is a welcome relief for any political candidate and/or politician.

We have community groups such as the Ipswich Men's Shed and service groups such as Rotary that every day reach out and connect people in our community. We have sporting teams and clubs such as Brothers and Jets leagues clubs that work with local community groups, non-government organisations and others to raise awareness of need or simply to be inclusive. We have a chamber of commerce that is dedicated to promoting Ipswich business and that provides support, mentoring and networking of opportunities for new and established businesses.

I am aware of the challenges we face in Ipswich. Currently our unemployment rate sits at around 10 per cent, which is well above the state average, and our youth unemployment rate is even higher. In fact, youth unemployment more than doubled during the former LNP state government's term. As I mentioned, Ipswich has the highest population growth forecast of any city in Queensland. We need a second crossing on the Bremer River. We need to see the final part of the Ipswich Motorway upgrade, Darra to Rocklea, completed. We need a performing arts centre. I know those things and more can be achieved and I look forward to working with my colleagues in the Ipswich City Council and with my federal colleague, Shayne Neumann, to fight for that infrastructure for our city.

There are people who think that Ipswich is Labor heartland and it is true that from 1983 to 2012 Ipswich enjoyed very strong representation from my predecessors, the Hon. David Hamill and the Hon. Rachel Nolan. David and Rachel had a vision for Ipswich and each and every day they fought to ensure that vision was realised. During their terms, Ipswich grew and started its evolution into the city it is becoming. Under Labor, Ipswich achieved a campus of the University of Queensland, now USQ. We have the award-winning Workshops Rail Museum and the Ipswich Art Gallery, directed by Michael Beckmann. We saw a boom in the establishment of small business and economic confidence. The federally funded Ipswich Motorway upgrade, Dinmore to Darra, finally happened and completely changed the lives of many Ipswichians.

We saw growth in the creative arts community with contemporary art spaces opening and we saw the advent of the annual Ipswich Art Awards, which this year celebrates its 15th year and attracts artists from far and wide. We saw unprecedented funding in schools such as Bremer State High School and Amberley District State School. We saw a much-needed expansion to the Ipswich Hospital and reforms to education, bringing Queensland in line with other states. However, I do not agree with the premise that a whole city can be politically oriented one way or another and I think it arrogant to think otherwise. When Pauline Hanson, an Ipswich woman, became politically active, she enjoyed strong support from Ipswich and from the wider community. She even won a federal seat in the area. Minor parties such as Katter's Australian Party, One Nation and Family First always fare very well in the polls in Ipswich and I would challenge anyone to find much similarity between the policies of One Nation or the philosophies of Pauline Hanson and the philosophies and values of the Australian Labor Party.

Along with the projected growth of our city, Ipswich is experiencing great multicultural diversity, with people from the Philippines, North Africa and India settling there and making Ipswich their home. That is good news for Ipswich. Having people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds enriches and strengthens our community and helps us to grow. I will work with those communities to ensure that they are connected, employed and engaged in the Ipswich community.

Earlier, I spoke of my belief in the importance of equality in relation to social, racial and economic equality. There is another pervasive inequity that our society faces and that is gender inequity. We live in a country governed by a Prime Minister who has appointed himself the Minister for Women and yet who is on the record as saying things such as—

I think it would be folly to expect that women will ever dominate or even approach equal representation in a large number of areas simply because their aptitudes, abilities and interests are different for physiological reasons.

Of our then Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, he said, 'Gillard just won't lay down and die,' and then stood beside signs at a media opportunity that said, 'Ditch the Witch.' When asked on International Women's Day 2015 what he felt his greatest achievement as Minister for Women was, he responded that it was the eradication of the price on carbon. I can only assume that he is relating that to one of his earlier enlightening quotes—

What the housewives of Australia need to understand as they do the ironing is that if they get it done commercially it's going to go up in price and their own power bills when they switch the iron on are going to go up, every year ...

When the front bench of the Australian parliament has 26 men and two women and the year is 2015, we Australians can know with certainty that we are not being represented fairly, progressively or equally. I am proud to be a member of the Queensland Labor Party that, in this 55th Parliament, has an equal balance of men and women on the front bench. Overall, 39½ per cent of the Queensland Labor caucus is women. We are almost there.

We have heard a lot about the increase in incidents of domestic and family violence. This year, 34 women have died as a result of violence, the majority of which was perpetrated by men known to them, and the year is not even half over. When compared to last year, so far this year double the number of women have been killed. Those shocking statistics of violence against women at the hands of their husbands, partners or male family members are a tragic indicator of just how our society has failed women when it comes to equality. There is much to be done. I look forward to working with local groups in my electorate like the Domestic Violence Action Centre and the Ipswich Women's Shelter to stand up for these vulnerable women in our community.

It is not possible to get to my age or my position without having numerous people influence and encourage me along the way. It is not possible to name everyone who has helped me on this journey, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank as many as I can.

I begin with my mother, Barbara, who, as I have already said, was a remarkable woman. She gave my sister, my brother and I all the tools we needed to become articulate, considerate, compassionate, connected and capable adults. She taught us to think critically and creatively about the world around us and for these things and much more I am eternally grateful. My father, Colin, and his wife, Valda, have always been loving, supportive and generous to me and that has meant so much to me. My brother, Bruce, and my sister, Laura, who tolerated their little sister with kindness—most of the time—and then later my half-brother, Stuart, have always been there for me with their love and support.

I have wonderful nieces and nephews and two spectacular great-nieces. My niece Alison and nephews Jacob, Declan and James, along with their mother, Laura, worked on my campaign and stood in the hot sun all day on election day. Having my big sister on my side on election day could very well have been my secret weapon as I do not think anyone was game to not vote for me, so fierce is her loyalty. My former husband, John Howard, is a loving, kind and supportive man who stood by my side for almost 30 years and helped shape the person I am now.

I thank Chris Forrester, Cheryl Bromage, Anthony Chisholm, Dick Williams, Andrew Antonioli, Neil Henderson, Tracey, Jess Hill, Ben Swan and all the unions for their support of me right from the outset. I have a wonderful support base in Ipswich—people like my campaign director and friend, Wayne McDonnell, who was disciplined, leaving no stone unturned throughout the campaign, and his wife, Bronwen, who was temporarily widowed for the duration.

Karla McDonald is another. Karla's health was not great during the campaign so instead of being out on the hustings, she offered to cook my meals for me for the duration of the campaign. So each week I would have a delicious bundle of healthy meals provided to me. Anyone who has been a candidate through an election campaign will know just how special Karla's contribution was.

Don Wilson is a man who brings out the best in everybody and who shares his invaluable knowledge and experience with me because he believes in me. That means so much and I thank him sincerely. Gina Woodward did a wonderful job working on rosters and keeping our booth workers fed and watered.

Shaun Nancarrow worked hard throughout the campaign coordinating the numerous volunteers we had on board. Shaun accepted the position of assistant electorate officer alongside the wonderful Sandy Venn-Brown in my electorate office. It would be a very rare occasion when Andrew Spark is not the smartest person in the room. I am very fortunate to have him on my side working on my campaign and being on message every single time.

I had the invaluable wisdom, experience and support of Rachel Nolan and David Hamill, two former members of this House, throughout the campaign and that support continues now. They have left big shoes for me to fill and I am humbled by their support. My former boss, Shayne Neumann, who loves a good campaign and is the go-to man when you need statistics or any local knowledge, has been very supportive of my campaign and of me personally and I thank him. My former work colleagues—Kylie, Nick, Janice and Wayne—are true professionals and I thank you all for your support.

I thank all the branch members and volunteers who worked so hard to ensure Ipswich had Labor representation, especially to Logan, Ben, Brian and Nick. A special thanks to Kai Clancy, who is such an inspiration and who I know has a great future in store. I thank Elaine, Robyn, Rhonda, Jillian, Agnes, Pat, Holly, Karen Moorcroft and Karen Newton for their friendship and laughter and wisdom. I thank Margaret Doran for her strength of character, her intellect, her humour, her integrity and wisdom and her unwavering support of me throughout the many years I have had the privilege of knowing her.

I thank my much loved friend Suzanne Gulikers. Suzanne and her husband, Tim, have believed in me for many years and were a steadying, supportive and wise guiding hand throughout the tumult of preselection, campaigning and beyond.

I thank Helene Shephard who I have been known to describe as 'the bee's knees'. And that is just what she is. Full of common sense, perspective, insight, tough love, humour and honesty, it is impossible to not feel optimism and gratitude when you are in Helene's presence.

I would also like to thank my yoga teacher, Bonnie Preston. Yoga has made me strong—physically, mentally and spiritually. I am ever grateful that in Ipswich we have a teacher of the calibre of Bonnie and now her own student become teacher, Susan Yates.

I thank the numerous Ipswich people who have approached me and spoken to me of how they have put their faith in me and how excited they are to have me as their representative. This warmth and support has perhaps been the most surprising thing I have encountered during my time as candidate and now as the local member—people like Jet, who is seven years old and who approached me, with his slightly embarrassed mother in tow, to tell me that he stayed up late on election night to watch the booth results on the television. Jet had an extraordinary grasp of the election results and followed Ipswich closely because that is where he lives. He was so excited that I won and recognised me immediately when he saw me in public.

Encounters like this humble me beyond measure. They remind me of the responsibility I have to the people in my electorate and to my position in the Queensland parliament. I do not take this responsibility lightly.

I pay tribute to some very special people who have inspired me from the moment they came into my life and who continue to inspire me every day. They are my two children, Samantha and Oscar, and my much loved son-in-law, Tomas. I thank you for all the love you have shown me over the years. Your love sustains and nourishes me and I hope you understand how much it means to me and how proud I am of you.

Again, I thank the people of Ipswich who put their faith in me. My promise to you is that I will work tirelessly to ensure that our city is represented progressively and fairly. There is work to be done and I welcome the challenges ahead.