



Speech By
Melissa McMahon

MEMBER FOR MACALISTER

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mrs McMAHON** (Macalister—ALP) (4.03 pm): Thank you, Mr Speaker. I acknowledge the member for Buderim on his recent speech and his journey to this House. I also acknowledge your election to the esteemed position that you now hold. I want to start by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet, the Jagera and Turrbal peoples, and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I also want to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which my electorate, Macalister, stands—the Yugambah speaking peoples. I want to acknowledge my local elders Aunty Eileen, Aunty Robyn and Ted Williams, whose support I can always count on for wisdom and guidance.

In compiling this speech, I note that members have quoted contemporary poets, traditional Australian balladeers and civil activists. As a point of difference, a military discussion normally starts with a quote from a strategist of note. In deference to my great-grandmother, a descendant of Prussian immigrants, and the Beenleigh community that was partly settled by Prussian immigrants, I shall quote Carl von Clausewitz—

If the mind is to emerge ... from this relentless struggle with the unforeseen, two qualities are indispensable: first, an intellect that, even in the darkest hour, retains some glimmerings of the inner light which leads to truth; and second, the courage to follow this faint light wherever it may lead.

I shall follow Clausewitz and head towards the light on the hill.

My road here is not the road most travelled. I stand here not as a result of a childhood dream or the culmination of some predictable career path. I stand here because I am compelled to be here—compelled because of the values my parents instilled in me, compelled because of my experiences in serving the people of Queensland and Australia, compelled because of the events in Queensland in 2013.

I am the eldest child of working parents. They have worked full-time for as long as I can remember and I stand here as a testimony to their dedication in raising a family while working full-time for the people of Queensland. They did this in the seventies before it was the norm, not out of some desire to make a statement or out of some sense of empowerment or liberation but because it was necessary because there were bills to pay and mouths to feed. I am sure my mother would have loved to have had the option to stay at home and raise her kids, but not every family has that luxury.

I would love to stand here and profess to have had some sort of idyllic childhood in a settled family home, but the reality was my family moved where housing was affordable or work was available—from the bayside to Bulimba to Ipswich to the western and southern suburbs of Brisbane and out to Roma, an endless array of state schools, uniforms, new friends and toys and clothes permanently stowed in tea chests.

With working parents you get to know your extended family from an early age. My grandparents, aunts and uncles were prominent people in my upbringing and some are here today and I share the achievement of standing here in this House with them. I thank them for their wisdom, guidance and, more importantly, their support throughout recent years as I started a family of my own.

I particularly want to acknowledge Mrs Fay Loughran—Nanna. She was one of my biggest supporters: as fair, compassionate and strong a woman as I have ever known, having raised six children and working in jobs ranging from book binder and shearers' cook to running a local corner shop. She then went on to have a hand in raising 14 grandchildren and 26 great-grandchildren—such a strong heart, but alas not one strong enough to make it to hear this speech today.

My family has always been a working one—loyal servants of Queensland, as were their parents. It is probably no stretch to realise that they instilled some values in me that most working Queenslanders would recognise as their own—work hard, strive to do your best, take every opportunity to improve yourself, look out for your mates, have compassion for those who do not have it as good as you, and call out injustice and unfairness when you see it. The belief was that if you followed these values you would do okay.

I think it was a great surprise to my family to see me enlist in the Army two weeks after turning 18, not having come from a military family—my first step down the path less travelled. Whether it was my parents' values shining through or a strong focus on Australian history that abounds in our family, my desire to serve our country, to wear the uniform adorned with the Rising Sun and all that that entails, was cemented the moment I pulled on my first pair of boots. Whilst it was my parents who instilled strong values, it was in the Army that I developed the skills to turn ideas and plans into well-thought-out actions—a skill that I use or have used every day since, just as I still put on my boots every day.

I would like to acknowledge the leaders I served under and from whom I learned, honed and refined my own leadership skills. I would like to acknowledge the soldiers I have had the privilege to lead and the senior NCOs whose patience and mentoring saved a young subbie's backside on more than one occasion. I give a shout out to my colleagues and peers with whom I served in various units in Queensland and on deployment.

There is also a small unit that I would like to acknowledge that has helped me personally as well as thousands of other uniformed personnel. Army mental health units work with military personnel to counter the wide and varied effects military service has on individuals. Our broader mental health strategy in Australia, particularly with regard to veterans, is not perfect. In fact, much more is needed to be done. Whilst I languished and dealt with injuries from my service, the mental health support provided to me was first rate, but I acknowledge that that is not the experience of everyone. It was with their consistent and persistent support that I was able to climb out of my hole and continue achieving my personal and professional goals.

Defence families know the personal sacrifice that comes with service—the constant moving, the weeks and months away from home, the lack of communications and the missed family milestones. I know that my last deployment was difficult for my young family. I missed my daughter's first birthday, her first words and her first steps. I can never make up for that, but I have the fervent hope that my dedication to service will rub off on her as much as my parents' experiences and values did on me.

As much as a challenge officer training was, I felt I needed to be more active in my community and the confines of the barracks in the training area were just not enough. Please do not mistake me: to receive my Queen's commission at 20 years of age was certainly a proud achievement, but I am a Queenslanders through and through, so I sought to devote myself to the service of my fellow Queenslanders.

At the time of my resignation last year, I had completed just over 20 years in the Queensland Police Service. I have to say that I have had an amazing career in blue, primarily due to the wonderful people I have worked with. It is a career filled with challenges: to see daily distressed Queenslanders experiencing the worst days of their lives, holding someone's hand at a crash site as life slowly seeped from them, and seeing a side of life and the living conditions of some Queensland families that the majority will remain blissfully ignorant of. But there have been many highlights: reuniting lost children with distraught families, bringing about a resolution to those whose lives are in turmoil, and having a positive interaction with at-risk children.

In my 20s I enjoyed the rough and tumble of front-line policing in places such as the Gold Coast, Logan and Brisbane and I will always consider myself a champion of general duties policing, but my passion is education. Upon completing my Bachelor of Education, I sought the opportunity to become a police recruit instructor. To stand in front of countless squads of recruits for almost a decade has been rewarding. Seeing Queenslanders, young and not so young, prepare to take on a career of service is an amazing experience.

My last secondment was with the Domestic, Family Violence and Vulnerable Persons Unit—a small but dedicated team of sworn and unsworn staff who work to improve QPS procedures and practices in the field of domestic and family violence. That was rewarding work and I certainly hope that I have achieved something in some small way towards improving the work of a large organisation dealing with an enormous and often thankless task.

I would like to thank my colleagues and comrades on the thin blue line for their friendship and support over the years. It is truly an occupation that few on the outside can comprehend. I would also like to acknowledge all the administration and unsworn staff within the QPS. One thing that I have learned working at the pointy end, whether that be in green or blue, is that I could not have done my job without the work of the administrative, logistic and support staff. They allow the rest of us to get on and do our jobs.

I can honestly say that I have had an enjoyable professional career in uniform. It is also no stretch to say that—like most Queenslanders, I would imagine—I have spent most of my adult life happily ignorant of the goings-on in this House. That was until a series of events in 2013 that would again change the direction in which I would travel. As many Queenslanders will know and still acutely feel, in 2013 the Newman government brought about great anxiety and financial devastation to families throughout this state. It would appear that not everyone values the service that their fellow Queenslanders provide. In 2013, my mother, my father and my husband found that they were no longer needed or valued by an LNP government. Collectively, 100 years of service to the people of Queensland was discarded, disregarded and disrespected. My working parents, who sacrificed so much, who missed out on so many of their family's achievements, did so apparently without being valued by an LNP government.

When my family's livelihood and stability were threatened, I was compelled to take action. I was disabused of the notion that a life spent in service of this state is one valued by all. It is not enough just to value these things; they must be fought for. I am compelled to be in this House and I am compelled to fight for not only front-line services but also those who work in the background, out of the limelight and who are much maligned by those opposite. It was the sacking of over 14,000 Queenslanders in 2013 that compelled me to join the Labor Party.

The loss of income and job security for my family would not be the only defining moment of 2013. In October 2013, I would unexpectedly welcome my son. I say 'unexpectedly', because he was born a full three months early. He was the tiniest, most fragile living thing I had ever held. It would take days before I could hold him and months before he could feed through anything other than a tube. As one who had never experienced much hospital time, the world of ICU, ABCs and incubators is a frightening one, especially when alone and 10,000 miles from home.

I would like to take the opportunity that I have in this House to acknowledge the staff of the Countess of Chester Hospital neonatal intensive care unit, especially Dr Ravi Jayaram, Dr Steven Breary, unit manager Eiran Powell, and the neonatal nurses and midwives who cared for my boy as if he were their own. I carry each and every one of your names with me every day to remind myself that I have him with me because of you.

My boy and his fighting spirit is a source of pride and strength for me. Knowing that he has fought and won battles at an age where only machines could keep him alive, I stand here compelled to fight for him and the thousands like him who were born too soon. I will also fight for the families who came home from the hospital empty-handed and broken-hearted. In all honesty, my kids are doing okay. They are loved; surrounded by an extended family; they are fed, sheltered and clothed; and their education and health needs are looked after. In reality, they want for nothing, but I know and I have seen that so many kids are not as fortunate, are not as lucky in how fate determines their family's circumstances. Those kids do not get reliable meals, they are not being encouraged in education and far too many of them are exposed to violence in their homes. These are the Queenslanders—the future of Queensland—who I will fight for. It is with this attitude towards getting the required front-line services that I seek to represent the good people of Macalister. They deserve nothing less.

The new electorate of Macalister is based around the historic township of Beenleigh. Last year, we publicly celebrated the township's 150th birthday. I would like to acknowledge the work of locals who put together the three-day celebration: Rodney and Linda Hammel, Councillor Jennie Breen, the people of the Beenleigh Historical Village and my team at the Beenleigh Neighbourhood Centre. I thank them for their tireless work behind the scenes.

The Macalister electorate, which is based halfway between Brisbane and the Gold Coast, is an area that is not only steeped in history but also provides opportunity. The Macalister electorate is home to Australia's oldest registered distillery, the Beenleigh rum distillery. The distillery, founded in 1884, is still distilling to this day and now invites tours and functions in its newly opened visitor centre. Next door

to my electorate's oldest enterprise its newest enterprise will open, with Zarraffa's opening its head office and operations centre that will employ 50 staff. My electorate's other industry and major employer is the Teys meatworks. It employs 800 workers and is the second largest meat processor and exporter in Australia. Whether rum, coffee or good steak is your vice, we have it all in Macalister.

The defining natural features of the Macalister electorate are the twin rivers of the Albert and the Logan. It is from the twin rivers that the Eagleby Giants Junior Rugby League Football Club draw its dual blue guernsey colours. These rivers are great sources of recreation and commerce but, as we saw not one year ago, they can also be a source of fear and destruction. But when nature tests us, as is a Queensland trait, we rise to the challenge. The community rallied around the many residents, businesses and sporting clubs that found themselves under the slow moving but unrelenting inundation.

I am proud to stand here as the inaugural member for Macalister. I thank the electorate for their support and I know of their desire to see more investment in jobs and training in the local area. I acknowledge the thousands of families who choose to live and raise their kids in the area and assure them that I am here in this House to fight for quality education and health services in Macalister and surrounds.

Because my road to representing the good people of Macalister was not the standard route, there are people I need to thank and to acknowledge for their effort, their work, their guidance and their support that allows me to stand here today. I would like to acknowledge the support of the leadership and membership of United Voice: Mr Gary Bullock, who saw something worth backing; the United Voice field team led by Chris Moore; and the guidance and support of the fabulous Jeanette Temperley. Your constant visits to the Macalister campaign/crèche were always a great morale booster. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Peter Simpson for his support for me way back in 2015 and I wish him well as he tackles his next biggest campaign.

I would like to acknowledge those who started me on this path, pointed me in this direction and gave me a nudge: Evan Moorhead; the member for Waterford, Shannon Fentiman; and Wendy Turner. They encouraged me to take the leap from mere party member and volunteer to candidate. Whenever I doubted whether a copper from Logan could take on a political role they insisted that this House, this government and Queensland is better served by having more front-line service workers in the parliament.

I would like to acknowledge my key campaign staff, Sean Leader and Michael Rose. Sean has guided me through the ins and outs of branches, the party, the rules and campaigning over the past three years. I have never met a person more devoted and passionate to this party and progressive politics. I would also like to acknowledge Margaret Keech, the former member for Albert, for her advice and guidance, and Senator Claire Moore, who always found time to come doorknocking with me and my team.

On the ground it is my local Beenleigh branch whom I have the greatest pleasure working for and with. Mrs Fran van Gilst, Marlene Ward and Betty Redmond have been my biggest supporters. From the moment I set foot in the branch in 2014 they have been in my corner and backed me every step of the way. Between them they have likely uttered my name more times than my mother. To be able to stand here is as much their achievement as it is mine. Thank you, ladies.

I would not be here without my family, some of whom are here today: my parents—all of them, my six younger siblings, my grandparents, my husband and my three beautiful children. There is a large number of women within the early childhood education and care sector who have also contributed greatly to the shaping of my children's lives.

To my daughters, whom I hope to lead by example, I seek to surround you with strong capable women and stronger values. My eldest daughter Cara has grown up around campaigns for most of her life and is now, coincidentally, a proficient phone banker in her own right. Whilst I do my best to teach her the essential life lessons, I am constantly reminded by her about the important ones. In 2015 when I ran but did not win it was my then four-year old who snapped me out of the malaise that often follows a loss. Quite the competitor, she understood that I did not win, but quietly asked, 'Did the red team win?' When I told her we had she told me there was nothing to be sad about.

To my son, whose presence I cherish every day: you may not have the life that you deserve but I will give you everything I can. I will fight for every opportunity to be available for you to achieve as much as you can. To my little Mack, you are in for one rollercoaster ride, but do not fret, we are experienced riders in this family. To my husband, on whose broad shoulders I stand: you have been my life's partner for well over 20 years and the voice behind me that urges me to do more, go further, go harder. I am here because you compel me, not to just say it but to do it. My journey here is not the standard one, but I submit that it is no less compelling.