




Speech By
Mick de Brenni

MEMBER FOR SPRINGWOOD

Record of Proceedings, 5 May 2015

MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr de BRENNI** (Springwood—ALP) (7.53 pm): I begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land on which Parliament House sits, as well as the traditional owners of the Springwood electorate. I pay my respects to the first guardians of this land and their elders past, present and future.

I also acknowledge and congratulate the member for Nicklin, the new Speaker, on his election to the esteemed position. I am sure we all acknowledge that Mr Speaker's contribution to democracy and the rule of law in Queensland over the past decade and a half has been without reproach. We can all look forward to a new era of integrity and accountability in this House under Mr Speaker's capable guidance.

I also acknowledge the 39th Premier of Queensland, Anastacia Palaszczuk, for her outstanding leadership. To have led the Labor Party from just seven members in 2012 to forming government in 2015 is by any measure extraordinary. I commend both the Premier's magnificent effort as well as the dedication, resolve and the true grit shown by the vastly outnumbered Labor opposition of the 54th Queensland Parliament. I acknowledge the election of all of my parliamentary colleagues, in particular those representing the residents of the City of Logan and those who are members of my union. Finally, I wish to acknowledge all those members of the Labor Party who were elected in January this year. To have won so many seats in such an uphill battle truly is testament to the hard work and extraordinary perseverance and talent of each and every one of you.

My own journey to these chambers began almost 20 years ago and has been made possible in no small part through my proud association with the Queensland trade union movement. It began in the mid-1990s when I was doing work experience during the school semester break with my father, Alan de Brenni, a solicitor. At the time I attended a meeting at a footwear manufacturing company that was restructuring its small factory in Brisbane's southern suburbs. The company had recently been split into two entities with fewer than 15 people in each. Under the workplace relations common law of the time this meant that the factory workers would have their entitlements to long service, annual leave and termination pay stripped from them. On that day the workers were told they had lost their fair and reasonable entitlements, but what was worse was that some had lost their jobs as well. Perhaps most gut-wrenching of all, due to the restructuring of the company and its financial arrangements, under unfair workplace laws the company could seek to avoid making redundancy payments to those now without a job.

It is a clichéd phrase, but these workers were truly salt of the earth people. Mostly first generation immigrants from Greece in their forties and fifties, these men and women had spent 10, 15, 20 years or more working day in, day out in a tiny, dark and cramped factory. I can distinctly smell the leather and rubber, the overwhelming stench of glue and solvents as it permeated the air and caused a dizzying headache within minutes to anybody who was not used to it. Yet these were the sorts of people who had barely taken a single sick day in their entire lives such was their commitment to doing an honest job with pride and dignity. To see grown men and proud, hardworking men and

women break down in tears was simply heartbreaking. I could not see how it was fair, how it was just or reasonable that people who had just done the right thing, who were just trying to make a living for themselves and their families, could have that all ripped away from them.

In an instant in that small dusty factory in the suburbs I made a decision that would literally change the course of my life. Representatives from the workers union were on site at the time standing with the workers in their time of need. I spoke with a representative and asked if I could do work experience with the union. To choose to forego my family's profession at that instant was, as you can imagine, quite a shock. To this day I am still not sure which one of us was more surprised by my decision—my father or I.

Since then I have worked in several roles, including in a leadership capacity in the United Voice union, a large organisation, at the time employing some 120 staff. Through it I have enjoyed the benefit of corporate experience on a board of directors entrusted with \$1.2 billion in funds under management. I want to thank the union movement for the opportunities it has given me. I believe that in large part the experience of being part of the United Voice team has given me the qualities I need to run for parliament and the confidence and capacity to do the best possible job.

I must also thank the many dozens of volunteers and supporters who came out in their droves over the past 18 months to campaign for a better way of government. I acknowledge those who are in the gallery this evening. I have been truly humbled by the tremendous amount of effort put in by everybody. I would be remiss not to mention and thank them for their efforts. Firstly, I would like to thank my wife Kristie. Not only did she work tirelessly in a volunteering position while still undertaking her full-time role as a school executive and now high school principal, but she provided vital emotional and moral support through what was, as all political campaigns are, a challenging time. Kristie, you are a wonderful wife, an outstanding professional, a leader and an extraordinary mother. I wish to also thank my parents, Allan and Kathryn, for all their work and support over my 37 years. I would also like to thank them for the kind donation of our humble campaign quarters in Rochedale South in the heart of the neighbourhood that I call home, that they call home and the place in which they raised me. To Tony and Pauline Walsh, my parents-in-law, thank you for your counsel, your kindness and your generosity. My sincere gratitude also extends to the staff and volunteers of the Australian Labor Party office, the federal Labor member for Rankin, Jim Chalmers, and the Queensland Council of Unions, in particular Ron Monaghan, a long-time friend and mentor who, despite being a Sydney lad, has devoted much of his life to working Queenslanders.

Thanks go to John Battams, Ros McLennan and all of their team. I thank the close members of my union family, United Voice, such as Fiona Scanlon, Scott Zackeresen, Matt Lawrence and Gary Bullock. I say to my supporters at the RTBU, the Services Union, the Teachers' Union, the CFMEU, the MUA and many others that your assistance and guidance has been truly invaluable. I also wish to thank my campaign director and long-time friend Peter Allan. I thank the members of the Springwood branch, the leadership team of John, Sean and Inari, and many others too innumerable to mention. They know who they are and I hope that they know that I truly value the hard work they have all put in.

I make particular mention of my dear friend Emma, who gave her family to our campaign. To Emma, Brad and their boys, I say: if you can help me and Labor win the election campaign, I know you too can win the battle that you are now in. Finally, I say a special thanks to local teacher Neil Bradley and retired TAFE cleaner and ex-Navy serviceman Peter May. You could never hope to meet more down-to-earth and humble men. They both joined the Labor Party only very recently, yet took to volunteering like the proverbial duck to water. Whether it was making phone calls to residents, meeting with people in their homes or delivering mail, no ask was too much. They pushed me to work harder each and every day, both through their words of encouragement and the outstanding examples of action they set for everybody who took part in our campaign.

Together, our team truly epitomises the spirit of the people of Springwood, from Rochedale in the north to Cornubia in the south. Springwood is my home and it is where my wife, Kristie, and I will be raising our children, Charlie and Scarlett. I say to my children: you give me the inspiration to serve our community. Every parent wishes for their children a future where their lives are better, their jobs are more secure and their community spirit warmer. When you read this one day, I truly hope you are proud of what I achieved in this place.

I turn now to the Springwood landscape. With just over 1,000 hectares of forests and parks, almost one-quarter of the Springwood electorate is made up of natural green spaces. It is ideal for outdoor recreation and the electorate's many kilometres of walking and mountain-biking tracks provide ample opportunity to get fit and experience nature at the same time. Springwood is a community we can all be proud of. I cannot think of a better place to raise my family. However, our

way of life needs to be preserved now and for future generations. That means that our local forests and green spaces must be protected so that our diverse wildlife will have a place to live and thrive, and parents without big backyards will always have somewhere for their children to play and experience the wonders of nature. Our government will restore protections for the environment. We will maintain those green spaces and the quality of living in Queensland.

I have been listening to residents in Springwood and they have shared with me their concerns about planning and development. They have told me that they are concerned about their right to fair consultation on development around their homes. Labor's approach to planning and development will be different to that of the former LNP government. We are a government of consensus and we will consult with our constituents. We will never deny the community an opportunity to have an appropriate say about planning in their neighbourhoods and we will always make sure that we act in the best interests of that community. That is why, in consultation with all stakeholders, we are currently reviewing the Planning and Development Bill to ensure the best possible outcome for Queenslanders. By doing so, we will ensure residents retain the right to be heard on the decisions that shape tomorrow's cities and suburbs, not just big developers.

Labor's commitment to health is just as strong. In Springwood thousands of families are primarily serviced by the Logan Hospital, which is located in the nearby electorate of Waterford to the west. With more than 50,000 in-patient admissions, 75,000 emergency department attendances and almost 9,000 operations performed in the past financial year alone, Logan Hospital provides an exceptional service to our community. I pay tribute to its workforce. We are going to ensure that that service can continue and get better. We will take some of the pressure off healthcare professionals with a plan for an extra 400 nurses and midwives throughout Queensland. That will mean an extra 70 professionals in the metro south region alone, where Logan Hospital is located. We will also spend \$12 million over four years on specialist school nurses to assist in the early identification of hearing and vision conditions in schoolchildren. Just this week we injected \$30 million to address excruciatingly long wait lists for ear, nose and throat complaints.

In addition, we have committed over the next three years to hiring 2,500 extra teachers for our schools. Three schools in the Springwood electorate will immediately benefit. Springwood, Shailer Park State High School and Shailer Park State School will receive a staffing boost from that commitment. More teachers means fewer overcrowded classrooms, more one-on-one time with students and better educational outcomes. Importantly, it will also restore respect to the teaching profession, treating our educators as the skilled professionals that they are, rather than just numbers in an accounting ledger to be struck off at a whim.

As a mostly residential area, many people in Springwood were left worse off when the previous government defunded the highly successful Tenant Advice and Advocacy Service. That cut meant that only one in 40 calls for advice were answered. It was a service for all Queenslanders, providing independent support. There are vulnerable people in every community and Springwood is no exception. With rentals making up a substantial proportion of properties in the area, it is an important issue in my electorate. Labor will restore this vital service, with \$20 million over the next four years to help Queenslanders understand their legal rights and obligations when renting.

With almost 17,000 occupied residential properties in Springwood, there is much to celebrate about our government's commitment to renewable energy. Under the previous Labor government, Springwood had a massive uptake of solar panels. With just over 8,200 solar equipped roofs in Springwood, we have more than our fair share of household solar panels in Queensland. I have no doubt that my electorate will be leading the way on Labor's commitment to have one million solar rooftops statewide by 2020, because solar is a win-win solution. It is not polluting, it is easily installed on almost any property and it is completely limitless, at least for the next few billion years or so. It is better for our environment and it is better for the family budget. An independent review of feed-in tariffs will ensure that solar owners are paid a fair and reasonable rate for energy fed back into the grid.

Those are all issues that I am passionate about and I am proud to be part of a government with an unshakeable commitment to making our state a better place to live. I am standing up for mums and dads, for young people and our elderly, and for every Queenslander whose household budget is under pressure from rising living costs. I will continue to stand up for families whose breadwinners earn penalty and minimum rates—those same conditions the federal government is trying to undermine. Some say the cost of decent working conditions is too high. I cannot agree. Without decent conditions such as fair penalty rates, the sacrifice is too high as people who could be relaxing, socialising with friends or playing with their kids instead are at work, sacrificing their precious family time and putting in the hard yards to make ends meet. Our ambulance, fire and rescue workers, our nurses, our cleaners, our restaurant staff and many more work long and difficult shifts to keep our

communities safe and our economy turning. Minimum rates and shift penalties are not an added bonus or some kind of sweetener; for many people, it is the money that pays the bills, puts the food on the table and keeps a roof over their heads.

Under a Labor government, working people will be afforded the respect that they deserve. The people of Springwood and Queensland have a strong sense of fairness and they have voted accordingly. For that reason, I believe that the last election was primarily about three things. Firstly, it was about the services that our communities rely on: our schools, public transport and community organisations, as well as essential services such as power, water, hospitals and police. Those services enrich our lives, building better and happier communities, and they are the backbone of a healthy and progressive society. The people of Queensland have emphatically rallied against unfair budgetary measures designed to slash those services and privatise many of them by stealth. As Labor member for Griffith, Terry Butler, said in her first speech to federal parliament.

... you cannot cut your way to a better Australia. You must act.

Secondly, the election was about the people who deliver those services: the teachers, the nurses, the child safety officers, the utility workers, the doctors, the school cleaners—the list is practically endless. Those people work tirelessly to provide the services that many take for granted. When we flick a switch on the wall, the lights turn on. When we send our children to school, we know they will come back home each day a little more knowledgeable. When an inferno blazes, we know our brave firefighters will be on the scene as soon as possible to contain it. That happens because of the efforts and dedication of hundreds of thousands of hardworking Queenslanders. Those are the people who serve our community and who make our lives better, and they deserve our respect. Over the past three years, their rights and, by extension, the rights of the entire community have been under constant attack. However, they stood shoulder to shoulder to oppose that attack and maintain Queensland's high standard of living. It is through their efforts and the efforts of the unions that they form to unite their voices that they have maintained high-quality services in the face of cuts and intimidation. By uniting, they ensure that all Queenslanders can continue to rely on the services that enrich our lives and better our society. Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, the election was about integrity. This is a point I would like to expand on a little more, if you will indulge me.

Since the election there has been much speculation both in the media and political circles about the mindset of voters. Many have said the electorate is volatile, delivering a massive majority to the LNP in one election and returning government to the responsibility of the Australian Labor Party the next.

The similarly sudden and unexpected change of government recently in Victoria would *prima facie* seem to confirm this hypothesis. There has been discussion about how unpredictable voters are and how no government is safe from a seemingly capricious electorate. Nothing could be further from the truth.

It is the simple truth that the results of both of these elections were entirely predictable, if quite unprecedented. As columnist and author John Birmingham wrote in the *Brisbane Times* on 2 February this year—

The electorate isn't volatile. Voters aren't predictable. The rules have not changed. If you lie to people, if you promise one thing and deliver its opposite, if you treat public office as your due and the ordinary people who put you there with contempt, they will turn on you. And when they come for you, their vengeance will be swift and terrible to behold.

The electorate has spoken with a voice that has been heard around the nation and they have delivered a message that both sides of politics would do well to heed. Integrity is paramount to good government, to democracy and especially to the people of Queensland.

It is only through the good graces and confidence of my local community that I stand in this House today. The people of the Springwood electorate have entrusted me with a great responsibility and I will ensure their faith in me is not misplaced.

There is no doubt that I have very big shoes to fill. Previous Labor members for Springwood have served this great electorate with grace and humility. Their first priority was always to the people of the electorate, ensuring their voices were heard. They have set a powerful example of what a true representative of the people should be, and I look to their record of service with both inspiration and guidance as I step into this role. I thank them for leading the way in our great electorate and pledge to serve the community as capably as they have for a combined total of more than 19 years out of the Springwood electorate's 28½ years of existence.

I stand in this chamber today as a member of a new and progressive government—not a government that cuts, but a government that creates; not a government that divides opinions, but a government that unites communities. As for that little shoe factory all those years ago, we took up the

fight on behalf of those workers and on behalf of fairness and justice and we won. In the face of a system stacked against them, those hardworking individuals stood tall and refused to be bullied into submission. They stood their ground and ensured that no-one—no-one—took from them those rights that they had earned through years of dedicated and loyal service. I stood up for them, and I will do the same for Springwood now.

When the people of Springwood need a plan for jobs, I will stand up for them. When the environment is under attack and the natural beauty of our land needs defending, I will stand up for it. When the dignity of individuals is threatened, whether you are a mum or dad, a student, a pensioner, a worker or an entrepreneur, an activist or a carer, I will stand up for you. This is my pledge as part of the new Palaszczuk government for the people of Springwood and the people of Queensland as a whole.