



Speech by

LINDY NELSON-CARR

MEMBER FOR MUNDINGBURRA

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FIRST SPEECH

Ms NELSON-CARR (Mundingburra—ALP) (12.30 p.m.): Mr Deputy Speaker, may I begin by extending my warmest congratulations to both you and the Speaker on your election to the high offices that you hold. I feel certain that you are the right people to preside over this Parliament—the most difficult in recent years. I also extend congratulations to the members of Her Majesty's Government and particularly to Premier Beattie on his election.

I express my appreciation of and gratitude to the citizens of Mundingburra, who on 13 June showed their confidence in me by electing me to office. This win was a culmination of the endeavours of a team of people who contributed enormous amounts of time, effort and expense to ensure that the electorate of Mundingburra returned to the Labor Party.

Firstly, I mention my campaign manager, Dale Parker, who worked tirelessly and was an inspiration to the rest of the campaign team. Dale has since been elected the Townsville City Councillor for Division 5, and I know that he will represent his division with enthusiasm, innovation and absolute integrity.

In naming a few of my other key campaign members, I firstly thank David Lowe for his strength, commitment and energy. His positive attitudes and refusal to be drawn into controversy set a fine example to the rest of the team. I thank also Beth Keating, the mistress of Electrac and the EVPVs, and Ray Goodmanson, who became everyone's right-hand man by dedicating all his time and effort to the campaign.

I thank Warren Williams and the RTBU for giving us a place to call home during the past three weeks. We ran our office very successfully from there. Thanks must also go to Warren's secretary, Peta, for her major contribution. The cast of 30 or 40 other doorknockers, letterbox droppers, major supporters and people such as Barry Mitchell, Bob McDonald, Barry Ramsey, Daniel James and others too numerous to mention in this speech also deserve thanks. They all know who they are and to all of them I am extremely grateful. Thanks must also go to our energetic, non-sleeping organiser, Richard Cleal. I thank the fundraising teams for their immensely important roles in raising money for the campaign, and I thank the branches in my electorate who sent in regular financial donations.

I acknowledge Maralyn Kell for the weekly shopping that she did for my family and for the beautiful meals that she regularly cooked for us. It is such generosity and friendship that indeed makes entering public life possible. To people such as Maralyn, who were silent supporters, I say: thank you. I wish to acknowledge the support, both moral and financial, of Emily's List. Jenny Beecham, who became my shadow during the last two weeks of the campaign, was worth her weight in gold.

Finally, thanks to my family: my parents, who parented my children and dedicated all other time to EVPVs and general campaign duties, and my five wonderful, accepting children, whose lives and faces were catapulted onto local television during the advertising campaign and whose most frequent question was, "Mum, will we see you tonight?" Finally, I must thank my incredible husband, Russell. Without his original vision and his love, I would not be here today.

With the help of all these individuals and organisations, we have been able to reclaim Mundingburra on behalf of the Australian Labor Party. We went into the election requiring a swing of 2.9% to win the seat. We achieved a swing of 6.7% in a difficult election campaign against a high-

profile member. Once again, I thank the good citizens of Mundingburra and stress my commitment to being their voice in Parliament.

I was raised in a small town on the south coast of New South Wales. My family lived on a Housing Commission estate before moving to Sydney, where I became part of the sixties and seventies movement. I received a scholarship in the days when education was a right, and I studied to be a teacher. I taught in inner Sydney schools for some years before moving to Queensland, where I have taught across the board in many regional centres. During the past five years I have practised as a guidance officer and lectured in this field at James Cook University.

Let me describe the Mundingburra electorate. In doing so, I acknowledge and pay tribute to the original citizens, the Wulgurukaba people. The Mundingburra electorate is not by and large an industrial or rural electorate. It is basically residential middle Australia. The constituents in the electorate include employees in the public and private sectors, professionals, labourers and a large population of soldiers from nearby Lavarack Barracks. While many people go outside Mundingburra to work, Mundingburra is where they live, so the issues of city life—jobs, education, health, justice and the environment—are the primary concerns of my electorate.

Mundingburra has a large proportion of educational facilities—11 primary schools, five high schools and a TAFE college. While there are large businesses in Mundingburra, small business is the major employer within the electorate. The current trend away from small business, especially in the retail sector, is of concern to me. The businesses in the surrounding electorates which create employment for the citizens of Mundingburra deserve my support. Without those employers, such as the meatworks, the railways and Korea Zinc, unemployment levels in the electorate would be much higher.

The electorate boasts a cultural diversity, and this Labor Government is committed to making Queensland a cohesive, harmonious and multicultural society. We are proud of our cultural mix, and while racism may be an issue it is not a problem. There is a strong move through reconciliation not to tolerate racism. In Townsville we are proud of our social diversity. Our Culture Fest and reconciliation concert, held just this weekend, testify to the huge groundswell of unity already existing and growing in our community. Indigenous Australians are failing. It is our duty to support and empower them in a genuine effort to bring some real equality into their lives. The divisive rhetoric of One Nation members serves no other purpose than to create disunity, confrontation and anger.

The people of Mundingburra do not want someone who will make false promises. They want someone who will listen to them, someone who will be honest with them. As an experienced counsellor, I am very aware of people's needs, and to be able to listen to them is half the challenge. Relationships and communication have been the very cornerstone of my work and family life.

I have battled as a single mother, so I know what it is like to go without. I know how difficult it is to be a mother and a father to your children. If the ALP in Queensland had not provided public housing, legal aid, free dental and medical services, as well as a free hospital system, I could not have studied to become an effective, contributing member of the work force. Had we not been in Government at that time, my children would have become victims of a socially unjust system. I know all about mortgages and balancing the budget, and I have first-hand experience with blended families.

I wish to acknowledge the immensely important role of trade unions. I am proud to bring to this Parliament a recognition of trade unions and their legitimate role in advocating and facilitating collective action amongst working people. I have been a member of the Queensland Teachers Union for many years and through life experiences have developed links with other trade unions.

The recent waterfront dispute enabled me to meet and know a fine group of workers and their families. These were the Townsville Patrick employees, who had an excellent reputation and had received a letter from their employer commending them on their best practice performances. Yet weeks later they were sacked as a result of a national collusion between the coalition parties and Patrick stevedores. They were sacked because they were members of a union. They were sacked because they chose to be loyal to themselves, their union and their workmates.

On the ensuing picket line I had the opportunity to get to know these workers and their families. I also became part of a women's support group which was formed to assist families to deal with the realities of Federal coalition industrial policies. These women had to hold together their families, support their husbands, balance the family budget with little or no incoming money and protect their children from the negative aspects of the dispute. These are ordinary Australian citizens who deserve better from their elected representatives. I am proud and grateful for the opportunity to work in the interests of these and other ordinary working people.

Women believe that many politicians do not focus on the issues that are relevant to them and strongly support more women in Parliament. A female perspective is critical if we are to improve the status of women and refuse the discrimination that women continue to face. Although this Labor Government, with 25% women members, has made strong progress towards equal representation, I notice on the other side of the House a collection of testosterone badly in need of more balance.

Perhaps that is why some members of the Opposition have shown resistance to Peter Beattie's insistence that parliamentary behaviour must improve. These better standards will serve to attract more women into public office.

During my doorknocking, it became very clear that women perceive their counterparts in Parliament to be less self-interested, less ego-based, to have more commonsense and to have directly experienced problems with the family, children, education, health, the elderly and unemployment. Women are interested in the global issues, but they are more interested in how those issues translate into their daily lives. They believe that many politicians are out of touch with these real issues.

Women are concerned that job prospects for their young families are uncertain, and those who do work have to work harder for less. Hardship is out there, wages are falling and security in employment is gone. The gap between the haves and have-nots has increased and widened. Family breakdown is of huge concern, especially when reduced services for families and increased financial pressures have made such a huge impact. With enormous and rapid social change, we have seen an increase in suicide and violence. Families are isolated because the extended family has gone. Marriages and partnerships have broken down, bringing an emphasis on values to an all-time low.

These are some of the issues that our Government has already addressed—child care, positive parenting and youth issues to name a few. Not only did Labor initiate the Seniors Card, it has now introduced a free ambulance service for pensioners and seniors, supported by a genuine plan to reduce hospital waiting lists. Labor has put Cool Schools back on track by allocating \$12m to overcome the inequities of the present system.

The notion of Leading Schools and equity is gone, and we have brought back equality and distributive justice. Labor has initiated crime prevention strategies, parent support programs and domestic violence strategies to address the economic and social risks that give rise to crime. The urban renewal programs, some already under way, have a positive impact on crime reduction.

Funding for child care is the responsibility of the Federal Government, which has cut \$820m from the budget for these services. It is impossible for a State Government to fill the gap that the Federal Government has left. However, a State Labor Government will make it easier for families to balance work requirements with the needs of their children.

Labor has made a firm and unequivocal commitment to the maintenance of TAFE Queensland in public hands. It will not be privatised. User choice and competitive initiatives will be maintained at January 1998 levels for a three-year period to allow TAFE time to adjust without disruption to other providers in the training market.

Labor's key environmental priorities reflect the issues of particular concern to Queenslanders. In establishing an Environmental Protection Agency, Labor will play a proactive role in monitoring, regulating and reporting on all Government and non-Government impacts on the environment.

The recent closure of the Ross River and Bowen abattoirs, where hundreds of meatworkers lost their jobs, has serious implications for the remaining Australia Meat Holdings facility at Stuart, where meatworkers feel insecure about their future. Many of these employees live in Mundingburra. Until the collapse of live cattle exports to Asia, the future of these meatworkers looked very bleak indeed. Towards the end of 1997, live cattle exports collapsed as a result of the Asian currency crisis. This was accompanied by sentiments of doom and gloom from graziers and others in the beef production industry.

Conversely, what has happened, as a direct result of the dramatic reduction in cattle exported, is the creation of wealth and job opportunities within the Queensland beef processing industry. Graziers are actually getting better prices this year for their cattle than they did last year and a far higher percentage of those cattle are being slaughtered and processed within Australia by Australian employees. Increased quantities of high-quality value added processed beef is filling markets and competing successfully on the world stage. The by-products from this beef production are the raw materials which create many other industries and employment throughout Australia.

The AMH meatworks close to my electorate is a seasonal shed which traditionally employs people for around nine and a half months a year. This year marked the earliest start ever at AMH as a direct result of cattle being kept in Australia. Stuart meatworkers left the dole queues a month earlier to begin production on what has been a very successful season for both the company and the employees. Beef throughput has been high this year and employee earnings have improved with the available overtime resulting from extra production. These pay packets are spent within the Townsville electorate completing the cycle of job creation within the city.

As a teacher of students at risk, including those who for whatever reason just do not make the grade academically, I am concerned about job prospects when they leave the school environment to enter a world that increasingly requires high academic achievement to compete in the modern job market. The meat industry is one of the last available places where large numbers of unskilled youth

can get a job, obtain on-the-job training and hold down a responsible, reasonably paid job within the community.

Where do these kids go when the local meatworks closes down? It is a fallacy to think they will go off to university or some trendy job training centre to become upwardly mobile professionals. It is more likely that they will end up on unemployment benefits and experience all the subsequent social problems. These are the reasons why wherever possible I will be an advocate on behalf of regional employers, such as the meat processing industry. The other great problem for regional meatworks is the centralisation of beef production by a couple of super sheds in the south-eastern corner of the State. This has direct implications for regional youth; suicide and substance abuse are the direct result of high unemployment and associated social pressures. It is not only important that we create jobs; it is important that we create jobs in the regions.

The Beattie Labor Government is committed to creating jobs and breaking the unemployment cycle. Jobs and job security are the major concerns of ordinary families, including those in my electorate. My electorate will now benefit from the creation of nearly 1,400 apprenticeships, traineeships and job placements.

Economic development in north Queensland is about to change the face of Townsville, bringing it to regional prominence—something that is long overdue. It is also good news for rail in Townsville. Many Queensland Rail employees live in my electorate and will benefit from a commitment to a more secure future, with \$20m spent on the workshop relocation to Stuart. The consultative processes with QR and the unions will ensure a partnership that can only enhance workers' security in an expanded permanent work force.

As a community leader, I want to emphasise that I stand for honesty, integrity and social justice. There is one thing that I want to achieve during my term of office, and that is to win back the confidence of the people in the electorate—confidence in the political process. I want to bring back professionalism in politics so that people can feel safe and confident in the ability of their member to lead and make decisions.

I am in accord with the people who are sick and tired of political point scoring, backstabbing and undisciplined behaviour which serves no other purpose than to turn people away in disgust and anger. These same people are looking for someone who can listen, feel empathy and act on their behalf. They want local issues to be heard and dealt with. As a woman, I represent more than half the population and, as a mother, I represent the family. My experiences as a parent have taught me patience and tolerance and the meaning of unconditional love.

The family unit has changed and divided. Families are struggling to keep their heads above water. They are desperate to keep some traditional values, but they are bombarded with fear and uncertainty, both in their relationships with partners and children and in the insecurity they face in their employment. No wonder so many constituents have abandoned us if we cannot even hear the issues that are basic to their existence. The issues of the family unit, jobs, education, health, ageing parents and all the social implications that plague the family of today are what must be addressed.

I believe I can bring back the confidence of the people by doing what I have always done as a mother and as a professional. I will listen, I will take on board local issues and I will represent the people of Mundingburra to the very best of my ability. Holding regular informal community information sessions will be a commitment I make to the Mundingburra electorate. In this way, members of the public, local community organisations and anyone interested can have a direct link to their elected member.

We will bring back the disenfranchised and empower them in the decision-making process. Our Premier has begun the process of getting back to the grassroots and is already travelling extensively throughout the region, presenting an open and accountable style of leadership. My electorate office has received several phone calls from constituents who voted for parties of other persuasions but felt compelled to ring and congratulate the Beattie Government for setting such a strong pace over the past 30 days.

In tightening up the standards and ethics in Parliament, our Premier has sent a clear message to all members that this Government will meet the high expectations of behaviour expected by the community in their elected representatives. By adopting a team approach with the community, I believe I can advocate on behalf of my electorate and win back local confidence. We are here to represent the community in Government in a fair and accountable way.

In Townsville, we are fortunate to have Mike Reynolds as the member for Townsville and also the Premier's representative in the north. Mike was Mayor of Townsville for nine years and, during his successful term, he always put the interests of ordinary community members first. In this, my inaugural speech, I acknowledge my gratitude to Mike for his support, strength and wisdom during the campaign and my ensuing period in office. I assure the people of Townsville that Mike and I will work hard as a team to best represent the interests of all the citizens of Townsville, the largest regional city in Queensland.

The challenge has been set and Peter Beattie has shown complete dedication and commitment to the issues the electorates have identified. This Labor Government is listening. This Labor Government is being proactive. I feel proud to be part of such a dynamic, strong and accountable Government. I pledge my support to the constituents of Mundingburra.
