



Speech By
Yvette D'Ath

MEMBER FOR REDCLIFFE

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PRIVATE MEMBER'S STATEMENT

Member for Redcliffe, First Speech

 **Ms D'ATH** (Redcliffe—ALP) (11.05 am): Thank you, Madam Speaker. I rise to speak for the first time in this chamber to deliver my maiden speech as the new member for Redcliffe. It is an honour for a person to be chosen to be a member of the Queensland parliament, just as it is for all of the other representatives who serve this parliament and their communities and for those people who serve in our local, state and federal parliaments across Australia. I consider it an immense privilege that the people of Redcliffe chose me to be their representative in this Queensland parliament. I know that I am only the 15th person to have served in the federal parliament and then the Queensland parliament and the only female member to do so.

It is reasonable for people to ask why I chose to put myself forward at the Redcliffe by-election, having previously served as the federal member for Petrie for six years. To answer that question, I have reflected on my first speech in the federal parliament and the reasons why I chose to run as a candidate in Petrie so many years ago. I put myself forward as a candidate in 2006 because of the path that the government of the day was taking Australia down. At the time we had a government that had stopped listening to the people; that had sought to govern for some, not all. I was moved to want to make a bigger contribution—a personal contribution—by fighting for a change in the direction of our country's policies through a change of government. I knew that as a Labor candidate I could help make that change.

That passion and that desire that drove me back in 2006 has not wavered in any way. Governments need to ensure fairness in their actions and to ensure those most in need in our community are supported. Governments need to recognise that one of the most important investments we can make to strengthen our social and economic future is to invest in our youth and their education and training. These are the values I hold dear—values that are just as important today as they were in 2006. That is why the past two years has been so difficult. Since 2012 I have witnessed my local community of Redcliffe and our great state of Queensland being taken down the same path as the Howard government took us down in 2006. We now have a state government that did not stop listening—it appears to have never been listening to begin with; a government that said anything to get elected and has proceeded to let our communities down at every turn.

In November last year, with the resignation of the previous state member for Redcliffe, an opportunity arose that allowed me to once again make a bigger contribution—a personal contribution—to fight for a change in the direction our state is taking. I was approached by many in the Redcliffe community to nominate as a candidate. It was humbling to have so many people encourage me to put myself forward. These people are everyday people—working hard, raising families, running businesses, volunteering their time with community organisations. These are the people who have inspired me to do more. These are the people who deserve someone who will stand

beside them and speak up for them. They are tired of being neglected and they are angry with what has been done to their communities.

As one of those people, I can see that the community I live in, am raising my family in and am passionate about is under attack. Jobs have been lost, services cut and funding stripped away. Those left behind in our hospitals, schools, the Public Service, TAFEs and community organisations have been unable to speak up due to fear of further repercussions. I had had enough, as had the Redcliffe community.

However, this was not all that Redcliffe has had to endure. It would be normal protocol in a maiden speech to acknowledge the efforts of the previous member for the electorate irrespective of which side of politics they represented. I cannot do this. The Redcliffe community has been hurt by the actions of the previous member, Scott Driscoll. Mr Driscoll failed our community, he abused our trust and he caused real harm to many. It is because of this past member's failings that the people of Redcliffe were called upon to vote in this by-election. I only wish that the people of Redcliffe could have been spared this pain. And they could have because Mr Driscoll's conduct was known by many, including his financial dealings with the community organisation RCAMB, at the time he was preselected and before he was elected. The LNP let our community down by believing that this was a candidate who was worthy of being the representative for Redcliffe.

The community was certainly disgusted at the way they were treated by Scott Driscoll but the real anger was reserved for the Premier and the LNP government. The actions of the LNP government over the past two years have had far-reaching implications in Redcliffe. It is for these reasons that the decision the Redcliffe people made on 22 February was a decision that I believe they did not make lightly. The electorate wanted someone who will stand up for our community, who will fight for our community and who will listen to our community. The people of Redcliffe knew that they would get that with me. I fought hard to bring new housing, new school libraries, halls and science and language centres, trade training centres and education resources, the new Redcliffe headspace to support youth welfare and extra funding for the Gateway Motorway to the area, to name just a few of my achievements over the past six years.

The community also knew that I was able to deliver what nobody before me at any level of government had been able to achieve, and that is the funding for the long-awaited Moreton Bay Rail Link, with the cooperation of the Moreton Bay Regional Council and the then state Labor government—a rail line that had been talked about for more than 100 years but never had funding committed to it. We now have this rail line under construction with a completion time of 2016, bringing many jobs with it.

However, being a strong representative is far more than the funding you bring to the electorate. It is about being a strong local representative, being out in your community, being involved in your community, being available and approachable. Redcliffe knows that this is the type of representative they get with me. I know that with such honour comes much responsibility. Redcliffe is a great electorate. The Redcliffe electorate covers the Redcliffe peninsula east of Hercules Road and includes the suburbs of Kippa-Ring, Redcliffe, Scarborough, Newport, Woody Point, Margate and Clontarf and includes the beautiful Moreton Island.

Of course, the Redcliffe peninsula is not just a bunch of suburbs; it is a community. Recently, someone said to me, 'Redcliffe is a village,' and in many ways it is. Across the various places that I have lived and visited in my life I have never seen such a strong community with a large volunteer base and many great community and service organisations. Our environmental credentials are the envy of many, with a marine conservation park, an internationally listed RAMSAR site and a strong tourism sector based around Moreton Bay and our surrounds. We consist of many small businesses that are becoming more engaged through the Redcliffe city chamber, and I look forward to working with the chamber to strengthen our local economy.

It is important, however, to acknowledge that Redcliffe has its challenges. As a community, as a region in South-East Queensland, we have many challenges and opportunities that present themselves. With a rapidly growing region, the need for services including health and education to keep up with expectations and community needs is ever present. We need to take measures to strengthen our local economy, support small businesses, grow tourism and invest in jobs. We need to protect our environment and to educate our community about our local jewels of Hays Inlet and Moreton Bay. We need to tackle homelessness, unemployment and particularly youth unemployment and discrimination against seniors in the workforce. We need to ensure that people with disability are able to get the support that they deserve and have the access to opportunities that others may take for granted. We need to make sure that our seniors, our pensioners and self-funded retirees are

valued and listened to in our community, recognising the valuable contribution they have made and continue to make in our local communities and in society.

I will continue to work with our local community and to engage with local businesses and chambers, with health professionals, with local community organisations as the new member for Redcliffe to gain their insight into ways that we can act in the best interests of our community. I look forward to continuing my strong association with our local schools and the broader school community.

I know that people are feeling the pressures of cost of living and particularly the cost of water and electricity. Many people have told me that households of one or two people are regularly receiving water bills of \$400 a quarter. Just this week a young couple who have not even moved into their new home in the region have received their first Unitywater bill and it is \$400. How can this be when they have not even used any water? How are people who have been in hospital or away receiving bills that show increases over that period? There are questions that need answers. There are promises made by the LNP government that need to be kept.

The same can be said about giving the Redcliffe community a voice on deamalgamation. These are not issues that I intend to debate as part of my maiden speech. However, to remain silent on these issues in my maiden speech would be to ignore the wishes of my community and would be sending a message to the people of Redcliffe that I have not listened. I have no intention of being that type of member.

I do need to talk about the Redcliffe by-election. The LNP took extreme measures to attack my character, credibility and integrity. Never before have I experienced such a personal campaign. I do not intend to go through the sordid details of the false allegations against me, but I will take up one issue. The argument put by those opposite that at the by-election the people faced a stark choice between a local, a mum and nurse or me, a union person. I am always amused by such comparisons, defining me as merely a union person or a union advocate. Firstly, I am proud to belong to a union and to have worked for a union, the Australian Workers Union. To have the privilege of spending your days fighting to ensure fairness and equity, to protect hard-won rights and to work to improve people's living standards into the future is not a bad occupation. In fact, it sounds very similar to the role of an elected representative.

However, I also want to highlight what other attributes I bring as a representative. I, too, am a local in Redcliffe, a mum and a wife. I have not always lived in Redcliffe. As a family we spent many years moving from rental property to rental property, from school to school. My parents worked hard to put food on the table and a roof over our family's heads. My parents ensured that we understood the value of hard work and being able to stand on your own two feet. My parents never complained when times were tough; they just kept going. Eventually, this led our family to the Redcliffe peninsula and I had the pleasure of attending Redcliffe State High School. However, I did what my siblings had done and what many of my age at the time did. I left school at 15 and went straight into the full-time workforce. I saw no point in remaining at school as I was never going to go to university—no-one in my family ever had. It made sense to get a job and pay my way in the household. That path saw me work in retail, clean tables, work as a receptionist in real estate, work in a bearing company spending many long nights counting small O rings and many other jobs.

It was in my early 20s that I realised the importance of an education. I witnessed firsthand the benefits of furthering your education, having missed out on many jobs just because others had a piece of paper that I did not. This spurred me on to enrol in night school and I completed my senior in English and Economics. I then moved on to TAFE and then on to university. I continued to work full time during this time and after 14 years of study I finished with a Bachelor of Laws and a Graduate Diploma of Legal Practice, eventually getting admitted in the Supreme Court of the ACT, with the now Leader of the Opposition and the member for Inala, Annastacia Palaszczuk, being admitted alongside me.

Of course, if working full time and studying for 14 years did not keep me busy enough, I also started my family during this time, having two beautiful children. Just to make it a bit more exciting throughout this entire time and right through to today, my husband has been a full-time shiftworker. Our family certainly has experienced firsthand what it is like to juggle family, work and education commitments along with meeting the financial obligations of paying a mortgage and all of the cost-of-living pressures that come with having a home and family.

Having finished my studies, I then had the incredible opportunity to work overseas during 2005 in Canada and the US, giving me a greater understanding of our similarities and differences in policy development in important areas of social welfare, education, health and workplace laws of our great

countries. Having completed all this, I then had the honour of being elected as the federal member for Petrie, having the privilege of representing the people of Redcliffe amongst other communities. I thank all of the constituents, businesses, schools and community organisations that I had the great pleasure of representing over those six years.

I wanted to outline this because I believe that our parliaments across the nation should reflect people from a variety of backgrounds and with different skills and experience. It is this type of life experience that we need in our parliaments and it is this type of life experience that the people of Redcliffe value. I appreciate that being elected in a by-election means I have my work cut out for me. There is at most 12 months before the next general election, and I must work hard during this time to fix the damage done to this community and to rebuild the trust. I intend to pursue with the same energy that I showed as the federal member for Petrie and I showed the people of Redcliffe over the past three months the issues important to my community and to hold the LNP government to account for the promises they made to the people of Redcliffe in 2012 and in this year's by-election. Redcliffe has gone for too long without a voice; without a representative in this parliament. I will not sit quietly. I will be the voice that the community wants and the voice that the community truly deserves.

I wish to thank the Leader of the Opposition for appointing me as the shadow minister for education and training, science, IT and innovation and shadow minister for disability services. It is widely known in my communities that education and training is one of my real passions. I believe that education changes lives and we, as law makers and those in government, must ensure that we are providing the pathways for people of all ages to take up those opportunities. I personally believe that more needs to be done to support trade training. A trade qualification is as valuable as a university degree and we need to ensure that those opportunities are there in our society and to provide support to people pursuing those paths. That is why I believe investment in trade training centres in our schools and in our TAFEs is a critical part of providing the infrastructure and resources necessary to provide those opportunities. I look forward to continuing my strong relationships with the Catholic education sector, the Independent Schools Association, our state schools, the Primary Principals Association, our P&Cs and P&Fs, the Queensland Teachers Union, the Queensland Independent Education Union and other unions covering school communities.

I also have the important portfolios of science, IT and innovation. Queensland is well known for its medical research, and as a state and country we are known for being innovative. However, the challenges are supporting and nurturing these areas and ensuring that we keep these discoveries in our own state and our own country because when we do we create opportunities, we strengthen our economy and we create jobs.

Last but not least, I have the portfolio of disability services. There is not one person in this parliament who could disagree with the statement that we are not doing enough to support people with a disability and their family and carers. I am proud to have been part of a government that introduced the National Disability Insurance Scheme. However, there is a long way to go to see that become tangible support for those in need in our communities. I look forward to working with the disability sector, providers, carers, families and people with a disability, to listen to their needs and to be an advocate on their behalf. These are important policy areas for the state of Queensland and I will ensure that I fulfil these duties with the same passion and enthusiasm that I will deliver to the communities of Redcliffe.

I end my maiden speech thanking those people who, with the great community of Redcliffe, led me to this moment. Firstly, I must thank my husband, George, who has stood by me for almost 25 years; a man who has always had faith in me, who inspires me and who supported me in all of my endeavours over the years: through studies, work and children. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge my husband and his contribution to society with the great work he does as a serving police officer. I acknowledge all of the serving police officers in Queensland. I believe that the job of a police officer is far more difficult than the hardest day of a member of parliament. I thank the police and their families for the service they give to our communities. To my beautiful children, Emma and Cameron, our lives have certainly changed over the years with my time in federal parliament and we now start a new chapter in our lives. As any of us who have ever served in public life know, it is our families who make the biggest sacrifice when we choose to serve the people. There are many times that my children have missed out on having their mum attend a special event, or not had their mum around when they needed me. And, of course, as our children get older they are more aware and alert to the things that are said in the media in the thrust of a campaign. We must all remember that it is not just the candidates but also the families behind them who must deal with the emotions of politics. I hope my children learn from what I do and why I do it. It is important to me that my children grow up understanding that there is a difference between a politician and a parliamentarian. The

former is there for their own gratification, the latter is there to serve the people. I hope we all strive to be great parliamentarians. To Emma and Cameron, thank you for your love and support.

I thank the leader of the parliamentary Labor party, Anastacia Palaszczuk, for her leadership and her personal support during the Redcliffe by-election campaign and the interest she has shown in the Redcliffe community over the past two years. Thank you to all the opposition caucus members for their support in my campaign. To the ALP state secretary, Anthony Chisholm, and to the party office staff, thank you for your support and guidance. I thank those who have worked most closely with me on the Redcliffe by-election campaign. I pay tribute to Laura Gowdie. Laura has been campaigning by my side since 2006. Laura has been someone I can confide in and trust and, like me, she has the community and Labor values at heart. To Ryan, Karl, Daniel and the two Jennys, thank you for your tremendous efforts in the campaign office and beyond; you kept me sane over the past three months with your humour and energy.

A special thank you goes to the ALP branch members and my local branch members in Redcliffe who have always supported me and who worked tirelessly during the Redcliffe by-election. To the many volunteers who walked in off the street, who contacted my office and volunteered their time to assist in the campaign, I say thank you. To the unions who came out and supported the campaign, I say thank you. The fact that unions are willing to advocate on behalf of their members to give workers in my community and in the state a voice and to fight the attacks by this LNP government on their rights and conditions should be applauded. To the essential service workers who came and campaigned, I say a huge thank you. To the firefighters, doctors, nurses, teachers and cleaners who were willing to stand up and be heard, I wish to express my deep gratitude to you all. It is unfortunate that the LNP government would rather criticise you when instead they should be thanking you for the important work that you do in our society. The Premier should be asking himself what would motivate these professionals to want to so publicly stand up against his government. The answer would be that the decisions made by the LNP government are having such a significant impact on their livelihoods and their ability to serve the community that they will not remain silent any longer. These workers are standing up because they have had enough of a government that does not listen. I thank the Not for Sale campaigners who are willing to shine a light on the government's agenda for asset sales.

I finish by once again thanking the Redcliffe community for putting their faith in me and entrusting me with the important role of being their strong voice in the community and in the Queensland parliament. I promise to work with them and work for them as the elected representative for Redcliffe.