



Speech by

# Steve Minnikin

MEMBER FOR CHATSWORTH

Hansard Wednesday, 30 May 2012

---

## MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr MINNIKIN** (Chatsworth—LNP) (5.08 pm): At approximately 20 minutes past seven on the evening of 24 March, I was able to fulfil a 20-year goal that I had set myself: to win the state seat of Chatsworth. As many members before me have said, it is a truly humbling experience and I feel absolutely privileged to have been given this opportunity by the people of Chatsworth. At the point in time when the realisation had sunk in that I had actually won the seat, I felt an overwhelming sense of responsibility, and it is this notion of responsibility and what it entails that will be the cornerstone of my speech tonight in this hallowed chamber. Before I begin to expand on the issue of responsibility, I want to extend my congratulations to the Speaker of the parliament for her election as the first female Speaker in this state's history. It was an absolute privilege to be part of witnessing history, with her elevation to this important role at the last sitting of parliament.

I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet tonight, the Jagera and Turrbal peoples. I also want to reaffirm my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, the Queen of Australia, and to her representative, Her Excellency the Governor, Penelope Wensley, and my loyalty to this parliament and to the electors of Chatsworth.

My idol, Sir Winston Churchill, once stated, 'The price of greatness is responsibility.' I wish to address the notion of responsibility in two parts—one from the head and one from the heart. My speech will outline several key areas including my responsibility to the state seat of Chatsworth, my responsibility to uphold my core ideological values, taking responsibility for one's own actions and risk, responsibility to our children and future generations, and our responsibility to the First Australians.

I have a responsibility to the Chatsworth electorate, which bestowed upon me a tremendous honour on 24 March. Regardless of any ideological difference amongst this chamber, I am confident in stating that one unifying responsibility that all members share is the need to provide effective representation for their electorates. As I walk into this wonderful chamber and realise that only 1,159 men and women have previously had the honour of being here before the 54th Parliament, the unique privilege we all have dawns on me. I am delighted that primary school children, along with other members of the Chatsworth electorate, are present in the public gallery tonight—and they are rightfully positioned above me, where they should be; I am indeed their servant. The moment that this august chamber no longer feels special and is taken for granted is the day that I should resign.

I have a responsibility to work hard for the people of Chatsworth, just as my political predecessors have from both sides of politics. They include Sir Thomas Hiley, Bill Hewitt, Terry Mackenroth, Michael Caltabiano, Chris Bombolas and Steve Kilburn. Whilst, understandably, I do not share the same political philosophy as all of the previous members for Chatsworth, one unifying thing we all share is a love of this outer eastern area of Brisbane. Special mention should be made of former member for Chatsworth Bill Hewitt, who gave me wonderful advice and even distributed letterbox material on several occasions throughout the campaign. That he did this even though the terrain was hilly and he is in his 80s sums up the character of the man.

I have lived in the Chatsworth electorate for the majority of my life and currently live with my wife and two boys in the heart of the electorate—Belmont. Growing up in Koree Street, I attended Carina State School and in year 7 was the school dux, collecting the David Byrne medal of merit. Collecting the award medal was my first-ever contact with a politician, and I can remember turning to my father, Jeff, and asking, 'What does a politician do, Dad?' His response then is still relevant today. He said, 'They try to make people's lives better, son.'

I learned how to swim at the Carina pool in Zahel Street with Roy and Pat Holland. In the early 1970s I was riding my supercool Dragster pushbike around a piece of bushland now known as Carindale. Back then, a Jelly Tip ice-cream cost around 25c. I can remember when the Belmont terminus really was the end of the tram line and when Chris and John Nickolou's small convenience shop on Old Cleveland Road was the only supermarket around the area, long before Westfield Carindale opened in 1979.

Not only have I grown up in this electorate; I have grown up with this electorate. For decades my family has been closely associated with the Chatsworth area through local sporting clubs and community associations. I, too, share their commitment and connection to this fantastic local community. It is that connection which enables me to understand the issues that impact upon this electorate. It is that connection which leads me to stand here tonight before you having the honour of being the current member for Chatsworth. It is my responsibility to serve the people of Chatsworth well and to represent all constituents, regardless of their political leanings. No one political party has a mortgage on common sense or good ideas, and I will always listen to those on the opposite side of the chamber, as the people of Chatsworth would expect me to.

I have a responsibility to represent my electorate in its entirety—from the tradesperson at Carina, family at Wakerley, small business owner from Tingalpa, retailer at Carindale and professional at Belmont. I have a responsibility to uphold my core ideological values in this chamber. Personal ambition and self-interest are noble traits which have forever propelled men and women to aspire to greater heights throughout history, but so, too, is a sense of decency, unity of purpose and the ability to put aside one's individual focus in life in order to contribute to a greater good. We are a party created around the individual, but no individual is greater than the party. Self-interest is important. For far too long it has been misrepresented. As Baroness Margaret Thatcher stated—

There is not and cannot possibly be any hard and fast antithesis between self-interest and care for others, for man is a social creature born into family, clan, community, nation, brought up in mutual dependence.

Some members may be surprised to know that I come from a strong Labor family and on election day at Carina primary school I had one uncle handing out how-to-vote cards for me and another handing out how-to-vote cards for my opponent. What makes me so proud to be a Queenslander and an Australian is that we have a robust democracy decided by the power of the ballot box and not by the sound of Kalashnikovs and AK-47s. We should never take this fact for granted.

I joined the former Liberal Party in 1989 after studying political theory at university. For the first time in my life I studied all of the famous political ideologies and was immediately influenced and drawn to liberalism as espoused by John Stuart Mill, Thomas Paine, John Locke and Jeremy Bentham. I was immediately attracted to core beliefs such as freedom of association, reward for effort, equal justice under law, minimalist government intervention, free markets and the proposition that governments are not the masters of the people but are their servants. Within a few years I was honoured to become the Young Liberal state president and federal treasurer. In between working full time, I managed to earn a Bachelor of Business from the University of Queensland, a graduate certificate and graduate diploma from QUT and a masters degree in property economics from QUT. I have a responsibility to apply my core ideological beliefs and values and academic knowledge in a sensible and pragmatic way in order to best represent the needs of the people of Chatsworth and the state as a whole.

In any form, extremism is a dangerous thing. I believe that Queenslanders are fairly even keeled and will react if they sense that one particular political orthodoxy is lurching too far to the left or the right. As an economic liberal, I agree with Milton Friedman when he stated in 1962, *inter alia*—

The existence of a free market does not of course eliminate the need for government. On the contrary, government is essential both as a forum for determining the 'rules of the game' and as an umpire to interpret and enforce the rules decided on. What the market does is to reduce greatly the range of issues that must be decided through political means and thereby minimise the extent to which government need participate.

You cannot distribute wealth that you have not yet created. I am an unashamed champion of small business. My former roles as a shopping centre developer and manager have given me an appreciation of the virtues of thrift, hard work, risk taking and seeing small business people getting up at 4 am each day in order to carve out a better future for both themselves and their families. There are many small business owners in Chatsworth and it is my responsibility to represent them well. Our role and responsibility as a government is to provide an opportunity deposit slip for all Queenslanders and not an entitlement chequebook. It is our responsibility as the government to be an enabler of opportunity and not a provider of assumed entitlement. We have to take responsibility in this state for our own actions, develop resilience and accept risk. Ronald Reagan once said—

We must reject the idea that every time a law's broken society is guilty rather than the lawbreaker. It is time to restore the precept that each individual is accountable for his or her own actions.

This notion was further explored in a recent article in the *Australian Journal of Politics and History* which stated that political theorists Hayek and Anderson—

... deplored the demoralising effects of a culture of dependence and irresponsibility and both insisted on the importance of risk in the struggle in human life. The pursuit of security within an order free of risk, experimentation, confrontation and uncertainty could only lead to a general loss of resilience and initiative.

We need to craft public policy that encourages resilience and risk taking. Learning how to play well together in the sandpit and learning how to take a knock promotes social awareness and the concept of taking risks in life.

We have a responsibility to our children and future generations. My wonderful wife, Roz, and I have two fantastic boys, Harrison aged 15 and Lachlan aged nine. It is manifestly unfair that this state, as a legacy of the previous government, will soon rack up around \$85 billion in state debt which equates to an interest bill of around \$540,000 per hour. The vast majority of this debt was racked up long before the GFC and the recent tragic flood disasters. Why should my two young boys be forced to pay in the years to come for the economic mismanagement and largesse of the previous government? Each successive generation should be standing on the shoulders of the generation preceding them. Intergenerational debt and economic incompetence are compelling reasons we needed a change of state government—so that we can give our future generation a decent shot at life rather than being unfairly burdened economically.

We have a responsibility to start thinking strategically from an economic and environmental viewpoint rather than in a three-year electoral spin cycle. We owe this level of responsibility to our children and to their future generations. I would rather do what I knew in my heart and my head was the right thing to do strategically than pander to some short-term political gain. We have seen too much of that at a federal level over the past 18 months, and people are tired of it. The electorate is becoming better educated and is not stupid. I believe we have a responsibility to always listen to the will of the electorate and outline a vision not just for the life of this 54th Parliament but to offer a plan for the future of our state in which the beneficiaries will not necessarily be us as the current members but our children.

State government is fundamentally about service delivery and we have a responsibility to start treating each dollar of the public purse as if it were our own hard earned cash. We, as politicians, are merely the custodians of taxpayers' money. It is time that we showed responsibility for valuing the price of a dollar in just the same way as we try to teach our children mutual respect and responsibility. Many of us have made an economic sacrifice to run for public office and we have done so because we want to make a difference for future generations. No current generation's reckless economic management should ever be allowed to stifle the dreams and aspirations of our most precious state asset, our children.

We have a responsibility also to the first Australians. All members in this august chamber have a responsibility to continue to narrow the gap in living standards between our Indigenous cousins and other Queenslanders. I do not profess to be an expert in any field, but having lived in Mount Isa as a child during the mid-1970s I have firsthand knowledge of the plight of the very proud Kalkadoon people. Education was back then and, in my humble opinion, still remains the key today to closing the gap with aspirational opportunity. One of my role models as a young Liberal state president was the former Senator Neville Bonner, who gave one of the greatest speeches I have ever had the privilege of listening to in the early 1990s when he stated words to the effect, 'Don't give my people your sympathy, give them the same educational opportunities so that they gain a sense of ownership over their future destiny.' Whilst many inroads have been made over the past few decades, surely the hallmark of statehood is that moment in time when any little girl or boy can arise from whatever station in life they come from, regardless of socioeconomic status, creed or colour, to one day become Premier of this magnificent state.

As the member for Chatsworth, I now have the responsibility to acknowledge from the heart the people who have helped me arrive at this privileged position. I would like to congratulate the Premier, Mr Campbell Newman, for the textbook case study he provided on the essence of true leadership—some might even say courage under verbal fire—as both he and his family were subjected to an unprecedented personal and negative campaign. Not only was his success a win for Ashgrove but it was a win for the values of decency, resilience and courage. I congratulate the Premier and his family for the poise and dignity they showed throughout the campaign. Class and style are not attributes that you can buy; they are acquired through one's upbringing and adherence to a decent set of core beliefs. Politics is a battle of ideas, not personalities, and whilst it is self-evident that the course of modern Australian politics has gone down the presidential style of focusing on leaders, the recent state election result vindicated my belief that substance and a commitment to principle will always prevail over negative spin.

I also thank the Premier for the honour of serving the state as the Assistant Minister for Public Transport. I have a wonderful mentor in the minister, the Hon. Scott Emerson. I would also like to pay homage to the other two members of the senior leadership team—the Deputy Premier, the Hon. Jeff

Seeney, and the Treasurer, the Hon. Tim Nicholls—who cast aside any personal ambition for the greater good of the LNP and ultimately the state of Queensland. In concert with the Premier, these two gentlemen conducted themselves with dignity and grace throughout the recent state election campaign and the result of this tight-knit teamwork is ably demonstrated when one looks around the chamber and sees the current composition. I also acknowledge the heavy lifting that was done to bring the LNP together as a cohesive political force by the Hon. Lawrence Springborg, the Hon. Mark McArdle, party president Mr Bruce McIver and vice-president of the party, Mr Gary Spence. Indeed, I doubt that many of my cohort would be representing their electorates if it were not for the efforts of these four gentlemen, along with many other men and women who have sacrificed much to create one unified party that combines the best of traditional Liberal values as espoused by John Stuart Mill with the classic conservatism of Edmund Burke.

It would be remiss of me not to also pay tribute to the fantastic central campaign team who created Australian political history back in March. The campaign director, Mr James McGrath, along with the then state director, Mr Michael O'Dwyer, ran an intelligent campaign that focused on a positive narrative and put the hopes and aspirations of the people of Queensland first rather than the party. I would like to acknowledge my brilliant Chatsworth campaign team. Obviously, every state seat is different and techniques that work in one electorate may not be as effective in another. However, one unifying feature that remains constant with every member in this chamber is true: none of us occupy our current seat in this place without exceptional support from our campaign teams. To my core team, of whom many are here in the public gallery tonight, who stayed the course with me over nearly a year and a half—Roz Minnikin, Russ Egan, Paul Scarr, Jason Sondorp, Perry Dollar, Kev Whitmee, Barry Glover, Mark Franklin, Drewe and Kerry Freeburn, Steven Brittle, Patrina Penfold, Murray Gourlie, Zach Davis-Hancock, Russell Powerlett, Craig Wilson, Councillor Adrian Schrunner, Councillor Ryan Murphy and Matt McEachan—I salute and thank you all. I sent an SMS out to my Chatsworth campaign team in the early hours of 24 March that stated 'Let's go out and create a little history today.' We did. I wish to thank everyone who contributed to my Chatsworth campaign as I would not be in this privileged position without a total team effort. Thank you all for helping me achieve my dream.

All of us have a responsibility to never forget where we came from and who formulated our value system. In my case, the role that my parents, Jeff and Denise Minnikin, played cannot be understated. Whatever I have achieved in life has been due to the internal belief system they instilled in me as a boy. Between my mother and father, I was taught to work hard, to never take anything or anyone for granted, be responsible for my own actions, respect the family unit, respect people not based on the value of their financial bank balance but the deposit of decency they exhibited back to you, and to raise my own children to be self-reliant and free-thinking members of society. I could never repay them fully in any way other than to try to make them proud of the fact that the values they instilled in me have been passed on down the line through my own two boys. I also pay respect to my parents-in-law, Harry and Corina Mole, who, like my parents, have a tremendous work ethic, are tolerant of others and have successfully raised and educated three daughters of their own with minimal government assistance. These people are the everyday heroes of society. They are unassuming, law-abiding folk with a love of state and family. They are typical, wonderful Queenslanders.

Whilst it is true that my parents were my early role models, my 'rock of Gibraltar' is undoubtedly my wife, Roslyn, who is the most talented woman I have ever known. Her ability to work throughout the night until she gets things done to an exceptionally high standard is remarkable. Indeed, without Roz by my side I would not be in this privileged position tonight. She is a wonderful wife and a brilliant mother to our sons. After nearly 20 years of marriage, she still continues to amaze me. I thank my two boys, Harrison and Lachlan, for the countless hours of letterbox dropping they did during my campaign, along with putting up with the countless hours of embarrassment they endured every time we drove out in my car in public with my big bald head adorned on the side doors with campaign artwork and people continually looking at us.

I would gladly give up my life in a heartbeat for any one of them and I have always maintained that you have not fully lived until you have found someone worth dying for. They do, in fact, complete my life and my reason for wanting to be the member for Chatsworth is to ensure that my boys and their generation prosper long after my time here sets. I have in the public gallery tonight my mother, my wife and my two boys as well as several close friends. I salute each and every one of them for assisting me to make my dream of speaking in this hallowed chamber this evening a reality. None of us in this chamber can do this on our own.

I again thank the people of Chatsworth, who have recently bestowed upon me the greatest gift that one can be given in public office: the opportunity to serve as a member of parliament and play a role today for the betterment of Queenslanders tomorrow. I wish to be judged not by my political longevity in this sacred chamber but rather by the demonstrable contribution I make through good public policy to enrich the lives of the people of Chatsworth and the state as a whole. It is my responsibility to contribute to public life via sound political policy which will enable the next year 7 student from perhaps Carina, Gumdale,

Mayfield, Camp Hill, Tingalpa, Belmont or any other primary school in Chatsworth to become a future member of state parliament.

I dedicate this maiden speech to my immediate family, my parents, as well as my sister Tracey and brother Michael and to my deceased grandparents Jack and Lucy Sands and Theda and Tom Minnikin. Above all else, in order to serve Chatsworth well I will strive at all times to conduct myself responsibly. Thank you.