



Speech by

Trevor Ruthenberg

MEMBER FOR KALLANGUR

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr RUTHENBERG** (Kallangur—LNP) (5.58 pm): I wish to speak this evening about philosophy and society. Society determines how it should live and government should reflect that. We live in a complex community made up of very complex relationships, agendas, agencies and individuals. There is a whole area of science dedicated to the study of structures of society and its evolution. In the history of the earth, democracy as we know it today is a very young concept. However, within that concept, Queensland is one of the oldest continuous democracies in the world. We have a proud history of non-violence, societal progress, encouraging and participating in robust debate most of the time within the confines of law and common decency, not violence and death as we witness every day in other places around the world. Our society is not static, but it is very much a dynamic organisation. It can get sick. It has bad days. It has times of unbelievable achievement and it affects everyone of us as we participate, willingly or not.

Each of us contributes to our communities and each of those contributions affects us in varying ways depending on how we are related to those activities. Ultimately, the way our democracy affects each of us depends not only on how we each interact within our community but on the way others interact in our community as well. We are, to borrow a phrase, a coalition of the willing in pursuit of our own personal ambitions and desires but within the confines of the rule of law.

Our community of Queensland is made up of smaller communities, all intertwined with each other yet still somehow individual. Participating harmoniously in our society means we all must adhere to common understandings of principles and values—some encoded in law, others accepted as ideals. It is we in this place who come together to represent the members of our communities, to reflect and debate these ideals and to determine common presuppositions. It is we who must listen and decipher our community's understandings and then translate them here in this place. We must reflect accurately the thoughts and pulse of the folks who have entrusted us with that responsibility so that our community can continue to grow and morph as our circumstances change and move. I will, as best I can, represent and engage those who have entrusted me to represent them without fear or favour and irrespective of individual political, religious or philosophical presumption. I am sure that I will have many people who will give generously of their time and advice, and I will do my best to listen to them.

In my experience, irreconcilable conflict occurs when two sides of an argument emanate from two different presuppositions when neither will compromise sufficiently to align or co-exist without causing the other serious concern or impacting their presupposition sufficiently that it affects the integrity of the other's argument. One way to facilitate a coming together of different points of view is to seek the common values each side brings to a conversation.

Our state, in the relative short time it has been in existence, congregates around common values forged in historical events and occasions. The guts of pioneering families coming in a ship for months across the sea with little prospect of ever returning to their homes and families has forged a fighting spirit, a tenacity in our psyche. My own family arrived in this country in 1863 and settled in Minden as farmers. Likewise, the Anzac experience—credited with the birth of Australia as a nation—further forged values like mateship, courage, sacrifice and loyalty. Today the Anzac spirit is still forging values in our youth, values like gratitude for the sacrifice of the men and women who fought to maintain our freedoms.

Our community also adopted values from its Judeo-Christian heritage, values like love for one's fellow man. We take joy in the simple things in life. We protect the peace in which we live. We take a lot on the chin and have a character that allows us to endure hard times. We display great acts of kindness frequently. We look for the best in people. We place great value in loyalty. We look up to strong leadership, someone who can control their emotions in a statesmanly manner—someone like our Premier.

It is these values that allows us as a community in Queensland to maintain one of the longest and most established democratic precincts in the world. These values forge common purpose, understanding and goodwill in pursuit of developing a more robust and peaceful community. As a new member in this place, I wish to honour those who have come before me with their leadership and vision. I hope to also contribute to this great tradition so that, as a consequence of my efforts, others in the future will recognise our collective efforts and remember them with good review.

I have lived in six countries for at least a year in each of those countries and I have travelled to many parts of this world, and I believe that Australians have several very acute cultural traits, more so than anywhere else in the world. These traits have evolved because of the way Australia has grown up and serve as a great leveller in our society. The first trait I speak of is an ability to detect and dispense of insincerity. Australians have a way of getting to a point very quickly when they think you are being insincere with them. It is this very trait that in recent years has caused politicians to be viewed very poorly by our community in terms of offering any real value to our society. When we the representatives of the people stop representing them, we have very little value to them. I will work very hard every day to ensure that I remain valuable to my community by ensuring that I am representing them well. I implore all of you here in this place to lift to a high standard of public service, remembering that service implies serving or being a servant. Let us all strive daily to be diligent in our efforts to serve those people who trust us to represent them. I acknowledge those members whose communities have re-elected them. This act shows their trust in you and I hope to learn from you so that I, too, may ensure I am re-elected because my community values my contribution here in this place.

The second trait that I think Australians display more than people anywhere else in the world is a keen sense of fairness. Australians will sacrifice much and give generously if they feel that others are doing the same. If you ever want to see this in Queensland, you only have to look at the efforts of the mud army or at the way Australians respond to the Salvation Army. I think this is why Australians dislike the carbon tax so much—because, instinctively, they have a sense that the tax is simply unfair. Nowhere else in the world is a people being asked to make a sacrifice that even comes close to the sacrifice that this federal Labor government is asking us to make, especially when there is almost zero impact on carbon emissions and especially given the fact that many jobs will be moved overseas, producing in many instances a greater carbon footprint due to the more relaxed pollution laws in those countries. It is not that Australians do not want to contribute to a solution to the issue of carbon production; it is the fact that the mechanism being used is unfair, and Queenslanders instinctively know this.

In our society we expect everyone to pull their weight, to contribute according to their ability. The families we represent will work hard and do the best they can. What I think they expect from us is simply the same. I do not think they expect us to have all of the answers or even to provide buckets of gold for them. They just want what is fair: their share. They do not want to be lied to. On election day—24 March—the two things people said to me consistently were, 'Don't let us down,' and, 'Don't lie to us.' To me this means, 'Do your best. Represent us well. Tell us when and why something can't be provided, and be straight with us.' You can be assured that I will, to the very best of my ability, try to honour these very reasonable requests as I serve my community.

We who are leaders in our community must be servant leaders. We must lead by example. In the past the example of leadership fell on people like pastors, priests and civic leaders. More and more, however, I think the influence of institutions like the church is, like its membership, struggling. Other leaders, however, are stepping up—leaders like school principals, for example. I think they are more and more becoming those people that communities look up to. In my electorate of Kallangur there is a high school called Dakabin State High School. The principal there is a man by the name of John Schuh. Our community is a better place because this man contributes so generously and passionately to his community in his role as principal. One of the values he brings to his community and a value that he is working with them on is discipline. I have observed his actions and leadership and I want to recognise him as a person I value, and I am proud to call him a friend. I will be glad to learn from him as together we try to provide better facilities for our young people to learn in so they can rise above adversity.

Mr Schuh encourages his community to be disciplined in their efforts to achieve their potential. His own work ethic, integrity and commitment have inspired and are inspiring others around him to work hard, and together they are building a community that they can be proud of. What Mr Schuh is accomplishing is the development of a culture that once again respects its leaders because they respect themselves. Since returning to Queensland to live some six years ago, I have noted with dismay the level of disrespect that exists for those positions within our community that were once seen as pillars of society. Police, ambulance

officers, nurses, doctors and teachers all struggle with the very basic tenet of respect broadly as they engage with their community every day.

I stand shoulder to shoulder with the Premier in his desire to raise the level of debate and respect in this place so that it can be an example for people in our community to follow. I welcome robust debate and exchange of ideas, but I also urge my fellow members to exhibit grace, humility and respect for each other as we strive to be examples that our communities can be proud of. Let us strive for the values of discipline in our own daily lives and let us be part of the collective effort across our communities that helps to re-establish broadly the values of respect for those people who serve us in our communities. This is not pie-in-the-sky idealism; it is a very achievable ambition—one that not so long ago our society not only displayed but actively participated in.

I salute the principals, teachers and staff at Dakabin State High School for fighting the good fight and working hard every day for a better community. I challenge every person in this House to put in the same effort. Franklin D Roosevelt said—

We may not be able to prepare the future for our children, but we can at least prepare our children for the future.

Our schools strive every day to do this and I salute the effort of teachers as they guide, teach, discipline and educate our most precious of resources, our children.

For our society to function well, every person must participate. Many functions in communities are accomplished only with volunteers. Winston Churchill said—

You make a living by what you get; you make a life by what you give.

I am reminded of state emergency services, Surf Life Saving, Meals on Wheels, any one of our many sporting and service clubs and our P&Cs. I think a more dramatic example of what Winston Churchill was talking about is the effort by Rotary International to eradicate polio. After 25 years of effort, there is a real possibility that this disease can be eradicated. That would not be possible without the thousands of people focused on this effort all over the world, volunteering their time and resources to their communities. Locally, I hold up an example to my community of people like Don and Olwyn Connolly from Whiteside. This couple has served community focused groups for over 50 years in my area. Even now in their retirement they both participate in several different organisations that make my community a better place to live. I am privileged to have met many fine volunteers—people striving to make life for themselves, their families and friends just that little bit better. Sporting clubs, service clubs, social groups and faith based groups all contribute in different ways to provide a rich and diverse culture and a community that offers many opportunities. I am proud to be part of a government that has policies that will help facilitate the ongoing efforts of these clubs, groups and organisations.

I think a way that a society or community is able to determine its health is to look at how it treats or deals with its most vulnerable. I am not talking here about people who have a choice and who make bad choices; I am talking about people who, because of their particular circumstance, find life a little bit tougher than do the rest of us. I do not understand why I have such empathy for the disabled and mentally ill in our society and their carers. This group of unique people typically struggle every day for some semblance of normalcy in their life. Most accept their lot in life and choose to do the best they can with what they have been given. Unfortunately, from many angles their starting point in life is at a different spot from those of us who are able and that makes their lives that little bit tougher.

A simple example of that is the cost of transport. To fit out a vehicle to be able to transport a wheelchair has a starting price of \$20,000. I hope to be able to advocate for those folks in my community further on this matter and represent their needs adequately and sufficiently so that this government, of which I am a part, can continue with the efforts that we have already commenced to ensure that our most vulnerable are well cared for and in a manner that reflects our values, especially that great Aussie value of getting a fair go. I ask the federal government to consider the funds needed to get the National Disability Insurance Scheme up and running and to consider reducing any number of other priorities—for example, the NBN—in favour of funding the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

To this end, I will continue to support and uplift local organisations such as Youth Excel, which is establishing itself in Kallangur and which will provide much needed youth and family services, particularly in the area of counselling and organised youth activities. This organisation, in partnership with the local Christian Outreach Centre community and businesses, is an excellent example of what I have spoken about—people giving of themselves for the greater good of their community. I look forward to working with Pastor Doc and Michelle Mitchell in this very important work.

There are several things that on behalf of my electorate I wish to identify as being a high priority—things that I intend to fight for. Transport infrastructure is the No. 1 everyday issue. We need to address the issues of a bridge over Youngs Crossing, the Petrie roundabout, the Dakabin Railway Station and a park-and-ride facility, a Boundary Road bridge over the highway, a noise barrier along the Bruce Highway so that people can sleep at night, better and more frequent bus services and ensuring that the impact of the

new Petrie to Kippa Ring rail line supports infrastructure as a positive consequence for my community. Other areas that are important issues are the rebuilding of the Dakabin State High School assets after years of neglect and disrepair. I will also be advocating for more police officers to serve in tactical support roles. I know that, due to the dire financial state the former government left this state in, many of these issues are not going to be realised in the next three years. Nonetheless, I will advocate for them.

Speaking of a fair go, I wish to thank a few people. Firstly, and very humbly, I thank the people of Whiteside, Kurwongbah, Narangba, Burpengary South, Dakabin, Kallangur, Murrumba Downs and Petrie for trusting me to represent them. I especially wish to thank those who placed their trust in me and who voted for a conservative for the first time. I will work hard every day to repay that trust they placed in me.

To my parents—and my father is here—I can simply say thank you. To my mother, who taught me faith and values, and to my father who in later years has been a fantastic mentor and friend, thank you. To my siblings, thank you. I made it. I wish to thank the LNP team in Kallangur for their trust, faith and effort over the last four years as we worked to offer the electorate of Kallangur a real alternative as a representative in this place. However, in doing so I wish to recognise the efforts of former member Mary-Anne O'Neill, who I found to be a thoroughly decent person. I also wish to acknowledge the friendship and counsel of federal members the Hon. Peter Dutton and Wyatt Roy. I value their input and help.

I also acknowledge the collegueship and friendship of the new members for Pine Rivers, Seath Holswich; for Morayfield, Darren Grimwade; and for Murrumba, Reg Gulley. I consider myself to be richer because of their friendship. I also recognise the honourable Yvonne Chapman for her support over the years. I also recognise the fantastic support offered to me by the LNP president and his campaign team, with special mention of Matt McEachan for his friendship, advice, patience and help. Along with the LNP team in Kallangur I also wish to thank the Premier, who, during the campaign, gave an example of leadership that inspired us all to keep going. However, it was the incredible example of the dignity that the Premier's wife displayed during times of extreme and unwarranted public attack during the state election campaign that most inspired our team. Her clear sacrifice and example of leadership was simply admirable.

In closing, I wish to publicly thank my wife for her unwavering confidence in me. We have been married for 23 years and have two boys of whom I am extremely proud. My boys Isaac and Joel deserve a special thankyou for being so patient with me. I recognise their own sacrifice that allows me to serve the broader community. As to my wife, I have dragged her all over the world. Together we have lived in 26 homes and four countries. We have lived on three continents. Without her unwavering support, I could not have followed my life's path. She is my best friend, she is my lover, my rock and my very faithful wife. Each day I thank God for giving her to me. If I have one prayer that I really desire my Lord to grant me it is this: that I might grow old holding the hand of this very special woman.