




Speech By  
**Tom Smith**

**MEMBER FOR BUNDABERG**

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### INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Mr SMITH** (Bundaberg—ALP) (2.00 pm): I rise in this House proudly as the member for Bundaberg. I rise as a member of parliament dedicated to delivering for his community and for always holding true the values and principles that have shaped me to this moment. Bundaberg is the jewel-in-the-crown city of the Wide Bay region. It is often said—most often by me—that when Bundaberg is doing well Queensland is doing well. The Bundaberg electorate has a rich and proud history along the banks of the Burnett River and no history of the region dates back further than those of the Bailai, Gurang, Gooreng Gooreng and Taribelang Bunda First Nation people. I wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands of Bundaberg's First Nation people and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, as I do the elders of the land on which we meet in this place today.

Bundaberg is an electorate with a history of resilience, the overcoming of hardship and a strength of a community that may at times be forced to bend but refuses to ever be broken. The people of Bundaberg are Queenslanders and, once more, they are regional Queenslanders. So often havoc has been caused time and again by drought, flood or fire, yet Bundaberg's history is based on the rolling up of sleeves and getting on with the job. This history has now developed into an ingrained culture that sees the Bundaberg brand spread not only all over Australia but also across the world.

This year was a year like no other and, many have claimed, an election like no other, a year that has seen the rapid spread of COVID-19 stretch across the globe to devastating effect. Indeed, in Australia and Queensland we saw the uncertainty and emotions of doubt and fear in the lives of everyday people: our neighbours, our friends, our family. But it was Queensland that stood tall. Queenslanders came together. They rolled up their sleeves and got on with the job of keeping each other safe. In times of uncertainty we all look for leaders, and in my electorate of Bundaberg it was no different. As the months of the year 2020 rolled on, Bundaberg turned to the leadership of the strong, stable Palaszczuk Labor government. As I knocked on doors during the election campaign, as I spoke with constituents on the phone and met with locals down the street or at the markets, it became clear that, regardless of their previous political persuasion, the people of Bundaberg felt safe that our Premier, Premier Anastacia Palaszczuk, and her cabinet of ministers were leading Queenslanders through their darkest moments since the outbreak of World War II and keeping us safe.

I thank the Premier and her team for putting the lives of Queenslanders and regional communities like that of Bundaberg first when it comes to health and safety. It is because of this strong leadership that small businesses in my electorate have been able to rebound so quickly from their initial lockdown restrictions: businesses such as Williamson's Fine Meats run by Robert alongside two of his sons accessing the extended Back to Work program; businesses such as Grindstone Coffee House where Kristy was able to use Small Business COVID-19 Adaptation Grants to invest in new tabletops and the expansion of an outdoor eating area. Because of the strong health response to COVID-19 the businesses of Bundaberg are already experiencing the positives of a strong economic recovery plan.

These positive experiences coming out of the strong health response to COVID-19 have also delivered for sport and community clubs, sporting clubs just like Brothers Bulldogs Australian Football Club where coach, Ash Charlesworth, was able to get his under-12s back on the field and playing the

sport they love, whilst at the same time Ethan, Cal and Amity were able to be cheered on by mum and dedicated volunteer Lisa. A community club, the Bundaberg Central Rotary Club, was able to meet for dinner, fellowship and plan projects for the good of the community at the iconic Bundy pub, the Club Hotel. This was done far earlier than anyone had anticipated. These steps along the path to recovery were and are because of the strong leadership of a government that followed the health advice and did not bow to the reckless and politically desperate calls for the borders to be reopened by those on the other side.

Although the influence of COVID-19 may have shined brighter a light upon the strong leadership of the Palaszczuk Labor government for so many first time Labor voters, I believe that a year and campaign without the shadow of COVID-19 would still have resulted in Queenslanders and the community of Bundaberg backing in a Labor government that has been relentless in its pursuit of fairness, inclusion and a never-ending determination to create local jobs by investing in regional Queensland.

I know this because of the hard work and dedication of my team of volunteers who were on the ground in Bundy, a team of volunteers who spoke to locals on the phone in those early days of COVID-19 to make sure that they were doing okay and that they could access and contact the volunteer care army, a team of volunteers who knocked on the doors of nurses, teachers, doctors, cleaners, business owners and those who were also seeking employment so as to give their family all that they could in life. It was in the conversations I had with my volunteers, and, indeed, the phone calls and doorknocks that I had myself engaged with, that the values which Queensland Labor prides itself on were there in the heart of Bundaberg.

I must take this moment to thank those volunteers who had those conversations, who spent their hours contributing to a cause greater than themselves, who worked themselves to the very last moment of election day and then for a week and a half to the end of the count and then a further two days for the recount as well. There are so many to thank and I will do so in due course, but I would like to mention my campaign manager, Terry Rees, for his tireless efforts, hard work and dedication. It was because of the hard work, the time taken to listen and to give voice to the people of Bundaberg that we were able to draw in election promises that when delivered will completely transform and shape a positive future for every single person in Bundaberg.

These achievements I speak of are: a \$42.5 million upgrade for the Isis Highway; \$42.5 million for the Bundaberg East flood levee that will keep safe the lives and livelihoods of so many across the community; and over \$4 million into our local TAFE for investment into agricultural, horticultural and manufacturing industries. In Bundaberg we saw commitments to local sporting organisations: \$100,000 for surface and facility upgrades at the Kevin Brogden Memorial Velodrome, along with a further \$100,000 for lighting upgrades to Salter Oval, each with commitments from the local council to match the funding by our state government. The Stripey Family—that is, the Bingera Football Club—will receive \$200,000 towards much needed surface and lighting upgrades ready for their centenary year.

The health and wellbeing of all in our community is a topic that Labor governments understand so well and those opposite so little. Bundaberg will be home to a \$15 million alcohol and other drug rehabilitation centre announced by Deputy Premier Steven Miles on his visit to town during the campaign. This is a much needed addition to our region. The commitment to deliver a new hospital is a game changer for the Bundaberg community and will not only deliver the highest quality health care but also create local jobs for local people.

I thank my volunteers, the ministers, the Premier and all those who put their faith in a Labor government at the last election. I am proud to be representing the people of Bundaberg as a member of parliament on their behalf. I have always fought to represent others and have always strived to be the best person that I can be for all of those around me.

Teaching is the profession I first chose. Teaching is about helping young people to learn not only what is in the curriculum but also about life, family, friendship and self-worth. At the end of the day, teaching comes down to representing your students through your actions. If you do not present yourself as ready and interested to engage them in their lives at that moment, they will know that you are not there for them. I offer that as an analogy for representing the electorate of Bundaberg. If I do not, each and every day, show my community that I am ready to work for them and engage them in their lives at that moment, I would be doing them a disservice.

Such a thought process towards my teaching profession and now my role as a representative for the people of Bundaberg has been shaped and guided by many individuals who have had positive influences. As a teacher I have been guided by a gathering of professionals who always sought to put their students first, earning trust, giving out respect and being rewarded by seeing the growth and steps taken term by term, year by term. They are teachers such as the ever-inspirational Michelle Gault, Wendy Buttsworth, Anne O'Brien, Richard Ball, Lachlan Johnston, Susan Pryor, Deb White, Tonya

Holder, Bronwyn Wright, Stephen Keightley, Tim and Michelle Hadfield, Cate McKeown, the unconventional Larry McKeown and the somewhat-voice-of-reason Kristen Pollard. I would also like to note the contribution of the HPE staff at Kepnock State High School, led by Roslyn Coombes. Whilst not a teacher, I pay tribute to a man who gave his all to improving the schooling experience of students, Mr Bruce Kielly. Not all of those mentors and colleagues of admiration would sit with me on this side of the chamber, although I cannot fault the lessons I have learnt from them and their dedication towards a profession that they hold dear.

I now turn to more personal matters to explain the initial course that has brought me to this place. My family instilled in me the values that fuelled my passion to pursue a course of representing an electorate, a community and a grouping of individuals seeking a form of help or assistance that can bring about improvement in their lives. My mother, Wendy Smith; father, Mike Smith; brother, Nick Smith; and my grandparents Carol and John Stroud, better known as Gran and Pop, have had the most profound effect on me from childhood to now. My family are not a family from wealth. They worked hard for every gain in life that they ever earned.

My grandmother Carol left school at a young age and set about working low-paying, hard-tasking jobs. My pop John, for whom my middle name was given, pursued work as a carpenter around the country, finishing one job and then chasing another across our great broad land, with Gran, two kids in tow and a caravan as well. My mum would save five and 10 cent pieces for bread and milk, yet always found a way to ensure that Christmas and birthdays were made more special each year. It is the nature of my mother to always put others before herself. It is no wonder that she is now a councillor, having previously worked in aged care and as a teacher aide in a special school.

It is clear to see where the early influences of my family would lead my values: to become a teacher and to join a political party that reaches for the light on the hill by which we aim for the betterment of mankind. My father shares those values and, as they led him to the Labor Party, his strong teachings of what Labor values are, the values of looking out for others, are what guided me to be a member of the greatest institution and I am so proud to be a member of it: the Australian Labor Party. Along that path I was able to meet friends and mentors to whom I owe a great debt of gratitude: Laura Fraser-Hardy, Rosie Gilbert, Nick Barter, Zac Street, Karen Grogan, Hamish Richardson, Alana Tibbitts, Penni Pappas and, of course, Isaac Cavanagh.

Mr Speaker, as you are aware, before entering this place I was a teacher. I have worked with young people for years as a secondary school teacher and a Rugby League coach. Often the hardest moments of working with young people are when they come to you to tell you of their pain and hurt, and their sense of emptiness and worthlessness. However, it can be in those moments when the successes and important moments of their lives can be shared and can be gained. The moment a student reveals why they carry the physical and emotional scars can also be the moment when they realise that somebody cares. As a candidate at this election I listened to victims of domestic family violence, battlers of impoverishment and disability and people who thought that no-one would care—until suddenly they realised that others do. The great value of my family and the great value of the party to which those of us on this side belong is the value to care for all.

I am inspired by my former students and I am inspired by the constituents I meet every day, but there are two people in my family who inspire me most. I became a teacher to help young people and to make a positive difference in their lives. I am incredibly lucky and honoured to now work for the people of Bundaberg and I will strive every day to make positive outcomes in their lives. However, I realise that I have been fortunate to have those opportunities when so many others have not. My cousin Willow and my brother, Nick, fight some of life's unfair challenges daily just to get near to seizing life's opportunities. My brother has fought and fought his whole life. He has been challenged in ways that would break any ordinary person, but he does not break. While his rather slender physique might not suggest it, my brother is the strongest person I know.

Mr Speaker, there are things in life that you and I are afforded by the sheer random nature of life. I can accept that sometimes the nature of life is to produce an unfairness of sorts for people. My brother and my cousin overcome those unfair challenges by facing what is a matter of their life. However, missing out on the opportunities afforded to you, Mr Speaker, to me and to the members in this House simply because of a postcode, the name of a suburb or the balance of one's parents' bank account is not something that I will ever cop as fair or a part of life. My brother is a fighter, my union is filled with fighters and Labor governments are fighters. For as long as I sit in this chamber proudly as a member of a Labor government and proudly as the member for Bundaberg, I will fight every day and every way for my constituents and my community to ensure that equal opportunity is afforded to all. I finish by noting that my grandfather John could not be here by one year. Although he is not here, he is loved very dearly and missed as well.