




Speech By
Ali King

MEMBER FOR PUMICESTONE

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INAUGURAL SPEECH

 **Ms KING** (Pumicestone—ALP) (11.41 am): I rise to second the motion moved by the member for Stafford for the address-in-reply to the opening speech by His Excellency. To enter this place, passing beyond the 'Members Only' sign and through the grand doors of this chamber, to rise and speak here for the first time as the member for Pumicestone is an extraordinary honour. It is a long way from where I started. I grew up attending a two-room primary school in a tiny regional village. Dairy, sugar cane and fishing made up what local economy there was. Every few years the wide brown river burst its banks and rolled into local houses, including our own. There was poverty. There was disadvantage. It was not easy for young people to stay and to thrive.

My dad could not work following a serious accident and so we relied on an invalid pension. My mum baked cakes to sell at cafes in the nearest town and worked nights in a restaurant to pay the bills. Through it all, with no money and three growing kids, somehow it never felt like poverty. When you live in poverty your horizons are tight and they are closed around. Despite everything, my parents, Nick and Cherie, always had big dreams and high hopes for us; a sense of possibility for our lives. They gave me their love of words and adventure and their curiosity to learn. I can only say how grateful I am to them for their belief in me and their unending support always.

From early childhood they made very clear their unshakeable expectation that I would attend university. At my campaign launch a month out from election day, when supporters gathered at the Bribie Waterways Motel with the sparkling Pumicestone Passage outside, I stood to speak and I said—and it has been said since to far greater acclaim—that I am proud to be the first of my extended family across all generations and all continents to achieve a university degree. But even more than that I am proud not to be the last. I was the first, but I am not the last. Since I broke that ground in our family, many have followed. Our whole trajectory has changed and we are now a family for which higher education is a choice that you have.

A young person growing up in Pumicestone in 2020 faces some of those same challenges that I experienced. People in our community experience high rates of economic disadvantage. We have some of the highest rates of disability in Queensland. That makes it difficult for families to grab hold of opportunities for further education, as it was difficult for my family. Statistically, a young person growing up in Pumicestone and beginning university in 2021, with the same high hopes with which I began in 1995, is likely to be a young woman. When she graduates in 2023 or so she is likely, as I was, to be the first in her family to graduate with a university degree. When she does she will be breaking new ground and creating a new trajectory for her family. There is every chance that she will be studying nursing at Caboolture, at the University of the Sunshine Coast that our Palaszczuk Labor government has championed so strongly. At long last a young person in Pumicestone has higher education readily within their grasp; not at the end of a two-hour journey of multiple trains and buses, but right in our own community. Like me, that young woman may be the first but she will not be the last.

This is a journey toward opportunity and a journey of enormous change within only a couple of generations. That journey began with a Labor government, the government of Gough Whitlam. Prime Minister Whitlam's championship of accessible education has wrought the most profound change for

families like mine within my lifetime. It is the transformative power of education that brings me before you today.

I stood shoulder to shoulder with parents, kids and teachers and campaigned for Pumicestone state schools to be fully air conditioned because I believe in removing barriers to education and training, whether they be hot summer classrooms, the increasing cost of a degree or the need for more apprenticeships. We were successful in that campaign and the daily lives of kids and teachers in our local schools are being transformed as a result. For as long as I have the honour to remain in this place, my job is to ensure that the transformative power of education is available to the people of Pumicestone, whatever their backgrounds, whatever their education needs and whatever challenges they experience.

After my dad's accident he never worked full-time again and our family could so easily have fallen through the cracks, but with quality public health care Dad was able to get through and our family could flourish. Because that is my history I believe deeply in quality public health care and supporting the most vulnerable in our society. Amidst the exquisite beauty of Pumicestone, high levels of health disadvantage and disability stalk our communities. Many people in Pumicestone know those challenges from the inside and I walk beside you in that, like my friends Leonie and Ferdi. For years Ferdi got up at dawn and headed down to Brisbane, multiple times each week, for the specialised dialysis that would keep his kidneys in the best possible shape while he waited for a transplant. Leonie told me that the travel and the tiredness took such a toll that she was worried that he would not last out. Those worries took a toll on her too. Ferdi's story ends well. He got his kidney transplant and he is thriving.

Pumicestone has the highest median age of any state electorate in Queensland. Health commuting to Brisbane for medical care is a real problem, especially for older and vulnerable people who cannot drive themselves. That is why I am so thankful that the Palaszczuk government has committed to building two satellite community hospitals so that the people of Pumicestone will have more health care closer to home. It fills me with hope to think that from 2023 our nursing student may start work as a graduate nurse at one of our satellite community hospitals in Caboolture or on Bribie. As we train the healthcare workers we need for the future in our own community, we create our own solutions: the jobs, the services and the skilled staff to provide them.

As I rise today as a brand new leader, I acknowledge those who have gone before. My very first event as a member of parliament was a NAIDOC Week celebration for PIEEC, the Pumicestone Indigenous Education and Employment Council. PIEEC has been newly created to advocate for better outcomes in learning and working for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in Pumicestone. Rising to speak that day, I felt humbled and in awe of the 1,600 generations of leaders that have gone before me on the lands of the Gubbi Gubbi people. As the elders and leaders of PIEEC look to create and enhance the bonds of community in Pumicestone, my commitment is to listen carefully, support your aspirations and try always to walk beside you.

Reflecting on the 91 years since the first woman was elected as a Queensland state representative, there is a deep irony. On the one hand, I am one of only 97 women ever elected to this place. Within my lifetime, and even during my adulthood, that privilege is vanishingly rare for a woman, yet the people of Pumicestone have overwhelmingly chosen women as their representatives across the political spectrum. I am the fourth woman of five members for Pumicestone.

Growing up in an area similar in so many ways to Pumicestone, I had never met or even seen a woman in political leadership. Compare that to a young woman coming to adulthood in Pumicestone right now, who has grown up seeing women in local, state and federal representative roles. That same young woman is half as likely to attend university as any other Queenslander. She is at heightened risk of unemployment. Pumicestone is rich in human kindness and community, but our median income is substantially below the Queensland average. There is much work to do, but I am proud to represent a community that readily recognises women as leaders and values what we bring to the table.

It was not me alone that so many people in Pumicestone were voting for when they cast their ballots. Some were, certainly, but forthrightness is one of the shining qualities of the people of Pumicestone and they told me every day, loud and clear, what messages they wanted passed on. I quote, with your indulgence, Mr Speaker: 'You tell our Premier she's doing a great job'; 'You tell her from me to keep on sticking to her guns. Tell her to not let them get her down'; 'You tell Annastacia thank you for keeping us safe.'

In this terrible year of pandemic, our Premier did not what was easy but what was brave. People in Pumicestone saw that clearly. They saw it and they respected it. Many people living in the communities that make up Pumicestone had good reason to fear the impacts of COVID-19. They rewarded our Premier's genuine care for them and her battles on their behalf with their faith and their support. I lost count of the number of times people said to me, 'I have never voted Labor in my life, but I can see you working hard and I'm going to vote for you to say thank you to Annastacia for keeping us safe.'

There is very little good to come out of this pandemic. Lives have been lost and the economic challenges are enormous, but I do see renewed faith in political leadership. For the first time, ordinary people saw and believed that their leaders were working for them. It has been a privilege to be able to support people in Pumicestone through this difficult year. My hope now is that if you trusted our Premier and me with your support I can make you glad of your decision.

If a member's inaugural speech is a record of what they deeply value, then I am deeply proud of my work as a health adviser to the Palaszczuk government. This election, where women's reproductive freedoms were put very explicitly on the chopping block by those opposite and their allies, only strengthened my commitment to ensuring that women seeking essential reproductive health care need never again fear criminal prosecution; that health workers providing that care need never again fear prosecution; and that women and health workers can now and forever access clinics with their privacy and dignity unmolested by shameful bullying and abuse. Generations of Labor activists worked for these reforms, Labor legislated them and now Labor has fought to protect them. I hope that those who tried to make women's reproductive decisions an election issue can see, finally, that it just does not work.

No meditation on leadership or women in this place is worthwhile without reflecting on the mighty leadership of a mighty woman, Jackie Trad. Jackie once said, 'Progressive change is slow and it's hard, and sometimes it feels like it will break your heart, but to make it happen you must have a seat at the table.' It breaks my heart that the people of Jackie's community have lost their seat at that table, but Queensland has been greatly changed for the better by her time here.

The project of change that we in Labor take on when we come to this place did not start with us, and our responsibility is to make sure that it continues after we personally are done. A few weeks before our Queensland election, I was sitting on the couch at the end of a tough day with my little boy and girl and we were watching New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern give her speech following her magnificent election victory. My children had lots of questions, as kids do, and then my little son asked me, 'Mummy, can boys be politicians, too?' In that moment I knew that my efforts to make sure that my kids see all the human possibilities of leadership have been worthwhile. I am grateful for my children and their patience for this life that has called me so strongly. I did not get to see my mum have a career. While my children sacrifice a lot so that I can follow this path, my hope is that, in seeing my work, they will learn the importance of leading and working on behalf of others.

Long ago my husband, Chris, and I discovered a shared love of words and adventure. In his novel *Cloud Atlas* David Mitchell wrote, 'Do whatever you can't not do.' Chris, without your support to do what I couldn't not do, I would not stand here today. Thank you for your genuine delight in my success. It is a shared success and I look forward to more shared adventures.

So many people have contributed to bring me here today. My greatest fear in making this speech is forgetting some of you. My union, the mighty United Workers Union, represents some of the most vulnerable and low-paid workers across almost every sector. In Pumicestone, that is the workers who pick our fields of strawberries, raspberries and blackberries. It is the aged-care workers who care for frail and elderly Pumicestone residents, like my friend Lindsay's elderly granddad. It is also the teacher aides like Sandy, who was recently badly hurt at work. I enter this place with the interests of those workers front and centre and humbled by the support I have received from my union and its members.

Thank you to Garry Bullock for his belief in me and to Matt Lawrence and Wendy Turner for their counsel and comradeship. My gratitude also goes to the broader union movement and the QCU for their support.

Thank you to Queensland Labor Party office and especially Jules, Jeanette, Penni and Ben for seeing me through a tough campaign. I cannot possibly name every volunteer who has worked so hard for nearly a year, but my campaign director Kerry, Lyn and Paul, Dave, Brownie and Domenic all warrant a special mention. Thank you to the many Young Labor volunteers who came to Pumicestone to help. The Bribie Island branch of the ALP has been extraordinary. I promised right at the start that I would be the hardest working candidate you had ever seen and I hope you feel I lived up to that.

Thank you to my dear friend Harry Thompson, to whom I owe my sanity given the last trying weeks of the campaign. I firmly believe that, in asking a young person to lead, your belief in them helps make them a leader. Rhiannyn Douglas, I asked you to lead and you succeeded beyond my wildest imaginings. There is no ceiling to your sky. The Deputy Premier has long supported me as a boss, friend and mentor. Thank you for always having my back, even when you were busy saving Queensland.

There is no greater gratitude I can express than to the people of Pumicestone for trusting me to represent you. Together, I have the highest of hopes for what we can achieve for our beautiful community. It is beautiful not just in the richness of its natural wonder but in the human qualities of

generosity, honesty and commitment to community. However long or short my time in this place as your member for Pumicestone, every time I walk through these doors I will be mindful of the privilege of representing you.

I have high hopes too for our young Pumicestone woman beginning university in 2021. I hope that you learn and flourish, that you embark on whatever adventures of work and family you may choose and that you enjoy opportunities for education and health as good as anyone else in Queensland. You deserve no less. My story has come a long way from where it started. I finish now with more words from David Mitchell's epic adventure *Cloud Atlas*—

Our lives are not our own. We are bound to others, past and present, and by each crime and every kindness, we birth our future. I commend the motion to the House.