




Speech By
Samuel O'Connor

MEMBER FOR BONNEY

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr O'CONNOR** (Bonney—LNP) (4.37 pm): I rise to speak today with the great honour of being the first member for Bonney in this House. A new electorate, Bonney covers the inner-northern Gold Coast, taking in Labrador, Biggera Waters and Chirn Park in the east and Arundel-Parkwood in the west.

We boast an outstanding university in Griffith, with the new industries of the health and knowledge precinct imminent, the Gold Coast's major hospital, seven fantastic schools, all the live music and food that NightQuarter has to offer, outlet shopping at Harbour Town, and two of the key sites in the upcoming Commonwealth Games with the games village and the hockey centre. Not only that, our Broadwater is one of the most stunning parts of the coast. Wavebreak Island protects our beaches, and our view of the city skyline is second to none. I am proud to represent the 50,000 people who call Bonney home. I will tell anyone who will listen how great my patch is, and I am glad to have that opportunity today.

I will start by talking about my own journey to this place and, given my age, this will be relatively short! Like most people on the Gold Coast, I was not born there. I chose to live there. I came to the city because of the lifestyle and opportunity it has to offer. I am a proud son of Ipswich where my family have made a profound contribution to that community. My own existence is actually owed in part to the presence of a Royal Australian Air Force base there. My father, an airframe fitter, was posted to it where he met my mother, I am informed, at a local disco.

I grew up around my family's business, RT Edwards & Sons—a Queensland icon. It was started by my great-grandfather Roy after he lost his job as an electrician at the railway workshops during the Great Depression. He borrowed a few pounds off his aunty and rode his bike around town making electrical repairs. He grew the business to the point of setting up a shop and then, after having the call to serve God as a pastor, my grandfather Tom took over while in his early 20s. There are not many people as determined and driven as my grandfather. He built the company up to over a dozen stores employing hundreds of Queenslanders. Some of my earliest memories are of following him around the sales floor. I learnt a lot from how he interacted with customers. He would always give them his time and make them feel genuinely valued.

My parents sacrificed a lot for my education. At high school I found my gift for academia and my distinct lack of talent in the sporting arena. Since then I have firmly found my place as a keen spectator and you will often see me at Gold Coast Suns games. I went on to the University of Queensland to study biomedical science and political science. Anyone who has undertaken an arts degree has copped jokes at its expense, so I hope that my presence in this parliament is proof it has some value.

I started work, as many university students do, in pubs and bars—an industry I would stay around for seven years at fine establishments, ending with the Labrador AFL Sports Club. In fact, my only job during the campaign was behind the bar at that local footy club and I am proud to have a bit of that here today with a few locals coming up in the courtesy bus that I used to drive!

Hospitality work can be unforgiving, with long shifts at unsociable hours which ruin your sleep patterns and cause you to miss many of your friends' celebrations. Regardless, I would not have traded the experience I gained there for anything. It is an industry that helps you hone your people skills and teaches you how to adapt to stressful situations and environments. I want to use my time in this place to advocate for other 'hospo' workers and to use my firsthand, ground-level experience with the laws and regulations governing the industry to make a contribution in how they are crafted.

After university I wanted to emulate my father by serving in the Australian Defence Force. However, I was hampered by an atrial fibrillation I had when I was 20—about 40 years too soon! This was the most difficult period of my life. It was not like a normal job knockback in that I could not study further and suddenly become eligible; I had to find somewhere else to channel my desire to serve and contribute. I should take a moment to assure you, Mr Speaker, that my heart has been beating normally ever since. It is structurally and functionally healthy and you should not be expecting a sudden by-election in the near future.

A friend of mine, Phil, the biggest political tragic I know, recommended that I apply for a role in the office of the former member for Waterford, Mr Mike Latter. I will be forever grateful for that opportunity and the skills I picked up there. Despite Mike's grounded style and community connections, it was always a difficult seat for us to hold, to say the least. It was through this role that I made my move to the Gold Coast.

I spent most of my childhood holidaying at Biggera Waters, so I knew it well. When I saw an opportunity come up to work in the federal member for Fadden's office, I jumped at it. In that office over a relatively short space of time I gained firsthand experience of the highs and lows of politics. I built my communications skills under Mr Robert's leadership and he showed me that politics is an outlet for a desire to serve. Office manager Helen Lewis gave me invaluable professional guidance and I am grateful to call her a friend.

Soon after I joined the Liberal National Party. Its values align with my own and I had a strong family connection to the cause as my great-uncle is Sir Llew Edwards, a former member for Ipswich and deputy premier. I and all of us in the LNP share his maiden speech sentiments where he spoke of the importance of the individual in that we must 'legislate to provide an equal opportunity for all' to 'acquire the knowledge to enable him or her to improve his or her station in life and as a result benefit the community in general'. I carry his extraordinary legacy of service to this state on my shoulders—from backing in Medibank to Expo 88 and South Bank and as chancellor of UQ.

That is where I will come to what I would like to achieve—my vision for our community. I want my area to remain a livable community with affordable housing in an incredible location. The people in my electorate are lucky to have everything so close, including schools, a university and job opportunities. I want to make sure they are all as easy to get to as possible, whether that is by road or public transport. Light rail has been transformative for the Gold Coast and we need it to maintain our lifestyle with the growth our city is experiencing. It must truly become the spine of our public transport system. I want to see it extend along Olsen Avenue to Harbour Town from the hospital. This essential connection could include stops at Southport Sharks and Central Street and would be a spur line of barely three kilometres in length. The Harbour Town area would be a hub and it would allow easier access to the tram network for people from Biggera Waters and further north. The data clearly shows that light rail works. People use it in huge numbers and it increases patronage on bus services as well. Quality public transport is important to making sure communities like mine are viable and livable.

Similarly, our local state roads are vital connections for our city. The industry along Brisbane Road in particular supports thousands of jobs and we need to make sure it is not a nightmare to get in and out of. I will be doing what I can and working with the City of Gold Coast to fix the intersections at Olsen Avenue, Captain Cook Drive and Hollywell Road and Brisbane Road itself. The M1 is a daily nightmare for many people in Bonney. If there is a crash, there will be a blockage. It is clear we need an alternate route and I will advocate for the Intra-Regional Transport Corridor or Coomera Connector until it becomes a reality.

Community safety is a huge issue in my area, in particular around Labrador and Biggera Waters where the crime statistics are concerning. This not only impacts how people feel on their own streets and in their homes but goes to the reputation my community has more broadly. We need to change how we are perceived and we can all play a role in selling why we are so lucky to live where we do. From a government perspective, I would like to see more and better resourced police. I welcome the Queensland Police Service's purchase of a block of land in Arundel and the elite officers of the Rapid Action Patrol group who will soon call this facility home. Hopefully this means my community has some of the fastest police response times on the Gold Coast.

The Broadwater is one of our greatest assets and I think we could do a better job of enhancing it. I want to see what can be done through the Gold Coast Waterways Authority to allow it to undertake bigger projects than simply maintaining the navigation channels. Our side of politics has a great track record, having presided over the building of the world-leading sand bypass system. That was in the eighties and without it the Broadwater as we know it would not exist. It is a defining feature of the northern Gold Coast, which has unrivalled recreational usage. We should be driving the use of Doug Jennings Park, in particular getting more big events there. This will almost certainly involve access upgrades.

I am passionate to make sure that every child in our area has access to a world-class education system, so I will be making sure every promised project to my local schools is delivered, including the prep and special needs playground at Labrador State School, shade covers at Coombabah High, sorting out the hall at Arundel and upgrades at Musgrave Hill and Southport High. More broadly, I want to do what I can to engage young people in the process that determines so many aspects of their lives. Young people can often feel that the political sphere is out of their reach or, worse, that it is irrelevant. I want to engage them in politics so that their voices can be heard and they can feel empowered to make a difference. Being young myself gives me a unique opportunity to be part of this system with a relatively fresh set of eyes.

Bonney is named after one of the most remarkable women Queensland has produced—pioneering aviator Lores Bonney. Among other things, Lores was the first woman to fly from Australia to England and caught her passion for flying from Bert Hinkler. Funnily enough, Lores could not drive so she would hitch a ride with the milkman to the airport at Eagle Farm. Lores's other achievements include the longest one-day flight by an airwoman, being the first woman to circumnavigate Australia by air and completing the first flight from Australia to South Africa. She overcame her own disappointments in life to be a pioneer in aviation and in breaking barriers for women at the time. Her tenacity is one that I would like to adopt as I serve the good people of Bonney.

I am here because of the Liberal National Party—not just the organisation and its structures but especially because of the hardworking volunteers who give their time and effort. I will not be able to name everyone, but to everyone who has helped in any way, no matter how small, I very much appreciate it.

To those closest to me—Rod, Suzanne, Emily and Kathryn: it is hard to say just how lucky I am to have you in my life and I am grateful for the love and support you provided me during the campaign. My parents and sister in particular travelled down most weekends and they picked up a new fitness regime—letterboxing and doorknocking. Their work during the final two weeks, especially on pre-poll, was nothing short of extraordinary and the whole experience brought us closer together as a family.

My campaign manager, Pat Crotty, put in a huge effort and kept everything on track. I met Pat three years ago when he was my real estate agent while I was buying an apartment in Biggera Waters. When I was chosen by our local members, I knew I needed someone with experience to guide me and he was the natural choice with his no-nonsense approach and succinct feedback that is always appreciated.

The SEC chair, Kate Truelove, took over just as the campaign was firing up and did a fabulous job. For a new party unit, we can be proud of how well we are going and a large part of that is due to Kate's organisational skills. Rob Lumsden is the vice-chair, but he was really a jack-of-all-trades during the campaign. We had an impromptu campaign catch-up over a coffee or beer in almost every cafe or pub in Labrador more times than I can count and I truly value his friendship. The work that Rob and Ryan did with signage was phenomenal. It put my name recognition through the roof, painted the electorate a lovely shade of blue and also really complemented our issues campaign. Katrina and Ruth were also outstanding campaigners.

Nerida Smith is a fantastic secretary and the LNP is far better for having someone of her calibre as one of its members. I want to name a few others: Anne-Maree and Bill and, of course, my cousins Tommy and Issy; my uncle, Gary Edwards; Joan and Michael George; Simon Cowland-Cooper; Linda and Stuart Shave; Fran James; Jim and Cindy Sullivan; and Sarah and Bonnie, who travelled from interstate. They are all appreciated.

The Caldwelles—Cameron, Warwick and Therese—are a family who were born to campaign and are extraordinary assets at a polling booth. My region is served well by Viv Grayson, with his calm and collected leadership style. There is rarely a meeting that he is not at, and I thank him for his guidance. Alec Pokarier and the YLNP provided many foot soldiers and I am grateful to have been around such a passionate and hardworking group of young people. Hopefully, I am still in this place by the time many of them begin their own parliamentary careers. My office is all set up and I have a fantastic team in Joe Wilkinson, Katie Omrod and Deb Rowles. We are all looking forward to serving our community.

I thank a few of my colleagues, especially my immediate northern neighbour, the member for Broadwater, for always being available for guidance and advice. I should also thank him because my best booth results were at his pre-poll. I do not know if that had anything to do with him. I also thank the member for Mudgeeraba for taking me under her wing and showing me some best practice campaigning and the member for Theodore for always checking in on how I was going. I am fortunate to sit with members who have decades of wisdom and experience. Mr Speaker, I will try my best to make sure I cause you less trouble than do two of them in particular, the member for Mermaid Beach and the member for Whitsunday.

I am sorry to say that for 21 of the 26 years that I have been alive we have seen Labor governments in Queensland. I have every confidence that our leadership team, guided by the member for Nanango, will have the best chance of bringing that to an end. I am humbled and proud to serve as Deb's shadow assistant minister and grateful to have her mentorship as I learn the ropes in this place.

Finally, I give my commitment to the people of Bonney. It is the greatest honour of my life to serve them in this parliament. I will remember that every day they allow me to stay here and be their voice. I am here because of them and that is what drives me. I will make myself as available as I can and encourage them to reach out to me. I will follow up their issues and advocate for their ideas. I will serve them with passion and do my best to make them proud.