




Speech By
Brent Mickelberg

MEMBER FOR BUDERIM

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MAIDEN SPEECH

 **Mr MICKELBERG** (Buderim—LNP) (3.33 pm): It is truly an honour to stand in this House today as the newly elected member for Buderim. Through my words today I hope to impart some understanding as to my motivations and what I hope to achieve for the people of Buderim. I am privileged to have the honour of representing an electorate as vibrant as Buderim.

The electorate encompasses the suburbs of Sippy Downs, Mountain Creek, Tanawha, Palmview and Buderim on the Sunshine Coast. My wife, Anna, and I were drawn to Buderim because it had a sense of community that was evident from the moment we drove into town. This is exemplified by the Buderim War Memorial Community Association, which was established in 1945 to serve as a living memorial. Rather than build a concrete cenotaph to remember the war dead, the Buderim War Memorial Community Association exists to provide the opportunity for everyone in the community to contribute service in order to commemorate the sacrifice of those who have served and, in doing so, to build a vibrant and supportive community. I am not aware of any other situation where this exists and in my opinion that notion is something that we should cherish.

While many would recognise Buderim and its surrounds as being a highly sought after place to retire, what may be less well known is the fact that Buderim is a hub for education. Some of the largest and best performing public secondary schools in the state are found in the electorate, namely, Mountain Creek State High School and Chancellor State College. Additionally, the University of the Sunshine Coast is located in the Buderim electorate and has fast become a centre of excellence that provides a viable option to allow students to complete their tertiary studies on the coast, thereby reducing the drift of talent away to Brisbane and other centres.

The Buderim electorate is an area of great growth, with considerable expansion occurring in Palmview where 16,000 new residents are expected to set up home in coming years. Such growth presents both opportunities and challenges. Our region needs investment in rail and roads so that residents have a viable option to get to and from Brisbane in a timely manner. We need continued investment in our schools as they become increasingly constrained in terms of space.

In order to deliver for our electorates, I believe that we need to work across all levels of government. Since being elected I have been heartened to work with my local councillors, Councillor Christian Dickson and Councillor Ted Hungerford, both of whom have shown a desire to work proactively so that we can deliver for our respective constituencies and solve local problems. Similarly, the work that Ted O'Brien and Andrew Wallace have been doing in their capacity as my federal LNP colleagues has been exceptional. The advocacy and teamwork evident in their approach to the CoastConnect fast rail proposal and the Land 400 bid has been an example to the rest of us.

The course that I have charted to arrive at this destination today has been one of service and it has been through that course that I have been drawn to this place. I am here because I believe in putting my hand up to get the job done rather than just complaining from the sidelines. My father, Graeme, was an officer in the Australian Army. First and foremost he was an infantryman. The role of the infantry is

to seek out and close with the enemy, to kill or capture him, to seize and hold ground and to repel attack, by day or night regardless of season, weather or terrain. It is a difficult job and it is not suited to all. Those who serve as infantrymen take great pride in adhering to the motto 'duty first'. It was through this lens that my understanding of right and wrong, of service above self-interest, of loyalty and commitment was forged while watching my father's example.

My mother, Leah, provided the kind of loving and caring family that, sadly, many do not experience within our society. Mum's family were graziers and drovers and she never lost her connection with the bush. I learnt much from Mum's stories of stock camps and stations, stories about my grandfather Reg throwing cleanskin mickeys or of my grandmother dealing with a rogue king brown in the shed that was their home. From my mother I acquired a love of animals and I learnt resilience, determination and humility. She was a beautiful and loving mother and I know she would have made an amazing grandmother to my children.

In 2006 my mum was diagnosed with breast cancer. She fought hard to beat that insidious disease and we thought she had. Unfortunately, at the start of 2009 it was back and we received the devastating news that it had spread throughout her body. It was at this point I first became involved in conservative politics. With Mum terminally ill, she was a frequent visitor to the Nambour Hospital emergency room. The parlous state of Queensland's healthcare system at the time meant she often had to wait for hours upon hours in an emergency room suffering unnecessarily from the effects of a disease that would ultimately take her from us at Christmas 2009. It was then that my anger grew towards public policy and a healthcare system that was in crisis and had failed my mother.

From the outside I witnessed a state that could not even get the basics right. In the Mary Valley where my family live I witnessed the Traveston travesty where government decision-making on a whim had resulted in upheaval and uncertainty for honest, hardworking families who just want government to get out of their way so that they can get on with their business.

As a young man I read a book written by Ion Idriess titled *The Cattle King*, which details the life of Sir Sidney Kidman, one of Australia's great cattlemen. That book was to play a significant part in shaping my aspirations and goals as a young man. The book was the inspiration for me to pursue a career in the beef industry. After I finished my studies I worked as a stockman in the US and on cattle stations in the Northern Territory. Sitting around the camp fire out at camp I soon realised that it was very unlikely I would ever achieve my dream of owning a cattle station while I earned \$1,500 a month, so I found myself drawn to another albeit less satisfying career in finance. Like many who have been raised in a family where a culture of military service pervades, I had resisted enlisting in the Army for some years. However, I inevitably found myself drawn to the military and I enlisted in 2004.

I quickly came to learn that service in the military is more than just a job; it is a way of life. As I have travelled through the election process I have reflected on my past service in Afghanistan, East Timor and during the search and rescue operation in Grantham during the horrific 2011 floods. I have reflected on the sacrifices of those who have served and those who are currently serving, and I cannot help but consider how military ethics and politics are related.

I believe that the culture of service and sacrifice that exists within our service men and women is the same approach that we must demand of our elected representatives. The best of our politicians sacrifice daily in that they attend community events nearly every single night, spend long hours doorknocking and engaging with the community they represent, or work relentlessly to improve the situation of one of their constituents who is not getting a fair go.

Military service has taken me to countries far less fortunate than ours. I have seen malnourished children in desperate hunger and I have seen men commit horrific acts against each other. These things change the way one views the world. As a consequence, I am passionate about looking after our military personnel, veterans and, most importantly, their families, because the things that we ask our military personnel to do are unlike any other job.

I want to take a moment to speak about an issue that I find personally very difficult to address, but it is nonetheless important. Most civilians do not understand why soldiers want to deploy. We want to deploy so that we can do our job for real, apply our training and see if we are up to the job. It is to be out there standing shoulder to shoulder with your mates in the harshest of environments and not letting them down.

In November 2012 I got the chance to deploy on a short-notice deployment to Afghanistan after another officer was wounded. I worked as part of a NATO Special Operations element and I worked closely with the US Special Operations Command Headquarters, which controlled all Special Forces in Afghanistan. Predominantly, my role meant facilitating raid and kinetic strike operations, and I was lucky enough to work with soldiers from many different countries.

I never felt that I was going to die in Afghanistan, but I often felt vulnerable. I recall one incident when we were in a small two-vehicle parole and one of our vehicles got bogged. We were getting reports of Taliban radio chatter discussing our predicament and we were very exposed. I remember US troops driving past and leaving us out there. In the end it was an Afghan army truck driver who bravely stopped to help. I remember being terrified as I bent down in front of him to do up the tow chain. I told the sergeant who was with me to cover me, as I was completely vulnerable. I will never forget how my heart raced as I knelt down in the cold mud before this stranger. In the end he was just a good Samaritan. I cannot speak in detail about my service over in Afghanistan, but some of the things that we saw will stay with me for life: images of children killed by the Taliban, suicide bomb attacks and US soldiers killed by the Afghan soldiers they had been mentoring.

I returned to Australia on Anzac Day 2013. When I got home I had leave and my wife, Anna, arranged for us to go on a cruise, as she had correctly identified that being around airports might not be such a great idea. It turns out that trapping me in a boat with 2,000 people for a week was not such a great idea either. I found myself being hypervigilant and aggressive, and being in close proximity to others meant that I was constantly on edge.

At home I found it hard to reconnect with Anna and I found myself yearning to be back in Afghanistan. Although I was living with someone who loved and cared for me, I often felt isolated and alone. The images kept returning to me and my anger grew as I suffered nightmares. Driving was one of the hardest things to adapt to as I was constantly scanning for threats, and any trip was a battle to contain my aggression. On a drive from Cairns to Townsville one night with my sister I recall seeing movement on the side of the road. It clearly triggered something and I swerved violently in reaction. To tell you the truth, I had not even realised what had happened or how I had reacted until Katie told me to pull over.

Over time I began to wonder if I would be better off ending my life so that I would not be a burden to Anna and my family. I felt that I was not doing anything to make their lives better anyway. I was seemingly able to rationally think about the fact that it was a stupid thing to consider, but at that point I had worked out how I would do it. The only thing stopping me was the hurt that I would inflict on Anna and my family. By that point Anna saw that all was not right, and one afternoon she called in and cancelled her shift at the police to stay by my side. In hindsight, I know that Anna's decision to stay home that day saved me from doing something more drastic. It was her intervention that prompted me to seek help. Eventually I sought treatment with a psychologist who specialised in returned veterans and police. It was a difficult time for our marriage, and I was lucky to have Anna stick with me and help me to recover.

In 2014 we discovered that Anna was pregnant with our first child, Lara, and that was around the same time I felt like I was getting back to 100 per cent. Up until Lara's birth, despite all that I had gone through, if someone asked me to go back to Afghanistan I would have dropped everything and left in an instant. I craved the feeling of doing something more meaningful, of working as part of a team to achieve bigger goals and the adrenaline that comes with being involved in those really significant life-and-death events, but with the birth of Lara I learned that caring for a child more than satisfies that urge, because nothing is more important than my family. It is incredibly difficult for me to tell my story in this place, but I feel compelled to do so—not only to spread awareness about the danger of PTSD for our defence and emergency services personnel but also because too few men are willing to stand up and tell their stories of struggling with mental health. I want my son to grow up knowing that he should not be afraid to seek help if he ever needs it.

I want to mention my beautiful wife, Anneliese. Thank you for being my anchor over the years through both good times and bad. Your support during the long months before and during the election campaign was above and beyond what you committed to when we said our vows nearly eight years ago. I know that this journey has been just as demanding on you as it has been on me. You are a wonderful wife and mother, and convincing you that I was a good bloke was the best move I have ever made.

To my wonderful kids, Lara and Alex: you are not here to listen to me today but, hopefully, one day you will read this and realise that you are the reason that your mum and I strive to make our world a better place. Your innocence and unquestioning love are the fuel that drives me. I apologise for the nights when I will not be home to read you a story before bed, but you should know that I will be thinking of you both when I am away from you because I want the state that you grow up in to be a better place than it is now.

To my dad, Graeme: thank you for your selflessness and your commitment to family. The sacrifices that you and mum made to ensure that your kids had opportunities did not go unnoticed, and I will be forever grateful. Thank you for the long days and nights that you put in letterboxing, putting up signs and roadsiding. Thank you for your frank and honest advice and support. Your commitment to the LNP cause over a number of years has been exceptional, and it is something that you should be justifiably proud of.

To my sister, Katie: thank you for all your advice, guidance and know-how. Without your support, I am sure I would have fallen at the first hurdle. Your adept advice in relation to prosecuting local issue campaigns, social media engagement and general campaign knowledge was a massive unfair advantage that I really appreciated. Knowing that I could trust someone with your knowledge and capacity meant that I could just concentrate on the grassroots job of knocking on doors and talking to constituents.

Thank you to my campaign managers, Adrian and Tim. Thanks for your tireless efforts in arranging roadsides, letterboxing, doorknocking, media and the multitude of other tasks that are required of a volunteer campaign manager in a high-profile fight like that for Buderim.

I know that I stand in this House because I am the LNP member for Buderim. My success is due to the efforts of those who share my belief in the values espoused by the LNP. I acknowledge the contribution of my predecessor, Steve Dickson, who was an active local member.

To the men and women of the Buderim SEC, many of whom are here today: thank you for your efforts in supporting me to take up the fight on your behalf. In particular I thank my campaign committee of Ted, Rob, Tommy, Marg, Rocky, Mike and John Tusler for their hard work standing on the side of the road manning market stalls, letterboxing and manning booths. It is because of people like Gillian, Don and Annie who spent days calling constituents across the electorate, along with Dougal, my father-in-law Peter, and Drew, who waved corflutes at roadsides day after day, that we were successful.

Mitchell, your advice and support throughout the campaign and during the lead-up were first rate. A special mention to John Quinney whose dedication to ensuring that the people of Buderim saw my face on a corflute at every available opportunity was nothing short of amazing. It will take quite a while to convince my daughter Lara that it is not normal to see dad's head plastered on a sign at every turn! John, for your sustained effort over a long period of time, thank you.

To my hardworking electorate office staff, Tim and Cherie: all of us in this place know that we cannot do this without our staff, so thank you. Clearly I do not have the time to list all who helped on my campaign, and I am sure if I do try I will miss someone; however, to those who assisted in any way I want sincerely to say thank you because it is the grassroots members who do the hard work that wins elections.

Tim Nicholls, the time and effort you committed to the last election was first-rate and for that I would like to say thank you. I would like specifically to thank Deb Frecklington for her support and advice. I know that many of the other new members share my appreciation of the time she spent supporting our campaigns.

To the people of Buderim, I commit to being an energetic, hardworking and constructive state member who puts the interests of the people of Buderim before my own. I will fight to ensure that we build the roads that we need so that we all can spend more time at home with those most important, our families. We need innovative solutions to our local traffic challenges. I commit to working tirelessly to resolve the mess that is our local traffic network. I will fight to ensure that our schools have the funding so our children can get a great education. I will never take a backward step in ensuring that our police are empowered so that they are able to protect our community. I will protect our unique and precious way of life at all costs. This is my commitment to the people of Buderim, and I expect to be held to account for my actions.