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Speaker Brodtmann, Gai, MP

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Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (12.34 pm)—Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your recent appointment.

Without Canberra there would be no Australia. To borrow the words of Sir Henry Parkes: ‘The crimson thread of kinship runs through us all.’ Those threads are drawn together in this city. They run from every corner of this nation, and the knot that binds them is this House. But it could have been very different: 112 years ago, a four-state referendum on federation foundered in New South Wales. Although a majority said yes, support in New South Wales fell below the votes necessary for a mandate. Six months later, George Reid won amendments to the Constitution that dragged his state over the line. One was that the federal capital would be in New South Wales, no closer than 100 miles from Sydney. Many years and many more arguments would pass before the new federation settled on a capital, and a city to house a nation was built on Limestone Plains—a land that had been home to the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people for thousands of generations. Today I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

All of us are proud to be Australian. I hope that in my time here I might convince more Australians to be proud of our national capital, because without it, we would still be a collection of quaint, inward-looking colonies bickering over what divides us, not a federation focusing on what unites us.

Like so many of my constituents, I was not born here. More than 20 years ago I chose to live in Canberra, and I am a fierce defender of my home. As a city built to house a government, it has many critics. But Canberra is as Australian as the bushland that surrounds and intertwines it. Australians know and love the bush and know its dangers. The 2003 bushfires that tore through the suburbs of my electorate, killed four people and destroyed 500 homes showed the courage and strength of our community and reminded Australia that the bush capital was their capital and that we are part of them.

My electorate is home to people from every part of Australia and every part of the world, who directly or indirectly work to serve the nation. Canberra is home to the most highly educated population in the country,

but it is also home to people battling disadvantage and disability. Canberra is home to a community with a heart that provides shelter to refugees and the homeless, food to women seeking refuge and support to the infirm.

Canberra is home to the Prime Minister, the Governor-General and diplomats from every part of the globe. Canberra is home to children who love learning and love to sing, such as the boys and girls of Charles Conder and Gordon Primary, Malkara School, Holy Family and Canberra Girls Grammar—children liberated by state-of-the-art buildings and technology that will help them gain new skills and make better music thanks to the Gillard government. Canberra is home to places that preserve and share our history and culture, and it is home to this Parliament House—this people’s house. I want to thank the people of Canberra—in the Tuggeranong Valley, Weston Creek, Woden, the inner south, Oaks Estate and Tharwa—for putting your faith in me. As long as I am here I will listen to you and I will advocate for you. I will strive to represent you well, as Annette Ellis did.

Many of the people in my electorate are public servants. Some here like to join the chorus of those who ridicule Canberra and denigrate bureaucrats, but why would you scorn people who dedicate their lives to public service? I was a public servant once and was honoured to work for my country. Let me tell you of another public servant: my friend Liz O’Neill. Liz worked for the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. She worked to help keep the peace in Bougainville and to provide some comfort to the families in the morgues of Bali in 2002 and again in 2005. In 2004 she was blown off her feet by the bomb that exploded outside the Australian embassy in Jakarta. In 2007 she died in the service of her country when her plane ran off the runway at Yogyakarta.

Some credit George Orwell with saying that ‘we sleep soundly in our beds because rough men stand ready in the night to visit violence on those who would do us harm’. It is a tribute to those public servants called soldiers. But we also sleep soundly in our beds because invisible heroes ensure our national interests are protected abroad. Others protect our borders. Some make sure our cities and towns are safe. Others make sure our food is clean and keep our lights on. Some help the sick, the aged, the disadvantaged and the disabled.

Others ensure our children's toys are safe and our story is kept alive. Public service should be lauded, not derided. And as long as I am in this place I will defend the women and men in the Australian Public Service, because public servants are, after all, servants of democracy.

But Canberra today is more than what has been dubbed a 'government theme park'. About half of its workforce is in the private sector in small, medium and microbusinesses; light industries; animation and the arts; law; and advocacy. I want to see business and industry continue to grow and thrive in Canberra, liberated by broadband.

This year is the 100th anniversary of the drawing of the borders of the ACT, and in many ways Canberra is far from complete. I hope to live to see this territory's horizons expand beyond anything the surveyors could have imagined. I hope to help Canberra grow and flourish so we have the skills and population we need to maintain the lifestyle we love, while still providing the services and infrastructure for tomorrow. I hope to play a role in helping to draw those future borders that live now only in our dreams and aspirations.

Many of you probably do not know that the borders of my electorate stretch to Norfolk Island. We are all familiar with the island's rich and unique history and patois, but most would not know it is in need of reform, and I welcome the Gillard government's reform to its governance and financial management to improve economic stability and equity. I hope that the best years for Norfolk Island and Canberra lie ahead and I am honoured to have been chosen to represent these very different parts of our nation here in this House.

But I have not come alone. I carry the dreams, the work and the sacrifice of others, and I will never forget them. There is my grandmother, Enid Anderson, and my great-grandmother, Ada Huggins. In the language of the day, both were in service. My great-grandmother worked as a domestic in Victoria's Western District. She supported 13 children, on her own, in a house with dirt floors. I never met Ada, but I will never forget her. My grandmother worked three jobs and her abiding fear was that the state would take her children because she was poor. My grandmother died nine months after I was born. She was just 54. I was too young to know Enid, but I will never forget her. I was 11 when my father left my mother, and then my own future did not look that bright. My mother, Faye Anderson, also worked hard. Her sacrifice and love would see all three of her daughters go to university, but her hard work alone would not have got us there. She needed the help of giants—and she got it. My sisters and I went through a world-class public school system, and when I got to university it was free. The giants that built that system were people like you and, above all, the women and

men of the Labor Party. They had been building it since my great-grandmother was a child. I never met most of them, but I will never forget them.

Because of the Labor Party I escaped a cycle of disadvantage, and there are millions more like me. My life is testimony to the truth that education is the great transformer. That is why we desperately need the Gillard government's education revolution; without it, the opportunities, choices and options of future generations and our future are diminished. My sisters and I had a great public education that set us up for life. That is why I am a strong defender of government schools and a staunch advocate of access to education and support through it, whatever your background. Education is the great empowerer, particularly when it encourages a quest for broad and continuous learning. Education builds self-esteem and confidence, and a great education cannot happen without great teachers—teachers like Chris Mithen, who at Springview Primary sowed my love of learning, a love that flourished at Donvale High through teachers who encouraged us to be bold, to believe in ourselves and to strive for excellence.

But a quality secondary education is not one that only prepares a person for university. A quality education is multidimensional. It lays the foundation for a successful future in a vocation or trade. It lays the foundation for a quality life and a better quality of life. I want to see a return to an understanding of the dignity of work that values every job well done, because each job, no matter what it is, adds to the common good.

History shows us that if work is to be dignified workers need advocates, because workers rights did not fall from the sky. History shows that, without unions, workers were broken in what William Blake called dark satanic mills. He understood that change would not come without a fight, and the best weapon in the fight for workers rights is the trade union. This is why I am proud that the Labor Party was born in the fires of the union movement and fashioned on its anvils. It is something we should never seek to hide and something we should be proud of. Since I left high school, unions have protected me at work and this year worked to get me into this House. I am particularly grateful to the CFMEU, the NUW, the USU, the SDA and the CPSU.

I will never forget what the unions have done for this country and as long as I am here I will staunchly defend your right to defend your members. But, as a former small business owner, I will also remind my union friends that getting the balance right is extremely important. Australia is a wealthy country. It has room to pay its workers a decent wage and to provide them with decent conditions while at the same time rewarding risk and enterprise. So I will also strive to continue to make it simpler

and easier for people to operate and succeed in business. That means continuing with the Gillard government's improvements to the tax system. That means continuing with the Gillard government's improvements to the superannuation system to make it simpler and more flexible so people are genuinely empowered to choose what is best for their retirement and to reap the rewards of their years of hard work. To me, Labor values mean that hard work should be fairly rewarded and that good government sets sensible boundaries for the rogues, not an obstacle course for the decent.

There is a proper role for government and a proper role for the private sector and there is such a thing as too much government. I saw it in my year in India when I was posted there in the mid-nineties. India then was very different from the emerging powerhouse of today. Then, I saw an economy hampered by too much government intervention and protectionism and an economy hampered by not enough social service, infrastructure and innovation. The India of the mid-nineties also exposed me to incredibly confronting poverty. But that also proved the truth of Victor Frankl's words: 'everything can be taken from a man but one thing: the last of the human freedoms—to choose one's own attitude in any given set of circumstances, to choose one's own way.' Despite their poverty, beggars wrapped in loincloths still prayed thanks when they showered under a train station water pump. India reminded me like nothing before or since that no life is cheap and that everyone has hopes and dreams and deserves to be treated with dignity and humanity. It also showed me that, without innovation and decent social services and infrastructure, a society can operate at only a fraction of its capacity. India is rising, and Australia should do everything in its power to engage, collaborate and cooperate in its rise. It is a great nation and will be a greater one.

My time as a diplomat confirmed my belief that if we are to flourish as a nation we need to be outward looking and generous. We must be committed to free trade and engage in dialogue with all nations. In an interconnected world we cannot be indifferent to what happens beyond our borders. A peaceful, prosperous Australian future hangs on a peaceful and prosperous future for our region and our world. That will not happen by accident. It will be built on good governance—an agreed set of enforceable rules—on trade, on self-determination and on defence. That starts with diplomacy, and hopefully dialogue will always triumph. But diplomacy also demands a strong and modern defence force because sometimes we have to defend our freedom and that of our friends.

That said, our generosity should also focus inwards. But we can only afford to be generous if we are

strong, stable, growing economy, an economy with the right level of regulation, the right level of support and assistance and the right level of freedom. We can only afford to improve our environment and maintain biodiversity if people have jobs and pay tax. We can only afford to provide better social, health and education services if we are prosperous, because a prosperous economy allows us to be generous in every way. As a former board member of the Gift of Life Foundation, I would like to thank the government for introducing major reforms to lift the rate of organ and tissue donation in Australia. The government's reforms now strongly encourage Australians to be generous with that most precious of gifts, the gift of life.

While on donations, I cannot finish today without mentioning the names of just a few of the people who have given me so much. Thank you to my campaign team, particularly to my rock Gail Morgan, Narelle Luchetti and Simon Tatz. Thank you to my Labor Party family and to my friends who worked hard in so many ways in the freezing Canberra winter to secure my election. Thank you to the Uhlmann family for always cheering from the sidelines, particularly Kate Foy. Thank you to Heather and Alwyn Henman and to Viv and Ray Waterford for being there during the tough times. Thank you to my sisters, Meg and Amy, for their merciless honesty and boundless loyalty. Thank you to my mum, Faye Anderson, for her tenacity and love that liberated me to this life. Finally, thank you to my husband, Chris Uhlmann. Thank you for introducing me to the shades of grey in life, for broadening and deepening my spiritual and moral understanding and for reminding me each day that decency must prevail, whatever the circumstances.

I would like to dedicate this speech to the women and men who have shaped my life but could not be here today, particularly Mary Uhlmann, who died during the campaign after a long battle with pain and suffering. May you all rest in peace. I would not be here today without you and I will strive to make you proud.

Words can only stretch so far and they fail when I try to express the honour and the terror of being here today. I have dreamed of being here. I admire anyone who takes up the challenge of politics and who honestly tries to improve the lives of his or her people, no matter what political lights they follow. Although it is not fashionable to say it, I believe politics is, or should be, an honourable profession. In the end, it is about improving people's lives. And at its best politics is about building a better community and a better nation.

I am not a blind partisan and have many friends of all political dispositions. But I am Labor to my bootstraps. We are in a battle of ideas and I believe it is desperately important that we win. When we win our prosperity is shared. When we win children get the chance of a

world-class education. When we win Australia gets a country that supports the weak; a nation that uses its wealth to help the poor. When we win individuals are encouraged to excel but never at the expense of the common good. When we win workers get a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. When we win we fight for jobs and the environment. When we win our nation is outward looking and engaged with our allies and the forums of the world. When we win we demand from each the best they are able to give and offer to each the chance to be the best they can be.

The Labor Party is great because of the strength of its ideas and the courage of the giants who have filled its ranks through the ages. We should be proud of all that Labor has achieved and never be timid about our beliefs, no matter how slim the margin, no matter how fraught the fight. As long as I am here, I will fight for all Canberrans and I fight in solidarity with my party, because as long as Labor is strong Australia will be a great nation.