



## **Speaking Notes**

**for**

**The Honourable Curtis Pitt MP**

**Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of Queensland  
Member for Mulgrave**

# **40TH CPA AUSTRALIA AND PACIFIC REGIONAL CONFERENCE Youth Engagement and Youth Parliament Address**

**Wednesday 1 November 2023**

**Parliament House  
Brisbane**

## **PLAY VIDEO**

- **Junior Indigenous Youth Parliament 2022 Thursday Island (3.04 minutes)**

## **TRADITIONAL WELCOME**

I acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we are meeting, and I pay my respects to their Elders, past and present.

We're very fortunate to live in a country with two of the oldest continuing cultures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose lands, winds and waters we all share.

## **SPEAKING POINTS**

Friends and Colleagues,

As we have just seen, the Queensland Parliament prides itself in running a Youth Parliament program in all parts of our State.

The images we've just watched were recorded last year at the first Junior Indigenous Youth Parliament held on Thursday Island in the Torres Strait.

Most young people in the Torres Strait would not ordinarily have an opportunity to visit this building in Brisbane and participate in Youth Parliament programs – so instead we take Parliament to them.

As I will discuss, we place great stock in the civic education program we offer to all Queenslanders and particularly to our young people.

Whether this is through our school visit education and tour programs, classroom visits, school teacher professional development programs held in conjunction with the Supreme Court Library, the development and provision of videos, fact sheets classroom activities and teacher resources, public service seminars, or of course our very extensive and tailored Youth Parliament program, the aim is to involve as many of our citizens as possible.

However, before I go into more detail about our Youth Parliament program, as you would no doubt be aware by now, we are currently assembled in the only operating chamber of the Queensland Parliament.

Unusually for Westminster-style democracies – but not entirely uniquely – this Parliament is unicameral, having voted to abolish our Upper House in 1921 which took effect the following year.

As you would also be aware, Queensland is a one member per electorate parliament. For example, we have no list MPs.

Therefore, in reality, an aspiring MP usually needs to navigate the party-political process to secure party preselection, raise funds for electioneering, and then be chosen by voters at a public election.

And of course, the next layer of complexity is about safe seats, marginal seats, which seats have sitting members recontesting an election, and probably the most important issue being the prevailing politics of the day.

That system doesn't automatically immediately lend itself to a great number of young people securing party preselection or be running in a winnable seat for their party.

It doesn't preclude young people and of course we can find examples across many if not all our Parliaments of young people successfully entering parliament, just that in the real world of competitive politics there can be all sorts of pecking orders and levels of support, and sometimes it just takes a period of time to become established enough to build that support.

But we all know there are many paths into Parliament, electorates of all shapes and sizes, independent and/or party candidates, and the list goes on.

Perceptions of parliament can also play a role in who even participates in the process of elections or making submissions to committee inquiries.

We also need to continue to demystify politics and parliament and not only ensure its relevance to the lives of all citizens, but ensure it is perceived as relevant.

So, as Speaker of the Queensland Parliament I'm a great supporter of community engagement programs that aim to give people as much access to and understanding about parliamentary proceedings and processes as possible.

Some examples of this are the regional sittings of parliament that we undertake.

To date the Queensland Parliament has conducted six regional sittings where the entire parliament is relocated to a regional location for an entire sitting week.

This allows for a huge array of public engagement activities, especially with children and young people who may not otherwise ever have the opportunity to visit this building in Brisbane.

It also allows for any member of the community to attend the public gallery of the temporary parliament which can draw more attendees in one week than we may have attending the gallery here in Brisbane for the whole year.

And we took our highly successful and popular Youth Parliament program to Far North Queensland with us which also included an Indigenous Youth Parliament.

Like we all do across the range of parliaments represented here today, the Queensland Parliament debates, amends and passes all manner of laws which are very significant to our citizens of all ages.

But the debates and contributions that come out of Youth Parliaments give us a glimpse into the priorities and mindset of the current cohort of young people in our State.

Youth Parliaments provide the opportunity for school students to serve as 'Youth Members' and gain a hands-on understanding of Queensland's parliamentary processes.

Youth Parliament programs see students introduce and then debate a mock Bill or motion.

When possible, the content of the Bill or motion will reflect topical issues of interest to Queensland students.

Youth Parliaments also include an Adjournment Debate which allows youth members the opportunity to publicly speak on issues of specific interest to them.

Members of Parliament, including myself as Speaker, usually preside over each Youth Parliament to ensure that debates are conducted in accordance with parliamentary practice and are conducted as half-day events here at Parliament House and in regional Queensland locations. This year we have conducted nine youth parliaments – based on clusters of schools from designated areas, a Legal Studies Youth Parliament and the Junior Indigenous Youth Parliament I mentioned before.

Additionally, the YMCA Queensland Youth Parliaments is also held here at Parliament House.

I've collected examples of the topics that young people bring forward.

- Youth Crime (the youth participants are always tough on crime and this is definitely the most popular topic).
- Housing



- Increasing access to prayer rooms in schools
  - Protecting koalas
  - Banning Vaping
  - Graffiti and Vandalism
  - The cost of school sport and recreation activities
  - Pollution in waterways and biodegradable plastics
  - Tree and Land Clearing
  - Commencing parliamentary proceedings with a more secular and inclusive prayer to encourage diversity
  - Mental Health concerns related to the Australian Tertiary Admission Rank
  - Age of available treatment for transgender children
  - Homelessness on the Gold Coast
  - Whitfield Home of the Performing Arts – a new performing arts centre at Whitfield SS
  - Ideas for country excursions for students – including experiences with bush tucker, culture, and land
  - Littering
- and of course...

- Getting rid of homework

What I have said to youth members at the opening of youth parliaments is that just as it is humbling to be elected as a Member of Parliament, it is humbling to be chosen to represent the youth of an electorate.

I encourage their passionate contributions but done so respectfully.

During the Queensland Parliament's first meeting more than 150 years ago, the very first Speaker of this Legislative Assembly, the Honourable Gilbert Elliott, urged members to display "mutual forbearance and self-control during debates."

I impart this tale to my fellow MPs to impress that it is incumbent upon us to act with dignity and decorum reflecting the great honour and trust the people of Queensland have placed in us.

I also see youth parliaments not as a training ground for future MPs – although some have gone on to that career – rather I see them as practical, civic education, something

that can educate young people on how parliament works and how laws are debated and made in the hope this understanding can encourage a range of community participation and leadership outcomes.

Honourable Members and participants, it has been a privilege to talk to you today.

I will leave you with some highlights of our most recent Youth Parliament in Regional Queensland and then I am more than happy to take any questions you may have.

## **PLAY VIDEO**

- **Toowoomba Youth Parliament highlight reel (2.48 minutes)**

## **Q & A session**