



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

ADJOURNMENT

Cooper Electorate: COVID-19

SPEECH

Monday, 7 December 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Kearney, Ged, MP	Question No.

Ms KEARNEY (Cooper) (19:40): One of my favourite quotes to remember in a crisis is to 'look for the helpers'; you will always find people who are helping. During 2020, indisputably one of the worst years in decades, I've been so proud to see helpers everywhere in Cooper. Firstly, to the North East Neighbourhood House Network and the many not-for-profits—the Bridge at Darebin, Reservoir Neighbourhood House, Jika Jika Community Centre, Preston Rotary, Diverse, the Salvos, the Northern Community Church and so many more: you are the backbone of our community but this year you have just gone above and beyond. When the pandemic hit, you pulled together and organised emergency food relief, providing over 40,000 meals. Believe me when I say that you saved lives this year. You were the safety net that caught people, and you wrapped the arms of community around everyone.

This year, we also learnt whose work is absolutely essential to keep society turning: the retail workers, truckies, emergency relief workers, posties and all of those who put themselves at risk to keep us all going. We are indebted to you. To the healthcare workers—doctors, nurses, carers in nursing homes and allied health professionals—I can't imagine the year you've had. I'm sure many of you are experiencing trauma from what you've witnessed as the pandemic swept through. Please, look after yourselves. To the groups that represent our culturally diverse communities: thank you for working so hard to keep the ties of community strong during the pandemic. To the teachers of Cooper: what you've had to conquer is immeasurable. As a mother of teachers, as a grandmother and as a citizen with hopes for our future generations, I say thank you. Enjoy the pending holidays!

To all our sporting heroes who have been keeping community sport alive: it's been so tough. But I came across so many parents and coaches in my daily walks in the park using their one hour of exercise to throw a ball to a kid's bat, kick a soccer ball around or boot a footy, just to keep skills up. Community sport is run by volunteers, by parents who are determined to give their kids a healthy and joyous outlet. We will be back in force next year, I know it. And I can't wait to get out and cheer my lungs out from the sidelines in support and appreciation.

To our First Nations elders and community leaders: the great health outcomes your communities maintained during the pandemic proves how well you responded. You reminded us of the importance of country and culture when dealing with a crisis. You alerted us to the pressure points for First Nations peoples and you showed us the way through. The pandemic highlighted the cracks in services and needs, especially for First Nations children. I look forward to continuing to work with you to address these.

To the climate and environment groups in Cooper: you found ways to adapt your important work to the restrictions we faced in Melbourne. Our 'Friends of the Creeks' groups were a great example, using their hour of daily exercise to pick up rubbish along the creeks and to keep an eye on the health of our waterways. And to my own Climate and Environment Reference Group activists a sincere thank you. The group has done incredible work this year and has helped to ensure I kept a direct line between activists back in Cooper and this chamber. Whilst we've been up against a health crisis, the climate crisis has not gone away. This group has helped to keep our community informed, connected and represented when it comes to action on the climate and the environment. You're wonderful, and I can't wait to see all of you in person next year.

And, of course, to our refugee advocates: you are tireless, persistent and bold. I give a special call-out to the 'Cooper Grans', who keep me grounded and who give me hope. They give me hope that we can get an outcome for asylum seekers and refugees bound up in indefinite detention. To all who make the trip down to the Mantra hotel each week, I thank you. The men inside tell me time and time again how important your presence is. I will not give up fighting for human rights alongside you.

I give a big shout-out to our business community, who've done it very tough. Your resilience and ability to transform and adapt to the crisis was astounding. I have never enjoyed shopping locally as much as I did during the pandemic—seeing the whole community of Cooper come out to support you. And, finally, thanks to everyone

who did the right thing, kept each other safe and saw us through to the current double-doughnut situation. It'd be lovely to see your gorgeous faces without the masks. Thank you.