



Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 19 June 2013, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday, 19 June 2013.

INAUGURAL SPEECH

Mr ADAM MARSHALL (Northern Tablelands) [10.10 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I stand here this morning very humble and proud to have been elected to this place by the people of Northern Tablelands. There is no greater honour in life than to be entrusted to represent your community, no nobler pursuit than to serve the community and no greater responsibility than to advocate for the needs, desires and aspirations of the people. I am very honoured to have received a vote of confidence from the communities of the Northern Tablelands and fully understand that support comes with an expectation that I will work hard for them, be a strong advocate and represent their issues in the Parliament and in the Government. I willingly undertake that task and welcome that responsibility.

Throughout the campaign for the seat of Northern Tablelands I was always described in the media as the youngest candidate. Now that I am in Parliament I am described as the youngest member of the Legislative Assembly. When I was elected to Gunnedah Shire Council at the age of 19 I was described as the youngest councillor in the State, then the youngest mayor at the age of 23 and, at 25, the youngest chairman of the New South Wales Country Mayors Association. While others have sought to make much of my age throughout my career, I have not. Gender, background and age should not be a barrier; rather one's commitment to the role, and one's willingness to listen to the people and be a strong voice for them should really be what is emphasised. I have never regarded myself as a young person, just a person taking on a very serious responsibility and doing the very best that I can.

I am incredibly proud to join a resurgent Nationals party in this place. We have now a young, vibrant and diverse group of members of Parliament representing more than 92 per cent of the area of New South Wales. I believe it is a very good sign for the renewal of our party, but it is also a good sign for the people of regional New South Wales. Since my election a great deal has been made of the scale of the result, and I must say it was quite extraordinary. For those of you who know me well, you know how humbled and how uncomfortable I was with the final numbers and the tumbling of the records that ensued. It is not something that ever sits well with me. I appreciate the significance of the result, particularly for the members of our party who have toiled for 14 years in the tablelands to work hard to see the seat regained by our party. I particularly acknowledge the former member for Northern Tablelands, Ray Chappell, who is in the gallery, and the Chairman of the Armidale branch, Rosemary Leitch, who is one of those many people who have worked for 14 long years in warm but mostly incredibly cold conditions on polling days in the tablelands to try to have the seat returned.

I want to make it clear that while I think the result is incredibly significant for our party, for the Government and for the people of the Northern Tablelands, I know that the people will judge me on my performance, my commitment to them and the results that I achieve in partnership with the communities in my electorate. So the results of 25 May are important and very gratifying, but I have never been one to rest on my laurels, and I am not about to begin now. Today I acknowledge my parents, Geoff and Sue Marshall, who are in the gallery, and my many friends and supporters, including my aunt and uncle, Jenny and John Marshall, who have come all the way from Toowoomba. It is great to see them all here.

It is wonderful to have a strong base of support throughout the electorate, and far beyond that. It is very encouraging to see them all here, and I really do appreciate it and thank them. My father, who will be uncomfortable about me speaking about him like this, is also a former mayor of Gunnedah Shire Council. I remember at one stage when I was considering entering local government he actively discouraged me from entering politics. But, like many sons, I took no notice of his advice and instead chose to follow his example. Regardless of that, he and my mother have always been incredibly supportive in everything I have done throughout my life and have helped me along my path, and I thank them very much for that and for being here today.

I am a country boy through and through. I grew up an only child on a farm near Gunnedah and learned right from the very start about the hard yakka of farming, the trials and tribulations of the agricultural sector, and the challenges of managing farming operations in rural areas. I had the pleasure of attending Gunnedah South Primary School and then Farrer Memorial Agricultural High School—both public schools and schools that I absolutely loved. I am very pleased to see in the gallery my former principal from Farrer, Ian Downs, and his wife, Shirley. I thank them for being here. Along with a great many people, Mr Downs has been a great mentor to me throughout my life and imbued in me a sense of obligation to give something back and to contribute. I thank him for that.

Unlike many of my peers, I chose not to gravitate towards the bright lights of Sydney, but made a deliberate decision to stay in the

country area and make my career there. I am very proud that I have spent my whole life in regional New South Wales and most of my working life serving the communities in which I have lived. I have never ever regretted that decision. When I left school I cut my teeth in an electorate office and went on to become a journalist, during which time I successfully stood for Gunnedah Shire Council. One of my strongest influences in entering public life came from my grandparents, and I acknowledge in the gallery today my grandmother Ros Thompson and thank her for being here. My grandfather always has much to say about politics; needless to say, he does not think much of politicians, except for his grandson, which I think is magnificent.

They instilled in me some great values from a very young age and, although I have probably never acknowledged it, I should, and I choose now to thank them for the values and ethics they instilled in me from a very young age. As with most things, when I entered local government there was a very steep learning curve that prompted a very quick path to maturity. You soon learn that your life is not your own, that the price of public life is that the public want a piece of you all the time—even when you are doing your shopping—and you need to respond accordingly. Another valuable lesson that I learned very early on was how essential it is to work collaboratively and to work within a team. I discovered early on in public life that you never achieve anything on your own. I found that, as a leader, you need to convince people, consult extensively and work collaboratively towards a common vision. You need to work within a team environment.

These were all valuable lessons I had to absorb on the job at a very early age, but the most important lesson of all was drilled into me by a former member of this place, Roger Wotton, whom many of my colleagues would know very well. I vividly recall that he pulled me up on one of my first days as mayor of Gunnedah and told me to hop in his car as we were going for a drive and he was going to teach me about the world. One of the things he said—and it is a mantra I have lived by—was, "Adam, if there is anything you do in public life, it is to put the concerns and the priorities of the people first. If you do that, the politics will eventually take care of itself." They were very wise words and I have carried them with me ever since. I always want to let the community drive my agenda and not the other way around, and I have Roger to thank very much for drilling that into me.

That is why I am so proud to stand here as the latest member of our Nationals team. The Nationals is a great and strong party that represents the people of regional New South Wales unashamedly. It respects the right of members of Parliament to represent the views of the people they represent vigorously. It is a party that is not bound by dogged political ideology or philosophy; it is about geography. It is about giving all the people who live outside our major metropolitan areas a voice and sticking up for them. Just as in the early days of the last century when the old Country Party was formed to fight for a fair go for people in rural and regional areas, we continue that battle. I am very proud to be part of that and to wear that mantle. Regional New South Wales is becoming more diverse and our party is reflecting that and evolving and constantly renewing. My preselection and subsequent election to this place is a very tangible sign of this.

The Northern Tablelands electorate experienced a great level of support from the Government during the by-election campaign. There were a number of great announcements for the people of Northern Tablelands: \$1.6 million for the Glen Innes airport, \$1.3 million to upgrade the Guyra to Ebor road, \$3.5 million for Emu Creek crossing near Bundarra, and \$200,000 for valuable mental health programs at Freeman House in Armidale. They were just a few of the announcements. There is great value in having Government Ministers visit your electorate to see first-hand what needs to be done and to discuss issues with local people. I take this opportunity to reissue an invitation to all those Ministers who visited my electorate during the by-election campaign to come back and see the results of some of those announcements and discuss other priorities with the people of Northern Tablelands.

I acknowledge and thank the Minister for Health, Jillian Skinner, for her recent visit to the electorate and her strong support for the redevelopment of the Armidale Hospital campus. On her visit she reiterated the New South Wales Government's commitment of \$10 million to the redevelopment of the hospital. I will be working very hard with her to press the Commonwealth in the lead-up to the Federal election to provide the remainder of this funding so that this much-needed project for the most important rural referral hospital in the Northern Tablelands can go ahead.

The Minister also approved the new multimillion-dollar ambulatory care building on the hospital campus and was personally responsible for providing additional funding to ensure the community health section of that building could be completed as part of the overall project. With the opening due later this year I look forward to welcoming the Minister for Health back to the electorate once again not just to open the facility but also to give the community the opportunity to thank her for her tremendous contribution to health in the tablelands. I also thank the Minister for Education, Adrian Piccoli, for his visit and for his strident support and advocacy for the Gonski reforms, which will benefit many rural and regional schools. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

A big issue for education in the Northern Tablelands is the continuation of years 11 and 12 Higher School Certificate programs at the essential schools of Ashford, Bundarra and Emmaville, which are under threat because they do not fit the current Department of Education staffing formula. My view echoes that of local communities that it would be much more effective for the department to be flexible with its formulas to ensure the outstanding results that have been achieved at these schools—not just in the opinion of the schools but endorsed by a review report conducted in March this year by the department—to ensure that these results can continue to be achieved and local Aboriginal students in particular are able to undertake and finish their secondary education at their local

high school. I look forward to further discussions with the Minister and his department to find a workable solution to this issue.

As is the case with many of my colleagues in The Nationals, roads are always a top priority and in our current Minister for Roads, Duncan Gay, we have one of the best roads Ministers this State has ever seen. I was very grateful to the Minister for his visit to the electorate and for his announcement of funding for the Emu Crossing bridge and the Guyra to Ebor road upgrade, both of which are important strategic thoroughfares not only for tourism but also, importantly, for freighting valuable produce in and out of the electorate. I am grateful also to our Premier, Barry O'Farrell, who visited the electorate during the campaign and announced a number of funding initiatives. Most importantly, he appreciated the significance of the electorate to the people of Northern Tablelands and to the Government. He understood as well, when he made an announcement about road funding, that it is vitally important for country people to see their leaders. I look forward to a return visit from the Premier to Northern Tablelands shortly.

I would not be standing here today if not for the support given to me by my leader, the Deputy Premier, Andrew Stoner. He was a stalwart during the campaign, visiting the Northern Tablelands four times and announcing the \$1.6 million funding for the Glen Innes Flight Training Academy, which is a vital project for the economic growth of our region and the diversity of the economy in the electorate. It will create jobs and growth, which are much-needed in country areas. Most importantly, the Deputy Premier gave me his political and personal support, which was invaluable. There was no better feeling on the night of 25 May than joining with him to place that last green piece in the jigsaw on the map of New South Wales, showing quite proudly that we now represent more than 92 per cent of the land area of New South Wales.

I cannot finish this speech without thanking all the workers, supporters and branch members who helped during the Northern Tablelands campaign. They were tremendous. They worked incredibly hard, day and night. They were unstinting in their efforts and so keen to see the seat returned to National Party hands. They stood on street corners in freezing weather, as many of my colleagues can attest, on polling day and during the week leading up to polling day. They stood at polling booths and handed out fliers. They wore those wonderful yellow shirts, which are fashion items—I am still waiting for many of them to be returned because everyone wants to keep them. I thank them sincerely for their tremendous effort. There are too many people to mention and I will no doubt omit some, but I say a big thank you to them all. I am indebted to them and I will certainly work very hard for them and not let them down.

I acknowledge and thank The Nationals State Chairman, the Hon. Niall Blair, MLC, and our State Director, Ben Franklin. Together they make a formidable team. The Nationals are now a very professional and intimidating force. I also thank the people who worked very closely with me on the campaign: Ross Cadell, who is here in the gallery, and Jessica Price-Purnell, who worked with me day and night. It was good for me but I am not so sure it was good for them. They worked incredibly hard and I am very appreciative of that. Ben and his head office team were incredible and I really appreciate the work they have done, and continue to do for our party. I also want to thank all of my colleagues from The Nationals and the Liberal Party who came to the electorate and put in an enormous effort. All my colleagues have been very warm in their welcome and so helpful thus far and, as I said yesterday, I know that will continue. I appreciate it. It is incredibly humbling to have the support of so many and to enter this place as part of a very strong team. It certainly has been an amazing experience, and I thank you one and all.

In conclusion, I give another assurance to the people of the Northern Tablelands that I will never take them for granted nor will I ever allow this Government to take them for granted. I will work tirelessly on their behalf. I understand the challenge before me and acknowledge that my predecessor left big shoes to fill. I am determined to work incredibly hard for my constituents to ensure that their priorities are my priorities and, most importantly, that they are also the Government's priorities. I again thank all my colleagues, friends and family for being here. I look forward to being in this place for some time to come and being a strong voice for the Northern Tablelands in ensuring that we get our fair share.