



# Inaugural Speeches

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**Mr TIMOTHY CRAKANTHORP** (Newcastle) (Inaugural Speech) [11.31 a.m.]: I begin my first speech in the New South Wales Parliament by acknowledging the traditional owners, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, on whose country we meet. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of my home town, Newcastle—the Awabakal and the Worimi people. You are a tough and spirited people. You make a strong and ongoing contribution to our city. It is a great honour to stand in this Chamber today as the elected member for Newcastle. It is a privilege that I do not take lightly and one that I will carry out to the utmost of my ability.

My story begins in the picturesque town of Moruya on the far South Coast, famed for supplying the granite pylons the Sydney Harbour Bridge stands upon today. My parents, David and Jeanette, were schoolteachers. My father, an English History Master, passed on a great appreciation of the written word, running, and the love of a good time. My mother, who is here today, gave me an eye for detail, a full appreciation of the values of social justice and the importance of education. To my two brothers, Andrew and Justin, I appreciate your support, strength and wily habit of always being there when needed most.

My journey to this Chamber was sparked by my father's consistent questioning of the status quo, my parents' constant letters to the editor of the *Eurobodalla Star*, the *Sydney Morning Herald* and, finally, by my father's campaign in an attempt to become a councillor on Eurobodalla Shire Council. I was fortunate enough to be elected School Captain of Moruya High School which led me in part to apply for a Rotary scholarship at the age of 17. That scholarship took me on a remarkable journey to South Africa in 1987 where I witnessed the ugly, brutal policy of apartheid and the indignity it imposed upon everyone associated with it.

I was privileged enough to be taken into the real South Africa by ANC sympathisers who took me into the township of Soweto where I saw the real impact of apartheid on local schools, communities and churches. The reality of apartheid was emphasised when I was forced to hide in the back of the car to avoid detection on my way into the township. It was there that I first saw the effects of extreme poverty, exploitation and inequality. I saw white military personnel with submachine guns in the school grounds of black students where windows were smashed out in school buildings.

What I also saw was a very politically active school population. It was not the headmaster who ran the school; it was the school students and the school representative council. It was those same black students who asked me those difficult questions regarding our own Indigenous population and our own racist heritage. It was then during my time in South Africa that I made a vow to myself to fight for better health and education, and social and political outcomes for my community, no matter where I live. So that, colleagues, is the base upon which my motivations have been built. I am driven to fight for social justice and equity—which is why I joined the Australian Labor Party. There is no other party that has the same focus on improving the life of everyday people.

These principles have always guided me over the years and developed and been deepened by my life experiences. From my first job of cleaning out stables, to working in a hardware shop, restaurants and bars, to driving delivery trucks, I learned about long hours and hard work. After a short stint working for IBM I started working in the disability sector where my passion and commitment for social justice led me to work with people who could not talk, people with severe behavioural problems and those with severe brain damage. After working at the Cerebral Palsy Centre I was privileged to gain a deep understanding of the need for individuality of those with cerebral palsy. I have a Business Degree from Charles Sturt University and a Masters Degree of International Studies from Sydney University. It was at university as the President of the Student Association that I became politically active and lead busloads of students from Bathurst to Sydney to fight against the injustices of government.

After I completed my Masters I was fortunate enough to work in other areas of real passion for me—foreign aid and the environment. In Indonesia I worked for an environmental education centre which specialised in growing Indigenous rice seeds and helping local communities gain control of their rice seed production and harvesting. It was here that I found myself building the local village chief's compost bin. The significance of this incident may seem opaque but as I was stuffing the *Jakarta Post* into the bin I was astonished to read the front page which showed dogs on leashes and men in balaclavas on the docks in Sydney. It was the time of Peter Reith and John Howard; a time to come back to Australia and to fight the good fight for jobs, a fair go and the right to bargain collectively.

And so I did. I worked for Tanya Plibersek on her inaugural election campaign. This was followed by work for Carmel Tebbutt, Allan Morris, Sharon Grierson and Bryce Gaudry. These were astute and wise people and I thank them for sharing some of their many

insights with me. To Allan and Bryce, I thank you for your unwavering support. For the past nine years I have worked in mine safety for the New South Wales Government. I have a deep belief in the value of public service. During my time in mine safety I have worked with some outstanding people who always conducted themselves with the utmost integrity. To the current and former directors of mine safety, Rod Morrison, Jennifer Nash and Rob Regan, I owe you an enormous debt of gratitude. I am especially grateful to Rod. Thank you for your mentoring and fearless advice—which was not always to your advantage. To the whole team in mine safety, thank you for your comradeship and your support over the years.

For the past six years I have also been a councillor on Newcastle City Council. It has been quite a tumultuous experience, particularly with the recent ICAC-induced resignation of our Lord Mayor. This experience has given me an even deeper appreciation of what is really important to the everyday lives of my fellow citizens of Newcastle. I have also been fortunate enough to represent Newcastle City Council on the board of the Westpac Rescue Helicopter for the past five years, and the board of Northern Settlement Services, which in the past two years has helped to settle refugees in our community. Both boards have provided a great experience and insight into their unique experiences. Thank you for allowing me to work with you and to learn from you. In my time as a Labor councillor I have had the pleasure of working as a team to get some great outcomes for the people of Newcastle. We have fought to save pools, childcare centres and public spaces for community groups. We have saved and invested in Blackbutt Reserve as well as championed the Bathers Way Coastal Walk, which has become the envy of other coastal cities.

Perhaps my proudest achievement as a councillor was successfully fighting alongside the local youth to get what is now considered one of the best skate parks in Australia at Empire Park. It is across the road from what is one of the best surfing strips in Australia—Bar Beach to Merewether. To fellow Labor councillors Stephanie Posniak, Jason Dunn and the future lord mayor of Newcastle, Nuatali Nelmes, thank you for your support and comradeship over the years. I wish to offer special thanks to Sharon Claydon, MP, my former council colleague and now our fantastic Federal member for Newcastle, for her consistent support over the many years that we have worked together on so many projects. It is much appreciated.

The union movement has always had a very strong presence in the Hunter. The first trade union was established 157 years ago at the coal pit near the art gallery in Laman Street. Trade unions and the Newcastle Eight Hour Committee met in the local hotels before the opening of the first Newcastle Trades Hall 120 years ago. Still strong today, and now called Hunter Unions, I thank Daniel Wallace and the peak body he leads for their steadfast support during my campaign, with particular thanks to the Maritime Union of Australia, the Maritime Union of Australia Veterans, the *Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union*, the Finance Sector Union, the United Services Union, the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, United Voice and the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association.

The union movement in Newcastle not only fought for fair pay for workers but also was instrumental in saving large parts of historic Newcastle. Like Jack Mundy's better-known efforts in The Rocks, Peter Barrack as secretary of Newcastle Trades Hall saved large swathes of what is now the historic East End of Newcastle. They also stopped inappropriate development on Foreshore Park and the historic precinct of Cooks Hill which now, like The Rocks, is a much sought after suburb. Following the closure of BHP 15 years ago, the rest of Australia is beginning to see what Newcastle really has to offer. Our largest employer is not a steel producer but, rather, great institutions like the John Hunter Hospital and the University of Newcastle.

Retail, healthcare, tourism, energy research, construction, education, accommodation and manufacturing are now our key areas of employment opportunity. Local people tell me consistently that their number one priority is jobs. Over the past year, unemployment in Newcastle has nearly doubled to 8.8 per cent and youth unemployment is now one of the State's highest. Despite this, we still see New South Wales Government train carriage contracts going overseas and Newcastle manufacturers are forced to close. New South Wales bus contracts go to Queensland, and again Newcastle manufacturers close. Contracts for Navy supply ships are going to Korea and Spain and now submarine contracts are going to Japan. I want to see more manufacturing contracts come to Newcastle. Like the Hunter Business Chamber, I want to see a convention centre in Newcastle to create and attract business and jobs to our city.

While it is great to see the New South Wales Government showing an interest in Newcastle and pushing ahead with the implementation of the Newcastle Urban Renewal Strategy, there have been some worrying developments that are now the focus of an upper House parliamentary inquiry. These include three high-rise towers in the historic precinct of Newcastle and cutting the rail line into the heart of the city. As a result of this, mixed with the disappointment of the Independent Commission Against Corruption investigations over the past six months, we have seen an unprecedented number of public rallies expressing the discontent of people in Newcastle. We have had resignations of the State members and resulting by-elections. It is time to restore trust and confidence in the political process. Now is the time for the unions, businesses and community groups to work together to ensure that we get the best outcomes for Newcastle. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

One key organisation that has been working to revitalise the city centre is Renew Newcastle. This groundbreaking organisation, under the leadership of Marcus Westbury and formerly Marni Jackson, has done an exemplary job in revitalising the city centre though finding short- and medium-term uses for buildings in Newcastle's central business district that are now vacant, disused, or

awaiting redevelopment. My vision for Newcastle is for a vibrant, smart and healthy city with full employment that nurtures the creativity for which we are known. Newcastle has more artists per capita than any other city in Australia. We have a magnificent collection of art valued at \$60 million. It is a tragedy that we have not been more nurturing of this creative resource. The \$21 million redevelopment of Newcastle Art Gallery, a catalyst project in the Government's own 2020-21 Plan for NSW, has not proceeded. Such a project is pivotal and would have provided a huge economic boost for Newcastle. I will fight tooth and nail for this art gallery redevelopment to come to fruition.

Over the past six years as a councillor on Newcastle City Council I have also campaigned, on behalf of the people of Newcastle, to retain the existing rail line into Newcastle station. At the beginning of this year I initiated a process of consultation that I called "Our Town Our Choice". I asked members of our community to tell me their preference for the allocation of the \$350 million announced by the Government for the termination of the railway line. I outlined a number of urgent infrastructure projects that would have significant long-term benefits to Newcastle and the region. The community response has been overwhelmingly in support of using the \$350 million for the infrastructure projects. It is because of this that I made the decision to base my by-election campaign on this proposal and offered the community a very clear choice. My main opponent in the by-election was publicly and stridently in support of the Baird Government's plans to rip out the rail line into Newcastle. Of the eight by-election candidates, only two supported the Government's policy.

The result was that 66 per cent of voters supported candidates who wanted to keep the rail line running into Newcastle. The people of Newcastle have clearly shown that they do not want the rail line cut. I now have a mandate and a clear responsibility to follow through on what my community elected me to do. The community concerns over this matter are also reflected in the submissions to the parliamentary inquiry. Some 350 submissions have now been published and the vast majority of them support retaining the railway line. Where is the logic in removing this transport system? We are about to have a new university campus bringing 5,000 students into the area and the nearby law courts almost completed and very little parking space has been provided. There is also GPT's proposed 500 apartments and 30,000 square metres of retail and commercial space. The Asian Cup, which will be held in Newcastle in January, will attract 35,000 people.

This matter must be resolved. The quandary is why any government would spend almost \$500 million doing something that the community clearly does not want. The way out of this impasse is for Mr Baird to put on hold the plans to terminate the service at Wickham on 26 December and to give the community a clear choice at the March election. If the people of Newcastle want the rail line to be terminated they will vote for a Liberal candidate. If I am re-elected, the Government will need to accept that it is our community's choice and respect it as such. However, I would like to achieve some sense of bipartisanship on this issue to avoid the truncation continuing to be a divisive issue for another 20 years. I presented a letter to the Premier's office this morning requesting a meeting to discuss this issue, and I await his response.

Newcastle has the largest coal port in the world. However, we cannot continue to rely on king coal. We must diversify as a region and focus on other energy resources. The Newcastle of the future I want to see will focus on new energy and technology markets. Newcastle can be the energy capital of Australia. We already have the CSIRO Energy Centre, the Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources, a world-class university and a thriving digital technology sector. These are the vital ingredients for a long and bright future for the young Novocastrians of today.

I thank my unstoppable campaign managers Samantha Marsh and James Connor, and the irrepressible David Latham. I thank the Posniak-Marshall family: Stephanie, James, Isobel, Annabel and Amelia. I also thank the Newcastle Labor team: Sally Tate, Graham Wilson, Judith Driscoll, Stu Morgan, Gary and Liam Parker, Jazzua Andrews, Phillip Johnson, Shirley Schultz Robinson, Barbara Whitcher, Nicola Dean, Cath and Kevin Claydon, Victoria Phillis, Simonne Pengelly, Donovan Harris, Chris McNaughton and Deb Wood. Forgive me if I have missed anyone.

Indeed, thank you to all the wonderful Australian Labor Party members in Newcastle and beyond, and especially Young Labor who did so much for me during my campaign. To John Robertson and Linda Burney, and the team in the leader's office, thank you for your ongoing support and commitment to making Newcastle the best it can be. John Robertson's 17 visits in the past three months demonstrate that Labor does not take Newcastle for granted and never will. To Sonia Hornery, Clayton Barr, Jodie Harrison, Peter Primrose, Lynda Voltz, Penny Sharpe, Andrew McDonald, Michael Daley, Adam Searle, Ron Hoenig, Paul Lynch, Luke Foley, Ryan Park, Tanya Mihailuk, Nathan Rees, Guy Zangari, Anna Watson, Sophie Cotsis, Greg Donnelly, Walt Secord and all my other new colleagues who came up to Newcastle, thank you. Also, to John Graham, Kaila Murnain and the head office team, thank you.

To my children, Oscar, Luca, Sienna and Avalon, I know that you do not understand what is going on just now, but I hope that one day you will understand why I am doing this and forgive me for the sacrifices that you have already made and will no doubt make in the future because of my choices. Thank you. My deepest thank you is to the person who is my rock and to whom I owe everything —my wife, Lara. Without you, none of this would be possible at all.

People in this Chamber may well ask why people in Newcastle are so passionate about their home town. Why are they such a

resilient, tough bunch of people who pick themselves up after earthquakes and floods, and are so proud of their city? Let me fill you in on what it means to be a Novocastrian—things I have learnt since first coming to Newcastle some 27 years ago. It means just whipping down to Nobbys, Newcastle, Bar Beach or Merewether on a weekday before or after work and having a peaceful swim, and joining the unwashed crowds on a weekend to surf or be swamped by Nippers. It means watching a film at King Edward Park in the dusk of summer and then slipping down to the Bogey Hole, the rock pool hewn out of the majestic cliffs 194 years ago.

It means watching my kids playing for Cooks Hill Juniors with children from all over Newcastle on a sunny Saturday morning, trying to pick them out in a sea of black-and-white jerseys. It means walking out to the breakwall beyond Nobbys, the big chunk of rock in the water upon which our lighthouse is built. It means catching the ferry to Stockton and meandering around this historical suburb with its wide streets, slow pace and long, flat beach. It means going to Fort Scratchley and hearing the guns firing, imagining they are returning fire to the Japanese submarines that shelled Newcastle all those years ago. It means swimming in the egalitarian Newcastle and Merewether baths at dusk, with the moon reflecting off the ocean.

It means hearing the roar of "Newcastle, Newcastle" when the Knights are whipping Manly at Hunter stadium, or hearing the deafening sound of the squadron cheering from the stands when the Jets are thrashing the Central Coast Mariners at yet another game. There is so much that is Newcastle and so much that Novocastrians hold dear, and today you have heard but a snippet. As the new member for Newcastle I thank my community for placing your trust and confidence in me. I will do my absolute best to advocate for you and represent you and our great city in this Parliament. Thank you.