



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 6 May 2015.

Ms PRUE CAR (Londonderry) [6.15 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I begin this evening by acknowledging the Gadigal people of the Eora nation and I pay my respects to their elders, past and present. I also acknowledge the Darug people, whose ancestors walked the lands on which now sits the electorate of Londonderry. It is an honour beyond compare to be in this historic chamber in the oldest Parliament in Australia to represent the people of my community.

In December 2013 I was not long Labor's candidate in the upcoming election. I was getting out and about, knocking on doors, meeting local residents and campaigning on the issues. In the suburb of Whalan one day I met a young mother. She had recently moved into a house owned by Housing NSW. She had two young children. Like so many other properties owned by Housing NSW, the house next door had been vacated, but it had been vacant for such a lengthy period that it had been completely destroyed—vacant for well over six months while tens of thousands of families wait on the list.

To add insult to injury, when she moved in this young mum found syringes in her backyard where her children wanted to run and play—as every young child should have the opportunity to do. But when she contacted the department, seeking help, they actually asked her to clean it up. What I did not know then was how many times I would see and hear different variations of this same story; time after time people being left on their own to fend for themselves—forgotten.

After knocking on doors every single day for more than 17 months, I come to this place not on my own; I come with thousands and thousands of personal stories just like that one, told to me by the people of my wonderful community—honest, passionate and generous people. They have placed their faith in me to fight for their issues in this, the epicentre of government in the nation's first State. Now it is time for me to repay their trust. Tonight is the first of many occasions on which I will be rising to my feet to champion their cause. Before I begin I want to acknowledge previous members for Londonderry and its various iterations—suburbs that were sometimes in electorates called Mulgoa, Nepean or St Marys. To Alan Shearan, I know how hard you worked for the community. To two of my personal mentors, Diane Beamer and Faye Lo Po', I am so proud to follow in your footsteps as strong women from our area who forged their careers fighting for the western suburbs of Sydney. And last year we said goodbye to our beloved Ron Mulock, a giant of our region. After I ran in the 2011 election he sent me a handwritten note. It said:

Never give up, never give in, and keep fighting.

Thank you, Ron. I took your advice. Most especially, I want to acknowledge a man I did not really know—the late Jim Anderson. Twelve years after his tragic passing on election day in 2003 people still talk to me at their front door about what an incredible local member he was. All over the electorate there are memories of him: signs bearing his name in parks and at schools. I did not know you, Jim, but I can think of no better person to look up to.

In the 1970s the future Labor Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, led the Australian Council of Trade Unions. Legend has it that he would inspire large crowds of people at rallies on issues affecting the daily lives of working people, motivating whole generations of people to take action. My grandfather, Les, was in these audiences a few times at Bankstown Town Hall with his daughter, my mother. He was a working man, a union man and a Labor man. He died a short time before I too felt a pull towards an involvement in politics to pursue change. Over the years my mother has often commented to me that he would have loved to have been with me, making a difference, getting stuck into the issues. I suppose it would have been incomprehensible to him at the time, at those rallies, that his daughter's daughter would be a Labor member of Parliament, 45 years on.

Maybe it is in my blood, but it is no wonder that I gravitated towards Labor when that interest first sparked. In fact, when I first told my mother, she was the one who suggested that I join the Labor Party and she drove me to the local campaign office. They told me Kim Beazley was coming to Werrington the next day. I rang my English teacher and took the day off school. Thank you, Mrs Elborough. That school had a strong emphasis on fighting for social justice, and I personally thank them for that. What I believed then, and what I believe now more than ever, is that Labor is the party of social justice, the party of opportunity. Labor brought us Medicare, compulsory superannuation and the reformist governments of Wran and Carr. In 2015 Labor has a challenging but essential responsibility in this Parliament on behalf of the people of New South Wales. Every one of those 499 days I campaigned to come to this place I became more and more convinced that government has a powerful role to play in improving people's lives—the provision of quality health care, access to educational opportunities that are not based on postcode or income and a helping hand to those who need it most. These are all ways that State government can and should have an impact.

I am a child of the western suburbs of Sydney. Like so many others of their generation, when my parents were newly married they

set up their first home in this city's booming outskirts. For them, it was Morris Street, St Marys. The newly drawn electorate of Londonderry is a diverse one—from the semi-rural northern suburbs around Londonderry, Berkshire Park and Llandilo, some without town water, to the burgeoning new releases of Jordan Springs and Ropes Crossing—two of the fastest growing suburbs in New South Wales. There are suburbs around Werrington County and Cambridge Park that have been there a little bit longer, and some, like St Marys, that have been there for some considerable time indeed. This is a town steeped in the stories of early Australian history, where a teacher from St Marys Public School, Peter Dodds McCormick, wrote a patriotic song that would later become known as the Australian National Anthem. In the east the towns around Mount Druitt are home to some of the most generous and welcoming people I have ever met—people I am proud to call my friends and who have a pride in their suburbs and communities that runs so deep.

I am grateful every day that my parents chose to raise my sister and me in the western suburbs where I am now bringing up my own son. It is a place where parents will work two or three jobs for a better life for their children and where small business owners strive to succeed but is consistently denied its fair share. Since 2008 I have been working to represent this community, where I grew up, as a councillor on Penrith City Council. I have loved every day that I have worked with community groups and residents to improve the impact of local government on our area. I am most proud of my work with the local community in advocating against this Government's plans to transport radioactive waste from Hunters Hill to the western suburbs—an issue still hanging over our heads after a four-year battle. It is exactly the sort of reason why I wanted to do the same here: to fight for a better deal for us in the west.

They say that education is the great equaliser—the one mechanism that truly has the power to circumvent generations of poverty, disadvantage and injustice. But, shockingly, in 2015 only half of all public schools in Western Sydney even have air-conditioning in their classrooms. This means that children at schools in suburbs like Colyton and Willmot swelter in temperatures of over 40 degrees in the middle of boiling hot Western Sydney summers. Surely we cannot expect our children to be learning productively in these environments or should force our teachers to work in these conditions. As a mother this angers me. As a member of Parliament it furthers my resolve. I put the Minister for Education on notice that this will be a personal priority of mine.

One in 11 Australians calls Western Sydney home. Western Sydney is the third largest regional economy in Australia. Suburbs like Caddens, Claremont Meadows, Jordan Springs and Ropes Crossing are rapidly expanding. This growth must be met with investment in local infrastructure. It is not good enough for the Government to plan for primary schools in suburbs like Jordan Springs, with construction to begin five years from now when 2,000 homes have already been sold and plans for many more. It is outrageous that residents living in suburbs like Claremont Meadows are promised recreational parks that remain unfunded decades on. And while State governments place growth targets on regions like Penrith to expand, we are left lobbying for multimillion-dollar hospital redevelopments because mothers are being forced to have babies in emergency department car parks. Significant upgrades must take place urgently at Nepean and the dramatic de-funding of Mount Druitt Hospital must cease immediately.

Governments make the mistake of forgetting about Mount Druitt Hospital, but we cannot deny people health care based on where they live. In areas where many people do not have access to a car, they are presenting at their local hospital only to be told to go to another. Locals have a right to their local hospital. The housing affordability crisis facing New South Wales, and Sydney more specifically, is palpably felt most in Western Sydney. With property prices skyrocketing, parents question whether their children will ever be able to afford that great Australian dream—ownership of their own home. This challenge is significant, but it must be addressed. Young families need government to assist them with getting their foot in that door, including with stamp duty.

One of the biggest challenges facing the western suburbs of Sydney lies in the ever-increasing employment deficit. It is simply too large. While there is no arguing that congestion on our arterial motorways, like the M4, must be addressed urgently, governments must look at long-term, strategic ways to address the problem. Every day mums and dads from suburbs like Werrington Downs get into their cars and travel east for the only work that can pay their mortgage and support their families. Their trip can take up to three hours each way. By the time they get home at night, their children are already tucked in bed and fast asleep. This has devastating impacts on families. Government must get serious about its role in encouraging business to invest in moving to the new central business districts such as Penrith and Blacktown. That could be started by the Government setting the example and moving its own departments in a westerly direction.

The recent election campaign has had many impacts on me. But the most heartbreaking has been the way my eyes have been opened to the true state of public housing in New South Wales. My opening story is only the tip of a very large iceberg. More than 120,000 people are lingering on the waiting list. There is often a two-year wait for emergency housing. Waiting a decade for urgent maintenance is unacceptably commonplace. I am talking about serious safety concerns: windows with no glass panes, collapsing walls and holes in floors. The sad reality is that there is a maintenance backlog of more than \$300 million. The Auditor-General found that in 2012-13 the Government delayed \$85 million worth of scheduled maintenance work because of savage budget cuts. Something must be done urgently.

Every day people's lives are being impacted by the lack of action. They are living in substandard conditions. We are failing this test.

These decisions are difficult, but must be taken. We need new housing stock, a better way to address maintenance and reinvestment in areas that have been forgotten. People simply deserve better than this. The things I have seen with my own eyes cannot simply be unseen. I cannot have listened to so many of these stories and now stand here and fail to act. Therefore, I intend to use the opportunity my community has given me to advocate for change.

Election victories occur because of teams, not individuals. No-one can knock on 20,000 doors and make 35,000 phone calls alone. I have many, many people to thank, and I am happy that many of them are in the gallery tonight. To the loyal and passionate members of the Labor Party, thank you for embracing me and fighting alongside me every day of a very long campaign. Thank you for the early mornings at train stations and for the mammoth effort every weekend. I thank the Londonderry State Electoral Council, led by Peter Clapham and Brad Bunting, Andrew Peach, Derek Margerison, Joe Fisher, Bengt Fredriksson, David Bentham, Tony Woolgar, Gai and Michael Maskell, Tony and Celine Smullen, Bill and Linda Armstrong, Rika Kaula, Sophie Young, Ian and Shirley Watt, Samara Phillips, Leigh Russelle, Kath Presdee, Ri Joseph, Mark Phillips, Mark O'Toole, Ben Bryan and Kanwal Dhillon. I am forever grateful for your efforts.

To Lois Fisher, thank you for coming on board in my electorate office and bringing your years of experience to the team. To my friend and constant source of advice—I call him the "mayor of Mount Druitt"—Blacktown Councillor Charlie Lowles, thank you. To my mate and confidante, and the reassuring voice on the end of the phone, Penrith Councillor John Thain, I could not have done it without you. I want to say a special thank you to the groups in our community that I have come to know over the past two years for always making me aware of all your concerns and for the amazing work you do in giving a voice to so many people in our areas.

To Georgie McCann and Di Mularvey and the Tregear Public School Parents and Citizens Association, Haylee Brown and the Bennett Road Public School Parents and Citizens Association, Ivy Roberson and the Whalan Community Action Group, Peta Kennedy and the Willmot Community Group, the Jordan Springs Residents Group and to the best friend that Ropes Crossing ever had, Derek Margerison, thank you. To my friends in the Filipino community, the Philippine Language and Cultural Association of Australia, Rissa McInness and the Prue Car dancers, maraming salamat po! I also thank my friends in the subcontinent community.

I thank my friends with whom I worked with at MS Australia. My experience there taught me so much about what people can achieve against serious odds. I thank the most professional campaigners in the country: the team at New South Wales Labor. Thank you Jamie Clements, Kaila Murnain and David Latham for your constant support. My organiser, Dom Ofner, is probably the most talented campaigner in the country, and he got me through the campaign. Thank you. My friends in the union movement should know that I will always be proud of our connection. I am so proud to have campaigned alongside you in defence of our public assets. I thank Tony Sheldon, Michael Aird and all my friends at the Transport Workers Union, Bob Nanva, Alex Klassens and the Rail, Tram and Bus Union, Gerard Hayes and the Health Services Union, Russ Collison and the Australian Workers Union, Graeme Kelly and the United Services Union. I also thank Mark Lennon, Mary Yaager, and the team at Unions NSW for that amazing campaign. Thank you Mary Court and the ever enthusiastic team at Penrith Valley Community Unions.

I thank my new colleagues—the Labor Party shadow Ministers. Particular thanks must go to the Hon. Sophie Cotsis, the Hon. Walt Secord, the Hon. Adam Searle, Ryan Park and Guy Zangari. Most of all, I thank the Leader of the Opposition, Luke Foley, for his personal support of me and for standing with me for four years arguing against the transfer of that radioactive waste. I have so much confidence in you and your intelligent and compassionate vision for New South Wales. I am so proud to be part of your team. People sometimes say to me that if I want a friend in politics I should get a dog. I do not subscribe to that opinion. Thank you to all the lifelong friends I have made from our time way back in Young Labor: Bob Nanva and Sally Deans, Gerard Gilchrist and Elizabeth Scully, Sam Crosby and Rose Jackson, Senator Sam Dastyari and his wife, Helen, Daniel Mookhey and Tamsin Lloyd. I am so proud that Daniel has been appointed to the other place today. We have had some great times together and always supported each other.

I turn now to my campaign team, affectionately self-titled the "Prue Crew". Their enthusiasm, dedication and commitment will be the stuff of legends. My compliments to the best campaign director in NSW, Aaron Duke. What an operation! I am so proud of my outstanding volunteer coordinator, Paul Mills, and Geeth Geeganage, Luke Heffernan, Lizzie Green, Liam Rankine, Sean Sotheran, Michael Elliot, Wihartati Kartika, Nick and Daniel Harrison, Ashlee Gardener, Geoff Brown, Megan Sturges, Malithi Geeganage and Corey Matthews. Please know that nothing you ever did went unnoticed by me—not the freezing cold train stations nor the boiling days door knocking. The Labor Party in Western Sydney has a bright future in you.

I turn now to the two people who set up their home in Morris Street in 1977, my parents. Words could never express my gratitude for what you have done for me. Your sacrifices have been so many. You have supported me every single day, not only during the campaign but also from that very first day when I joined the Labor Party as a teenager with a burning desire for the power of government to change people's lives. You are a shining example of the love and commitment of parenthood. My victory is also yours.

To the most important person in my life—whom I hope will one day read this speech—my Max. When you were born one of my

friends remarked that you would make my politics personal. How right she was. You inspire me in ways you will never know. Every day I will strive to make the society you and your generation inherit a better place, a fairer place, a place where people do not get left behind. Each and every day that I have this job will be a true honour—a privilege that comes with a heavy responsibility. To the people of Londonderry I say that each and every one of those days I will be fighting as hard as I can for you in this place, because that is exactly what you deserve. Thank you.