



Inaugural Speeches

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The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of families, friends and supporters of the member for Port Stephens. I welcome you all to the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of New South Wales to listen to the inaugural speech of the new member for Port Stephens.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON (Port Stephens) [11.28 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Parliamentary colleagues, friends and family, thank you for your warm welcome. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Gadigal people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of the land I now represent in this Parliament, the Worimi people, and pay my respect to their elders past and present. I am humbled and honoured to stand in this Chamber today as the new member for Port Stephens. Might I add to Madam Speaker's list of firsts—unfortunately she is not presently in the Chamber—I am the first woman to represent the electorate of Port Stephens in this place.

Port Stephens is a place of great beauty, inspiration and history. It stretches from Tea Gardens-Hawks Nest in the north, to the Hunter River and Tomago in the south; from the rural beauty of Dunn's Creek in the west, to the stunning Tomaree peninsula and Broughton Island in the east. Port Stephens is blessed with natural beauty. It has the most beautiful beaches in New South Wales, pristine coastal habitats, and is world renowned for its dolphins and koalas. I am proud to say that we have the largest marine park in New South Wales, a great Labor achievement.

Port Stephens is positively brimming with potential. Port Stephens' potential was recognised early in Australia's history. In 1899, land on the northern side of the bay was identified as one of 40 potential sites for Australia's first capital. The site is now known as the lovely hamlet of North Arm Cove. Tanilba House was built by convicts from 1837, and at the same time the National Trust-listed Tomago House was being built by the Windeyer family, in Tomago. Fort Tomaree played an important role in Australia's east coast defence during World War II, and in Boomerang Park, in Raymond Terrace, Federation was celebrated, light horses trained for the Boer War and our troops marshalled for both World Wars. Today, Port Stephens has a diverse economy spanning from hospitality and tourism to heavy manufacturing; from primary production to aerospace endeavours.

It is with a great deal of pride that I can class as one of my neighbours the Royal Australian Air Force Base at Williamstown. The RAAF Base employs 3,500 people, with most of the servicemen and servicewomen posted to RAAF Williamstown choosing to live in Port Stephens. Their involvement in our schools, sporting and volunteer organisations makes my community stronger. Port Stephens is very fortunate to host not only the RAAF but also Newcastle airport. They are significant contributors to the local economy and the Hunter. So you can see, in addition to its breathtaking beauty, the people of Port Stephens have a lot to be proud of.

But like many people who live in Port Stephens, I did not grow up there. It is a place where people choose to live. Almost nine years ago, immediately prior to the impending birth of my third daughter, Lily, my family and I moved to Medowie, a town in the heart of Port Stephens. Medowie is a community of about 9,000 people and is largely populated by young families. We moved from Newcastle to Medowie with a view to returning to a simpler way of life—a back-to-basics program, if you like. We now have 26 chooks, an unkempt vegie garden and two crazy dogs. On my way home, I usually get to wave at our local kangaroos. It is a place where I quickly felt at home, because I grew up in country New South Wales.

My father was a public school principal; my mother was also a teacher, professions that are not only vocations but also a lifestyle choice. Whilst they chose to shape young people's lives, it also meant a few moves for our family. We started out in Mulwala on the New South Wales-Victorian border, then moved to Tumut and ended up in Albury. I was schooled in the local public schools and I enjoyed all the benefits of a public school education—an education that allowed me entry to the University of Sydney to study arts and law.

My parents have been public education advocates for as long as I can remember, with my father opting to take positions in areas of disadvantage and my mum being a TAFE teacher. It should come as no surprise that I bring that same passion for equality of access to education to this role. My parents came from different sides of the track. My mum's mother grew up on the waterfront in Rose Bay and married a Macquarie Street doctor who was a University of Sydney medallist in medicine. We would visit them when they lived in Wagga Wagga, where my granddad, Dr Kenny, had established the first radiology practice.

My dad's father, Bert Washington, was a battler. Having left school in Leeton at the age of 14, he went to work in a gold mine at West Wyalong. He was "on the wallaby" during the Depression, ending up on the show circuit where he spent much of the rest of his life. He was, literally, a showman or a "showie". Whilst education is the great equaliser, so is war, and both my grandfathers enlisted in the army and served in Papua New Guinea. I loved visiting Poppa during Christmas school holidays because I got to

work the clowns in his backyard show at Ettalong Beach, graduating to the merry-go-round when I was considered responsible enough.

From across the generations, from both sides of the track, the importance of hard work and respect was instilled in me, values that stood me well in my professional career as a lawyer and, I believe, will continue to do so in my role in Parliament. Throughout my professional career, there were many people who gave me opportunities that I am very grateful for. The late Tony Dutton was the best lawyer I have ever known—hardworking with a great intellect, humility and humour. I also thank Catherine Henry, my former partner, for her generosity and understanding.

Many people would be aware of the recent storm which smashed the Hunter and other areas. Port Stephens was one of the areas declared a natural disaster zone. The sheer length, breadth and extent of the harm were astonishing and unprecedented. My heart goes out to those who have lost loved ones, suffered the loss of their homes and their families' income and those who continue to suffer in other ways from the harsh hand that Mother Nature dealt. I give my heartfelt thanks to the local State Emergency Service and Rural Fire Service volunteers for their extraordinary efforts and bravery during the emergency and recovery stage of this natural disaster.

The natural environment in Port Stephens is something my community values. However, our area is at risk of overdevelopment. I recognise the efforts of the community group Voices of Wallalong and Woodville in representing their community's interests until, ultimately, the Independent Commission Against Corruption acted on their concerns. I also recognise the efforts of the Boomerang Park Action Group, Say No to Sandmining in Bob's Farm, Tomaree Ratepayers and Residents Association, Williamtown and Surrounds Residents Action Group, South Tomaree Community Association and the Port Stephens EcoNetwork. The sheer number of groups that have formed in Port Stephens is indicative of the difficulty our community has had in having its voice heard in the face of developments that risk quality of life and environmental sustainability. The number of community action groups in Port Stephens is also a reflection of the level of concern within my community about the lack of transparency, accountability and integrity in planning decisions and processes at a local and State Government level.

The concern is not without foundation. My community has been touched by the ICAC, and I am very grateful for it, not because political opponents have come undone but because it has shed light where it was needed and, in doing so, allowed people to live their lives free from harassment. Corruption is not just a theoretical concept, or something you read about in the newspaper that brings politicians down. It hurts people and it hurts communities; and it has been hurting people in my community for too long. I will respect the trust placed in me by my community. I will act with integrity and I will continue to stand against corruption in all forms and on all fronts.

Other challenges being faced by the people of Port Stephens are like those in many other rural and regional communities in New South Wales. We have a dire need for mental health support, particularly for our youth. There is a dire need for better access to vocational training, TAFE and jobs. Unemployment in Port Stephens is at crisis point, with the unemployment rate being more than double the State average. There is a dire need to increase local health services, improve public transport and increase support for people escaping domestic violence, together with the need for more affordable housing.

And yet, in Port Stephens, these challenges have been exacerbated by decisions made by a government that would appear to have very little understanding of what is happening in rural and regional New South Wales. In Port Stephens, in the past four years, we have seen community psychology services shut down; the local domestic violence refuge defunded then propped up at the last minute in a lesser form; and our local community college lose funding to deliver the courses where we have a skills shortage, in aged care and child care.

The decision to centralise services may make sense on paper to bureaucrats, but it often makes no sense whatsoever when it is applied in rural and regional communities. The Government's so-called reforms, Smart and Skilled and Going Home Staying Home, have only hurt my community. As a proud member of Country Labor, I pledge to be an advocate for rural and regional communities in this place. Each of us has issues that sit higher in our hearts. One of these for me, having been a health lawyer, is the right of all people living with disabilities to have greater autonomy and choice. The National Disability Insurance Scheme [NDIS] is landmark legislation because it enshrines in law the concept of choice. The New South Wales launch site of the NDIS was in Newcastle so I have witnessed firsthand its promise and its pitfalls.

I believe it is incumbent on all members of this Parliament to ensure that the aims of the NDIS are met and that real choice is delivered to people living with disabilities. It would be a shame if at a Federal level we talked the talk while at the State level we do not walk the walk. In my view, the Government's plans to completely privatise State-run disability and homecare services risks the success of the NDIS in New South Wales and places the most vulnerable people in our communities at risk. As a member of the Fifty-sixth Parliament of New South Wales I hope to contribute to the success of the NDIS as it is rolled out across the State.

Another issue close to my heart, and closer to home, is the fight for a public high school in my home town of Medowie. So many

people have now heard about "Medowie High School", and it does not exist!

Mr Ryan Park: I want to hear about it again.

Ms KATE WASHINGTON: I know the member for Keira wants to hear more about this. This has been a longstanding battle. For the past eight years, I have stood alongside members of my community and fought for our children's right to have access to local public secondary schooling. Land was designated for a high school in Medowie, and purchased by the Department of Education in 1983. To this day, the land remains untouched.

As we in the Labor Party know, education is key to ensuring equality of opportunity. Any barriers to accessing education should be minimised. Currently, we have 1,000 children being bussed out of my community daily just to access public secondary schooling. And yet the Government does not think there is merit in the proposal to build a local high school. Perhaps the Government needs to look at the election result. Better still, they should have taken heed of their own representative in Parliament. On 1 June 2010, former member for Port Stephens Craig Baumann addressed this Chamber as follows:

I speak today about one of the most important issues in my electorate: the need for a high school in Medowie.

On this, I could not agree with Craig Baumann more. The only reason I am standing here today is that so many people contributed to this long-running campaign to return Port Stephens to Labor. Some of the people who contributed have travelled to be here today, and I thank them so much for making the effort. I am delighted to be sharing this experience with them. I will start with the people who were there from the start: thank you to my mum and dad, Bert and Leslie Washington, for your unwavering and unqualified love and support over my entire life. Whilst there were no doubt times when you were uncertain about the direction in which I was headed, you have instilled in me values of social justice that are with me to my core.

To my patient and caring husband, Andrew Hardy, and my three beautiful daughters—Phoebe, Tess and Lily—I love you all dearly and I thank you for your willingness to join me on this adventure. Thank you to my big brothers, Stuart and Damon Washington and their amazing families. I am delighted to see my nieces, Ava and Ruby Washington, here today. I owe my thanks to someone special who could not make it here today: the Hon. Bob Martin. He was the first member for Port Stephens and a wonderful Minister for Fisheries in the first Carr Government. I thank Bob and his wife, Margaret, for their unwavering support and friendship, and I hope they are enjoying their travels. They even helped me doorknock in Anna Bay.

A huge thank you to Sophie Cotsis, MLC, and Courtney Houssos, MLC, for their support and guidance over a number of years. I also thank New South Wales Labor Party General Secretary Jamie Clements and Assistant General Secretary Kaila Murnain, who believed that we could secure Port Stephens for the Labor Party. A very special thank you to Luke Foley, for being a regular visitor to Port Stephens, and John Robertson before him. Thank you also to the members of the Parliamentary Labor Party and their staff, who were always on hand to give advice, together with the many shadow ministers who made the effort to visit Port Stephens, including the former shadow Minister Steve Whan.

I turn now to the local champions—the branch and community members who worked so hard. From the very beginning, branch members were unified and unwavering in their support. Prior to the election, I recall driving home from a branch meeting almost in tears because I was overwhelmed by everyone's kindness and generosity. I feel like I now have an enormous family in Port Stephens and I look forward to sharing this experience with them all over the coming years.

I am glad to say that there are now too many branch members to name individually, but I would like to mention a few: Grant Kennett, Fred and Glenis McInerney, Jim and Lois Morrison, Grahame and Elaine Froment, Alex Smith, Fran Corner, Bay Marshall, Ivor Blanche, Bobbie Antonic, Jenny Battrick, Roz Armstrong, Helen McLean, Lynn Lockett and Nancy Hosking. I must make special mention of Graham Blythman and Gail Armstrong, and I wish them well for the future. A special thank you to the indomitable Frank Ward, OAM—champion letter writer, former Port Stephens councillor and amazing advocate for women's rights. Brian Crooks is another champion letter writer and an enormously hard worker.

Thank you also to Councillors Peter Kafer and Geoff Dingle. There are also too many community members who helped me to name them all. I mention Tom Lacey and his dog, Penny, from Raymond Terrace. He drove around with my poster attached to the back of his mobility scooter for months. To all the people who put up signs and got politically active for the first time in their lives, I say thank you so much. Thank you also to Unions NSW and to the dedicated members of the Public Service Association [PSA], the NSW Nurses and Midwives Association [NMA], the NSW Teachers Federation, the Electrical Trades Union [ETU], the Rail, Tram and Bus Union [RTBU] and the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union [CFMEU] for all their assistance.

Finally, I thank my hardworking campaign team. From the outset, and against the odds, we campaigned hard and achieved the unexpected. Giacomo Arnott, thank you for your commitment over such a long campaign. Thank you also to Ruby Porter for your positive energy and hard work. My final thank you goes to Jay Suvaal for pulling everything together in the critical last few months of

the campaign. Everyone's efforts combined saw us achieve what Sportsbet and the local media did not see coming—an almost 20 per cent swing to overcome a 14.7 per cent margin and a win for the party of fairness, equality and social justice: the Labor Party. For the people of Port Stephens, my message is simple: I will work hard to ensure that our community gets its fair share. I will work with the local community and with the Government to ensure its election commitments are delivered for my community. I will always give my local community the respect it deserves.