



Inaugural Speeches

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The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): On behalf of the new member for Newtown, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of New South Wales Senator Lee Rhiannon, former New South Wales Senator Kerry Nettle, former member of the Legislative Council Sylvia Hale, local government representatives, family, friends and supporters of the new member.

Ms JENNY LEONG (Newtown) [5.02 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): As a matter of protocol and a mark of respect, I acknowledge that we are meeting on the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land. I acknowledge one particular elder who passed away recently. Ray Jackson was a Wiradjuri Warrior, the first president of the Indigenous Social Justice Association and someone who was no stranger to standing outside this place fighting for Koori justice. One case that Ray worked tirelessly on was justice for a young TJ Hickey, who died tragically just over a decade ago. The police continue to prevent his family from placing a plaque in Redfern to commemorate his death. So until his family's wish for a plaque can be realised, and as a mark of respect to Ray's work, I will read the words on the plaque onto the public record of the New South Wales Parliament:

*On the 14 February, 2004,
TJ Hickey, Aged 17, Was Impaled
Upon The Metal Fence Above.
Arising From A Police Pursuit.
The Young Man Died As A Result
Of His Wounds The Next day.*

Ray, I assure you that we will continue your struggle for justice; and while you are deeply missed, you will continue to inspire us because future generations deserve to live with justice, dignity and respect. Well, here we are. Let us do this. To the people of Newtown who entrusted me and The Greens to represent you, and who reflect our diverse and progressive values in this place, thank you. To those who were part of the Greens for Newtown campaign, many of whom are here or watching the live feed today, thank you. We did it! To those who have been part of the growing New South Wales Greens since that first gathering on the steps of Glebe Town Hall, and to those who have contributed to the Greens movement nationally and globally, thank you.

To those who have been elected and those who have been part of electing Greens to local councils, State parliaments and our Federal Government, thank you. In particular, I thank our former New South Wales Greens members of Parliament Ian Cohen, Michael Organ, Cate Faehrmann and Sylvia Hale. Special mention goes to former Senator Kerry Nettle and Senator Bob Brown. Your action in the Federal Parliament, standing up against George W. Bush, will continue to be an inspiration for me in this place. To those who work behind the scenes and those who continually challenge us to stay focused on our principles and stand together despite the challenges, thank you. You know who you are and you know the contributions you make behind the scenes, and for that I am truly grateful. I feel particularly humbled that Jack Munday, a man who has contributed so much to our movement and this wonderful city, has joined us in the gallery tonight.

I thank my partner, Kristian, who is my plimsoll line. He has been my life companion for the past 19 years. We declined to have our wedding recognised in law. One day, when the institution of marriage is no longer tainted by discrimination, we will get legally married; until then, we will continue to live in sin. To those who have been part of the progressive movements for social change, in my social circles, study, work and friendship circles, thank you. This year is the Anzac centenary. As such, it is worth noting that Frank Burke, the member for Newtown in 1917, was president of the Anti-conscription Council before being elected. The electorate of Newtown has a radical past that is still evident today. Lillian Fowler, the last member for Newtown in this place, began her inaugural speech to this Chamber in September 1944 by stating:

I have always thought that government meant action by elected representatives and the formulation of ideals for the benefit of people. My ideal government would frown on anything not to the ultimate good of all.

The main issues on her agenda at that time were proposed changes to electricity delivery, local government amalgamations—which she posited were motivated by the Government's desire to seek electoral benefits— along with housing, rents and accessible public

transport. It seems that some things will always stay the same. Our community and our neighbourhoods are no strangers to collective action. We have a long and proud history of standing up against injustice, overdevelopment, evictions from public housing, the sell-off of public assets and cuts to public services.

We have proudly contributed to campaigns to save Tasmania's forests and rivers and to stand up for refugee rights. We are some of the most progressive peoples in this State—indeed, in this country—and the common beliefs and values that we share and that define us run deep. We are committed to grassroots democracy, to social equality and economic justice, to environmental sustainability and to peace and non-violence. We have a radical past. We are a strong community, and we know how to activate, organise and campaign to win.

Given this, it seems only appropriate for me to advise those planning to build WestConnex or overdevelop around Petersham Park, those who intend to sell off the Australian Technology Park site or fill the Central to Eveleigh corridor with unsustainable, unaffordable housing, or those who seek to ignore the imperative for Aboriginal housing on The Block to factor in the radical history of Newtown before they act. Also, it seems appropriate for me to encourage any potential investors in WestConnex to look closely at the resolve of the good people of Newtown when preparing to borrow or to lend to this unwanted and unwarranted project.

Even though I did not grow up in a political family, it is clear that my values and beliefs have shaped my political and professional life. As a teenager, I used to get told off a lot by my dad if I asked to use the phone—not because I was not allowed but because the phone was as much mine as his or mum's. You see, in our house we were all equals. What was good for the adults was good for the kids. I am so pleased that my mum, Jan, and my dad, Chris, and my wonderful sister, Tessa, can be here with us today. They were and are my immediate biological family—but our sense of family was always bigger than the four of us. My "blonde sisters", as we call them—the three daughters of my mum's closest friend and my godmother, Libby, who passed away almost 14 years ago, when her daughters Jessica, Sarah and Carlie were just teenagers—moved in to our family home and became part of our family. Our close family friends also became part of our family. The time spent at the incredible Aldinga Beach on summer holidays with the Atkinses, Delaneys and other close friends are some of my fondest memories.

Aldinga Beach in South Australia is perhaps the first place where I came to recognise the immense beauty of our natural environment and the powerful soothing and calming effect it can have on the madness of our world. The importance of family and friends as a collective support and shared responsibility for each other was something that was evident in my dad's upbringing and in my mother's actions. Chris Leong was the youngest of seven brothers and sisters. His family lived in Malaysia and, as the youngest, he was given the opportunity to study in Australia—something made possible only as a result of his older brothers and sisters working to support him studying here. Jan Leong, my mum, looked after all of us forever without praise, and she still does. So it is no surprise that I have a very strong respect for the positive influences of loving families, of whatever shape or size they come in, and it is in that vein I also acknowledge Ros, who is here representing Kristian's Tassie side of the family.

The municipality of Newtown took its name from a weatherboard store called New Town Store. This store was located on the corner of King Street and Eliza Street, where the old Oxford Hotel used to sit. It was at the Oxford Hotel at the age of 19 while living in a share house on Abercrombie Street that I first started to connect with the leftie, radical, creative, intellectual types of Newtown. After I finished working at David Thompson's Sailors Thai restaurant in The Rocks, we would jump in a cab to the Oxford. If you were to peer back in time into the depths of the downstairs bar, you might spy me standing on the sticky carpet—shaved head, leather pants, playing pool, and singing along with a sense of earnestness each time Portishead's *Glory Box* or Nirvana's *Smells Like Teen Spirit* came on the jukebox.

Newtown—and the people I met when I moved there—made me an activist. Or at least if I was an activist before—and I am pretty sure I showed signs of it from an early age—it was the people I met when I moved to Newtown who taught me what an activist was. Since then, besides a stint working for Amnesty International in London and in Hong Kong, the area covered by the electorate of Newtown has been where I have lived. It has been where I have worked and socialised. It is my hood—and I love it. I studied at Sydney university—campaigning against Howard's voluntary student unionism—worked in restaurants in Surry Hills, had connections with theatres and artist spaces, joined actions against sniffer dogs and reclaimed the streets. And like so many who live in the electorate of Newtown, I know what it is like to deal with dodgy landlords and live with the threat of rent increases and insecurity—something I am keen to push back against hard while I am in this place.

I have lived with the uncertainty of casual work and at different times I have relied on my union—the Australian Services Union [ASU]—to help with threats to my rights at work while acting as a delegate for them to help with the rights at work of others. I watched the growing number of people sleeping rough on our streets and tried to help others as they struggled on the stairs at inaccessible stations. I have enjoyed many a night out in the wonderful vibrant venues that fill the electorate of Newtown. The people who live in the electorate of Newtown are welcoming of difference and diversity, so it is perhaps not surprising that many come to Newtown to feel accepted, or to have their diversity celebrated even if they do not live here.

After a gap of 65 years, the electorate of Newtown once again has a member in this place. We might be the smallest electorate in

the State but our vision for how we want to reshape politics is significant. While it is factually correct that the census ranks us the highest of any electorate in New South Wales that identifies as "no religion", do not be fooled into thinking that we do not share strong common values and beliefs. Perhaps one of the most defining things about The Greens, and by extension those who support them, is the basis on which are made—not on short-sighted, self-serving electoral cycles but on long-term visions.

To the children of the electorate of Newtown who enjoy our playgrounds, pocket parks and the magic yellow bus, and particularly to the mini-ones of my closest friends and comrades—Evie, Flo, Eliza, Beatrix and Seamus—know that in this place, in the decisions that we make I will have an eye to your future and the generations to follow. The same goes for the young people living in our wonderful city, including my stepson, Eamonn, who has spent time on and off in this part of the world since we first met on Ivy Street when he was just four.

It was the fearless Burmese democracy champion Aung San Suu Kyi who said, "It is not power that corrupts but fear. Fear of losing power corrupts those who wield it". It is clear that for too long, under successive governments in New South Wales, the priorities have been wrong. If the community interest—the good of the people and the planet—were at the heart of the decisions made in this place, then we would see an end to the violence against women; recognising that, just like poverty, it is not inevitable. We would see investment in safe, secure, affordable housing.

Animals and our natural environment would be protected. We would invest in public education—a proven way to address inequality. Abortion would be removed from the Crimes Act, and we would take a harm minimisation approach to drugs and alcohol rather than a "tough on law and order" approach. The rights of workers would be protected, including their right to organise and to strike, as would be the right of activists and residents to protest, without fear of police brutality or intimidation. We would accept our global responsibility to transition this State to 100 per cent renewable energy and we would establish a human rights Act for New South Wales. This is not my agenda. It is our agenda.

If I were standing here alone, starting from scratch, it would be hard even to know where to begin. But I am not standing here alone and I am not starting from scratch. As the member for Newtown I am simply adding one more voice and one more body to the movement for social change and environmental protection. I am joined in this place by two other Greens colleagues and five more who are working to advance the same progressive agenda in the other place. Jamie Parker—the vanguard for The Greens in this place—serves to represent the people of Balmain with integrity, commitment and compassion. Jamie, your ability to live The Greens principles and practice in our policies by how you serve as a local member will be an inspiration to how I seek to represent the people of Newtown.

Tamara Smith is the new member for Ballina—what a pleasure it is to have not achieved the goal of being the first female member of The Greens in this place! Because of that, we are both here. To our upper House colleagues, whom I have known and been inspired by for many years, thank you—Jan, Mehreen, John, David and Jeremy. I look forward to working with you. Thank you to our Federal colleagues led by Christine and Adam, including the dedicated and tireless activist, Senator Lee Rhiannon. I am so pleased that you are here in the gallery tonight. But, more importantly, we are backed up by you: the members and supporters of The Greens and the people in Newtown, in New South Wales and beyond, who do not want to accept that things have to be this way. Lee Rhiannon said in her inaugural speech to the Federal Parliament:

History demonstrates that while parliaments make the laws, people are the driving force for social change ... one of the great strengths of the Greens is our constructive parliamentary work, combined with our commitment to amplify in this place the voice of progressive people's movements.

Tonight I stand here in this place having gained almost 46 per cent of the primary vote, the highest Greens vote in the country—at least for now. This result was achieved by an incredible campaign run by the amazing Emma Bacon. But this achievement is not just one by or for the people in the electorate of Newtown. The fact that I am standing here today is a testament and tribute to the past collective struggles that have been fought. It is pretty unusual for someone like me to be standing in this place. I have been a feminist for many decades, but like William Yang—the Sydney-based artist—says, I did not come out as a Chinese Australian until later in life. As a teenager, like many others, I wanted to fit in; I did not want to be different. So much so that I researched eyelid surgery that I heard was possible to make you look more western. When I was asked, "Where are you from?"—something that still happens today, which I now handle very differently—I would get a knot in my stomach and clench; I would feel as though I did not belong in my own country and I would say defensively, "Adelaide".

I am now proud to be able to share my cultural heritage and my background. I would like to thank those from the Chinese community who have been welcoming to an "ABC" like me—particularly Daphne Lowe-Kelly who is in the gallery tonight. It seems both that the glass and the bamboo ceilings have cracks, and that is surely a good thing. But it is crucial that lawmakers do not add to the barriers that people face to equal participation in our society. It is pretty clear that simply trusting the government of the day to do the right thing is not going to be enough. Slippery words and excuses that continue to allow human rights to be violated are a

tacit endorsement of racism, sexism and discrimination.

During my time in this place, I look forward to working collaboratively with others—in the Parliament and on the streets. It is the only way that we will ever achieve change. While I am here I will work every day to put an end once and for all to discrimination entrenched in our laws, to ensure the enforceable protection of human rights and our environment, to stop public money being wasted on polluting tollways and put towards ending inequality and injustice so that all the lefties, radicals, feminists, unionists, activists, human rights defenders, environmentalists and all those who are part of our compassionate and progressive communities—past, present and future—are here with me in this place. Thank you.