



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 5 May 2015.

The SPEAKER: I acknowledge the presence of New South Wales Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Social Services, Mr Craig Kelly, MP, Federal member for Hughes. I also extend a warm welcome to Dr Stavros Kyrimis, Consul General of Greece. I welcome all the family, friends and supporters of the new member for Miranda to the Legislative Assembly.

Ms ELENI PETINOS (Miranda) [5.32 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech):

How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world,
That has such people in't!

Albeit seemingly far removed, this extract from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* goes to the namesake of my electorate. With the opening of the Crown land sales in the shire from 1856, Thomas Holt invested in a large way, purchasing some 12,000 acres stretching from Sutherland to Cronulla. In a 1921 letter, James Murphy said:

The name Miranda was given to the locality by me as manager of the Holt Sutherland Company which I formed in 1881. I thought it a soft, euphonious, musical and appropriate name for a beautiful place.

Today, Miranda's northern boundary is defined by the southern shore of the Georges River from Alford's Point in the west to Taren Point in the east. The southern boundary of Miranda is generally north of President Avenue between Kirrawee and Caringbah, therefore boasting an abundance of rivers, parks and bushland. The proximity to beaches and the Royal National Park in the adjoining shire electorates ensures that Miranda, and our shire, is truly a lifestyle choice for its residents. Despite the undoubted natural aesthetic of Miranda, it is not only the physical attributes of the electorate that characterise it as beautiful. Shakespeare's character delights at the wonder of people, a sentiment that I share towards my new constituents and our local community.

Madam Speaker, as I stand here today in this place as a proud Conservative, a Christian, before this historic institution, I say thank you to the people of Miranda for your support. I am deeply humbled and honoured to be afforded the privilege of representing the community in which I have been raised. I will work tirelessly to fight for you and for our electorate, and I promise that I will never take you for granted.

To my predecessor, Barry Collier, I sincerely thank you for the 13 years you committed to public life for our community. I wish you and your family well in your future endeavours. I take this opportunity to acknowledge the popularity of our Premier and thank him for his support. Dare I say that, as the former Federal member for Cook, his father, Bruce Baird, is slightly more popular in my electorate. Either way, I would welcome you both to visit Miranda at every opportunity.

There is one local issue that has outlived the tenure of any politician—that is, the overwhelming support for an F6 motorway. For too long, shire residents have endured congested local roads as an unavoidable part of their daily routine. The only way to truly ease congestion is to get through traffic off our local roads and onto a new motorway across the shire to complete the missing link between Sydney and the Illawarra. I eagerly await the outcome of the \$11 million feasibility study, and will advocate for our community to ensure that this vital piece of infrastructure is finally delivered to our shire.

As a result of the shire's ageing population and its young families, access to quality healthcare is paramount. I am proud to have been part of the team that recognised the need to bolster local health services and invested in our hospitals. Early works are underway for upgrades to St George Hospital at a cost of more than \$300 million and the \$60 million upgrade to Sutherland Hospital. This is a significant win for my electorate and for adjoining ones, reinforcing once again that the Baird Government is delivering where it counts most.

It is bad government to be reactionary and to merely throw money at the problems. With an active lifestyle being embedded in the shire's culture, I am concerned about the increase in childhood obesity across the State. We need to give our children the right tools from a young age to keep them out of the health system. A comprehensive program of exercise and nutritional diet across our school system needs to be assessed with a useful medical index to ensure that we are moving in the right direction. The National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy [NAPLAN] is designed to test the scholastic skill set amongst students. Surely the

time has come to balance this with an assessment of our children's overall physical health.

Consistent with our enviable lifestyle in the shire, I take this opportunity to commend the Sutherland Shire Council, local sporting clubs and private operators who have delivered magnificent synthetic sporting fields aimed at maximizing better health outcomes and significantly improving accessibility for numerous sporting codes. This is another practical way of delivering improved amenities to meet a growing demand whilst promoting active participation. The final report of the New South Wales Independent Local Government Review Panel recommended that Sutherland Shire Council should stand alone, but the same cannot be said for many smaller metropolitan councils. I urge these councils to seize the moment to amalgamate and enhance their long-term viability.

Foundations, both past and present, intrinsically inform ideology. It is my values that shape the way in which I will represent Miranda and our State. The first value is cultural. It is steeped in the sacrifice and history of my family. My maternal grandfather, Nicholas, boarded a ship in Greece and docked in Melbourne in 1955. He came to Australia in search of a better life with a single suitcase to his name. It was two years later that he waited patiently at the port in Sydney, only a photograph in hand, searching for his soon to be wife, Chrisoula. Together they settled in Surry Hills and had three children; my mother Marianna being the middle child.

My paternal family's journey to Australia commenced in 1961 when my father, Alexander, then 6, came to Sydney with his parents, Aaron and Helen, and his two younger siblings. They too came by ship to their new home, which brought hope for a fresh start and new opportunities. Settling in Surry Hills, they shared a single terrace house with two other families. Eventually they moved to our shire, living in the same premises as the fish shop they ran at Sylvania and my father attending Gynea Technology High School.

At the core of both families was a tireless work ethic. Both grandfathers worked during the day, with my grandmothers choosing shifts of an evening to ensure that the children always had a parent present. Like so many other Greek migrants, they found labour-intensive work as an excavator and seamstress in the case of my paternal grandparents whilst my maternal grandparents were factory workers. Both families had humble roots and a modest lifestyle. They lived within their means. They did not jump the queue. They did not ask for handouts or have an entitlement mentality. They celebrated their Greek heritage, but not to the detriment of mainstream Australian values. The Australian dream materialised, and they eventually achieved home ownership and education for their children. Australia changed the course of their lives and, like many migrants, they enhanced the rich tapestry of our society.

Today, more than 40 per cent of Australians were born overseas or have at least one parent who was. This is our multicultural reality. Significantly, the historic ties between Australia and Greece remain and are celebrated. On 24 April 2015 we commemorated 100 years since the Anzacs left Mudros Harbour in Lemnos for the Gallipoli landings. During World War II thousands of wounded were brought to the hospitals on Lemnos. As an Australian of Greek heritage, I am proud of the role that the island my family descended from played in our Anzac story and acknowledge the almost 1,300 Allied soldiers who lay at rest within its military cemeteries. I am thankful for the foresight of my family. Without their sacrifice I would not be in this place and I am immensely pleased that I have my two grandmothers, my parents and my siblings here with me this evening.

My second value is individual freedom. It is steeped in my party. For 37 years my father has been in small business as a chiropractor. I spent my childhood admiring that my father was a successful business owner, understanding the responsibility, red tape and regulatory burden that came with it. It is this experience that showed me from an early age that government should not stifle free enterprise. As the founding father of our party, Sir Robert Menzies, said:

... any business should be open to all. This [is the] system we wish to protect.

Privately imposed restraints which ... submit the small trader to oppressive limitations should be eliminated.

Small business is a vital part of our local and New South Wales economy. There are 680,000 small businesses in New South Wales, comprising 96 per cent of all New South Wales businesses. In the Sutherland shire local government area there are 20,455 small businesses, which make up 96.7 per cent of the total businesses in this area. With half our workforce in New South Wales employed by small business, it is incumbent on government to encourage growth and yet our State operates within the confines of an archaic regime of penalty rates that stifles that exact growth and discourages business owners from keeping their doors open on weekends and in the evening.

There are several industries that rely on the hard work and creativity of individuals. Hospitality is but one industry that cannot survive without this human element. We want to encourage tourism to Sydney and promote it as a vibrant and global destination, and yet we cannot expect small businesses to operate with flexibility under the stringent confines of penalty rates and government levies that compromise our competitiveness. Clearly this will require Federal and State cooperation. Tax reform goes to the heart of my belief in small government. The individual is best placed to determine where they should spend their money, not government. It is generally incumbent upon us to reduce taxes and encourage economic growth. Because a strong civil society hinges on a strong economy, we should encourage the aspirations of the individual to grow so that we can dedicate more resources to those who truly

are unable to look after themselves through no fault of their own.

Comprehensive tax reform linked with expenditure restraint could help rebuild budget resilience at both State and Commonwealth levels, and increase the financial independence of the States. There also could be a gain in economic growth from changes to the tax landscape if Australia relied more on consumption (GST) and less on corporate and personal taxes, stamp duty, taxation of insurance and payroll taxes in their current form. This was the revolutionary objective of John Howard and Peter Costello. Currently a housing boom is boosting our coffers, but as we saw in Western Australia with its mining boom, nothing lasts forever. We need a comprehensive shake-up to shift the current tax burden, lift economic growth, productivity, and provide room to boost participation on a sustainable basis. If New Zealand can achieve this, why can't we?

The third value is merit. It is steeped in the core traditions of liberalism. My gender is very unremarkable. It is the same as 50 per cent of the population and yet all too often it seems to be the quality used to define or characterise me. The political gender debate centres on whether women need more assistance to seek public office, implicitly requiring special treatment above their male counterparts to overcome a disadvantage. I have always violently objected to the proposition that I need to be propped up and am capable of attaining only a tokenistic position. I believe in a system based on merit. I believe in choosing the best person for the job. Accordingly, quotas have no role to play in determining the best candidate for the role. They stifle and eliminate competition and promote not the best but the best-gendered candidate.

Quotas address the objective without tackling the steps necessary to achieve it. Certainly female participation in politics is important, but this should be achieved through mentoring the right candidates. It was 10 years ago to this day that my mentor and former employer, Senator the Hon. Fierravanti-Wells, was chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales to fill a casual vacancy and represent our great State in the Senate. I am incredibly fortunate to have the benefit of her wisdom and guidance, and I acknowledge and thank her for her presence in this place today.

As I am the only new Liberal female to enter this Fifty-sixth Parliament, clearly we do need to do more. Whilst I have been vocal in my disapproval of quotas, an aspirational target for women at least stimulates thought, discussion and movement on the issue. If we are serious about seeing a change in our Parliament, it is time to embrace renewal in our party. By empowering each party member with a vote, greater diversity of opinion is considered when selecting the best candidate for the seat. That is why I support the proposed Howard reform model for the New South Wales division of the Liberal Party and encourage party reform to be at the forefront of our agenda moving forward. Similar to targets set for government board positions, I would also advocate that the New South Wales Division of the Liberal Party set an initial aspirational target of 30 per cent female member of Parliament representation following the 2019 State election.

It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the people who have assisted me on my journey to Parliament. Through the tumultuous rollercoaster of the past few months my parents, Alexander and Marianna, my grandparents, Helen and Chrisoula, and siblings, Christie and Aaron, provided the emotional support and physical manpower to persevere. I also acknowledge Nick Gavrinotis, Susie Ganis, Joe Agadakos, Bill and Penny Petinos, Denise Kalls, Riad and Roula Sfeir, and the Petridis and Gavrinotis families for their contributions. It has been said to me that there are no friends in politics. I respectfully disagree. This journey would not have been possible without the guidance and encouragement of the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, MLC, Richard Shields, and the member for Wollondilly and my friend Jai Rowell, together with my amazing campaign manager, Chris Rath, and deputy campaign manager, Nathaniel Openshaw.

I similarly extend my thanks for the fantastic help received from the Young Liberals who tirelessly assisted me during the campaign. Additionally, I particularly single out and acknowledge the unwavering support of the former vice-president of the New South Wales division, Peter Poulos. Peter is one of the best strategic thinkers and campaigners in our party. Numerous candidates across all tiers of government have successfully benefited from his wisdom and special talents. I, too, am one of them and I remain forever thankful. Returning a blue tide in the shire required a concordant of cooperation amongst elected Liberals.

In this respect, I particularly thank the Hon. Scott Morrison, MP, for his leadership, and Craig Kelly, MP, along with my State colleagues the Hon. Mark Speakman, Lee Evans and Melanie Gibbons. I thank the member for Holsworthy for encouraging me at every opportunity. Under the direction of Mayor Kent Johns and Deputy Mayor Carmello Pesce, I acknowledge the fantastic efforts of the Sutherland Shire Council team, most notably Hassan Awada, Tom Croucher and Tracy Cook. Your collective efforts are not forgotten.

To the members of the Liberal Party and others who have supported me, and without whom I would not be here, namely, the State director, Tony Nutt, State president Chris Downy, Emeritus Lord Mayor John Chedid and his team, Ann and Mervyn Youl, Justin Owen, Renate Britton, Mary-Lou Jarvis, Will Nemesh and Matt Cross; to all the members of the Miranda conference, headed up by the very dedicated president, Andrew Monsif, Marie Ficarra, Magdi and Mona Mikhail, John and Monica Tawadros, Paul Parris, Elias and Eleftheria Sioutas, Constantine and Vasiliki Sdrodiliias, Mike Sheedy, Matthew Wallis, Justin and Louise De Domenico, as well as shire locals Glenn Gorrick, Scott Chapman, Diane McInerney, Lorraine Johnson and Paul Signorelli, I extend my thanks and

appreciation.

As Odysseus skilfully navigated his ship past the dangers of Scylla, I too am embarking on my own political odyssey supported by my staff. There are certain risks and some of us may not complete the journey together. But ultimately what matters most is that you chart a course and remain steadfast in your pursuit of reform, your values and doing what you know is right. I will live by this creed in the service of my party, the Miranda electorate and the great State of New South Wales.