



Inaugural Speeches

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The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! On behalf of the new member for The Entrance, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery this morning of Senator for New South Wales Deborah O'Neill; former member for Dobell Michael Lee; former member for Gosford Marie Andrews; former Building Workers Industrial Union of Australia [BWIU] secretary Tom McDonald; former Pastrycooks Union secretary Bob Singh; and local government representatives, family, friends and supporters of the new member. I welcome you to the Legislative Assembly today.

Mr DAVID MEHAN (The Entrance) [10.30 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Mr Deputy-Speaker, I congratulate you on attaining the office of Deputy-Speaker in this Parliament. Twenty-three years ago, in 1992, I had recently moved to the New South Wales Central Coast. In that year I worked on my first Central Coast campaign for the Australian Labor Party. It was a by-election for The Entrance electoral district. The seat was then held by the Liberal Party for the Greiner Government.

At that by-election, Labor's Grant McBride achieved a historic victory over his opponent. The result of that by-election represented a rejection of Greinerism and the dry heartless economics that that government practised. Grant McBride went on to serve The Entrance electorate for 19 years before retiring at the 2011 election—an election which saw the Liberal Party return to The Entrance. At the 28 March election held this year the people of The Entrance voted once more against privatisation. They voted against changes to our TAFE system and they voted to return to The Entrance electorate the Australian Labor Party. I am very proud to have been elected by the people of the Central Coast in The Entrance electorate and to be sent to this House to represent them.

I also am mindful that I am in this place as a member of the Australian Labor Party, the oldest political party in this country—formed in 1891, in this State, by resolution of the New South Wales Trades and Labor Council. At an election held in that year, 35 Labor men were sent by the people of New South Wales to this House. One of them, James McGowen, was elected as their spokesperson. During a debate in this House on tariffs he sought to explain the new political force that had come upon the scene in New South Wales that would change forever politics in this land. He said to his opponents, "The Labor Party are ... state socialists ... more or less." He went on to explain what this meant using words that are as relevant today as they were 125 years ago:

The whole object of the Labor Party is for democratic legislation in the interests of the people. We believe almost to a man in these lines of the English writer Landor: Every government should provide for every subject the means of living honestly and at ease. We should bring out of every man as much utility as we can.

Those words are as good a guide as any to Labor's roles and politics. It is a rejection of the Liberal notion of economic freedom. It is as concerned with social and economic outcomes as it is with opportunity. It is a call for government engagement, not withdrawal from public life. It is this view of the world that guided Labor in the years that followed. It is this view of the world which has elevated the idea of fairness to the central place it has in this country today. And it is this view of the world which has led, slowly and by stages, to what is often referred to as the welfare state in this country.

I am a product of the Australian welfare state and the Labor movement that helped create it. It was public school teachers at the Whitebridge High School who first put the idea in my head that I might be able to obtain a university education. It was free tuition received at the Newcastle university that gave me the professional qualifications in geology which are the basis of my ability to obtain work. And it was the income support I received from the State that allowed me to sustain myself during that period.

Growing up in Newcastle, I could not help but absorb a fondness for the labour movement and the part it played in my life. My father, Ray Mehan, is here today. He is a musician who plays drums and he played in bands every Saturday night. Most musicians in Newcastle also were members of the Musicians Union. The union would tour local schools to show students the different instruments they played. When they visited my school, Kahibah Public School, I recall the local union president, after he learned I was Ray Mehan's son, declare to the class that my father was the best jazz drummer in Newcastle. It made me very proud indeed.

Growing up in Newcastle, I also absorbed some of the anxieties and fears that swept our town as a result of the mass redundancies that occurred in the early 1980s as the steel industry closed, industrial production declined and unemployment and under-employment became a permanent feature in many people's lives, including some in my family. After retiring from the workforce my

mother, Beverley Temple, who is also here today, told me that the age pension now provides her with a higher and more regular income than the casual wages she earned as a club worker.

After I finished my professional studies I obtained work as an engineering geologist, working mainly in Sydney but also in Newcastle after the 1989 earthquake. At that time, I appreciated the opportunity I had to return home as part of the recovery effort to help people deal with insurance companies and builders to ensure their homes were properly repaired and not just hastily patched together. By that time I had joined the Labor Party in 1989, and I was active in my union, the Association of Professional Engineers, Scientists and Managers Australia. A growing interest in industrial relations led to a role as training officer and then an official role with the National Union of Workers [NUW], New South Wales branch. The NUW gave me the opportunity to represent working people on the Central Coast.

My fondest achievement during that period was negotiation of equal pay for female workers at the Nana's Apple Pie factory. At that time—and this was only in the late 1990s—Nana's was owned by the American multinational Simplot. The membership and I were genuinely surprised at the resistance shown to our reasonable claim. We prevailed only after industrial action and with the assistance of the New South Wales Industrial Relations Commission, but prevail we did. It confirmed for me the need to have a strong and regulated industrial relations system to ensure fairness in our workplaces.

It was also during that time that I, along with Brad Stewart of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union [AMWU] and Rod Jarman of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union [CFMEU], rebuilt the Central Coast Trades and Labour Council—a group that went on to coordinate the campaign against the Howard Government's WorkChoices legislation in the lead-up to the 2007 Federal election. The Central Coast region comprises the local government areas of Wyong shire and Gosford city councils. It is located between the Hawkesbury River to its south and Lake Macquarie to its north. The original owners of the land are the Darkinjung peoples, and I want to pay my respects to those peoples and their elders here today. I also want to acknowledge the traditional owners of this place, the Gadigal people.

Five electoral districts are located wholly or partly within the Central Coast region: Gosford and Terrigal to the south, my own electorate of The Entrance at its centre, and Wyong together with parts of Swansea to its north. The Entrance electorate is defined by its geography which has created a number of distinct communities, each with its own character and, more importantly, its own needs. It is a marvellous place to live. We have a coastal strip, our own national park, the Tuggerah Lakes and a very pretty university campus. It has many of the benefits of a large city while retaining a relaxed country lifestyle. The Entrance electorate and the wider Central Coast has, politically, always been contested ground.

The Entrance electorate has only existed since 1988 and since then has been represented by four different members from both major parties. It is incorrect to say, as the first member for The Entrance did, that "the Central Coast has always been looked upon as a Labor stronghold". Let us be clear: Before 1962 the Central Coast was conservative territory. But in that year, Ray Septimus Maher, who was also Speaker of this House, won the newly created seat of Wyong for Labor. Steady population growth on the coast saw the boundaries of coast seats change regularly, as did the party holding those seats.

By 1988 continued strong population growth saw the creation of my own seat of The Entrance. At the election held that year, Bob Graham won the seat for the Liberal Party and became the first member for The Entrance. Bob Graham held The Entrance electorate for one term before his defeat at a by-election ordered by the Court of Disputed Returns in 1992. He went on to have a successful and continuing political career in local government as an Independent councillor on Wyong Shire Council. He has served as mayor and he remains a respected and dedicated worker for the community. In his inaugural speech in the place he said some fine things about his then Liberal Party colleagues. I spoke to him about these comments when preparing for today and I can assure this House and honourable members opposite that he has certainly changed his mind.

I have already touched on the 1992 by-election. It was indeed an historic moment. The election of Labor's Grant McBride signalled the resurgence of Labor in New South Wales under Bob Carr. Grant's place in Labor history is assured and it is right that he was referred to by Bob Carr as "McBride the magnificent". In 2011 Labor was swept from all of the Central Coast seats it held. In The Entrance electorate Grant McBride had decided to retire and I was selected by the party rank and file as Labor's candidate. It was a brutal experience. The Liberal win was comprehensive, and the Liberal Party's Chris Spence was elected the third member for The Entrance. Chris decided to retire from the seat following allegations made before an Independent Commission Against Corruption inquiry. The impact of such things always falls heavily onto the family of elected representative and, for this reason, I wish Chris and his family all the very best.

Labor has always performed best when it holds regional seats. Mindful of our history, Labor approached the 2015 State election campaign on the Central Coast firmly resolved to fight as a team with the best interests of our region our first priority. This approach worked. Labor recovered all four Central Coast seats lost at the 2011 election. My Labor colleagues on the coast, Kathy Smith in Gosford, David Harris in Wyong and Yasmin Catley in Swansea, are determined to hold these regional seats for Labor as our contribution to the next Labor government in New South Wales.

I wish the new Liberal member for Terrigal, Adam Crouch, all the very best. While our political views are irreconcilable, Adam, I do commit to work with you in the interests of the people of the Central Coast. I also acknowledge the campaign run by our candidate for Terrigal, Jeff Sundstrom. He ran a fine campaign and gave Adam a real fight.

Since 2005, and on my application to the New South Wales Geographic Names Board, the Central Coast has been officially recognised as a region in its own right. This has allowed us to measure progress on the coast against other parts of New South Wales. It has strengthened and confirmed our regional identity. It has also highlighted areas that we desperately need to address. Our region continues to have an unemployment rate above the State average. Unfortunately, unemployment on the coast has increased since 2011.

Jobs in TAFE and WorkCover have been made redundant or moved to Sydney and Kellogg's has closed its Charmhaven factory and Blue Tongue Brewery its Warnervale plant. Wyong Council and Corrective Services have announced further job losses. There has been little good news over the last four years. But it need not be this way. The Wran Government showed what an activist approach to job creation on the Central Coast could do when it established an office of the planning department on the coast and built the infrastructure and industrial land needed to make the first serious reductions in unemployment seen in our area. The past four years have shown that we need more, not less, government engagement to generate jobs on the coast.

A lack of affordable housing is a growing problem on the Central Coast. The demand for homes which has spilled over from the Sydney region has forced the price of local houses to unprecedented levels and reduced the pool of available rental accommodation. An unofficial auction system has developed where prospective tenants are asked to pay rent in advance, meaning low-income earners are consistently outbid. An abundance of tenants means that an increasing number of landlords are declining to make reasonable repairs, safe in the knowledge that another tenant is never too far away.

Tenants on the coast have been ably represented by the Central Coast Tenants Advice and Advocacy Service [CCTAAS]; its staff are here today. For the past 10 years I have served on the management committee of the service and I want to acknowledge the good work done by our staff for the people of the Central Coast. This House must do more to address the need for more and better affordable housing in this State. The rights of tenants can be improved and I look forward to working with tenants advocacy services to improve tenants' rights, including addressing the issue of tenant databases, which in a tight rental market are being misused by the rental industry.

Last week I had the opportunity to meet with representatives of the Retirement Village Residents Association [RVRA]. The growth of the retirement accommodation industry is a feature of the Central Coast. In an effort to bring about fairness to the industry, the former Labor Government introduced the Retirement Villages Act 1999. Residents are seeking a review of the Act and its regulations to improve the rights of residents, and I look forward to working with them for a just outcome.

The campaign to win my place in this House has been supported by all the elements of the labour and progressive movement and many people of goodwill across the Central Coast. The three great Labor Party branches of my electorate have been the foundation of that success. By way of thanks, I want to acknowledge each branch and every branch member. Thank you. My own branch, the Ourimbah-Narara Valley Branch led by its president, Anne Sullivan, has been my home for over 20 years. The Tumby Umbi Branch, led by its president Bill Thompson, has always welcomed me to its meetings. Its growth over the past two years has been an example to us all. And lastly, The Entrance Day Branch, led by its indefatigable president Isobel Lowe, is the home of our veteran members.

These branches made a conscious decision following our defeat four years ago to immediately begin the work of rebuilding and readying ourselves for the 2015 contest. Working together, we coordinate our efforts through our State Electoral Council [SEC]. I pay particular thanks to the delegates and office bearers of my Executive SEC who have held our local party machine together. I make special mention of Des Moore, SEC president, and Kyle MacGregor, SEC secretary, during that period.

Our local branches have been well supported by the upper House parliamentary representatives allocated to the Central Coast. New South Wales Legislative Council member Greg Donnelly has attended so well to his Central Coast responsibilities that he is now considered something of a local. The office of Senator O'Neill has been a source of great strength for Labor on the Central Coast and it is a credit to party General Secretary Jamie Clements for allocating such a hardworking Labor woman to the Central Coast. I acknowledge also the role played by Kaila Murnain and Michael Buckland for their efforts coordinating our campaign across the Central Coast.

Parties have their own internal politics and processes. I have been fortunate to have had a number of close supporters and advisers at important moments during my career in the party. I mention a couple of them today, but by no means all of them. Tony Sheridan will long be remembered as one of the great Labor mayors; Vicki Scott, my dear friend and the most progressive councillor on the Central Coast; Kay Hawkins, a dear friend and former secretary of The Entrance Day Branch; and Maurie Lynch, my dear comrade,

former Building Workers Industrial Union official and president of The Entrance Day Branch.

The role played by Central Coast Young Labor was critical to our ground campaign. I have been well served by this group of idealistic young men and women who walked hundreds of kilometres with me during the campaign to help me knock on the doors of more than 20,000 homes. I record my appreciation for their work and thank Liam O'Callaghan, Shane Gillard, Andrew Glassock, Zac Harrison and Adam Hart for their efforts. They were helped also by Tony Grant and his masterful guerrilla poster campaign.

This fantastic ground campaign required coordination and leadership and here I was ably served by Peter Duggan. Peter is a graduate of one of our local public schools, Lisarow High School. I am fortunate to now have him on my staff. Rounding out the ground campaign was Marc Pooley. Marc has faithfully served the party and me for many years and he, too, has joined my staff. An office needs an expert administrator and I am well served by Catherine Wall who learnt her trade in the office of the former member for Gosford Marie Andrews. She has already established a fantastic office from which I can work. The success of my campaign relied on the goodwill of many people outside the Labor Party who have progressive views. Many helped but I mention two: Audrey and Tom McDonald, who are here today. They have been good friends and advisors for many years.

The union movement made a huge effort on the Central Coast during the election. Its opposition to the Government's plans to privatise, contract out and cut essential services greatly assisted me. I acknowledge the role played by Central Coast Community Union Alliance and my old friends at Central Coast Unions, particularly its secretary Debbie Westacott, Salim Barbar, and the many union members who door knocked in the electorate. Many of these are members of the Electrical Trades Union. I acknowledge also the work of the Lister boys, Paul and Ben, for their efforts on the Central Coast.

I am a member of the National Union of Workers [NUW], which was formed in 1907 by warehouse workers in the nearby suburb of Pyrmont. I reserve a special acknowledgement for that union and the support it has given me within the party and during the campaign. The NUW has a strong tradition of demanding dignity for labour and the right to be heard by their employers. Its secretary, Derrick Belan, has continued the great traditions of that union today. I wish him and its members all the very best.

None of us in this place could pursue our role without family. It is a great comfort to have here today my mother and father who have travelled from Newcastle. But it is a special comfort to have my sons Tom and Charlie here to witness this event. My youngest child and most enthusiastic campaigner, Lily, could not make the trip. Her brothers should tell her that I miss her very much. My dear friend and partner Deanne McIntosh could also not be here today but she attended my swearing-in on Tuesday, and that was a very special moment.

I am eager to get to work for the people of The Entrance. I want to make The Entrance a better place to live, work and raise a family. But this will not happen without a conscious effort by the State to plan and build a community that will provide for all its citizens in the best traditions of the Labor Party. I thank honourable members, particularly those opposite, for the courtesy they have extended to me today to deliver my first speech. I also thank the office of the Deputy-Speaker and the parliamentary staff for welcoming me to this House. I look forward to working with you all for the progress of this State and the people of New South Wales.