
INAUGURAL SPEECHES

The PRESIDENT: I ask members to extend the usual courtesy to all members giving their inaugural speeches this evening. Before calling the Hon. Damien Tudehope, I welcome into my gallery members of his family, including his wife, Diane; their children, Patrick, Monica, John, Madeleine, Anna, Lucy and James; and their baby granddaughter, Lily.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE (Minister for Finance and Small Business) (17:18): I commence by saying I do not know where my wife is—I am sure she is coming—but my seven-month-old granddaughter is going to have a very serious operation tomorrow and I dedicate this speech to her. I thank my wife, Diane, who is somewhere, and the members of my family who have come here today, and all those people who are here who have supported me throughout my parliamentary career. There are too many of them to name, but they can be assured that they have my gratitude.

I am tempted to repeat what I said in the other place four years ago and just sit down, but I am not going to do that. One should never give up an opportunity to place on record those matters that are important in this next term of government and are important to me. I want to start by saying that I am a fierce advocate of freedom. This includes the freedom to make mistakes, the freedom to have a different world view and the freedom to share different, even disagreeable, ideas. I reject the notion that it is the political elite who are the custodians of all our thoughts, our speech and our actions. I believe that all Australians ought to be entitled to their own opinions, that it is fine to disagree with the person standing next to you and that we may hold our differences with civility, whether they be on matters of economy, education, or religion. I echo the words of our Prime Minister, who said, "We must learn to disagree better."

Free speech in this country is under attack like never before. Tragically, there are few remaining in public life who will stand up for it. The most recent State and Federal elections, however, are indicative. That tells us that Australians will always reject the politics of division and envy. That tells us that there is a generation of "quiet Australians" who value their families, their jobs and the wonderful lifestyle that this country has to offer. That tells us that the average Australian asks for nothing more than that the government should get on with the job of delivering for the community and then get out of the way so families can get on with their lives.

It is now clear that there is only one side of politics that represent these "quiet Australians". It is the Liberal-Nationals Coalition that seeks to deliver better outcomes for all the people of this State. It is the Coalition that is now the party of the worker. Workers do not want a government whose aim is to push policies that will tax them into poverty and then tell them how to live their lives. No—they desire a better future for themselves and their families, and they should expect to achieve just that through hard work and persistence. It is this side of the House that gets it, and the Berejiklian Government is one that I am proud to be a part of. In our Premier we have a leader who every single day puts the needs of the people of New South Wales first. The Premier has spelt out the five priorities for this next term of government. I wish to take this opportunity to address each of those priorities.

Firstly, we are delivering a strong economy, quality jobs and financial security for the workers of today and tomorrow. This Government has a great story to tell of responsible governance and strong economic management. We have a narrative that points to the lowest unemployment rates in the country and record spending on vital infrastructure—on our roads and public transport, on our hospitals and on our schools. We are employing more teachers, more doctors and nurses, and more essential services personnel. Since 2011 we have delivered over half a million jobs in New South Wales. Over the next four years, we are going to deliver a quarter of a million more. Our Government has achieved this while keeping our expenses reined in, with predicted surpluses across the forward estimates.

Our triple-A credit rating is affirmed and we are in negative net debt. Operating expenses per capita are the lowest of the mainland States and New South Wales now holds a net worth of a quarter of a trillion dollars. Our almost \$90 billion infrastructure program is driving this State forward. And the projects that this generation of government begins will be the infrastructure that the next generation of Australians will enjoy. We are creating jobs for today and careers for tomorrow. We are providing for the present but also preparing for the future. We are proudly known as the jobs capital of Australia and we are the engine room of this nation.

I repeat: We are the party of the worker. So, whether you are a shearer in Dubbo, a shoppie at David Jones, a nurse at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital, or a tradie in Parramatta, this Government has your back. Because unlike previous governments that have operated on platforms of dependency, this Government operates on policies which are designed to create jobs and provide opportunity. In my submission, the greatest expression of dignity that we can guarantee individuals is to ensure that they have an opportunity to pursue a career; for we are dignified by our work. To be deprived of work—to be unable to provide for ourselves and those dearest to us—is not only to be financially vulnerable but it is also mentally and emotionally crippling. I repeat what I said in my maiden speech in my capacity as the member for Epping. I quoted Saint John Paul II in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens*, where he said:

Work is a good thing for man—a good thing for his humanity—because through work man not only transforms nature, adapting it to his own needs, but he also achieves fulfilment as a human being and indeed, in a sense becomes more a human being.

Ours is the Government that pulled all the necessary economic levers. Ours is the Government that took notional ideas and made them come alive. Ours is the Government that took pipedreams and actually took them to the pipeline. The Sydney Metro opened last Sunday. It is a fine example of just this. It is a project promised no less than four times by the dreamers opposite but finally delivered by the doers on this side of the House. Ours is the Government that ought to stand proud at the fact that we have restored this State to the premier position in the country and the envy of this nation. And so it should not come as a surprise that the good people of New South Wales would place their confidence in us for a historic third term of government.

The second priority is to deliver the highest quality education no matter where you live or what your circumstances. We are privileged to have the Minister for Education and Early Childhood Learning in this Chamber. I do not know a single parent in New South Wales, nor in the whole of Australia, who does not desire the very best for their child. We as a government share this aspiration. We want to give every child the opportunities, the education and the skills that will give them the very best start in life. It is for these reasons that we have embarked on the largest school-building revolution that this State has ever seen.

This includes a \$6.5 billion commitment towards more than 190 new and upgraded schools, 22 of which were delivered before the first term started this year; a \$1.3 billion investment to wipe out the school maintenance backlog for our government schools; and \$500 million to provide cooler classrooms with air conditioning and ventilation systems at up to 1,000 schools across the State. But this Government is rolling out education initiatives beyond bricks and mortar. We are investing in our teachers, our curriculums and our programs to provide better outcomes for our children. We are talking about 4,600 new teachers over this term of government working in these schools with our children. We are talking about worthwhile initiatives like the Active Kids and Creative Kids programs so that our children can develop the skills, friendship groups and networks that will benefit them long into the future.

We are talking about a government that understands that a quality education will mean a more capable and flexible workforce, greater innovation, greater opportunities and jobs for the future. That is why the Government has also invested \$80 million towards the construction of a new "mega TAFE" in the heart of western Sydney. That is why our Government is providing 70,000 extra free courses for young jobseekers and 30,000 places for mature-aged workers looking to re-enter the workforce. But while it is true that a child's educational environment is important, what is taught outside of the classroom is just as important. It is my submission that parents are the primary educators of their children. The State must always recognise and support this rather than seek to usurp it. It is not the educator's role to promote a radical agenda of identity politics in the classroom. Our focus must be on arithmetic, history and literacy, not gender identity. In my capacity as the member for Epping—

[Interruption from the gallery]

The PRESIDENT: Order! Just as we have rules in the Chamber, we ask that members of the public also abide by those rules. I ask those in the public gallery not to applaud or interject but simply to wait until the member has completed his speech. There will be an opportunity outside in the foyer for the public to congratulate the member on his speech.

Mr DAMIEN TUDEHOPE: I thank the President and I thank the people in the gallery for the applause. In my capacity as the member for Epping I was proud to have introduced to the Legislative Assembly a petition of more than 17,000 signatures from concerned parents opposed to the ironically labelled Safe Schools program, which was introduced under the guise of an anti-bullying initiative. Allow me to be clear: There is no room for bullying of any kind in our schools but neither is there room for a program that encourages children to explore gender theory and promotes the sexualisation of young children. There is no room for any program that calls for students to cross-dress or for the introduction of unisex bathrooms in our schools.

We owe a debt to Rob Stokes who, as education Minister, committed to ensuring the removal of the Safe Schools program. We also owe a debt to Dr Pansy Lai and the courageous work done by all those who gathered the 17,000 signatures for that petition. I will say again that the State does not own our children. The values that make us who we are—our moral fibre and the things we hold dear to us, whether they be the intrinsic dignity of the individual, freedom, respect for others and the law, hard work or equality between the sexes—begin at home. In his first address to this place the Hon. Mark Latham asked why we hear so many voices of the people who refuse to believe in the virtues and achievements of Western civilisation. He asked:

What has Western civilisation done for us? Only advanced health care and education, architecture, engineering, information technology, free speech and the rule of law.

It is a rule of law that no single individual is above, irrespective of their office. Nevertheless, he questioned how the West has come to such a serious state of decline. While I agree with the observation made by Mr Latham, I submit that the answer is to be found largely in the systematic deprecating of the family unit. Only within a strong family unit is it possible for the bedrock of our Australian values to be properly nurtured in the lives of our children. I agree with Ronald Reagan, who captured the sentiment well:

In raising and instructing our children, in providing personal and compassionate care for the elderly, in maintaining the spiritual strength of religious commitment among our people—in these and other ways ... families make immeasurable contributions to ... [a nation's] well-being. Today, more than ever, it is essential that these contributions not be taken for granted and that each of us remember that the strength of our families is vital to the strength of our nation.

The third priority outlined by the Premier is that this Government will be delivering well-connected communities with quality environments. When the Coalition was elected in 2011, the Government was faced with soaring housing demand and a total bankruptcy of infrastructure and debt. The message accepted by those opposite was that Sydney was full and it sent the corresponding message that proper planning and infrastructure were not required. Ten years ago New South Wales had no B-Line bus service on Sydney's northern beaches, no effective light rail in Sydney or Newcastle and no metro railway connecting Sydney's booming north-west and south-west to the CBD. Ten years ago there was no Opal card. Instead, we stood in long lines at the train station concourses waiting to buy tickets and in even longer lines at the Roads and Transport Authority to renew our licences.

Now housing and infrastructure in New South Wales have been and continue to be addressed—but at a cost. The speed and volume of construction have been disruptive to the community. The Premier is right to call for a slowing of immigration rates because there is a need to allow infrastructure to catch up with demand. As it currently stands, the States bear the responsibility for providing the roads, schools and hospitals but have no hand on the lever controlling immigration. In my submission, it is appropriate that States have a seat at the table when immigration targets are set by the Commonwealth. Such significant changes in terms of immigration, development and infrastructure in such a short period will inevitably lead towards a fracturing of community life. With this in mind, the Premier has embarked on a strategy to improve the quality of community life through greater attention to planning decisions and the delivery of open space.

I would like to take a moment just to dwell on the concept of well-connected communities because it gives rise to issues well beyond the delivery of open space and more available parking, as important as those issues are. Recently a friend of mine who does home maintenance for an elderly woman found her deceased at her home. She had been deceased for a week and no-one knew. I recall many years ago, in 1974, a lecture I attended at university. The lecturer observed that living rooms were once structured so that lounges and chairs faced one another, as people were expected to interact and engage in conversation. His lament was that they all now faced the television instead.

The breakdown that started in the family home is now endemic. Today it is no longer an uncommon sight to board a bus or train only to see every face staring down at a small screen. My son recently pointed out to me that there is now a function on Uber whereby a passenger is able to inform a driver that they would rather not be disturbed on the journey. It appears to me that one of life's bitter ironies is that while there is increasing engagement and connectivity on platforms like social media and the internet, human interactions are on the decline and today many face terrible struggles with loneliness.

I would like to suggest that when we talk about well-connected communities we need to do so in a way that seeks to address loneliness, which is becoming such a crippling health problem. We need to acknowledge that there are many people in our communities who believe that no one cares about them. This is the age of loneliness. Indeed, so severe an issue is loneliness that the United Kingdom has appointed a Minister for Sport, Civil Society and Loneliness. The Jo Cox Commission in the United Kingdom has found that more than nine million people—approximately 14 per cent of the population—are often or always lonely. Former United States Surgeon-General Vivek Murthy echoes these sentiments when he calls loneliness a health epidemic.

It would be naive of us to think that Australia is exempt. A 2016 Lifeline survey found that more than 80 per cent of Australians believe society is becoming a lonelier place. One further small observation is that we have seen the proliferation of single-bedroom apartments in Sydney, which, in my view, has contributed to or is emblematic of increasing levels of loneliness. But there is no silver bullet. I raise this issue because loneliness appears to play such a significant precursory role to homelessness. Addressing homelessness is a priority for this Government. Over \$1 billion will be invested in homelessness services over the next four years and I note that the Premier earlier this year signed a global agreement to halve street homelessness across the State by 2025.

Government, however, cannot achieve this alone. There must be a united and concerted effort from local communities, non-government organisations and all of us. To this end, we ought to invest in our volunteers. We need to see the value in each person and the time that each person freely gives to volunteer organisations. We must never undervalue the work that is being done by our churches and charities. Already more than 2.1 million people volunteer across the State each year, contributing a combined 240 million hours. We, as a government, ought to be looking for further ways in which we can encourage more people to get involved in making New South Wales a better and more connected place.

Governments around the world are consistently looking at ways to improve taxation systems to ensure efficiency and promote fairness. It is my submission that in New South Wales we ought to consider ways our taxation system can encourage more volunteering in our communities. We should consider how small and medium businesses can play a role in encouraging more volunteering. I am of the view that businesses will benefit from increased goodwill and our communities will benefit from increased tangible social capital. It is fitting that I raise this matter today as last week was National Volunteer Week, which recognises and celebrates volunteers and the important work that they do. I acknowledge the work done by the husband of the Hon. Bronnie Taylor. I commend the Premier on celebrating volunteers across our communities.

The fourth priority for this Government is to be at its core radically customer centred. The Premier has made it abundantly clear that this Government's reason for being is to put the people of New South Wales at the centre of everything we do. It came as no surprise that the earnest, hardworking and digitally savvy Victor Dominello was appointed as the very first Minister for Customer Service. We have already made great steps in demonstrating that commitment to the people of New South Wales. The one-stop Service NSW offices, which facilitate the processing of transactions with government and provide advice to reduce the cost of living have been a resounding success.

I am honoured to have been appointed the Minister for Finance and Small Business in the Berejiklian-Barilaro Government. Victor has been and will be putting the customer at the centre of everything that he does. In very much the same capacity, so will I make every endeavour to put small businesses front and centre of what we do as a government. Behind every small business is a family; behind every small business are its employees; and behind every small business is a community that is dependent on its services.

I say this because I was once a small business owner. I know firsthand the difficulties small business owners face on a daily basis, the pressures that are placed on families when cash flow is tight, when bills need paying or when school fees are due. I know what it is like to put your house on the line, to be buried in mountains of paperwork, to work long hours and to have sleepless nights. I am not saying that it is the role of government to ensure that every business succeeds. What I am saying, however, is that it is incumbent on government to make it as easy as possible for them to do business and to foster an environment that will allow small businesses to grow and succeed.

While there is always more work to do, we as a government are committed to the following principles: reducing red tape; connecting small businesses with expert advice; creating networking opportunities for small businesses to work collaboratively; building our economy and growing confidence and investment; and ultimately nurturing the entrepreneurial spirit that has become so characteristic of Australians. Finally—and I am sure everyone will be happy to hear me use that word—this Government is committed to breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage by fixing the problems that have traditionally been thrown into the too-hard basket. It is my submission that we are all here to leave a better New South Wales for the next generation than the one we find ourselves in.

There are a number of areas where there are entrenched social issues, including indigenous health and education, high recidivism rates, the number of children in out-of-home care and the treatment of the elderly and the vulnerable. I want to pay tribute to the retired Minister for Family and Community Services for the remarkable job she did in the last Parliament to reduce the number of children in out-of-home care who would be shuttled from one foster family to the next. It was her vision to seek a solution by facilitating permanent placements. The passing of the Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment Act last year is a tribute to her and it is a matter of some shame that it was not supported by those opposite. The newly appointed Minister for Families, Communities and Disability Services, Gareth Ward, has recently introduced a bill to create the first independent Ageing and Disability Commissioner to shine a light on abuse, neglect or exploitation of the elderly and vulnerable in our communities. I commend that initiative.

I would like to raise just a few issues that have traditionally been deemed "too difficult". One of the largest epidemics we face as a society, particularly in our regional centres, is the increased use of crystal methamphetamine, or the drug more commonly known as ice. I was pleased to hear the Premier announce last year a special commission of inquiry into the use of this drug in New South Wales. The question for the inquiry is: How do we as a government treat the problem? It is my view that this Government cannot by its passivity allow more users to simply fall by the wayside of a misguided solution to the problem of drug addiction. Only a strong message of deterrence and rehabilitation programs designed to help those addicted will prevail. The problem of ice certainly is related to a wider issue of drug addiction, which includes the use of gateway drugs such as ecstasy at music festivals. There is a small percentage of the population who would suggest that drug testing is a possible solution. The evidence, however, does not stack up. I agree with the findings of a research report published by the National Addiction Centre at Kings College, London, which found:

Pill testing of any description does not guarantee safety, or protect the consumer against individual responses to pills. At best, it gives an artificial "shine of safety" to a group of diverse drugs that remain both illicit and potentially harmful.

There is one final issue that I would like to raise. Lest there be any doubt, I am fiercely pro life. I join with Thomas Jefferson, who said:

The care of human life and happiness, and not their destruction, is the first and only object of good government.

It is my strong view that we have become far too comfortable with speaking of human life critically as noxious to the environment, or taxing upon the economy, or straining upon our relationships, or burdensome to the wider population. I believe that all life—whether at its dawn or dusk—is good and brimming with latent potential. We all can empathise with the circumstances of those who have suffered tremendously at their closing hours with their loved ones. Indeed, who wouldn't? It would be an exceptional case to find anyone whose hearts are not stirred by such unhappy circumstances. But compassion itself cannot and will never be an ultimate solution. It is seldom wise to make decisions based purely on emotions. As parliamentarians we must also look at the potential consequences of the decisions we strive to undertake.

When a human life begins we hold to an unshakeable conviction that that life should go well, that the investments and aspirations attached to that life represent hopes and dreams to be realised rather than frustrated. Should such a position change for a person whether at the dawn or the twilight of their lives? Could it be that the plea for so-called death with dignity might be better interpreted as a plea for better care, support and comfort? In the 2017-18 budget the Treasurer announced a \$100 million funding package for palliative care across New South Wales. This package included training for 300 nurses, 300 scholarships for rural and regional staff to enhance their palliative care skills and 30 additional nurses in hospitals, homes and nursing homes. Additionally, the Premier has made a further commitment of \$45 million towards the delivery of 100 additional palliative care nurses to ensure patients can access the care they need in the setting they choose. These are all initiatives I am proud that this Government has undertaken, for there are few things worth fighting for more than to protect life and to uphold its intrinsic value.

At the risk of torturing the language, this was not my first inaugural speech—as I said earlier. It is my honour and privilege to be given the capacity to stand here and deliver another. I again thank my colleagues in this place and all in the public gallery for their courtesy in listening to me. In closing, I am of the strong view that the future is bright for New South Wales and for the aspirational, hardworking families of this great State. But there is more work to do and I look forward to contributing in some small part to the success of the Berejiklian-Barilaro Government. Thank you.