



# Inaugural Speeches

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**The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George):** Order! On behalf of the newly elected member for Macquarie Fields, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of former members for Macquarie Fields, the Hon. Craig Knowles and Dr Andrew McDonald, a former member of the Legislative Council, John Ryan, and family, friends and supporters of the new member. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly this afternoon.

**Mr ANOULACK CHANTHIVONG** (Macquarie Fields) [4.29 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Thank you, Mr Deputy-Speaker. Family, friends, and fellow parliamentarians, politics and public life are about service. We are here to serve our fellow citizens and to open up opportunities for their aspirations, helping them to build a better future. I stand here today in Australia's first and oldest Parliament as the fifth member for Macquarie Fields, representing an area named after the fifth and most significant Governor of New South Wales, Lachlan Macquarie, speaking in a precinct which bears his name and surrounded by his legacy—the Sydney Mint, the Barracks, the Sydney Hospital, Hyde Park, the Domain, and of course this very building.

If politics is about serving the public interest and the common good, who in New South Wales history better epitomises those ideals? Governor Macquarie transformed a penal settlement into a major economy with hospitals, roads and public institutions. However, his greatest examples of public service, where the common good was placed in front of personal gain, can be seen in his values and his vision for New South Wales and the nation. He ended the Rum Rebellion. He believed in total equality under the law, regardless of rank in society. He believed in a fair go and enacted the emancipist policy which reflected his values of a meritocracy and justice. He greatly valued an individual's societal contribution and valued very little of his or her social class. And he had a strong social conscience, as shown in his desire to improve the living conditions of Aborigines. It is a privilege for me to be the member for Macquarie Fields, an electorate that bears the name of a true gentleman and a giant of New South Wales history.

There are very few places in the world where my story or my journey to our Parliament is actually possible—not as a visitor or a stranger but as a member. My parents, Bounmy and Somboun, who are seated in the gallery, started our family's journey in Laos, a country where instability and conflict had caused them and other people they knew to leave their country of birth. It was an unstable environment, not of their own making but one which caused them to seek refuge in another country and to find a different future from the one that was unfolding before them. In making their journey they left behind their families, their friends, and the very little that they owned for an unknown destination and an unknown future. But it was a journey they were determined to make and they followed a destiny they could not control. They had nothing of monetary value and they carried nothing of material worth, but they had the most important and valuable possession that mattered most, not just to them but to all of us—they carried with them hope. It was all that they had, but it was all that they needed.

Upon arriving in Australia with their four young sons, including me, the second youngest, they encountered many obstacles and felt many fears. They were in a land they did not know. They had to learn a language they could not speak. They saw signs they could not read, and they heard conversations they did not understand. They may have started cleaning dishes in restaurants and moved onto the factory floor, assembling glass, plastic and aluminium products, but they had high hopes for their family and for their sons because they believed in something special about this new place. They believed in the Australian idea. This idea promoted equal access to opportunity, to choice and to fairness that would be available to all those who seek it and not be denied to anyone who required it. This idea could release your talents and you would be rewarded for your effort, determination and ability. In this idea you could aspire to all that you wanted for yourself and for your family because in this nation, built on the simplest of ideas and based on the strongest of values, everybody is entitled to have their chance in life, regardless of where they were born, who they were born to, where they live and what their parents do for a living.

This story—and my journey to the Parliament—is not about my parents or our family, or about my election; it is about the strength of our common values of fairness and equal opportunity. It is about the openness and depth of our democracy and it is about the power of the Australian idea of hope and aspiration. These are Labor ideals—hope, opportunity and aspiration, a better life for all. That is why I joined the Australian Labor Party. Our work in the Parliament is never finished, with former Prime Minister Keating saying that the reward for public life is public progress. But how would we measure it? Is it the number of political promises and press releases? Most certainly not. What about how highly we rank against other States in Australia and other nations across the OECD? Maybe. Or is it the number of programs funded and projects finalised? Possibly. The measures are much simpler and more substantial.

It is my view that we strive to measure our public progress through the tone of our parliamentary debates, the depth of our public discourse, the role of science, statistics, reason and rationale in policy-making and, for me personally, measuring whether there is just enough space on the ballot paper and whether there is one more seat in our democratic institution for a skinny kid with two long, funny names, who had to learn English as a six-year-old to one day represent his community in our Parliament. These are true measures of public progress because they reinforce the nature of our egalitarian state, the openness of our community, the level of cultural riches and the diversity of our society. If I were to have said the same things when I was a six year old, it would have been as follows [Laotian words spoken and translated]:

Nothing is impossible.

This Legislative Assembly of ours, with its Westminster traditions, can be an institution for great change and can help to meet the challenges of a modern New South Wales for generations to come. However, at times we fail to live up to our communities' expectations. A number of residents spoke to me about what they think of politicians of all parties. It was not positive. A softly spoken and well-informed gentleman spoke to me as he made his way from the polling booth at the Robert Townson Public School. He and his son had just voted informal because they were disenchanted by the negativity, personal attacks and substandard debate. His feelings though, I suspect, are reflective of many who have felt disappointed when they see personality power plays put in front of public debate and political partisanship put ahead of the public interest.

We need to do everything we can to raise the standard of our parliamentary debates and public discussion to meet our people's expectations. Consideration should be given to changing the rules of parliamentary debate, question time and parliamentary schedules, perhaps along the lines of the British model to encourage reasoned debate rather than sloganeering, showmanship and rehearsed lines. However, changes in institutional rules alone cannot elevate the perception of our profession in the eyes of the people. It will take a prolonged effort and a long time, but we should make a start. Our public resources are limited, but the public demands on them are not. There needs to be a balance between economics and fairness. Our solutions should be driven by our collective interest, not by political ideology. They should be built on our values, not based on the needs of vested interests. Bipartisanship is not a sign of failure, because vested interests always will win and policy outcomes are always weaker when bipartisanship goes missing.

Government cannot solve every issue on its own and nor should it. We need the combined will of our community and we need to take it with us. Society works best when there is shared responsibility between government, the people it serves and the organisations it helps. Labor's way of "We are in this together" is more productive than you are on your own. Education is an equaliser but it is also a vehicle for social and economic elevation. Your family's bank balance should never determine how much your mind is worth or put a value limit on your ability. In a prosperous New South Wales there should always be enough public credit for all of us, especially those of modest means, to withdraw from and invest in our own aspirations to advance our society.

Public education is fundamental to a fairer and more prosperous New South Wales. I know this because I have lived it. Without society's investment in my public education—and that of other students—at Robert Townson Public School and Robert Townson High School, I would not have been able to attend the best universities and learn from the brightest minds. It is in Labor's DNA to ensure that our schools are well funded, our teachers are well trained and our students are well supported with all the tools that they need to learn and to live up to their own educational aspirations. When governments underinvest in our education or training systems or seek to commercialise what is a valuable common good, it not only takes away classrooms that should have been built or books that should have been bought but also takes away the hopes of a sharp mind and a strong will wanting a better life. We deny people the opportunity to fulfil their potential.

Labor will never be part of this outcome. My time at the London School of Economics further reinforced to me why New South Wales needs to be a continually outward and international looking State. In my small class there were students from all around the world coming to learn from each other and to share their ideas and experiences. They came from a variety of professional and academic backgrounds, most were bilingual, others were multilingual, but all were clever. I knew that those students, once graduated, would go back to their countries thinking of ways to make innovative products we might want to buy and to deliver the services we would have to pay to use. In New South Wales we must not only compete with other States within Australia but also against other nations. Our education curriculum and vocational courses should always be open to new ideas, different subjects and improved teaching methods, and we must ready our workforce for the jobs of the future—jobs in science, technology and innovation; jobs in climate science and renewable energy; jobs in culture and creativity; and jobs in value manufacturing and professional services.

In a connected and internationalised world, the race for the brightest minds to create the jobs of the future is intense. Competition has moved beyond nation states and is now between international cities. It is not just about attracting financial capital but also about attracting human capital. Would it not be good if we could add to our society and attract hardworking, highly skilled, well-educated and creative people to Sydney, Western Sydney or New South Wales? These people will grow our economy, they will add to the

richness of our society and social fabric, they will come with new ideas to begin new businesses and create new jobs—and yet, they were trained elsewhere, using someone else's money. We need to find better strategies to attract these people and to encourage them to stay. It will not be enough simply to rely on harbour views, sunny days and sandy beaches.

The people of Macquarie Fields have given me the greatest privilege in allowing me to serve them as their local member. I recognise the trust and faith that they have placed in me to represent their interests and to advocate on their behalf in the New South Wales Parliament. The people of Macquarie Fields—an aspirational area full of people who want to build a better life—go about their daily lives making an honest living, helping others in our community and they always do so with hope for a better future. They are a genuine and generous hardworking people who ask for very little but who I know deserve so much. Our local community is further enriched by its cultural and social diversity, with more than 56 per cent having at least one parent born overseas. Their different life experiences, culture, language and ideas enhance the social and multicultural fabric of our society and add a few more pages to Australia's storybook. I am delighted to be able to represent so many people from so many different backgrounds that have chosen Macquarie Fields to be their home.

I have seen many changes in the area. Our original family home was one of the first to be built on the street when about a third of Raby was still to be developed. Since then, newer suburbs have been added with a few more on the way. Despite this, the Georges River Nature Reserve and Scenic Hills are defining local environmental landmarks which remain untouched by major development. These areas provide the open space and rural landscape that protect us from encroaching development. This environmental buffer is important to my community and together we will continue to oppose any major development which cuts into its rural character.

It is unacceptable to me that in modern New South Wales in 2015 Macquarie Fields railway station does not have an easy access lift and is a station where some trains do not stop. There are too many stories of mums with prams and bags, silently struggling to get up and down the stairs or of pensioners stopping multiple times to take a rest, just to get to the other side of the station. This is not good enough for the people of Macquarie Fields. This is not just an issue of infrastructure but also an issue of inequity and exclusion.

Named after Governor Macquarie, our area has historical significance but to me, as a proud Labor MP, Macquarie Fields has another special claim: It is the political home of Edward Gough Whitlam, located in the heart of the Federal seat of Werriwa. Macquarie Fields is not just any electorate; it is Labor heartland. For decades, Labor—and only Labor—has provided strong and effective representation, bringing the hopes and aspirations of every street in the Macquarie Fields electorate to Macquarie Street.

Politics is a tough job where no-one achieves anything on his or her own and people are only as good as those around them. I have been fortunate to be surrounded and supported by so many genuine people. Their only want was for my electoral success and their only wish was for me to make our community a better place, through hard work and dedication, as the member for Macquarie Fields. I pay tribute them and record how much their effort and encouragement has meant to me. To my campaign team, led by Dave and Mitch, the Australian Labor Party [ALP] organisation, along with my friends Paul and Alison—a great team effort. To the many volunteers who made phone calls, letterboxed many streets, put up signs in front yards, set up street stalls and knocked on doors, I thank each and every one of you. With gratitude and respect, I thank the rank and file membership of the local Labor Party which endorsed me as their candidate. Our Labor Party can only get stronger and our Labor parliamentarians can only be better if ALP members are given more say in our party and get a chance to select their candidates.

I thank George, Meg, Rudi and Wal—my council caucus colleagues—for the opportunity they have given me to lead local Labor over the past five years. I also extend my appreciation to some of my non-Labor council colleagues with whom I have worked cooperatively, including my good friend Fred Borg. I also take this opportunity to recognise somebody of special quality—the late Brenton Banfield. Brenton was a decent and caring man who taught me much. While he may no longer be with us, it is still my hope to make him proud. My home city of Campbelltown, which covers most of the electorate of Macquarie Fields, is a better community because of the dedicated employees of Campbelltown City Council under Paul Tosi's leadership. Paul is a top-rate public administrator but, more importantly, he is an honourable and decent man.

To previous members who have represented Macquarie Fields over multiple terms—original member Stan Knowles, the Hon. Craig Knowles, and my immediate predecessor, Dr Andrew McDonald—I am indebted to them and thank them not only for their company and their counsel but also for showing me the way to serve our community with distinction and dedication. I also extend my appreciation to my local Federal members of Parliament, Laurie Ferguson and Chris Hayes. I am also pleased to enter the Legislative Assembly with the newly elected member for Campbelltown. Greg and I were strangers all those years ago when we met at my parents' grocery shop and now we are fellow members in this House. All those who know Greg are proud of his achievement.

To my personal friends—some of them are here tonight—even though I cannot name them all, they know who they are and I want them to know how much their friendship means to me. These are the friends who are always willing to give up their time when I ask for it and they are the friends who were gracious with their advice when I needed it. I am grateful for their friendship. There are two sets of families who have given me unqualified love and acceptance. To the Rule family—Mollie, Julie and Aaron—our Australian

family histories could not be more different. They are descendants of the First Fleet and my family are first-generation Australian migrants, but their love, affection and acceptance of me are no different than if I was one of their own. To Aaron, any success that I have had or ever will have is owed to his sacrifice and dedication. He is a dear friend and I am a better person and a better public representative because of him.

To my parents, my three brothers and their partners, my niece and nephews—including Tristan, who is here tonight wondering how much longer before PlayStation 4 time—you bring much joy and happiness to my life. My parents in particular have imbedded in me the values of hard work, determination, optimism and the need to look out for others who are less fortunate and less able. Like any parent, they are proud to see their son in Parliament but I am even prouder just to be their son. They say that politics is a lonely profession. My life inside and outside politics would be very much the lonelier without my partner, Anna. Her love and understanding have made me a better man. Our journey in life has many more years ahead and I very much look forward to sharing those years with her.

All these people I have mentioned, through their different strengths, wisdom and generous spirit, have made me all that I am and all that I will ever be. My determination and aspiration is that we as a Parliament do all we can to make a better life for the people of this great State, just as Governor Macquarie did all those years ago. In all areas of public debate, New South Wales can lead the nation; we should and we must. We must. I thank the Legislative Assembly.