

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE BRONNIE TAYLOR

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind members to extend to the Hon. Bronnie Taylor during her inaugural speech all of the usual courtesies.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR [5.29 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Mr President, may I begin by congratulating you on your re-election and by acknowledging all other members of the Fifty-sixth Parliament. I make particular mention of my colleagues from the NSW Nationals: the Hon. Duncan Gay, the Hon. Rick Colless, the Hon. Niall Blair, the Hon. Sarah Mitchell and the Hon. Trevor Khan and, of course, my class of 2015 colleague the Hon. Ben Franklin. It is indeed a privilege to be able to serve in this place with all of you, and I very much look forward to the days ahead.

As His Excellency the Governor reminded us yesterday, we are all here because we have something that unifies us all: a belief and a commitment to a great country, a great State and, for The Nationals, a great rural and regional New South Wales. We want the best possible opportunities for the people whom we represent. Just as this place has an enormous history and at its best has been a powerful representative of the people of New South Wales, so we each individually bring our own history to our roles. My history has largely been one of working from outside the political system. For 40 years I have been unaligned to any political party, seeking the best in health, in education and in agriculture for my communities from people of any persuasion. However, six years ago I determined that it was time to put myself at the table, to work from the inside, and The Nationals was a natural fit for me. It is the party that can best represent rural and regional Australians. I am therefore incredibly honoured to take a seat in this place as a representative of the good members of the NSW Nationals.

I have not long built my career in politics. I have built my career in health. I am a proud nurse. Nursing is a profession I love and I will miss. There is nothing more rewarding than being a nurse. The privilege of patients and families allowing you into their lives when at their most vulnerable is a true honour. I have seen the best and the worst of government in health. At its worst, government imposes policy upon communities that simply does not fit. At its best, government partners with communities to assist in solving their health issues. A great example of this has been the devolution of decision-making to a network of local health district boards and allowing the community a voice at the highest levels. Being part of a health board has indicated to me that this is a valuable model that is working. Consultation has become meaningful, rather than simply ticking boxes. Other areas of government could perhaps have something to learn from this health model.

My father worked for Qantas, our national carrier, for his entire working life, starting when he was 18 and flying the mail runs in Papua New Guinea. A stint in Sydney saw him meet my mother, and together they set off on a life that was to bring a string of different postings all over the world. My father was the proudest Australian I will ever know. In a corner of every new country he resided in there was a house and flagpole that remained forever Australian. I spent my early years in New York followed by postings in the Philippines and in Thailand. I have a deep connection with these Asian countries and their people. It is still somewhere I

can return to and feel completely at home, with its rich culture and resilient as well as very stoic people.

After leaving school I attended the University of Sydney where I studied nursing. This was to be a decision to this day I am so grateful for and ultimately has paved the way for me to be standing here today. I knew I had found my niche when I started caring for people affected by cancer. I spent eight years as a clinical nurse specialist in palliative care, both in the city and the Monaro, three years as a clinical nurse consultant in cancer care, and four years as one of the original Breast Care Nurses for the McGrath Foundation. The final 18 months of my 20 years of service to NSW Health was as the Director of Cancer Services for the Southern New South Wales Local Health District [SNSWLHD].

It was through my work as a cancer nurse that I became politically active—and this was definitely not within the guidelines of the code of conduct for NSW Health. I just may have been the staff member most requested by senior management to read and re-read the code. I was most definitely not an easy nurse to manage. But that was because I felt so acutely that my patients were not getting the services they required or receiving the treatment they so desperately needed as close to their homes and their families as possible.

Country people are so stoic—incredibly so—and this is something that struck me when I made the move from the city to the Monaro. It was because of my patients that I set about lobbying for a local oncology service. I knew we could safely deliver chemotherapy locally and that this would contribute greatly to the treatment options and experiences of our local patients. I approached the health service with my ideas, based on evidence that patients who live outside the metropolitan centres have poorer health outcomes, often because they choose treatment options that will not take them away from their homes or their communities but that do not reflect best practice.

For example, a rural or regional patient will choose to have a radical mastectomy instead of breast-conserving surgery partnered with chemotherapy and radiotherapy so that the time they are away from home is minimised. I must make myself clear: I do not advocate for being able to deliver all specialised health services and treatments in the regions—we want the best specialists providing the best treatments in the best environments. But the services that we can provide to the highest standards locally should be absolutely delivered locally, and there is no doubt that this can be done with many cancer treatments.

When I approached the health service I was told, "There is no way we will ever support a local oncology service". So here my story of becoming the accidental activist was born. Receiving no joy from the health service or the government at the time, I worked with the famous community group the Monaro Committee for Cancer Research. At the time it was led by the formidable rural woman Sue Litchfield—I should not look at you, Sue—who is someone I am proud to call my friend and who has had an enormous impact on my life and on my belief that people in the regions deserve to be heard.

I am beyond thrilled that Sue is in the public gallery today. Sue is an inspiration. She represents for me what is truly inspiring in rural women: intelligence, versatility, passion and

a determined nature to see that all politicians understand what is needed to allow us all to thrive in the regions. She is truly a Monaro treasure. Sue asked me one day what I thought our community needed for our cancer patients and I told her that we needed an oncology clinic. So, along with her energetic committee, we set about taking on the health service to get a local clinic. This meant extensive fundraising— for which the committee is now renowned, having raised in excess of \$1 million. That is not bad for a population of 10,000. The *7.30 Report* on the ABC did a fantastic story on one of our fundraising events—Cooma's Dancing with the Stars. I can most definitely assure you I gave Sonia Kruger a run for her money as the hostess with the mostest. It is quite a picture.

The day we opened the clinic was one of the proudest moments for our community: It encapsulates the enormous generosity of spirit that is rural New South Wales. We will not be beaten. We deserve good health services that are accessible and that allow us to stay in our communities, whenever possible. That is only fair. The establishment of the Cooma Oncology Clinic reflects a community taking charge of its health care. Government needs to actively listen to our communities and to support them in their needs. The best initiatives in communities are those that the community drives and that government partners.

One of the first patients to use the Cooma Oncology Unit was Susan Mitchell, OAM—a proud National. I met Susan when she was diagnosed with advanced pancreatic cancer. She was a formidable force and her reputation for being an advocate for the regions was well known. On the home visits I made as her nurse with her and her husband, Dugald, she would always turn the conversation—which could and perhaps should have been about her—to coercing me to become involved with the New South Wales Nationals, to advocate for better health services in New South Wales. I am honoured that her husband, Dugald, is with us tonight and I know that somewhere upstairs she will be listening now and making sure I do not disappoint.

My years as one of the first McGrath Foundation nurses were definitely the highlight of my professional career. The McGrath Foundation is a stand-out organisation with its roots in the community. It is a foundation built by two incredible, unselfish women, both from England but who shared a common link of falling in love with great Australian cricketers. Etched in my memory is my first meeting with Tracy Bevan and her telling of her story of love and friendship that led her to stand beside her best friend and begin the McGrath Foundation—not for themselves but because Jane McGrath wanted to do something for others in a health system that was difficult to understand and to navigate. The McGrath Foundation is another example of the people power that exists in our communities. When government is able to support and partner such initiatives we get terrific outcomes.

Over 80 per cent of McGrath nurses are based in the regions across Australia and are proudly supported by their communities. This model gives power to communities by allowing them to be involved in a positive message and to contribute to something that makes a real difference in their locality. I was and remain a very proud McGrath Breast Care Nurse. I salute Tracy Bevan and her team and thank her and the beautiful Pip Bell—one of our nurses—for being here with me in the Chamber this afternoon. I am just "tickled pink" that you are here.

The Hon. Robert Brown: Very good, very droll.

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: It worked! My nursing career has also taught me to deliver a message with truth and transparency, no matter how difficult it is to hear. It is these skills I draw on every day and that professional skill and experience will serve me well as a member of the Legislative Council. As politicians, we cannot fix everything and we do not win all the time—far from it—but what we must do is to be honest and transparent, and have the ability to articulate our message well and explain our decisions, without fear but with consideration for those we will inevitably disappoint.

My husband, Duncan, and I have been blessed with two girls. There is no doubt that daughters turn their fathers' hair grey and age their mothers well beyond their years, but we most definitely would not be without them. I am not a parent who tends to boast about her children. I am quite hard on my girls and I know they will agree. I found out from a teacher at their school that they were both hiding in a closet last year having quite a discussion about what a "tiger mother" I was and that no-one else's mother could possibly be as difficult as theirs. I do expect a lot from Hannah and Holly. They are fortunate: they have two parents who love them and a large extended and close family that feels the same way about them. Our expectation is that they become the very best people they can be, and that they serve their communities well. We must keep our children grounded, love them and encourage them and have strong families with strong values, but the best we can do for our children is to let them know they need to work hard and they need to be good people.

The girls have had access to a great education, both in the public and private sector. How fortunate we are as a State that we have a choice. Both sectors are invaluable and both play an important role by shaping the future of our children. Opportunities come from the benefit of access to a good education. We still live in a land where life opportunities through education are unequal. A child from Wilcannia does not get the same chances as a child from Woollahra. We need to give all our young children the chance to start their education at a preschool, followed by a good local school with great teachers led by an effective principal and with an engaging curriculum that extends to both academic subjects and vocational training to suit the aptitude of each individual student. In particular, those schools in the most complex communities in our State need the most urgent and direct intervention.

These schools are where we begin to rebuild our most troubled communities. We have started down that path with the Rural and Remote Education strategy but we have much more work to do. We owe that to our rural and regional families. With good schools and educational opportunities, we can make families and youth thrive in rural communities, which will in turn strengthen our regional development. We want families to want to stay in our communities but to entice them to stay we need great schools and great opportunities for their children.

I met my husband, Duncan, whilst still at school; he was very dashing and quite the catch—but more on this part of my life later. I honestly never imagined Dunc wanting to return to the country, so when he asked me—about eight years into our extended courtship—if I would be

willing to return with him from Sydney to the wide open plains of Nimmitabel, I must be honest, I did a second take as I knew that life as I had imagined it would not eventuate. I would have followed Dunc to the end of the earth and back, so it was a fleeting moment of consideration.

Duncan's family has been farming on the Monaro for generations. It is a place of vast openness, natural treeless plains and a beauty that is unique and magical. The Monaro has what some might call a challenging climate. Gale-force winds blow across the mountains and a biting minus 10 frost is a common occurrence. I believe it is this climate that makes the people of the Monaro so resilient and content because honestly, if you did not love it, you probably would not stay. The Monaro is renowned for its tough grazing stock and its fine, beautiful, clean and very green Monaro merino wool. It is said that Monaro stock can survive anything that is thrown at them and the same can be said for its people. It is a diverse area, with the Snowy Mountains at one end and the ever-growing city of Queanbeyan at the other.

We are also very fortunate in the Monaro to have the most outstanding local member in this Parliament. I have loved working with the Hon. John Barilaro over the past four years and I relish the thought of what he will achieve for the Monaro in the next four. He encapsulates what is so terrific about the south. He loves where he comes from and he will fight to the death for it. The Monaro Nationals are a great team, inspired by a great leader in John and his recent win in the seat of Monaro reflects that. His success is the result of the efforts of the many people who have worked hard alongside him. I acknowledge my good friend Emma Watts, our State Electoral Chairman: a formidable woman with a great intellect and an ability to bring teams together in a common purpose. I am excited about working with John to ensure the Monaro is kept in the safe hands of the New South Wales Nationals for many terms to come.

I have spent the past four years as a councillor on the Cooma Monaro Shire Council, three as the deputy mayor. I have learnt a great deal and have gone from being critical of local government to championing it on many levels. There must be change in the way councils do their business, I acknowledge that—but there is so much good in local government and it remains the closest form of government to the people, and this is particularly so in rural and regional New South Wales.

Agriculture has a huge and exciting future and I am grateful to have the opportunity to be part of it. Duncan's father, Peter, has had a huge influence on both of us; because of his astuteness and hard work over his lifetime, he has provided our family with the opportunity to be part of a terrific family farming business. Peter took great risks to build his property, surviving horrendous droughts and low commodity prices to expand to a point where we now have a successful farming business that sustains several families. We must support families to absorb risk and build their small businesses so that they are sustainable into the future, not by giving them handouts but by creating a framework within which they might operate successfully and resiliently in the face of difficult seasons and price cycles, which inevitably will come. We must demonstrate that we are committed to agriculture and its bright future by

encouraging young people to develop their careers on the land and in the regions.

Nowhere is the role of the veterinary professional more crucial than in rural New South Wales. I have had the pleasure of sitting on the NSW Veterinary Board for the past four years. It is a profession I admire deeply. Their evidence-based care and advocacy for animals is based on science rather than emotion and sits at the core of their profession. That approach of science and evidence should be embraced, not just in veterinary science but in food production, animal welfare and environmental sustainability.

My grandmother Rachel Eileen Stevens was a strong and wise woman who hailed from Wales. She bequeathed to me her rather troublesome psoriasis and a propensity at very inconvenient moments to burst into very Welsh tears, so please bear with me for the next few moments. Here we go! My family has been a constant support to me. My mum is an incredible woman; she is strong to the core. I think her finest feature is that one evening she would be sitting next to President Marcos in the Philippines and the next day would be helping her Filipino golf caddy look after his sick child. Everyone is absolutely equal to my mother regardless of their background or any other status. She is also an incredible athlete. In fact Mum had a golf handicap of eight, and can still wipe most of the family off the tennis court—and I am sorry, but that includes the grandchildren. Unfortunately, we lost my Dad 18 months ago to pancreatic cancer. He was really my biggest fan and he so would have loved all of this—but I know in my heart that he is beside me today cheering me on. God bless you, Dad.

My sister has always been a tower of strength; she looks out for Mum and she keeps us all together. My brother-in-law Paul is a gem and a testament to the powers of the New South Wales health system. In 2002 Paul was diagnosed with acute lymphoblastic leukaemia and a positive Philadelphia chromosome, which meant every time we put him into remission with very aggressive chemotherapy he kept reverting to his leukemic cells; so his chances of survival were very slim indeed. But thanks to a new drug trial and the formidable force of my sister willing him on and terrifying every nurse and doctor who came near him if they had not washed their hands, he sits in the gallery today fighting fit after completing a 600-kilometre bike ride raising money for children who have cancer and their families.

To my girls, thank you for supporting me through this. Hannah, I know politics is not your thing, but give it time. You might want to join the Young Nationals at Sydney uni yet! Holly, my youngest, who lives for sport and is part of the award winning Young Nationals netball team: I will not be much longer as I know you have a netball game at seven, and school sport will always take preference over your mother. And that is okay. Now to Dunc. I met my Dunc when I was 17. His legendary status preceded him; he was school captain, head of the military corps, academically top of his year, a great basketball player and a very handy second rower, and that is of Rugby Union—the game of champions, in case anyone is wondering.

The Hon. Niall Blair: We should have preselected him!

The Hon. BRONNIE TAYLOR: People say that a bit. But you are stuck with me for eight years, Minister. The day we were married was one of the happiest days of my life and I do confess I stood there about to walk down the aisle and I really could not believe I had pulled it off. I have no hesitation in saying I would not be standing here if it was not for you. You make me a better person. You have always been beside me and your support means everything to me. I admire you: your recent work as President of the Isolated Children and Parents Association speaks volumes about who you are. Anywhere I go in rural New South Wales, they sing your praises of how you have lifted the issues of rural and remote education to new heights, finding solutions and developing models of education that will deliver. This is reflected in your vision of the Cooma Universities Centre, which is now a reality in extending access to higher education to regional youth. As it says in that book, Dunc, that we read to the girls for what seemed like an eternity, I really do love you to the moon and back.

I thank Anna O'Brien, another great lady of the south, for agreeing to come with me as my adviser. She will keep me focused on the things that matter, and we will make a great team. I would not be here without the support that the members of the New South Wales Nationals have given me, and I will not let them down. I conclude by pledging to honour these three things whilst I sit in this Chamber: I will never forget who I am; I will never forget where I am from; and I will never ever forget that I sit in this Chamber representing the good members of the New South Wales Nationals. Thank you, Mr President.