



Inaugural Speeches

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The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): On behalf of the newly elected member for Rockdale I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of former members for Kogarah Cherie Burton and Brian Langton, former Senator for New South Wales Graham Richardson, Consul General of Greece Stavros Kyrimis and the family, friends and supporters of the new member. I welcome you—yassas—to the Legislative Assembly today.

Mr STEPHEN KAMPER (Rockdale) [11.23 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their elders both past and present. I also acknowledge the Dharawal people, who were the first people to meet Captain James Cook when he arrived in Botany Bay in the heart of my electorate. I speak for the first time in this place with a sense of great humility and awe. While it is traditional to leave acknowledgements to the end, there is one person whom I need to thank before all others and without whom I would not be here today.

Four years ago I suffered a loss at the 2011 State election. Never in its history was Rockdale not held by the Labor Party. At that point I do not think I could have imagined running again. I remember feeling lost on that Sunday morning. For perhaps the first time in my life I had truly tasted defeat. I will never forget the words of my wife, Magdalene, as I lay there moping and feeling sorry for myself. She told me to get up off my arse, get back to work and keep fighting to represent the community I love. Magda and I have been married for 31 years and she has always been there for me. I remember as teenagers we stayed up late at night discussing all we hoped and dreamed to achieve in our lives.

Together we have raised five wonderful children. We have four beautiful grandsons and—without any pressure, kids—we await many more. Magda, we have made a life built on your dedication and love of our family. Without your endless patience, kindness and care, all of our successes would have been nothing but a pipedream. Magda, I cannot thank you adequately for all you have done or what you continue to do, but I promise that I shall make you proud as we embark on this next stage of our lives, and I pay tribute to you today.

I feel so privileged to have come to this place representing Rockdale, where I have lived and worked my entire life. Rockdale is a vibrant and multicultural community. I would boast that there are not too many places in Sydney where you will hear conversations being conducted in half a dozen languages as you walk down the street. These days we take immense pride in our diversity, but it was not always so. Growing up, I remember feeling a deep sense of shame when my mother would speak Greek to me in public. Now I feel ashamed that I was ever embarrassed by my mum.

My mother, Fotini, is the strongest, bravest woman I know. She is the moral compass of our family; she has never had an ill word to say about anybody and she shows nothing but kindness and love for the world. When she was 19, with not a word of English and nothing but the clothes on her back, she left her village to migrate to Australia. Mum had seen nothing but a bleak future in a dying town. She knew in her heart that she never wanted to raise her own children in such a place. She risked everything to make her way to our great nation so that we could have a better life. I am so proud of everything she has done, and I am inspired every day by the courage of her spirit. I love you, mum.

My father's parents migrated here from a small northern Greek village during the early 1920s, fleeing from post-war struggle. They found their new village—Broken Hill—and that is where Dad was born. Dad spent the first dozen years of his life in western New South Wales before he and his five siblings were dramatically uprooted after my grandfather broke his back down a silver mine. They moved to Eveleigh Street, Redfern, which then was one of the poorest parts of Sydney. In many ways, my adult life has been defined by the death of my father. From humble roots and an immigrant background, Dad built a successful family accounting practice, which my brother, Bill, and I have grown to one of the largest suburban firms in the State. Bill and I have worked together our entire lives up until this point. I am sure my brother will still be the first person I turn to for counsel and wisdom.

Dad taught us both always to give back in everything we did and always to have respect for our society. He was the most giving man I know and instilled in me the values I hold dear today. He died when he was around the age I am now and I cannot help but feel that every day I live is now a blessing, a gift in time, a chance to practise my father's teachings and give back to my community. My father had never been a religious man, so it was more than a bit of a surprise when he told his family that he was travelling to Israel to find Jesus. Little did he know how true those words would ring when he suffered a fatal heart attack in the Monastery of St George near Jerusalem. My father was the backbone of our family, a proud Australian born and bred and I miss him dearly. My siblings and I were third generation Australians, but we were still always made to feel like we were different. I remember hanging out after school at Spiro's Worksburgers, hearing customers coming in and placing their orders:

Plain burger, packet of chips and a coke thanks wog.

Constantly overhearing casual words like those broke my heart, all the more so because my dad spoke with a broad ocker accent and I felt like I should have just belonged. I was driven to assimilate; more than anything, I wanted to be accepted and so I threw myself into Australian life. I loved rugby league, cricket, and just about anything where I could get my hands on a ball. I was always first up on the hill at Jubilee oval, barracking for my beloved St George Dragons. It was not until much later in life that I found confidence in myself, in my family and our traditions, and I realised that in embracing my Hellenic heritage I was simultaneously embracing my own identity as an Australian.

Multiculturalism is the beating heart of our society and it pumps life through Rockdale every day. But there have been vast changes here since my childhood in Sans Souci. It is a beautiful place, bordering the sparkling waters of Botany Bay, but we are crying out for the amenities that will revitalise our area. When I was growing up, the Brighton baths were one of the premiere destinations in Sydney. We had a state-of-the-art hospital at Kogarah and we were second to none when it came to hospitality, dining and retail. Sadly, our facilities and services today have fallen behind. In many ways our suburbs have expanded and prospered while our utilities and businesses have languished.

Whatever time I have in this place, I will use every moment of it to fight for Rockdale. I will fight to see St George Hospital, the hospital I was born in, brought up to a modern standard of excellence. I will fight to protect our wetlands, our parks and our waterways, and I will fight to develop the commerce and industry that will see us prosper for generations to come. I will fight to restore faith in our local high schools, in James Cook Boys High School and the neighbouring Moorefield Girls High School, where my wife and I first met. I will passionately fight against domestic violence—a terrible scourge on our community which we simply cannot ignore.

I cannot find words strong enough to express the disgust I hold for domestic violence. I have spent my entire life surrounded by strong women—my mother, my sisters, my wife and my wonderful daughters. The girls always get you: I am so lucky to have them in my life. I cannot comprehend how anybody would ever want to hurt any of them. Domestic violence claims the lives of two women every week in Australia and it sickens me that we are not doing enough to end this problem. We need to focus on early intervention and education. We need to get the message out there in our schools that, if dad hits mum, it is not normal and it is not all right. We need to break the cycle of intergenerational suffering. Most of all, we need to protect the lives of women and children.

I am a St George boy through and through, and I swear that I will always represent the best interests of my region and my people during my time in this place. I come to this place with a history, not only of running small businesses but also of representing the interests of the business community. The Liberal Party often touts itself as the party of small business and many in the Labor Party would like to claim that title for themselves. The truth is, as every small business person knows, neither party is the party of small business. In New South Wales, small business directly employs almost two million people.

Jobs should not be a partisan issue. I cannot stand it when I hear that we need to look after either employers or employees, enterprise or labour. Anybody running a business knows that caring for one is caring for the other. Enterprise should be encouraged. Going into business should be simple and easy. If we wish to ensure Australia's prosperity into the future, we need to take the politically difficult choices that will allow our economy to flourish. For 30 years since the 1985 tax summit, we have been ignoring the reforms our State and Federal tax systems so desperately need. Again and again, we commission reports that call for the same courses of action and again and again we stick our heads in the sand because we find it all just a bit too difficult.

Our nation is stuck in a fiscal holding pattern. We fail to take action and then insult Australian taxpayers by billing them for our failure. Too often we have seen legislation introduced not to provide solutions but simply to create the appearance of action. Too many times I have seen the minimum wage and our industrial rights scapegoated in this debate. The reality is that there are much greater issues at play, which if dealt with properly will see both business and the workforce flourish.

It is an indictment on all of us that prior to every election, both sides rule out even looking at the major planks of our taxation platform. We hear platitudes assuring us that there will be no change to negative gearing, to land tax, to the GST, or to superannuation. We need change, not wilful ignorance. We should be developing a tax system that provides adequate funding to the core social programs which we as a people expect. We tinker at the edges while our structural deficit grows year by year. We do not need cosmetic reform; we need wholesale reform.

When the Liberal Party was elected a little more than four years ago, after 16 years of Labor, many in the business community were celebrating. They had been promised lower taxes, less regulation and all the other motherhood statements that conservative politicians regularly offer. Four years down the track and we have just seen more of the same. The Government's slogan is "NSW NOW", but all we are getting is "NSW tomorrow". For the small business sector, inaction and lack of interest have once again been the hallmarks of this Government. Small business owners and their interests need to be represented in this place. The Labor Party

must recognise that the support of small business owners is worth fighting for and to do that we need to take up their cause on issues that matter to them. There could be no better example of this than payroll tax. The payroll tax system in our country is simply counterproductive revenue raising. We arbitrarily punish those who invest in enterprise and in our most valuable asset—human capital. We must seek alternative revenue streams and stop placing a ball and chain on employment in our State. We need governments to take a proactive approach in dealing with these issues, rather than waiting until industry pressure provides them with no alternative.

Technology is changing the world. Modern innovation is constantly creating new platforms from which we can all benefit, but legislation is not keeping up with the pace of advance. It is sad indeed when my youngest grandson, Stavros, is fluent in the use of an iPad but in the halls of power lawmakers are turning a blind eye to the sharing economy made possible by tablets and smartphones. As legislators we need to embrace the platforms and services which the people in our electorates are already using. At the same time, we need to recognise our responsibility and ensure that existing industries are adequately supported to adapt to those changes. It is never good enough for any of us, as elected representatives, to throw our hands in the air and declare that a problem is too difficult. I will always act to ensure that government is working for the people and not the other way around.

Without the work of so many people, there is no way I could have found my way into this place. First, I acknowledge the work of my predecessor, John Flowers. He was the first Liberal member for Rockdale and, if you will forgive me, I hope the last. To my core campaign crew, thank you so much for all the early mornings and long days, for every weekend we spent doorknocking and every night we spent calling residents. George Perivolarellis—thank you mate. I thank Michael Rosser, Mohamed Moubayed, George Vellis, Jack Boyd, Siobhan Armson-Graham, Uncle John Tsounis, Katerina and the entire Jovanovski family and, of course, my champion friend Khalil Ibrahim. I can never repay you all for the countless hours you sacrificed for me.

My sincere thanks go to the Labor Party activists who supported my campaign: Anna Lignou, Bill Kritharas, Vicky Roussos, Sam Almaliki, Bert Loveridge, Angelo and Irimi Anestis, Kirsten Andrews, Linda Beattie, Adrian and Joanne Coates, Steve Kenny, Big Bill Kotevski, Phil Lang, Zlate Angelkoski, Daniel Barbar, Micky Pesic, Maggie Potts, Mick Shiels, Andrew Tsounis and the entire Tsounis family as well as all the other branch members and, I am sure, dozens of others I have forgotten. I could speak at length about each of you and the incredible contribution that you made in returning Rockdale to Labor, but we would be here all day.

To our local Rockdale City councillors: Shane O'Brien, Tarek Ibrahim, Andrew Tsounis, Joe Awada, Ron Bezic, Peter Poulos, Petros Kalligeros, Paul and Lydia Sedrak, Nick Mickovski, Mark Hanna, James Macdonald, Michael Nagi, Liz Barlow and last—but certainly not in any way least—my old schoolmate, fellow James Cook High boy and dear friend Bill Saravinovski: You all do our city proud and I look forward to working with you to make Rockdale a better place. To my friends and supporters: Andrew Daoud, Henry Yan, Grant "The Mango" Hawkswell, the Danias family, Greg Gav, George Giannaros, the Kosta family, Paul Harbord, Michael Doueih, Victoria and the Panourakis family, Fouad Deiry, Robert Moody, Peter Efstratiou, the Stamateris family, Joe and Steve Brcic, Jim Angelis, Peter Antonopoulos, Alexandra and the Mitropoulos family, Reg Fadel, Brett Levy, the Tsounis family, the wonderful Bill Mougios, and everybody else: You have been there for me through thick and thin, and I thank you.

To the union movement, particularly to Mark Buttigieg, Rita Mallia, Brian Parker, Randall Millington, Tony Sheldon and all the others, thank you for your dedication to working people. To my friend Andrew Ferguson, you and I proved that business and unions can work together for the benefit of all. To Luke Foley, John Robertson and the Opposition staff, thank you for leading our party through such a difficult time and for your commitment to the Rockdale electorate. To my incredibly patient parents-in-law, Nick and Helen Salvanos, thank you for everything you have done for me over so many years.

To my children, Tina, Eleni, Paul, Nick and Chris, to my sons-in-law, Carl and Bill and my daughter-in-law, Stephanie, and to my grandchildren, Dean, Rossie, Stevie and Stavie: You give me reason in life. To my siblings, Angela, Despina and of course my brother, Bill, and their spouses, Ian, Craig and Gina: You have always been there for me. To my sisters-in-law, Katina and Jenny and their spouses, Emanuel and Don, to my proud uncle Nick Kamper, a Broken Hill boy, and to my entire extended family—there are too many of you to name—I appreciate everything you have done for me.

To my business partners John, Anthony and my gun nephew, Paul Kamper, and to the entire Kamper Accounting staff: Thank you for your support and patience over the past four years. To my best friend, John "Tank" Petropoulos and the entire Petropoulos family: Thank you for always being there—friends for life. To the members of Young Labor, thank you for your tireless work. Without you I and so many others would never have had a hope of being elected. To my volunteer coordinator Chris Donovan, thank you for your extraordinary support and effort.

To all the wonderful community organisations, local religious and cultural groups who embraced me so warmly, thank you. To the Greek Consul General, Stavros Kyrimis, your support was inspiring. To my political mentors Cherie Burton, Noreen Hay, Anthony Albanese, Sophie Cotsis, Doug and Robert McClelland, Brian Langton, Graham Richardson, and Morris Iemma: Without each one of you I would have been running blind. To my colleague Shaoquett Moselmane, you have embraced me as a brother and your insight into Rockdale politics has guided me throughout the past year; thank you. To my mates Chris Minns and Jihad Dib, how special for

us to have walked into this place together, and how lucky we are to be in this Parliament with a Labor caucus with such incredible talent.

To everybody at head office, Jamie Clements, Kaila Murnain, David Latham, George and Courtney Houssos, David Dobson, Lewis Hamilton Jim Minns and all those who make up the most effective campaigning machine in the country: Thank you so much for your often underappreciated work. I know I have thanked so many people, but as I have campaigned over the past year I have been truly humbled by the assistance, counsel and kindness I have received from those hundreds of people around me. It only feels right to me that I acknowledge all of your contributions to a victory that is not mine, but ours.

Emanuel Tsardoulis, my dear and cherished friend. Emanuel came to run my campaign more than a year ago now, just months before his tragic death. You were taken from us far too soon. I miss you every day and I still check my phone waiting for you to call. I wake up thinking it is a bad dream, and that you will be back with us at any moment. We started this campaign together, and I know you are up there watching us right now. Zoi, thank you for being here today. Emanuel always had a sense of the divine, a sense of fate about him. I think it was in his design that he helped Edward McDougall find his way to run my campaign. Teddy you are a young man well beyond your years. You are the smartest person I know. You display an incredible loyalty and compassion to all those around you, and I am so proud to call you my friend.

Finally, to every person living in Rockdale, to those who supported me and to those who did not, I promise today that I will be deserving of your trust and faith. I will represent our entire community without fear or favour and, if I fail, I ask that you throw me out in all due haste: Thank you.