



Inaugural Speeches

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The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): On behalf of the new member for Gosford, I acknowledge everyone in the gallery, especially the family, friends and supporters of the member for Gosford. Welcome to the Legislative Assembly. I call the member for Gosford.

Ms KATHY SMITH (Gosford) [10.57 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I thank the previous speaker, David Mehan, for doing the hard bit. He covered all the statistics for the Central Coast, which is always hard to get through. Standing here today is an honour that awes and inspires me. I hope that my deceased parents can see me and that they are proud of my accomplishments. I congratulate all my fellow members, returned and new, on their success at the recent New South Wales election. Let us hope together we accomplish much for the State of New South Wales in the next four years.

I have many people to thank who assisted me with my success, people who voted for me and placed a lot of trust and belief in me. I will be forever grateful to them for their support and I will ensure that I do everything in my power to live up to their trust. Marie Andrews, a former member in this Chamber, was my predecessor for many years in the seat of Gosford. It is my belief that if Marie had not retired when she did, we would not have lost that seat at the last election. Senator Deborah O'Neill and Marie have acted as formidable mentors and advisers and have given their support by making themselves available to answer questions at any time, day or night.

David Harris, now back here as the member for Wyong, supported me all the way and was an invaluable source in boosting me, maintaining my confidence and providing guidance and advice. I would not have made it without my campaign team, especially Jesse Corda, who is present in the gallery today. This young man made sure I was out there meeting people and making phone calls without let-up. Thank you, Jesse, for pushing me. Jesse is a young man to watch as his strength and commitment will take him from success to success in the Labor Party. Jesse was more than ably assisted by Rhys Zorro, another young fellow who knows how to motivate people and ensure that the job gets done, and he does it with a dry humour that brings laughter into the hardest of days. Thank you, Rhys. These two were ably assisted by others of the Young Labor movement; I am sure we have all met them. We had some extremely motivated and physical days, chasing around with the Young Labor Flying Squad when they hit the electorate running.

Also I had the incredible Michael Buckland coordinating my campaign, and what a great job he did, despite the frustrations I must have put his way. I owe much to Jamie Clements and Kaila Murnain and I thank them both for the faith they placed in me. Members from Unions NSW door-knocked in my electorate on three separate occasions; their anti-privatisation message was welcomed by all householders. Without them I would have had to do a lot more walking and a lot more talking. I thank each and every one of them. Of course, our new leader, Luke Foley, visited the Central Coast on a regular basis, showing genuine interest and commitment to the Central Coast. The Labor community on the Central Coast owes a big thank you to Linda Burney and Greg Donnelly for keeping the fires burning for us for the past four years and I take this opportunity to thank them on behalf of all of us.

Branch members were unwavering in their support and practical help and I thank them all. There are far too many to mention but we all know who they are. I have to make special mention of Genny Murphy, who unfortunately cannot be here today. Genny is the Secretary of the Peninsula Day branch of the Labor Party and is a formidable lady. Genny has become a very special person to me since I decided to stand for election and I will be forever grateful for her encouragement and support. It was never too early in the morning and nothing was too hard for Genny. I thank Genny for her hard work and very special friendship. I thank also the staff here in Macquarie Street. Since arriving in a state of amazement and disbelief the Clerk and all the parliamentary staff have offered assistance with a smile and in a very helpful manner. From induction day to problems with my new iPhone, everyone has been tremendous. I thank Madam Speaker and her office for the warm welcome I received and also for her very kind greeting card.

Since campaigning began my husband, Peter, has turned grocery shopping into a fine art. His fantastic efforts in the kitchen have allowed me to give up cooking entirely. Peter, I thank you for your patience and support but now I have been elected it is not going to let up at all; nothing much is going to change. My children and grandchildren have been neglected as I became too busy to catch up with them. They too have been supportive and I know are very proud of me. They are all here today and I thank them all from the bottom of my heart. I have here my son, Richard, and his wife, Ellie, his daughter, Georgia, my number one grand-daughter, the firstborn, my daughter, Janet—Christopher, her husband, could not be here—and their children, Ali and Joshua. Thank you, guys. I love you all dearly.

My background is working class through and through. I was born in Sheffield, England, the city known for its steel mills and cutlery. It was also renowned for the smoke and dirt that spewed out of those mills, although I believe they have cleaned up their act now

as one after another of those mills has succumbed to overseas manufacturing. Both my grandfathers served in and survived the First World War, although survived may be a misnomer. As with so many others, that conflict left them damaged and the effects of it went to the graves with them. My maternal grandfather in particular was affected very badly and I do not recall him uttering more than a couple of dozen words in all the years that I knew him.

At the outset of World War II my parents were too young to be called to military service and by the time my father did reach enlistment age he had already been instructed by the government to become an employee in the protected occupations of the steel industry. He was told he was to undertake an apprenticeship as an electrician. On leaving school my mother became a cashier and secretary at Woolworths, which was an elite position by local standards. After the war my father worked long hours helping to establish a business being set up by a former Royal Air Force pilot with his demob pay. The business consisted of only the two of them and there were many times when we would not see my father for days on end as they worked tirelessly to make a go of things.

Towards the end of his life dad told me that he regretted ending up working in an office for a living as the business was growing and expanding; he would have preferred to work outdoors but at that time that was the prevailing attitude. That generation scarred by depression and war believed they should be grateful to have a job and beholden to the people employing them. Many years before dad had lectured me on changing jobs so often even though each change was a positive one. Work was not supposed to be enjoyed but was to be undertaken come what may to ensure the care of your family.

I think it was this attitude that led to my own view towards work. I do not work for people; I work with people. However, I do work for money; I have always worked for money. My parents were dedicated, giving people. They toiled hard all their lives to provide for their children but it was taken for granted that the older children would leave school as soon as possible to help provide for the family. I am the second eldest of six children and we were fortunate, I think, when my father accepted a transfer to a new company acquired by his employer. My parents decided we would up stakes and move to the beautiful spa town of Buxton in the Peak District of Derbyshire.

In the village we moved to we had an outdoor type of upbringing with the moorland beginning only a matter of metres from our house on a Roman road which continued on over the moors on its long way north. My friends and I and our dogs—and in one case horses—spent our time wandering and exploring the countryside. But in the true country way I married young. While I was in hospital following the birth of my son, Richard, I was told by my father that the family had decided to come to Australia. In the end my husband and I and our brand new son came along too. Ten of us came and now, many years later, it would take me quite a while to sit and count how many we have become. We are all over the place now.

I said earlier that I think we were lucky to have moved to the countryside in England but prior to this move my parents had already decided we could have a better life in Australia and they were in the process of planning this when the transfer offer was made. At that time I was only very young and when my parents broke the news to me that we were going to Australia I was so excited by the prospect that I immediately ran to the local library to find reading material to learn about this new, exciting and relatively unknown place. In fact, it was so unknown to me that when the only book I could find was entitled *Australasia* I thought I had hit pay dirt—although I must say that it did not answer many of the questions I had about Australia.

Following in my parents' footsteps I spent my working life office bound but through choice and in positions I enjoyed, which was just as well as my third child, Janet, was only 12 months old when my marriage essentially came to an end. After the breakup of the marriage, I was the breadwinner for my children and me and apart from rare periods when my first husband would contribute financially, I did it alone. There was no child support agency in those days. I loved being with my children as we built our lives together and we had much fun and laughter, as we still do today. We really do make a great team, guys.

My career has been in business administration and management and this is how I came to meet my second husband, Peter. We married in 2001. Peter and I moved to the Central Coast following the sale of a very successful business established by Peter in 1985. We decided we were too young to retire but did not want to tie ourselves down to the obligations of full-time work so we decided to move to the Central Coast and buy a property on acreage to operate as a bed and breakfast. In this way we could go travelling or do what we wanted when we did not feel like working. In 2003 we purchased the perfect property in Empire Bay. After a 12-month battle to obtain a licence to operate we welcomed our first guests.

Disillusion had set in while fighting bureaucracy and as Peter had begun to take on consulting work in his area of expertise we decided to sell up and move to a smaller house at Umina Beach. This gave me greater opportunity to pursue other interests and led to my full transition into consumer advocacy. Earlier, in 1996, I had been diagnosed with cancer and during treatment I had become aware of an elderly lady who had to travel from Wyong to the Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for radiotherapy treatment each day for six weeks. She travelled by bus and train, and what torture that must have been for her. I was living in Hornsby at the time of my diagnosis and I was fortunate enough to be able to afford private radiotherapy treatment only 10 minutes away from home and my place of work. Silly or not, I was left with a feeling of guilt knowing that this much older lady was having to struggle to travel for

treatment while I could be driven for mine without any effort on my part.

On moving to the Central Coast, I was appalled to find that the only change to the local situation concerning radiotherapy treatment was the establishment of a private facility. However, that facility cost cancer patients thousands of dollars if they were to have treatment locally rather than travelling for public—that is, no cost to patient—treatment. As we were in a low socio-economic area, this was an impossible situation for some and many people were incurring debt to pay for treatment. That debt would mean many years of repayments and many years of depriving themselves in order to make them. Others were forgoing this lifesaving treatment altogether in the hope that the doctors were wrong.

Being a person who always spoke up for the underdog and who took on the battles of those not able to fight for themselves, it was inevitable that I would do something to draw attention to this dreadful situation and a group of us began campaigning for the provision of public radiotherapy locally in 2006. It was an intense campaign, and it was only me and my very loyal and beautiful friend Kimberly Bates who continued through to the end. We had support from the then members for Wyong and Gosford, David Harris and Marie Andrews. In April 2010, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Premier Kristina Keneally came to Gosford to announce joint State and Federal funding of more than \$38 million for the construction of the Central Coast Cancer Centre, which of course included the public radiotherapy facilities for which we had battled so hard. On that day I had been discharged from hospital following the removal of a mouth cancer for less than 24 hours and Mr Rudd must have thought I had a very unusual way of speaking.

The Prime Minister praised the actions of consumer advocates for bringing the problem to the Government's attention. He pointed out that even though politicians think they know what is needed by the community this knowledge does not always tally with what the public really wants. It had been made very clear to us by senior politicians at both State and Federal levels that without the public action the Central Coast would not have been in the running for public radiotherapy for many years. As I recall, we were number seven on the list, so public advocacy works. Today I am pleased to report that the number of people on the Central Coast receiving lifesaving radiotherapy has increased dramatically—I understand by about 22 per cent. This is not the number of people deciding to be treated locally rather than travelling for treatment; this is an increase in the number of people who previously would not have had any treatment.

It is impossible to say how many of these people would have missed out or who would not have survived under the previous arrangements. However, statistics demonstrate what a tremendous investment by the Labor Government in cancer survival this public facility has been. So, fellow members, let us all listen to the public advocates in our area when they come to us with an issue. Many lives may be helped. The radiotherapy campaign on the Central Coast also introduced to me broader State and national issues that were in need of cancer consumer advocacy. Cancer directly affects one in three of us, but many more indirectly when our friends and family are impacted by this disease. While I had been campaigning on the Central Coast I had also been working as a consumer advocate with the Cancer Voices movement in Australia.

Cancer Voices is the largest truly independent, non-funded cancer consumer organisation in Australia. I became the chair of Cancer Voices NSW as well as an executive committee member of Cancer Voices Australia. During my time with Cancer Voices, many battles were fought and won at both State and Federal levels. There is still much to be done in the cancer area, but I came to realise that the time had come to return to my own backyard and to work to the best of my abilities to continue to improve the lives of people on the Central Coast. There was never any question but that that would be done with the Labor Party.

Gosford must surely be of the most diverse electorates in the State, with a range of communities with very different needs. It has a history to be proud of and a lifestyle that is to be envied. I do not intend to give a history or geography lesson, David has already done that very ably. Rather, I will discuss some of its myriad concerns. It encompasses the beautiful seaside communities of Umina, Ocean, Ettalong and Pearl beaches alongside the fishing community of Patonga, and the mountain communities of Somersby, Mangrove, Kulnura, to Peats Ridge Mount White. We have the small river communities on the Hawkesbury River and the larger more urban communities of Woy Woy and Gosford city and its surrounding suburbs. All these areas have different and very real needs that must be addressed. No one community can be considered more important than the others, and there is a lot of work to be done to ensure the best outcomes for the majority of people. It never ceases to amaze me how decisions can often be made in favour of those making the loudest demands rather than taking the route that will benefit the largest number of people.

Over the past four years this has occurred in a number of cases in my electorate where expenditure is being made on projects that benefit only a small number of people. In one case, \$7 million has been spent on a pedestrian underpass that I have yet to find one resident who will speak in favour of let alone walk through. This project has been foisted on them at such a high cost. They do not want it. I would like to question the wisdom of a few projects. Hopefully I can meet with the Minister concerned to discuss possible redirection of funds to related projects in the electorate. One of the projects involves \$45 million that has already been committed for a vehicle underpass that will run alongside the pedestrian underpass. We will see who uses it.

The condition of local roads is appalling, and nowhere more so than on the Woy Woy Peninsula, an area which has approximately 35,000 residents and which attracts many tourists. I am hearing reports of, and in fact have spoken to, elderly

residents who feel isolated in their homes because they fear walking to bus stops along roads without footpaths. The roads are merely hard strips with crumbling edges. We have a new local saying that I have heard recently: "We used to drive on the left, now we drive on what's left." Young parents pushing strollers and the disabled cannot walk in safety and mums and dads are concerned about their children walking alone in the path of oncoming traffic. Isolation will surely lead to depression and other related health problems. That is a very expensive outcome for a lack of investment in roads.

Coal seam gas extraction in water catchment and food production areas is a great concern to 99 per cent of local residents. Assurance should be given by this Government, and adhered to, that coal seam gas will never be extracted from this region until such time as it is proven to be safe and viable, and the Chief Scientist has reported to this end. The Labor Party has set the precedent on this issue and I call on this Government to follow suit. Gosford city itself has been declining for many years, and unless a cohesive plan is developed and approved for the city as a whole, it has been said by some working in the town planning profession that it may never shake off the death throes it appears to be suffering.

One Sunday morning recently I tried to get a cup of coffee in Gosford, but no cafes were open. I could not get a cup of coffee in this once-thriving town. We have a chronic housing shortage and a rapidly growing homelessness problem. We have an official youth unemployment rate of 24 per cent. However, welfare organisations put this at closer to 40 per cent. With the demise of TAFE on the Central Coast much opportunity for our young people to train for meaningful employment has been lost. We have a school retention rate of 6:10. Something does not quite equate. Why would anyone move the opportunity of further study or vocational training at TAFE from the people who need it most on the Central Coast and attach it to an organisation many miles away in the Hunter region? It may not make much sense but that is exactly what has happened under this Government. Those are just some of the reasons that prompted my decision to enter politics.

The Central Coast has long been a forgotten entity—an appendage to the Hunter or northern Sydney regions, a poor cousin, an also-ran. In the lead-up to the election, promises were made by this now re-elected Government to recognise and respect the Central Coast area as a stand-alone region, which—as David pointed out—it had been declared some years ago. The members representing the electorates of Wyong, The Entrance and Swansea and I will be closely monitoring the situation. We will be working as one unit to ensure the best possible outcomes from all the commitments made by those opposite in the lead-up to the 2015 State election—for example, promises in the region of \$1 billion were made during that campaign.

This investment will be warmly welcomed by each of the approximately 320,000 residents on the Central Coast. I note that the re-elected Government has already axed the position of Minister for the Central Coast; we now only have a Parliamentary Secretary for the Hunter and Central Coast to look over us. I hope that is not a sign of things to come. As I said earlier, there is much to be done. I stood for election promising to do the best I possibly could for the people of Gosford. Today I reaffirm that promise to every resident in the electorate of Gosford. I will work with them for the betterment of the people of the Central Coast. Thank you.