



Inaugural Speeches

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Page: 241

The SPEAKER: On behalf of the member for Granville, I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of the Federal member for Werriwa, Mr Laurie Ferguson, MHR, as well as family, friends and supporters of the new member.

Ms JULIA FINN (Granville) [5.54 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I am honoured to stand here as the member for Granville and as a representative of the Australian Labor Party. Labor has a long and proud tradition of local representation in Granville, and I am pleased and honoured to recommence that representation after the recent election. The possibilities open to parliamentarians to improve the lives of others by creating opportunities and providing protections for the vulnerable has been a great motivation. The electorate of Granville was created in 1894. It elected the Labor candidate, George Smailes, who was born in Durham and who started work at the age of 10 in coalmines at Newcastle. He studied at night to educate himself and eventually became a minister. Some time after migrating to New South Wales he was appointed Pastor of the Primitive Methodist Church at Parramatta.

The next Labor representative, elected in 1913, was former Premier J. T. Lang, who represented the electorate of Granville until 1920. He was instrumental in the introduction of valuable social legislation to implement the 44-hour working week; advances in workers compensation, including compulsory insurance; establishment of the Industrial Relations Commission; and the elimination of fees for secondary education. It was a privilege to know Jack Ferguson, the former Deputy Premier and member for Merrylands, which now falls within the Granville electorate, whom I came to know after his retirement. Admired by so many, Jack devoted himself to the service of his community, along with his wife, Mary, even in retirement. His loyal and effective working partnership with former Premier Neville Wran is well known. He is credited with both Wran's ascendancy to the leadership, and the longevity and success of his Government.

Having left school at 13, Jack was largely self-educated and was a great champion of public libraries from his time as a councillor on Parramatta City Council. I am sure he would commend the changes to libraries in recent years that have ensured that they continue to make knowledge and information accessible and affordable online, as well as through books and other publications. His humility was reflected in his request not to have a State funeral and instead to have his funeral at his local parish, St Patrick's, Guildford, which of course could not fit all those who came to farewell him.

I acknowledge the former member for Granville, Laurie Ferguson, Jack Ferguson's son and a close friend of mine, who is here this evening. Laurie went on to become the Federal member for Reid and now serves as the Federal member for Werriwa. A tireless advocate for human rights, Laurie is widely respected for his work with ethnic communities and his longstanding relationship with many groups, which did not cease when he moved to the Werriwa electorate. He is still a member of the Granville East Labor Party branch and was also a strong supporter and trusted advisor during my election campaign, as well as those of the candidates for electorates in the Werriwa area.

Kim Yeadon also made an outstanding contribution to the Granville electorate and to New South Wales as a Minister. Locally, he achieved many things, including the construction of new police stations, the Merrylands transport interchange and a school hall at Granville Boys High School. As a Minister he introduced the first native vegetation management legislation, as well as restructured the timber industry, allowing it to transition sustainably to focus more on plantations while many significant forests were rightly included in our national parks. He also introduced a pioneering greenhouse gas emissions trade between the Tokyo Electric Power Company and State Forests. I worked with Kim Yeadon in both his electorate and ministerial offices, and deeply respect his intellectual curiosity, interest in policy detail and unwavering commitment to his principles.

I acknowledge the tremendous support I received during the election campaign from many people, but particularly from my family and from Labor Party members and activists. My husband, Dr Leigh Martin, has been a tremendous support during a very long and arduous election campaign. His advice and assistance have been invaluable. My mother has also been a great supporter, despite my inability to visit her as much as I would have liked over the past year. While my father passed away in 2004, the values he taught me were a great source of strength and inspiration during the campaign. I make special mention of David Voltz and David Halliday. David Voltz organised much of the campaign at the same time as caring for his partner, Toni, after her diagnosis with melanoma. After Toni's illness deteriorated rapidly earlier this year, David Halliday proved to be invaluable in taking the reins of the campaign, supported by Felix Eldridge and Ashley Buck.

Activists from the union movement also assisted, particularly Alison Rahill, Rita Malia and Jennifer Glass. I also mention the enormous contributions made by Alex Peck, Ian Pandalovski, Alex Tak Tak, Steve Christou, Maurie Campbell, Ting An Zhang, Janaki Poudel, Prabir Maitra, Vasee Rajadurai, Rafah and Kassem Chalabi, Councillor Glenn Elmore, Councillor Lisa Lake, Durga Owen, Arunesh Seth, Mustafa Hamed, Clovis Batti, and Elie and Sandra Khaltoum, among many dozens of others.

I have lived in Rosehill and Granville for more than 20 years. I have served on Parramatta City Council for the past 15 years, which provides a strong insight into the area, its people and their needs. I note that when Jack Ferguson delivered his inaugural speech, he spoke of the need for better planning and cheaper housing in Western Sydney. Those needs are still pressing today, with apartments, townhouses and duplexes replacing homes on quarter acre blocks, but without additional classrooms, train services or improved access to the M4. At the local level, I am strongly opposed to plans to close Wentworthville and Guildford swimming pools at the same time as the populations of these suburbs is rapidly increasing—density allows and necessitates local community infrastructure like swimming pools. You should not have to drive so that you can have a swim to cool off on a really hot day.

The Granville area has a great legacy of Victorian and Federation architecture that should be preserved and considered carefully in accommodating our growing population. The suburb of Granville was originally established as Parramatta junction when the first western railway line was constructed. Industry and housing followed, and Granville served as a major rail interchange until around 18 months ago, when the current timetable removed 100 services a week from Granville station. Those services and more need to be reinstated if Granville is to accommodate the 19,000 additional apartments suggested by the Parramatta Road Revitalisation Strategy.

While large million dollar homes are not uncommon now in the Granville electorate, the average income is around \$200 per week less than the New South Wales average, yet rents are close to the Sydney average. Houses costing less than \$550,000 are extremely rare, poorly located and in poor condition, as are apartments under \$350,000. In addition, Granville has above average numbers of people working in industries with high rates of casual employment such as construction and hospitality, resulting in a lack of job and financial security. Granville also has above average concentrations of social housing, although many people and families who qualify for social housing can wait more than a decade to be housed, paying rents that are not affordable.

During the election campaign, I came to work closely with Holroyd Community Aid and its dynamic coordinator Narelle Morris. Holroyd Community Aid has assisted people in the Merrylands area since 1966 and recently lost a tender for the provision of emergency relief, which has caused great community angst. In recent years, Holroyd Community Aid provided an average of around \$180,000 in emergency relief to almost 1,000 clients each year, along with Energy Account Payment Assistance vouchers, food vouchers, nappies and assistance with phone bills. These are the necessities of life and it is deeply concerning to me that families can be forced to choose between paying for food and electricity bills not only in a wealthy country like Australia but in a suburb with homes that can cost in excess of \$1.3 million.

Public education and universal healthcare are great achievements of the Labor movement and the people of Granville certainly benefit from them. Despite below average incomes, the people of Granville have higher than average levels of university and TAFE education—this is certainly a remarkable transformation in recent decades. The social mobility and job opportunities that have been provided by affordable education cannot be taken for granted and should not be taken away from the less well off. Granville TAFE is the second largest TAFE campus in New South Wales and provides great opportunities for school leavers and people retraining to improve their skills. It must continue to provide affordable quality vocational education. Similarly, the University of Western Sydney provides great opportunities for its students, many of whom are the first in their families to attend university.

Granville benefits from its proximity to the employment centres of Australia's largest medical precinct at Westmead and Sydney's second central business district at Parramatta. Both require government support and private sector investment to continue to grow and thrive. Quality local jobs go some way to addressing the traditional disadvantages of suburbs like Granville, Merrylands and Guildford, but also make accommodating Sydney's growing population and its commuters easier if workers do not have to travel far to find good jobs. In relation to Westmead, there is a trend to rely more on the private sector for the delivery of health services in our hospitals. I am concerned about what this means for my constituents in Granville as patients, and for employees at Westmead Hospital and Westmead Children's Hospital.

The electorate of Granville is extremely culturally diverse, with more than 42 per cent of residents born overseas in countries where English is not the most commonly spoken language, particularly Lebanon, India, Sri Lanka, China and Afghanistan; and Granville has much larger than average Hindu and Muslim populations. Supporting and celebrating our cultural and religious diversity is important, and I have been honoured to be invited to share in significant religious and cultural celebrations for many of these communities. As a councillor, I have tried to make it easier for faith-based communities to come together and pray. I recognise that when my faith, Catholicism, and other traditional Christian faiths established churches, land in Sydney was plentiful and cheap, and most parishioners walked to church so did not require allocated car parking to be set aside to be used for only a few hours every week. I intend to maintain my commitment to supporting religious freedom and diversity as a member of this Parliament.

Many people have settled in Granville after fleeing wars or being forcibly relocated to build a better and safer life for their families. Lebanese families first settled in the area during the Ottoman period, but many more came during and after the civil war. They have made a great contribution to the local community and to Australia in business, politics, sport and charity work. I note my predecessor, Tony Issa, was the first Lebanese Australian member for Granville as well as the first Lebanese Australian Lord Mayor of Parramatta. Through my close association with local Tamil and Palestinian families, my concern about their displacement and decades of discrimination has grown. I am hopeful that the recent change in the Sri Lankan Government will lead towards national reconciliation and end decades of discrimination against the Tamil people. I would also like to see those responsible for war crimes brought to justice.

In the case of Palestine, the displacement continues and the frequent conflicts are a great source of sorrow and pain for Granville's Arabic-speaking communities, especially the Palestinians. I support the recognition of Israel and Palestine, and believe that the security of Israelis and Palestinians is of equal importance and value. I recently joined the local Palestinian community in welcoming the Palestinian national football team to Australia for the Asian Cup and saw how much pride the community had in the team and the hope they give for Palestinian statehood. While these are international issues and usually reserved for the Federal Parliament, they have a strong impact on the local diaspora communities. You cannot know those communities without appreciating the hardships they have faced.

I come to this Parliament having worked for many years in public policy within the New South Wales public service as well as the private sector, so I have a strong interest and experience in many policy areas as diverse as transport, housing, energy and superannuation. In particular, I have a strong commitment to the promotion and growth of renewable energy as an increasingly cost-effective alternative to coal-fired electricity that can assist in reducing greenhouse gas emissions. I accept the views of the overwhelming majority of scientific experts that climate change is real. A comprehensive response is both necessary and overdue. In the modern era, energy is an essential service and governments have a responsibility to ensure its continued supply and to ensure that the public interest is not undermined by the monopolistic nature of supply. I also believe it is necessary and responsible to secure affordable gas supplies for local business and residents as Australia becomes a gas exporter from the east coast. This can be done without the risks associated with coal seam gas.

Furthermore, I am increasingly concerned that within sections of the media and public policy debate, scientific expertise and evidence is no longer valued as it should be and opinion in many cases is considered superior to fact. Disregard for the science and evidence of climate change is but one of many examples of this. I am glad that both sides of politics have taken measures to cease recognising those who celebrate ignorance by refusing to vaccinate their children against debilitating and sometimes deadly diseases. I hope that this is the first step back to valuing knowledge, reinvesting in the sciences and being able to honestly describe ourselves as the clever country.

I also come to this Parliament with the benefit of having grown up in rural New South Wales. My mother still lives in Canowindra, where she practiced as a solicitor. Canowindra is a great place with which my family has a long relationship. I grew up on a farm, which my father worked until I was 30 years old. Contrary to conventional farm management, my father maintained many beautiful trees on the farm as he loved the native birds that nested in them. Maintaining habitat is one of many important reasons to keep protections for native vegetation on private land. I understand the current conflicts between traditional farming and both mining and large scale irrigation. I am very concerned about animal rights and deplore the suggestion of "ag gag" laws—disturbing footage of animal cruelty is evidence of a crime and collecting it should not be criminalised.

At the same time, I am equally concerned about PETA's current campaign against wool. Having assisted with shearing on my father's farm every six months from a young age, I never saw shearers mistreating sheep and saw only occasional tiny nicks and cuts; nothing like the bloodbath PETA presents. I cannot imagine the situation is particularly different elsewhere, but where there is evidence of it, it should be investigated and prosecuted. It should not be presented as typical.

Come 2019 I want to see a Granville electorate that is not ignored by Government; where educational opportunities are cherished; where transport is improved through more train services and improved access to the M4; where Westmead hospital staff are supported and emergency waiting times reduced; and where local roads do not become rat runs due to excessive WestConnex tolls. I want to be a part of a Parliament that values diversity, where we welcome people with backgrounds different from our own and ensure they share the opportunities that we, as Australians, benefit from. There will be times when as parliamentarians we are forced to make hard decisions. But I reassure my constituents in Granville, Westmead, Wentworthville, South Wentworthville, Merrylands, Merrylands West, Mays Hill and Guildford that I will be accessible and they can rely on me to represent them in this Chamber in our country's oldest Parliament.