



Inaugural Speeches

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Page: 634

The SPEAKER: I warmly welcome to the gallery the family, friends and supporters of the new member for Swansea. I also welcome former member of the Australian House of Representatives representing the seat of Charlton, the Hon. Greg Combet, and former member for Swansea Robert Coombs. All of you are most welcome to the Legislative Assembly this morning.

Ms YASMIN CATLEY (Swansea) [10.10 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, the custodians of the land on which we meet in this place. I pay my respects to the elders past and present and to their future leaders. I am proud to stand in this Chamber as the elected representative of the people of Swansea and so I also pay my respects to the first nations people of that land, the Awabakal people and the Darkinjung people. I am honoured to stand here knowing that the people of Swansea have put their trust in me to represent them. Being elected to the New South Wales Parliament by your community is one of the greatest privileges one can receive. Thank you. To the people of Swansea: I will represent you with integrity and with honesty, and I will always respect the interests of our community. I am humbled that you have given me this responsibility. You will not be disappointed.

Swansea has an abundance of natural beauty. It is surrounded by two significant lake systems, Lake Macquarie and the Tuggerah Lakes. It is also home to the stunning Munmorah State Conservation Area with its sparkling coastline and enviable nature walks. There are four surf clubs stretched along the 40 kilometres of pristine coast, which is the eastern border of the electorate—Lakes Surf Club, Catherine Hill Bay, Caves Beach and Swansea Belmont. I am proud to tell you that I am a member of the Caves Beach Surf Club, where I volunteer my time as a lifesaver. There has been a bit of competition about which electorate has the most beautiful beach. I am not going to weigh into that debate, because I know the answer. However, I can inform the House that I host the safest beach because I am there. You are all welcome to come and visit. Be assured that whilst you are swimming you will be safe. My patrol has not lost a swimmer yet.

I joined the Australian Labor Party when I was 19 years of age. I joined because it is the party that shares my values of fairness, justice and equality. I grew up in a working-class family. We were taught to love and respect ourselves and others, to treat people how you would like to be treated, to think about others and to stand up for what is right. But, above all else, we were taught to be proud of who we are and loyal to what we believe in. Today I am here to share not just some of my story but also the stories of the people and the communities I represent. If ever there were any doubt about my purpose for being here it was quickly dispelled last week in question time. The Minister for Skills was asked about the debacle in which this Government has left TAFE NSW—underfunded, understaffed, under-resourced, overpriced and inaccessible. The Minister's ill-considered response was, "We make no apology about the fees."

I know that in my electorate apprentices are paying between \$500 and \$1,500 extra for their courses. This is creating barriers for people in the Swansea electorate who want to learn. Labor has always valued vocational education. Labor values TAFE because TAFE means skills and skills mean jobs—jobs for our young people, jobs for the disadvantaged or jobs for those who are looking to make a positive change in their lives. Every day we depend in some way on the services, skills or support of someone with a qualification from TAFE, such as the mechanic who fixes our car, the early childhood educator who looks after our children or the hairdresser who cuts our hair.

There are a large number of tradies in the Swansea electorate. They all relied on the local TAFE to gain their qualifications. In the 2011 census it was found that, at 10.9 per cent, Swansea has the State's third-highest proportion of residents employed in construction, at 24.6 per cent, Swansea has the sixth-highest proportion of residents with trade qualifications and, at 56.2 per cent, it has the fifth-highest proportion of residents who left school in year 10 or earlier. I commit in this House to being a champion of TAFE for the people of Swansea and New South Wales.

It is with enormous pride that I stand here today in the Legislative Assembly of the New South Wales Parliament, the oldest Parliament in this country, to deliver what will be the first of many speeches. To give some context, there have been 1,639 members of the Legislative Assembly. Only 57 of them have been women, which includes those who are here today. Being here in this Chamber as the elected representative for the electorate of Swansea is a privilege of great proportion and one that I will be reminded of every time I enter this place.

I was preselected as the Labor candidate in February 2015. As many of my colleagues will attest, winning preselection in a political party is no easy feat. I thank my local Australian Labor Party branch members, many of whom are in the gallery, for throwing their support behind me to be their candidate at the 2015 general election. I also thank Anthony Albanese, Jill Hall, Pat Conroy, John Graham and the Leader of the Opposition, Luke Foley, for their encouragement and support. To Greg Combet, it was your support and encouragement that gave me the confidence to stand for public office as a representative of the Australian Labor Party. You are one of the most decent human beings I have ever met. I thank you for your belief in me.

With the help and commitment of the local branch members we laid out a plan to run a solid grassroots campaign. Team Catley was headed up by Deahna Richardson, Elle Lingard and Adam Shultz. They were fun, energetic and committed and I have already booked them in for four years time. To Rose Jackson, thank you so much for keeping us on course. However, Deahna Richardson was the champion of the Swansea campaign. She ran a tight ship with military precision. She is my stalwart, she is loyal and I trust her with all my heart. You are my friend.

At 15 months it was a long campaign. I thank those of my dedicated campaign team who were with me from the beginning to the end: Councillor Kay Fraser, Steven Jones, Lindsay Hall, Councillor Doug Vincent, Sean Goss, Kathy Tudor, David Murray, Judy Wells, Christine Buckley and Val Symington. Their level of enthusiasm and energy never wavered. They kept me going. I also extend my thanks to you, John Robertson. John visited the campaign on many occasions and it was a great surprise when he came doorknocking with me in Budgewoi. The residents were very impressed. Thank you very much, John. So many volunteers spent countless hours knocking on doors, phoning people or supporting me at street stalls, shopping centres and markets. I know that many of you are here today. I am so grateful for your assistance and the Labor Party is so lucky to have you. With more than 64 per cent of the vote, it was a resounding victory for Labor and for you and your efforts.

Together we had more than 20,000 conversations with our community. It was truly a humbling experience. The issues have varied from croaking frogs to building airports, but in September I met Gary. He lives in Budgewoi and he is a crazy South Sydney supporter, but he described to me the tough times his wife was experiencing. "She has cancer but it's better now, though, since we don't have to travel to Nepean Hospital every week for treatment", he told me. You can imagine my surprise on learning this. Gary explained to me that even though he had pleaded with health officials to receive treatment locally, he and his wife had to trek down to the Nepean Hospital twice a week for six months. Unfortunately, this is not an isolated case. This Government's cuts to health and health workers contribute to these dreadful stories that we hear all too often.

The guiding principles for the health of our community should not be determined by what people can afford. As a community we must ensure that health policy is guided by our values, not the bottom line. It is and always has been Labor governments that have invested in better public health. I am proud to stand for the party that introduced Medicare—a universal health care system and primary funder for health care in Australia, a system that allows access for everyone regardless of their economic or social context, where they live, or their medical needs. Health care should prioritise patient care and be driven by improving patient outcomes. It should never be relative to profits of shareholders or economic gain. I stand for a strong and progressive public health system. But that means keeping hospitals in public hands.

It also means investing in the nurses and the doctors of our health system instead of burning them out and taking them for granted. It means supporting cutting-edge medical research. I acknowledge the groundbreaking research at the Hunter Medical Research Institute, which I may say was funded by Labor governments. I make special mention of the member for Strathfield, who knows how important the institute is for the Hunter region. She was instrumental in securing State funding at that time along with the local Hunter Federal Labor members. We cannot afford the conservatives' privatisation plan for health and hospitals in New South Wales. Unfortunately, some private healthcare operators put returning profits to shareholders before patient care. It is right for us to have legitimate concern about the ability of the private sector to deliver health care to everyone who needs it, irrespective of their ability to pay.

Let me just go back to Gary for a moment. Gary and his wife are pretty working class. They live in a modest home and they provide for their family, but they struggle with the rising costs of living. They cannot afford private health insurance. They are pretty typical, in fact, of the many people who live in the Swansea electorate. Gary is relieved that the trips to the Nepean Hospital now are only twice every six months, but he was also very grateful for the treatment that his wife had received, even though it had had significant impacts on their lives. These people do not really ask for much, and they are very accepting. Madam Speaker, I, on the other hand, am not so accepting. The people of Swansea deserve access to quality health care and I will fight for that for them every day. Health care is not something on which I am willing to compromise and it is not something that the people of New South Wales should have to concede or negotiate.

There is a lot of inequality in our health system and those on the other side are happy to actively contribute to this disparity. I watch the gap between the haves and the have-nots in my community every day. I will work hard to reduce that gap and ensure that there is fairness in our health system. When I talk about fairness, justice and equality and what this means to ordinary people, there is no better example than the access to education and health. It has always been apparent to me that education leads to opportunity—a

better future and a better life. A great education equips you with the skills that you need to get a good job and to establish a secure life for yourself and your family. It is fair and just that everyone should be entitled to get a world-class education, regardless of his or her background. Education is the great equaliser. You do not have to look far, though, to find those who simply would not be where they are without access to public education.

Last year I spoke to a woman named Linda. At the age of 32, Linda's husband had a stroke, which prevented him from working. He was a builder. Linda had always been a stay-at-home mum. She described to me how scared she was for her family's future. That was until she found TAFE. Linda retrained through TAFE and now she is the sole income earner for her family. She is a confident woman going forward. I was very proud to meet her. Likewise you do not have to look far to see how cuts to education devastate the lives of those who otherwise could not afford it. Earlier this year I spoke to a man in Lake Munmorah. He had two subjects to complete before he finished his assistant plumbing course at Wyong TAFE. To get by, he worked nights at the Sanitarium factory at Cooranbong. Before he could finish, Wyong TAFE stopped offering the course and the nearest TAFE campus which offered it was Maitland. Craig simply could not keep his job and finish his course. He was forced to choose.

It is not only morally wrong to deny an education to people like Craig but also ultimately it leaves our society poorer. The short-sightedness of those who seek to erect barriers to educational pathways completely baffles me. I have always believed that education is a public good. All of us want to be confident that the electrician we employ knows how to wire our house properly, that the doctors who treat us know exactly what they are doing and that the bridge we are driving on is designed by a quality engineer. The fact that socio-economic status is still a key determining factor for educational outcomes says to me that there is much more to be done. This is just not good enough and I intend to be part of the solution to change it.

While education is crucial to empowering people to reach their full potential, there is nothing more dignifying than having a job. We all know that to raise a family in financial security and to get the satisfaction we all deserve in our lives, most people need a good, secure and rewarding job. But the benefits of a good job go beyond the individual and the family. They can be seen in vibrant communities, in safe streets and in strong regional and national economies. In fact, it is no exaggeration to say that good jobs are at the heart of a strong society. That is why they are at the heart of what Labor stands for. But for too many people, finding or keeping that good job is not getting any easier. In fact, it is getting harder.

In the last year alone New South Wales has seen 24,000 more people become unemployed. In fact, since the Australian Labor Party [ALP] was last in power in New South Wales, we have seen 45,000 people join the unemployment queues. In Swansea the unemployment rate is approximately 8.1 per cent. But those statistics mask the real cost of a lack of a good job. They do not show the worry felt at countless dinner tables as families struggle to make ends meet. They do not show the heartache of relationships broken down because of financial stress and the guilt of kids who blame themselves for that breakdown, regardless of what their parents say. They can never show the human cost but it is, in fact, the human cost that really matters.

The solution to too few jobs, though, is not more precarious jobs, lower wages or the abandoning of communities where generations have made their homes. It is investment not only in people and their skills but also in industries, technologies and infrastructure. The solution is not a government that sits on its hands and says, "Just let the market fix it." It is a government that says, "We have a responsibility to provide the vision, infrastructure and impetus for growth that creates good jobs."

In our region we know what it means to have to adapt to change. We have experience in the devastation that wholesale industry closures can have. But we also have experience in building the new industries and the new jobs that will underpin our children's prosperity. We are home to the CSIRO's National Energy Centre, which is doing cutting-edge research into solar and other new, clean energy. We are home to the Newcastle Institute for Energy and Resources, which brings together the country's best thinkers to invent the energy technology that the whole world will need to tackle climate change. These are not just research centres for the sake of research; they are collaborative efforts with industry to create whole new industries. They are not just inventing the technologies of the future; they are helping to create the businesses that make the future a reality and, in the process, creating those good, secure, rewarding jobs that we need so desperately.

In the United States of America jobs in the solar energy industry have increased by 22 per cent since 2013. Some 170,000 Americans are now employed in turning sunshine into clean energy. But here, while we have the best solar resources in the world and while we lead the world in solar technology, our investment in renewables is the lowest since 2002. Rather than supporting this crucial industry, capitalising on our gifts and our smarts, Liberal-Nationals governments, at State and Federal levels, are sabotaging our future through policy incompetence and inaction. Whether it is renewables, ship-building or high-tech services that need the best broadband possible, we need a government that will fight for an advanced, dynamic and strong economy and, crucially, for the jobs that must sit at the heart of that economy. As long as I have the honour of representing the people of Swansea they can rest assured that their local member will be fighting for that economy and for those jobs—for them and for their children.

My father instilled in me the importance of having a job. Jack Catley was a seafarer. In his day it was not uncommon for seafarers to be out of work for long periods, worried about providing for their families while they waited on the roster. Jack and his colleagues campaigned to change these work practices and to install a system that was fair and gave workers some certainty. My dad is a life

member of the Maritime Union of Australia. His union has fought for better working conditions for maritime workers, on our shores and internationally, for more than 120 years. I have been associated with that union all my life. I have walked with them in support of an apology for our Indigenous brothers and sisters. I have rallied with them against apartheid in South Africa. I have cried with them when a worker does not return home as a result of a workplace accident. And I stood shoulder to shoulder with them during the 1998 Patrick's dispute—one of the most despicable attacks on workers in the industrial history of this country.

The working men and women of the Maritime Union of Australia—whom I proudly call my friends—have had a significant influence in shaping my beliefs, which I know will make me a better parliamentarian. I extend heartfelt thanks to the trade unions that supported me and helped Swansea return to Labor. I thank the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union [AMWU], the CFMEU Mining and Energy Division, United Voice, the Independent Education Union [IEU], the nurses, the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association [SDA], the teachers, the fireys and, of course, the Maritime Union of Australia [MUA]. I give special thanks also to Daniel Wallace from the Newcastle Trades Hall Council.

Many of my friends, family and supporters are here today. I am delighted to be able to share this proud day with you. Thank you. Jack and Ann Catley, my parents, are also here today. They are joined by Roslyn, Lorraine and Richard—my sisters and brother. They will all tell you that, as the baby of the family, I am spoiled rotten. I would like to put it on the public record: You are right. You may have all spoilt me but I assure you it does not take away from the love and respect I have for each and every one of you and for your families. It is impossible to take on this responsibility without a strong support structure behind you. I have only to ask and you are there. I would not have been able to do this without you. Thank you so much.

My lovely daughters, Alex, Georgia and Charlotte: You are the loves of my life and my work here is driven by my desire to make this place a better one for you so that you have a better future. Please know that there is nothing you cannot achieve. To my husband, Robert, you and I are lifetime partners. We make a great team. We share the same values: fairness, justice and equality. Everything we do is guided by those values, including our relationship. I do, however, hope that you look to using the shining example set by the partner of the former member for Swansea over the next four years. Congratulations to my Labor colleagues, those who have been re-elected and to the new members of this House—the class of 2015. Game on!