

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE MARIE FICARRA

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The PRESIDENT: I advise members and visitors in the galleries that the Hon. Marie Ficarra is about to make her first speech in this House, and I ask that all the customary courtesies be extended to her.

The Hon. MARIE FICARRA [5.54 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I speak in this debate for the first time as a member of this place, and in doing so I recognise the honour of becoming the first woman from the Coalition to serve in both Houses of this Parliament. I would like to thank the Clerk of the Parliaments and her staff for the assistance they have provided me since I assumed office. I also extend my thanks to my parliamentary colleagues from all political affiliations, who have shown me courtesy and respect since my first election in 1995 and my subsequent return to this place. I particularly want to thank my Coalition colleagues who have encouraged me and guided me in recent years to facilitate my return to this place. You know who you are and you know how much I value your friendship and appreciate your support.

I particularly acknowledge in the public gallery today Mike Stanley, a good friend of mine from the Hunter Valley, and, importantly, the great nephew of the first woman to serve in this Parliament, Millicent Preston Stanley. Her portrait hangs in the foyer at the entrance to Parliament House. Millicent Preston Stanley was the member for Eastern Suburbs from 1925 to 1927. Millicent was involved in a wide array of women's groups and issues and was President of the Feminist Club for many years, encouraging Australian women to stand up and have a voice in their communities, in their local councils and in their parliaments.

History shows that Millicent was a woman who never gave up. She had a genuine love of people and never confused her kindness with weakness. During her time in Parliament she campaigned tenaciously on reducing the high rate of maternal mortality at that time, reforming child welfare, making amendments to the Health Act, and better housing. All these issues are still relevant in today's society and they are issues that I will very much pursue. I come to this House proudly carrying the values instilled in me as a daughter of Italian immigrants. My father, Antonio, and my mother, Rosaria, migrated to Australia post the Second World War from the Eolian island of Lipari, a part of Sicily in Italy, to set up a new life for our family, which included my brothers Frank, Aldo and Joe.

My family, like thousands of others of the day, were economic refugees from a divided Europe besieged by unrest and monetary depression. Australia offered a place of safety and opportunity. My parents transformed themselves from working in an island economy dominated by fishing, agriculture and mining to becoming proprietors of a small family business—a milk bar that naturally included fruit and vegetables. One of my earliest memories is as a four-year-old child attempting to sneak the remnants of chocolate ice cream from the base of a large Streets ice-cream container from which the family made ice-cream cones. Unfortunately for me, I was too short—and probably still am—and I remained trapped headfirst for some time until one of my brothers, who is in the gallery tonight, heard my muffled screams as the frostbite set in. These days I am far more careful with ice-cream cones and I restrict myself to visiting the Cronulla mall gelato bars, but I still have a phobia for confined spaces and freezers.

On a serious note, I am proud to have spent my early teenage years working in one of the few ethnic small businesses in Beverly Hills at the time. It taught me much about understanding my local community, Australian values, our heritage and, importantly, the power of communication and knowledge. I have many fond memories of growing up serving in the fruit shop, and I always smile when I remember my small calico apron that my mother sewed for me. There I was proudly guarding the tomato stack, which had a sign in front of it warning all, "Please do not squeeze me until I'm yours". This adage still applies, may I say.

My brothers, Frank and Aldo, their wives, Ann and Caroline, together with my nieces Rosemarie,

Liane, Victoria and Jenny, and my nephew-in-law Peter are all here tonight. To my great-nephew Daniel and great-nieces Mary-Kate and Remy, and the very many family members who could not be here, especially my nephews Paul and Michael and nephews-in-law Peter and Jason, I love you all dearly and I am very proud to call you my family.

To my many friends and supporters in the gallery, my Tuesday night family whom I have nicknamed the Triple D club—the desperate, dateless and dysfunctional amongst you—I love you all very much and thank you for your care and support of me throughout my life. I thank you for all the public and political involvement that you have endured, all the letterbox dropping, the endless fundraising, and standing on polling booths, shopping centres and railway stations. I could not have made it this far without you.

My late parents embraced what Australia had to offer. They loved their freedom and the right of individuals to work hard and prosper in this great country, and, most importantly, they loved their children and grandchildren. They were determined to ensure that their futures were secure. Indeed, my parents ensured that I was given the opportunity to have an excellent education—the greatest gift of all.

I attended Regina Coeli Primary School at Beverly Hills, Mary McKillops at Lakemba, Beverly Hills Girls High School and then Sydney University. My participation in my Catholic religion has enhanced my understanding of life and still does today. I was proud to be part of the congregations of Regina Coeli, Beverly Hills; St Declans, Penshurst; Sacred Heart, Randwick; Sacred Heart, Mona Vale; and am proud to be a part of St Aloysius, Cronulla today.

The Catholic Church, its program of social justice and the wonderful parishioners that I have met during my life have taught me so much about the important aspects of life—not superficial monetary obsessions, but the benefit we gain from spiritual strength and moral conviction, from strong family and personal relationships, generosity and care towards others and a willingness to serve our community. I wish to recognise in the gallery tonight my good friend Reverend George Caps, from the Christian Community Outreach for the homeless and all the fine work he has done in our society.

Education has been so important for migrants in Australia. Education facilitates the pathway to employment, citizenship and participation in society. As such, it was this education that prompted my political awareness as a young adolescent. I became convinced that the freedom to live, work and prosper depended on having strong and appropriate public policies and legislation based on community consultation. I stood for local government as a young woman in the late 1970s because I believed, and I still do believe, that local government is an integral grassroots part of society.

I enjoyed every minute of my 16 years as a councillor on Hurstville City Council, as its Mayor and Deputy Mayor and as President of the Australian Women's Local Government Association. I acknowledge many councillors and past councillors here in the gallery tonight and the dedication they have to their communities—doing so much for no financial gain but the satisfaction in being able to serve. I believe it to be admirable.

I also relished every minute of my time as the member for Georges River in the Legislative Assembly—that other place. My past political experience has taught me that good law and policy development should ideally ensure that there are no long waiting lists in hospitals for citizens in need, that education is freely available, that our streets are safe and that taxes are fair and collected for good purposes and not mere revenue raising.

More importantly, good law guarantees that all people have equal access to education, health care and justice, and can participate in our society irrespective of wealth, ethnicity or gender.

Australians share common values such as respect for freedom and dignity of individuals, support for democracy, our commitment to the rule of law, the equality of men and women, the spirit of a fair go, of mutual respect and compassion for those in need.

I believe that the Parliament is the most important institution in every democratic society and I

am proud but humbled to serve in this place. The Parliament's actions ultimately regulate, finance and facilitate every section of our society. The presence of Parliament provides public legitimacy to the governance of its people and the structure of its society. More importantly, through democratic elections, the Parliament provides the voice for our diverse country. I am a small "d" democrat, which inevitably means that I am a large "L" Liberal. I believe that the Liberal Party has delivered to our community an environment that has facilitated services to people and families to prosper and cater for their needs and interests. Due to a Liberal Government, as a young person I received tertiary education, opportunity and hope. I very much want what I received to continue for future generations to come.

I pledge to work tirelessly to represent the people of New South Wales whilst demonstrating Liberal Party principles. The Liberal Party is a party of initiative and enterprise, valuing the importance of the family, individual freedom and private endeavour whilst caring for those in need.

As a member of this place, I see great opportunity to involve and develop the interest of the people of New South Wales in the political system. Whatever one's political philosophical beliefs, I am sure that all would agree that a sound understanding of political processes and good access to elected representatives is a vital ingredient to a civil society. We do not want our fellow citizens to feel so disempowered, alienated and frustrated that they need to take action en masse, as some did on the streets of my home suburb of Cronulla in 2005—in fact, outside my front balcony on North Cronulla Beach.

We need better understanding of differing cultures and, more importantly, better communication. It is our job as legislators to ensure that understanding and communication. As members of Parliament, we should give everyone a ready ear, to hear about their problems and work together to find solutions to those problems so as to maintain and improve our great Australia.

During my preselection and at the recent State election, I gave a commitment to travel throughout regional and rural communities as much as possible to meet members of those communities and assist them in any way possible over the next eight years. Whether or not these people are in constituencies represented by members of another party, whether or not they are comfortable speaking English, whether they live close to where I live or far away, I am committed to being responsive to their needs.

I believe also that it is essential that young people be listened to and that their needs and interests are addressed. Over the period of my involvement in public life I have come into contact with some amazing young people. Some of them are here tonight. I wish to acknowledge and thank sincerely the great support, encouragement and advice I have received over the years from the Young Liberal Movement.

I acknowledge in the gallery tonight the current president Noel McCoy, past presidents Alex Hawke, Natasha MacLaren-Jones, and the many other past and current hardworking members, such as Nathaniel Smith and his "Flying Squad", Jai Rowell, Zaya Toma, Liz Davies, Jameela Khan, Simon Fontana, Belinda Frisken, and the others who are unable to be here tonight and are far too numerous to name. I thank you, not just for your contribution to political life but to your local communities. I am particularly fortunate to have as my loyal and hardworking staff member the Vice-President of the Young Liberal Movement, Daniel Try. He is a future leader, I am sure. Thank you all.

I would also like to acknowledge two important young people whom I have watched grow into fine young men, and they, too, are here tonight. Unfortunately neither of them is a member of the Liberal Party but both have made significant contributions to their communities. To Vincent De Luca OAM: I admire your integrity, courage and devotion to others in need. Vince survived a life-threatening battle with cancer at the age of 22 and by the age of 26 he had become one of the youngest people in our nation to be awarded the Order of Australia for his already many years of extraordinary service to his community, particularly in youth welfare and community-

based organisations. To Matthew Fuentes, who has also been active in community service from a very young age: You too are amazing. I value the love, support and expert advice you have both given to me over the years—and still do, whether I want it or not!—and I wish you all the best in your already very successful careers.

I turn now to what I hope to accomplish in the years to come. I am a scientist by training. My first paid work was as a senior tutor, then lecturer in histology to medical, dental, veterinary science and science students at Sydney University whilst undertaking research into childhood muscular dystrophy. I have been fortunate and privileged to have worked and held senior positions for three major international pharmaceutical and medical diagnostics companies, Hoechst Pharmaceuticals, Cytoc Diagnostics and most recently Merck, Sharpe and Dohme Australia.

My career post-university progressed from educating medical practitioners about new pharmaceutical products to informing our Federal decision makers about new medical developments and the evidence favouring approval and taxpayer Medicare funding. Over this period I received invaluable assistance with this endeavour from experts who started off as my professional colleagues but whom I now consider as dear friends and mentors. I acknowledge their presence tonight: Professor Neville Hacker, Head of Gynaecological Oncology at the Royal Women's Hospital in Sydney and a world leader in the field of gynaecological cancer; Associate Professor John Gullotta, from the Federal branch of the Australian Medical Association [AMA], who has also been a bastion of support for women's health care; and my good friend Di Ford, who has played a major role in teaching me the skills of effective, outcome-focussed, government relations.

Many in this House know that I believe friendship should not be dictated by political allegiances. Di has held various senior roles with Federal and State Labor members and Ministers. I am proud to say she and her late husband, John Ford, have been not only loyal colleagues but also wonderful friends.

During my working career I am proud to have played an important role in the development of our national health strategy to combat cervical cancer, diabetes, heart disease, osteoporosis and other illnesses. My last employer, Merck Sharp and Dohme, is currently in partnership with CSL in supplying vaccines that, thanks to the great wisdom of our Prime Minister, John Howard, and the Federal health Minister, Tony Abbott, will substantially prevent cervical cancer in the next generation of young Australian women. I believe my experience in the roles I have mentioned has been invaluable to my understanding of the national and State health systems and how they can be improved. During the time I spend as a member in this place I will use my scientific training and the expertise of my colleagues to determine just what is and what is not being achieved when it comes to health care.

I will support good decisions, made transparently, with full disclosure of supporting evidence that withstands scrutiny. But I will certainly oppose any decision that is not in the best interests of the welfare of the people of this State. I also strongly believe that political spin and gloss should be exposed; quality evidence and substantiation should lead to remedial action. That is what the people of New South Wales expect, along with new initiatives and policies that improve their lives and that of their families. In my discussions with senior members of the medical profession I have encountered deep disquiet about the way they are expected to modify their work to achieve certain bureaucratic and outcome irrelevant levels of performance. The measure of good outcomes, performance is typically what that great thinker Avedis Donabedian called process measures.

Born in 1919 in Beirut of Armenian parents, Donabedian studied at the American University in Beirut. As a young man he faced difficulties because of his ethnicity and had to continue his distinguished academic career in the United States at Harvard. Donabedian made the breakthrough discovery that all measures of quality in health services could be described under three categories: structure, process and outcome. Structural measures describe the capacity, such

as the number of beds open in a hospital; process measures describe how well and how fast things happen. For example, how long does one wait for a needed total hip replacement in a public bed in New South Wales? But all of these are subservient to outcome measures. How are we progressing in reducing the burden of disease?

Donabedian was much revered as a thinker and much loved as a cultured, passionate and creative person. He and his followers have strongly and immeasurably influenced every public health expert and health economist of my generation. Donabedian crystallised our understanding of what quality means in health care delivery. I do not confine my thinking on need for quality evidence to just the health sector. In the fields of energy and water supply, planning and environmental management, transport, housing and every other field, whenever we want to make advances we need to get our measures right before we can talk about what we have achieved. For example, in recent years there has been much discussion about whether train services are better if they run more often to timetable, even if passenger numbers are declining and passenger satisfaction is abysmal. I have no doubt what international public transport experts would say about that. What does not get measured properly does not get managed well. I particularly acknowledge the Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell. Barry and I commenced our parliamentary careers together back in 1995. My parliamentary career was curtailed somewhat for a period but I have returned, and I look forward to working with Barry and my colleagues to ensure a Coalition win at the next election. Barry has appointed me as the shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship, assisting Gladys Berejiklian, the Shadow Minister for Transport and Citizenship, who is in the gallery tonight. Gladys is a fabulous performer and a good friend. To me, citizenship is most important; it means both gaining rights and embracing responsibilities. Australian citizenship is a privilege, not a right, and we want people who come to Australia to fully participate in Australian life through citizenship. The right to vote to elect our representatives and have a say in the running of our communities, State and nation is the highest form of individual recognition as an Australian citizen.

We should all respect the laws and norms of any society we join, whether as a guest or a permanent citizen. Such respect has always accompanied the great cultural contribution of the vast majority of migrants. I will therefore work diligently with people of all ethnicities to promote that form of citizenship that my family so strongly and passionately embraced.

Australians have been so successful at integrating millions of people with diverse backgrounds from more than 200 countries because of our unique nature of kindness and mateship.

I particularly acknowledge someone who had a great impact on me as a newly elected member of the Legislative Assembly back in 1995, the late Ian Glachan, OAM. Ian was a wonderful and kind family man who genuinely cared about people. He was an extremely ethical man who was a role model not only to his fellow parliamentarians but also to the community at large. He will forever be one of the most respected members to serve in the New South Wales Parliament, and I acknowledge the presence in the gallery tonight of his wife and my dear friend, Helen Glachan, a fellow member of the New South Wales Liberal executive, and her daughter, Ann. I thank you for coming all the way from Albury.

I cannot name all my campaign supporters as I risk offending any that I may momentarily overlook. I thank all of you present tonight and the many who could not attend. During my 28 years in the Liberal Party I have always admired the work I have witnessed by all of you. To those in my Sylvania Waters branch of the Liberal Party led by our President, James Young, all the other party members from branches in the Sutherland shire and the St George region, to my fellow Liberal State Executive members, to Helen Wayland, President of the New South Wales Womens Council and her many members here this evening and to my fellow Liberals across New South Wales: I would not be here today but for your hard work.

To my great friend and supporter, Senator Concetta Fierravanti Wells; the Hon. David Clarke, MLC, and Marissa Clarke; Chris Hartcher, the member for Terrigal; the Hon. Mike Gallacher, MLC; the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, MLC; Nick Campbell, Vice-President of the New South

Wales Liberal Party: I thank you for your belief in me and your assistance in helping me return to this Parliament. To my hardworking and patient fundraising team—Ann Chapman and Dr Frank Chapman, who have been with me from the beginning; Clive and Lorraine Johnson, who keep me accountable; the irrepressible Val Coy; Mercia Goldsmith; Ali McCaughan; Alan and Marie Bonney; Fay Samuel; Lina and Andrew Gullotta. OAM; Teresa and Sam Restifa; Di Todaro; the effervescent Maria Venuti, AM, who is recognisable to all in the front of the gallery; graceful Helen Zerefos, OAM; the irrepressible Ferdi Dominelli, who is also in the gallery; councillor Frank Oliveri; Rick and Jillian Forbes; Nick Scali; Mario Martino; Linda Restuccia; Mary Lou Jarvis; Teena McQueen; and Rod and Len Bosman: I thank you all for being there whenever I yelled for help. You are always there.

It is also particularly pleasing to have in the gallery tonight some outstanding men and women who were candidates at the last State election: Tricia Hitchen for Penrith, Karen Chijoff for Mulgoa and Andy Rohan for Smithfield. I know you will keep fighting for your communities and keep involved with us in the New South Wales Coalition as we need your passion, energy and input.

Finally, I come to the most important person in my life, my husband, Dr Alan Carless, and my recently acquired Carless clan—my mother in law, Alice, Aunt Jean, brother Peter from Calgary Canada, and nephews James and Charlie. They have welcomed me into their hearts and their lives and for this I love them dearly. Alan's great love and support for me has enabled me to return enthusiastically to this place. He keeps me charged and focused on serving the people of this great State. He ensures my feet are always on the ground. In conclusion, I would like to read into *Hansard* a most beautiful poem that Alan wrote for me when we decided to share our lives forevermore not so long ago:

You came into my life and filled it full
Of love and energy and boundless joy
Replacing much that was so deadly dull
And worthless, like a worn out plastic toy.
To aid us on our never-ending trip
We only need the best things that we own:
Our wisdom, values, faith and fellowship
In all the close knit circles where we've grown.
Together now we travel to that place
Where lovers go, escaping all our pain
We hold each other, knowing our embrace
Is gentle, yet so certain to remain.
While ever I can think my thoughts quite clearly
My first will always be, I love you dearly.

**Question—That this House do now adjourn—put and resolved in the affirmative.
Motion agreed to.**

The House adjourned at 6.22 p.m. until Wednesday 6 June 2007 at 11.00 a.m.