



# Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 11 May 2011, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday, 11 May 2011.

Mrs ROZA SAGE (Blue Mountains) [12.09 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): In giving my inaugural speech I congratulate the other newly elected members who join me in this the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales. As I stand here today I feel overwhelming humility and honour on being elected the seventh, and the first female, member for Blue Mountains in this historic first term of the O'Farrell-led Liberal and Nationals Coalition Government. In this respect I acknowledge the previous member for Blue Mountains, the Hon. Phil Koperberg. On the day I moved into the electorate office he was very gracious and visited, wishing me well. We had a smooth transition, thanks to Phil's honourable stand in keeping the interests of the Blue Mountains electorate and constituents to the fore. For this I give him my sincere gratitude and wish him well in his new endeavours as Chair of the State Emergency Management Committee, a position for which he is eminently qualified.

I believe that the person I am today is the result of the sum total of my life experiences. Real life experience and skills from someone who has been connected with the community for a long time give me a good understanding of what my community wants and what they expect of their elected representative. My story begins with my parents. My parents came to Australia separately from war-torn Europe, from Hungary, as displaced persons. They were fleeing the ultimate failed socialist experiment, communism. They met and married in Australia and had me and my sister, who has come from Queensland and is in the gallery. My father passed away a few years ago but he and my mother always expressed their gratitude and thanks for coming to such a wonderful free country and became proud Australians.

My parents were hard workers, a quality I learned from them. My mother had come to Australia with her parents and siblings. My grandfather was a hairdresser and barber, a trade he taught my mother. They owned a hairdressing shop in Petersham and saved enough money to buy a small farm in Riverstone. Some of my earliest memories were of staying at my grandfather's farm. My dad had many jobs, from cane cutting in North Queensland to carpentry in Alice Springs before he married, and also worked on the construction of the Sydney Opera House, believe it or not, but he always dreamed of farming. My parents bought a hairdressing shop of their own in Marrickville. This is where I started my school life—Marrickville West Public School, the home of bitumen playgrounds. After a few years my parents saved enough money to buy a large acreage in south-east Queensland at Carbrook, where my father fulfilled his dream of running his own farm.

Moving from inner city Sydney to the wide expanse of country living was a defining period in my life. I thrived. I love the bush and the space to this day. That is why I love living in the Blue Mountains. I attended a small country school which had grass in the playground—Redland Bay State School on beautiful Moreton Bay. I excelled at school, thanks to the influence of some very inspirational teachers. Inspirational and dedicated teaching staff, I believe, make all the difference to lifetime learning. I then went to Cleveland and District State High School, an hour's bus trip away. I did well at high school and was the recipient of a Commonwealth scholarship. I take time here to acknowledge the dedication of the teachers in the Blue Mountains electorate. My electorate in fact has the highest numbers of teachers in the State.

Since childhood I had always been fascinated by science and especially the workings of the human body so I set my goal to do something in the medical sphere. A chance appointment with the visiting school careers adviser steered my thinking to studying dentistry. And dentistry is what I was accepted into at the University of Queensland, a choice I never regretted. I relished the academic rigors that university and dental school offered. Dentistry then was a full-time, five-year course. Then, as now, I believe that a love of learning and exploring life keeps the mind sharp and life interesting. Then, as now, I always do my utmost: I give my full energies to every task I undertake. This promise I give the people of the Blue Mountains.

Whilst at uni I met my first husband, also a dental student at the time. The opportunity to secure our dental careers in the Australian Defence Force through the defence force undergraduate scholarship scheme was available so we joined the Royal Australian Air Force. After graduation we were posted to RAAF Richmond. Then I was posted to Operational Command Glenbrook as the officer in charge of the medical-dental unit. My time in the RAAF was another defining period in my life's journey. I was able to hone my skills as a dental practitioner as well as learn discipline, order and duty. When you have served in the Defence Force you share a special bond with others who have served of another way of life.

It is the RAAF that brought me to the mountains but it was the lifestyle and the surrounds that made me stay. I left the RAAF as I was having my first child. In those days it was an all-or-none deal—you worked full-time or you were out. On leaving the RAAF we bought a house in Mount Riverview, where I lived for the next 18½ years. I worked on a casual basis as a dentist in local private dental practices, including the practice in Springwood which we were to later buy. My husband and I bought the Springwood practice in 1988 during the "recession we had to have". Tragically, not long after, my husband unexpectedly passed away. I was left with two little girls, a dental practice to run, a home-based model railway business and a very hefty provisional tax bill. I overcame

these adversities with the help of my wonderful family in Sydney, my uncle Frank and aunt Rosa, and my church family. I know what it is like to be a single mum; I know what it takes to build a small business; I know how to manage finances, all qualities and skills which give me a good grounding for my new vocation.

A little while after, the new love of my life entered the picture. Ted and I were married in 1991 and two years later I had my third beautiful daughter, Isobel. I soon discovered I had married another train tragic—sorry Ted, rail enthusiast. For the last 22 years I have been practising dentistry in Springwood. As such I have a particular interest in health issues and particularly dental health, to which I look forward to contributing. To my previous patients: I am sorry that you have lost a dentist as I will now be committing myself full-time to my new role; however, my new office is always open to anyone in need of assistance.

For those members not familiar with the Blue Mountains, it is a unique area—neither rural nor metropolitan, but I believe a unique region in its own right. The Blue Mountains electorate takes in most of the City of Blue Mountains, stretching from Mount Tomah to Blaxland. Indeed, the Premier announced that entry to the Mount Tomah Botanic Gardens is now free, a promise delivered in the first weeks of the Liberal-Nationals Government, of which I am proud to be part. This is encouraging news for the community and local tourism. The Blue Mountains is a city within a national park: indeed, it is part of the world heritage listed Greater Blue Mountains National Park. It is a place of great natural beauty and of rare flora, being home of the Wollemi pine. It also has a long history of Aboriginal occupation in the custody of the Darug and Gundungurra peoples. It is an area that is also steeped in colonial history. Who has not heard of the crossing of the Blue Mountains by Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth in 1813?

The crossing was an event that opened the new colony to the central west and ultimately led to the development of the rest of Australia. Subsequently William Cox was commissioned to build a road over the mountains. It was completed in 1815 by convict labour in a period of six months—a fact that is often brought to attention by Blue Mountains residents when comparing the upgrade of the Great Western Highway, which has taken decades. I would like to bring to the attention of the Parliament that the bicentenary of the crossings of the Blue Mountains will occur in 2013. Preparations for events have already started by a very dedicated and enthusiastic team. I am very excited to be the member at this time and able to be involved in such a historic anniversary.

The Blue Mountains is a linear city that is divided east-west by the two transport corridors of the Great Western Highway and Blue Mountains rail line. Having 16 train stations to visit during the election campaign—which I do not think my opposition did—I learned a thing or two about our train line. Members may not be aware that one of the biggest issues for the Blue Mountains was the deplorable state of the passenger services and increased travelling time. Some commuters travel for over two hours each way to work in Sydney. Our very capable Minister for Transport has recognised this and has committed to improving these services. The Blue Mountains comprises 28 separate townships, unique in their own right, placed along the highway and railway like a string of pearls—none standing out more than any other but together forming what I consider is the most beautiful electorate in this great State of ours. Already I have heard the point debated, but I think my electorate is the best.

Blue Mountains residents are very parochial and have a strong sense of community. Each township and village has its own character, which is one of the reasons the Blue Mountains is such a popular tourist destination. The Blue Mountains is a wonderful place to raise a family and a wonderful place to visit. Each of its towns and villages deserves the attention of a hardworking, honest and enthusiastic member of Parliament, which I strive to be. The Blue Mountains provided a natural wall for the early settlement of Sydney to keep the convicts in. A way around the Blue Mountains was discovered by John Wilson 16 years earlier than the famous Blaxland, Lawson and Wentworth crossing—a little-known fact. John Wilson was a convict who made an expedition, knowledge of which was suppressed by Governor Hunter for fear of the convicts finding a way out of Sydney. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Can I say that, 200 years on, I am sure the Governor would not mind my informing Parliament that there is a way through the Blue Mountains out of Sydney, but may I encourage all members present and all of the public to come and visit our beautiful city and enjoy the World Heritage listed area. Visit the Three Sisters rock formation, the waterfalls at Wentworth Falls and ride the cable car across Jamieson Valley at Scenic World, Katoomba, or enjoy a leisurely lunch or coffee at the many great cafés and restaurants. There are so many other jewels to explore that I do not have time to mention them all. The announcement of an extra \$5 million for regional tourism is certainly welcome among Blue Mountains tourist operators.

The Blue Mountains is also a city of the arts, with many renowned painters, performers, musicians and writers calling it home. There are the heritage-listed properties of Sir Henry Parkes, the father of federation, Norman Lindsay, the famous artist and author of the loved children's book *The Magic Pudding*, and the former home of Eleanor Dark, the novelist, which is now used as a writers' retreat for writers from around the world. There is such a richness of culture and natural attractions it is little wonder that the residents of the Blue Mountains are very protective of and parochial toward their area. But it is foremost the people who make the Blue Mountains what it is. There is a strong emphasis on volunteering in the community, and I acknowledge all these dedicated people. In particular, I mention emergency services volunteers.

The Rural Fire Service branches are of vital importance in my electorate, which is the most bushfire-prone area in the State. They are the nucleus of many communities. We also have a very active State Emergency Service [SES]. I have personally been on the

receiving end of both services. I also acknowledge the many Bushcare and Landcare groups that volunteer their time to restore degraded bush areas. I confess to a particular interest as I am a member of my local Warrimoo Reserve Bushcare group. I have met with the Blue Mountains Bushcare committee and I must report that they are very, very excited about the Liberal-Nationals statewide commitment of \$10 million for these groups.

It is precisely for that reason I stepped forward to nominate as the candidate for Blue Mountains. I felt that after 16 years of hard Labor we in the Blue Mountains had been neglected long enough. There was a strong feeling among the people that change was needed. After a hard-fought campaign, during which I went doorknocking in 40 degree heat and in rain at street stalls in Blackheath in five degree cold, the people of the Blue Mountains cast their vote and cast aside a tired, scandal-ridden Labor Government for a fresh, energetic Liberal-Nationals Government that will make New South Wales the number one State again.

No man is an island. I wish to take a few moments to thank the hardworking, dedicated team that assisted in my election to this great place. Firstly, I thank my long-suffering family—my husband, Ted, my daughter, Emma, and her husband, Stewart, my grandson, Archie, and my daughters, Charlotte and Isobel, for their love, support, encouragement and patience. I know the corflute in the living room was not a good substitute for all those months of campaigning, but it was worth it in the end.

I thank Diane Marris, my campaign director, who supported me through thick and thin—and there was a lot of the latter. To Jeff Egan for the brilliant media campaign; to Councillor Chris Van Der Kley whose help was invaluable—I see them in the gallery; to those volunteers who manned our campaign office, Betty Smith, Jim Keane, Dorothy Brandley, Cliff Newman, Christine Bartlett and Peter Olsen; to our catering crew on the day—an army cannot march without food—to Caroline Newman, my mother, who has come from Queensland to be here, and my daughter, Isobel; and to all those who stood at polling booths on election day and at pre-poll: thank you.

I especially thank my hardworking local Young Liberal team of Brendan Christie, Alex McDonald, Dylan Barnes, Rhyce Gawronski, James Beckett, Shaun Stoneman, Elliot Ryan, Tim Robinson, Tiarne Wadi and Amy Richards, and our Flying Squad, who were a tremendous help. I give special thanks to my wonderful mentors, Michael Richardson, who is the retired member for Castle Hill and who also was our duty member of Parliament, and our fantastic former Federal member, Kerry Bartlett. To all my Federal and now State parliamentary colleagues who came out to the Blue Mountains to doorknock with me, stand at street stalls and train stations: your generosity in giving up your time from already busy schedules, your support, and your confidence in me was very sincerely appreciated.

I feel a need to make very special mention of Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, who managed to break her arm all in the line of duty while door knocking with me. We spent many hours testing the health system at Nepean Hospital, and I am pleased to report that her arm is healing very nicely. It may seem to be a stretch of the friendship to ask the Senator to revisit the streets of Winmalee at the next election, but to her credit she has graciously promised to return. I must say that one of the best experiences of the campaign was in the last week when energies were flagging. To see that big Start the Change bus come through the Blue Mountains and stop at Springwood and to see our State parliamentary representatives, both Liberal and Nationals—many of them are in this Chamber—was such an encouragement.

Finally, I must thank the people of the Blue Mountains, who supported me and placed their faith in me on 26 March. I will always strive to represent you with integrity and compassion and, above all, never take you for granted. For 16 years those opposite squandered our once premier State. This was felt hard in the Blue Mountains, along with the rest of New South Wales. The election result last month demonstrates that the public viewed the Labor Government with its revolving doors of premiers and Ministers as having lost its way. As a dentist, I am proud to be part of the extraction of a rotten, inept and tired Labor Government. I do not take my election to this place lightly. I will always strive to work hard for the people of the Blue Mountains electorate. Already my office is assisting with a constant stream of constituents who are in need. Time is not on our side and I will not waste one moment in fighting for the best results for the people of the Blue Mountains.