



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday 26 May 2011.

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ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): Order! Pursuant to resolution, business is now interrupted for the presentation of inaugural speeches. Before I call the member for The Entrance, I remind the House that this is the member's inaugural speech and I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

Mr CHRIS SPENCE (The Entrance) [6.21 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Twenty-three years ago, in 1988, two Liberals representing the Central Coast delivered their maiden speeches. One was the previous Liberal member for The Entrance and the other is the member for Terrigal, my good friend and mentor, Chris Hartcher. It is with a great sense of pride and honour that I stand here tonight, not only with Chris, but with Darren Webber, Chris Holstein and Gary Edwards, as part of the Liberal team which now covers the Central Coast. On 26 March this year, 498 people across New South Wales put their names forward as lower House candidates to represent their communities and 405 of them were unsuccessful.

To be numbered among the chosen is a rare honour but it is also a great responsibility—a responsibility that I intend to discharge. On 26 March this year there was an historic victory for the Liberal Party—the biggest party majority in New South Wales history, ending 16 years of Labor mismanagement. It was a clear sign from the people of New South Wales that they wanted transparency, accountability, integrity and honesty restored to government. That commitment was given to and will be delivered by a Coalition Government and our new Premier, Barry O'Farrell.

For many of us life takes us on a long journey. Indeed, many stories collectively form the chapters of our lives that shape our values and our beliefs. Eight years ago, the direction of my life, what I thought I valued and my priorities, changed in the space of a few hours. On 18 January 2003 I was doing night shift work as a Corrective Service Officer at one of the Australian Capital Territory's remand centres. Late that afternoon I was awakened by a phone call and I was informed that a bushfire alert had just been broadcast for my suburb. I went outside and looked around. There were people climbing onto the roofs of their houses, hosing gutters and preparing for the unknown.

I too climbed on my roof and started hosing down the gutters. Within a few minutes the sky went black and an ember attack like a burning snowstorm preceded a fire of massive proportions. There was a roar of sound as the fire engulfed the pine forest adjacent to my home. The darkness and the smoke were so heavy that I could barely see a few feet in front of me. The heat was intense and thousands upon thousands of embers were swept across the streets and houses in front of a fire-driven windstorm. This was the unprecedented bushfire that was to sweep through the western suburbs of the Australian Capital Territory, tragically killing four people, destroying over 500 homes and severely damaging thousands of properties.

My home in Duffy was engulfed by fire only 25 minutes after the phone call that woke me. I grabbed my dogs, threw them in the car and fled in front of the firestorm. After leaving my dogs with a friend I returned to the Kambah area seeking to assist others to fight the fires and to help those whose homes had been destroyed. Some five hours later I returned to what was left of my home. Like so many others that day, I had saved nothing of my own. I was left with only the clothes on my back and I had no insurance to replace what I had lost. Attending a bushfire recovery centre that night to collect second-hand clothing was one of the most humbling experiences of my life. I had only second-hand clothing to wear. I had no wallet, licence, credit card or money. I felt like a person without an identity. For the first time in my life I felt exposed and dependent. I suddenly discovered what it was like to be a refugee.

It was only after two weeks, with a Big W voucher, that I was finally able to buy my own clothes. Sometimes you realise that what you have taken for granted can be taken away in an instant. You also realise how important the small things are and how dependent you are on others. The fire changed my life. I sought a new beginning. I sought new opportunities and I moved to the Central Coast. It is there that I began my involvement with the Liberal Party and my journey of public service, which has led me to this House.

My family has a long and proud record of public service. My parents, Janet and Michael, who are both present in the gallery tonight, have devoted most of their working lives to our community—my mother as a teacher. Teachers are the cornerstone for guiding and

educating our young people and I am forever grateful for the love, guidance and teaching that she has given me over the years. My father enlisted at the Royal Military College in Duntroon in 1970, later graduating as an officer in the Royal Australian Engineers. With his military postings my family moved to Holsworthy, Papua New Guinea, Melbourne, Sydney and Canberra before he finally took his discharge at Kapooka in 1990. He followed a proud family tradition of military service and instilled in me the values of patriotism, discipline and commitment.

I owe a great debt to both my parents for the love and support they have always shown me and for the values they have instilled in me and have upheld themselves. They both came from Queensland to work on my campaign. Both of them have always been there for me and it is an enormously proud moment for me to have both of them here tonight. Along with my debt to them is my debt to my grandparents, Reg and Bev, who are in the gallery tonight, and Kevin and Doris, who have both sadly predeceased us. Reg has given over 50 years of service to the Liberal Party, which was acknowledged by our Leader, Barry O'Farrell, at a special presentation at Cronulla. Reg and Bev have been wonderful grandparents and have shared with me all my life's highs and lows. They are my biggest fans. No matter what path I have chosen I know that I have always had their absolute support. To have them both here tonight is truly a blessing.

My father's parents, Kevin and Doris, are no longer with us. I know they would have been delighted to see me stand here today, just as they were thrilled to see my father graduate from Duntroon. I hope they see me do as well in this vocation of service as my father did in his. Just as my father served in the Army, so my grandfather, Kevin, served our country in the Second World War. He was in the 2/3rd Australian Composite Anti-Aircraft Regiment from June 1942 to January 1946. He fought the invading Japanese at Buna, then at Lae, Wewak and North Borneo.

My initial desire at school was to go into the Armed Forces as my father and grandfather had done before me. I had planned to join the Air Force, but my life took me elsewhere. I have the greatest respect for those who serve our country. I have and always will support and uphold them. I am committed to assisting them, both during their service and in their retirement, as a citizen and as a member of Parliament. My interest in politics began in my early twenties when I started to work in the Federal Parliament, firstly in building services and then in parliamentary security. Through various twists and turns I came in 2004 to join the Shelly Beach branch of the Liberal Party. It was there that for the first time I made the acquaintance of Phil Walker, who had carried the flag so well in two elections and whom I was to work for when he stood again in 2007. I acknowledge him here tonight.

Hundreds of people participated in the great victory on 26 March when we achieved a historic swing of 17.3 per cent in The Entrance with 50.9 per cent of the primary vote. This result was possible only with the help and support of the more than 300 volunteers who worked on polling day. And this result is your victory—I am your representative. And equally, tonight is your night too. I acknowledge the friendship and support that the two sitting members from the Central Coast, Mike Gallacher and Chris Hartcher, have given me. Their support, advice and assistance have been sustaining and invaluable. Without Chris and Mike the Central Coast Liberal organisation would have been leaderless. They were instrumental in the Federal successes in Robertson in 1996 and Dobell in 2001, and together they helped bring about the historic results in The Entrance, Wyong, Gosford and Swansea. For as many years as Chris Hartcher has fought the good fight on the Central Coast, Ray Carter has always been there as support for all Liberal campaigns. I thank him for that.

No mention of The Entrance campaign can ever be complete without a tribute to Laurie and Evelyn Littlefield. They have been like rocks for the Liberal Party at The Entrance for over 40 years. Their time and their support, their friendship and their encouragement have been constant and touching. They ask nothing for themselves and give everything of themselves. Our State Executive representative, Lynn Webster, has always supported me both on the ground in The Entrance and in the higher reaches of the Liberal Party. I acknowledge her tonight. Likewise I acknowledge Carol Stewart, Barbara Craige, Herv Nayna, Jim and Christine Gorman, William Nemesh, Gerry Cirulli, Alan Rodwell, Rod and Michael Shellshear, Quintan and Jan Anthony, Garry Gluyas, Domenic Biasi and Michelle Markham for their stand-out work in the electorate shopping centres. Despite the summer heat and the hilly terrain I was ably assisted in the daily doorknocking of over 17,000 homes and other campaign activities by my dedicated team of volunteers, including Phil Grantham, Nathan Miller, Tim Koelma, Luke Nayna, Scott McGrath, Christian McLaughlan, Andrew Brickhill, and the best Italian campaigner, my friend Simo.

Another group of people also worked tirelessly on my campaign 24/7, putting their lives on hold to help me. They deserve to be acknowledged—my dedicated, hardworking and loyal staffers, Aaron Henry and Laurie Alexander. I also welcome our newest addition, Emily Haines. The campaign office and the strategic planning for over six months were superbly carried out by Bob Ward, my campaign manager. Bob was more than a manager; he was an adviser and a counsellor. His skills enabled me to focus 100 per cent on relating to the voters rather than to the administration. The Central Coast-Hunter campaign was oversighted with great skill by Rod Bosman on the ground and Mark, Richard, Chris, Clint, Lisa, Jen and Eleni in William Street. There are some others who have stood by me and supported me over the years and through the campaign to an extraordinary extent. They know who they are, and I express to them my profound thanks and appreciation. I was assisted in campaigning and doorknocking by a number of shadow Ministers and members, and I thank them all. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

In particular, I acknowledge the leadership, the guidance and the support given to me by our leader, Barry O'Farrell. Barry made frequent visits to the coast to campaign with me, and each time he took the trouble to encourage me personally. He is a great leader and I believe history will show him to be a great Premier. I also thank the leader's staff over the years for their support and assistance, including Natasha, Brad, Sam, Sally, JBR, Matt, Rose, Dianne, Gayle and Peter O'Connell, Peter Schmigel and Rod Bruce. To my Oztag team mates and friends, particularly Czes: When I started the campaign I knew I could rely on you and you never let me down. Led by you, over 50 more Oztag players from the coast helped man the booths on 26 March with the same enthusiasm they show on the footy field. I thank them all. Since my early twenties I have had a group of friends from Canberra. They are my closest friends and, despite the passage of time and the distance between us, nothing can, and I hope nothing will, ever diminish our commitment to each other. Dean, Daniel, Jordan and Terry are four of the best mates anyone could ever wish for. I thank them for their years of support.

But above all I thank my guiding light, my beautiful wife, Vienna. I wish she were here tonight, but our separate careers see her with business commitments in Melbourne. But rest assured she is with us in spirit and, more than that, she is watching this live on the internet. Vienna, you are my inspiration and my rock. I could not have embarked on this journey without you, and I certainly would not stand here tonight had it not been for you. I cannot thank you enough. I hope that the demands of politics will never be placed above the commitment we made to value each other above all others. Before I go on could I please thank each and every one of the over 400 people who have travelled down from the Central Coast to support me and my fellow coasties tonight. To those in the galleries, those watching live in the Theatre and on the internet and around the building tonight, thank you. I would also like to acknowledge and thank the hardworking staff of the Parliament, particularly the attendants and catering staff who have helped make tonight.

I am the third member for The Entrance, a seat created in 1988. It is a magnificent electorate with its superb beaches and lake. It stretches across both Gosford city and Wyong shire, and includes four railway stations, huge shopping centres and the Central Coast campus of Newcastle University. However, it is an electorate with many challenges, especially in roads, public transport and employment. I hope to work for the betterment of our area in many respects, but especially in these three. We need to end the traffic gridlock on Wyong Road, the Pacific Highway and The Entrance Road—falsely called the Central Coast Highway. They all need a massive injection of funding and have been neglected for too long.

The last 16 years have seen no major road works in my electorate despite its population growth. We need to break the endless daily drudgery for over 30,000 commuters both on road and rail. Eventually we will need a new freeway to Sydney. Eventually, too, we will need a high-speed rail link between Sydney and Newcastle. These can only come about through the combined effort of both the Federal and State governments. Yet only last week we saw Labor's indifference to the Central Coast, yet again, when federally it dropped all funding for the F3-M2 link. Labor's contribution in office was to promise a high-speed rail link for the 1999 election, at a budgeted cost then of \$800 million, and immediately shelve it along with hundreds of other promises as soon as the election was out of the way.

Rail services to the Central Coast after 16 years of inertia need upgrading. A journey from Gosford to Central is slower now than it was when the first electrified service began in 1960. Similarly, the people of The Entrance were given a hospital at Wyong so badly staffed that for some time it could not be used for mothers to give birth. This in a population of over 150,000 people! Tuggerah Lake was allowed to decay by Labor. The very name The Entrance is used today because of the channel connecting the Pacific Ocean to Tuggerah Lake. Yet the lake, suffering population pressure and siltation, was, like so many other problems, ignored. The last Liberal member was responsible for major dredging programs in the lake, the creation of new islands and lakeside parks. Contrast this with the former Labor member. His only contribution is an insignificant and very forgettable sandstone statue in the park. Since my election the biggest single request to me is simply put, "Can we finally get something done in this area?" The answer is yes. Yes we can, and yes we will.

I aim to get something done. I aim to represent all people in the electorate of The Entrance. I aim to fulfil my commitments: my commitment to the engineering study of The Entrance channel; my commitment to fixing the gridlock on Wyong Road; my commitment to the express train services to cut travelling time to and from Sydney; my commitment to policing and maintaining The Entrance police station; my commitment to help business revitalise the central business districts of The Entrance and Gosford; my commitment to properly planned public housing with adequate parking, and council and community consultation in site selection; my commitment to work with all levels of Government and business for job creation and to reduce unemployment—especially among our youth; and, above all, my commitment, along with my friends and colleagues on the Central Coast, to fight for, recognise and establish our presence as a region in our own right, not just in name. Our region is as large as the Australian Capital Territory, with the fourth biggest population in New South Wales, and it is entitled to the same level of services as Sydney, Newcastle and the Illawarra.

In my journey around the electorate of The Entrance I have met thousands of good people. I thank them for their support on polling day and I give them this pledge: I will not let you down. Sir Robert Menzies spoke about the Liberal Party being for the forgotten people. In my electorate I am determined there will be no forgotten people. To the residents of Narara, Niagara Park, Wyoming,

Lisarow and Ourimbah, I give you this assurance: You will no longer be the forgotten people as you have been under Labor. In my endorsement speech to the Liberal Party at The Entrance I drew attention to the Roman God Janus, after whom the month of January is named. Statues of him always have two heads: one looking forward and the other looking back. Janus is the god who looks forward to the new year but he also looks back to the past year.

Like Janus, this Government must look forward. But it must also look back. It must look back because it will be seeking to advance the great achievements that were made when we were last in government. It must look forward because there is a huge task before it to make good Labor's mismanagement. For the Liberal Party the history of the electorate of The Entrance is a story of Liberal achievement. Under the Greiner Government great things were achieved for The Entrance. In the four years the Liberal Party held the seat it had a proud record. We will have a proud record once more. Mr Acting-Speaker, overhanging your chair is the State crest on which is written the State motto: *Orta recens quam pura nites*. In English that means: Though recently risen, how brightly you shine. Under this Government, though recently risen, New South Wales will shine. Under this Government, though recently risen, The Entrance will shine once more.