



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

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

Mr CHARLES CASUSCELLI (Strathfield) [6.40 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I am somewhat intimidated by the history of this place and humbled by the trust that the people of Strathfield have placed in me. Regardless of my personal feelings, here I stand like many before me, determined "to make a difference". The only promise I can make in good conscience, so early in my political career, is that I will try to be entertaining along the way.

I acknowledge that it is by the grace of God that I stand here before you, paying tribute to those who by their desire and efforts have put me in this place. The most precious of all commodities is time; it is fixed for all of us and all of the world's wealth cannot buy an extra second more than has been allotted to us. And yet many, some of whom I call family and friends, others that I call colleagues and yet others that until very recently I called strangers, saw fit to unselfishly give of their time to support my aspirations to serve in the Parliament of New South Wales. I owe each and every one of them a debt of gratitude, one that cannot be satisfied by words alone in this place, but try I must.

Tonight I can do no less than acknowledge those who most suffer from the vagary of my person—my wife, Maria, and my daughters, Eleisha and Bianca; the love, support and patience was plenty and all freely given. They are here tonight and they are easy to recognise: just look for three beautiful women that look like sisters. Just being in their presence elevates my spirits and reaffirms the reason that I find myself here in this place. In my family the women have been both a stimulus and a support to my aspirations. So much so that, in the future, should blame need to be apportioned to someone for my being involved in New South Wales politics, whether it be for better or for worse, I can confidently and easily direct them to my wife, Maria. "It's all her doing", I will declare, and because of this I am so very grateful to her. I thank very much Charlie and Rosie, my brother and sister-in-law for their love and support during times that were challenging for them.

I am also thankful for the counsel and prayers of Pastor Anthony Shalala who convinced me that even though God may not be a Liberal, with prayer we could get him on our side just this once. I prayed for a miracle; I imagined a sea of Labor voters being parted for the Liberal candidate as countless conversions of political faith took place as I doorknocked amongst them. This did not quite work out as I had expected. And yet no prayer goes unanswered. Do members recall the last six months of the election campaign when the former Government was plagued by a series of misadventures? When I thought things could not possibly get any worse for them, it did. My confidence soared as I imagined supernatural providence. Through this providence I was surrounded by capable and committed people.

My success was driven by having the counsel and energy of the best election campaigners in the business: the Hon. Don Harwin MLC, President of the other place, and Mr Joe Tannous, a can-do man of enormous capacity. I was humbled by the support and friendship from many of my parliamentary colleagues, in particular the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, the Hon. Andrew Stoner, the Hon. Michael Gallacher, the Hon. Chris Hartcher, the Hon. David Clarke, and my colleague from across Parramatta Road, Mr John Sidoti, MP. I give special acknowledgement to the Hon. Michael Photios, Fiona Long and Jaymes Boland-Rudder for their encouragement and suppressing their laughter when I told them of my intentions. To all the members of my campaign team, to the members of the Strathfield conference, to the Liberal faithful from other conferences, to my army colleagues and my professional colleagues from former lives, and to my church family, I extend my heartfelt gratitude.

The legacy of the former Labor Government of New South Wales, the very same one that had become an alien in its own State, is best summed up with one word, waste—wasted opportunities during a time that we had many, wasted resources that were scarce in themselves, wasted efforts that produced so few benefits, and wasted time that can never be replaced. We can now turn our back on this legacy of waste, the dark ages are behind us, and the renaissance of New South Wales has begun with its Fifty-fifth Parliament.

We are a Government that represents the best of our society; we value intelligent ambition, personal effort and readiness to serve as the essential conditions for success. We encourage independence, we reward effort and we promote innovation. It is these ideals and the policies that are birthed from them that differentiate us from those who have proven entirely incapable of addressing the most basic challenges of a modern society. Our priority must be to engender a new confidence towards our Government. We have a duty to those who elected us not to resile from the facts, not to underestimate the sacrifices nor to "spin" our way out of difficult situations.

The first few weeks of the Fifty-fifth Parliament have seen humour and wit reintroduced to this Parliament by my colleagues, replacing the sad jokes that had found a home in this Chamber. My military service taught me that confidence thrives on honesty and honour, and it thrives when we appreciate the sacredness of obligations and the unselfish performance of duty. This is not lost

on my parliamentary colleagues. Today I am proud and delighted to report to this House that the Premier's leadership, characterised by frankness and vigour, and the immediate execution of our 100-day plan, are being acknowledged in our community with excitement.

In contrast, the Opposition seems bewildered; things are moving too fast, they complain in this Chamber. They still don't get it, do they? It must be an altogether amazing thing for our community to observe its Government moving from a circus of daily crisis management and replacing it with a regime of clear goals for the future. It has certainly confused the Opposition. Luckily for them they have at least four years to learn the concepts of planning and goal setting.

Never again should we neglect growing crises such as the generation and distribution of electricity and the neglect of transport and roads infrastructure, where delay always leads to more harsh and painful solutions. As in all things, balance is key. There is a need to maintain balance between the public and private economy, balance between the cost and hoped-for advantages, balance between the necessary and the desirable, and balance between our actions of the moment and planning for the future. For the first time in 16 years balance has been restored to the development of policy, to the allocation of resources and to the delivery of services.

Our Government will only be as good as the performance of the public service. The people of New South Wales demand reform in the administration of Government and the application of business principles to public affairs. As a means to this end, public service reform should in good faith be enforced. Contrary to the Leader of the Opposition's mock defence of the New South Wales public service in this place just yesterday, the New South Wales public service had a genuine message for the former Government. On the very day that the 2011 State election results became obvious, a sigh of relief the likes of which has never been experienced in the history of this State went forth from the New South Wales public service and was felt in every electorate. Sir Humphrey Appleby would have been proud.

Let us now at every opportunity promote the ideals of public service; let us encourage those who worthily seek public employment by insisting that merit and competency shall be recognised above all else. Let those who execute our policies be encouraged to have a voice in the administration of government and let us honour them by freeing them from the shackles of unnecessary partisan interference. I do not believe that the current organisational structure of the New South Wales public service, which is essentially organised around the concept of super agencies, is the optimal model for our State. In effect, the previous Labor Government introduced another layer of management between its ministers and the public service. At the time the initiative was justified as delivering cost savings based on the concept of shared services and economies of scale. We should note that all these are back office functions. Very little was said about the direct improvement of services.

It is my view that the current super agency structures will continue to promote self-interest and institutional convenience to the detriment of our community. They will have less transparency and it is less likely that community interest will be championed by individual agencies. I have an alternative vision for the public service of New South Wales. It is simple in concept but requires daring in its execution. It is nothing more than achieving collaboration on a scale not previously attempted in our State. Collaboration demands a sharing of information, cooperation in planning, a consensus on goals and implementation of common systems. Increasing demand for services and costs of delivering these services will force us to action—sooner or later, whether we are ready or not, and whether we like it or not.

I believe that the Public Service Commission, which has been announced by our Government, should also provide leadership for the public service reform agenda. It could do so by sponsorship of the top 10 government initiatives that champion integration, interoperability and collaboration across the New South Wales economy. Our strength as a State is nourished by the strength of our communities. A community that through the leadership of its government finds a balance between sensitivities and expression, so that the term "political correctness" effectively is irrelevant, is a strong one. A community where the views of the minority are respected, and wherever possible noted without an undue imposition of minority views on the majority of the community, is a strong one. A community that has strong local support networks to look after its most vulnerable members, while being adequately resourced by government, is a strong one.

The trend that I have witnessed over the past decade, in which the dependency of our communities on government is increasing, disturbs me greatly. It is unrealistic because a government without the initiative and effort of its people is powerless. It is unnecessary because people, when provided with the right motivation and resources, will do things far more effectively for themselves and their families. And it is dangerous because at times of hardship or catastrophe, we as a community will be found wanting, regardless of the good intentions of government. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

"God helps those who help themselves" is not a sound bite but, rather, a fundamental mindset to guide our lives. It can be prudently replaced by "Governments helps those who most help themselves". I can guarantee, if nothing else, that the benefits to the community and its members will be immeasurably more than if we totally rely on government to relieve us of all hardship without personal contribution, depending of course on means and on circumstance. I deeply desire that my community develop more

resilience by developing greater capability to look after itself with a fundamental change in this State's approach to emergency management. I am advocating far less emphasis on the response to emergencies where medals are won, and far more in the planning and preparation for emergencies where the real work is done.

We all start life belonging to a family. I believe that many of the challenges to the wellbeing of our society and our community have their roots in our diminishing appreciation of the contribution that strong families and strong local communities make to our very existence. Family environments are the breeding ground for selflessness, discipline, commitment and sacrifice. I want the family unit to have an enhanced status in our society. Laws should not compete with the status of the family unit but rather give it added authority and protection. I am a passionate advocate for individual responsibility and accountability. Blaming the system, the authorities, the law, the parents or the past does not sit well with me. I am sensitive to those who have suffered and continue to suffer through the actions of others, and in me they will always—always—find a friend. Rather, my concerns find roots in the growing trend in our society whereby individual accountability is unreasonably diminished in preference to promoting excuses. We need to reverse this trend and hold to the idea that individual accountability is a pre-eminent consequence of all that we say and do.

People choose Australia for their home not because of what it may become but because of what it is—a young, confident and democratic nation that has been shaped by the Judaeo-Christian tradition. It is this tradition that has formed us as a people and as a nation. This is the basis for our laws and institutions, our values and customs. Confident of who we are, we must continue to extend our hand of friendship and invite others to contribute to our society and become part of who we are. On a lighter note, I have heard from my colleagues in the last couple of weeks claims to a number of firsts. Examples are Mr John Sidoti, who is the first Liberal State member for Drummoyne. Well done, John! Mr Bryan Doyle is the highest ranking police officer to enter this place. Well done, Bryan! I had intended to say, "Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on being the first female Speaker of this House", but that is obviously not you, Mr Deputy-Speaker.

The DEPUTY-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): I accept on Madam Speaker's behalf.

Mr CHARLES CASUSCELLI: Thank you very much. After a few days of reflection I too am able to claim a first in this Parliament. I am the first Italian bricklayer to represent the State seat of Strathfield who has also served as an officer in the Australian Army, who is a former senior executive in the New South Wales and Commonwealth public services and the private sector, and who has moved house 17 times in 31 years of married life and is still married to his first wife. That is my claim to fame!

Strathfield is one of the most ethnically diverse electorates in the State. I am proud of our country's acceptance of people from all cultures and traditions. It is with justifiable pride that I introduce my electorate office team of Miray, Michael and Christina, who are all younger, smarter and better looking than me. This team is able to communicate with its constituents in Arabic, Mandarin, Korean, Indonesian, Italian and of course English, such is the importance we have placed on the linguistic and cultural diversity of our electorate. I have heard some of my colleagues justifiably espouse the virtues of living in their electorates: serene rural areas, beautiful coastlines—I can conjure images of this—and majestic mountains. I too will be attracted to these areas in time—when my mind is dulled, my energy is depleted and when serenity takes the place of action and excitement. Right now I say to them, "Give me a life of action, excitement, energy, choices and entertainment!" This is why Strathfield should be the electorate of choice for the under nineties. It is a fact that people walk faster in Strathfield than in any other electorate in Australia.

Strathfield may or may not be the best place in which to live. I suspect that, just like many other electorates, it has its fair share of the good, the bad and the ugly. But I can confidently say that Strathfield is an amazing place that is steeped in history. It is the home of many notable families. It has community villages, modern commercial centres, grand and stately homes, an abundance of parks and beautiful tree-lined streets—and I am not describing Drummoyne. It is serviced by major transport hubs, enjoys many of the best schools in the State, and has a large number of churches reflecting the many faith traditions. It is also subject to the forces of progress, and progress demands change. Prudent change requires measured control and community-based planning. Strathfield is struggling under the weight of traffic congestion.

People do not feel safe on public transport or when moving about our community outside business hours. Development along the Parramatta Road and western rail corridor has the potential to dramatically change the quality of life for Strathfield residents, for better or for worse. I believe that the priority construction of the M4 East and the Strathfield town centre master plan, amongst others, will facilitate the changed process for the better. No, I have not given up on the M4 East simply because the Federal Government may have. Easing traffic congestion, as well as increasing the police presence on our streets, will be a priority in my first term. We need strong, vibrant local shopping centres such as the Homebush Village to encourage interaction and participation in the life of its local community.

As for me, I am an Australian and also an immigrant. In fact, I am a working class immigrant boy from Blacktown and I am a Liberal. I landed at Circular Quay in 1963 at age 5½ years. I lived through pre-multiculturalism—a period that I remember fondly as one of character building for the few ethnic children at Blacktown primary and Blacktown Boys High schools. We do not call it character building anymore, but I am fortunate in that instead of traumatising me it developed in me an independence of character

and a sense of humour that has served me well to this day; whether it continues to do so in this place remains to be seen. I left school at age 16 and commenced a traineeship eager to make my mark in the world and help my parents, who had sacrificed all they had to sacrifice for the sake of their children. It was not easy for them.

My father sacrificed his health in service to the people of New South Wales working for the government railways as a rail welder—a hard job by any measure. My mother sacrificed her health in service to her family as mother and wife. Their names are Domenico and Maria Caterina Casuscelli. Today, not as a member of this Parliament but as a grateful son, I wish to honour them. My faith guides me and will continue to guide me. I am but a poor example of God's handiwork, yet he has seen fit to deliver me a number of messages. The uninitiated should know that God frequently speaks to me through my wife, as I am sure many members have experienced from time to time. I quote from the *Book of Wisdom* regarding authorities in this world,

If, then, you find pleasure in throne and scepter, you princes of the peoples, honor WISDOM, that you may reign as kings forever.

I take heart from that message. The other message given to me is how to conduct myself, and again I quote from the *Book of Wisdom*:

Because, though you were Ministers of his kingdom, you judged not rightly, and did not keep the law, nor walk according to the will of god! Terribly and swiftly shall he come against you because judgement is stern for the exalted—for the lowly may be pardoned out of mercy, but the mighty shall be mightily put to the test.

I aim to be pardoned out of mercy for my good intentions that may have gone wrong, but I need to find out if that premise will also hold true with Barry. My personal journey that has led me to this place is unremarkable, save for a number of surprises. Like many others, I have had instances of life throwing up opportunities to test my character. Some would call these life-defining moments, but I think it is being overly dramatic. They are not necessarily moments of great accomplishment but moments of doing the right thing in spite of personal costs. This leads me to the legacy that I wish to leave at the time I depart this place. I may or may not achieve great things, for it is in the nature of man to aspire to great things, even to a simple Italian with an ordinary record of achievement.

If, through circumstance or lack of talent, I achieve little, I will be pleased to hear others say, "At all times he did what he thought was right." That will be enough for me. To my parliamentary colleagues from my side of politics and others, I wish you all success in this place, good health to enjoy your endeavours and ample opportunity to nourish your souls through the love and support of your families. God Bless the Parliament of New South Wales, its Ministers, its members and all of its staff.