



Inaugural Speeches

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

Mr DARREN WEBBER (Wyong) [6.50 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Tonight I stand here with a sense of unreality. I never dreamed I would be a candidate for Parliament, and when the honour was bestowed on me I was challenged with the expectation that I could win a seat that the Liberal Party had never represented. Though I am young, my journey here has been a long one. For me, the path of community service began on the magnificent beaches of the Central Coast. Some of the most rewarding experiences in my life have occurred on the beach. Surf Life Saving Australia, an iconic Australian institution, coordinates thousands of volunteers like me who work hard to keep our beaches safe. It is my pleasure to acknowledge in the public gallery tonight Chad Griffiths and Stuart Harvey from Surf Life Saving Central Coast. My involvement with the movement goes back many years. I have had the honour of being Club Cadet of the Year and Junior Surf Life Saver of the Year. I have been elected to the positions of chief instructor, secretary, club captain and president. All these roles are unpaid and voluntary, requiring time above and beyond the countless hours devoted to performing patrols on weekends.

Surf lifesaving has taught me many things, and rescuing someone from the surf is a real buzz. But the most rewarding experience happens early in summer on a Sunday morning. "Nippers" is the name given to all young children involved with the club. Most of the under-sevens that I used to teach started off fearing the waves. Week after week, after many hours of encouragement, the moment when the nipper catches his or her first wave occurs. You can see the transformation on their face immediately. The look of horror is replaced with excitement, having conquered the elements and their fears. From there on in there is no stopping them. It is that transformation that I had in mind when I stood for Liberal endorsement in Wyong. Prior to 26 March the majority of the Wyong electorate had never voted for any political party other than Labor. Many were taught the old fallacy that Liberals represent the wealthy and Labor represents the workers—an out-of-date class stereotype that Labor supporters still pull out of their bag of tricks for elections today. But, just as I had persevered with scared nippers in the surf, I persevered for 12 months on the campaign trail, reassuring Wyong voters about what we Liberals stand for and spreading the Coalition's positive message of much-needed real change for New South Wales.

Time after time people would tell me that they had never been doorknocked by a politician before, let alone a candidate. Some apologised, saying that while they appreciated my efforts and agreed that we had the worst State Government in history, they still had to vote Labor because their parents always had. But the majority were sympathetic—sympathetic to a new vision for Wyong: the vision offered to them by the Liberal Party. As a candidate I joined a team. You could almost say I joined a family: the Liberal family. My leader, Barry O'Farrell, was a constant support. He came up to support me so often I was thinking of giving him his own bedroom at my place—complete with a mighty Wests Tigers doona! The two State members, the Hon. Mike Gallacher and Chris Hartcher—who had been the sole standard bearers for many years—backed me, advised me, and at times even chastised me. My good friends, and now colleagues, Chris Spence, Chris Holstein and Garry Edwards, made up the famous five: a team dedicated to delivering responsible government that worked with extraordinary unity and teamwork.

Our campaign leadership under Rod Bosman had an unmatched record: five wins out of five contests on the Central Coast. His chief assistant, Sue Honeybrook, was an unmatched example of energy and enthusiasm. Karen McNamara, my campaign manager, was my greatest helper—right from when I was endorsed. Karen, I am very happy to acknowledge you in the gallery tonight. Your dedication and commitment from day one played a great part in our victory and to you I am profoundly grateful. More than 300 people manned the polling booths on 26 March. Every polling booth was absolutely covered with Barry O'Farrell and Darren Webber corflutes. Out of 27 polling booths, we carried 19— an unprecedented result in Wyong. The enthusiasm of the polling booth workers was evident at the huge celebration party that night. They are too numerous to thank here, but I know their names and I thank each and every one of them.

Wyong railway station became a second home to me in the past six months. From 4.45 a.m. until 7.15 a.m., a dedicated team hit the station regularly. Supporting me were many of our members and supporters. Those who especially put their lives on hold, and went above and beyond what I could ask for, include Andrew Ferrari, Brendan Tate, Trevor Morton, David and Sharon Watts, Scott Arneil, Darren McKeirnan, Richard and Ruth Joplin, Tony and Karen Drinan, and of course Glenda Bilton, who ensured that all our workers on election day were well fed. Dennis Pogsun staffed pre-poll without missing a single day—an extraordinary time commitment. During the campaign we erected more than 1,300 corflutes. We blazed the Liberal message in every street, in every shopping centre, and on over 400 homes. An amazing feature of the campaign was the number of people who contacted us for a sign. Dozens of others, when they saw the team putting up signs, would come up and say, "Put one on my house too."

We had a superbly located campaign office on the Pacific Highway in Wyong. I was never on my own in the campaign. The Liberal Party from William Street was constantly on the phone. Shadow Ministers came to assist me with specific issues—and even with doorknocking. Our leader, Barry O'Farrell, was in Wyong even before I was chosen as the candidate. Barry's pledge to support the

people of the Central Coast in their fight against the Kores coalmine set the scene for our Wyong campaign. We were strongly supported by Alan Hayes and Mike Campbell from the Australian Coal Alliance—who are both here tonight—in that battle to make sure that the Wyong valleys that comprise 53 per cent of the coast's water catchment were protected from arbitrary decision-making.

Barry, your commitment was second to none. You brought the shadow cabinet to Wallarah Bay, with all your Coalition shadow Ministers meeting community groups and leaders. And—what a tribute to Wyong—I began polling day standing with you at Blue Haven booth and then cast my vote with you at Kanwal booth. Our victory in Wyong was built on foundations—foundations laid by that small group of people who consistently upheld our values, articulated our philosophy and punched above their weight in what for years was a Labor stronghold. I acknowledge the hard work of the previous Liberal candidate for Wyong, Ben Morton. He, along with his parents, Trevor and Linda, have kept the Liberal faith for many years, together with other local families like David and Sharon Watts, Mike and Judy Gallacher, and Alan Woods.

Likewise, I acknowledge the hard work of all previous Liberal candidates in Wyong. At the time of their campaigns Wyong was deep under the spell of Labor and the task they faced must have been daunting. In particular, I praise Rick Walton, our candidate from 1991. Rick assisted my campaign and added invaluable insight. Liberal councillors Lynne Webster and John McNamara guided me and kept me informed of local issues in conjunction with two well-established independents, Doug Eaton and Greg Best. To our sister conference of Davidson, represented in this House by Jonathan O'Dea, I say a special thanks. Guys, you did a great job and, Jonathan, you were a constant help. Under the tireless direction of Jose Menano you sent up team after team to work the shopping centres and knock on the doors. Jose, you were with me every step of the way. Davidson is a great conference and proved itself to be a great parent to Wyong.

My friends, particularly those long-time mates since my school years, were originally not understanding as to why I would wish to enter politics. They were a little concerned, so dreadful was the public perception of a politician after 16 years of bad politics. However, seeing my passion and knowing my ideals, they all supported me. I want to especially thank Chris Dobson, Todd Lang, Scott and Tanya Lang, Scott McCrone, Julie Shelley, Rick Ward and Corinne Phillips. They are all great mates who have played integral parts in shaping my life journey. I also thank some of those friends' parents, Frank and Louise Dobson, and Steve and Sue Ward. As a young candidate contesting a State seat for the first time I appreciated greatly the wise advice of my good friends Robert Browne and June Kentwell. I look up to them as political mentors. Finally, let me make the most heartfelt tribute to my father, Lester, my principal and greatest supporter. The Webber family moved to the Central Coast from Newcastle in the early 1940s. My grandfather Norman Webber opened one of the first hardware stores in the area. Since then our family has been involved in local small business and community service. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

My father, William Lester Webber, commonly known as Lester, has owned and operated several small businesses and has devoted more than 50 years of his life to surf life saving. He is in the gallery tonight. Dad, you have been my strength and I pay tribute to you. You, above all others, have influenced my ideals and values. He is joined by Uncle Norman, Aunty Pam and Aunty Margaret. I suspect all of us Webbers, including Nan and Pop, who are no longer of this mortal world, are all still in shock that our name now forms part of the rich history of the New South Wales Parliament. To represent my home, my family, my friends, my supporters and also those who did not vote for me is a true privilege and an honour. I thank the electorate of Wyong for entrusting to me their representation. To be the first Liberal to ever represent Wyong is something of which I am very proud and humbled by. The opportunity and indeed the responsibility to make a difference on a large scale in the electorate is both challenging and exciting. Neither I nor the Coalition Government will take Wyong for granted. We will not treat the constituents of the electorate as just a red patch on a strategic map in Sussex Street.

The Wyong electorate in all its incarnations has been represented by Labor since its beginning. Originally its working population consisted of dairy farmers and their families. There was a large abattoir and, along with the council, these were the two chief employers. Wyong shire is split in two by the Wyong and The Entrance electorates, as is the Federal electorate of Dobell. Wyong's main arterial links are the Pacific Highway and the Newcastle-to-Sydney railway line. Its boundaries are the Pacific Ocean in the east and the F3 freeway in the west. It is a magnificent area with its lake, its beaches and its forest. But, like all growth areas, it faces many challenges. Tragically, it is disadvantaged and regularly features on the indexes of disadvantage.

Its rapid growth and lack of service and infrastructure spending under the former Government have led to traffic gridlock on the Pacific Highway and Wyong Road, overcrowded trains and an understaffed Wyong Hospital with a brand-new maternity ward, which through lack of staffing is unable to offer a proper range of service to mothers and families. An instance of the former Government's gross incompetence and neglect of the area is seen in the construction of the Wyong police station, or lack thereof. This was first promised in 1999 and it was promised again in 2003, 2007 and 2011. It still remains uncompleted. The same can be said of the Warnervale town centre—a planning disaster that has dragged on for decades.

As part of my election campaign I made a number of pledges to the electorate, which I intend to see brought to fulfilment. These include: upgrading the intersections along Wyong Road; finishing construction of Wyong police station; working with the Roads and Traffic Authority and, importantly, the community to get the Pacific Highway upgraded through the Wyong central business district;

assisting commuters by introducing three express rail services to and from Sydney each morning and each afternoon; and delivering practical measures to clean up Tuggerah Lake, with the ultimate goal of restoring her to her former glory. I plan to deliver with the health Minister a low-care emergency triage unit to complement Wyong's existing emergency department. A special interest of mine is the problem of graffiti. It despoils shopping centres and homes. I strongly support our announced policy of depriving repeat offenders of their drivers licence or their entitlement to a drivers licence.

I live and breathe the electorate of Wyong and the Central Coast. I was born at Gosford Hospital, I grew up in Tumby Umbi and, along with my sister, Kylie, attended Berkeley Vale Primary School and Terrigal High School. We are products of our great public education system. Mum and Dad provided for us both the best they could and sacrificed much for our benefit. Through hard work, my parents were able to provide a home on acreage in beautiful Tumby Umbi. During my high school years we hosted several Japanese exchange students at home. I was enormously privileged to represent my school and Wyong shire on a return exchange visit to Japan. Not long after school I took part in an Anglican Board of Mission trip to the Philippines. As I visited the many impoverished communities of the Philippines I was struck by the terrible poverty I saw and I came to appreciate what a lucky country Australia is. I also came to appreciate my responsibility to help others less fortunate than I. I had limited interest in, or knowledge of, religion until I was a teenager. At the age of 12 I determined to become a Christian and was baptised and confirmed in the Anglican Church. I was deeply impressed by the dedicated stewardship of Father Peter Lord, and I count him as both a teacher and a friend. I am proud to acknowledge myself as a Christian and ask for God's blessing on my work.

On leaving school I commenced an apprenticeship as an electrician. The Central Coast is a stronghold of tradespeople, thousands of whom commute to Sydney and Newcastle to find work. Tradesmen and women are small business people. They receive no sick leave and no holiday leave. If they do not work they do not get paid. They ask for nothing and they receive nothing. They are givers to our society, not takers. The philosophy that underpins small business is the philosophy of our great party—the party that believes in free enterprise, the party that believes that one should seek to contribute to the common good rather than take from the community, the party that believes in helping the disadvantaged as far as possible with a hand up, not a hand out. So there was only one party for me to join, and that was the Liberal Party.

In 2002 the great John Howard was Prime Minister of Australia. His leadership inspired me. His values and his integrity attracted me. I went to the office of my Federal member, the member for Dobell, and asked how to join and do my part. I was a walk-in. No-one influenced me; no-one asked me. I originally joined the Young Liberals branch and later transferred to a senior branch. Lynne Webster invited me to join the 2004 Liberal ticket for Wyong Shire Council—in an unwinnable position, I hasten to add—and my political career was underway. Wyong comes last alphabetically in the list of New South Wales electorates. For too long Wyong has come last in the delivery of services and infrastructure. With Webber for a surname I am used to being last on the list, but it is time for the Wyong electorate to get a good dose of reverse alphabetical order. It is time for the Wyong electorate to be part of a government of reform. It is time for the Wyong electorate to have a more effective voice.