



Inaugural Speeches

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Mr ANDREW ROHAN (Smithfield) [11.32 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Madam Speaker, I commence by congratulating you on your appointment as the Speaker of this House. It is a marvellous achievement and I wish you every success. I am profoundly grateful and touched by the great honour accorded to me by the voters of my electorate of Smithfield. And I am deeply conscious of the historic victory in being elected the first Liberal member for Smithfield as I deliver my inaugural speech. It is my first speech in Australia's first Parliament, a speech I never imagined I would one day have the honour and privilege to deliver, and a speech that I hope will be as extraordinary as my journey into this place; a journey that started in the summer of 1918 when my father was just a teenager and my mother a young child.

They and their families were among 90,000 Assyrian Christian refugees fleeing their ancestral homeland to escape persecution. My parents and the other refugees were fleeing from the Ottoman Empire to escape what would later be known as the "Armenian, Assyrian and Pontic Greek Genocide". By the grace of God my parents survived, for the reason they were protected, and protected by none other than an Australian soldier. Lieutenant General Sir Stanley George Savige, KBE, CB, DSO, MC, ED, at that time a 28-year-old captain, was selected to join "Dunsterforce", an elite task force assigned to resupplying the Assyrians fighting in Persia. Unable to complete the task due to the fall of Urmia, he persuaded his British commander that he should stay back with the remaining refugees.

For six weeks, Captain Savige used all the means at his disposal to protect the refugees against the perpetual onslaught of the Ottoman forces. Reasoning that the Turkish commander would concentrate on killing him before harming the refugees, he strategically placed his command at the rear of the refugee procession and deliberately drew enemy fire. By offering his command as a target, even though he was outnumbered 100 to one, Captain Savige managed to slow the enemy advance long enough for most of the refugees to flee. This act of courage and self-sacrifice was far beyond what was expected of a junior officer in the field. Captain Savige was subsequently decorated with the Distinguished Service Order for his efforts. Australian journalist, historian and official war correspondent, Charles Bean, wrote:

The stand made by Savige and his eight companions that evening and during half of the next day against hundreds of the enemy thirsting like wolves to get at the defenceless throng was as fine as any episode known to the present writer in the history of this war.

My parents survived the Genocide because of the heroic actions of Sir Stanley George Savige and I, as the newly elected Liberal member for Smithfield, pay tribute to him today in this House. My parents having survived and eventually meeting some years later married and had six children. I was born in 1948 in Habbaniya, a small town on the banks of the Euphrates River in central Iraq and the location of a British airbase—RAF Habbaniya—where my father was employed. At the age of 11 my family moved to Baghdad and settled in the south-western suburb of Dora where I completed my schooling.

My parents valued a good education and they valued hard work. They provided me, my brother and four sisters with all the necessities and encouragement to attain a higher education. I clearly remember the struggle my parents went through to raise us. They instilled in me a sound work ethic and taught me to take nothing for granted. Thanks to them, in 1970 I graduated from the University of Baghdad with a Bachelor of Science in Geology and in 1975 a Master of Science in Petroleum Geology. After completing my Masters Degree, I began working as a geologist with the National Minerals Corporation, where I supervised mineral exploration programs.

My parents, Baijan and Panna Rohan, have recently passed on, but I know they would have been proud of their son becoming the State member for Smithfield and I know they are watching from a better place. Our family is very close. I would like to thank my brother, Youaow Rohan, my sisters Albania Darmo, Rebecca Youkhana, Sara Rohan, Ramzia Rohan, my brothers-in-law Leon Darmo and Andrew Youkhanna, and my sister-in-law, Khanna Rohan, for their great support throughout the campaign. Five years after completing my postgraduate degree, I was awarded a scholarship to undertake a Doctorate in the United States of America. I

declined the offer and made the decision to instead leave Iraq forever. I left everything behind, including my teenage sweetheart and future wife, Janet Simon.

I arrived in Sydney in September 1979 and settled in the south-western suburb of Bossley Park, in the State electorate of Smithfield—it's where I still live today. Shortly after my arrival, I enrolled at the University of New South Wales to continue my studies under the supervision of Professor Phillip Evans. However, in 1981 I was offered a position with Robertson Research Australia as a geologist in North Sydney. It was an offer I could not resist. At Robertson Research I obtained eight more years of experience as a geologist, overseeing oil and coal exploration programs in Australia and abroad. I had the privilege of working with some of the most prominent members of the industry as well as consummate professionals. The late John Harrison, our chief geologist, who contributed immensely to my professional development, is one such example.

Fate played a role in reuniting me with my teenage sweetheart, Janet. In 1982, after her family had settled in the United Kingdom a year earlier, she came to Sydney accompanied by her father, Andrew Simon. We were married in January 1983 at the St Mary's Church in Fairfield and we were blessed with two boys, Sargon Rohan and Luka Rohan. Both were educated in local public schools and both have now graduated from university and are busy climbing the corporate ladder in their chosen fields. My two sons are my pride and joy. I love them dearly and I am honoured to have them here today with my wife, Janet. I cannot thank my wife, Janet, enough for looking after her three boys—I know it was not easy to manage—it needed special talent from you and for that I say thank you.

In 1988, despite drastically cutting staff, my employer did not survive the recession that Australia had to have. It was tough enough being unemployed but, to make matters more difficult, my unemployment coincided with the birth of my two sons. Simply put, I lost my income at the worst possible time: when I needed to support my growing family. However, I was determined to work hard and provide for my family. I started a small printing business and, having owned and operated this small business for the past 17 years, I know the pressure facing other small business owners. My firsthand experience as a small business owner has taught me the need for greater local employment and investment opportunities, especially for our youth.

As an active member of my local community I helped migrant families resettle and establish themselves in Australia. For more than 26 years I worked hard to promote the importance of education, cultural awareness and sporting activities in my local community. It was through this voluntary community service that I was introduced to and inspired by a number of individuals. Many of them are here today, but I wish to single out one person in particular, His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia, AM, Archbishop of the Assyrian Church of the East in Australia and New Zealand. His Beatitude Mar Meelis Zaia has dedicated his life to the church and is responsible for the transformation of Australia's Assyrian community by building new churches, cathedrals and schools, as well as social centres and a retirement village. His Beatitude sends his apologies as unfortunately he could not be with us, but I am sure he is with us in spirit. I acknowledge that Mr Youaw T. Kanna, a founding member of the Assyrian Australian Association and a pioneer of Australia's Assyrian community, is also here in the public gallery.

After the recession Australia had to have I decided to join the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party's conservative values and sound economic policies truly resonated with me following the experience of losing my job due to Labor's economic incompetence and reckless spending. When I joined the Liberal Party I had no interest in nominating for any public office, including local government, let alone any idea that one day I would be a State member of Parliament. My interest at the time was simply to fly the Liberal flag in a Labor Party stronghold, to support local Liberal Party candidates with their election campaigns and to help the local community engage the Liberal Party. Since then I have held almost every position at a local branch and conference level. I have had the pleasure of meeting many good people and faithful party members.

I am indebted to the Liberal Party for providing me with the opportunity to represent its ideals in this historic Parliament. At this point I acknowledge Mr Bob Robertson, who introduced me to the Liberal Party some 20 years ago. I acknowledge all the members of the Smithfield SEC for their support throughout my election campaign, especially Robert Joseph, Nabeel Mirad, Anwar Osman, Samy Ishak and Caroline Ishak, as well as members of other local Liberal Party branches such as Charbel Saliba, Dai Le, Markus Lambert, Thomas Dang, Gwen Riley, Annette Wilton and Robert Jacobucci. I am very fortunate to know each one of them. I acknowledge my Fairfield City Council colleagues Councillor Zaya Toma, as well as councillors Joe Molluso and Frank Oliveri, who have been with me in the Liberal Party for more than 20 years. I thank them for their support during my campaign.

As a councillor on Fairfield City Council over the past two years I have done my best to be a voice for the residents of Fairfield city. I am most proud of fighting for a youth centre in Fairfield, as well as fighting to keep the Fairfield City Farm open, demanding more car parking spaces in the town centres and making the council more accountable to the residents. I acknowledge our council's General Manager, Alan Young, who is here in the public gallery. He has a tough job pleasing all the councillors from the various sides of politics on Fairfield council, but he does a good job. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I express my great appreciation to the people of Smithfield who elected me on 26 March 2011 with an overwhelming swing of 20.3 per cent to represent them. I know that many of them voted Liberal for the first time in their lives. I thank them for putting their faith

in me and in the Liberal Party. To them I make this pledge: I will always put you first. I will dedicate the next four years of my term in office to proving to you, my constituents, that your trust in me was well placed, because for me, first and foremost, politics is about serving people. The State electorate of Smithfield is part of the greater western Sydney region and is 135 square kilometres in area. It is a typical working class community. Its boundaries extend from the western M4 in Greystanes to Elizabeth Drive in Edensor Park and from South Creek in Erskine Park to the Cumberland Highway in Fairfield West.

My electorate of Smithfield takes its name from the suburb of Smithfield, which was originally known as Chilsholm's Bush. In 1867 Smithfield was a semi-rural settlement populated by vine growers, gardeners, and wood timber cutters as well as orchards and tanneries. John Ryan Brennan, an attorney who was appointed Police Magistrate, named it Smithfield after the meat markets of London and Dublin. Smithfield has become a thriving commercial centre, and the once rural township is now a mixture of semi-rural, residential, commercial and industrial lands. The State electorate of Smithfield is within the boundaries of the Fairfield, Holroyd, Penrith and Blacktown council areas and comprises the suburbs of Abbotsbury, Bossley Park, Cecil Park, Eastern Creek, Edensor Park, Erskine Park, Greenfield Park, Greystanes, Horsley Park, Kemps Creek, Mount Vernon, Prairiewood, Prospect, Smithfield, Fairfield West and Wetherill Park.

Smithfield is a microcosm of multicultural Australia. Almost half of my constituents were born overseas. Almost 60 per cent of my constituents speak a language other than English at home. In fact, more than 100 different languages are spoken by my constituents in the electorate of Smithfield. I recognise the many Assyrian, Chaldean, Arabic, Italian, Mandaean, Vietnamese, Croatian, Serbian and Chinese community leaders here in the public gallery today. I thank them for coming. Smithfield is home to many attractions, including the Western Sydney Parklands, the Fairfield City Showground and the Eastern Creek Raceway. Smithfield is also well known for its large industrial area. The Smithfield-Wetherill Park Industrial Estate is the largest industrial estate in the Southern Hemisphere, and is the hub of manufacturing and distribution in the greater western Sydney region. With more than 1,000 manufacturing, wholesale, transport and service firms providing more than 20,000 jobs, the Smithfield-Wetherill Park Industrial Estate plays a key role in the State's economy.

Five public high schools and 13 primary schools are located in my electorate. As is common with public schools throughout New South Wales, most have suffered greatly over the past 16 years, with an increased workload for teachers, larger class sizes for students and a blowout in the school maintenance backlog, leaving schoolteachers and students to work in nineteenth century conditions. That is why, during the election campaign, the now education Minister, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli, and I met with parents and teachers at William Stimson Public School in Wetherill Park to announce that we would inject more than \$60 million into school maintenance funding and restore local decision-making to school communities.

Although there are a number of hospitals relatively close to my electorate, which my constituents may use as the need arises, there is only one hospital within my electorate's boundaries and that is Fairfield Hospital in Prairiewood. I was pleased to welcome the now Premier and the now health Minister, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell and the Hon. Jillian Skinner, to Fairfield Hospital, where they announced that the Coalition would deliver 100 more beds and 25 more nurses to the local area health district as part of our More Beds, More Nurses, Real Reform health plan. This was a great win for patients at Fairfield Hospital and a great win for Sydney's south-west. My electorate is home to only one police station, at Wetherill Park, and I will certainly be pressing for increased police numbers and more support for local Neighbourhood Watch programs. I thank the now police Minister, the Hon. Michael Gallacher, MLC, for visiting Wetherill Park police station and announcing more funding for police resources in my electorate, as well as more support for the Bossley Park Neighbourhood Watch.

I take this opportunity to express my appreciation to police officers all over New South Wales, but in particular to the Fairfield Local Area Command, under the leadership of Commander Peter Lennon, APM, for their commitment and service to my electorate of Smithfield. On the question of transport, it is quite interesting that the last time the Coalition was in government a substantial allocation was made to complete the overpass on the Cumberland Highway at Fairfield West, and now that the Coalition is back in government we will deliver the long-awaited and much-needed upgrade to the Polding Street and Smithfield Road intersection. The intersection under that same overpass in Fairfield West was ignored by the Labor Party, for the entire 16 years it was in government. Visiting the site, with the then shadow Minister for Roads and the now Deputy Premier, the Hon. Andrew Stoner, we committed \$3 million to this vital project in order to ease traffic congestion in the area. As members may be aware, this is one of the worst accident spots in Sydney as identified by both the New South Wales Roads and Traffic Authority and the NRMA.

During the campaign I said my priority would be to stop the increasing cost of electricity. The greatest threat to the increasing cost of electricity today is the current Prime Minister's and Labor Party's carbon tax. As a geologist, I know that the Earth's climate is constantly changing owing to natural variability in the Earth's processes. Why do geologists tend to be sceptics? A geologist has a much longer perspective. Geologists study the Earth and its history; they realise that the climate has changed often in the past due to natural causes. The Earth's climate naturally varies constantly, in both directions, at varying rates and on many scales. In recent decades global temperatures have risen. Yet many times in the past our planet has been far warmer and far cooler than today. Labor's carbon tax will hurt local families in my electorate by raising the cost of living even further and it will hurt industry and investment. I am opposed to any carbon tax and will continue to campaign against its introduction.

The campaign to win Smithfield was not easy. In fact, it was really hard. I was lucky; I had a small but dedicated campaign team. Without their help victory would not have been possible. During the election campaign we embraced technology and in particular social media. In fact, the number of fans on my Facebook page is second only to our Premier's Facebook page. We doorknocked just under 18,000 homes, we held more than 100 street stalls, letterboxed the entire electorate several times, put up hundreds of posters and called thousands of homes. One day, while doorknocking in the suburb of Smithfield, I came to a house where a gentleman was sitting under the front veranda. As I began to introduce myself to him he stood up and said, "You're Mr. Rohan, aren't you?" I said, "Yes sir, I am." He then proceeded to tell me that he and his family had been voting Labor for more than 40 years, but not anymore. He also said that I was the first politician to ever visit him. He was angry about the mismanagement of the State and felt betrayed by the so-called "working man's party". I believe this really summed up the feeling of voters right across the electorate, which was reflected by the result we achieved on election night.

I acknowledge and thank our leader, the Premier, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell. He united our party and paved the way for the Coalition's resounding victory on 26 March 2011. I thank the Deputy Premier, the Hon. Andrew Stoner, and Ministers the Hon. Jillian Skinner, the Hon. Michael Gallacher, the Hon. Chris Hartcher, the Hon. Anthony Roberts, the Hon. Adrian Piccoli, the Hon. Brad Hazzard and the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian for visiting my electorate during the election campaign. I thank my campaign team members: Nina Kiwarkis, Gaby Kiwarkis, Joseph Mirza, Adeeb Khoshaba, Matthew Hana, Councillor Ross Grove, Doug Calleja, Youhan Daryoush, Vince Ripepi, Stuart Smith, Adrian Pryke, Andrew Osman, Elias Shamoan, Jamal Elishe, Najah Namrood, Patrick Osman, Dalia Yousif, Vivian Mirza, Dalia Mirza, Ashie Mikeal, Hedra Moshy, Ross and Robert Candelori, Lujana Youkhana, Karim David, Brian Zammit, Laurel and Ellis Noak, Vincent De Luca and Jackie Wall, as well as my 120 election day volunteers; all this would not have been possible without their contribution.

Special thanks go to the Hon. Anthony Roberts for being so supportive during my campaign, and providing me with an army of volunteers from Lane Cove. I wish to acknowledge the contribution of the Young Liberal flying squads and their coordinators, Abi Shead and Charles Perrottet as well as the many Young Liberal campaigners involved in my campaign. I place on record my sincere thanks to the Liberal Party secretariat for their invaluable expertise, guidance and role in my success, in particular our State Director, Mark Neeham, our Campaign Director, Penny George, but more generally, all the staff at the secretariat.

I want to acknowledge the support of my parliamentary colleagues who have helped guide and support the local branches in the Smithfield area over the years, in particular, the Hon. David Clarke, MLC, the Hon. Marie Ficarra, MLC, the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, MLC, and the Hon. Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells. I want to pay a special tribute to the Hon. Charlie Lynn, MLC, and especially thank him for his support as the duty MLC for south-western Sydney. Without his guidance and assistance, it would have not been possible to win Smithfield. I want to thank Councillor Zaya Toma. He was the maestro of this campaign and to whom I credit a significant part in this victory.

As my campaign manager, Zaya demonstrated great leadership, strategic thinking and vision. Zaya spearheaded the campaign to expose the failures of the Labor Party in the Fairfield area over the past two years. This has helped convert the once Labor heartland into Liberal territory. I acknowledge Zaya's parents, Yoniya and Benjamin Toma, who are here in the public gallery. I thank my staff, Joseph Adams, Katrine Oliveri, Emmanuel Brikha and Zaya Toma for their hard work and loyal service to me and to the community at large, thus far and into the future. We have campaigned together for many years in the local area and it is an incredible honour finally to be in a position to be able to serve the community, for all of us. And finally, I congratulate all members on the success of their election to this place. I look forward to working with you over the coming term.