



Governor's Speech: Address-in-reply

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

Mr TONY ISSA (Granville) [7.10 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is with great respect and honour that I address the House as the first Liberal member for Granville since 1938. I am deeply humbled by the responsibility with which the people of my community have entrusted me and I promise to repay their faith and goodwill by serving them to the very best of my abilities. I wish to congratulate all the recently elected members, particularly my fellow Liberals in western Sydney. I have every confidence that over the coming years we will achieve great things together. I would also like to congratulate our leader, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, the Premier, and Minister for Western Sydney. I am honoured to be a member of his team. Our Premier's decision to retain the Western Sydney portfolio is a reflection of the importance of this region to our State and the size of the task ahead of us.

In Australian electoral history there has not been a bigger mandate than the one achieved by the Liberal-Nationals Coalition on 26 March 2011. Western Sydney threw its support behind the Liberal Party and I have no doubt that the region will be an important focus of our attention over the next four years and beyond. I believe this Government was elected because the community wants to see us focusing on the fundamentals: building infrastructure, providing services and upholding family values. I can assure the House that we will not take western Sydney for granted. We will work tirelessly to deliver the opportunities, infrastructure and services that our electorates deserve.

The people of Granville are warm and culturally diverse, they are hardworking and family-oriented, and I am so proud to represent them in the New South Wales Parliament. Granville is an electorate representing much of western Sydney, a region that contributes around \$80 billion to the State's gross domestic product. Western Sydney is Australia's third largest economy, behind Sydney and Melbourne, but it faces many challenges, including traffic and housing pressures and a transport system that does not efficiently integrate our communities within the region. Over 16 years the previous State Government promised 12 new rail lines, yet delivered only half of one, and unfortunately it was not in western Sydney.

Western Sydney's population of two million people do not have access to the same services and job opportunities as those living in other parts of the city. However, I know that we too will be judged on our achievements. A major task will be to break down social and economic barriers and ensure that the people of western Sydney have ready access to employment and services within our local area. I would like to see a greater portion of the tens of thousands of people who commute past Granville every day using their skills and talents locally. More jobs in western Sydney means fewer people on our roads stuck in traffic trying to get into the Sydney central business district. And of course I will continue to lobby for the Granville car park to serve our community, an important piece of infrastructure that was promised by the previous Government but not delivered.

I am no longer a young man and I speak with an accent, but nobody could have more affection for their local community than I do. Granville has been my home since arriving in Sydney from Lebanon in 1973, leaving behind my village, my friends, my school books, my soccer fields and my childhood memories. I am proud of my Lebanese heritage, I am proud of my family, I am proud of who I am—an Australian first and foremost. I will always be grateful for the wonderful life Australia has given to me and thank God for the opportunity to serve my nation and my community with a clear conscience.

I have had a long and hard journey—I was born in a little town in north Lebanon in 1955, the fourth of seven surviving children to my father, Khalil, and my mother, Marina. My father started working as an 11-year-old after the passing of my grandfather and so did not have the opportunity to go to school, but he taught himself to read and write, the basics. At the age of 19 my father married and with Mum they raised seven children, who I can honestly say were their only investment in this world. With my brothers and sisters we grew up in a simple, loving, caring Catholic Maronite family—living according to basic principles, fearing God and respecting others.

Like many migrants I joined the workforce early to support my family and was soon employed at a factory. From there I joined the State Rail Authority as a station assistant and within two years became qualified as an Assistant Station Master. I then took on a new role managing the wool freight for New South Wales for the next 12 years of my life. During this time I married a decent, beautiful local girl, Susan, and we were blessed with four children—Tanya, Stephen, Natalie and Pierre. And now I have three beautiful grandchildren, Xavier, Lara and Sophia, and two son-in-laws, Chadi and Fadi, and a daughter-in-law, Jasmine.

In 1987 I was elected to Parramatta City Council as an alderman, where I have served continuously and continue to serve as a councillor for Woodville Ward. Over the past 24 years as a councillor I have chaired many committees and meetings and I have served as a representative on many advisory committees and boards such as the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC], the Riverside Theatres and the Bicentennial Committee, to name just a few. In 1995 and 1999 I was elected Deputy Lord Mayor and in 2008 I was elected as the first Liberal Lord Mayor of Parramatta, also becoming the first Liberal Lord

Mayor in New South Wales. I am proud of my achievements as lord mayor, including removing parking metres from Harris Park, introducing 15 minutes of free parking in the Parramatta central business district, and refurbishing the Granville, Guildford and Harris Park town centres, as well as rejuvenating the Parramatta River foreshore.

I worked closely with the police and the community to bring about a peaceful resolution to the Harris Park riots. In this matter I acknowledge the leadership of Parramatta Local Area Commander, Superintendent Robert Redfern, APM, who is here this evening. During my time as lord mayor I worked hard to raise the profile of the position. I always made myself available to help people resolve their problems, and I was pleased to attend many community events, no matter how small or modest. I regularly held Meet the Lord Mayor barbecues around the local government area to raise money for local charities and to feed the homeless. For these services I earned the title of "the people's Lord Mayor".

I led delegations to China, Vietnam and Lebanon to establish friendship relationships and to encourage investment in the local area. In China I was pleased to sign a friendship city agreement in Beijing, and in Lebanon I was honoured to receive the President's award for services to the community. Throughout my public life I have always remained actively involved in my local community, and I founded many different organisations with the aim of assisting migrants settle in to their new homes. I was the president and treasurer of a multicultural organisation, and for many years I was responsible for more than 20 staff providing services such as family support, youth services, social workers, preschool, and before and after school care.

I was also the chair and member of many other organisations such as the Australian-Lebanese Association, the Australian Lebanese Welfare Group and my village association called Berkasha. I have served on my local school parents and citizens association, and I was a diocese representative for my children's schools. I also served for 36 years on the Our Lady of Lebanon stewardship committee coordinating fundraising. I have run neighbourhood advisory seminars in conjunction with local police, and I also served on local police consultative committees. I also founded youth organisations with the objective of guiding young people through a program to keep them away from drugs and alcohol and to encourage them to remain in school. I taught them to respect themselves and to have pride in their community, and I organised social activities to keep them occupied.

I am proud to say that all of the young people completed their studies and are now employed, and starting families and businesses of their own. For these services to the community and local government I received the Local Government Medal, and I was honoured to receive the Order of Australia Medal in 1995. My motivation has always been to give something back to the community, to listen and help those in need, and to give the youth a fair go. I am completely devoted to my community. I arrived in Sydney with no money and no university degrees, but I had ambition and dreams. I truly believe that all you need to serve the community is a good heart and a generous spirit. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I thank God for my wonderful community full of friends who have kindly supported me and stood by me through the highs and lows of public life, especially my family for their continuous support, understanding and patience. I love you and I truly appreciate it. I acknowledge the presence here today of my family, who are my strength, my courage and my inspiration—my wife, Susan, and my children Tanya and her husband Chadi and my grandkids, Stephen and his wife Jasmine, Natalie and her husband Fadi and my son Pierre. I also acknowledge my brothers and sisters: Joseph, Venitta, Nabil, Antoinette, Michael, Peter and their families, my nieces and nephews—there are too many of them to name.

Allow me also to thank those who I do not see here today but who I know are watching me from heaven: my loving parents Khalil and Marina, who would be so proud of me today. I acknowledge the clergy and my fellow parishioners at Our Lady of Lebanon, and my many friends in the community from so many different backgrounds, cultures, languages, religions and beliefs. I thank the Liberal Party for the honour and trust it placed in me. I place on record my gratitude to all the councillors and staff at Parramatta City Council with whom I have worked, in particular my former senior adviser, Justin Mulder. I thank them all for their friendship and support. I am proud of my achievements in local government and I look forward to the new challenges of representing my community in the New South Wales Parliament. As a member of this Parliament I will work to fulfil my role and earn the trust the people have placed in me. I will always uphold my values and beliefs, and I promise to work with devotion and integrity.

In conclusion, I will take a few moments to acknowledge the contribution of my amazing and hardworking campaign team and supporters, including my eldest son, Steven Issa, who did a superb job as my campaign director, assisted by my younger son, Pierre Issa; Steven's wife, Jasmine Issa, my daughters Tania Chahine and her husband Chady Chahine, and Natalie Bushara and her husband Fadi Bushara; all my brothers and sisters and nieces and nephews, especially Michael Issa; my parents-in-law Joseph and Mary Gallas; my brother-in-law Bill and his family; Odette Farah; Elias Youssef, whom I thank for his support; Fred Frangie; Joe Boumelhem; Councillor Nasr Kafrouni and his family; Martin Zaiter; Joe Kaltoum; Joe Rahme; Tony Khattar; Tony Draybi; Tom Kudinar; George Coorey; Ray Touma; Jim Carol and his sons Ian and Craig.

I also acknowledge Tania Raffoul; Nemer Elias and his family; Simon Sabet and his family; Phillip Issa and Joe Issa and family; Elias Batty; George Dib and his family; George Mourched and his family; Tony Bousaaid; Tony Batty; Sarkis Vagi; Claude Bou-Georges and her friend Zoe; Rabi Akl; Salah Noumair; Samir Dandan; Mouhtaz Zeriaka; Bishop Abikaram, Bishop Saliba and Bishop Drawish; Father Maroon Moussa, Father George Saab, Monsignor Shora, Father Dr Antoine Tarabay, Sheikh Azzam, Sheikh Taleb, Sheikh

Safi, Hajj Hawchar, Hajj Hamad, Hajj Zeriaka and Samir el Sag; all the local Arabic and ethnic newspapers and radio stations; the many mayors and councillors from different cities, whom I am proud to call my friends, as well as all the Afghan, Chinese, Greek, Indian, Maltese and Lebanese community leaders.

I warmly thank the army of more than 200 volunteers who went into battle with me on 26 March. Without all of you I would not be standing here today. We are all on the same road and I know you will travel this new journey with me. I thank the current and former members of the Parliament who kindly supported me in my election campaign: our Premier, Barry O'Farrell, John Ajaka, David Clarke, Gladys Berejiklian, Marie Ficarra, Mike Gallacher, Chris Hartcher, Matthew Mason-Cox, Adrian Piccoli, Michael Photios, Jillian Skinner, Greg Smith, Ray Williams and all the others who generously offered their support. I thank you, Mr Deputy-Speaker, and all honourable members for the warm welcome they have extended to me, and I thank all the parliamentary electorate staff for their kind support and assistance. Finally, I thank the people of Granville for their trust. I am honoured to represent them and I look forward to serving them. Thank you.