



# Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 3 May 2011, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday, 3 May 2011.

## GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### First Day's Debate

The Hon. ROBYN PARKER (Maitland) [6.00 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I move:

That the following Address be adopted by this House, in reply to the Speech which Her Excellency made to both Houses of Parliament:

To Her Excellency, Professor Marie Bashir, Companion of the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order and Governor of the State of New South Wales in the Commonwealth of Australia.

May it Please Your Excellency—

We, the members of the Legislative Assembly of the State of New South Wales, in Parliament assembled, desire to express our thanks for Your Excellency's Speech, and to express our loyalty to Australia and to the people of New South Wales.

We assure Your Excellency that our earnest consideration will be given to the measures to be submitted to us, and that we will faithfully carry out the important duties entrusted to us by the people of New South Wales.

We join Your Excellency in the hope that our labours may be so directed as to advance the best interests of all sections of the community.

While I am no stranger to the Parliament, tonight I speak for the first time in this Chamber. I do so as the first woman to represent the electorate of Maitland, before you, Madam Speaker, the first woman Speaker of the New South Wales Legislative Assembly. Although I was a member in the other place for eight years, the sense of honour and privilege of representing the people of New South Wales is never lost on me. I am not the first person from Duckenfield to be a member of the New South Wales Parliament. The Hon. John Eales junior lived on the very same property as my home. Although he was a member of the Legislative Council from 1880 to 1894, we cannot find comments attributed to him in the parliamentary records. The same cannot be said for me.

It is a humbling experience to be part of the new New South Wales Liberals and Nationals Government. The diversity, talent and experience that are found amongst my colleagues must surely make this one of the most impressive governments that has assembled in this Chamber. My childhood was similar to that of many of my generation. We lived simply but well. We knew everyone in our neighbourhood, and life revolved around our home and our family. My parents, Adeline and Campbell McEwen, both left school at a young age to supplement their family's income. Through sheer hard work and determination they established a small, successful business. My parents also encouraged me to appreciate diversity, to challenge and to think for myself, and to stand up for our values and our way of life.

In practical terms, my family life represented the vision that Menzies had articulated for society when first establishing the Liberal Party—the desire for a society built on deep respect for the dignity and freedom of the individual, where effort is rewarded and enterprise encouraged; a society of equality; a society of opportunity and choice. When it came time for me to make a decision about my career there were not a lot of options. It was not just an aversion to the sight of blood that saw me choose teaching over nursing. I have always thought that there is nothing more satisfying than watching the face of a person—either a child or an adult—when he or she grasps a concept or a skill for the very first time, and I wanted to be a part of that.

I arrive in this place having worked with children, families, the disabled, women suffering violence and some of the many in our community who have fallen by the wayside, often through no fault of their own. My broad life experiences were expanded through my eight years of representation in the other place and as the chair of a number of committee inquiries. Whether it was with the services that I established in the predominantly housing commission areas that were some of our first neighbourhood child-care centres, or through establishing one of the first mobile community outreach programs in the city of Maitland almost 30 years ago, all of my roles have involved supporting families and linking them with their communities. Times have changed and the barriers and

boundaries of neighbourhoods and families are less rigid than they were in the past. Technology now offers us more opportunities for connectivity than ever before, but there can be no substitute for providing that connectivity in more practical terms at a grassroots level.

I entered Parliament on the back of those who believed in me. There were so many people who encouraged and supported me to realise my political dreams. I am pleased to say that many of them are still mentoring and supporting me. I particularly acknowledge the many members from all sections of the Liberal Party whose support and guidance I have received over the years and to whom I will remain eternally grateful. I have been fortunate to have the guidance and support of my colleagues, in particular our Premier, Barry O'Farrell, and the Deputy Liberal leader, Jillian Skinner. Barry led our party through the past four years and to a historic victory with conviction, fostering our discipline, energy and focus.

Deputy Leader Jillian Skinner has been there as a shoulder to lean on. Despite her incredible workload, she has always found the time to encourage, listen and assist. I thank my colleagues past and present in this Chamber and in the other place—in particular, the new President of the Legislative Council, my friend and former whip in the other place, the Hon. Don Harwin, and former member the Hon. Patricia Forsythe, who encouraged me to enter politics. My dear friend Judy Hopwood, the former member for Hornsby, has been a great friend throughout the highs and lows of political life. When I called Andrew Tink, our former colleague and a wonderful mentor to many of us, me included, to tell him I was disappointed not to see A. C. Wentworth's portrait on the wall looking down at us as I entered this Chamber today, his wise advice to me was to keep calm and carry on.

I follow a number of other Liberal women into Parliament. I have great admiration for all of their achievements. I thank them for blazing the trail and for setting the path for me to follow. The mentoring, training and support provided by the New South Wales Women's Council has been instrumental in our success, but there is more to be done. I look forward to continuing to mentor more women to take up the challenge of political representation.

I acknowledge my family and friends, not only those present tonight but also those unable to be here, who have faith in me and my ability and who have helped shape me to become the person standing before you today. I thank them for their love, their guidance and their support. They know why I wanted to be a participant in the law-making process for the people of this State; they know the sincerity of my motivation, my level of commitment and the energy and enthusiasm that I apply to everything I do.

I have mentioned my role in the other place and my career before coming to this place, but it is my role as wife and mother that is the most significant one. When I was elected I asked my children for their advice. "Keep it real, Mum", they said. I have tried to do that. The reality for them having a mother in politics is something the public really cannot fully appreciate or understand. Family friendly hours, for example, are meaningless when you live two hours away. However, none of us could do this job without the support of our families, and I am no exception.

My children have made great sacrifices and have never complained, apart from the fact that too many meals have consisted of casseroles or soup that I cooked in preparation for a week away in Parliament. The past eight years have seen enormous changes in their lives. Dylan, Chelsea and Heath are brilliant young adults now. All three are already making a mark on the world in their own way. Apart from their academic, musical and sporting achievements they have a great sense of self-confidence and high ethical standards, and are actively involved in contributing to those less fortunate than themselves. I could not be a prouder Mum. Of course, the other integral member of "Team Parker" is my husband, David. He is my rock, my soul mate, my greatest supporter—and sometimes my greatest critic. I can never begin to thank him enough for his love, motivation and guidance.

In Maitland we are parochial and proud of it. We are proud of our origins, we are proud of our diversity. No matter what challenges are thrown in front of us, we are strong, united and resolute in our desire to succeed. The people of Maitland are the salt of the earth, people who care about each other, people who rally around in times of crisis, people who support each other through both the good times and the bad times, people who ask for no more than their fair share, and people who expect no more than a fair go. In short, these attributes describe the Australian way.

There is a marked difference between my experience and that of someone from Sydney. There is a strong—and some would say justified—feeling in rural and regional areas that the past Government focussed on the Sydney metropolitan basin and only sometimes glanced fleetingly past its boundaries. The overwhelming result in March 2011 signalled clearly that this attitude must change. The policies we took to the election will lay the groundwork for this change. It will be exciting to be a part of that. Abraham Lincoln once said:

The legitimate object of Government is to do for a community of people whatever they need to have done but cannot do for themselves in their separate and individual capacities. In all that the people can do for themselves Government ought not to interfere.

Governments have a responsibility to provide a constructive hand up rather than simply a handout. This is a basic tenet of Liberal

philosophy. We want equality of opportunity, freedom of choice, a commitment to care for the disadvantaged and a balance between economic growth and environmental protection. Those goals are the very reason I stand here, humbled and privileged to accept the role of serving all the people of New South Wales. Solutions to problems are never found in an ad hoc way, and throwing money at them only ever meets a short-term goal. I joined the Liberal Party because it is a party of long-term vision, progressive rather than reactionary. I will take that approach in my role in this place.

I left the Legislative Council extremely proud of the work I undertook there. The inquiries I chaired into areas such as bullying in schools, the state of the New South Wales Ambulance Service and the provision of education to students with a disability made a real difference, which, at the end of the day, is the reason we put our hands up to be parliamentary representatives. I place on record my thanks to all staff who have helped me not only in my former role but also in the transition to my new role as a member of this place. One of my favourite quotes is from American anthropologist Margaret Mead. It has not just been an inspiration to me, but I believe it represents the common ideals that have driven every one of us to become a member of this place. She said:

Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.

Like all members, I suspect, I have an unassailable belief that my electorate is the best in New South Wales. I have had an association with Maitland for nearly 30 years. It is an area where I have worked, where I have raised a family, and that I proudly call home. As the fastest-growing local government area in New South Wales, the challenges facing Maitland are immense. For too long the region's growth has not been complemented by the necessary infrastructure. The people of Maitland have been badly let down by the short-term vision and spin-cycle obsession of the previous Government. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Our roads are clogged, our hospitals are full and frustrations are increasing. In electing me their member, the people of Maitland have placed their faith in me that I will get things done, that I will implement a shared vision for an aspirational, thriving Maitland where the quality of life of generations past is restored. It will not be easy, but I know that with a lot of hard work and with the policies this Government has in place I will face the electorate in four years' time knowing that things have improved. In order to maintain our wonderful lifestyle our rapid growth must be managed. Infrastructure must keep up with demand. In my electorate of Maitland, we must strive to find a balance between the mining-related industry that is a major employer and a key driver of the New South Wales economy and preservation of the heritage aspects of many of the towns that make up the electorate. Heritage has been made a key portfolio in the New South Wales Government, and I am looking forward to the opportunity of working with communities throughout our State to conserve and celebrate our rich heritage.

I acknowledge the contribution of the former member for Maitland, Frank Terenzini. It is also appropriate that I acknowledge former liberal members for Maitland that I now have the honour of joining. The irrepressible the Hon. Milton Morris, AO, Peter Toms and Peter Blackmore, who is our current Mayor, were all superb parliamentarians and their legacy will well and truly survive in Maitland for many years. I appreciate their on-going guidance and I can only hope that my time in office is as beneficial to the people of Maitland as was that of the Liberal members who came before me.

I could not speak here today without thanking my local branch members and supporters who saw in me the potential to become the member for Maitland. The volunteers—my 'blue army'—who for many months manned my campaign office, drove billboard trailers, displayed posters, handed out my leaflets, manned pre-poll and polling booths and did the thousand and one jobs that campaign volunteers selflessly do are not thanked often enough for.

It is with great humility that I have been asked to serve the people of New South Wales as the Minister for the Environment, and Minister for Heritage. There are great opportunities to deliver good outcomes, and the need to get these outcomes right is felt very acutely in my electorate. My aspiration as a Minister in this Government is to be one that encourages practical environmentalism where every person is given the opportunity to rise to the environmental challenges that confront us. I take on this role aware of the rich environmental legacy of previous New South Wales Liberal and Nationals Governments. The foresight of previous Coalition Governments led to many of the State's most important environmental reforms. It was the New South Wales Liberals and Nationals that created the Environment Protection Authority, passed the Ozone Protection Act, introduced kerbside recycling and created 16 new national parks.

Over the coming months the O'Farrell Government will continue to outline the measures it will take to counter some of the most pressing environmental problems we face. We understand that good environmental policy is more than just rhetoric—it is at the core of sustainability in this State. We must be a Government that does not forsake environmental responsibility in the pursuit of being economically competitive. There needs to be balance in all that we do. Getting the balance right is difficult but essential if we want to pass on a world to be proud of for future generations. Today I have talked of communities, of people, of life philosophies and of journeys. I have talked about some of the things that I believe are important in life. I am incredibly honoured to be standing in this House, filled with anticipation at the opportunity I have to work towards a better quality of life for all the people of New South Wales.

I am a woman, a mother, a wife, an advocate and a daughter. I have concerns, aspirations and ideas. And now, as the member for Maitland, I make a commitment to you and to myself that I will not take this opportunity for granted. I will not squander this chance to work for the betterment of us all. I will stay strong, I will maintain my integrity and I will represent New South Wales to the very best of my ability. Finally, none of us would be here today without the support and love of our families. I again thank my husband, David, and my children Dylan, Chelsea and Heath—they are the reason I am standing here today. They tell me the significance of an inaugural speech is not only an introduction to the Parliament but the speech most often quoted at a member's funeral. At the end of my days when people discuss me I hope they will say:

She was enthusiastic about life, about people; she cared. She worked tenaciously to make a difference whilst at the same time she was a wonderful wife and mother.

I thank all my colleagues on both sides of the Chamber for their hospitality in allowing me the indulgence of addressing them today. I wish them all the best for their term in office.