



## Inaugural Speeches

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**Ms FELICITY WILSON (North Shore) (17:19):** It is with a profound sense of awe that I speak for the first time in this Chamber, in the mother of Australian parliaments. In itself 10 May is an historic day—it was on this day in 1787 that Captain Arthur Phillip gave the order for the ships of the First Fleet to assemble at the Mother Bank in Portsmouth prior to departure on 13 May. On that day began the excitement and the challenge that has defined the Australian nation that we know today. Equally, it was the start of our still unresolved proper relationship with the first peoples of this land.

It was on 10 May 1901 that the first Commonwealth Parliament sat in the parliamentary buildings in Melbourne, its home for the next 26 years. Beyond our shores, but no less part of our history, it was on 10 May 1940 that Winston Churchill assumed the prime ministership at a time when we were fighting side by side in the defence of freedom. And on 10 May 1994 that freedom triumphed again when Nelson Mandela was inaugurated as South Africa's first democratically elected leader. I grow ever more cognisant of the great privilege and honour it is to undertake such a journey of public service and advocacy for my community and for the people of this State.

It is my personal journey and the experiences of my life that have led me into this role. It is my personal journey that has instilled in me the drive to fight for equality of opportunity and liberty for all in our community. As the member for North Shore, representing my home is a deep honour and I will endeavour to meet the challenge with the highest levels of public service so long as I am in this Parliament. Like all of us, I am a product of my family's history. I count among my ancestors John Busby, a nineteenth century pioneer, builder of Sydney's water supply and whose sons, William and Alexander, served in the Legislative Council.

My own grandparents both grew up on the land in country New South Wales. Each lost a parent as a young child, and then struggled—like so many others—through the Great Depression. When the war came, they both signed up. My grandmother, Edna, left her family home in Forbes at the age of 18 to serve in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. She met my grandfather, David, at Temora air base, they had one date at the picture show, and then courted via telegram throughout the war. My grandfather had never been in a plane before, but went on to fly 31 missions over Nazi Germany and Europe in World War II as a Lancaster bomber pilot alongside two of his brothers, and was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service.

My grandparents were married one month after my grandfather's repatriation at St Augustine's Anglican Church in Neutral Bay. Almost 70 years later, my husband, Sam, and I were also married there, and we now live just down the street from their first home. My grandparents dedicated the next 50 years of their lives to their community—my grandmother to her church, the Lions Ladies and the Mothers' Union, and my grandfather to the Lions, Freemasons, and Rotary. I do not think we will ever see another generation so dedicated to sacrifice and service on behalf of their country and community. But I live every day in honour of their example, and strive to be the person they helped raise me to be.

My own family's life was to take a different turn. My family was scarred by domestic violence and mental health issues and my mother, as a single mum, was forced to raise my two sisters and me. With very little, she did her very best, but it was tough. And then there's me. I am the product of the

real sacrifices my mum and grandparents made. I was born in Cessnock, where mum and dad were working in a small business in town. I started my secondary education at a high school that did not perform well academically and that was known for drugs and teen pregnancy. But my grandparents knew the capacity of education to change lives through their own lived experience.

Neither my parents nor my grandparents had finished high school in their youth. But in his fifties, my grandfather studied for the Higher School Certificate at night, then studied law at the University of Sydney, and practised as a solicitor into his late seventies. With my family's encouragement, I was lucky enough to earn an academic scholarship and receive a great Christian education. Now, more than 15 years after completing school, my love of learning sees me close to completing my third university degree. My experience taught me early on about the ability for education to transform lives and disrupt intergenerational cycles of poverty and disadvantage. I believe too many kids across our State are not getting the educational opportunities they deserve. While my family's story is personal to me, it is not unique. There will be others in this place with a similar story. In the face of adversity, our families battled to make their own success.

It is this story that brought me to the Liberal Party and now to the New South Wales Parliament. My values are Liberal values, and it is from those values that I understand that it is strong self-reliant individuals who build strong communities in which everyone can be given the opportunity to achieve their highest potential while ensuring that those who need special help and care are never left behind. That access to quality education is the most transformative thing in anyone's life. That each of us has a responsibility to contribute to public service and to build a better life for our families and our communities.

I stand in this place as a staunch advocate of liberalism. Australia's core values are underpinned by liberty unfettered by the State or by collectivists who believe the individual cannot and should not determine his or her future. It is what my grandparents fought for, and it is what has given me the chance to be here today. Our liberty can only be assured by free speech, the right to participate at all levels of society, and a representative democracy where governments listen to the community and are guided by its voice.

Our liberty demands no restriction of access to opportunities such as work, education, or to make a better life for ourselves and the next generation. In a country like ours, there are boundless opportunities for all and good government must enable the economic prosperity that underpins opportunity for each individual to fulfil his or her capabilities. I am a member of the Liberal Party because it enshrines those values and believes in individuals, their rights, their freedoms, and their opportunities. I would not be here today without the Liberal Party.

The Berejiklian Liberal Government holds the promise of our generation. I have joined a government that has wiped out government net debt. It has created the economic environment within which business can flourish and it is now investing in the largest infrastructure program in our history—infrastructure that is making a difference to lives across our State and in my own electorate. It is funding the largest school investment program in New South Wales history to ensure the best start for kids; the largest road and rail investment program in New South Wales history, to bust the congestion that robs families of time at home and businesses of productivity; and it has made significant investment in hospitals and health care, including the world-class facilities delivered in my backyard at Royal North Shore Hospital.

The Berejiklian Government truly is an infrastructure government. The work of government does not end with an economy that is thriving. A strong economy enables us to improve the lives of families affected by violence, mental illness and disadvantage. These are matters of my own lived experience and are close to my heart. A strong economy enables us to give our next generation the best start through a quality education. I bring to this place the belief that government has a responsibility to encourage social justice. When women continue to be murdered by their partners, our society is unjust. When children continue to suffer violence in their homes, our society is unjust. When people with mental illnesses are not given a chance to live a fulfilling life, our society is unjust.

I have entered this place to speak for those who cannot access the opportunities of our prosperous and free society. I know the fracturing impact on a childhood of family violence and mental illness. I know the hardship of poverty; the struggle on welfare. I know the almost limitless power of education to cut through disadvantage.

My parents' marriage broke down when I was three. In the 1980s there was not a lot of understanding of mental illness. Frankly, we still have a long way to go. My mum did not know at the time that her husband's behaviour was caused by schizophrenia. While he was a loving man, his illness led him to be violent, and my sisters and I suffered the brunt of his disease for a number of years.

I know now, as an adult, what I did not know as a child; that my father's illness could have, and should have, been diagnosed earlier, and that this detection and subsequent treatment would likely have ensured he could live a fulfilling life. Even today, our society struggles to recognise, diagnose and treat many mental illnesses. Schizophrenia affects 1 per cent of our community and 50 per cent of those people will attempt suicide. Too many take their own lives and too many are left to live empty lives. The stigma attached to this illness destroys lives by discouraging help-seeking and diagnosis.

As a society, we lose so much from mental illness.

We lose mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers, sons, daughters, grandchildren and grandparents. My sisters and I lost our father. My father lost his family. He lost his autonomy. He lost the chance at a fulfilling life. I know now that he was stolen from me by a disease that should have been treated. Nearly half of all Australians will experience a mental health condition in their lifetime. Many are not even aware of the warning signs, and too many do not know how or when to seek help. Too many members of our community and their families continue to struggle without adequate support.

It is no surprise that efforts and policies that champion children and families have correlated with the representation of women in our parliaments. As a former President of the Liberal Women's Council I have spent many years working with members of the Liberal Party championing policy issues of importance to women. In entering this Parliament as the seventy-third woman to sit in the Legislative Assembly I have reflected on the contribution of the first woman to sit in this place. Millicent Preston-Stanley's parliamentary career was highlighted by her staunch campaigns for an improvement in the rate of women's mortality in childbirth, child welfare reform, institutional care for people with mental illnesses and more equitable custody rights in divorce. In her inaugural speech, on 26 August 1925, she said:

I want to make it clear that I am not here merely as the representative of one sex. I believe that women's questions are national questions, and that national questions are women's questions, and it may be shown that woman can take her place amongst the representatives of the people in the Parliament of the country and play her part in the political life of the nation.

In echoing her statement, I am also here not merely as a woman; however, I will always be a champion for women, for our lives, our rights, our freedoms, our ability to determine our own futures, to compete on a level playing field, to access opportunities unconstrained by our gender. Growing up, my grandmother always encouraged me to beat the boys, a mantra that told me from the youngest age that there were no limits to what I could achieve because of my gender—and yet women remain underrepresented in our parliaments. The Legislative Assembly currently consists of 27 women out of 93 members—a total of only 29 per cent. When the population of our country and State is more than 50 per cent women, I find it hard to understand why more than 70 per cent of this Chamber are men.

Sir Robert Menzies was ahead of his time when it came to female participation and representation. Menzies' declaration in 1944 that "men and women will, side by side, be members of this organisation" reflected his aspiration to create a party that was beholden to no-one and open to everyone. The Liberal Party has spent much of its energy since committing to the principle of merit in selection to Parliament. Today, only 22 per cent of the Liberal members in the Legislative Assembly are women, and it is only 15 per cent in the Legislative Council. No one can credibly make the argument that Liberal men are more than four times as meritorious as Liberal women and deserve more than four times the representation.

That is why I made the case within our party for the introduction of targets for women's representation in our parliaments. I am proud to say that my stance, and that of Premier Gladys Berejiklian, has since been adopted by our division. Targets represent a commitment, an agreement from the party leadership and membership that things need to change. They do not impose equal outcomes but seek to level the playing field for equal opportunity. I would say that is a very Liberal approach to addressing our gender imbalance. As a party we must hold ourselves to account in meeting this commitment, and I will continue to work alongside our members on efforts to improve our party's culture and nurture more women into leadership positions.

I acknowledge the work in this regard of Chris McDiven—a lion of our party—for a lifetime's commitment and for her personal mentorship and friendship to me. I now stand in this place as the representative of the electorate with the highest proportion of women of all 93 electorates. Until our parliaments reflect our communities we will continue to struggle to represent the diverse views of our society. I welcome the efforts already made by this Fifty-sixth Parliament. I am addressing this Chamber, which is presided over by the first female Speaker in its history, the Hon. Shelley Hancock, MP, a Speaker who has championed reforms to parliamentary business to make it more family friendly. The perceived inability to juggle a family and a career is a hurdle to many of my generation, particularly women. I want to recognise Madam Speaker's commitment and efforts to reducing this barrier.

I have also joined a government led by the first female Liberal Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, MP. Premier Berejiklian has long been an advocate for women and continues to champion women in our community and in our Parliament. During my election campaign countless

women, young and old, approached us to tell her of their excitement at her election. It was particularly powerful for me to see the young women—often schoolgirls—who view her as a role model and know that they too can aspire to the highest offices in our land. The challenges facing women of our time may be different to those of Millicent Preston-Stanley's era, but they are no less in need of the attention and focus of our parliaments.

In our digital age we see new challenges, including the rise of revenge pornography as a new tool that intimate partners use to subjugate and oppress women. With the pervasive influence of our 24-hour sensationalist media young women are succumbing to mental illnesses, including eating disorders, in their aspirations to unattainable standards of beauty and value. Self-harm is all too prevalent, with suicide the leading cause of death for young women, as well as young men. At the other end of the spectrum we see many women over the age of 65 living alone—and in my electorate that's 40 per cent of those women, and many of them struggle with isolation and the resultant health and wellbeing impacts. Every electorate in New South Wales, to a greater or lesser extent, is touched by the scourge of domestic and family violence, including my electorate of North Shore. I pay tribute to former Premier Mike Baird for creating the first ministerial portfolio to tackle such violence, and recognise the efforts made by the Minister, Pru Goward, to reduce the incidence of family violence across New South Wales. But more can—and must—be done to ensure that women and children in our society can live without fear of violence or death in their own homes.

It is a great privilege to represent the electorate that has become my home after a childhood and youth spent searching for stability. I have been a resident of the North Shore electorate for the best part of a decade. It is where Sam and I were married and have made our home. We are genuinely representative of our community. Many of us are young, well-educated professionals, seeking to make a home in the most beautiful part of the world. Two-thirds live in apartments, and more than half of our residents move house every five years. There are also large numbers of people in our community who have contributed significantly to our society and settled into retirement locally. Our proximity to the Sydney central business district [CBD], coupled with our vibrant villages and beautiful harbour foreshore, attract the highest educated workforce in the State.

North Shore is diverse and dynamic. It is home to some of Australia's biggest tourist destinations, including Taronga Zoo and Luna Park, but it also conceals many secret and quiet hideaways like Lavender Bay and Berry Island. North Shore boasts extensive natural bushland weaving along Sydney Harbour. Our natural environment is a hallmark of our identity and its beauty has inspired artists throughout our history, including Arthur Streeton and Brett Whiteley. I will continue to fight in this place and in our community for the preservation of our harbour foreshore. I am committed to ensuring the sustainable revitalisation of sites like Berrys Bay as places for the public to enjoy.

My electorate is home to North Sydney CBD—one of the largest business districts in Australia. We are well connected to the city through a range of train, bus and ferry hubs. We are also the long-suffering users of one of the most congested roads in Australia, Military Road, which has for too long been a subject of concern and impassioned advocacy for local residents. I applaud the Premier, the Minister for Transport and Infrastructure, the Hon. Andrew Constance, and the Minister for Roads, Maritime and Freight, the Hon. Melinda Pavey, for committing to delivering the tunnel, an investment in the quality of life of everyone who uses our local roads and is impacted by the daily impost of heavy traffic. I will work with the Premier, the Ministers, Roads and Maritime Services, and

our community to see the project through. Early works have already started, and I pledge that for as long as I am the member for North Shore I will fight to make this tunnel a reality.

Our community members are active and engaged. I have committed myself to listen to their views and to represent them. I know they will be vocal and share their extensive knowledge and experience with me as I seek to work for them. Equally, I will be vocal in expressing their concerns and standing up for them. I know that I will be able to work closely alongside my local Federal Liberal members of Parliament on a range of issues of importance to our community, and I look forward to continuing to work with the member for North Sydney, Trent Zimmerman, and the member for Warringah, Tony Abbott.

For nearly a quarter of a century the electorate of North Shore was represented in this place by Jillian Skinner. I am honoured that she is in the gallery this evening. Our State has reaped the benefits of her personal dedication to improving the health and wellbeing of everyone across New South Wales as our longstanding Minister for Health. She achieved record spending, especially on much-needed health infrastructure; she empowered local communities to take leadership in health policy and delivery; she pioneered investment in medical research; and for the first time she put issues such as pain management, palliative care, HIV and AIDS prevention, and organ donation on the Government's agenda seriously.

I pay tribute to her and her husband, Chris, and to their family for her extraordinary service and commitment to the electorate and the people of New South Wales

As we all know, entry into this place is as a result of fierce campaigns—especially in by-elections. I would not be here without the support of the Liberal Party to whom I owe so much and to the individual members of that party who worked on the North Shore campaign. I pay tribute to the more than 300 volunteers who worked so hard for my election: conference leaders Simon Moore, Lisette Walsh, Marilyn Cameron and Neville Mitchell; key campaign team members Paul Maltby, Jessica Keen, Ralda Kirton, Bob Lawrence, Jonathan O'Dea and Shayne Mallard; Young Liberals from my own Mosman Branch—my alma mater—Joanna Howe, Lachlan Finch and Will Spence; and from further afield, especially David Nouri, David Tregenza and Joel Clark; from head office—though much maligned Chris Stone, Alicia McCunzie and Nick Westenberg; and all party members from across New South Wales who worked tirelessly on the campaign. Thank you.

Thank you to my now parliamentary colleagues, who travelled from as far afield as Kiama, Wagga Wagga, Gunnedah and all across Sydney. I was even blessed with the support of friends from The Nationals—as a country girl at heart, their generosity does not surprise me. It was a rare privilege that is seen only in by-elections to gain support from so many parliamentarians, and I am so grateful for their dedication. They say that there are no friends in politics, but you could not find a better friend or supporter than Luke Sikora. I cannot imagine anyone who could have managed this short-run, complex and intense by-election campaign better—or managed me better. I am blessed to have friends who have supported me throughout my involvement in the Liberal Party, including James Wallace, Morgan Forrest, Al Cameron, Matt Kean and Gareth Ward. I am grateful, too, for the longstanding friendships of people who continue to enrich my life, such as Katrina Riddle, Samantha Abeydeera, Elva Cruz, Elizabeth O'Brien and Patrick Wall.

My by-election experience has left me with an even deeper respect for the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian. Her steadfast commitment to the community was apparent every day during the campaign, and I will set her standard of contribution as my benchmark. But today it is for her personal friendship and support that I acknowledge and thank her.

I would not be here today without my family. As the youngest of three girls, I have been loved and cherished as the baby of the family since I was born. Whatever hardships we have faced, we faced them together. To my mother, Lesley: Thank you for always supporting me and believing I could achieve anything. To her husband, Steven: Thank you for being such a crucial part of my mother's life and supporting our family. To my sisters, Christiana and Alexia: Like all sisters we have fought big and small battles, but the battles I remember are the ones where we were on the same side. Thank you for having my back as a little girl, and for continuing to back me as an adult. To their husbands, Mario and Greg, and my nieces and nephew, Gabriella Domenic, Lilly and Gracie: Thank you for being a part of my life. Our family is richer for your having joined it.

I believe that politics is a team sport—although occasionally it seems more like a blood sport. Seven years ago I met a man in the Young Liberals who shared my ideals and my values; someone who cared about making a difference in this world. He was a man who believed in equality and was happy to share my feminist tag. So of course I married him before anyone else could. Sam and I are a team in all things, and his faith, courage and belief in me have propelled me here. Sam, I love you and appreciate all you are and all you do. With Sam, I have gained his parents, Steve and Debra, who not only have raised the finest son but also give their love and support to us both unconditionally. It would be remiss of me not to acknowledge and thank my grandparents, who I know watch over me and would be so proud to see me here.

Women in politics, especially ones like me with strong views and strong opinions, often attract disapproving attention—a peculiar feature not found in relation to men. On taking office, Margaret Thatcher said, "To govern is to serve." I am here to serve. I am here to serve the Liberal Party, whose values I embrace and without whose support I would not have this unique opportunity in the first place. I am here to serve the Berejiklian Government, whose policies are the best guarantee for the progress of this State and every individual within it and whose leadership is an exemplar to the rest of the country. I am here to serve this Parliament. Being a parliamentarian is more important than being a politician because it is through the collective, and whenever possible cooperative, actions of this Parliament that the people of this State are best served.

The sacrifices—often made in blood—to allow free Parliaments to provide democratic government require us to treat this place and this institution with honour and respect. Above all, I am here to serve the people of North Shore, who have honoured me with their mandate, imposed upon me the great responsibility to represent them and on whose behalf I will work tirelessly. Thank you.

*Members stood in their places and applauded.*

**The SPEAKER:** I congratulate the member for North Shore on her inaugural speech.