



## Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 14 November 2017.

**Mr AUSTIN EVANS (Murray) (17:04):** Gawaym banha yuwin ngadhi Austin Evans. Gadhang badhu girra-girra-bang badhu. Dyiramadilinya badhu nginhagu Wiradjuridya Dhaagundha. Nginha ngurambang marunbunmil girridyu. Biyambul Dhirrangal nganhalgu mudyigandhi. Yindyamalgirridyu biyambul mayinyguwal. Greetings, my name is Austin Evans. I am pleased, I am happy and I am proud to be from and belonging to Wiradjuri Land—the area I grew up in. I love this country—my region, my electorate, my State and my nation. All elders are important to me and I will respect all people.

I thank the voters of Murray for giving me the opportunity to serve them in this place. Less than 2½ months ago I was planning for the end of the year and what I had to do with Coleambally Irrigation Co-operative and Murrumbidgee Council. And then the whirlwind happened: Adrian Piccoli resigned and I embarked on this journey. I will start with some thankyou's. I thank the National Party, a party that has supported me and been incredibly welcoming, and that I have found to be incredibly democratic. I thank Joan Douglas, who has supported me in roles within the party all the way along, from when I showed up at my first meeting.

I thank the National Party members who made the trek to Griffith at very short notice for the preselection meeting—80 of them with four days notice to come along and participate in the democracy of the National Party. I thank my campaign committee, Jack Piggott, Nathan Quigley, Tom Chesson, Daniel Johns and Josh Hodges, and the staff at head office, many of whom are here today, who helped those guys make it look as if they had been planning an Austin Evans campaign for months—they had not. I thank all the members of Parliament and ex-members of Parliament who came and helped, many of whom are here today: John Barilaro—congratulations for tomorrow on 12 months as the Deputy Premier, and happy birthday too—Gladys Berejiklian, Barnaby Joyce, Adrian Piccoli, Bronnie Taylor, Niall Blair, Paul Toole, Troy Grant, Steve Bromhead, Wes Fang, Sarah Mitchell, Michael McCormack, Kay Hull, Leslie Williams, Mel Pavey, Adam Marshall, Geoff Provest, Greg Aplin, Daryl Maguire, and then our Victorian friends Peter Walsh, Peter Crisp, Andrew Broad and Tim McCurdy.

I thank Remi Luxford and the video crew, and all the people who at very short notice stumped up and appeared in video pieces for me. I thank the guys who did the photos and all the people who appeared in the photos for me at very short notice. I thank the volunteers on the booths all over the vast electorate—an army of workers who mobilised at very short notice. I have not fully absorbed the magnitude of the number of people involved—friends, relatives, former and current members of Parliament, staffers, party members, supporters, friends of relatives, relatives of friends and relatives of ex-members of Parliament. It has been such a short time and an absolute whirlwind since the election.

That was the election campaign. But I would really like to thank and acknowledge the significant people—many of whom are here today—places, experiences and events that have made me who I am, and note what I can bring to this place because of them. My grandparents, William and Gladys Evans and George and Barbara Allen, were all born in Australia. However, they were born in Victoria—so hopefully Victoria does not change its citizenship rules or I will be in trouble. They all migrated to the Riverina at a young age and created new lives a long way away from where they

grew up. My dad, Max Evans—who is in the gallery and with me today—taught me many things. Chief amongst them was to be myself, even if that is different, and to never judge people by the superficial.

My dad left school at 14 because the train on which he had to travel to high school got him there at 11.00 a.m. every day, but he is one of the smartest people I know. He built machinery on the farm. He built ski-boats—half a dozen of them. He built water skis when his family wanted to go water-skiing. He learnt to use a computer when he was in his seventies. He is an incredibly smart man, who taught me to judge people by what they are. In the 1960s, my father planted hundreds of trees across his farm—long before the word "environmentalist" was fashionable. In the 1980s we planted a bunch more trees, probably at the worst time ever—at the start of a drought. We looked after those trees. We watered them and got them to maturity. One of the strange things is that, probably because of planting those trees, I was a member of the Australian Conservation Foundation at one stage—no longer. My father—this is remarkable, and probably speaks of a couple of issues—has probably lived on that farm longer than any white man. That goes to explain how short a time Europeans have been in this country, and how committed my father has been to his farm.

My mum, Val, is here today. She has loved me and provided for me. She spent a lot of time driving me to fun runs. You may not think it now, but once upon a time I was quite a reasonable runner. On Saturdays if there was a fun run in Wagga Wagga my mum would take me there and do the fun run with me. That is probably where I got my athletic ability. Sorry, Mum: I have let that go! My mum's greatest gift to me was her faith and teaching Sunday school to a sceptical, argumentative boy—me. Whilst I probably did not appreciate it and understand it at the time, it was a key foundation for the faith that has been a guiding aspect of my life. Many years later I made a commitment to become a Christian at a strange place—a Pentecostal Uniting church in Townsville—but that faith has guided me for the last 30 years and has become a key part of my life.

I went to school at a small school in Matong. There were two teachers and 30 kids in two divisions. I used to sit there in third grade trying to answer the questions that all the sixth grade kids were doing. I was that obnoxious little know-it-all. My sister Lee probably hated me for that. We had to go 22 miles to school each day even though we were only six miles from town because my dad had the bus run. We used to travel those dirt roads, and if it was wet weather we would often have to cross the creek to get to school.

I attended Narrandera High School—my local school—and went on to do my Higher School Certificate there. I only did that because I was not old enough to get a licence, and without a licence you could not do much in the country. After leaving school I worked in agriculture for a number of years. I picked fruit, carted hay and worked as a labourer in an engineering workshop. I had stints as a tourist officer and a youth worker. In 1993 I went to university and got an agricultural engineering degree. I worked for a couple of years in North Queensland in irrigation and a couple of years for the Kondinin group. Thirteen years ago I went to do a month's work at Coleambally for Coleambally Irrigation; I only finished up there two weeks ago.

The people in those jobs have taught me a valuable lesson—the power of hard work and teamwork. I am proud to have been involved in agriculture all my life. I think it has been an incredible industry for Australia and very successful. A mark of that is the fact that we have not been concerned about the widespread availability of food since my father's generation, which grew up in the 1930s.

Agriculture has done such a marvellous job of delivering for this country that, to some extent, we take it for granted.

My older sister, Toni, and her husband, Mark, are here today. Toni has worked hard all her life to try and bring a bit of decorum and class to me. She would probably be quite pleased to see me in a suit today. I guarantee that everyone in the gallery and most of the people here who know me are quietly laughing to see me in a suit today. I am, and probably will always remain, a slob and a bogan.

My other sister, Lee, is here. Her husband, Mick, could not be with us today but Lee has made a particular sacrifice because it is her son's birthday today. Happy birthday, Calem; sorry that I am taking your mother away. My brother Warren and his wife, Neena, are also with us. Warren is my blood brother but also my spiritual brother. Neena has been a good friend to me. A mark of that was the way she embraced politics for me. For the first time in her life she stood at a booth handing out cards for me. She had with her her daughter Carina and her granddaughter Nevaeh. At five years old, Nevaeh was probably amongst my youngest booth workers. Neveah asked about it and was told that she was playing a game with Uncle Austin. She said, "If I'm playing a game with him why isn't he here?"

I wish to talk about Steven and Delwyn. Steven is here but Delwyn, unfortunately, was unable to be here. Steven is like a brother to me—a spiritual brother. Like Neena, he embraced politics for me—even though, as a long-time union member, he is probably more of a Labor voter than a Nationals voter. He has a lot of other interests but I was very moved that he was willing to do that for me.

My wife is Demelza. Demi saw through the superficial to see the person in me. Our first date was to a friend's twenty-first birthday party. I think all her friends that night were amazed at this person she had brought along—this person with the long hair and beard, dressed in a flannie and no shoes. They all said, "This isn't Demelza's type." My mother-in-law, Faye—who is also with us here today—had such low expectations after first meeting me that her only condition was that I had to wear shoes to the wedding. I am sure that my sisters are still amazed that Demi married me. I certainly am—and I am so incredibly grateful that she did. Demi has challenged me; she has been challenged by me. She has supported me, laughed, cried, been frustrated and been frustrating—but we would not have it any other way. I thank her for coming on this journey with me. Two-and-a-half months ago, when Adrian Piccoli announced his retirement, I asked, "Are you ready to jump on a bolting horse and hold on for dear life?" She said, "Yes," shaking her head the whole time.

We have been blessed with four wonderful boys who are also here today—Oht, Declan, Darby and Wilkie. It has been an honour to get to know these four boys as they have grown up. Each is an individual; each is unique. They make me laugh and they make me cranky, but it breaks my heart when they are sad. They have changed me in so many ways. I am older, wiser, more responsible and more compassionate. I do not sleep in anymore. I used to—all the time—but I suspect that 12 years of babies and toddlers in the house has brought about a permanent change. Thanks, boys: I am going to find that really useful in this new job!

I have been lucky, most of my life, to be surrounded by positive, can-do people. All those people have played a role in creating who I am. They are unique, as are all people. They are a constant reminder to me to treat all people as unique individuals and not to stereotype people or put them into boxes. I am also unique. If you try to put me into a box there is a good chance I will not fit.

Whatever stereotype you think I fit is more than likely wrong. That idea is something I bring with me into this place. I know some people in this Chamber quite well; some I know a little; most I have not met yet. I look forward to meeting each and every person in this Chamber and learning about their uniqueness.

I thank the people of Murray who have given me this opportunity. I am blessed to live in such a beautiful and diverse electorate. It is a large electorate. I say to those of you who are not in Cabinet, and who were not in Griffith three or four months ago, that Adrian Piccoli made a comment which will allow you to appreciate the size of the electorate. He said that the Murray electorate has only one airport which has regular commercial flights to Sydney, and that is at Griffith. Griffith is closer to Bondi than it is to parts of my electorate in the Wentworth shire. That is how big the electorate is.

Murray is a big and diverse electorate with a huge history. Mungo Man, who will be repatriated this Friday, is one of the oldest known sets of human remains in Australia and, some say, the world. More than 5 per cent of the population identified as Aboriginal in the 2016 census and 15 Indigenous nations are represented in my electorate. They have faced competition for land, disease has wreaked havoc on them, and their culture and language has been suppressed. Those nations have survived that and are forging a renewed connection with their culture—like at Tirkandi Inaburra, an Aboriginal community centre between Darlington Point and Coleambally, which is connecting boys with their culture and giving them pride in who they are. Dr Stan Grant, who helped me with my opening Wiradjuri remarks today and who wrote the Wiradjuri dictionary, has seen a great increase in the use of the language and the pride of Wiradjuri people. In the 1800s, Europeans started moving into the electorate, building industries and creating communities. People like my grandparents moved to the area in the early 1900s. Migrants from all over the world moved there throughout the 1900s to build lives, industries and communities.

The newest town in New South Wales is Coleambally. There are many people in the public gallery today who are from Coleambally. The town was built from nothing. When the first people moved to Coleambally there was a sign on the highway that said, "This is where Coleambally will be", and nothing else. They lived in sheds when man was walking on the moon. They were pioneers who saw the area turn from six sheep farms into productive irrigation country. Some of those pioneers are still alive. Migrants still came to the area in the 2000s, building on the past and creating their own piece of rich tapestry. Over 10 per cent of my electorate was born overseas. When the number of parents born overseas is added, the number is enormous. There are numerous nationalities that thrive as active communities work together to improve our lives. These are people who have spent time—years, decades, lifetimes, generations, millennia—creating viable, successful communities.

We are a large electorate in area, but a small voice when it comes to democracy. We have seen the impacts of decisions made elsewhere affect us much more than most of the people making those decisions. The Murray-Darling Basin Plan and water is a good example of that. With 70 per cent of New South Wales water entitlements sitting in the Murray electorate, this was always going to affect us badly. Along with the communities dependent on the other 30 per cent, we are wearing the brunt of the impact from decisions made by people who bear minimal impact. The same goes with the decisions to make the red gum forests national parks. It is communities in the Murray electorate that have borne the brunt of those decisions, not the people who have made them. These decisions

impact and damage industries and communities that were built over years, decades, lifetimes and generations.

My constituents look at the time they have spent building their industries and communities and compare it to the time spent on the decisions that have undone their work, and they see a mismatch. They feel disrespected. That is the intention of no-one in this building, but my constituents have asked me to ask members to give them some of their time so that they feel respected, particularly on the issues that have big impacts on their lives. The kicker for me is that I cannot ask that of anyone and not do that myself. My final comment is that it is now my responsibility to bring those issues to this place. I have to listen to the opposite viewpoint; I have to give my time, which I have found to be more precious in this last month, to the issues that will affect others significantly. I have to do my best to understand the issues fully and put myself in someone else's shoes. That is no small commitment, especially with the time pressures that this place brings, but it is the minimum I need to do to fulfil the pledge I made earlier today. Thank you.

*Members stood in their places and applauded.*