

**The Hon. NATALIE WARD (18:08):** It is an honour to be in this place and a privilege to speak for the first time. I am humbled to have the opportunity to serve as a member of the Legislative Council. I will serve with humility and courage. I cannot claim to arrive here from a disadvantaged background. I was blessed with a loving, stable, happy family home. My parents worked hard to provide me with an excellent education. It was strong family values and love that allowed me to develop my faith, my work ethic, and a strong desire to serve. I would like to thank my parents, Dianne and David Ward, for igniting my passion to serve. My work as a lawyer and political adviser later exposed me to the reality of the hardships faced by people from many different cultural and social backgrounds. That experience has only further ignited my desire to change things for the better. Many an inaugural speech has contained a moving quote by a revered member of this planet, and I am not going to disrupt the status quo—well, not tonight. It was Martin Luther King who said:

Life's most persistent question is, "What are you doing for others?"

More exciting than that statement was the resulting holiday in honour of King—a day of service where everyone stops to do something for someone else. King was right when he acknowledged that service makes the world a better place. I acknowledge the volunteers in this State. I acknowledge those in the Rural Fire Service [RFS] and Rotary clubs, on Parents and Citizens boards, lifesavers on patrol, and volunteers at local Shute Shield Rugby clubs—those who passionately commit themselves to their communities. Your roles are important and your service is valued.

Despite the cynicism, and perhaps even contempt, that people often hold for politicians, I still believe that entering public office is an important calling. The opportunity to direct your intellect and energy toward the betterment of your State is one of the greatest contributions you can make. And, so, as you are my witnesses, I declare I am here, in the words of the Wenona School motto, "Ut Prosim"—that I may serve. There are many lawyers in this place and I am glad to be joining them. A good and noble lawyer is respected by her opponent. So let the record show that I will endeavour to be a noble and respected opponent to my honourable colleagues in this House. To those lawyers I have had the privilege of working with, whose work changes lives, rights wrongs and finds peace in resolution, thank you for all you do. I will both defend and champion your work in this place.

Like any good lawyer, as the doctrine of equity goes, I must come to the court with clean hands. And so I declare I am a dual citizen. I am a South Australian export—the daughter of a Welsh immigrant father and free settler mother. I come from a beautiful place where my 95-year-old grandmother Gladys Lorenz still lives. It was in Adelaide on a hot summer day 26 years ago that I ran up to a Young Liberal stall at Adelaide university and asked, "Where do I sign?" The reason I joined? In my first ever pay packet—which was lean—I found, to my horror, a deduction for compulsory union membership. I had not consented. I did not want to be forced to join a union. My freedom of choice had been violated. It made me a lifelong Liberal. I was not going to be bullied back then, and I am certainly not going to start now. I am proud of my heritage and proud of my choices in life. I will be a warrior for freedom of choice for our citizens in this place.

I acknowledge the love of my life, my husband, David Begg. Nothing is more important than family—having someone to walk beside you, share the journey, love you, support you and occasionally drive you crazy. Thank you, David, for the gifts of our two beautiful, amazing children. I am lucky to have you. I am constantly inspired by you. You make me laugh because, yes, you are still funny. As a lawyer you took the Catholic Church to the High Court and paved the way for a royal commission which brought light to the darkness of childhood sexual abuse. Your determination and courage to represent those who could not stand up for themselves was brave and ballsy and the right thing to do.

You are the most intelligent, articulate, scary bright, enthusiastic, optimistic person I know. You give so much to everyone around you. And, now, after years of advocating for liberal values, you have chosen to relinquish your career for me. Many wives give up their careers for their husbands; my husband has given up his for me. Thank you for your love and self-sacrifice. Like so many others who have sought your counsel to take on careers in this place, in the words of Isaac Newtown, "If I have seen further it is only because I stand on the shoulders of giants who have gone before me."

It is timely, on the back on my husband's sacrifice, to ask what it means to be a woman in Parliament. In 1890, Premier Sir Henry Parkes introduced electoral reform bills into the New South Wales Parliament which would have allowed women to stand for office. A number of honourable men spoke against women entering Parliament. The bills were defeated. Last week, in 2017, before I even entered this House, some people questioned my eligibility for this role. What did they ask? Did they question my qualifications, my experience as a lawyer or as a government adviser? Did they care that I was integral to introducing government policy that has saved taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars? Were there any questions about whether I was committed to making a difference? The answer is no. They were suggesting that I cannot make decisions for myself or that I was somehow gifted a place in here after only 26 years of service to the Liberal Party.

It will not surprise you to hear that I am an independent, strong free thinker, a mother of two beautiful children, a devoted wife, and someone who, most importantly, cares about improving the lot of people in New South Wales. As a woman in Parliament I do not intend to sit here and take unfair criticisms. I will fight hard with anyone who wants to put petty rivalries ahead of service to the people of New South Wales. It is worth noting that it was another 36 years after Sir Henry Parkes first introduced his bill that women were finally allowed to stand for election in the Legislative Council. I hope that it does not take that long for us to mature.

In speaking of service to the people of New South Wales, I must acknowledge the Hon. Greg Pearce, a former member of the Legislative Council. One of the great privileges of my life has been working with Greg. Both in the Opposition years and in one of the greatest reformist ministries of New South Wales government, it was his intellect at the core of so many positive changes to this State. His work in revenue, budget estimates, compulsory third party insurance [CTP], workers compensation, information and communication technology [ICT], leasing the desalination plant and ports, and capping public sector wage increases—just to name a few—helped bring the State's billion-dollar deficit under control and set the path for where we all are now. Greg's quiet achievements were never heralded, in keeping with his humility. But I learned a great deal, for which I am deeply grateful. Greg, thank you. I will carry the torch for you in this place.

In 2011, New South Wales was ranked last in all economic indicators, including growth and unemployment. Here we are in 2017, in Government, with a budget surplus that other States and countries envy. CommSec's State of the States report ranks us the leading State economy for the thirteenth straight quarter. The public understandably always expects more than just strong fiscal results. We must continue to ensure that for the balance of this term, and then, hopefully, in terms three and four, our obligation to the vulnerable is not just couched in terms of what is in our charter. At its heart, a government must have a moral core. We now have a government of the highest integrity. It is for these reasons that we must continue to perform and satisfy the voters of this great State. The Australian Labor Party [ALP] must look at our infrastructure achievements of the past 6½ years with such envy. This has not happened by chance. It has been delivered on the back of tough and at times unpopular decisions. Those decisions have set up this State's infrastructure needs for many generations to come.

As a representative of the northern province I promise to do my part. The northern province is a place bordered by water on three sides. The geography alone creates traffic challenges and people have been longing for a Northern Beaches Tunnel for 50 years or more. Now, under Premier Gladys Berejiklian, it is a reality. In the early days of this Parliament places like Berowra Waters and the coves of Pittwater were largely uncovered. However, the entire northern province has changed enormously over the decades. The challenges now faced by the communities of Hornsby, Manly, Willoughby and Davidson are overdevelopment, housing affordability and the need for more mental health services in our area. We need more transport connectedness; we need to preserve our natural environment for the good of our kids and theirs; and we need to ensure that we have the right education and health services for the increasing population.

Fortunately, our Premier is looking to the future of the northern province. We are building new roads, new transport infrastructure and new and improved schools and hospitals. The future of my province is looking bright, and I will be a fierce advocate to ensure that these projects get built on time and make the life of every member of the northern province community better. I look forward to the opening the Northern Beaches Hospital, ensuring commuter times drop on the NorthConnex, and of course seeing the first cars through the Northern Beaches Tunnel. I have enormous faith in our key Ministers in these portfolios delivering for the northern province; but, nonetheless, I plan to be a warrior for all the infrastructure projects affecting the communities for which I am responsible.

While the future of our great State is in good hands, the next 10 years will see drastic changes to the way we do business within a digital economy. My son keeps telling me so. Automation, robotics and the internet are things set to affect one in two jobs in this State. Thank you, Andrew Grill and Anne Marie Elias, for reminding us to prepare for the start-up community, which will become tomorrow's future employers. I will be a warrior for women founders, who now represent 25 per cent of all new start-up companies. As the daughter of an entrepreneur and having been both an employer and employee, I know how much business in this State carries its weight. I will stand with Premier Berejiklian and her program of incentivising business and getting out of its way.

But business is nothing without community. Community is the backbone of our lives, our economy and our wellbeing, by whatever means. For our family, surprisingly, it is through rugby. Not only is rugby the game they play in heaven, it is the great leveller. It holds communities together and crosses international borders. From the Braidwood Redbacks to the Manly Marlins and Manly Mermaids, we have an Olympic gold medal women's sevens team right here in New South Wales. I will be a warrior for rugby, especially women's rugby in this place.

Of course politics is also a team sport. I will be a champion for our Coalition colleagues and the importance of strong country and regional communities. Having a farm in Braidwood, I know the challenges our country friends face. I also know their strengths. We have a State rich in resources in the ground, above it and in

our Coalition partners. We are stronger together, and I look forward to working with you on the importance of the regions which feed us, clothe us and power our capitals. An issue for us all, city and country, is mental health. I acknowledge Dr Vijay Roach and Catherine Knox and the critical work you do with the Gidget Foundation. You saved my life. It is criminal that in a country so wealthy, so full of natural resources and human capital, we still have people taking their own lives. Thank God for the survivors. Thank God for those who help them to survive. I will be a warrior for mental health in this place.

To my children, Madeleine and Fergus, I will embarrass you. There will be nights—like this week—where I cannot be home to help with homework and, like Monday, I will miss the trumpet concert and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics [STEM] showcase. I am sorry. Long after you have forgotten about it, I will not have. But I hope that one day you will understand and forgive me. I am hoping my work here will make a difference to your lives and those of your children and maybe even your great-great-grandchildren. Thank you for your lively dinner table conversations, for being curious and critical of the world around you, for being optimistic and enthusiastic. You keep me centred. You are great political activists. Do not ever stop questioning and challenging. Maybe just don't challenge me quite so much! Your future is limitless. I promise that I will also be a warrior for your future in this place.

I am thankful for my beautiful sister-in-law, Adrienne Ward, and my brother, Tony Ward, who carries out his role as a brother diligently and will never let me take myself too seriously. Thank you for travelling to be here today. Eileen Begg, Kirsty Begg and Grahame Barker, thank you for welcoming me into your lives and creating a strong family bond that our children and we have the luxury of enjoying. My Uncle Derek and Auntie Valerie in Queensland, who are watching, my Auntie Helen and Nana Gladys in Adelaide—I acknowledge people who are not here but who I know are watching over us: Dr John Begg is one of the sharpest intellects I have met, and one the gentlest men I have ever known and we in politics could learn a lot from him; Auntie Anne Inkster, a teetotal Presbyterian elder—I know she is watching and please excuse my language when I quote her favourite saying: "Bally men"—I am so lucky to have cheeky friends and I am grateful they will never call me "Honourable"; Milly Brigden; all of the Moufarriges; Monique Harris and Damian Horton; Suzanne Foster; Emma Halsey; and Alastair McEwin.

I acknowledge my colleagues and all the members of the Liberal Party, many of whom are here tonight. Their loyalty, honesty and counsel have seen me through the past 26 years. Just like any good family we have our moments, but we always come together. One thing I am so very proud and slightly terrified of is Liberal women. Do not mess with them—Chris McDiven, Robyn Parker, Marilyn Cameron, Di Woods, Carolyn Cameron, Sophie Stokes, Caroline Speakman, Shauna Jarrett, Nichola Constant, Namoi Dougall, Joanne McCafferty, Gabrielle Upton and Patricia Forsythe. And the women in office, all of you who serve, for those women who have stood for office and have not made it here—yet—I am here for you. Do not give up. We need you.

Women Coalition members and Ministers in this place—I am humbled to serve with you. And the best woman Premier that New South Wales has ever seen, Gladys Berejiklian, it is a privilege to serve with you. I will be a warrior for you in this place, and, as you demand, a warrior for the people of New South Wales. I am very aware that I am merely carrying the torch from those who have gone before me: the Hon. Bruce Baird, AM; Chris Puplick, AM; the Premier who had the courage of his convictions and my friend, Mike Baird; the Premier we should have had, John Brogden, AM. Those who are not here: Ross Barlow, OAM; and John Booth; of course the magnificent Manly Business Branch and all members of the northern province. I can't name everyone here but I will thank you in person.

To the next generation—like the movie, I call them the Bright Young Things: Tom Loomes, Mitchell Hillier, Ian Hancock, Lachie Crombie, James Wallace, Chris Rath, and Lachie Finch. I have such faith in you. You're smarter, savvier and better looking than we ever were. To my mentors, Dr the Hon. Robert Gordori Stokes—he hates me calling him that; the Hon. Stuart Ayres; the Hon. Don Harwin; the Hon. John Ajaka, Mr President; the Hon. Matt Kean; Trent Zimmerman, Jason Falinski and all my Liberal colleagues, thank you for being Liberal champions. All athletes need coaches and there is none better than Kevin McCann, AM. The Hon. Paul Fletcher and so many other Federal and State colleagues—I will thank you in person. I promise to honour you by upholding the core Liberal values of free enterprise, the freedom of the individual, and freedom of choice.

In an increasingly fabulously disrupted world, in a world where traditional approaches and methodologies are being challenged, these values have provided me a compass to map my direction. I promise to advocate for pulling people up and incentivising, rather than burdening them and penalising them. I will be a warrior for incentives rather than penalties to let them get on with the job. I will be courteous to the taxpayer and vigilant against mismanagement and union thuggery. I am proud to work alongside others who will not let partisan, hard conservative views or union self-interest prevail.

Finally, I will be the best that I can be for New South Wales—for my colleagues, for my family and for my father. I am incredibly sad tonight that my Dad cannot be here. My father was an entrepreneur who created jobs. He turned a run-down winery into a thriving employer when everyone said it could not be done. And he kept it throughout the Labor recession that, apparently, we "had to have." Dad, you were kind, generous to a fault, an inspiration, and like many good people you were taken way too soon. I miss you every single day. You were my best friend and my fiercest critic. You taught me to stand up to thugs and bullies through intelligent articulate argument. You taught me to be brave. I promise to uphold the values you instilled in me in this place and for all Liberals and Coalition members, and to thank our predecessors.

Mr President, I thank you, and I thank honourable members for their courtesies.