

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 09 May 2019 – Proof

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The SPEAKER: I welcome family and friends of the member for Albury to the New South Wales Parliament.

Mr JUSTIN CLANCY (Albury) (16:03): I begin by acknowledging the First Nations of this land and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to your position and I extend my congratulations and best wishes to other new members in this, the Fifty-Seventh Parliament.

I rise this afternoon fully conscious of the responsibility to serve well my community. The people of the Albury electorate have entrusted me to be their voice in this place—to speak of their being, belonging and becoming. I am honoured and humbled to be placed with this duty. I will speak for the identity of the Albury electorate—our region, and our people. Travelling through Albury in 1895, the famed American writer Mark Twain observed:

Now comes a singular thing: the oddest thing, the strangest thing, the most baffling and unaccountable marvel that Australasia can show. At the frontier between New South Wales and Victoria our multitude of passengers were routed out of their snug beds by lantern-light in the morning in the biting cold of a high altitude to change cars on a road that has no break in it from Sydney to Melbourne! Think of the paralysis of intellect that gave that idea birth; imagine the boulder it emerged from on some petrified legislator's shoulders.

Our identity is shaped by political boundaries, lines on paper. The political landscape as it impacts on the Albury electorate can be best exemplified by the railways. Poor communication between colonies, changes to plans and self-interest resulted in the colony of New South Wales having the standard United Kingdom gauge and the Victorian colony trains running on a broad gauge. Consequently passengers travelling between the two capitals were required to change trains at Albury—roused at all hours, night and day, with the catch-cry, "All change!" It was some 67 years after Twain that the standard gauge line was extended from Albury to Melbourne, removing the need to change trains in Albury.

We are the crossing place, a place of State borders and different rail gauges. Our identity is shaped by being on the outer limits of both the New South Wales and Victorian States. We are impacted by border anomalies that are often perceived to be a result of a paralysis of intellect. Addressing cross-border issues through a memorandum of understanding between States, the recent announcement of the Regional Deal by the Commonwealth Government and the work of cross-border commissioners are all important to my electorate, as they all impact on daily life.

While there are limitations and obstacles to life on the border, as Twain illustrates, there is also innovation and the willingness of our communities to collaborate and work together. The Albury-Wodonga Health agreement is a decade old this year. It is the basis of a unique service. Albury-Wodonga Health is the first and remains the only cross-border public health service to exist in Australia. Operating under an agreement between the New South Wales and Victorian governments, it provides the largest regional healthcare service between Sydney and Melbourne. It supports an outer catchment population of 250,000 and covers the north-east of Victoria and southern New South Wales. It is an example of what can be achieved through collaboration.

As a crossing place we also have the vantage point of comparing the merits or otherwise of policy in our neighbouring State. In competitive federalism we should make more of recognising the good work done in our neighbouring States. Whilst it may seem at times that we are on the fringe, we are at the same time at the centre of where policies may be judged. I take this moment to welcome to the public gallery someone who knows that well, the Victorian member for Benambra, Bill Tilley. Thank you for being here, Bill. Our identity is intimately related to our region, yet we are not defined by any one particular geography. We are the Riverina plains, the hills and mountains of south-west slopes and the Upper Murray. We are the Murray River and the Billabong Creek.

The place that is now called Albury is known by the Wiradjuri as Bungambrawatha, or "homeland". Howard Jones, a local historian, suggests that Bungambrawatha and neighbouring Mungabareena were among the richest food areas in Australia. So late do we recognise the rich culture and depth of knowledge of our First Nations that our homeland is plentiful yet at the same time fragile. This is something we are becoming increasingly aware of.

It is through our sustainably making the most of our endowments—our location, our environment and our agriculture—that we achieve. We benefit by enabling our softwoods, agriculture, logistics and manufacturing. That our region's geography is a competitive advantage is recognised by business attracted to the area—Mars, Norske Skog, Cool Off, Kotzur, Nestle and Border Express. Yet we need our governments, both Federal and State, to see our region less as a frontier or outpost and more as a rich region that truly can be a centre of growth for our State and for our nation.

The drought and water issues confront a large part of our electorates and the State, as stated by the Deputy Premier today. Being raised on the land, I know the challenges of farming with weather and markets. I have seen firsthand the impact of drought through my parents' experience. The longer the dry the more that hearts, hands and minds tire. However, I also know of the resilience in our farming communities, their ability to face hardships with innovation and their passion as custodians. I recognise the importance of a water agreement and plan that is shared across States and the Commonwealth. Yet our communities are vitally concerned about the impacts of water recovery observed to date and are increasingly apprehensive about the potential impacts of further water recovery.

Our communities are concerned that their local environmental and agricultural values will be compromised to achieve broader basin plan objectives. Communities are uncertain about who is responsible, and this has made it difficult for them to navigate the institutional landscape for implementing the plan. Water policy is complex, but it is also vital. We need to ensure that the social and economic prosperity of our regional communities is part of our thinking while returning water to the environment. The local environment, local farming, and local economy in the Albury electorate are no less important than the environment, farming and economies elsewhere. Ultimately, our rural communities are crying out to be heard. Be assured, I am listening.

Mark Twain speaks of dislocation caused by change. The village of Bowna on the Sydney road just north of Albury was first mapped in the 1850s, and by the early twentieth century consisted of several churches, hotels, a public school and post office. In 1933 the village was inundated by the newly created Hume weir. It was a dramatic illustration of dislocation, of massive change to the people that called the village home. As the weir dropped to its current level of 13.5 per cent capacity, the traces of foundations and roadways protrude like a decaying skeleton—a reminder of a village that once was.

We remember that government is called upon to play a fundamental role in managing change. It was John F. Kennedy who said, "Change is the law of life." We understand that change does impact on our people—often positive, yet sometimes in a profound and negative way, as it was for the people of Bowna, and we need to strike the balance in acting for the greater good. We need to be empathetic to those impacted by change. As an aside the site of the old Bowna village is now part of a property that was owned by my family for 30 years until 2015. In place of farming this land I now stand in this place. Change indeed.

Our identity is also found in our people. We are a place that, as mentioned previously, our First Nations call homeland. We are a place of new beginnings for the influx of migrants who passed through the Bonegilla Migrant Reception Centre. Many of these people went on to work on Snowy Hydro. The development of Snowy Hydro 2.0 is important to our communities in the east of the electorate; the wise investment from the proceeds of the sale of Snowy Hydro, important to all in our region. Coming from the land I recognise the importance of the small community. We have a great regional centre in Albury and we also have wonderful smaller communities. I want to see our small communities not just survive but thrive. We achieve this by encouraging business investment and projects that bring visitors to our towns, such as the State's first Rail Trail in Tumbarumba.

As I travelled the electorate, I had the opportunity to listen to our community and to hear of the challenges that we face. Deep to who I am is a sense of community. I believe each community is important and each person is important. The wellbeing of our society has an enormous impact on an individual's capacity to adapt, to change and to improve. As the Premier noted, the Liberals are the party of opportunity. On the border, all levels of society live close together. We live in a mix of advantage and disadvantage. As I look around my community I see people who are resilient and who respond to the opportunities for education, employment, financial independence, and I also spend time with those who are losing traction on their path through life.

We can help, in this place, by reviewing our laws for fairness and equity; we can develop programs that fund hospital improvements, better-resourced schools and improved transport options. And, digging deeper, we can support individuals who are finding the going tough—those whose lives are impacted by mental or physical ill health, homelessness, domestic violence, addiction. This is an area of human life and society that greatly interests me and is a source of motivation for my choice to embark on this new life of representation.

As for my identity, who am I? I stand here today as a father, a son, a husband, a veterinarian and small business person. I am a lad from the land at Urangeline East. Perhaps it may be asked why I am not like my namesake and chasing "the vision splendid of the sunlit plains extended".

There are probably two reasons for putting forward your name for politics, one is to be somebody, the other is to do something. Those words belong to former Culcairn Shire Mayor Elwyn Kotzur—and they are as relevant today as when he first spoke them more than 25 years ago. I am interested in the latter: to do something for my community, rather than to be somebody. I am determined to do the very best for my electorate. I stand here to represent the concerns, aspirations and needs of the people of New South Wales as effectively and as passionately as I am able. I also stand here keenly aware that I am indebted to many people who have guided me, supported me and helped me to be who I am.

My election would not have been possible without the support of many wonderful people. To my campaign team—Howard and Deborah Hinde, Ben Brndusic, Chris Stern, Claire Juranic, Anthony McFarlane, Campbell Simpson, Tobias and Amy Lehmann, Sheridan Leonard—thank you. To Gary Saliba, to the local branches and members, to the amazing friends and volunteers working on pre-poll and polling day—people such as Joan Dennis and Warren Kaye, who are so generous with their time—thank you.

To my predecessor, Greg Aplin, and his wife, Jill, and to Greg's team—thank you. Greg is held in high regard by our community and by his colleagues in Parliament alike. Greg has been a mentor and I trust that I would be well served to model my actions on his. He has made a significant contribution to our local community and our State. Greg leaves a legacy of not only projects delivered but also a pipeline of future projects. We need to see those to completion and then to work hard to continue supporting the aspirations of our communities. I believe that the best way to respect his legacy is to work hard and strive to improve further.

To the Premier, the Treasurer, Minister Roberts, Minister Harwin, Minister Marshall and Attorney General Speakman, for your support during the election—thank you. To all colleagues on both sides of this Chamber and parliamentary staff for your welcome here—thank you. To my team at our veterinary practice in Albury and Wodonga, you are part of my journey as a vet and as a person. Tabitha and I see you as family and you are dear to us. Thank you. To our new team in the electorate office, Peter, Stephen and Irena, thank you. I look forward to the journey ahead.

There are many along the way who have been educators, guides and mentors, from the little bush school of Pleasant Hills to St Joseph's, Narrandera; from St Patrick's and Xavier High School, Albury, to St Joseph's College Hunters Hill and Sydney University. I thank the Sisters of Mercy, Christian Brothers and Marist Brothers, and—whilst not educated by them, certainly influenced by them—the remarkable women who are Presentation Sisters. I thank the educators within schools, including Marion Bennett, Mark Halsted and Tony Lantry, and those outside formal education, including Bill Pearce and Val Edmunds. I also thank those who, though no longer with us, remain always in my heart and mind, especially that man of great spirit, Father Kevin Flanagan.

To friends from my early years and my brothers here today, and in particular to Anthony Dann, to the Steamers crew and to those from latter years back in Albury, to the good people around me that I am blessed to call my friends—thank you. You are my compass. To my clan, Clancy, Egan, Spillane and Carroll, from the rugged west coast and hills of Ireland to Australia, strong of faith and instilled with a sense of community and connected to the land—thank you.

Times on the land are rarely easy. The downfall of the wool industry was created in the late 1980s and by 1991 it had self-destructed with huge losses. Three years into the wool crash of the early nineties a farming couple sacrificed much to give me the opportunity to attend school in Sydney. Thank you, Mum and Dad, for your love and support. Thank you to my sisters, Margeaux and Celeste, and brother, David. You are a great source of support, particularly in recent years, when times are not always easy. I will say though that the bearpit is nothing on a good Clancy sibling parley. To Tabitha's parents, Clifford and Susan, thank you. Along with Tabitha's sister, Emma, you inspire with your strength and resilience. To our children, Xavier, Seamus and Natalie, thank you—Xavier, you are a most beautiful boy; Seamus, you live up to your name as a wild Irishman and you are also beautiful; and Natalie, our birthday girl of three today. You are all precious to me and I love you. They perhaps are also making a sacrifice that they do not fully know. To Tabitha:

She turns to me sometimes and asks me what I'm dreaming

And I realise I must have gone a million miles away

And I ask her how she knew to reach out for me that moment

And she smiles because it's understood there are no words to say.

Thank you and I love you. And thank you to Billy Joel, who if not previously cited in *Hansard* will be now. I would like to share with you my vision for our community. My vision is for a strong regional city and a strong region—a place to live, work and invest, where there is growth and opportunity; a region that caters for and engages all ages from our youth to our elders; a CBD with a central cultural precinct surrounded by a cosmopolitan mix of residential and commercial; suburbs that as they grow retain their identity and are a place to live well, delivered through community assets such as sporting grounds, activity areas and community centres; regional areas that prosper by listening to and enabling the people living there. My vision is that we work to address complex problems together—government and non-government, State and national—that we base this on the legacy of the past and that through meeting the challenges of the present we shape our community for the future.

There are two roads for my generation of MPs. There is pressure from social media and elsewhere to declare up-front your position on every issue of the day, to be identified by your causes and beliefs. This approach by its very nature sends a clear signal to those with other perspectives that they will not find a receptive ear nor an earnest representative for their cause, for their beliefs, for their hopes. It is my intention in this role to represent the people of the Albury electorate. I commit to listening to my communities before acting, to being a willing participant in dialogue and to facilitating the people's right to access the Government through processes enshrined in law and policy.

Do people really want to know what I think? I suspect this is the wrong question. Perhaps it is around the wrong way. What I hear from my community is that people want me to know what they think. The focus belongs on the people and helping them to be heard—really heard—and understood in places where this counts. Know that each time I enter this Chamber my thoughts will centre on our Albury community. One of the most salient pieces of advice I received in the lead-up to the election was from Noel Wilson, a retired farmer in Corowa, who said, "Be yourself; just be yourself." The other pieces of advice that resonate deeply with me have two sources. The first source is the motto of my alma mater, "in meliora contende"—to strive for better things.

The second source can be found on many a farm across Australia on the sides of the old Furphy water tanks. There are some of you who know where this is going! An old farmer sits today in the public gallery who, as a lad of merely 15, returned from school to work the land. He worked it then for 60 years. He would often recall the words on the Furphy tank and say to his children, "Good, better, best. Never let it rest. Until your good is better and your better—best." Twain's petrified legislator with a boulder for a head is not for me. I know my responsibility is to serve my electorate and to be their voice here in Parliament. I will not rest for I will strive to give you my all for our community.

The SPEAKER: I join the Chamber in congratulating the member for Albury on his inaugural speech.

Members stood in their places and applauded.