

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 29 May 2019 – Proof

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The SPEAKER: I extend a warm welcome to the guests of the member for Barwon, who is about to deliver his inaugural speech. Those guests are, among others, Ms June Lake, Ms Viktoriya Butler, Ms Abygael Rushton-Butler, Master Gabe Rushton-Butler, Ms Aniyah Rushton-Butler and Mrs Jenny Rushton.

Mr ROY BUTLER (Barwon) (11:32): I congratulate the Speaker on his appointment and I congratulate the Premier and her team on winning the election and forming Government. I look forward to working with members from all sides of this House and I thank them for their warm welcome since arriving here. I will turn the clock back now and tell the story of how I came to be standing here before the House today. I went to boarding school when I was 11. At boarding school I learned a lot about myself, other people, friendships and networks. Even today, I still have some of those networks and friendships that were formed in my six years of boarding school. Many of them were helpful to me during the election campaign.

After leaving boarding school at 17 I went straight to the Australian Army; I had to be signed in by my mum. I trained at Kapooka, completed an IT training course and then went to the 6th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, where I was in the reconnaissance sniper platoon. I learned a lot there about teamwork and resilience, and I learned that people are capable of much more than they think. People can do amazing things and most people do not realise just what they are capable of. After the army, I went to university for the first time. After a couple of years I worked out that it was not the right time for me to go to university. Instead, I worked in hospitality around Bathurst for a few years. Then I decided to return to my studies. I completed a postgraduate diploma in addictions counselling and group psychotherapy. It was an interesting qualification. For three months I lived as part of the treatment population and participated in one-on-one counselling as a counsellor and as a person receiving counselling. I also participated in group psychotherapy as a facilitator and as a member of the group.

I went straight from that qualification to working in Corrective Services NSW. I worked in three prisons in New South Wales as a drug and alcohol counsellor and group psychotherapist. After that I delivered and coordinated offender management programs across the Sydney metropolitan area and in western New South Wales. I learned a lot from working with prison populations and offender populations. I saw people at their lowest, people who were struggling to engage with the service system and I saw people who were at high points in their lives as they managed to achieve things post-release. I saw many interesting things there. In 2004 I began working for the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care as a manager of community access. I had teams of physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, psychologists and case workers across western New South Wales who all delivered services to people with intellectual disabilities. Again, I observed how these folk interacted with the service system. Sometimes it worked well and sometimes it did not. This experience has taught me what happens in the service system.

In 2009 I was appointed as regional manager of the Western Region of the NSW Police Force. At that point I thought I had the best job in New South Wales. It was fantastic. The Western Region covers 64 per cent of the State and has 1,400 fantastic men and women, both sworn police officers and civilian staff. I count many of them as good friends. That job was a good opportunity for me not only to see their bravery and commitment to communities but also to appreciate the contribution they make to community life. In many communities policing is the only remaining 24/7 service. These officers and staff become community leaders in so many ways, such as by coaching football teams and running pool competitions. I know that sounds like a minor thing, but in a small town it is a big deal. In 2014 my family and I moved onto a property where we have been breeding and raising beef cattle.

In 2012 and 2013 I was fortunate to go back to studying and I completed a Master of Public Administration through the Australian New Zealand School of Government with people from jurisdictions all around Australia and New Zealand. It gave me insight into how other jurisdictions work and into other cultures within the public service. All in all, it was a good learning experience. I have worked with many people—some great leaders—and people from whom I have learned how to be a great leader. I am not suggesting that I am a great leader, but I do aspire to be one. I have also worked with some people who are not-so-great leaders. I have learned from them what I do not want to do or say to people and that I do not want to treat people in the same way that those leaders did. Most recently I have had just one boss, Geoff McKechnie, Assistant Commissioner of the Western Region of the NSW Police Force. Having one boss is much easier than having more than 70,000 bosses. I have found that those 70,000 bosses often have competing priorities and different ideas. Sometimes those conflicting ideas can make negotiation challenging, but I am embracing the challenge.

Jenny is my amazing and beautiful wife. I have been with Jenny for 19 years. We did not get married early—we got it round the wrong way. We were married last year in Las Vegas on a whim. While we were out to dinner with some ex-pats, they asked us, "Why aren't you married?" We said that we were going to do it in Thailand the previous year, but there was too much bureaucracy—yet, here I am. My friends said, "Let's go do it now." I was wearing a pair of shorts and my work boots when we went to the Clark County Marriage License Bureau, got a marriage licence, visited a 24-hour chapel and got married. I suspect that for some of the people there, who were lined up on benches like members in this Chamber, it was not their first time around.

While I was on the campaign trail covering a huge chunk of New South Wales, Jenny looked after the property, the cattle, our other animals and our family whilst maintaining full-time employment. I can only take my hat off to her. Jenny, I love you and you do me proud—very proud. I have three gorgeous kids. Abygael, you are about to become an adult. You are a good, kind person and you do the right thing. You make me proud. Gabe, you are 16. You are a good man. You make good decisions and treat people well. That is all I can ask for, mate. You are a good fellow. Aniyah, aka Nino, you are a little ball of energy. You are going to do great things. Again, you are a great person and I am proud of you. Well done, sweetheart. In the past five months of travelling around Barwon, which as people know is a large electorate, I had about seven nights in my own bed. For the rest of the time my wife was on her own looking after everything. I take my hat off to her and acknowledge how amazing she is.

On election day we went to Broken Hill—we had to pick somewhere because there are that many towns within 10 hours' drive across the electorate—and my kids worked tirelessly all day. They delivered water, insect repellent and sunscreen to people from any party, it did not matter. We kept buying water and delivering it from polling place to polling place. In fact, it got to the point that everyone was expecting us to show up and they were looking forward to the water. So kids, well done. You are great! My children and the kids in Barwon are a major reason that I am standing here today.

People often ask me why I decided to run for Barwon. It is a good question. Some people say it in a different way, which I will get to later, but I could see that no-one else from a major party was going to win the electorate. After 17 years of travelling the electorate with three different agencies I had seen what was going on. For example, a lot of the jobs were being centralised into towns like Dubbo. I do not think the member for Dubbo is in the Chamber. Dugald does not need any more jobs in Dubbo; we need them out west. I watched jobs disappear from our community, I saw shopfronts close and the population decline. It was clear to me that meeting with my local members, both State and Federal, was not going to change things. The only opportunity to change things was to be an unrestricted voice in this place, and that is why I am standing here today.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to serve the people of Barwon. At this point I will restate my election commitments, which I gave prior to the election—no highways, no buildings. Nothing. My election commitments were simple—namely, to work hard and be honest. People accepted those commitments and I intend to maintain them. In the 2019 election the people of Barwon were asked to review the actions of government, to reflect on the reality of the present, to cast their minds forward to future generations and the world we are creating. They have to ask the question: Do we have the settings right? I say to all members of this House and in the other place that we have work to do. It is my absolute intention to leave a legacy of improved quality of life for people living in Barwon and regional New South Wales. To that end, I have invited people in non-Shooters Fishers and Farmers Party electorates to contact my offices to find out if we can help them.

The people of Barwon voted with their hearts and their heads. This is the first time since before 1950 that the electorate has not been held by the Country Party or The Nationals. That represents a massive change in sentiment. The people I have met all across Barwon do not expect government to solve all their problems. They know they have to work hard—and they are already doing that. If one goes to any community across Barwon they will meet passionate people who want to work with government to ensure a better quality of life and a brighter future for the next generation. As I said, people do not want government to solve all their problems or to simply throw money at an issue. They want recognition from government that at this moment in the history of New South Wales we stand faced with a choice: We continue to treat the communities of western New South Wales in the same manner we have been or we change our policy settings and reinvigorate the bush.

I often use the analogy that when you need to move a cart you look for a willing horse, and when you find a willing horse you put a harness on it. Across Barwon we now have a lot of willing horses. We have a lot of willing people who we can put a harness on and they will pull the cart. We need to make sure that we do not assume we know best. We need to engage with local government and local community representative groups to ensure that we are acting in a way that is consistent with what they want. We need to work with the community, listen to people, change our priorities and build a future where every child in Barwon has the same opportunities as a child in Sydney. We must ensure that those living in far west New South Wales do not continue to have their life expectancy decreased, and we must start opening doors for communities to thrive. We must create opportunity that is open to all.

The people of Barwon know that the people in this House can do better for them. They are over political correctness and minority groups trying to steer public opinion. We need to work together. I will work with anyone in this Chamber or the other place to improve outcomes in Barwon. By working together across the political divide we can solve problems and make decisions that will improve our collective future and, most importantly, our children's future. I have talked a lot about quality of life during the campaign and since. In Barwon we do not have many of the things that city dwellers take for granted. We do not have comprehensive public transport, the level of public amenity or 24-hour services—people cannot buy fuel or go shopping at midnight in most of our communities. We also have a very large Aboriginal population; they gave me great support through the campaign. I thank them for their support. Let us work on closing that gap and reversing the current health outcomes for Aboriginal people. Let us support Aboriginal people to gain traction on the issues that are important to them. We need to provide equitable educational opportunities for all people in the Barwon electorate.

We have heard a lot of talk about drought. Drought is a very simplistic way of describing what is going on in western New South Wales. We have gone well beyond meteorological drought, which is a lack of rain. We have gone beyond hydrological drought, which is a lack of water in our river systems, water storages and aquifers. We have gone deep into a socio-economic drought, which is a drought that is impacting all aspects of our communities. Businesses totally unrelated to agriculture are suffering the same thing. I often tell the story of speaking to a hairdresser in Narrabri who said, "Roy, people still get their hair cut but instead of coming every four weeks they are coming every six weeks." So all aspects of business across society are suffering. In order to provide equality of opportunity to people in western New South Wales, we need to bolster our TAFE. We need to make sure that when our kids finish school there are options for local tertiary education, which do not involve them leaving our communities. I have heard many stories from parents about their children attending university or TAFE in another town and then not coming back. They start a life somewhere else and do not come back. We have to keep people in our communities if we stand a chance of growing or maintaining our populations.

We need business incentives. I would love to see a five-year waiver on stamp duty for commercial property and commercial vehicles. I would also like to see payroll tax removed in regional New South Wales. Last week I was in Broken Hill speaking to some people at a dinner. They said that the decision to put an extra person on is an easy one, because if they do it will cost more in tax so they are better off not employing that person. A tax on employing people does not make a great deal of sense to me. We need to support people so they can reach their potential and to create an unfair advantage for businesses in regional New South Wales. I acknowledge the work of the former member for Barwon and those who contested the electorate: Andrew Schier, Darriea Turley, Eve-Lyn Kennedy and Phillip Naden. They all worked very hard. I honestly believe they all had the best of intentions in trying to represent Barwon and to improve outcomes in Barwon. It takes a certain kind of person to commit their lives to serving the public. Very few will ever put their hands up to enter public office. Indeed, as I learnt during the campaign and during the days since being sworn in, it is a life like no other.

The electorate of Barwon covers 44 per cent of New South Wales and its communities often have the same issues but they manifest differently. For example, water is an issue in every Barwon community. In Tibooburra, a town of about 60 people, there is no such thing as local government; it is an unincorporated area. The domestic water supply system in Tibooburra was operated by Dan Hough, who worked for the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, and Glenn Lackenby, who was a police officer. Glenn has retired and Dan has moved back to Broken Hill. I cannot say who is running the water system in Tibooburra at the moment. The difference between Tibooburra and Sydney is vast. In Tibooburra, people actually know who runs their water system because they have other roles in the community. In Sydney, people probably do not know the people who work for the utility providers.

Broken Hill has a good hospital and good health services but it is geographically isolated. For specialist services people often have to travel to Adelaide or Sydney. In Broken Hill the issue is not necessarily about primary health care, but about specialist services and accessing those services. People in Broken Hill have lower average incomes, so the costs of travel and staying overnight impacts them more than others who have higher incomes. Lake Cargelligo Hospital has become little more than a first aid post. There people can get a Panadol and a band aid, but if they need stitches, a fracture set, are expecting a baby or need their appendix removed, they will need to travel up to four hours away. Twenty years ago all those services were provided.

We need to look at home care for people after being discharged from hospital. I have heard too many stories about people near Hermidale and Cobar who have gone to Dubbo in an ambulance but have been told they have to find their own way home when they are discharged from hospital. A lot of our people do not have the discretionary income to pay \$100 for fuel or to pay for someone to come and get them. If we are to reinvigorate communities, we should not have to ask or lobby for the things that everyone needs. People should not have to ask for the necessities of life. They should be able to reach for aspirational goals. They should be aided by the people in this House. We should not be told what we want or need—it should be up to communities. In Barwon we have not lost our sense of community; it is stronger than ever. We have passionate campaigners and very strong community groups. People commit their time to make sure that our communities are good places to live.

The 25in25 is a Broken Hill group with the aspirational goal of raising the population of Broken Hill to 25,000 by 2025. It is a willing horse we want to put a harness on. The group is currently seeking a small amount of seed funding for an executive officer or research officer to amplify the involvement of its 30 volunteers. Other examples of community groups include Foundation Broken Hill, Great Artesian Basin Protection Group, Narrabri Chamber of Commerce, and health consultative committees across the electorate. Other groups include Rotary and Lions and branches of all political parties. Those groups have been in contact with me and they all want a better future for Barwon. They are willing horses waiting for a harness.

I now talk about the campaign, supporters and volunteers. I had no campaign manager. I did not have a driver or a minder, and I had no major party machine. I had to learn about media, social media and I became a video editor. It was a steep learning curve. I have zero political experience. I dislike the word "campaign" because it sounds disingenuous. The way I look at it, I spent time travelling and building relationships with people. I think my poor caravan is a write-off; there were too many dirt roads. Parts have fallen off it and I bent an axle. On one occasion when visiting Tilpa, I drove through a dust storm coming from Wilcannia. I was staying the night in Tilpa and when I arrived I announced to the publican and other people who were there to meet me, "You don't need to worry about the dust storm anymore. I've got all the dust inside the caravan." After driving for six or seven hours and then meeting with people that night, I was so exhausted that I just dusted off a bit of the bed, lay down in my clothes and went to sleep. There was nothing else I could do.

The nature of the people of Barwon is so trusting that I have a collection of keys to people's homes and an open invitation to use those homes as my own. When people discovered I was coming to their area they took days off work. They would actually forego work days, using their leave to take me around their area, introducing me to business people and locals. Such is the generosity of the people of Barwon. Many times through the campaign I would go to pay for a drink at a bar or for fuel after filling up the vehicle and it had been fixed up by someone else. Such is the support for change in the Barwon electorate. The vehicle is marked up and it was pretty obvious it was me. I could not hide but I have not had any driving complaints yet. After finishing a meal at a pub, a cafe or even a succulent Chinese meal I would often try to pay, only to be told the account had been settled by a previous diner. Such is the personal support I enjoyed from the people of Barwon.

After working across western New South Wales for 17 years I know thousands of people. When I needed to raise an army, people came forward and assisted in many different ways. Some people endorsed me to their networks, some shared content on social media, others plastered their property, trucks or children with my corflutes. There is a story about the corflutes that emerged as a result. The corflutes started disappearing off trees and appearing in pictures. People were sending me pictures captioned, "Roy at the beach", "Roy at Lake Glenbawn waterskiing", "Roy on the mower", "Roy sitting under the air conditioner on a hot day with a can of Coke". It turned into a bit of a competition and I was getting phone calls from people outside the electorate saying, "Look, I'm not from Barwon, but I'd really like to get some of your corflutes". It was fantastic. It was a good game and obviously there was a level of endorsement. I have a mate who is an interstate truck driver and he had my corflute on his back door for months.

We raised an army of more than 150 people who volunteered their time. People put their personal credibility on the line. There were big personalities in the community standing alongside me, endorsing me. I thank the Shooters, Farmers and Fishers [SFF] Party for their support and confidence in me as a candidate. I mention some people because of the massive contribution they made in coordinating my campaign or for their effort: Mark Hoath, Anne and Neil Kennedy, and Mal Unicomb in Coonabarabran; Diana Ferry in Broken Hill; John Ridley in Narrabri; John Clements in Wee Waa; Greg Martin in Cobar; and June Lee in Broken Hill. June sat out the front of the polling booth for three weeks—she is a cracker. I also mention Mal Brown and Stan Single in Lightning Ridge, Joan Hamilton and Enid Coupe in Walgett, Dave McKechnie in Mendooran, Tony Gavan and Spuz Hogden and his family in Dunedoo, Oliver Jacques who helped with media, Cheryl Yow and Bill in Quanda, Mark and Susan Hall, Cec Hargraves and his family in Lake Cargelligo, Jeff and Nicole Bourman who drove up from Melbourne to help out on election day in Broken Hill, and Ray Zell and Nat and Brian Mudford in Gilgandra. To the many people I did not mention now, I will thank you personally so if I have not called you yet, I will.

I also need to mention my mum and dad and my sister and brother-in-law. Mum said to me early on, before I went to boarding school, that she would rather give my sister and me an education instead of an inheritance. She worked her guts out as a single mum to do that. My dad was a totally and permanently incapacitated Korean veteran. He died in 2003 on his own terms. He rejected medical treatment because he thought dialysis would cramp his style. He would be very proud that I am standing here but would possibly question my sanity for walking away from the best job in New South Wales. I want to acknowledge the work of my sister, Steven and Boyd for looking after all the volunteers and keeping them fed on election day in Broken Hill.

In 2017 Phillip Donato ended his inaugural speech by stating that he hoped to introduce more people to this Chamber. I make the same statement. In 2023 I intend to have more SFF members representing electorates in New South Wales. You may not know this but I am a keen yachtsman. I live in the wrong part of New South Wales to be a keen yachtsman—I get that. When sailing with a limited number of crew or on your own, the phrase used is "short-handed sailing". I intend to assist the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party to teach others how to run a short-handed campaign so that they can run their own one-person campaign and be prepared for the 2023 election. As long as I have the honour to represent the people of the Barwon electorate in this place, I will work my hardest to address their priorities and ensure that their voices are heard. Thank you for your trust and confidence.

Members stood in their places and applauded.

The SPEAKER: I too congratulate the member for Barwon.