

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 28 May 2019

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH (Wollondilly) (16:27): Mr Speaker, for the first time I address the Fifty-Seventh Parliament of New South Wales in delivering my inaugural speech, conscious of the great privilege and responsibility bestowed on me by the people of Wollondilly. It is incredible to stand here as a member of a government led by Premier Gladys Berejiklian and Deputy Premier John Barilaro. The faith placed in me is sobering, the trials ahead are formidable and the opportunity to do what is best for my electorate is inspirational. In the Gospel of Luke it is written "to whom much is given, much will be required". I thank our Heavenly Father for the capabilities he has given me, for the upbringing and guidance that has allowed me to develop my abilities, and for the opportunities that he has presented to me throughout my life to this point.

The State electorate of Wollondilly was established in 1904 and dissolved in 1981. After a redistribution it was re-established in 2007. Since then it has been represented by Mr Phil Costa from 2007 to 2011 and Mr Jai Rowell from 2011 to 2018, who represented the community with commitment and distinction. Two former members for Wollondilly have been Premiers of New South Wales: the Hon. Tom Lewis, who was the member from 1957 to 1978, and Sir George Fuller, who was the member from 1915 to 1928. Further, the Hon. John Fahey, when the southern end of the Wollondilly electorate was recognised as the State electorate of the Southern Highlands, was also a former Premier. Each of those men represented our community and the people of New South Wales with excellence.

The electorate of Wollondilly covers 3,327.48 square kilometres. It ranges from Burradoo in the south, Warragamba in the north, Appin in the east and the Nattai wilderness and Burragorang Valley in the west. There are 52 towns and villages, and each has its own unique character and charm. In the coming years my electorate will face enormous opportunities and challenges, including future growth in residential dwellings, the aerotropolis, the provision of infrastructure, the impact of mining subsidence and the desire to keep our local rural character. Throughout the recent election campaign I presented my vision for the electorate. I ran a positive and high-energy campaign focused on improving the liveability for my now constituents. To deal with future growth in the region the Government is delivering in the key areas of roads, transport, tourism, education, health, cultural development, open space and sporting infrastructure.

In health, the Government will spend \$120 million on the stage 1 and 2 redevelopment of Bowral and District Hospital—the biggest infrastructure spend in a generation for the Southern Highlands—and, as my first official act as the newly elected member for Wollondilly, I had the honour of turning the first sod. I thank Minister Hazzard for this announcement and look forward to working with NSW Health to get the best outcome for my constituents. In education, the Government is currently re-developing Picton High School to the tune of \$102 million and planning a new public school from kindergarten to year 12 at Wilton Junction. In culture, I thank the Hon. Don Harwin, MLC, for his strong support of the Southern Highlands Regional Art Gallery and renowned artist Ben Quilty for his leadership.

Sport plays a major role in Wollondilly. During the campaign I made it a priority to build strong relationships with sporting clubs across all the codes and, as a self-identifying sports tragic of many years standing, it was an enjoyable task. I recently made a comeback to rugby for the mighty Bowral Blacks. I walked away with two cracked ribs, a torn hammy and general soreness all over. Yes, I am looking forward to the next game with the golden oldies. During the campaign we delivered and committed significant funding for several projects across the electorate to improve facilities for players and supporters, and in the years to come I will continue to fight for more funding. The importance of sport for the development of our youth is well known; it is one of the best investments we can make for future generations.

Wollondilly has the potential to be the tourism hub of New South Wales. The Southern Highlands is already a highly sought after tourism destination. However, close to the centre of my electorate lies a sleeping giant, which is about to be woken—namely, the re-opening of the Picton to Mittagong loop line for heritage trains between Thirlmere and Colo Vale. That is right, Mr Speaker, toot, toot, all aboard! Also during the recent campaign, through hard work, a successful petition, great public support and a strong media campaign, I was able to secure \$5.5 million to bring this dream alive. The loop line, which is a 34-kilometre single track, was built in the 1860s, but it has not been in use for 44 years. It also has the deepest rail cutting in the Southern Hemisphere, located at Hill Top. This funding will allow heritage trains to use the entire length of the track between Thirlmere and Colo Vale. This will deliver an amazing tourist experience and, more importantly, help to drive more customers to local businesses and create more employment opportunities.

Each year the NSW Rail Museum at Thirlmere, which is one of the best museums in the country, welcomes around 60,000 patrons. This project will value-add to the museum and it is hoped that in the future it will rival, and eventually topple, a similar steam train attraction in Victoria, located in the Dandenong Ranges just east of Melbourne, known as Puffing Billy. This attraction currently attracts around 480,000 patrons each year. By 2027, due to current State and Federal Government investment, this attraction is predicted to receive 730,000 patrons, which represents a huge economic benefit to the region. I want Wollondilly to exceed the Victorian tourism numbers, and today I call on our State and Federal governments to invest in stage two and bring steam all the way to Mittagong.

In my electorate there are two local government areas, being Wollondilly and Wingecarribee shire councils. Both have received much criticism in recent times. I want to work with both councils to improve the community perceptions as they work through the challenges they are facing. As a member of this Government, I believe we need to look at giving councillors more of say over the operation of their organisations, considering that they are the democratically elected representatives of ratepayers. To achieve this we may have to make amendments to the Local Government Act. My role is to improve community confidence in councils, just as they have confidence in our State Government.

My idea is to create more local jobs so that my constituents do not have to spend hours in a car or on a bus or train getting to and from work—valuable time that could be spent with their family—by creating an economic development State environmental planning policy [SEPP]. This economic development SEPP would assist to turbocharge job opportunities in my region and greater New South Wales, and would enable a more rapid response to business development proposals for employment areas by going straight to the State Government as the consent authority. Clearly, this will need consultation and I am sure we can find goodwill on both sides of the House to consider this option.

I have been fortunate in life to come from a loving and generous family, which gave me every opportunity to achieve my goals. I am the third and middle child of five children. Growing up in the 1980s was an absolute joy. Malcolm Fraser was Prime Minister, followed by Bob Hawke—may they both rest in peace. The Tigers made two grand finals. Australia won the America's Cup. *Crocodile Dundee* featured around the globe. Australia was on the world map. It was a great time! Like any young man I had dreams of rugby and cricket glory. I played at a good level, won a few premierships, scored a few tons but ran into a couple of injuries.

At 16 I took up a plumbing apprenticeship. I went on to become a tradesman, leading hand and foreman, and then to eventually run my own small business. Things were going well in my twenties until April 2008. I was a leading contractor on a large development site in north-west Sydney. Business was good; I had plenty of work. While working on site I had a split-second lapse in concentration, which led to an accident that nearly severed my left index finger—I nearly lost it. The doctors said the injury was almost irreparable and I would lose some function in my left hand. I feared that my business and livelihood would never be the same again. I had the operation later that night. Within days, I was stitched up and back at work, taking care and pressing ahead. As many of you know, when you run a small business—when you are the small business—you bear all the responsibility and the risk. It is all on the line and sometimes unexpected events like that happen. I was determined not to let it set me back. I made a full recovery.

I mention this experience because from it I learned a lot about myself—which was that, with tenacity, determination and perseverance, anything is possible. Not long after this I was given an opportunity to join a public relations and marketing firm, in which I worked with businesses and governments at all levels for around 5½ years. I thank Bill, who is up there in the gallery today, for giving me this opportunity. During this time I furthered my education by attaining a graduate certificate, graduate diploma and finally a Master of Arts in Organisational Communications at Charles Sturt University. I then took up a role in running a Federal Senator's office in Wollongong: Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells, who is also here today. Connie has been a great mentor of mine for many years, and still is to this day. Thank you, Connie, for the role that you played in my political journey.

Just before being preselected as the Liberal Candidate for Wollondilly, I was an adviser to the Hon. Anthony Roberts, MP—commonly known in this House as "Robbo". Minister, it was absolute honour working for you and I thank you for the countless hours of doorknocking and visits during the campaign. It gives me great joy to serve with you in this House. My involvement with the Liberal Party started in 2003 when I joined the NSW Young Liberals. I was first encouraged to join by our now Treasurer and Deputy Leader, the Hon. Dominic Perrottet, MP, who convinced me to get involved.

Mr Dominic Perrottet: Sorry!

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: Yes, he's to blame. As a tradie, I was a bit different from your typical Young Liberal. I moved up the ranks quickly, from Young Liberal branch president to a State conference president and a campaign director on many local, State and Federal campaigns. I was then elected as a member of the New South Wales State Executive. During that time there were many highs and lows, which is part and parcel of political life. The greatest high was talking my father into running for Parliament in 2006, along with a few others. He was not a member of the party, due his position at the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. He said no at first but then eventually said yes—he still blames me for it to this day. One of my greatest joys was sitting in a seat in the advisers' area 12 years ago to hear him deliver his maiden speech on the opposite side of the House. Now I am standing here delivering my maiden speech on this side of the House and he is sitting in the public gallery with mum.

Family, flag, freedom, faith, free enterprise—this framework underpins the values I stand for. I stand for limited government, lower taxes and less regulation. I believe Australia is at its best when it focuses on what unites its people, not what makes its people different from each other. Political correctness in this country has gone too far. We saw that during the recent Federal election campaign. Citizens of this great country rejected the extreme left-wing agenda that was being imposed on every Christian, Catholic and independent school across the country. We saw a war on the coal industry just to appeal to the latte-sipping lefties who live in inner-city seats, with no regard for regional areas such as my electorate.

The farmers, tradies, small business owners, mums and dads who work their guts out, day in and day out, with the ambition to get ahead and the self-funded retirees, who are not relying on the public purse, rejected Bill Shorten's extreme left-wing agenda. This agenda can only be defeated when it is confronted and called out, and that is exactly what happened on 18 May 2019. I know the pressure on small business owners to put food on their family's and employees' tables. Small business does not need help from government; small business needs government to get out of the way. I support the citizen in the battle against big government and I do not believe that the wages of the State should grow faster than the wages of the people who fund it. I support the farming and livestock industry because animal protein has been vital to human development. The role of government is to provide a helping hand when people cannot help themselves and to enable people to be their best.

Energy must be affordable and reliable. I support the construction of more high-efficiency, low-emission coal-fired power plants to keep power prices low for our citizens. I believe in renewables—I used to install them—but they are not at a level to replace baseload power at this stage. The technology exists to consider the introduction of waste-to-energy plants and I will be encouraging our Government to look at this as an additional means for power generation. I believe childhood is a period of innocence. I want to see schools teach core skills, not agendas. I want my children to learn about history, geography, mathematics, Western civilization, science and the arts; not Safe Schools, gender fluidity and other forms of Marxist brainwashing.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have been lenient with visitors in the public gallery, but they should clap only at the end of the member's speech.

Mr NATHANIEL SMITH: So much of our intellectual tradition comes from our Judeo-Christian history. We need to recognise this, embrace it, and make sure it has a place in our classrooms and curriculum. I want to see communities that care for our elderly in a compassionate and dignified way; infrastructure that enables us to move quickly and efficiently; paths that are well lit, with space for a pram; open spaces that enable everyone to participate in their favourite pastime; and trains that run on time, and often. I love the unique character of the Wollondilly electorate. I will be a champion for my electorate, its amenity, history and vitality for years to come.

Today I would not be standing here if was not for those who supported me to this point in my life—people such as Jerome Cox, Suzanne Fairhall, Zorica Kaye Smith, Ross Barwick, Andrew Brown, Rod Bosman, James Rigney, Stephen Sim, Councillors Paul Sedrak, Petros Kalligas and Ron Bezic, John Ruddick, Justin Owen, Ross Cameron, Liberal Party Federal Vice President Teena McQueen, Damien Pace, Edwin Nelson, James Flynn, Naji Najjar, Charles and Matthew Camenzuli, Gab Habib, Dee Zagarac, Matthew Murphy, Daniel Assaf, Andrew Selwyn, Steve Simat, Jeffery Wang, Christopher Holcroft, Patrick Doherty, Charles Perrottet, Michael Hughes, Christian Ellis, Robert Assaf, Paul Kim, David Clarke, the Hon. Damien Tudehope, MLC, and Kevin Conolly, MP—to name just a few.

I would like to single out those who mentored me, people like David Hayman, Tim James and Michael Cooke. I am thankful for their advice and encouragement. To those I worked with in Federal and State government—Wade McInerney, Janet Gray, Callum Fountain, Camillus O'Kane, Harry, John, Andrew Lewis, Robert Vellar, Doug Reuvette, Sue Clark, Alex Fraser, Norm Lipson and Simon Babbage—I say thank you.

During the campaign my support reached far and wide, with events and announcements. I thank the Premier, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, for her ongoing support and leadership, Deputy Premier John Barilaro, the Hon. Dominic Perrottet, Ministers Harwin, Ayres, Roberts, Stokes, Hazzard, Upton, Williams, Constance, Kean, Speakman and Pavey, and the Hon. Matthew Mason Cox, MLC, for their commitments and assistance. But there is one person whom I must single out, and that is my great mate the Hon. Lou Amato, MLC—your knowledge of the region was invaluable to my campaign, and I say thank you.

To the Federal member for Hume and Minister for Energy, the Hon. Angus Taylor, I thank you for your commitment to my campaign and, more importantly, for your ongoing advice. I thank Liberal Party HQ, Chris Stone and his exceptional team for running a magnificent campaign both in March and at the recent Federal poll. To my SEC president Russell Matheson and branch presidents and loyal party members, I say thank you. In particular, I thank Bowral branch president Frank Conroy for his leadership and commitment throughout the campaign.

I thank my campaign committee: Kyle Kutasi, Dallas and Zoe McInerney, Jennifer Martin, John Rigden, Lionel Rodriguez, Jeff Gray, Darron Fenton, and especially Dylan Whitelaw—thank you, mate. The team was led by my fearless campaign manager, and my now senior electorate officer, Peter McLaughlin, who had great support from his wife, Patricia. I say a special thank you to them. I thank my hardworking campaign volunteers for putting up corflutes, letterboxing, manning street stalls and assisting at pre-poll and on polling day. I also thank John and Janine TaWeehel, Tina Bishop, Jan Conroy, Margaret Osborne, Janet Rigden, Colleen Rodriguez, Ryan Clarkstone, Hilton Gibbs, Councillor Michael Banasik, Michael and Toni Baume, Jo Down, Tim and Kelli Bennett Smith, Karl Klein, Cloe Brown and Bruno Lopreiato. I give special mention to Lorri and Richard Harrison for their boundless energy, commitment and prayers during the campaign.

To Charlie and Elwyn Di Francesco: Your friendship and generosity to my family and me was extraordinary. I thank you. The support of my brother-in-law, Christopher, and my in-laws, Maurice and Michele, has been legendary—they miss the kids so much they are currently moving to the Southern Highlands in the coming weeks, and I welcome a couple more primary votes. To my immediate family, my older brother, Benedict, and his wife, Julianna, with their six children—yes, they are Catholic—who are wonderful nieces and nephews in Tasmania; my older sister, Dominica, and her husband, Matthew; my little brother, Jerome, and his wife, Siobhan, and my nephew and niece, William and Adelaide; and my little sister, Philomena, and her husband, Adrian, who are in the process of adopting a son, WooSol from South Korea, and I look forward to meeting my future nephew: Your support, love and friendship has helped forged the man who stands before you in this House today.

My parents have been the main influence throughout my life. My mother has put God and her children at the centre of her life; her devotion to us has been beyond measure. To my father: Unlike you, Dad, I will not be singing in this House, or in the corridors of Parliament, but I will be following your advice throughout my life—to always act with integrity and be the best husband, father and MP that I can be. In your valedictory speech in late 2014 you finished with the following quote from St Thomas More: "I die the King's faithful servant, but God's first." My parents have always taught my siblings and me to put God at the centre of our lives.

To my two little angels, Charlotte and Chloe: You are both growing up so fast and, even with this busy role, I will make sure that I do not miss out on seeing you grow into strong, faithful and beautiful women like your mother. And finally to my wife, Christine: You have sacrificed so much for me to be standing here before you all today. You are the best wife and mother any man could ever ask for. You are my inspiration and the love of my life. I love you and I thank you for supporting me through the highs and lows, and the good times ahead. Thank you all and God bless.

Members stood in their places and applauded.

The SPEAKER: As members appropriately congratulate the new member for Wollondilly, on behalf of the House I extend a warm welcome to the guests of the member for Wollondilly, particularly the Hon. Greg Smith, former Attorney General of New South Wales; Senator the Hon. Concetta Fierravanti-Wells; his Most Reverend Excellency Richard Umbers, Auxiliary Bishop, Sydney Archdiocese; and Teena McQueen, Federal Vice-President of the Liberal Party of Australia. I also acknowledge His Worship the Mayor of Wollondilly, Councillor Mathew Deeth; and the Hon. David Clarke, former member of the upper House.