

## Legislative Assembly Hansard – 08 May 2019 – Proof

**INAUGURAL SPEECHES**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** I welcome to the public gallery, friends and family of the member for Coogee.

**Dr MARJORIE O'NEILL (Coogee) (17:01):** I first acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered: the Gadigal people of the Eora as well as the Bidjigal people who occupy the eastern suburbs coastline and the electorate of Coogee. I pay my respects to them, their elders past, present and emerging. I apologise to all Indigenous Australians for all the harm that has been inflicted upon them by me or any member of my family past or present. I acknowledge that the State of New South Wales has not yet done what needs to be done to acknowledge the injustices inflicted upon our First Nations people. I commit to doing my best to ensure that this Parliament starts treaty or treaties negotiations with our First Nations people.

I enter this House standing on the shoulders of giants, from where I can clearly see the purpose of my being here. Giants like Kristina Keneally, who put at the heart of her Government a care for the most vulnerable in the community, particularly people with a disability, a Premier who legalised same-sex adoption, improved emergency department wait times, and properly funded schools and TAFE all the while maintaining a budget surplus during the global financial crisis. I stand on the shoulders of Bob Carr, whom *Forbes Magazine* called "dragon slayer" for his landmark tort law reforms, a Premier who created 350 new national parks, and the first Premier in the State's history to retire debt. I stand on the shoulders of Barrie Unsworth, who banned self-loading rifles and fought for a national gun summit.

And on the shoulders of Neville Wran, whose many achievements include the first New South Wales Anti-Discrimination Act, radical investment in public transport, public works and the Arts, a Premier who recognised the value of the environment and increased the number of national parks, limited the logging of rainforests, and phased out woodchipping and sand mining in national parks. I stand on the shoulders of William McKell, whose unrelenting tenacity resulted in improvements to working conditions, pensions and public housing, and the revitalisation of country New South Wales. I stand proudly on the shoulders of all those other men and women who have entered this House committed and prepared to work tirelessly to improve the lives of the citizens of New South Wales. I am committed to following their lead. Michael Daley and Penny Sharpe, thank you for your leadership and counsel.

The voters of Coogee elected me to represent them in this Parliament and I will do my very best to honour their trust. The Coogee electorate is both physically and culturally beautiful and enriching. I state this unequivocally, despite the origins of its name. The name "Coogee" is derived from a local Aboriginal word "koojah", which means "smelly place" or in the Bidjigal language "stinking seaweed", a reference to the smell of decaying kelp washed up on the beach. Luckily, I love both the sea and seaweed. Coogee is a diverse electorate, ranging from luxury homes to those doing it tough, with lots of tradies as well as numerous medical and university personnel, strong groupings of those who are religiously active and many who are very much secular.

Coogee is home to the University of New South Wales, the Prince of Wales Hospital and the Royal Women's Hospital, to many RSL, surf lifesaving and bowling clubs, as well as the famous and popular Randwick Rugby Club, the Roosters and Rabbitohs. The electorate abounds with great beaches, parks, restaurants and pubs. It has the Randwick Ritz, which is a great heritage-listed cinema, and quite a few village-style strip shopping centres. Every night of the week there is always something to do, a cheap meal to have and somewhere to go.

There are many like me of Irish-Anglo heritage, with a bit of Polish thrown in, whose families have lived in the area for a long time. I am a fifth-generation Bronte girl. A great number of our residents, particularly those of Jewish and Catholic heritage, came from Europe and settled in the area after World War II. Since the 1970s and the end of the Vietnam War, Coogee has been enriched by growing numbers of international students and migrants from many countries. Coogee is a loyal electorate, but swings with dissatisfaction.

During my current term, the Australian Labor Party will have held the electorate for more than 50 per cent of its existence. The electorate of Coogee, ranging from Bondi Road to a southern point beyond South Coogee beach, is predominantly an educated, socially engaged community that is very concerned with broader social issues beyond their own immediate self-interests, which includes a commitment to the environment. Coogee residents love their suburbs but care about issues beyond themselves.

Those who have preceded me as representatives of the electorate of Coogee have established benchmarks of excellence in community representation that will guide me in my future endeavours. Bruce Notley-Smith, although I do not share many of the same views as you, I acknowledge your service. Paul Pearce, the last Labor Party member for the electorate, who taught me the value of being honest and to provide genuine representation, thank you for your support and your tireless efforts working for the Coogee electorate.

Remember Ernie Page and his family, including his son and my fellow branch member Harry, and the enormous contribution made by Ernie not only to the Coogee electorate but also to libraries and local governments throughout the State of New South Wales? Michael Cleary, the great Australian footballer, who was also an elected representative for the Coogee electorate and a New South Wales Minister for Sport and Recreation and Minister for Tourism in the Wran Labor Government from 1981 to 1986 and Minister for Sport and Recreation, Minister for Racing and Minister for Tourism from 1986 to 1988. Then there is Sydney "Syd" Einfeld, who was a representative for the then Bondi electorate and later Waverley, who not only changed Australia's immigration policy to provide a refuge for Holocaust survivors but also built the New South Wales consumer protection infrastructure and laws, arguably the most progressive in the world at that time.

I acknowledge and thank all of those who have previously represented my electorate for their work, their commitment and their contribution to improving the lives of those they represented. I acknowledge also the first representative of the electorate of Coogee, Hyman Goldstein, a Nationalist member of Parliament who represented the Coogee electorate from 1927 until his death in 1928 and who had previously served as a member for the proportionally elected eastern suburbs district from 1922 to 1925. He was found dead in 1928 at the bottom of the Coogee cliffs in mysterious circumstances. Federal Nationalist member of Parliament, Thomas Ley, an enemy of Goldstein's who was concerned that Goldstein was about to expose his corruption in a business deal and who was later convicted of murder in England, is thought responsible for his death. How wonderful is it though that our first New South Wales parliamentary representative for the electorate of Coogee was a Jewish man born in London, England, to tailor Solomon Goldstein and Hannah Cohen? Goldstein's election says so much about the history of Coogee. However, I am extremely grateful that his demise did not establish a precedent for his successors!

I come here from another house, like the one I stand in today, that has strong foundations. My parents, Brian O'Neill and Keri Spooner, instilled in my siblings and me a belief in social justice, and the importance of minimum social and working conditions as rights and entitlements and not as objects of charity. My father nurtured in me a deep understanding of the importance of trade unions as protectors of employees' rights and of legal enactment as the strongest mechanism for enshrining those entitlements. My mother taught me to do the "Sesame Street"—to walk the talk, to know your neighbours and to care about your community.

My siblings, Bridget, Christopher, Mary and Francis, and my nieces, Matilda and Laura, have taught me the power of love and of selflessness, especially as they supported me over the past year. My aunts, uncles and cousins showed me yet again the value of family as they stepped up and not only assisted my campaign but also supported my family through the passing of my father in the days following the election. I must mention especially Korel and Kurt, who literally fed us all as we struggled to stay focused on the election while my darling father was approaching death. To my family and friends, I promise I will not stand on your shoulders, but I might need to lean on you from time to time.

My father, Brian O'Neill, was a unique influence in my life. He was a teacher, a union official, a New South Wales Industrial Relations commissioner and a higher education lecturer. He was a Labor man, a Catholic, an Australian of Irish decent, a farmer, an encyclopaedia of history and, above all else, a family man. He also loved work. Only two weeks before his death he still hoped to return to his lecturing role at the Wentworth Institute. Brian taught us all the value of work, be it as a shop assistant or a judicial member. He loved me and gave me advice, and I listened. He significantly influenced my fundamental values, including the right of all people to a minimum decent standard of living. What I also heard from him, which is of particular relevance to my role in this House, is to not prejudge but to listen and be open to new ideas; to not engage in personality politics but to remain focused on achieving the best result. I am here to secure the best possible parliamentary outcomes for the people of Coogee and New South Wales.

There have been other very important influencers in my life. The Franciscans, the Poor Clares and my primary school education at St Charles' Waverley nurtured in me a strong regard for the environment and the value of gentleness. My high school years at St Vincent's College in Potts Point helped to make me a strong, independent woman with a social conscience. I believe that my many years working in retail at Rebel Sport gave me an appreciation of the value of work. The amazing opportunity afforded to me to obtain a BA from Wollongong University, a BBus (Hons) from the University of Technology Sydney and a PhD in Management and Economics from Macquarie University all contributed to my developing the knowledge and skills that will assist me to make a worthwhile contribution to this House and this State.

Sport has been a major part of my life, including as a blindside breakaway for the University of Sydney, playing representative rugby and my earlier high school activities playing cricket, water polo, netball and basketball. I am also an active Clovelly surf lifesaver. All of those experiences have shaped me. I love and believe in the value of sporting activities not only for enjoyment and good health but also for the social connections and friendships that those activities enable.

Today I stand before you as a young woman of 33 years, the first female representative for the electorate of Coogee, well educated, with a strong sporting background, with previous employment as a shop assistant and as a lecturer in higher education in Australia, England and the United States. I have been a councillor on Waverley Council for the past few years and treasurer of the Local Government Association. Over the past few years I have learnt the nature of local government and the processes of government, and I have fought in the best interests of my constituents. As a member of this House, I will always advance a fiscally responsible and progressive social agenda. In identifying what that means, I will listen to the electorate. Listening is important. I will soon have more to say on that.

People in the electorate of Coogee tell me that they are very upset by the disruption to their bus services that used to take them to the places they needed to be and their current lack of access to their hospitals, libraries, schools and places of work. Residents choose workplaces and schools based upon existing bus routes that have since been cut. Older residents who once had direct bus access to their libraries and hospitals must now change buses via a train depot—no small task with a walking frame. Coogee residents are distressed by the rampant overdevelopment of their suburb, traffic congestion and the destruction of their trees and old heritage buildings. The returned soldiers and members of RSL and Legion clubs throughout the electorate are angry at the destruction of Anzac Parade and the trees that were planted to welcome home veterans. How can the destruction of so many trees, wildlife inhabitants and the traditional culture of suburbs be at all acceptable?

Residents throughout the electorate are angry that our great public schools are only partially funded and that their P&Cs must raise funds to pay for basic maintenance just to keep their schools functioning. Residents are distressed that there is no new co-educational high school proposed for the eastern suburbs. The people of my electorate place paramount importance on the environment. Put simply, they want me to fight for renewables, to eradicate single-use plastics and to take real action on climate change. They demand that I address the Coogee stormwater problem and push for a proper resolution, not just send the sewage further down the coast.

Responding to my community also means that I must fight for better public health services. In recent months I have personally experienced the worst of public health in New South Wales. My father waited 24 hours to have a cannula reinserted to receive intravenous antibiotics because nurses were unable to reinsert the needle and no doctor was available. He rang for nursing assistance, but none came on so many occasions we lost count because nurse-to-patient ratios were inadequate. Then there was the day he was left naked and cold for half an hour after a shower because no-one answered his call. Do you feel embarrassed for him?

During his last months, Brian articulated many times his great concern for those who did not have a strong family advocacy team like he had to fight for his humanity. I have personally witnessed how bad the public health system can be in this State and I am committed to improving it. I will also be fighting for a better deal for women in all aspects of our lives from birth to death, including reproductive rights and industrial relations. I am particularly concerned about the absence of refuges that allow pets, as research has increasingly shown that pets are often used to entrap and endanger women. I will be fighting for more refuge accommodation that is pet friendly.

These are the issues that my community expects me to pursue and I will. Additionally, the electorate of Coogee, as I have previously stated, has concerns that extend beyond their own immediate worries. They seek a better New South Wales and Australia. I will be forcefully advocating for a much-improved industry planning process. We need to fight for a first-class plan for how this State can move forward, build upon the great opportunities offered in the field of renewable energy and capture State revenue to be generated from new industries such as medical marijuana.

I will fight for a fiscally responsible, socially progressive agenda committed to a better and fairer New South Wales. I will listen to my electorate and more broadly to the people of New South Wales, to hear what they regard as the most pressing issues. Rural New South Wales is of great importance to all of us. My electorate cares deeply about the wellbeing of rural New South Wales, because they are smart and they know where their food comes from. I am very lucky to have spent some time during my life on our family farm in Bannister New South Wales, not too far from Crookwell. I have done fencing, I have planted trees, and I have mustered, tagged and castrated cattle. I will always listen and respond as best as I can to the needs of rural Australia.

I thank the many volunteers who worked very hard to help me get elected. It is very difficult to win a seat in Parliament and it is particularly difficult to unseat an incumbent in an area in which people are overall pretty happy with their lives. I thank sincerely the Australian Labor Party branch members and trade unionists, particularly the United Services Union, the Transport Workers Union, the Public Service Association, the Electrical Trades Union and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association, in particular Graeme Kelly and Tony Shelton, as well as Alex Claassens. I thank the many New South Wales and Federal Labor shadow Ministers and members of Parliament who visited my electorate and supported me. In order of appearance they were Michael Daley, who supported me from the very beginning; Prue Car; Penny Sharpe; Jodi McKay; Walt Secord; Jihad Dib; Tania Mihailuk; Jenny Aitchison; Yasmin Catley; Lynda Voltz; John Graham; Matt Thistlethwaite; Tony Burke; Kristina Keneally; Courtney Houssos; and Chris Minns. To the "boss lady" General Secretary of NSW Labor Kaila Murnain, as well as assistant secretaries Pat Garcia and Rose Jackson, thank you! My gratitude also goes to Dylan Parker, Humaira Nasrin and Todd Pinkerton, who helped me secure the seat.

Thank you to all the branch members who supported me, but also the very many family and friends who put in long hours for me and my best friend, Alex Jarman, who provided me with great personal support. Some of you are here this evening and I thank you sincerely. Paul and Sue Tracy, from the bottom of my heart, thank you for your friendship and frank advice. Jane and Katie Grusovin, thank you for encouraging me to run. Luke Mortimer, Glenn Pede, Troy Swan, Lachlan McGraw, Michael Collins and Mark Spooner—from the moment I was pre-selected you were by my side phone banking, bus stopping and hitting the pavement. Thank you. This year, 2019, marks 800 years since St Francis returned from the Middle East. His message to his followers after meeting with the sultan was to listen more and talk less. I intend to take his advice. This is what I plan to do: I will be the voice needed for social change as dictated by the people of New South Wales. My job is to listen. Thank you.

**The SPEAKER:** I join the House in congratulating the member for Coogee on her inaugural address. Forthcoming is the inaugural address of the member for Auburn. I acknowledge those in the public gallery, family, friends and supporters of the member for Auburn.