

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 28 May 2019

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

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.

The SPEAKER: We will now hear the inaugural speech of the new member for Camden. I extend a warm welcome to the guests of the member for Camden who are present in the public gallery today: his wife, Amy Sidgreaves, and his four children; his mother-in-law, Cheryl Brown; his parents, Mr and Mrs Sidgreaves; and his brothers and sisters. I also acknowledge the staff from the Camden electorate office. I am sure they all rejoice in what we are about to hear from the member for Camden.

Mr PETER SIDGREAVES (Camden) (16:56): Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment to the role. I am honoured and privileged to present my inaugural speech this afternoon in Australia's oldest Parliament in front of my family, friends and colleagues. I am here as the member for Camden, elected by the people of Camden. The Camden electorate is located in the south-west of Sydney and is steeped in history, heritage and natural beauty. At the same time, Camden is one of the fastest-growing regions in Australia. In 1856 when New South Wales first gained self-government Camden was an important agricultural district for Sydney. In 1859 it returned two members to the first Parliament.

In 1920 the Camden electorate was abolished with the introduction of proportional representation and did not reappear as an electorate until 1981. Since the second incarnation of the Camden electorate you could say that it has been a swinging electorate, with Liberal winning seven times and Labor winning four times. It is true that Camden generally swings based on the redistributions. When the redistributions move south towards Wollondilly, Liberal tends to win. However, when the redistributions move to the east towards Campbelltown, Labor tends to win. My plan is to buck this trend by working hard, engaging with and listening to the people of Camden and delivering on the commitments that I make.

The Camden electorate currently covers 331 square kilometres and includes suburbs such as parts of Luddenham and Badgerys Creek in the north, Austral and Leppington in the east, Camden South and Camden Park in the south, and Cobbitty and Greendale to the west. The 2016 Census states the population of the Camden State electoral division as 88,202. It would now be over 100,000 and is expected to grow to 250,000 by 2036. Given the forecast growth, it is clear that the delivery of roads, rail, education and health infrastructure, and services is required—and it should be delivered before or at the same time as the growth in population arrives. The census data also reported that the median age of people living in Camden is 34. Children aged zero to 14 make up 23.5 per cent of the population, which is higher than the State and national median ages, and people aged 65 years and older make up 11.1 per cent of the population, which is lower than the State and national median ages.

Given the growth in population expected in Camden and the fact that almost 25 per cent of residents are children, it is incumbent upon this Government to continue to build more schools and upgrade existing schools in the Camden electorate. Further, the data also reported that 15 per cent of people aged 15 and older living in Camden completed school to year 12. This is comparable to the State and national completion rates for year 2. However, only 15.6 per cent of people aged 15 years and older reported that they had completed a bachelor level degree or above, which is well below the State and national completion rates. Having said that, 30.5 per cent of people aged 15 years and older reported they had completed an advanced diploma, diploma, certificate IV or certificate III, which is higher than the State and national completion rates. The data demonstrates significant opportunities for tertiary education options, including universities.

The data also demonstrates a high level of demand for TAFE services by people aged 15 or older in Camden. This is why I wholeheartedly support the Government's campaign commitment to build a new \$80 million state-of-the-art Western Sydney TAFE campus that will train the next generation in trades including carpentry, construction, electrical and plumbing. The 2016 Census data reported that, of the people living in Camden who reported being in the labour force, 64.2 per cent were employed full time, 26.5 per cent were employed part time and 4.1 per cent were unemployed. The percentage of people employed is above the State and national employment numbers, while the employment numbers for part-time employment and the unemployed are lower than the State and national employment numbers. The data also reported that people aged 15 or older living in Camden had personal, family and household median incomes higher than State and national median incomes.

This suggests to me that Camden has a strong local economy. Further data shows that 65 per cent of workers leave the region to attend work. This suggests to me that Camden needs to create more local and diverse jobs. That is why I moved a motion in Camden Council in 2013 to establish the Camden Region Economic Taskforce. The goal of the taskforce is two-fold: first, to create an environment where existing businesses can thrive and grow, and employ more locals; and, secondly, to attract new investment into Camden that will create local and diverse jobs above and beyond those created by the Western Sydney International (Nancy-Bird Walton) Airport located in the north of the Camden electorate.

The 2016 Census data also reported that 73.5 per cent of people living in Camden travelled to work by car, either as a driver or a passenger, which is higher than State and national numbers. Only 7.8 per cent of people living in Camden travel to work by public transport, which is below State and national numbers. Given the population of Camden will grow to approximately 250,000 by 2036 and given the number of registered motor vehicles, coupled with the knowledge that 73.5 per cent of people living in Camden travel to work by car, it is clear that Camden needs road infrastructure. This is why one of my main priorities is to see further investment in local roads. The data also shows the need for better public transport, particularly rail.

I know that this Government has committed to building the North South line between Badgerys Creek and St Marys by 2026, when the airport opens. I would like to speak to the Ministers about the possibility of delivering the continuation of this line down to Narellan and beyond to MacArthur sooner than what is currently planned. While the 2016 Census data is comprehensive, it must be complemented by continuous feedback from residents. This is why I will be out in the community talking and listening to as many people as I can on all matters.

Camden has a number of historical, cultural and natural assets including, to name a few, the Australian Botanic Garden, Mount Annan; the Alan Baker Art Gallery at the historic Macaria House; Belgenny Farm; the Camden Museum; Camden Bicentennial Equestrian Park; and the Camden Town Farm. Camden also has a number of historical houses and homesteads including Camden Park House, circa 1835; Harrington Park House, circa 1817; Orielton House, circa 1815; Gledswood Homestead, circa 1830; and many more. I strongly encourage people from Sydney and beyond to come and visit. This is also why one of my main priorities is to preserve the history, heritage and natural beauty of Camden.

Now a little bit about myself: I was born on the lower North Shore of Sydney and I am the sixth child of nine children. For the first 10 years of my life, my family lived in Castle Cove. My memories of Castle Cove include playing rugby for Roseville from the age of five and then for Chatswood; sneaking into Innisfallen Castle, which was a private residence at the time; being taught to ride a bike by my brother who simply took me to the top of a steep driveway and then let me go; and our family of 11 living in a four-bedroom house for a couple of years while our next house was being built.

Our family then moved into our new house in Pymble. The only problem was that there was no electricity and therefore no hot water for the first six weeks or so. I am sure this was not easy for Mum, who had to cook, shower and wash clothes for the family at a friend's house. Our family spent the next 10 years at Pymble, although I spent much of this time boarding at St Joseph's College, Hunter's Hill, as did my father before me and my brothers. My memories of Pymble include spending a lot of time outside swimming and playing cricket and tennis with friends and brothers and sisters. I think our being outside was the only way Mum coped.

After finishing school I went to the Australian Catholic University and studied a Bachelor of Business, Marketing and International Studies. I completed two years of the three years before I decided to take some time off. Unfortunately, I never returned and for a long time, this was my greatest regret. Shortly afterwards, I started working at my father's business, where I worked with my brother Michael and my sister Louise for the next few years. While I only spent a few years working there, I learnt a lot about what it takes to own and operate a small business. I also learnt that not only do you work long hours but also the work never leaves your thoughts—day or night, weekday or weekend. Further, I also learnt that small business owners put their livelihoods on the line and while there are rewarding times, there are also tough times.

And there was even the recession we had to have. While I was only 15 at the time, I still vividly remember the stress in my father when that ominous announcement was made. One of the things I am most proud of is the fact that my father's family business has now been operating for 102 years. Next, I moved into information technology, where I have spent the last 19 years. I spent four years working with multinational IT organisations Compaq and Hewlett-Packard. For the past 15 years I have worked with Sydney Catholic Schools, first as an IT engineer and for the last 10 years as an IT manager. I also managed to complete a Masters of Management in Information Technology at Charles Sturt University, which relieved me of the regret I mentioned previously.

In September 2001, I met my wife, Amy. Eleven months later I proposed to Amy and we have been married for 15 years. We have four beautiful daughters: Lani, who is eight; Kaiyah, who is six; and twins Brielle and Zara, who are three, all of whom we love with all of our hearts and are extremely proud of. While Amy was born and bred in Camden, our decision to establish our home in the area represented the opportunities we could see for our future family. Amy, I sincerely want to thank you for your support. Without it, I would not be standing here today. I know the 12 weeks of the election campaign were particularly difficult for you. I want to thank you for your dedication and perseverance looking after our family almost single-handedly. Thank you for being here today. I love you.

Lani, Kaiyah, Brielle and Zara, I also want to thank you for being here today and for making the day more special for me. Girls, I want you to know that all of you are a big reason why I entered politics. Firstly, by being elected to Camden Council almost seven years ago and more recently to State Parliament. Given the growth of Camden, I want to ensure that everything that is great about Camden today is there for you as you grow up. I love all of you—and Lani, happy ninth birthday for Thursday.

I have spoken about how Amy looked after our family almost single-handedly. I would now like to thank Amy's parents, Gary and Cheryl Brown, for all the help and support you have given Amy and the girls. Your help and support have not only been during the election campaign, rather ongoing for years. I would especially like to say a big thank you to Mum and Dad. Thank you for everything that you have done for our family. Both of you have unconditionally loved and cared for us. Thank you for the many sacrifices made and the lessons taught for the betterment of your children. My core values of honesty, diligence and compassion are because of the way you raised us. I thank you for this and I love you both dearly.

To my brothers and sisters, Donna, David, Louise, Nicole, Michael, Jacinta, Daniel, and Virginia, thank you for everything you have contributed to my life. It is because of you that I have such a strong sense of family. When I look back on our times growing up together, two thoughts always come to my mind. The first thought is that if you do not make sure you are heard at the dinner table then no-one will listen; and my second thought is that at any given point in time you may be fighting with one of your siblings; however, you always have several others to play with. I would also like to thank my lifelong mates. I would especially like to thank Ash, Dave, Nick, Matt and DG. We have been good mates for more than 25 years and we have helped and supported each other for that time. I want to thank each of you for your friendship. I would also like to thank Father David Catterall, my friend and parish priest at St Mary MacKillop Catholic Parish, Oran Park.

Even though I was raised a Catholic, attended Catholic schools, attended Mass every Sunday—or almost every Sunday—and prayed the rosary countless times with my father, these were all done because I was asked or told to. Similar to our parents, Amy and I wanted to raise our girls as Catholics. However, it was not until we took the girls to mass with Father David that I felt I was attending mass not only for our kids, but for me as well. Father David, your contemporary style is engaging and our parish is testament to this. Thank you for engaging me and my family and for restoring my faith.

I now thank my campaign team. The campaign team consisted of Teresa Fedeli, Debby Dewbery, Diana Zammit and David Tricca. Your individual campaign experience, knowledge, and skills in your own specialised areas is greatly appreciated. Without each of you I do not think I would be here today. Thank you. I also thank all volunteers who helped during the election campaign and on election day. Whether you volunteered by putting a poster in your front yard, doorknocking, letterboxing, attending street stalls, assisting with phone canvassing, pre-poll, setting up booths, working on a booth or in any other way, I sincerely thank you for taking the time to help me get elected. I will not name you all; however, I am sure each of you know exactly who you are. I am grateful for your help. I say a special thanks to Christian Martinazzo, Julia Kokic, Rebekah Cromie and Romel Tallow, who each volunteered countless hours during the campaign and on election day, supporting me. I am extremely grateful for everything that you have done.

I now thank my predecessor. Thank you Chris for stepping down. Chris believes that he belongs to a rare and distinguished club. That is a club of members of Parliament who stood down on their own terms. Seriously, on behalf of the people of Camden, I thank you for your 17 years of service, first on council and, up until recently, State Parliament. Personally, I thank you Chris for your continuing advice—whether I wanted it or not. Chris, you should be proud of what you have achieved during your time in council and Parliament and I wish you the very best in your future endeavours.

I now thank the people of Camden who put their trust in me and elected me to be their representative in this House. I commit to the people of Camden that every decision I make as the member of Camden I will make with the people of Camden at the forefront of my mind. I pledge that I will work hard to achieve the priorities I campaigned on and will humbly serve the people of Camden. To reiterate, as the elected member for Camden, my priorities are preserving the history, heritage and natural beauty of Camden, building new schools, investing in local roads, easing the cost of living and creating more local and diverse jobs. In conclusion, as part of this Government, I will use my core values of honesty, diligence and compassion to serve the people of Camden. I will fight hard to deliver the local infrastructure and services needed to make Camden an even better place to live, work and raise a family.

Members stood in their places and applauded.