

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The Hon. ROD ROBERTS (17:32): From the outset let me say with a great deal of humility how honoured I am and what an intense pride I feel standing here this evening. A few short weeks ago I, along with my fellow newbies in the class of 2019, were entertained by a former longstanding member of this House, the Hon. Michael Egan. One of the many gems from Mr Egan was, "Don't say something in 30 minutes that you could say in 15 minutes. Your fellow members will appreciate it." On this occasion—and on this occasion only—I am taking his advice and keeping this speech succinct.

I take the opportunity in this, my inaugural speech in this House, to acknowledge the assistance and opportunities I have been provided with that enable me to stand before you today. Firstly, my wife and life partner, Lynette, has been a stable and steady rock for me and is always willing to let me pursue my goals and ambitions. For that I thank you. Our son, Cameron, is the joy of our lives and his own achievements, particularly in the sporting arena, have made us very proud parents. To our party founder and Federal leader, Senator Pauline Hanson: I thank you for providing me with the opportunity to have represented our party at the recent State election. You placed a great deal of faith in me and I trust that I have not, and will not, let you down.

To my colleague in the House, the Hon. Mark Latham: I owe you a debt of gratitude for the hard work, experience and heavy lifting you did during the campaign. It was those efforts of yours that raised our party to the position that we find ourselves in today. So to you, Mark, a public thank you and an acknowledgement of your vital contribution. To our New South Wales party executives, in particular Mick Jackson, Amit Batish and Kate McCulloch: thank you for your behind-the-scenes efforts in coordinating and assisting our campaign. To our other candidates and volunteer workers who manned polling booths and pre-poll booths, handed out flyers at train stations and made other valuable contributions, I say thank you.

Lastly, to our supporters and those that voted for us: I sincerely thank you and pledge to continue to advocate for our election policies that are based on common sense and practical approaches. I also acknowledge some members of this Chamber: Mr Justin Field, with whom I have shared a few cups of coffee; the Hon. Niall Blair; the Hon. Lou Amato; the Hon. Scott Farlow; and the Hon. Matthew Mason-Cox, who took the time to sit with me and offer friendship and advice. The Hon. Greg Donnelly has offered to provide me with his sage advice as well. Thank you, Greg. To all those gentlemen, I say thank you.

On the day I first set foot in this historic Chamber, I was asked: What is your inaugural speech going to be about? To be honest, I was at a complete loss. I know traditionally it is an opportunity to convey to others an insight into my past life and what has fashioned me into the character that I am today. However, I believe my fellow members do not need, nor want, to sit and listen to the trials and tribulations in the life of Rod Roberts. There is a loud call from outside this Chamber and particularly from outside this building that politicians are too self-absorbed and self-centred, that they would rather speak about themselves and that they are not interested in the community. This is definitely not a criticism of or reflection upon those that have spoken before me, but I have chosen to take a different course. It was a chance meeting with two young, bright and intelligent students on the front stairs of this building on Thursday 9 May that chose for me what I would like my address to be about.

Those two young leaders of tomorrow, Ella and Stephen, are the school captains of the Endeavour Sports High, which is situated at Caringbah in Sydney. By the way, that school was awarded the Australian Public School of the Year Award for 2018. Ella and Stephen were here as part of the School Leadership Program along with a number of other students from various schools. I am sure members are aware of that program. As this House was not sitting on that day, the young people were afforded the opportunity of watching proceedings in what we refer to in this Chamber as the other place, the Legislative Assembly. It was after this, during their lunch break, that I had this chance meeting with them both. I asked, "How did you enjoy your time watching the proceedings?" Unfortunately, I was left dismayed, disappointed and—to be quite frank—embarrassed by their answer.

They said, "We have been taught from kindergarten to show respect to one another and to listen when others are speaking. We did not see that here today." They could not believe the antics, the disrespect and the uncivil behaviour that they witnessed. They further said that they would not be allowed to behave like that at school. Those young future leaders of tomorrow have left this building disillusioned as to the state of politics and, in particular, the behaviour of politicians in New South Wales. Election to public office is a privilege and it carries with it a great weight of responsibility. The citizens of New South Wales expect, demand and, of course, deserve representation of the highest calibre. I believe we need to be reminded of the definition of a politician. That definition is one "who is responsible for making citizens' voices, opinions and perspectives present in the public policymaking process".

Members of this Parliament have been entrusted with the grave responsibility of providing effective and enlightened leadership of this State. That trust has come from the community at large. Recently I received communication from the Most Reverend Anthony Fisher, Catholic Archbishop of Sydney, congratulating me on my election to Parliament. In it he provided a quote from the *Bible*. It is from Luke 12:48 and says, inter alia, "And from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked." I do not come from nirvana, nor do not believe in utopia, and I do not believe that members of this Chamber should sit in a circle on the floor, hold hands and sing *Kumbaya*. This is the venue for the contest of ideas and ideals. Therefore, I do, as do we all, expect this House to engage in rigorous and robust debate.

In life, the varying of opinion is normal. In this Chamber, it is expected. That variance, in turn, can lead to frustration and disagreement. However, it is all part of the democratic process. The Westminster system of government has led to an adversarial approach, one where sides advocate their parties' policies and stance and attempt to persuade others to agree to their position. That is the nature of our role. This adversarial system, though, is not an excuse for ill-tempered and improper behaviour. It is not an excuse for conduct unbecoming of such a position of responsibility. The people of New South Wales demand and expect the appropriate level of behaviour from their elected representatives.

Through the two recent election campaigns it has become obvious that amongst members of the public there is a great deal of mistrust of politicians. This mistrust leads to a lack of confidence and faith in the political system and in those they have elected to represent them. This perception is fuelled by the display that the likes of Ella, Stephen and their fellow students witnessed. I believe it is incumbent upon all of us, in this the Fifty-Seventh Parliament, to change that view and perception. Whilst we will—and should—at all times passionately state and defend our position in debates, there remains no excuse for, or tolerance of, the degrading of others and of not displaying common courtesy. We are expected at all times—whilst vigorously outlining our opinions—to act with decorum.

Whilst on the subject of decorum and courteous behaviour, I acknowledge and thank the parliamentary staff from the Clerk's office, the library and members' entitlements. In fact, all those with whom I have had dealings have been so professional and helped to guide me through the maze that is this Parliament and its operation. That leads me to other questions I have been asked, which are: What do you want to achieve whilst you are in Parliament? What will be your legacy? I am not naive or egotistical enough to believe that I alone can change anything. However, what I do know is that all of us here, working together as a cohesive unit, can achieve many great outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

One area that I would like to focus attention on, and call upon all members in this House to support, is water security. I believe no-one in this House could be satisfied with the current state of our river systems and, therefore, our water supply. Water is intrinsic to life. It is a necessity to human life in so many ways. There are some clever and talented members in this Chamber. However, I know that even with our combined efforts we cannot change climatic events such as the drought we are experiencing at present. I think the Hon. Niall Blair touched upon that earlier today. But we are capable of putting in place mechanisms to harvest and capture more rainwater and, once captured, to store and manage the allocation of that commodity in a way that realises how precious it is.

In the early 1900s, way before the term "climate change" was thought up, Dorothea Mackellar in her iconic poem *My Country* wrote of droughts and flooding rains. Our country, and thereby New

South Wales, is a land of extreme climatic variability and a land that can be harsh at times. It has always been this way and will always be this way. Notwithstanding the unpredictability of our weather patterns, surely there is commonality within this Chamber to find better outcomes for our constituents. Water security, or the lack thereof, is imperative in helping to secure our long-term economic prosperity. The security, availability and, most importantly, affordability of water is absolutely necessary for agricultural production. It boosts regional population, employment, wealth and—of vital importance to us all—food security, whether it be animal- or plant-based.

We cannot keep taking more water from rural New South Wales without having a subsequent impact on food production and the surrounding communities. The viability of many towns is currently under threat. So too are jobs in regional processing and service industries. If we wish to maintain and hopefully grow our irrigated agriculture sector, we must increase storage capacity. There is no question that the current drought that we are enduring has shown that we have inadequate water storage. Irrigated agriculture has stopped in its tracks. If Australia is to become the food bowl of Asia, and if New South Wales wants to take advantage of the opportunities, we must have more water storage.

Many end users are competing for their share of the limited resource that is water—from agricultural, urban and industrial areas. Of course, there are also the necessary environmental flows. It is my understanding that the last dam built in New South Wales was Split Rock Dam near Tamworth. That was in 1987, over 30 years ago. In those 30 years the population of New South Wales has increased by 45 per cent. Now is the time for a holistic and integrated approach to the capture, diversion and storage of water. It is time to examine the augmentation of our existing infrastructure. It is time to ensure that best management and allocation practices are in place. It is time to guarantee that the systems in place are sustainable and efficient. It is also time to ensure that all practices in place are environmentally sound. As leaders we are encumbered with the task of delivering solutions in this area for the people of New South Wales.

As I cast my eyes around this Chamber, I see various political parties representing a diverse range of people with varying views and beliefs. But if I may, I will highlight a degree of commonality in this area. I look to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. They get it. They are heavily invested in finding a solution. In the last election they won two seats straight off the back of the water issue, being Barwon and Murray. If they want to retain those seats, and perhaps win more, they need to work to find a solution. I say to my friends here from the Liberal-Nationals Coalition, you lost those two seats to the Shooters, Fishers and Farmers Party. I am sure you want to win them back and also shore up support in other regional and rural locations. To do that you will have to work to find a solution.

To the members of the Labor Party, the political arm of the trade union movement, you purport to represent working families. Let me tell you: Jobs in regional and rural New South Wales are drying up as quick as the rivers—not just jobs directly in agriculture but also jobs in service and support industries such as transport, processing and manufacturing. Then there is the flow-on effect into retailing in small towns. Apart from rural folk, what about the working families in the city areas? With the decrease in productivity in the farming sector will come the inevitable rise of prices for produce. How will families be able to afford fresh fruit and vegetables to put on the dinner table? The Hon. Peter Primrose summed it up perfectly in his private member's statement in this Chamber last week when he said, "When farming is bad, everything is bad". The Hon. Mick Veitch, a former shearer from rural New South Wales, would have an affinity with rural people and surely an understanding of the impact the current situation is having. Need I remind you that the slogan for your branding of Country Labor is "Standing up for the country"?

To the Independent in the House, Mr Justin Field, and to the members of The Greens, who champion the cause of the environment: You would have noticed how I have talked about the importance of environmental flows and sustainable practices so you, too, have a vested interest in solving this dilemma. To the Hon. Emma Hurst and the Hon. Mark Pearson of the Animal Justice Party: Whilst you still have a lot of convincing to do to get me to forgo my steak or—with the arrival of winter—lamb shanks, I understand your passion and desire to encourage us to eat a plant-based diet; however, no rain equals no grain. If your goals are to be achieved you will need to ensure the reliability of the irrigation sector. Therefore, you need to get behind this.

To Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile, with all due respect, you have been in this Chamber a very long time. You have probably heard the discussion about water ad nauseam. You have seen this can kicked down the road many a time. Now is the time to fix it. I implore you to be involved. Your assistance is required. That leaves only One Nation—Mark and I. We are clearly concerned enough for me to be speaking about it this evening. We get it. Prior to the election the Hon. Mark Latham and I toured the southern parts of this State—Mark toured around Leeton and Moama and I toured around Griffith and Deniliquin. We saw the effects firsthand. We listened to the farmers' desperate and impassioned pleas. We made it one of our election policies and we want to work towards that promise.

We all have an interest, desire and motive to see positive changes and strategies implemented. The time has come for innovative leadership and visionary government policy for far greater harnessing, storage and allocation of our precious water resources. That vision may require the building of massive infrastructure. Some will say, "What will that cost?" I say, "What is the cost if we do nothing?" The same vision and leadership that was shown for the Sydney underground rail network in the 1920s, the Sydney Harbour Bridge and the tunnel under Sydney Harbour—not to mention the might of the Snowy Mountains scheme—is needed today. I am sure all of those projects had many detractors—those who scoffed and said it could not be done or was too expensive. I do not think that they are valid arguments. Finding a workable, sustainable and timely solution to the crisis we find ourselves in will enable and support the continued economic growth and prosperity of New South Wales. Remember: What is good for the people of New South Wales is surely good for us. Thank you.