



Dr Michael Holland

Inaugural Speech

Extracted from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 29 March 2022

Dr MICHAEL HOLLAND (Bega) (15:25): Thank you, Mr Speaker. Walawaani njindiwan, a Dhurga greeting. I acknowledge the First Nations of the State of New South Wales. I acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation on whose land we assemble today. I show my respect to their Elders, past, present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today. I acknowledge the peoples of the Yuin nation, who are the traditional owners of the Bega electorate, which I now represent. Daily I acknowledge this and my personal relationship with God and my community. Some 800 metres from here, the Gadigal people made their first contact with Europeans. Sadly, the Indigenous owners of the land were soon decimated by disease from overseas. Now our State shares a similar sadness and I offer my condolences to those who have lost their loved ones or suffered disease during our current pandemic. I thank my health colleagues who have worked tirelessly to provide health care to the people of our State during this crisis.

The First Nations peoples were from that time dispossessed of their land which they had inhabited for tens of millennia. It has been said that forgetfulness is essential in the creation of a nation. That is not the case. Remembrance is essential for the creation of a State. Without remembrance of the true history of our State, we will not reach genuine reconciliation with our Indigenous peoples. On being endorsed as the New South Wales Labor candidate for Bega, I informed the Indigenous peoples of the Bega electorate that my first act would be my commitment to their needs. My Indigenous neighbours continue to suffer the inequalities of health outcomes, employment, education and housing. They can and will solve these problems through self-determination. In the future, the Aboriginal flag will fly on the Sydney Harbour Bridge, which is built on Moruya granite from my home, the land of the Walbanja people. Under this standard, our Parliament must fulfil its responsibility to close the gap of equality with which the Indigenous peoples of our State still live.

It is of note historically that this new member of the Legislative Assembly, a doctor, gives his inaugural speech in the old Rum Hospital. I am not the first. D'Arcy Wentworth was an Irish surgeon and paying passenger to the new colony of New South Wales and served under seven governors of the colony. I acknowledge my medical colleague Dr Joe McGirr, the member for Wagga Wagga, who shares a proud history with this Parliament, and previous medical practitioners who have added their lived experience to the service of government. Why does a doctor stand for public office? Surely, the path to political representation is a course from student politics, legal qualification or local government experience. The health of a State does not only rely on doctors, nurses, midwives and allied health workers. It is not only defined by buildings, bed numbers and procedures. Health is influenced by social determinants. It is determined by secure housing, good education, reliable employment and a safe environment for our future generations.

These determinants are defined within New South Wales Labor principles, and these are the principles with which I have aligned. These principles and the principles of Medicare—universality, equity and choice—which I witnessed develop, should define the provision of health services in New South Wales. In particular, it is necessary for these principles to be extended to the areas of greatest need, which are the rural areas of New

South Wales. Health remains the primary concern of the people of the Bega electorate and was equally the catalyst for my decision to stand to represent them and the people of New South Wales. It is the reason why a grassroots movement in the Eurobodalla has campaigned, lobbied and advocated for a new level 4 regional hospital. This and the improvement of health care services in the Bega Valley are commitments to which I pledge during my time in political office.

The four pillars of medical ethics are: beneficence—the principle of doing good; non-maleficence—the principle of firstly doing no harm, "primum non nocere"; autonomy—the right of competent adults to make informed decisions about their medical care; and justice—the compatibility with the law and patient's rights. Most importantly, is it fair and balanced? I was warned to tread carefully with political and government ethics. But I ask: Should these four principles not be the basis of good government? Government exists for achieving the greatest good, the least harm and providing justice for the people of our State, respecting their democratic autonomy. As such, it is the ethical responsibility of the members of this Legislative Assembly to follow these principles. I thank the Speaker and the representatives of the Department of the Legislative Assembly, the members of both major parties and Independent members whom I have met during my orientation and over the past week. They have given me the reassurance and faith that this is the true nature of our parliamentary and democratic process.

One thing that my father left me was a copy of Rudyard Kipling's *If*, the classic Victorian era expression of stoicism. There is nothing wrong with a little bit of stoicism; it is part of the Australian nature. It is more than bearing your troubles without complaint; stoicism has the virtues of courage, moderation, justice and wisdom. That is how the Bega electorate has survived the physical losses and mental impacts of natural disaster. The Eurobodalla and Bega communities have focused on what they can control. Communities and individuals led, and continue to lead, by example. They have taken action where they can and they have practised resilience. The 250 kilometres of Princes Highway from Durras to the Victorian border connects towns and villages who share the same challenges and happiness. But, like families, they have their individual difficulties and, therefore, individual solutions. Our community triples in size when we welcome visitors from across the State, boosting our economy but stretching the resources of our health system.

Our community has suffered greatly over the past two years. It has been struck by a bushfire disaster of historic proportions, floods and the impact of the COVID pandemic—disasters which have recently been shared by the rest of our State. It is a proud community which has chosen to be represented for the first time by a Labor representative. It is a diverse community blessed by natural beauty and capable, resilient people. It has strong Indigenous communities, hardworking primary industry workers, dedicated healthcare workers, skilled teachers and resourceful business owners. But two years is a long time. It is time for our community to rebuild with the support of the New South Wales Government. The greatest need should determine policy and action. Our homes and businesses need to be rebuilt. Our environment needs to be protected. For our sake, for the sake of our State and for the sake of our future generations, climate change needs to be controlled.

The motto of my professional college is "ab umbris ad lumina vitae"—from the shadows to the light of life. It refers to the wonder of birth and our professional responsibility to the health care of women, their children and their families. It has been my career for the past 40 years. My advocacy for women's health is not stopped by my entering Parliament. Women's health care extends from before birth to the end of life. It requires comprehensive physical and mental health services, which are provided to the areas and individuals of greatest need. Women's health throughout life requires equality of reproductive, medical, surgical and mental health services across New South Wales, particularly to rural regions, including the Bega electorate.

Perinatal care particularly is the generational link that determines the development of our future individuals and consequently our society. This includes the provision of good preconception care, prenatal diagnostic services and comprehensive antenatal and intrapartum care from a variety of providers, from midwives and general practitioners to specialist obstetricians. It specifically requires comprehensive prenatal and postnatal mental health services. It requires the provision of early parenting services such as Tresillian Family Care services. These are deficient in many of our rural communities, including the Bega electorate. These services are a legislative and ethical responsibility of the New South Wales Government for which I will continue to advocate. As a white male, I can no more speak for women than I can for Indigenous peoples, but I can attest to my lifelong commitment to justice for women's health and Indigenous health care. As the member for Bega, it is time to bring our community from the shadows to the light of universal and equitable health care, to the light of safe and secure housing, to the light of the best education, to the light of reliable employment and to the light of a protected and preserved environment.

Traditionally, one's inaugural speech contains some biographical content. I have had a privileged life. All newcomers to our State come here for a better life. My maternal great-great-grandfather boarded a ship from Hamburg to seek a better life in New South Wales. He settled as a shepherd in the New England region. I was the youngest of three children born in the postwar baby boom. My father was an ex-serviceman who served in New Guinea and who represented his country in Rugby League. For my first five years, I lived above the historic and appropriately named Three Swallows Hotel in Bankstown, where my parents managed the pub. Our family then moved to Brighton-Le-Sands, a Sydney suburb that was multicultural before the word existed. Our Chinese-Vietnamese next-door neighbours owned the Orient Chinese restaurant in Rockdale, and I experienced the old-time Haymarket with their son, my friend. We had Maltese, Yugoslav and English neighbours. We also had the president and secretary of the then Miners Federation of New South Wales thrown in for some flavour of Labor.

Unfortunately, as a consequence of the traumatic experience of war and postwar male culture, I witnessed at a young age the effects of alcohol abuse and domestic violence on my family. This had a lasting effect on my family and for a while I lost my way. I personally have felt the distress of depression and worse. The effect was worse on my late brother, of whom I am reminded each evening as I pass the homeless in Martin Place so close to here. I am reminded of my visits to him in the Matthew Talbot Hostel—hence my personal and professional commitment to improved drug and alcohol and mental health services, particularly in our

deficient rural communities. Our State needs to cure this disease of homelessness, which can affect any of us or our families.

I am privileged to have had the support of a strong mother with strong faith and an extended matriarchal family. I was privileged to have been protected by the reforms of family law. I am therefore committed to the safety of women and their families from the scourge of domestic violence. I am privileged to have had an excellent and supportive education at Waverley College. I am eternally grateful to be the first member of my family to attend university, thanks to the great Labor leader Gough Whitlam. I am privileged to have received my postgraduate specialist training from wonderful clinicians, who teach their knowledge and skills pro bono in our unique system of medical education. As a consequence, I am committed to the equitable opportunity of early childhood, primary, secondary and tertiary education for the people of the Bega electorate. These privileges have given me a secure income. They have allowed my family to have secure housing and the best of health care and education. They have given me the privilege to serve my community socially, professionally and now politically. It is now my responsibility to advocate for a better life for its members as my ancestors would have expected.

My political life has been short, but I have many people to acknowledge and thank. I thank the community, which has placed its trust in me to represent them. I thank the many hardworking New South Wales Labor branch members who helped to achieve this historic election result. They were joined by a fine team of Young Labor volunteers—indeed, generations of Labor members. I thank my two campaign managers, Alex Costello and Rosie Ryan, who guided me through the weeks and made sure that I was fed, watered, and rested like an old warhorse. The team of James Cullen, Chloe Smith, Ed Ovadia, Zack Solomon and Sarah Michael covered hundreds of kilometres between the Monaro and Bega by-elections. They are almost locals to us now. I will be excused for not naming all the members and shadow Ministers who gave their time generously to the by-election campaign. Many came and went without our paths crossing.

Jo Haylen, Rose Jackson and Jodie Harrison were some who witnessed the unique experience of pre-polling and medical consultation. I thank Prue Car, David Harris, Greg Warren and local lad Tim Crakanthorp for their help on specific electoral issues. Mick Veitch and Hugh McDermott gave me their most helpful counsel. The individuals whom I have met and talked to are people of the highest principles who sincerely considered my welfare as much as the result of the electoral campaign. I am honoured to join them here today. In particular, I thank Chris Minns, the Leader of the Opposition, for supporting my nomination and endorsement. Chris reminded me on the day after the election that, when we first met, I told him that my only concern was that I will win it. Chris is a great leader with a future to lead this State to greatness. In addition, there were two special individuals who volunteered weeks of their time to support the campaign, Steve Kamper and Penny Sharpe. They have been sincere mentors and resources during my campaign.

I also thank the former shadow Minister for Health, Walt Secord, who encouraged me to keep up the fight for fair healthcare services in the Bega electorate and rural New South Wales generally. Equally, I thank the current shadow Minister for Health, Ryan Park, for his continued support for our electorate. I thank two

strong women in Federal Parliament, Federal member for Gilmore Fiona Phillips and Federal member for Eden-Monaro Kristy McBain, for their advocacy for the Bega electorate and their support for me. I acknowledge the previous member for Bega, Andrew Constance, for his 19 years of service to the Bega electorate. I would like to recognise and congratulate the other newly elected members of the Legislative Assembly: Jason Yat-Sen Li, the new member for Strathfield and a new Labor member who will excel in his role; my neighbour Nichole Overall, the new Nationals member for Monaro, whose electorate shares our border, roads and health district; and Tim James, the new Liberal member for Willoughby and proud new father.

Family is first and last. My family has witnessed the service of an obstetrician's life. As a husband, father and doctor, there were only two things: my family and my profession. Now they see a local representative, father, and grandfather who has three things: my family, my profession and my constituents. My wife, Lyn, has been the woman whose first interest had been the welfare of our family and that of the women and families of the South Coast. For nearly forty years, she has been my foundation, my anchor. She is the fierce defender of our pride. Her father said to her when she married a doctor, "I suppose that you will become a Liberal now." That proud, skilled, Labor master toolmaker would be very happy to have been proven wrong. My daughters, Kate, Rosemary, Emily, Grace and Alice, are fine strong women. They have shared the problems of anxiety and depression, which increasingly trouble their generation. They now serve their communities and country in their careers and families. I know that they are proud of me, but I am prouder of them than they are of me. I have already had a generational effect on the Bega electorate. Now, as the member for Bega, I hope to serve my electorate as its political representative as well as I have served it clinically.