



Mr Tim James

Inaugural Speech

Extracted from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 22 March 2022

Mr TIM JAMES (Willoughby) (15:56): I was just 11 years old when an eye doctor told me, Mum and Dad that I would go blind. The diagnosis of retinitis pigmentosa followed eye issues and difficulties since birth. I remember the looks on my parents' faces. For months we lived with this condition and started to face a future in which I would not see. Much as we all sought to be strong, there were many quiet tears shed. I remember committing myself to making the most of what I had, to doing my best to be my best, no matter what life threw at me. This was my lifelong resolution from a young age and how I was raised. Some months later, it was confirmed, in fact, to be a misdiagnosis.

Dad and I used to jog around the block each week. The hill up Eastern Valley Way back to our place on Penshurst Street was always tough. But, when given the all clear—namely, that I was not going blind—I ran harder and faster than ever up that hill. To some degree, that is what I have done ever since. This experience 35 years ago shaped me greatly. It defined my character and outlook and continues to demand that I never take anything for granted, that I dream big and do my best and make a difference when given a chance to help those less fortunate. This personal ethos drives me every day and has guided me to this place.

To represent the people of Willoughby in Parliament is a precious opportunity, a distinct honour and a humbling responsibility. I thank the people of Willoughby for putting their trust in me. It is up to me to live up to that trust, just like my predecessor Gladys Berejiklian did. I again salute her outstanding service to Willoughby and to New South Wales. I thank Gladys for her counsel and support along the way. It is a high bar of public service that has been set in Willoughby, a standard that takes time, respect and trust. I will strive to reach it. Both Gladys and, earlier, Peter Collins, whom I am delighted to acknowledge today, served with distinction locally for two decades and rose to become Liberal leader. I thank Peter and his wife, Jennine, for their counsel and encouragement.

I briefly mention another former member for Willoughby, from 1978, Eddie Britt of the Labor Party. Eddie was a good man who served in World War II and, together with his wife, Mary, had a strong commitment to community and the elderly in particular. One further mention of a former local member: Edward "Ted" Larkin was the first Labor MP elected north of Sydney Harbour. Ted represented Willoughby from December 1913 and was an advocate, rightly, for building the Sydney Harbour Bridge. He had earlier played for the Wallabies, before becoming a rugby league pioneer. I think he would be with me today in support of the North Sydney Bears' bid to return to the NRL. Within 10 days of the outbreak of the Great War, he signed up. Ted was killed in action on the first day of the Gallipoli campaign, in April 1915. There is a tablet right here in this Chamber in commemoration of him and George Braund, the other serving member who fought and died for us. I salute their sacrifice.

It gives me pride to mention members beyond my own party. I believe we must all strive to put people and community first, not politics nor partisanship, for our purpose here should be the greater good and

the higher goal of public service. I will put a photo of Ted Larkin in my electorate office as a reminder that everyone is welcome and we all play a part in building our community. As my old boss John Howard often said, what unites us as Australians is stronger and more enduring than what divides us. That is the approach I will take as the member for Willoughby.

Willoughby was home to the Cammeraygal people for thousands of years. It was a strong and sizeable clan, benefitting from the best of lands and fishing grounds. I honour their legacy and their Elders. The Willoughby electorate today is welcoming, warm and hospitable to people from all around the world. In the early days of settlement, though, it was seen to be inhospitable. Distance and topography held it back yet helped to preserve its precious natural environment. In those days, it was individual initiative and community spirit that led to Willoughby's development. People of enterprise and courage took risks and worked hard to build businesses and lives locally. Willoughby was the first council proclaimed on the North Shore, in 1865. Its first meetings took place in a slab hut behind a cottage on Peshurst Street, the street on which I grew up 110 years later.

The train line came in 1880 and opened up the area, most particularly around Chatswood. Around that time, my great-great-grandparents George and Maria James moved to Crows Nest. George served on the founding committee of the Royal North Shore Hospital and was present when the hospital's foundation stone was laid by Sir Henry Parkes, in 1887. Parkes, the father of Federation and a former State Premier, was then local member. His local connection warrants greater recognition and reinforces the high bar I spoke of earlier.

Enterprise, hard work and community spirit still define Willoughby today. Local people and community make our area strong, vibrant and successful. Willoughby is a centre of education, featuring strong public and independent schools. It is naturally beautiful, bounded by Middle Harbour on one side and the Lane Cove River on the other. Local people are passionate about our local environment and the effects of global environment issues too, likewise our rich architectural heritage, from Federation homes to Californian bungalows, each of which I was fortunate to grow up in, and the Burley Griffin influence in Castlecrag. Willoughby has a bustling commercial and retail centre in Chatswood. That is where I worked my first job, in 1992, for Grace Bros. There are many local shopping strips and villages locally, mostly small and family businesses, which are the engine room of our economy. I will be a strong voice for small business.

The Willoughby community is all the richer for its cultural diversity and vibrancy. About 20 per cent of the electorate has Chinese heritage. We have a large and proud Armenian community. Likewise, many people of Korean, Nepalese, Japanese and Indian background call Willoughby home, along with earlier waves of European migrants. There is a strong community tradition in Willoughby, which sustains us all. Church and faith communities, RSL clubs and veterans' groups, sporting and registered clubs, progress associations and service organisations, chambers of commerce, musical societies and arts centres, charities, school groups and many more—these, together with the most important part of any community, the family, are the little platoons that Burke championed, for they anchor us as individuals and as a society. Willoughby's are among the finest

little platoons imaginable. I will represent them very strongly. Willoughby locals are thoughtful and respectful. We expect the highest levels of accountability over public money. We volunteer, lead and care. We are grateful for what we have, while striving and working hard for more. Those local values reflect my character and values and naturally align with our Liberal values. I will give voice to those values and advance them at every step.

While much has been done by my predecessors locally, there is more to do. I want Willoughby to be leading New South Wales, to be our best and to have the best. My vision for Willoughby includes building two new schools in Chatswood and Gore Hill, and expanding current schools; growing Royal North Shore Hospital and ensuring the suitable use of its site; investing in new road and traffic initiatives to tackle congestion; listening and acting on the tunnel to uphold Willoughby's interests; improving and adding to green space and parklands to meet environmental and sporting needs; lifting public transport, including completing the metro and fighting to restore local bus services; and ensuring that local icons like the Haven Amphitheatre and Northbridge Baths are enjoyed for generations to come. I put on record that I heed the messages of the by-election campaign. I will listen, consult and take account of local concerns about development, infrastructure and environment—noting all points of view—and work across the community and Parliament towards solutions.

Like much of New South Wales, Willoughby has been held back by COVID. During the campaign I heard from many people about its effects on them, their family, businesses and community. I will be a strong voice for recovery, reopening and, I hope, never returning to lockdowns. There are many lessons from this COVID period that warrant careful reflection and action. I acknowledge the extraordinary contributions of local frontline workers during this difficult time. The challenges of the past two years, though, are different to those faced by earlier generations. I think of my great-grandfather Harry of Northbridge and my grandfather Jack of Naremburn. Both had sons whom they met after three years overseas at war. They barely spoke of the horrors of war. They lost loved ones and mates. Together with their wives, Laura and Marjorie, they gave up so much, and yet they achieved so much on their return, building families, homes and businesses locally. Many in Willoughby would share such a history, for that is how our community was built. Whenever life gets tough, I think of them—of their service, sacrifice, enterprise, hard work, and love of country and family—and likewise of my maternal family who forged a similar path in America and a very proud heritage for me. Those values guide me and give us hope and strength. It was these values and the need to tackle the threat of socialism that led to the formation of the Liberal Party in 1944.

I joined my party in 1993, aged 17, identifying with its core values of freedom, enterprise and individual empowerment, and believing we deserved better than "the recession we had to have". My local branch, Willoughby Young Liberals, met in the Crows Nest Club and made me welcome. I cut my campaigning teeth in the 1996 Federal election. I would go doorknocking on a Sunday morning with my local Liberal candidate, Joe Hockey. I will do so again with and for Trent Zimmerman, our member for North Sydney, in coming weeks. The Coalition's slogan in that 1996 campaign was compelling: "for all of us". Its message of bringing us together, lifting us up and seeing us confident, strong and proud as a people remains the standard today. I believed then, and I still do, that the politics of division and special interests diminishes us all. Today we see a lot of negative, lowest-common-denominator identity politics that judges people on attributes, not

character. It demeans us all and fails a fundamental principle: that every person is of equal dignity and worth, and should be afforded equal opportunity and freedom to be their best. This is at the core of my political belief and why I am a Liberal.

I inherently reject the principle—too often favoured by those opposite—of equality of outcome, for it counters and crushes the human spirit. We all have it within us, and we will live our potential when we are "to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield", as Menzies made out in his "The Forgotten People" address. This is the Liberal spirit that sparks my character. How fortunate Australia was to have the strength, courage and leadership of Prime Minister Howard and a bright, young Joe Hockey as part of his team. My six years working in their offices was the best schooling in public life, and I thank them. Anthony Roberts just happened to be the very first person I met during my earliest campaign experience in 1993. It was sheer and fortuitous coincidence. Little did I know that we would work together, would each become UTS Union president and would, indeed, become colleagues today. I thank him deeply for nearly three decades of support and friendship.

I was a proud member of the NSW Young Liberal movement for over a decade and, then and now, the Liberal Party, to which I owe so much. I acknowledge party president the Hon. Philip Ruddock, who is with us here today. Along the way, volunteering and community has been at my core. We get back even more when we give to community. I was proud to serve my local progress association in Artarmon in my early twenties. I thank its then president, John Peacock, for his continuing contribution. Menzies said that the first duty of government is to create the conditions for enterprise to flourish. It is business, enterprise and individuals that employ people, create wealth and grow our economy, not government. We need policymakers who will understand and uphold that duty. I came to know this in my full-time roles with KPMG, Allens, Pfizer and Johnson & Johnson, among others.

I believe in the power of education. I acknowledge those who have taught me along the way across many degrees, most recently my Master of Business Administration. In particular, I wish to thank Professor David Barker for his inspirational teaching during my time at UTS. I thank all those at Life Education whom I served for 10 years as a volunteer director. The education and health of our children is so vital. Good policy arises out of coherent and long-term principles, and listening. That is at the core of the Menzies Research Centre [MRC], where I recently worked. I thank Nick Cater, the MRC team and board. The art of researching, developing, and implementing policy is one all governments can improve upon. We should not expect the public service to lead nor dictate policy. It is so essential that we run good policy processes if we are to achieve good policy outcomes. I love my home State of New South Wales. I am hopeful and driven for our future. Australia needs New South Wales to lead.

I mention three areas for policy leadership that I will champion. The first is housing affordability. Home ownership is a path to security and grounds us in community. Home is a place to grow, belong and shelter from life's storms. Yet home ownership is out of reach for too many today. The median house price in Willoughby is now \$3.4 million. It is \$1.2 million for an apartment. The mobility gap between home owners and renters in Australia is the highest among advanced economies. Unless we address that, our communities will turn into

ever-moving tribes of nomads. There is no shortage of land in New South Wales, and our State property taxes are simply punitive and problematic. Today I call for stamp duty for first home buyers to be removed so that young people can get a start in real estate. I fear that too many will be left behind otherwise. Willoughby's beauty, proximity and community mean that the area will always be desirable and prices will reflect that. But we must also be aspirational and accommodating across generations. It must be the financial goal of the next five years that we remove stamp duty for first home buyers up to a reasonable ceiling. My proposal is for the Productivity Commission to inquire and tackle this essential need.

The second area for policy leadership is education. As a parent, I have a deep interest in education. "Here we deal with the future," Menzies said of schools. Our education system must first teach the basics well and ensure that every child in New South Wales can read and write. We need a system in which timeless core values are taught, including respect and resilience, and where the classroom is free from politics. We need a system in which our global rankings are rising and meeting today's competitive challenges. The third area is our Federation. We must take action for a more clear and functional Federation, including on taxation. I recall the original tax reform plans of 20 years ago, while working for Mr Howard. Only half of them were delivered at the time. It is now time to revisit this and address the States' inefficient tax base. State Governments should be rewarded for getting budgets in the black and delivering on productivity. Premier Perrottet's recent call for action on healthcare reform for our Federation was courageous and correct. In addition to those big issues, I am passionate about care for the vulnerable and voiceless, the mental health issues plaguing our young, respect for the rule of law and the strength of our democracy. I feel a particular duty to support those who are vision impaired.

There is much to do. None of this can be possible without the support of generous people. I thank Chris Stone and his team at Liberal Party headquarters for their expertise and hard work during the by-election. Likewise, I thank the Premier, Ministers and members who came to Willoughby and contributed to the campaign. I particularly recognise Alister Henskens for his very generous commitment. I record my deep thanks to Victor Kerr, Willoughby SEC president, and every member of the Liberal Party family, both locally and beyond, who gave time and energy to our by-election campaign. There are many people who have been on a political journey with me for a long time now. There is a small group who creatively call themselves "Team Tim", and for years we have met and made sacrifices together. I cannot thank them enough—they know who they are. To my many bosses, colleagues, mentors, advisers and many friends from so many walks of life—thank you all.

Nothing means more to me than family. As I now know, a parent's love knows no bounds. My parents, Bruce and Trish, are my longest supporters. I could not have more loving, generous nor wonderful parents and role models. Likewise, my big sister Susan, her husband Keith, my niece and nephews—I love you all, dearly. To my extended family on both sides of the Pacific—aunts, uncles and cousins, as well as my mother-in-law, sisters-in-law and brother-in-law—thank you all. I particularly want to mention my mother-in-law, Lesley, a strong and capable woman who has endured a great deal and does so much for us and our community. She is simply incredible. Six days after the by-election, Nikki and I welcomed baby Xavier to our family—timing is everything, they say. Together with our daughters, Chloe and Madeleine, we could not be happier, albeit a bit

busy. My wife and children are my inspiration every day. I am so fortunate to have a beautiful and healthy family. I thank them for their never-ending love and support. And I thank God for this and my other blessings in life. Nikki is the most wonderful partner in life, love and community. She makes me better and I am ever grateful for her.

As a young child, I played in the metal rocket structure in Muston Park, just down Penshurst Street. We always called it "the rocket park", and I loved it, as do my kids today. For a while it seemed I may not actually see the stars I sought to reach from that rocket. Today, thankfully, I see clearly and now have the opportunity to pursue a big vision for Willoughby and New South Wales. I look ahead, and aspire to this Theodore Roosevelt quote: I will "keep my eyes on the stars and my feet on the ground". I will take nothing for granted, dream big, and always give my best for Willoughby and New South Wales. Thank you very much.