



INAUGURAL SPEECHES

The PRESIDENT: I welcome into my gallery the family and friends of the Hon. Sarah Kaine, in particular her mother and father, Helen and Tony Kaine, and her husband and children.

The Hon. SARAH KAINE (18:01): I begin by recognising the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their Elders both past and present. I also acknowledge the damage to the people, country, language and culture of those traditional owners and other Aboriginal people in New South Wales, inflicted through the exercise of powers by this institution and others controlled by the State. I commit to learning more about Aboriginal history and culture, and about how my actions in this place can contribute to processes of recognition, representation and healing. It is a great honour to join the very privileged group of people who have had the opportunity to serve in this position on behalf of the people of New South Wales. It is of particular pride for me today, with my family here, to be part of a Labor Government.

It has been a great experience so far—interesting, but great—due to the staff at Parliament House, who have graciously assisted in settling me in to this place over the past few weeks. I thank them. I particularly thank Simon and Tony, the sound guys—who I think have been replaced—for letting me sneak in to practise this morning. If you could pass on my thanks to them, that would be great. I sincerely congratulate the other members elected to the Legislative Council in March and, in particular, the other women. Regardless of political affiliation, I am genuinely pleased that you are here and I look forward to the experienced perspectives you will bring.

I am very proud that this election saw an evenly balanced Labor ticket of men and women because, despite the progress we have made, this is never a given. I acknowledge the tireless work of Labor women elected to this Chamber before me, to whom we owe much credit for this result, such as ex-presidents Meredith Burgmann and Amanda Fazio and many others, including our current leader, Penny Sharpe. While we are nearly at 50 per cent, we haven't reached the symbolic threshold yet. Progress towards equal representation has not been linear. It was this Chamber that delayed the franchise for women longer than necessary in New South Wales. On 28 November 1900, almost a full decade after the Womanhood Suffrage League was founded in New South Wales, in voting against the Women's Franchise Bill the Hon. Alexander Brown—and I quote from *Hansard*—remarked:

I am absolutely opposed to petticoat government in every sense. I am somewhat like Dr. Johnson, who made use of that figurative expression in regard to ladies taking part in public meetings. When he saw a lady on a platform, or in a pulpit, or outside the domestic sphere it always reminded him of a dog walking on its hind legs, and the question with him was not whether the dog performed that duty well or badly; but that it was able to perform it at all.

Not content with comparing women to dogs, Alexander Brown had some more thoughts—and he felt the need to share them—about the kind of woman who would want to vote or, indeed, even more scandalously, take part in politics. He listed the types of women who were agitating for the franchise as ladies who had probably "driven their husbands into public houses", nagging aunts—that's for my nieces and nephews—and, my personal favourite, "gushing young girls who like to make a bit of a splash and who are getting a bit long in the tooth". The vote was lost that day 22 to 19, and a second debate on the bill nearly a year later was also lost. But third time lucky. After winning the vote federally and in other jurisdictions, New South Wales women did get the vote in 1902, but they were forbidden from standing for election to the Legislative Assembly until 1918 and were not allowed admittance into this esteemed Chamber until 1926.

Thank you, Maybanke Wolstenholme; thank you, Rose Scott; thank you, Dora Montefiore, May Manning, Mary Windeyer and Louisa Lawson—the founding members of the New South Wales Womanhood Suffrage League. I would like to add to the efforts of City of Sydney councillor Linda Scott, whom I note is here tonight, in recognising civic contributions beyond our founding fathers. How about we have one less statue of Governor Macquarie and replace it with any one of these women—or, even better, all of these women? I need to make a confession: I began preparing for today based on entirely the wrong premise. Completely giving in to my inner nerd, I consulted weighty tomes of great thinkers, undertook frenzied rereading of books that had previously impressed me and, if I'm honest, bought others that remain unopened on my desk and, let's face it, will probably remain there until the next wave of imposter syndrome hits. I was searching for a way to transcend the established tropes of this genre of speech whilst respecting its conventions. I wanted to impress with my wit, my gravitas. But to carve out my difference I needed to know how others had approached it. What have they said when in this position?

I started reading the inaugural speeches of all the current representatives in this Chamber. That provoked some realisations. First of all, and rather obviously, when you come from a party as big and as old as Labor, there are many that have come before you. Much of what I wanted to reflect about my commitment to Labor values had been said in a more elegant way than I could articulate, including by my colleagues here in this Chamber. They spoke of justice, equality, protecting the rights to decent work and to organise to achieve it. They spoke of addressing the injustices to Indigenous Australians, and in his inaugural speech last night my colleague the Hon. Stephen Lawrence spoke so well about that in his contributions to the fight. They spoke about gender equity, inclusion and the defence of democratic principles.

As I continued reading beyond my party colleagues I made a second discovery: Even for those within this Chamber from whom I diverge wildly on some issues, there was some commonality. I was often touched by personal stories, moved by accounts of individual histories—support of friends, love of family—and there was also evident a common desire to make change for good. Clearly, how we each define good and the means to achieving that are quite different. But most of us share that desire, that urge, and the appropriate reverence for the responsibility we have been gifted.

Ruminating on where I would fit into this place brought me to my final discovery: that I am uncomfortable in attempting to do what I cannot avoid, which is outline the individual contribution that I seek to make here and why. I am acutely conscious that in so doing I reinforce the great myth of our time: that what matters is me, my identity and my journey. It is a myth that has permeated every part of our lives. It is fostered by technology and media that atomises us and reinforces our singular interests over our common experience. It exploits efforts to recognise and honour various aspects of identity, instead creating a grotesque competition between individuals and issues for legitimacy. Back in 2010, in his impassioned plea for a reimagined social democracy, Tony Judt wrote:

However legitimate the claims of individuals and the importance of their rights, emphasizing these carries an unavoidable cost: the decline of a shared sense of purpose.

The loss of a shared sense of purpose sees its worst manifestations economically. The mantra of individual effort, individual achievement, and opportunity and reward creates an environment of ambient neoliberalism, to adapt a phrase of Thomas Piketty's. It creates an environment that deifies the private sector and demonises the State, and labels economically progressive sentiments as radical. Just think of the response to Jim Chalmers' essay earlier this year. It is an environment that until recently has remained unchallenged.

As an academic, my main area of research focused on parts of the labour market in which the cult of individualism, as facilitated by the dismantling of or opposition to regulation, has resulted rather ironically in bad outcomes for individuals and also dire consequences for society. My PhD research was on labour management in aged care and so it did not surprise me when the royal commission noted that the general approach to aged care has "been that the market will take care of itself without the need for active management or monitoring by the Government". Nowhere do we see more starkly the societal impact of that approach than in the appalling stories of neglect of our elders and the mistreatment of those attempting to provide care. It is that misunderstanding of the role that governments should play that I have fought hard to counter through the evidence-based, peer-reviewed rigour of academic inquiry.

I am an advocate for governments using their economic weight in publicly funded supply chains. We should not have a situation in which companies that attract public funding do not adhere to accepted legal and moral standards of fairness to their workers and customers. We should not have the situation, which has recently been revealed, in which a bus company that was found to have engaged in wage theft, deliberately withholding a minimum pay increase to its staff to the tune of \$3.5 million, was awarded another contract worth \$564 million not even a year later. It is not radical, old-fashioned, anti-competitive or anti-market to demand accountability. It is rational and responsible to ensure that the public money we spend provides the services we need, in line with the laws that we make. Procurement of publicly funded goods and services should factor in the overall impact and the overall cost on our community, not just the ticketed price.

After finishing my PhD, I spent some years as an associate professor at the University of Technology Sydney. That gave me the opportunity to teach undergraduate and postgraduate students and supervise doctoral students. I am particularly proud that one of my doctoral students, Associate Professor Martijn Boersma, who is in the gallery today, has become the recognised Australian academic expert on issues related to modern slavery. Like any good doctoral supervisor, I am still trying to take the credit for that.

One research project that had a particular impact on me was a five-year study in which we followed the lived experience of Vietnamese workers who were trafficked from Vietnam, facilitated by the Vietnamese state, to work in Malaysia and Thailand. When we visited the workers, they were living in shipping containers, had had their passports confiscated and were often detained by the authorities as a result. Those among them who were trying to organise for better conditions were hounded by internationally based members of the Vietnamese police. The bravery of those workers remains an inspiration. That research, leading to a prize-winning paper, focused on the gaps in formal labour regulation and, importantly, what those gaps mean for workers.

That was a theme that I explored more deeply in my research examining the growth of the gig economy. Despite early commentaries romanticising its disruptive effect, what has been revealed over the past decade or so of the growth of gig work is again a negative societal impact. It represented and represents a headlong assault on one of our most hard-fought social safety nets: the ability of workers to earn a decent day's pay for a decent day's work. Arguably, the growth of the gig economy is the high-water mark of that ambient neoliberalism and the logical conclusion to decades-long efforts to disaggregate everything—our work, our time and our communities.

Thankfully, we can feel that atmosphere changing. We felt it during the COVID pandemic that called for a collective, united response. We felt it in the election of the Federal Labor Government last year. We felt it again on 25 March when the people of New South Wales endorsed a different direction, tired of the impacts of privatisation, the neoliberal playmate of individualism. We feel it in the moves being made to reintroduce fairness to our labour market, with progress by the Federal Labor Government to ensure workers of any status can enjoy dignity at work. That is a move that we should mirror at a State level, using whatever levers are available to us. We feel it in a move to more compassionate politics in which we hear politicians speaking with respect to the marginalised and the vulnerable, to the electorate at large, and most of the time to each other. It is a source of great pride that Labor is leading on that.

We feel it most in the voting pattern of the young and their heavy leaning towards the progressive. That group, quickly overtaking others as the majority, has made it clear that they will not tolerate selfishness masked by a thin veil of economic conservatism. There is too much at stake. They are haunted by the ghosts of a future that they see as being shadowed by prospects of cataclysmic environmental degradation, driven by corporate greed and propelled by the apathy of generations that have come before them. While we may cling to outdated theories and solutions, the young are demanding more. They require us to be open to new approaches and new points of view and experiences that take us beyond our comfort zone. They know that the big issues of our time—the climate crises and its geopolitical consequences, the exponential growth of artificial intelligence and its ethical implications, gender diversity and inclusivity, and the need to provide a society in which we all can flourish—cannot be adequately tackled by a politics that is devoid of heart and pretends that these collective challenges can be addressed through fetishising the individual.

It is not an accident that our national anthem contains the line "with courage let us all combine". Before I get any puzzled looks, it is in the second verse. By that stage we have all started humming, but it is there. That line recognises that advancements are made through collective efforts. Such efforts require resolution and commitment. Working together is not always easy, compromise is not glamorous and is open to misinterpretation. Nevertheless, it is to that type of effort that I wish to contribute. It is also the type of effort that I saw day in and day out in my most recent experience as a senior executive in the Department of Premier and Cabinet, where I worked with dedicated and capable public servants who have the important but often invisible task of keeping the machinery of government going.

People who know me well and are listening today may be a little surprised by the tone of my comments. I am not known for always adopting a conciliatory approach. I am certainly not conflict averse and love nothing better than a heated discussion. As my husband could no doubt attest, I am the queen of the cheap shot, the sharp tongue and the frustratingly fallacious argument. While I will always be a fierce advocate for the causes I hold dear, the weight of this position requires a solemnity that reaches above my more base political instincts, and I promise to keep that in mind.

I did not reach this place by sheer determination or application alone. I also stand here as a product of the support and love of my family friends and colleagues. I have been shaped by the selfless example of my parents, Tony and Helen Kaine, who arrived at a migrant hostel in Marrickville in 1974 having traversed two other continents, responsible not only for their two children—my brother and sister—but also for my maternal grandmother and my two young uncles following the premature death of my grandfather. Those early years in Australia were tough for mum and dad, despite the obvious joy of my birth in December 1974.

Dad was a public school teacher, and he got a job in the Blue Mountains where we grew up. He was soon the Teachers Federation rep with a bit of a reputation for rebellion that followed him throughout his career. His stories of confronting various principals have become family lore. In fact, I think we could probably tell them better than dad at this stage. Mum was, and still is, always there for us. She is the creator of family tradition and the provider of solace and advice, working tirelessly at home and outside of it to provide for our needs. Both of them were influenced by the best traditions of Catholic social justice, if learnt in very different parts of the world—my dad in the midlands of England and my mum in outback East Africa. They have handed that down to us. They taught me and my siblings, and now our children, that heroism is in the everyday acts, in the doing things for others when you do not feel like it, and that sacrifice engaged in with grace is never bitter but is a sacred gift. They are heroes, both.

Likewise, I have been guided by the rest of my family: my uncle, who is in the Chamber tonight after catching the red eye from Perth; my sister; my brother; siblings-in-law; nieces and nephews. They have offered unconditional love tinged with the right amount of truth-telling that only a family can provide. I was also lucky to have the input of wonderful teachers, in particular at St Ursula's College Kingsgrove where Ursuline values and feminist principles morphed into my English teachers Sister Deirdrie O'Sullivan, who we knew as Sister Dos, and Libby Denny. They were wonderful women and wonderful teachers. I have also been supported by many colleagues and good friends who continue to provide so much day-to-day encouragement, many of whom are in the Chamber tonight, and others who I know are watching from home.

My time as vice-president of the Labor Party also made its mark. During that time I actively opposed those in the party and the Parliament who were advocating for privatisation, the opposition to which I am pleased has since become a key policy commitment of NSW Labor. I am also unashamedly a product of the industrial wing of the labour movement. I began work at the Australian Workers Union [AWU] in 1995 where, as an organiser, I was exposed to the realities of workplaces that I would never otherwise have understood. I particularly recall the impact of getting to know a group of migrant women working in a commercial laundry. They were warm and welcoming and kind, despite the brutally physical work which saw them handling putrid linen on the way in and then the burning hot linen on the way out which left their hands chapped and bleeding. They generously overlooked my missteps and youthful naivety as we worked towards getting them classified to a higher grade. It was at that time at the AWU that I also met Matthew Thistlethwaite and Richard Olson, both of whom provided much appreciated support in my efforts to get here today.

A big part of my more recent union experience was as president of the NSW Division of the National Tertiary Education Union. In that role and during my time with the University of Technology Sydney branch, I was lucky enough to work with a group of people who were particularly committed to grassroots involvement and providing a robust voice of opposition to the seemingly relentless commodification of higher education and the casualisation of the workforce. The then division secretary Michael Thomson is in the Chamber tonight. We were the most unusual of running mates but a good team, although I suspect we were the bane of everyone's existence at national office. Vince Caughley is also in the Chamber. I am thrilled that you are now the secretary of the NSW Division. It will only benefit from your ideas and enthusiasm, and I look forward to working with you in this capacity. Along with the Transport Workers' Union, especially Michael and Richard, I especially thank Tony Callinan and Dan Walton, who is in the Chamber tonight, and everyone at the AWU for being so steadfast during what can only be described as some nailbiting moments. That was a bit of a Labor Party in-house joke.

I thank Bernie Smith from the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Union; Alex Claassens from the Rail, Tram, and Bus Union; and Graeme Kelly from the United Services Union for their support. I am thrilled that Alex and Graeme are in the Chamber tonight. I know better than most the sacrifices that they all make to improve the lives of their members, and I thank them and their families for that. Finally, I thank those tasked with the ongoing and relentless role of contributing to my development; my husband, Emmanuel; and my children, Liam and Lily and stepdaughter Rose. Each of you have faced incredible challenges over the past few years and each of you have tackled them and continue to tackle them with courage, maintaining your curiosity, creativity and sense of fun. I could not be more proud, and I love you.

To conclude, and in the spirit of that line in the second verse of the national anthem, "with courage let us all combine", I pledge allegiance and friendship to those within the Labor Party, union movement, community and this Chamber who place the welfare of the people of New South Wales, its workers, its vulnerable and its excluded above personal ambition and grandiosity. I pledge to work constructively with anyone in this Chamber who in good faith and with courage also work towards a fairer, more just New South Wales. I thank the President for the opportunity to address the Chamber.

Members and officers stood and applauded.