



INAUGURAL SPEECHES

The PRESIDENT: I welcome into the President's gallery this evening the family and friends of the Hon. Jacqui Munro, including Hazel Wolfenden; Bruce Munro; Sue Munro; Ben Davis; Janine Middleton, AM; former member and President of the Legislative Council the Hon. Don Harwin; and Trent Zimmerman, the former member for North Sydney. You are all most welcome.

The Hon. JACQUI MUNRO (20:00): Mr President, honourable members, treasured friends and family. I have entered this place with the circumstances of my endorsement more public than many. The circumstances were a little unorthodox, but perhaps that has always been my fate. It is so good to be here. Before the 2023 election, just 61 women had served in this place. Now our Liberal Party in the upper House contains 60 per cent women. It is an enormous honour to be elected as the New South Wales Liberal Party's first openly LGBTQI+ woman in Parliament, and its youngest in the Legislative Council. I was not selected for these attributes, and although they should be unremarkable, and while I do not like identity politics, these unchangeable parts of myself mean I can provide a new perspective in this place. As such, the milestones should not go without remark—even if it is, at your indulgence, my own remark. It is not because of the immutable attributes themselves but because these qualities have shaped the communities I am in, the experiences I have had, the challenges I have faced and the way I think about opportunity, freedom, choice and fairness. An encouragement of diversity of thought and experience is critical to good policymaking, which I, of course, hope to contribute to.

Tonight I will share some of myself—where I come from, what I believe in and what my priorities are—so that you and the people across New South Wales, whom I represent, might hold me to account. I consider the privilege of this office as a vocation, but I am at the mercy of others to judge that. There could be nothing more important than to serve my State and country through the faithful creation of the human laws that govern us. I start by particularly acknowledging my nanna, Hazel, who is here this evening. She was born on the big block of land she still lives on in Beverly Hills—then called Dumbleton—and has seen so much change over her 93 years of life so far. When her husband and my grandpa, Ken, a British migrant who arrived here alone at 16 on a ship from London, developed the block of land when he married Nanna, he quickly earned the ire of neighbours. Grandpa would come home after 12-hour days working on the railways to literally build his family home from the ground up—from foundation to finish—all through the night. He was a hard worker, a staunch Liberal and believed deeply in responsibility and reward for effort.

Hazel is the mother of my mother, Beth, who is not here in person this evening. Mum is so much of the reason that I am in this place. The dignity, kindness and courage that I know can exist in this world is because she embodied it in living and in dying. Her example is one of the most powerful forces in my life. She is here in me, in my beautiful little—taller—sister, Kristina, and in all the people who knew her in this room and beyond. I also acknowledge my Scottish heritage, which was taught to me by my father, Bruce. I am of the Clan Munro, whose first chief lived in the 1300s across the Scottish Highlands. Our clan motto, "Dread God", must be the source of my humility—for it is only God who may look down on and judge the Munros. But a healthy fear of electoral retribution should never be far from a politician's mind, so under God I have pledged my loyalty to the people of New South Wales and Australia to serve in this place.

I am a daughter in a family of army soldiers and naval officers. My paternal great grandfather, Poppy, fought in the Battle of Be'er Sheva, a critical conquest in Israel that secured the region for the British forces in 1917. When I visited the town of Be'er Sheva 105 years later, I heard the admiration from Israeli descendants of that battle for the heroic efforts of the Australians in that parched desert. It reminded me that my place in the world is far reaching because of the service of my family. My grandpa, Harry Geoffrey Munro, who died just months before I was born, served in the navy, particularly in World War II, to defend his family, his country and our freedom. At every military event I proudly wear his medals to honour his sacrifices and service to our nation.

All of these men suffered psychologically in their own ways. Without the labels, they lived with post-traumatic stress disorder, alcoholism and depression. Respecting their service by providing better mental health care treatment to today's armed forces personnel, and all people, is a mark towards progress and a better society. I cannot round out my family history without mentioning a matriarch who must have passed on her enduring sense of optimism to me. Mini Munro, my great grandmother, is in the *Guinness Book of World Records* for being the oldest woman to marry. At 103 she tied the knot to a man two decades her junior. Unfortunately, he passed away first and she became twice widowed. But in love and while saying something like "carpe diem," Mini walked down the aisle and gave her heart to that man until she passed at 105.

If we are all a product of our history and circumstance, and our DNA holds the imprints of the lives of our ancestors, I believe I am fortunate to have been embedded with a sense that there is good to defend in the world and hope to generate through worthy action. I am thankful to have grown up in little Bonnet Bay in the Sutherland shire surrounded by the beaches and the bushland. We also had a family farm in Bigga, a tiny town between Goulburn and Cowra, where we rode horses and ran amok out in superfine Merino wool country. I am lucky to have lived briefly in the Snowy Mountains and taught people how to ski on the other side of the world. I have travelled widely throughout Europe and seen the ravages and successes of political turmoil. I am the proud product of an academically selective public school education. I have been absolutely blessed with the most beautiful mates, particularly an incredible group of women from Caringbah High School, many of whom are here tonight. They are loving mothers, carers, sisters, daughters, wives and friends, before anything else. You have given me the example of what is good and right, more than each of you could know.

After school, Manning Bar and Hermann's at the University of Sydney became my playgrounds. I am the first woman in my family to attend university. I enjoyed being in Sydney University Dramatic Society productions like the accidental comedy *The Term of His Natural Life*, playing saxophone for the JazzSoc Big Band and campaigning for friends and allies for the Student Representative Council and *Honi Soit*. I am sure I ended up among those sandstone walls because of seeing my dad, Bruce, graduate in the Great Hall when I was 10. He was a mature aged student who was the first of his family to attend university and received a Masters in Logistics Management to bolster his expertise in a successful business career. I hope that my father's great extroversion—he is such a natural entertainer, connector, learner and leader—has stood me in good stead. He continues to inspire me with his unbridled enthusiasm for life.

How grateful I am that my university attendance coincided with that of a group of people so equally enlivened by a joie de vivre, impassioned by political engagement and a willingness to work together in sometimes ridiculous pursuits. Many of these wonderful people are here tonight and continue to work in service of the political process—some beside me, some across the Chamber, others in the press gallery and many beyond. We all had a sense that ideas could be made real, and that there was something bigger to be a part of and to contribute to. Many of us fought a university takeover and kept the University of Sydney Union and its revenue-generating operations in student hands. I hear it is happening again today. I urge total focus to retain USU's independence. It is a legacy from 1874.

At 21 I ran for the USU board of directors with the slogan, "Let's Go Munro". I felt it was electorally advantageous to masculinise myself by using my surname. I acknowledge the many people in the gallery tonight who have been the heart and soul of campaigns with me from then until today. It was 2011. With the first flushes of political success, I took a call on Science Road next to Holme Building, my new USU office. I was the first one to be told by Mum that she had cancer. Between St George Hospital visits and doctors appointments, my sister and I tried to retain a sense of normalcy. It is what Mum wanted. After being told by medical staff after three months of chemo and radiotherapy that the worst was coming sooner rather than later, we were grateful she held on for a final Christmas. She insisted on eating well, pumping weights and joking with us until the end. She did not want a round-the-world adventure in those final months. She wanted to sit at home amongst the gum trees with the laughing kookaburras, overlooking the Woronora River. She had visitors and privately raged and was helpless, but above all she lived her values: selfless and stoic.

This courageous, practical and loving woman threw a party for herself before she died. Beth did not like the idea that all her loved ones would get together without her at a funeral when she was gone. Always thinking of others, she raised thousands of dollars at that party for Alzheimer's Australia, now Dementia Australia, in the name of Grandpa. Friends who had been gathered over 5½ decades joined Mum to celebrate life with her one last time. The impact of those long yet all-too-short months led to the most destructive and redemptive parts of my life. I know what it is to feel powerless and to ask for help when logic fails. It can happen to all of us. Every year since she passed, my sister and I and have been invited by Como Public School to present the Beth Munro Environmental Award at their annual presentation night. It is such an honour to recognise her contribution to the community in this way.

Mum's stoicism has been a source of great strength and inspiration. Today I call myself somewhat of an adherent of the stoic philosophy, espoused by Epictetus, Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, to maintain a healthy mind and perspective amidst the cut and thrust of politics. Perhaps it was inevitable when the Bonnet Bay Primary School motto 'Learn to Grow, Grow to Learn' so clearly mirrors Seneca's "As long as you live, keep learning to live." Fundamentally, the need to take personal responsibility for one's own mind and actions, to act in virtue and in service to achieve happiness and to accept the fates that befall us without rancour are tools that I require to maintain a fulfilling political life. Perhaps it would not seem so possible without seeing Mum's dignity and grace through the hardest of times.

But before I needed philosophy, I found a calling. Although I had been praising Prime Minister Howard in Facebook statuses since high school—because I am extremely cool!—it was not until after my first successful student election—again, very cool!—that I seriously considered joining the Liberal Party—the coolest! Being a political nerd since school, it troubled me greatly that one of our two major political parties valued compliance over individual liberty, with the Labor Party mandating that its MPs would be kicked out if they voted against the party's collective decision, even if their communities or their own conscience desired otherwise. It did not make sense to me that in a liberal democratic nation like ours, the value of an individual's right and responsibility to contribute in the Parliament, as elected by the people, was stripped away.

While union membership is 11.7 per cent of employees in New South Wales, with the largest group of that membership identifying as "professional workers", union organisations formally control half of the Labor Party, and certainly a majority when you consider the other half is full of union members. Please do not misunderstand me: Unions have a place in our society. But I do not believe that it is their place to control one of Australia's parties of government. Part of my role in this Chamber is to ensure that all people are fairly represented and that the interests of union officials do not go unchallenged. On the other hand, the Liberal Party's respect for individual liberty—the "work towards a lean government that minimises interference in our daily lives and maximises individual and private-sector initiative", as outlined in our party's "We Believe" statement—and the talent of its representatives, many of whom are here tonight, hooked me. Shortly after my election to the USU and the Liberal landslide of the 2011 election, I volunteered for two days in the office of Mark Speakman, new member for Cronulla, before he offered me a job. I was fortunate to have the encouragement of the fresh-faced member for Hornsby, Matt Kean.

Having politicians and experienced political actors mentor young people who want to make a difference in government and society is so important. My door is always open for young people, and particularly young women, who want to know more and get involved in political life. I acknowledge the incredible impact of the Young Liberals, which drives this work, and its president Dimitry Chugg-Palmer in the gallery this evening. I am a classical Liberal in the tradition of Locke, Smith, Burke and Menzies. I hold the belief that individual responsibility and action are at the heart of a necessarily complex but, crucially, good society. We achieve it through what Hume called the "dissoluble chain" of our togetherness, linking "industry, knowledge and humanity" for progress. To foster freedom for progress, political structures should support the opportunity for choice in all these areas. Freedom of choice, supported by individual empowerment, results in the best outcomes for us all. It is the most sustainable way to act over time. In my view, there is no better way to seek progress. These principles have lifted millions—billions—out of poverty. It is fundamental to the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights: the empowerment of the individual to create positive change and progress without recourse to undue power. Good law protects the vulnerable from the unscrupulous and encourages free enterprise and empowerment. In Menzies' words:

... the greatest element in a strong people is a fierce independence of spirit. This is the only real freedom, and it has as its corollary a brave acceptance of unclouded individual responsibility.

It is the joy, the value, the beauty and the potential of each and every individual person to live freely amongst fellows and to find meaning in life in the way they choose. That free expression is captured in music and art, science and innovation, family and friends—and, yes, at its best, in politics. That is the spirit that our society can generate and exude when every individual member is supported to find it within themselves. In favouring liberty, I encourage considered ethics and personal responsibility as the best way to reduce reliance on legislation to regulate behaviour. I am, as economic Michael Munger would put it, a directionalist rather than a destinationalist. I am not a revolutionary. I see sustainable progress in society as the broad agreement and movement of people through the Overton window.

I am loathe to quote Slavoj Žižek, but his question "What happens the day after the revolution?" remains relevant in times of political uncertainty. The conservative in me seeks to maintain strong institutions based outside of government structures wherever possible, from volunteer organisations like One Meal – It Makes a Difference, where I served on the board with a group of people organising hot, homemade meals to those in need across Greater Sydney, to sporting organisations like Oztag and netball that connect families and friends while promoting a healthy lifestyle. We need not, and should not, resort to government solutions for all sources of connection and support.

A caring society is also at the heart of conservative values, where institutions like family and marriage foster connection, comfort and a natural safety net. Though we know families can be far from perfect, it is about fostering a society that has the capacity to progress by developing healthier relationships based on respect for and responsibility of the individual. Where these fail, there is a natural role for government, on behalf of a caring society, to support people back to independence, if possible, and to comfort where necessary. I honour the cornerstone of our society—our parliamentary democracy—by protecting it fiercely. It is a system that has developed slowly over millennia to better serve its people and will no doubt continue to do so. My apologies for the apparent self-interest, and perhaps for the roast earlier, but as a good friend says, "If you're not going to vote Liberal, vote Labor." The strength and stability of a two-party system with our almost unique and wonderful compulsory voting system delivers outcomes that should allow us to find society's core values through our policies.

Unfortunately, there are many political systems in the world that seek to overthrow the primacy of the individual and our representative approach to governance. They deny a person a democratic vote for a governing body, oppress expression of thought and dictate the operations of an economy and a society, restricting choice. These authoritarian and communist political regimes exist at the expense of their citizens, not to serve them but to use them. We must be vigilant in our defence against these systems of power.

To bolster institutions, they must also be fit for a modern world. I was humbled to be involved in the Australian Marriage Equality campaign and acknowledge the people in the gallery tonight who were an important part of that, including Alex Greenwich, MP. Paul Ritchie, a speech writer for Liberal Prime Ministers, including Tony Abbott and Scott Morrison, articulated it best. In making marriage available to all couples, he knew that more committed families, not fewer, were better for our children and our communities. Who would value the institution of marriage more than those to whom it had been denied? It was a conservative institution made stronger through expansion.

It is vital that our party's narrative reflects the great work that it has done for Australians to enable them to live more freely. In the past 10 years alone, the Liberals amended the law to allow historic gay and lesbian offences to be abolished, abolished the gay panic defence for violent crimes, put pre-exposure prophylaxis on the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme and delivered the first official government apology to the 78ers. Though not perfect—and really there is no such thing in politics—there are also examples of great improvements for Aboriginal Australians because of courageous Liberal politicians.

Harold Holt and the Liberal Party presided over a successful referendum in 1967 to count Aboriginal people in the Census. The passing of the Land Rights Act in 1977 under Fraser, with the support of Australia's first Aboriginal member of the Commonwealth Parliament, Liberal Senator Neville Bonner, was an enormous feat of political will. More recently in New South Wales was the criminalisation of coercive control to help victim-survivors escape abuse before they are murdered, the introduction of Renewable Energy Zones to sustainably power our homes and our economy for the future, and the introduction of optional land tax. Those are the types of policies that will drive our State forward as a safer, more prosperous and more optimistic place to live.

Underpinning all our policy programs must be a strong economy to support those in need. That is why I will always try to encourage wealth creators, entrepreneurs and small business people—not because they have lobbied me, not because they will go on strike if I do not and not because they will threaten to stop funding my political campaign, but precisely because they will not do those things. Their contribution to our State is based on hardworking, responsibility-driven Liberal values. These are people working to provide for their families, to provide for themselves, to save for a home and to invest back into their businesses. Currently 99.8 per cent of business in Australia are considered small or medium. In New South Wales alone, 1.8 million people are employed by small business, accounting for 45 per cent of the New South Wales private sector workforce. I hark back to Menzies. He said:

... our first impulse is always to seek the private enterprise answer to help the individual to help himself, to create a climate, economic, social, industrial, favourable to his activity and grow it.

These are the people who provide us with goods and services every day, pay their taxes and create jobs for fellow Australians. I have worked in one of those small businesses in public relations and campaigns. I have witnessed the grit, drive and selflessness that it took those founders to persevere through the pandemic while keeping their employees on the books. JobKeeper helped enormously. They emerged more determined than ever. I am delighted to say that they are thriving today, with numerous international awards recognising their talented contribution to public policy discourse and advocacy. That is the raw spirit of the Australian small business person. Coming from a professional career in public relations, communication and public affairs, I know that no matter how good your policy is or how good the cause seems, without the right audience, messaging and communicator, it risks going nowhere. Tim Wilson, the former member for Goldstein, wrote in his recent book *The New Social Contract*, "Society struggles when resentment becomes so great that differing parties no longer share common interest."

In outlining some vision for what New South Wales can be, I hope we can find common interests. I envision a rich and biodiverse environment, where the complexity and fragility of ecosystems is preserved; generosity and goodwill offered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as they seek power over their destiny; a productive economy driven by private enterprise, innovation, competition, collaboration and determination; a place where individual talents, expressions and contributions are valued, from apprentices to investors and musicians to scientists; a thriving space industry; the capacity for people to live securely in their own home and be mobile when they choose; and a society where in-person interaction is prioritised because although the digital world gives us so much, nothing can replace our deep animal longing and positive response to close physical and psychological proximity.

I will briefly expand on a few of those areas before speaking more specifically about housing. I acknowledge that this, Australia's oldest Parliament, was established on Gadigal land. I pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I note the Message Stick that inhabits this place because symbolism matters, and so does the tangible equality of opportunity denied to so many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. I will sit in the Chamber more easily when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not condemned from birth, in their ancestral home, to lifespans a full decade shorter on average than non-Aboriginals. I will be deeply relieved when, in that life, they have not been involved in far greater instances of racism, violence, alcoholism and drug addiction, incarceration and a range of other health disorders, including the devastating effects of fetal alcohol spectrum disorder from the beginning of life to kidney disease at the end. We must have the courage to listen to the torment of powerlessness and heed the call for responsibility through the Voice.

Addressing flagging productivity is crucial if we are to maintain our valuable triple-A credit rating with a stable outlook. Australians are facing economic uncertainty after almost three decades of uninterrupted economic growth. Improving productivity is our key to success. I commend the work of the Productivity Commissioner, Peter Achterstraat, in a role created by former Liberal Treasurer Dominic Perrotet. He set out a range of regulatory and legislative reforms that can be introduced in this Parliament to promote productivity, including reforming the payroll tax system, improving local government accountability, harmonising apprenticeship and trade qualifications across the country, and delivering a comprehensive review of the New South Wales planning system to fix delay and uncertainty in planning processes.

On tax reform, encouraging entrepreneurship and a mindset that failure comes with its own success can be achieved with help from reform to our taxation system. That includes eliminating the payroll tax burden for businesses in operation for five years or less and investigating the waiving of payroll tax for businesses paying \$5 million or less in wages, and the introduction of productive land use tax incentives. We must also have an honest and public conversation about GST reform for improved fiscal efficiency and effectiveness, which Ken Henry should be around to see updated. It took John Howard a quarter of a century from first introducing the idea of a GST to its wide public acceptance and introduction into the Commonwealth Parliament. While a Federal tax, GST accounts for around 11 per cent of our State's revenue and is subject to serious fluctuations, particularly as we navigate higher interest rates and inflation with reduced spending. We have the responsibility to lead this conversation.

Fixing our messy apprenticeship system is an important part of our economic growth. My work with the Global Apprenticeship Network Australia has particularly alerted me to the possibilities and problems in the current system. Apprentices in rural and regional New South Wales should also be supported, and I acknowledge my Coalition colleagues who are fighting to do just that. In fostering good, human connections, I remind members of the value of art and play. Those are the things I was proud to fight for through the Keep Sydney Open movement. For CBDs in particular, with the increase of apartment living, it is vital that true 24-hour economies are encouraged. They are made lively because of the people who choose to live, perform, create, trade and travel in a stimulating global city. Whether its techno, jazz or drum and bass, visual art, poetry or dance, restaurateurs, tailors or bankers, I encourage the free flow of ideas and trade.

In saying all of that, I remind myself that one of the most challenging aspects of politics is prioritisation. I have seen that a focused mind achieves results in politics. In that spirit, I focus my remaining minutes on housing. Being able to afford a home is not a dream that we should give up on. As legislators, we must take on the responsibility of fixing this crisis, not only for renters but also for home buyers. The psychological advantage of a stable home cannot be understated, or that a person and a family can choose to live in their desired home and work towards ownership as a goal. It might be a place where they can take a salty morning dip, wake up where the freshest air is breathed or eschew sleep in the most vibrant city. They might take their kids out to the local park with other families or invite their friends over to play in their backyard instead. We know that housing has become an asset class more than a human necessity. In *The Forgotten People*, Menzies spoke of homes material, human and spiritual. Without homes material it is more challenging to attain the rest.

The Liberals risk losing a political movement and a generation of inspired actors if we do not engrain the idea that reward for effort is real and felt, not just said. When people feel as though their hard work will not set them apart or allow them to achieve their dreams, they will turn to government for support. It is a natural feeling. We are sleepwalking into a society of great Australian dreams, because its reality seems unattainable. As a politician in opposition it is my responsibility to hold the Labor Government to account. But in this House it is expected that we work together to seek reform, and I hope to do that.

The scale of the problem will not be solved by more public housing. It is an unsustainable route entirely. The current housing waitlist sits at over 50,000 people—over a third of the number of people already in government housing. It is estimated that 45,000 new homes will be required to be built every year for the next 20 years to house New South Wales' growing population. While in 2018 almost 70,000 dwellings were added to the housing stock in a year, in 2021 we continued a downward trend, with only 40,000 homes added. There must be capacity for more private investment to step in, with government required to work with developers to address this chronic shortage. They are not insurmountable challenges that we face. To address the cost of housing, we must do all we can to boost supply. I offer 10 changes to ease the cost of housing. Work on these could begin tomorrow:

1. Retain Coalition legislation that allows buyers to choose to replace transfer, or stamp duty, with land tax—a policy that treasury officials and economist have been calling for for decades.
2. Reduce application costs associated with building compliance for secondary dwellings on a single property.
3. Extend long-term rental to 12 months without development approvals using existing State registration approval processes—currently there is a three-month limit.
4. Develop an accurate short-term rental accommodation register that puts enforced limits on non-hosted short-term rental properties.
5. Increase density and height limits in the Sydney CBD and surrounds, particularly in Woolloomooloo, with in-fill development prioritised.
6. Release State-owned land.
7. Encourage banks to lend for dwellings under 40 square metres.
8. Undertake an accurate audit of vacant residential properties across the State.
9. Introduce land use incentives to develop properties for housing, including consideration of a vacancy and dilapidation tax.
10. Identify and report on five-year to 20-year housing targets by local government areas.

I thank the Liberal Party, its staff, led so faithfully by our outgoing and indefatigable State Director Chris Stone. In 2019 I ran for the seat of Sydney. I hope she will not mind me saying this, but Tanya Plibersek whispered in my ear after I had given an answer at Glebe Town Hall, which was a pretty tough crowd for a liberal. She told me that I had given a good answer. I was speaking about the importance of members in our Liberal Party and the party's character being inextricably linked to the characteristics of the totality of its membership. The Liberal Party will always be a party of individuals who have chosen to come together in service of their values and the community.

The former member for Coogee, Bruce Notley-Smith, our State's first openly gay member of the Legislative Assembly, said to me when I was a young Liberal something that I will never forget, "When I joined the Liberal Party, yes, I became a part of it, but the party became a little bit more like me." In that spirit I cannot finish without acknowledging the Liberal women in my life, who are absolute powerhouses. There are many—too many to name. The NSW Liberal Women's Council is a force to be reckoned with. The best of them are determined, diverse and whip smart. These Liberal women are deserving of seats in Parliament because they are the best chances our country has to succeed. The Hon. Natalie Ward, the Hon. Aileen MacDonald, Sally Betts, Senator Maria Kovacic and founder of Hilma's Network, Charlotte Mortlock, have shown me the very greatest strengths in women, for women.

Thank you to Matthew John Kean, who has encouraged me to persevere and prevail in speaking up for our values, because this work is not about us; it is about what we can do to serve; and James Wallace, who is a humble servant of the Liberal Party and a formidable political force. Deep thanks to my patient and loving family, to dad, my beautiful and kind step-mum Sue, brave Kristina, most amazing Ben. I would be nowhere without you and without your love and support. Thank you for everything. A final word from Epictetus who said:

For as the material for the carpenter is wood, and that of statuary bronze, so the subject-matter of the art of living is each person's own life.

I extend the metaphor to say politics is the material of politicians. I will use all the tools I can to improve the politics and policies of this place for the benefit of the people of New South Wales to the very best of my ability. Thank you.

Members and officers of the House stood and applauded.