



# Inaugural Speech of the Member for Wyong

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**Mr DAVID HARRIS** (Wyong) [10.41 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is an honour to stand here today as a member of the class of 2007 in this the Fifty-fourth Parliament of New South Wales. As we present our inaugural speeches it is significant to reflect that new members of Parliament from all sides of the House draw their experience from a wide range of backgrounds in the community. It is essential, as elected representatives in this Parliament, that we are able to bring varied knowledge and life experience to the decision-making processes in order to achieve the best outcomes for the people of New South Wales.

I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election and recognise the significance of Premier Lemma's push to bring renewal to the Parliament and to the Government. This began with the identification of candidates in key seats leading up to the election and continues with the large number of new Ministers, including three Ministers who are new members of Parliament. I hope you find your time as Speaker rewarding. I am sure that each new member of the Legislative Assembly will add to the rich tapestry of the Parliament by bringing different perspectives to the many challenges that confront the most populous State in Australia. The issues of climate change, population growth, employment and environment in the context of a twenty-first century economy provide great opportunity and challenge for this Parliament, as it does for all parliaments across this nation and, indeed, the world.

Albert Einstein observed, "The significant problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them." That is the challenge and it involves employing new paradigms in attacking these very important issues. It is clear the people of New South Wales desire—in fact, demand—leadership on these issues. They have returned the Lemma Labor Government because they understand that Labor can deliver what is necessary. In Stephen R. Covey's signature program from his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, a video depicts an 80-year old man at his birthday surrounded by friends and family. Each person tells stories of how this man has impacted on their lives.

The video finishes by asking us to consider how we would like to be remembered at our eightieth birthday. It is an interesting question. The answer from my perspective is that in the end it is not about personal fame or fortune—those things are very material—it is about how you have impacted positively on the lives of those around you. That is the essence of public life. Very few people ever get the chance to reach the privileged position we now find ourselves in. We must use this responsibility to deliver better outcomes for people's everyday lives. That will be our legacy, our contribution to making the lives of others better than they might otherwise have been. I have indeed been lucky in my life.

I have a beautiful family: my wife, Sherelle, and two lovely daughters, Rachael and Jessica, who are here today. I have had a fulfilling career in education and feel even more privileged to be standing in this place today. Each day I am thankful for the opportunities I have had in my life and recognise the influence others have had in helping me achieve my success. My strong personal motivation in family and work has been to help others to have access to those same opportunities. My parents grew up in the Greenacre area, near Bankstown, before moving to the Central Coast in the late 1960s. Our family is very much working class. Dad was a salesman and Mum a homemaker and later a school cleaner to help ends meet.

We did it tough at times, but my sisters, Sandra and Suzie, who are here today, and I never went without. I remember I believed in Santa Claus longer than most kids because I could not rationalise that Mum and Dad could ever afford what we received each year at Christmastime. Mum especially went without so we could attend school excursions and have the materials we needed to complete our education. Above all, we were always told to make sure we tried hard at school and have a good education. In reflection, we coped with some very difficult times including surviving periods of unemployment which put great stress on our family. But this stress had a significant impact on how I developed as a person and I know it gave me a deep resilience, a sense of purpose and a strength of character that has allowed me to flourish through sometimes difficult times in my life.

I have been privileged to grow up in an extended family of sorts, with my grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins all being very close. Last year my grandparents, Duncan and Betty Chapman, celebrated 65 years of marriage. Along with my parents, Maureen and Bob Harris, my grandparents taught me the value of strong work ethics, loyalty and most importantly for standing up for what I believe in. That has underpinned my heartfelt working class values of a fair go for all. That is why I could be nothing but a member of the great Australian Labor Party. I come from a proud public school background, having attended Woy Woy South Public School and Woy Woy

High School, where I was school captain. Yes, I am a proud Woy Woy boy! I became a teacher and a school principal because I valued the concept that education is the key to unlocking opportunity in one's life.

I acknowledge the important and special role that all schools and systems play in educating our young people. In particular, I am a proud advocate of the value of public education because it accepts everyone, no matter their background or financial situation, without asking questions. I strongly believe that public education has been the cornerstone of our unique Australian democracy and culture. My wife works in a public school and my eldest daughter attends a public school. I became a teacher 20 years ago. My first appointment was to Griffith Public School in the Riverina. I remember my colleagues at Woy Woy telling me at that time, "You don't want to go to the country." In retrospect it was the best decision I have ever made. It defined my career and gave me a perspective on life that I will value forever. Yes, there is life west of Parramatta!

From the multicultural town of Griffith I was appointed teacher in charge and then principal of a one-teacher school at Merriwagga, in only my second year of teaching. Merriwagga is a small farming community of 150 people. The local people took me in and taught me the true value of the meaning of "community". Farming communities are very good at supporting each other through good times and bad. From Merriwagga I moved to Hillston Central School where I experienced the extremes of both flood and drought. More importantly Hillston is where I met my wife, Sherelle. Sherelle gives me the spirit and support that drives me forward each day. I think that comes from her country upbringing.

My wife's family has a farm in the Hillston district and I get the unique perspective of seeing and understanding the hardship currently confronting them in this terrible drought. The dreadful image of their once green productive paddocks that have turned to red dust leaves an indelible mark in one's mind. That is something we in this place should be mindful of at all times. I am very lucky that my mother-in law, in particular, keeps my feet firmly on the ground when it comes to issues confronting the country. Needless to say, she does not support our side of politics. I tell her often that the Labor Party, through Country Labor, of course delivers for the country—but she is yet to be convinced. I am sure that over time I will eventually convince her of that!

My job next took me back to the Central Coast, where I was appointed principal at Dooralong, then deputy principal at Northlakes, then principal at Gwandalan and finally I was promoted to principal at Kariong Public School late last year. I resigned from that position a few weeks ago. As a school principal of 18 years in public education I have been privileged to work with such fantastic young people and their families, no matter their background, talents or disabilities. I have worked mainly in country and disadvantaged schools. A principal fulfils many roles: adviser, counsellor, manager, community builder, just to name a few—very similar to the role of members of this place. A principal works with communities to provide opportunities for students, including academic, social, cultural and sporting, developing them as individuals who can survive in this twenty-first century world. For me there is no greater reward than to meet former students, or parents, and hear how well the students have done in their lives. I have been lucky to work with so many talented and committed individuals who have taught me the importance of service to the community.

I have had some great mentors in education; innovators dedicated to improving outcomes for kids. Craig Sinclair and Roger Pryor taught me the value of technology in education. I am very pleased that recent Labor governments have invested heavily in providing access to information communication technology [ICT] for students and teachers. That is the way forward for both our economy and our culture. Bill Low, Frank Potter, David Cullen and Hunter-Central Coast Regional Director, John Mather—even though he is a Kiwi—taught me about leadership, personal development and change management, attributes that will be of great value to me in this place.

Maree Roberts was inspirational in pushing the importance of indigenous education and for fighting hard for all children. Maree is unwell, otherwise she probably would be here. She is a very passionate lady and we often talk about issues, as I sincerely value her advice. We have an important responsibility in educating the next generation of Aboriginal elders. Paul Day, my boss at Northlakes Public School, showed me the power of self-belief, the importance of improving outcomes for families and how education is a key feature of social justice. My gratitude to these people is beyond words and I hope I can repay their counsel and support through staying true to the ideals they have dedicated themselves to in their careers.

I am very proud that during the campaign we fought for and will receive a new trade school at Wyong, a new gym and performance space for Gorokan High School, which has a nationally renowned concert band, and improved facilities in other local schools including the completion of a new school at Hamlyn Terrace. These are welcomed investments in education in the Wyong electorate. Needless to say, I will take a great deal of interest in the provision of education and its impacts on families across the whole community in New South Wales. The electorate of Wyong, part of the region collectively known as the Central Coast, is confronted by a number of challenges and opportunities. I am humbled by and understand the great responsibility granted to me by the people of Wyong at the 24 March 2007 election. It is a custodianship I take very seriously and I will put my heart and soul into providing effective representation for the aspirations and needs of the Wyong community. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Wyong is an area of rich history, an important indigenous history, through the Guringai and Darkinjung people and a European history beginning with settlement in 1825 when William Cape, a headmaster of Sydney Public School, was granted land in the area. The Wyong area was known for its timber, farming and early tourism around Tuggerah Lakes. It is a beautiful part of the world with the

coastal stretch divided from the forested mountains by an array of lakes and lagoons.

The Central Coast region has a population almost equal to that of the Australian Capital Territory, and it continues to provide a new place for people to live away from Sydney. Many of these people will settle in our new suburbs in the Wyong electorate. An important part of my job will be to work closely with parliamentary colleagues in the region to promote its unique lifestyle and needs. We must work together to secure the economic and social infrastructure that is vital to support the growth in population.

At this point I would like to congratulate John Della Bosca on becoming the new Minister for the Central Coast, a role that helps to identify the uniqueness of our region. I also acknowledge the hard work of Grant McBride, member for The Entrance, for the work he did as a former Minister in promoting the Central Coast. Proudly, Labor has always represented the electorate of Wyong, and the legacy of previous Labor members has been strong. I acknowledge the work of Harry Jensen, Harry Moore, OAM, and Paul Crittenden in providing strong representation for the area. I will need to work very hard indeed to ensure that I reach the high mark set by them. They have laid solid foundations for me to build upon.

As I said, the key challenges in Wyong revolve around finding a balance between the environment, social infrastructure, and economic growth. These factors are interrelated and any way forward involves an intersection between them. This is an exciting time with many new projects about to begin bringing important investment and jobs to the area, but this must also be tempered with the need to protect the environment and the lifestyle that attracts people to the area in the first place. This is a delicate balancing act that must be executed with great care and consultation. Other issues that need to be confronted are proposed mining in the Wyong valleys, the health of our delicate lake system, and consolidation of our very important water supply.

An important natural feature of Wyong is its beautiful beaches. Significantly, 2007 is being recognised the Year of the Lifesaver. As a young guy growing up in Woy Woy, the beach and the surf club at Umina were very influential in my development as a young person. Apart from being a very healthy lifestyle, surf lifesaving is an important voluntary organisation. It fulfils a very necessary role in protecting people from mishap on our beaches, but it also offers a great opportunity for competition and friendship. I was able to attend State and Australian titles, competing in rescue and resuscitation, march past, sprinting and flags. I was even a boatie for a while, although I quickly got out after one big surf at Freshwater. Surf lifesaving is a wonderful way to keep healthy and to give back service to the local community. I look forward to working with the Lakes and the Soldiers Beach surf clubs in the Wyong electorate.

This year marks my twentieth year as a member of the great Australian Labor Party. In 1987 I joined the Umina branch and at the same time I joined Young Labor. My time in the Labor Party has given me the privilege of meeting some incredible people. One such fellow was Frank Peters. He was in his eighties when I joined the Umina branch. He took me under his wing when I first began and taught me the ropes. From electioneering to party politics, he guided me along, teaching me all the finer points.

Since those early days I moved on to become president of my Wyong branch, secretary of Dobell Federal Electoral Council [FEC] and delegate to several State conferences. During that time I watched and learned, valuing the rich history of our party. Throughout the election campaign I felt the weight of responsibility, representing the hopes of our branch members, fall heavily upon my shoulders. There was certainly added pressure when a former member for Wyong, Harry Moore, sternly told me on a visit that he had never lived in anything but a Labor electorate and he was too old to let that change now. If members have ever talked to Harry they would be aware that he uses a few four-letter expletives. However, he made it clear that there was no option other than to win.

I dedicate my success in the March election to every branch member who has ever shared his or her story with me over the years and enriched my life to make me a better person and better able to represent the electorate and the people of Wyong. It is appropriate for me at this stage to mention the supportive role the union movement played in assisting my election. UnionsNSW, through John Robertson, Tony Sheldon from the Transport Workers Union [TWU], Michael Williams and Craig Thompson from the Health Services Union [HSU] and, in particular, Bernie O'Riordan from the Electrical Trades Union [ETU] provided huge logistical support to our campaign in Wyong. We could not have run the campaign we did without their support.

I note that it was evident that the Federal Government's WorkChoices laws played a massive role in our final result. The community is very concerned about these changes, particularly in respect of the possible effects on young people. Many people related to me whilst I was doorknocking and at stalls that they support the concept of a fair day's pay for a fair day's work in a safe work environment. They believe that Howard's industrial relations changes attack this principle. I am very aware that a campaign team is essential in winning an election. My thanks go in particular to the former member for Dobell, my friend and mentor Michael Lee, who has been an important sounding board for me and for my family. I acknowledge his presence in the gallery today.

I acknowledge the role that Grant McBride played in giving me the encouragement, firstly to stand as a candidate and then by supporting me throughout the campaign. I acknowledge Marie Andrews, John Della Bosca, David Campbell and Federal member for Shortland, Jill Hall, for their advice, encouragement and support. I thank Mark Arbib, Carl Bitar, Peter Bentley and the party office for their belief and support. I thank our direct campaign team, comprising Sam Dastyari, Crissie-Lee Stevens, Paul Lister and Maggie Lloyd. I also thank Kirsten Andrews for her valuable advice and guidance. But special mention goes to Kaila Murnain and Steve Dampf

for putting their lives on hold for so many months and making our campaign so successful.

Many members of Young Labor and branch members and members of the community assisted but I make mention in particular of Len Hurley, Richard Keating, Peter Cooley, Peter McEvoy, Adam Wardrop, Matt Bourke, Patricia Amphlett—Little Pattie—Claire Johnston, Austin Woodbury, Wendy Honey, Dayle Walker, Lillian McDarra, Don Craig, Jen Harvey, Paul Day, Alisha Wilde and Councillor Neil Rose. Whilst there are hundreds of other names I could mention, they know who they are and I hope they understand the depth of my gratitude. Although I have already mentioned them I would again like to thank Harry Moore, OAM, and Paul Crittenden for their valued and continued support.

To my wife, Sherelle, and my daughters, Rachael and Jessica, thank you for your love and support through many difficult months. We make a good team. We share a strong bond through good times and tough times. I began this address by contemplating what people might see as my legacy when sitting at my eightieth birthday. If they view me as someone who has led a good life, provided advice and support to others, and achieved improved outcomes for the community, especially for the people in Wyong, my time here will have been a success. It is how I have approached my career in education and it is how I will approach my time as the member for Wyong. Being a member of Parliament is about listening to people's stories, sharing their experiences and understanding their needs. Stephen Covey advocates:

We must first seek to understand, before being understood. We must be emphatic listeners and we must seek synergy in our solutions.

Thank you for letting me share my story with you today.