



# Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday 2 June 2011.

**Mr JONATHAN O'DEA** (Davidson) [7.30 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech: Building on Traditions—Foundations for Tomorrow): Tradition is seeping through the walls of this green Chamber, filling the air. With a great sense of occasion and tradition, I welcome those in the public gallery as they, in a sense, welcome me to their New South Wales Parliament. In accordance with a tradition as old as this green Chamber, I am delighted to deliver my inaugural speech as the member for Davidson. I follow periods of admirable service from previous members Healy, Metherell and Humpherson. I also formally acknowledge that this Parliament sits on the traditional lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation. We are all but custodians.

By following tradition we enfranchise and respect our ancestors. New South Wales Parliament House has traditions and rules dating back to parliamentary democracy in Britain. This Legislative Assembly was established in 1856, and I have been advised to learn its rules early—so that I know how to break them properly. But seriously, I look forward to an independent Speaker enforcing those rules with fairness and balance. As parliamentarians, we must build a better tradition of rule adherence and integrity to ensure greater public confidence in the political process and in our common vocation.

One fine parliamentary tradition of which I propose to take advantage in this Fiftyfourth Parliament is for opposition backbenchers to have the opportunity to speak freely across a range of portfolio areas. In doing so, I hope to listen, observe, inquire and challenge the status quo with strong enough wings to fly above the plain of ordinary routine and prejudice. Mr Speaker, as I look around these green walls at the names of previous Speakers—which your name will join—I am reminded of one of my first functions as a new member of Parliament. It was a Rotary awards night at which I sat next to the grandchild of a previous Speaker in the House from early last century. I now stand before the current Speaker, contemplating what legacy I might leave my own grandchildren. One fine parliamentary tradition of which I propose to take advantage in this Fiftyfourth Parliament is for opposition backbenchers to have the opportunity to speak freely across a range of portfolio areas. In doing so, I hope to listen, observe, inquire and challenge the status quo with strong enough wings to fly above the plain of ordinary routine and prejudice. Mr Speaker, as I look around these green walls at the names of previous Speakers—which your name will join—I am reminded of one of my first functions as a new member of Parliament. It was a Rotary awards night at which I sat next to the grandchild of a previous Speaker in the House from early last century. I now stand before the current Speaker, contemplating what legacy I might leave my own grandchildren.

Talking about traditions draws on one's personal experiences and relationships. I grew up in a close family, with my father, Michael, my mother, Marianne, and eight brothers and sisters. All of them are here tonight. I thank them and my extended family for being such wonderful people and positive influences on my life. Growing up in a large family certainly teaches you how to relate to people and how to make your voice heard. My upbringing also provided me with a solid set of personal values, an excellent education, and a community service ethic. Whilst I believe that the traditional family model I enjoyed is certainly the ideal in society, it is appropriate that we accept all types of families in modern society. Similarly, we must embrace people irrespective of their age, race or religious background. Whilst my own faith is very important to me, I certainly support the traditional separation between church and state that ultimately makes both of them stronger.

The significance and place of tradition is clearly important. However, it should be instructive rather than prescriptive. As T. S. Eliot said, "A tradition without intelligence is not worth having." To do as has always been done without thinking is folly. Imagination, ideas and innovation must be allowed to challenge traditional approaches if we are to create new foundations for the future. Throughout my life I have espoused the traditional wisdom that "actions speak louder than words", and this applies particularly to politics. One area that our mainstream parties must better address through action is our environment. Unless words in this House are backed with action on the environment, they are only hot gas. Rather than more green House gas, we need more committed action on environmental issues if we are to build strong foundations for tomorrow.

The thin film of atmosphere that sustains our human existence is only about 10 kilometres deep—less than the distance from this Parliament to the Davidson electorate and its magnificent Blue Gum High Forest, which was recently nominated by the National Trust as an endangered heritage item. As some sections of society move more quickly than others to a realisation that action is needed, our governments have to provide stronger leadership, education and inspiration in protecting our environment and achieving a more sustainable society. A crucial step towards a more sustainable society is increasing the availability and reliability of public transport systems so that commuters gravitate away from private car use. As part of my personal commitment, I am catching the train to Parliament. So, Mr Speaker, you will no doubt understand if I am occasionally late.

Whilst our New South Wales population has grown considerably in recent decades, can the same be said of our vision, forward planning and infrastructure investment in the area of public transport? I think not. This concern is equally applicable to the area of water management.

In order to pay for those initiatives crucial to our future we need to free up public resources by increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of government. Surely we cannot afford to continue to deliver infrastructure projects with major cost overruns and delays. We also need to curtail the growth in senior public service ranks and administrative expenses in order to redirect resources towards longterm investments in our future.

In my professional life I have experienced the commercial world continually striving to do more with less. At the same time, I have observed the New South Wales government sector's record of delivering less with more. Despite record revenues, public service delivery in New South Wales has deteriorated relative to other States, to our economic and social detriment. We must do better. In doing so we must of course respect basic human dignity and be especially mindful of the most vulnerable in our society.

I worked as a volunteer in the refugee sector for a year after completing my undergraduate studies. Most people I met who were in difficult situations did not want to rely on handouts. They wanted a fair chance to better themselves and to contribute in a free and democratic society. Liberalism respects that and encourages people to strive towards their potential rather than become dependent on government. Individual spirit, hope, and a drive to succeed must continue to be fostered if our society of tomorrow is to thrive. This thinking is consistent with our most popular national tradition: a "fair go" for all, without undue government interference.

In building new foundations for the future, the traditional model of federalism in this country, dating back over 100 years, needs to be fundamentally questioned. Change must be welcomed as our world paradoxically expands but grows smaller. Our increasingly globalised society, with its rapid advances in communications and technology, shifting demographics and strong competitive pressures, makes New South Wales a very different place from that in the time of Henry Parkes. We need to make a more concerted effort to reform intergovernmental relations, rather than play politics between parties and levels of government. The traditional mantra of State rights should not be used as a defence for inaction in legislative reform. We must establish improved lines of responsibility and accountability between Federal and State levels of government in order to reduce duplication, inefficiency and blame shifting.

Certain left-wing groups with socialist prejudices have recently been critical of Federal Government funding for nongovernment schools. What the need for Federal funding of schools really highlights is the inadequacy of State Government support for schools generally and the malfunctioning of our system of federalism.

My wife and I currently send our sons to our local public school, and we certainly support a well-funded, strong, public education system. However, parents with children in nongovernment schools are not being treated fairly by the State Government. Without Federal funding, parents who exercise choice in regard to their children's education would bear an even heavier financial burden. The overall approach of governments to educational resource allocation should be about providing more equal opportunity, rather than artificially supporting the public system by denying parents fair choice in schooling.

State Government funding for children with disabilities should also be improved, as it should for preschool education, which is sadly neglected in New South Wales compared with other States. Early education and investment in our children is a key foundation for the future of our society. I will fight for all schools and educational institutions in Davidson, whether they be public or nongovernment.

In relation to health care, with our population ageing and an insatiable demand for health services, we must constantly strive to do better. State Governments and Oppositions need to focus on more than just public hospitals. They must more clearly define the goals of the public health system and the Government's role in it. Preventative health strategies should be afforded greater attention, as should the retention of quality nursing staff and making the whole system safer. Rather than promoting total dependence on the State, we should encourage people to be more self-reliant in a fair and balanced health system. The fact that many people choose to privately insure relieves pressure on the public system, which is good for all. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Dental health care, which is currently a State responsibility, has been a disgrace and requires urgent attention, as reflected in the Federal Government's need to announce special measures in its budget earlier this month. If New South Wales is to abrogate its responsibility for dental health care, this should be clearly acknowledged and negotiations should be entered into with the Federal Government to properly transfer responsibility, potentially along with other health services as part of a new federalism model. While some recent cooperative health initiatives are encouraging, such as those on diabetes through the Council of Australian Governments, I believe that a more fundamental realignment of health responsibilities is appropriate.

I personally support a clearer and better allocation of resources and responsibility on the part of State and Federal governments in both health and education. This might require States to fund all preschool and school education, with the Federal Government funding all health related areas. However, the actual delivery of these services should still be driven at a community level, albeit without the currently enormous State health bureaucracy.

It is understandable that the Business Council of Australia is scathing in its assessment of the lack of progress in intergovernmental cooperation and reform, through the Council of Australian Governments or otherwise. This is particularly so in business regulation, where many of the different approaches between States are difficult to justify. There are many potential reform areas in which the States can work together towards national harmonisation of business regulation without Federal involvement. While this process has begun, it is too slow, and much more remains to be done. One obvious example is our occupational health and safety laws. According to the New South Wales Business Chamber, our State has the most unworkable set of occupational health and safety laws in Australia.

Another example is lottery legislation. As a child I used to enjoy entering competitions promoted on the back of cereal boxes. I remember reading competition details while sitting at our crowded kitchen bench over breakfast and wondering why different States in Australia insisted on different rules for a national competition. When I became a practising lawyer I provided client advice on the different sets of rules and application permits needed to run the same competition in various State jurisdictions. More recently, as a general manager in business I experienced frustration with the overly bureaucratic approach to regulating business promotions for customer giveaways. Today, as a parliamentarian, whether it impacts on lotteries, insurance, property, or other areas, I am determined to do something about inadequate cooperation between States. To those of similar mind on both sides of the House I say, "Let's work together."

While recognising that politics is primarily about people, more disciplined business practices must be utilised to better manage services in New South Wales. In this respect I commend the Government on the 2006 State Plan as a step in the right direction and look forward to monitoring progress against the plan. I want to use my skills, qualifications and experience, including those gained as a lawyer, a senior executive, and a member of various boards and community organisations, to deliver better outcomes for the New South Wales public we serve. I am also pleased to be part of a new intake of New South Wales Liberal politicians with significant real life experience, including two Liberal colleagues also representing parts of Sydney's northern peninsula.

Sydney and its magnificent harbour can truly be compared to the international cities of London, Paris and New York, its status as Australia's leading city confirmed by its hosting of the AsiaPacific Economic Cooperation forum to be held later this year. London is divided by the River Thames, Paris by the River Seine, and New York by the River Hudson. In Sydney, the electorate of Davidson is divided by Middle Harbour Creek and Middle Harbour. Governor Arthur Phillip explored this area in April 1788 as he travelled through what is now Garigal National Park, in Davidson. A Sydney and its magnificent harbour can truly be compared to the international cities of London, Paris and New York, its status as Australia's leading city confirmed by its hosting of the AsiaPacific Economic Cooperation forum to be held later this year. London is divided by the River Thames, Paris by the River Seine, and New York by the River Hudson. In Sydney, the electorate of Davidson is divided by

Middle Harbour Creek and Middle Harbour. Governor Arthur Phillip explored this area in April 1788 as he travelled through what is now Garigal National Park, in Davidson. A member of his expedition wrote, "We came to a steep valley, where the flowing of the tide ceased, and a freshwater stream commenced."

Earlier this month I stood on the rock bar across the creek at the same spot where Governor Phillip would have stood almost 220 years ago, watching the sea water meet the fresh water. On that beautiful sunny day by the water I reflected that this juncture was a wonderful metaphor for the vast sea of tradition mixing with a fresh pool of ideas that might generate new life. Today the Roseville Bridge links the council area of Kuringgai on one side of Middle Harbour and the council area of Warringah on the other side. As a former local councillor, I look forward to working with representatives of both local councils and relevant Federal members of Parliament in vigorously representing all suburbs and people in the Davidson electorate. This includes helping to protect the unique character and heritage of the area from overdevelopment, a matter on which I will have more to say at a future time.

It is traditional and appropriate in an inaugural speech to acknowledge and thank all those family, friends, political colleagues and community supporters who have contributed to my having this opportunity to serve the people of New South Wales. To all of you, whether present in person or spirit, I extend my sincere and heartfelt appreciation. I particularly acknowledge my whole campaign team, including campaign manager Ian Leijer. Only one other person will I mention by name—my beautiful wife, Jacqueline, who more than anyone has allowed me to pursue this dream, whose ongoing support I value most and who is a wonderful mother to our four young boys.

A sense of tradition involves recognising the passing of time, of which I am but a small part. A long line of members have gone before me, and I am another one. I hope that this one will make a real difference, drawing on the best traditions of the past while developing new ways that might become worthy traditions for future generations—foundations for tomorrow.