



## Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday 10 May 2007.

**Ms PRU GOWARD** (Goulburn) [11.30 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly as the newly elected Liberal member for Goulburn. Goulburn is a sprawling electorate that takes in the northern villages of Colo Vale, Hilltop and Yerrinbool, through beautiful Southern Highlands towns like Bowral and Bundanoon, along the historic Hume Highway to the grand old town of Goulburn itself and southwards to Lake Bathurst and beyond. The history of New South Wales is told in this electorate: the struggle over the Blue Mountains and the subsequent development by our early explorers through the Southern Highlands, including Georgian Berrima. The railways and the fine wool industry are both significant chapters in the story of New South Wales and are both part of our local history. Goulburn, Australia's first inland city, boasts an architectural heritage equal to anywhere in Australia.

Goulburn is an electorate with not only a great past but great promise. Its nearness to the Hume Highway means it is part of an economic growth corridor—all the more reason to invest in its schools and its training colleges, in decent public transport and in water infrastructure. Not only do the people of Goulburn deserve decent public services, they would also be rewarded with further economic growth. This investment could go further: ten years of solid economic growth must surely mean it is now time to rekindle interest in the very fast train project, with all the benefits of decentralisation it would bring to our overcrowded metropolitan areas. I note my predecessor Peta Seaton had a similar view for this region 11 years ago—and nothing has changed.

The encouragement and commitment of the business community, with very strong chambers of commerce and men like Terry Oakes Ash and Charlie Johns, together with the mayor and deputy mayor of the Wingecarribee shire, continue to drive the Southern Highland region's growth, despite State indifference. It is an electorate with all the challenges facing regional New South Wales. It is an electorate where public schools are in dire need of upgrades and better staffing. Our teachers deserve better and our children deserve better than this. It is a place where public transport barely meets the needs of its citizens from Colo Vale to Goulburn and everywhere in between. Our youth, our elderly and the people of Goulburn deserve better than this.

The electorate of Goulburn is served by two major hospitals, Bowral and Goulburn, both run down with lengthening waiting lists and waiting times. Our doctors and nurses and the people of Goulburn deserve better than this. Water remains the electorate's most visceral issue. In the Southern Highlands, the Government's determination to take water from the Kangaloon aquifer to boost Sydney's poorly planned supply has many fearful for the loss of forest and productive farmland. Why is so much put at risk for so little, and at such a price? Our farmers deserve better than this.

In the city of Goulburn, the water problem is very different. Goulburn, to the chagrin of many of its inhabitants, has been promoted internationally as the town that ran out of water. This means no water for gardens, for cleaning up property and, until recent rain, it meant closed playing fields. Despite the best endeavours of the local council it has shaken business and investor confidence and the townsfolk have spent two summers watching their gardens die. But we are a stoic people, the people of Goulburn, and have stuck to the bargain. We have lived on level 5. It is time now for governments, State and Federal, to reward their fortitude by investing in an upgraded water management system so that the town never has to live like that again. The people of Goulburn do deserve this. When I began campaigning in Goulburn my knowledge of water management policy

was thin, to say the least. I am especially indebted to the Goulburn Water Group, whose members were not natural allies of the Liberal Party, but who took me in nevertheless and educated me with care and patience, so great and pressing was the issue of water for us all. From door to door, the uniting cry throughout the electorate of Goulburn is to be treated like people in Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong—the N. S. W. of New South Wales.

My immediate predecessors have set a high standard. I would like to acknowledge Peta Seaton, who has now retired as member for the Southern Highlands, and Katrina Hodgkinson, who served the people of Goulburn and the Southern Tablelands with enormous distinction when those places were part of the electorate of Burrinjuck. Before them, John Fahey and Robert Webster were local members people still remember with gratitude and affection, and I am the grateful recipient of their legacy. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery today of Robert Webster, Leon Oberg from the *Goulburn Post*, and many other local people who have come from Goulburn and the Southern Highlands, not only because they have been part of my journey into politics but because they are committed to the great region in which we live.

I extend my thanks to Michael Yabsley, Geoff and Pam Mitchell, who have cared for, comforted and guided me, Ken Street, Roger Worner, David Knaggs, Jo Vink and those members of the Liberal Party who worked so hard during the campaign. To Martin Lavery, my campaign director, I owe a debt that will not be forgotten, and to my manager Geoff Kettle, who managed the logistics, the driving and the squabbles in the car on our many journeys with great aplomb, my grateful thanks. Margaret Emery, Sally Cooper and Fiona Nixon, who took me under their wings, thank you all. Suffice it to say I have been loved, encouraged, advised and indulged by many people in the galleries and occasionally, in the interests of keeping my spirits up, I am sure I have been lied to.

Mine has been a long and eventful journey to this Chamber, a slow and often uncertain journey over half a century. My parents, Gerald and Zipporah Goward, cannot be here today but are with me in spirit. I owe them a great deal. Their commitment to their family, their honouring of their parents, their own struggles against adversity were formidable examples to all of their children. My father was permanently disabled during World War II and my family struggled. My mother worked, in the face of great social disapproval, to support four children. My brother, Nicholas, my sister, Elizabeth, and the two eldest, my twin, Penelope, and I all attended public schools until I won a scholarship to Woodlands Church of England Girls Grammar School. I won a couple more scholarships and finally one to university to study arts and economics. From these beginnings to today, my family and my Christian faith have guided and supported me, disciplined and inspired me.

My own family has also joined me today. Bringing up children is never one way. Each of my daughters has taught me so much, shared so much and forgiven me so much; we have brought each other up. I thank each of them for making such an effort to be here. Katie has come from overseas, Penny has come with her new-born daughter, Adelaide, and Alice has come from work. My husband, David, who has taught me, guided and advised, worked hard on the campaign and loved me when it was not deserved, is also here, up from our farm. It is hard work on the farm, but this is nothing either of us ever shied away from. My first career was working in Dad's plumbing shop. There is nothing more humbling than serving the public and always being wrong.

I come to this place after more than half a lifetime's involvement in politics. It began at university and moved to reporting politics for the ABC. Later I joined the public service and, more recently,

served as Australia's Sex and Age Discrimination Commissioner. It has all prepared me for politics—although nothing quite prepares us for politics—a fourth career in a lifetime, a final career in a lifetime. Journalism taught me to listen closely, question well and never lose sight of the public interest. The ABC nurtured and shaped me, exposed me to a vast range of issues and life experiences and prepared me for the life of an advocate. As a member of Parliament my fundamental task is now to listen to the community and carry its ideas and wishes into this place.

My days in the Commonwealth public service and as commissioner were a great privilege. I was taught public administration by wise masters and given the freedom to develop policy and advocate as commissioner. My work at the commission was guided by the great second commandment of Jesus, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself." In particular my time as commissioner allowed me to serve Australian women and their families, to appreciate the complexities of inequality, the linkages with the public good and the importance of sound socioeconomic analysis in matters of human rights. It also showed me that to achieve change I had to be part of the political process; I could not remain an interested bystander.

The issues we face today, both immediate and future, are as complex as they are important, and, as such, we must address them with our hearts and with our minds, solving them through the prism of our intelligence and our life's experience. To serve the people of New South Wales, to advocate for them, to defend them and to give them hope, there is no better place to be than this, the mother of Australian Parliaments. With the State's economy languishing, State service delivery always in crisis, the State over-regulated and public disaffection with politics so high, there has never been a more important time to restore hope.

Those of us who enter this Chamber for the first time do so when democracy, in the broadest sense, is also under great challenge, not from the usual suspects—war, economic depression or civil unrest—but from the new certainties of the future. When we had only tea-leaves to predict changes in climate, demography or society over 20 or 30 years, democracy could function satisfactorily with three-year or four-year parliamentary terms. We knew so little about the future that it was barely possible to do more than govern from day to day or year to year. We might have built grand monuments to last for centuries, but we could not build policy to last for more than a decade. But now we have predictive modelling and science to forecast our future with greater confidence than ever before. Global warming is now possible to predict in 20 or 30 years hence. The degree of accuracy remains one of debate, but of the direction there is no doubt.

Governments facing three-year or four-year terms are loathe to invest in a solution now when costs are immediate and benefits apparent only years later. Similarly, long-term health issues can now be diagnosed decades in advance, yet governments fail to invest in prevention today. The long-term needs of the New South Wales workforce have been well documented, yet governments persistently underinvest in education today. Social problems such as mental illness, drug abuse and family breakdown have well-recognised causes and can be prevented, but at considerable immediate cost and with rewards evident only in the future. An emerging problem for democracy is the timetable—the timetables of politics and policy no longer align. The needs of the present must always outweigh those of the future. Once this accurately reflected the political cycle of election and re-election. However, for many of the challenges facing New South Wales this no longer holds true. There is a

mismatch, and the first casualty of this mismatch has been the confidence of people in democracy itself.

There is increasing cynicism about the courage and determination of parliaments to deal urgently with what are seen to be the big questions, without any acknowledgement of the practical and political difficulties of putting the needs of those in 30 years before the needs of people today. The debate over the future of coalmining is a case in point: the threat of global warming tomorrow versus the reality of unemployment today. I am determined to be part of ensuring that this Parliament must, and will, get better at working with long-term problems over short-term political cycles, relying on strong and effective public consultation, embracing differences of opinion and improving cooperation between the major parties, who remain the only vehicles for policy change. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

My recent experience of Independents, however high their calibre, is that a Parliament made up entirely of Independents is even less likely to tackle the long-term problems facing us. It behoves the major parties, whether in Government or Opposition, to demonstrate this to a jaded electorate and media. It is easy to take democracy for granted. It is invisible, which is both its virtue and its problem. Its invisibility means we can get on with our lives safe in the knowledge that we have a Government we have chosen. Unlike military dictatorships, socialist totalitarian states or religious dictatorships, democracy does not involve the oppression of private law-abiding citizens, obtrusive social controls or state-imposed fear. But because of its invisibility, its unobtrusiveness, its silence, we are wont to take democracy for granted. Once every three or four years we go along and vote, and then we forget it. But there is more to democracy than election day and parliamentary broadcasts.

We cannot have a well-functioning democracy without strong support for the rule of law, high standards of governance, and transparency in public decision making through a free and open media. People must understand how the invisible hand of democracy works and want that for themselves. Democracy is only ever as strong as people's belief in and involvement with it. We must, as a Parliament, ensure this happens. In a more everyday sense, people are more likely to obey laws when they understand their purpose and know the benefits of upholding them. People must also have confidence in the legal system—the police, the way the courts deal with offenders and victims, and also the lawmakers, that is, our parliamentarians. This does not happen unless the Parliament recognises the importance of debate and reveres its traditions, and takes pride in the struggles they have come to symbolise. I look forward, Mr. Speaker, to seeing the importance of parliamentary traditions and courtesies restored under your leadership.

High standards of public administration so that people can see that government is fair, impartial and effective are crucial to faith in democracy. They give certainty to citizens and confidence to commerce. Australian governments have always been tempted to respond to crises and scandals with regulation—always more regulation. But regulation, including business regulation, also impedes the workings of the State and the economy to the detriment of its citizens. As William Pitt the Younger once said, "The art of good government is to do very little very well", a maxim those on our side of politics take seriously. This is the task of political leadership in New South Wales: restoring public confidence in our great State, business confidence in our economy and faith in our institutions. There is pride to be restored, history to be honoured and a future to be forged. In New

South Wales the task is before us. I am proud to be part of bringing hope, faith and trust to the people of the seat of Goulburn and to the State of New South Wales. I will serve the people of Goulburn with dedication and love. They deserve no less. Thank you.