

INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE LYNDA VOLTZ

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament stands: the Eora people of the Gadigal nation, and all the Aboriginal nations in New South Wales. I would like to thank the New South Wales Labor Party for putting me forward to the people of this State as part of the Labor team, and the people of New South Wales for having the confidence to re-elect a Labor government. Since colonisation New South Wales has always been at the heart of economic, social and political activities in our country. New South Wales contains almost one third of the population of Australia. It has the largest economy in Australia, valued at \$320 billion in 2005-06, or about 33 per cent of Australia's gross domestic product. Our literacy standards remain amongst the highest in the world. We have a diverse environment in New South Wales, with more than 600 parks and reserves covering more than 7 per cent of the State. Some 40 per cent of our coastline is now protected.

When the First Fleet arrived in Sydney in 1788 times were hard for all, but much harder for some than for others. At that time there were an estimated 40,000 Aboriginal people, speaking 250 distinct languages, and mostly with a shared common belief in the dreamtime and its creative deities. We all know about the serious issues involving Aboriginal health now so it is worth remembering that indigenous people were absolutely free of the diseases that came with European settlement. The new arrivals brought typhus, dysentery and cholera, as well as illnesses that Europeans took for granted such as the simple common cold. Because of this, thousands of Aboriginal people died needlessly.

Another group that bore a great burden was women. Of the convicts transported to Australia, some 24,000 were women—some were girls as young as nine years old. They laboured under the same conditions as men in as much as they were required to work in gangs of labourers building roads, were used as labourers for free settlers and were put to work in female factories. But they were also raped, flogged, considered whores and had their children removed—if indeed their children survived. The harsh reality was that many children and their mothers starved to death or died from disease. And, if it was bad for the women transported to this land, it was worse for Aboriginal women and girls, who were taken from their people, imprisoned, starved, raped and murdered.

So as we enjoy the material wealth and lifestyle of New South Wales we must never forget the suffering that it has been built on and must acknowledge the hard struggle of those who went before us. It is this struggle that laid the foundation of the party that I represent: the Australian Labor Party. It is one of the oldest and most enduring political parties in the world, and I am honoured to represent it in this Parliament. Ben Chifley best expressed the simple vision of public office in his speech to the Australian Labor Party national conference in 1949. He described Labor:

... as a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people.

We have a great objective—the light on the hill—which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand.

At the heart of the success of the Labor Party in New South Wales is the work of the labour movement and its rank and file members. Whilst many conservatives seek to portray the trade union movement as some type of secret Byzantine organisation, it has been vital to the

transformation of Australia into a prosperous and egalitarian society. Here is a democratic movement in which nearly 1.7 million Australians participate. It is a movement that has ensured not only a safe and fair workplace but also a more equitable society. The trade unions have been at the vanguard of movements involved with the suffragettes, the widows pension, child endowment and the environment. They have supported those who fought off oppression in places such as apartheid South Africa, Soeharto's Indonesia and Marcos's Philippines, and more recently they were the earliest supporters of democracy in neighbouring East Timor. The heart of the Labor Party is the rank and file members: the men and women who stick to the party and its principles through thick and thin.

I am continuing a great tradition in my own family of association with the Australian Labor Party and the Labor movement. My grandfather, Ben Walsh, was a founding member of the Birrong branch of the Labor Party and was the union delegate for the sheet metal workers at the factory in Regents Park he worked in most of his life. My mother joined the Birrong branch when she was 17 years old and I joined the party at 15 years old. As with so many other people my age, my family is the sum total of experiences of two world wars and the Depression. Both my Australian mother's and my New Zealand father's family belief in the labour movement grew through those difficult times. Two great grandfathers fought in the First World War. Denis Walsh died slowly from mustard gas poisoning and David Lumsden was wounded with what he called the "million dollar wound"—the loss of his hand. It got him off the Western Front alive, unlike most male members of his family, who died there. Eighteen of them served on the Western Front as British troops.

My grandfather Joseph "Joey" Voltz was a boilermaker, and a union man, who was trapped in a boiler more than once and was gassed and hospitalised as a result. My grandfather James "Ben" Walsh watched his father slowly choke to death from mustard gas damage. As children they were taken to Sydney and were fostered out. His mother, Ma Smith, went back to living on the St Clair Mission in Singleton until it was flooded. She then went to live down by the river. Unlike so many members of Aboriginal families at the time, Ma Smith managed to keep track of where the family lived. All three of Ben's brothers fought in the Second World War, with uncle Keith being captured on the fall of Singapore and imprisoned in Changi.

My grandmother, Jean Voltz, was brought from Scotland to New Zealand as an 11-year-old girl following her father's injuries in the First World War. She still lives there today. My grandmother Ada worked in clothing factories and did any weekend work available to make sure there was a roof over their heads and food on the table, the memories of the Depression never far away. Those experiences, the living history we all possess, make me what I am today. On whatever side of politics, people do not join political parties on an idle whim. As with the church or teaching, there is something in your soul that makes politics a calling—a vocation—that makes you want to be part of changing our society for the better. I have worked in factories, in the Regular Army, in pubs and in a workers health centre. I have worked for members of Parliament in electorates from the inner city of Sydney to the Torres Strait Islands. I have travelled around Australia a great deal, which has been a great education. It has given me depth and perspective on the disparity between those who have and those who have not, rich and poor, city and country.

We often hear that all politics is local but this is only true if there is a genuinely meaningful local voice. In a few short decades the Legislative Council has moved from a non-elected part-time Chamber to a fully elected body that is now uniquely placed to ensure that those that are most disenfranchised are not forgotten and there is an equitable distribution of resources across the State. That social responsibility must also ensure that all enjoy the rewards of what John Howard

terms the "longest economic expansion in our modern history". Whilst the official unemployment rate is currently approximately 4.6 per cent—a figure, we must remember, that counts anyone with one hour or more of work a week as employed—the true picture is much more complex.

My background is in the Western Suburbs, where the true picture is of an extraordinarily high level of casualisation of work and of housing repossessions for those who cannot afford mortgage repayments. And even if we stick with that very narrow measure of employment, unemployment amongst indigenous people is three times higher than in the general community. In some indigenous communities unemployment is a staggering 95 per cent. Real job creation is needed, particularly in regional and remote communities where unemployment is high, if we are ever to create a better society and make a real impact on health and living standards. Of course, a great deal of responsibility for this lies with the Howard Government, which is largely content to rely on employment figures artificially boosted by the current resources boom in Western Australia and Queensland. But we can endeavour to make a difference too—and this will be a major focus for me in my new position, with a particular emphasis on jobs in indigenous communities.

A job changes the social fabric of a community. It creates opportunity, wealth and social cohesion. I am pleased to see that some large employers are taking responsibility for fixing the problems: the ANZ Bank has an indigenous employment project through its Reconciliation Plan. Because governments alone cannot provide the panacea for all of society's ills, they need to work with business and the community to ensure real change. And we must never dismiss the value of small, innovative job-creation programs, as I have seen firsthand. They can make a real difference over the long term. Even small steps by businesses will plant the seed for future change—taking on just one indigenous employee or one indigenous trainee—because it is only through real jobs and ongoing opportunities that housing and health standards in Aboriginal communities will improve. It is my hope and expectation that a concerted effort to bring employment to indigenous communities will, in turn, impact on the disproportionately high rate of incarceration of indigenous men and women.

I am often asked about my service in the Australian Regular Army. It prompts me to mention briefly an issue that rests with the Howard Government but pervades the lives of all of us, and harms our reputation overseas. Two thousand years ago Sun Tzu wrote in *The Art of War*, "Those who love war will lead the country to destruction and those who crave victory will bring it dishonour. Therefore, war is not to be loved and the glory of victory not to be longed for. Dislike of war is the highest military principle." I am not going to glorify war, but I can say firsthand that the Australian Regular Army is overwhelmingly made up of good men and women with a deep commitment to serve.

The Australian Army has shown complete professionalism in its peacekeeping roles in East Timor and its service in Afghanistan and Iraq. But armies are not responsible for the ideology that sent them to war—and I can only believe that ideology rather than good sense led to the war in Iraq. The cost has been unacceptably high both in the lives of soldiers and the lives of the innocent in Iraq that have been lost. It is difficult to see how Iraq can recover. The war has failed in what should be the guiding principles of intervention: to protect and to restore order. But the cost of pulling out and leaving Iraq in a parlous state must be weighed against the damage caused by the continued presence of troops from Western countries. The lessons of Sun Tzu should not be ignored: "While we have heard of blundering in seeking swift decisions in war, we have yet to

see a smart operation that drags on endlessly." There has never been a prolonged war from which a country has benefited. As it was then, so it is now.

As I have said, the Australian Regular Army is overwhelmingly made up of good men and women. I am often asked what it was like as a woman to serve. I might just say that I do not think Pru Goward would have enjoyed it or lasted long if she finds the New South Wales Parliament a challenge! I was in the second group of women to train at Kapooka and become a fully fledged member of a Regular Army corps rather than a member of the women's corps. I am grateful to the women who fought the fight that allowed my generation of women access to greater and more equal opportunities than those that were available to them, not only in employment but also in sport, academia and business.

I particularly thank the women who have been mentors for me over the years: firstly, Jan Burnswoods, whom I replace in this House. Jan was one of the most tenacious members of Parliament. She was a driving force on so many women's issues for a long time. We all owe her a debt of gratitude for her long service and unswerving beliefs. Sandra Nori, for whom I worked for the past eight years, is one of the cleverest people I know. Sandra's mind works at an extraordinary speed and I was always asking her to slow down so the rest of us could catch up. I also thank Elizabeth Tout, Judith Hill, Christine Kibble and Caroline Staples for their never-ending belief and support. I also thank a couple of blokes, Robert Tickner and Peter Baldwin, and all my friends. I am not about to read out an extensive list but note four of my oldest friends, Linda Perrett, Greg Shaw, James Allen and Paul O'Grady, for all the good and bad times we have shared together.

I would like to single out the union movement for my thanks and gratitude, in particular the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, the Miscellaneous Workers Union, the Public Sector Association, the Power and Marine Engineers and the Maritime Union of Australia for their support and friendship. In particular I mention John Sutton, Andrew Ferguson, Jeff Lawrence, Annie Owens, Jim Lloyd, John Cahill, Sue Walsh, Steve Turner, Martin Byrne and Paul Garrett.

Most importantly I would like to thank my family. To my long-suffering husband Elias Bampos, my thanks for your love and support. To my beautiful girls, Katerina and Anastasia, both clever and cute, and a dangerous combination, thank you very much. To my mother, Maureen Walsh, and father, Bruce Voltz, thank you. To my in-laws, Vicky and Miltos Bampos, who travelled halfway across the world from Greece to live and raise a family in this country, thank you for your endless support and love.

To my brothers David, Mark and Anthony, my brother-in-law Nick Bampos, Laurie Ferguson and Francis Quayle, I would not be here without all of your support. And to my alternate children, Katrina, Jacinta, Liam and Shannon Byrnes-Staples and my goddaughter Astrid Jenkins and her little friend Max Lizzo, thank you very much. I intend to work hard—and I hope, effectively—in this Chamber in pursuit of what should be the guiding principle for all politicians: to bring a better standard of living and happiness to everyone.