

Legislative Assembly Hansard – 08 May 2019 – Proof

INAUGURAL SPEECHES

The SPEAKER: I join the House in congratulating the member for Coogee on her inaugural address. Forthcoming is the inaugural address of the member for Auburn. I acknowledge those in the public gallery, family, friends and supporters of the member for Auburn.

Ms LYNDA VOLTZ (Auburn) (17:26):

I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which this Parliament stands, in this case the Eora people of the Gadigal nation. But I also wish to pay my respects to the Wangal, Wategoro and Gundungara clans of the Darug people, the original inhabitants of the Auburn area that I am now so pleased and honoured to represent. The Cumberland Plains are the home of the Darug people and encompass nearly the entire western suburbs. Western Sydney has the highest concentration of Aboriginal people in Australia, with over 25,000 living in the Greater Western Sydney area. I first want to congratulate the Premier, Gladys Berejiklian, on her re-election. It is good to see the Liberal Party coming to terms with the power and expertise of women. It is a pity her Federal colleagues have not followed her example.

Mind you, with just two years up her sleeve in this post she has a long way to go to challenge the records of both Bob Carr and Neville Wran—both of whom were Premier for 10 years and who, between them, in the 1970s, 80s and 90s and up to 2005 won seven elections on the trot. Not since 1896 have such terms been achieved. Premiers Wran and Carr were the pinnacle of progressive government in law reform, human rights, environmental policy and economic management. It is a great honour to represent the people of the electorate of Auburn. My family have lived in the Birrong and Granville areas since 1938. My grandfather and grandmother, Ben and Ada, bought a piece of land on what is now known as Wentworth Street, Birrong, in 1938. It was only the second house on the street and the suburb was essentially bush. Their history replicates that of so many of those who still come to live in the electorate of Auburn. It was an opportunity for a better life.

My grandfather's early years were lived in Walcha. It would appear at some point the family moved to live on the St Clair Aboriginal Mission where his brother and sister, Eric and Rita, are recorded in 1915 in Singleton. This may have had something to do with his father's service in World War I. My granddad always said he was cared for by the Church of England in Sydney but the details of this now appear to be lost. My grandmother, Ada, worked two jobs; in a clothing factory during the week and selling pies at Canterbury Racecourse or at the Sydney Cricket Ground on the weekend to get money to buy the piece of land.

This story is no different from that of many who live in the electorate of Auburn today—families working together to create a better life for their families, often in more than one job, often with more than one family in the home. Some have lived there for thousands of years, some for decades and some have recently arrived. But their lives are a continuum on the land. Once a meeting place for the Wategoro, Wangal and Gundungara clans, the electorate of Auburn has now become one of the great meeting places of the world. These suburbs hold a collection of stories and have an immense beauty that cannot be found anywhere else. Every house tells a story, every street a new twist, every new birth a celebration, and every weekend a festival. In Auburn we may all speak different languages but fundamentally our story is the same.

Despite this sense of belonging and hope, so many in our local community are being left behind. Auburn has the second highest rate of homelessness in the State, after the electorate of Sydney. Homelessness has grown dramatically in the past 10 years, which suggests that whatever policies are being put in place they are not working. Its unemployment rate of 6.6 per cent is the highest in the Sydney metropolitan area and the second highest in the State, yet there are so many local residents delivering services on the ground, working with community organisations, sporting groups and religious organisations. Government must get better at harnessing the strength of local community if it intends to tackle what is becoming a dangerous trend of increasing numbers of disadvantaged people in the Auburn electorate.

The other dangerous trend this Government cannot ignore is the divisive narrative of "us and them". In a world where the weapon of those who wish to cause us harm is fear and division, those elected as representatives of government should ensure they avoid the temptation of further division by singling out one section of our community over another. In the other place I was always surprised at the ability of some in that Chamber both to ignore history and to present an irrational religious view when it came to the origins of our legal system. This of course was not due to a lack of research or understanding. It was simply a bald-faced attempt to exclude some of our community, essentially to create the us and them dynamic. It is the type of guff we also get from the ideas of the Ramsey Centre for Western Civilisation. Language matters and it should be used to enhance intellectual debate not, as has been the case in both Chambers in this Parliament, to stifle it.

History teaches us that all cultures have been perpetually in discussion with one another. By creating a social narrative that ignores these discussions we are ignoring the nuances of history and the nuances of our identity as a multicultural society. When isolationist politics translates into an isolationist history the only thing you get is lonely people disconnected from society, and that is a particularly dangerous place to be. The last few months have been distressing for many in our community. The senseless terrorist attack in Christchurch, followed by those in Sri Lanka, has shaken the local community.

It is imperative that those in this Chamber stand side by side with the community, taking on racism in all its forms. There is a growing tide of anti-Muslim, anti-Jewish and anti-Christian intolerance across this country and the world. The African community has also come under sustained attack. It is extremely disturbing. We must stand together to fight all these forms of racism and intolerance. It is also important we resist the temptation of standing up for one community whilst launching a veiled attack to silence the voices of another.

My electorate of Auburn has a large Palestinian community. Many Palestinian refugees were my friends at school, alongside a large contingent of Chileans who fled the Pinochet regime. The plight of the Palestinian people and the occupation of their sovereign lands is well understood in this country. Every one of the last five Morgan polls on Australian attitudes to the Israel-Palestine dispute shows majority support among Australians for the Palestinian case. They agree with Labor policy that Palestine, like Israel, should be recognised as an independent state by Australia. The polls show Australians also condemn the Israel Government's actions in allowing settlers to occupy Palestinian land. Palestine is the site of one of our earliest conflicts as a young nation. I have stood on a beach in Gaza and pondered on the forces that drew those poor Australian soldiers, from the ends of the earth, to Palestine and Turkey and on to the mass slaughter on the Western Front.

Australia has a complex history of involvement in conflicts over the last century. People will see this complex history as they walk the streets of Auburn. At Anzac Day memorial services they are likely to run into South Korean servicemen who fought alongside Australians not only in the Korean War but also in Vietnam. The Auburn dawn service always hosts a large Turkish contingent, standing side by side with those who have served in the Australian Defence Forces. There are many in the electorate from the Iraq and Afghan communities; they are here due to more recent conflicts that have seen our troops engaged in their longest period of conflict, lasting two decades.

Alongside these communities, the electorate of Auburn has one of the largest Chinese communities in the State. Anzac Day is also an important time to remember the great loss and service of the Chinese during World War II. Although less well armed than their American and British counterparts, whom they fought alongside in Burma, the Chinese held out 800,000 Japanese soldiers on the Chinese mainland. The horrors of Nanking, the bombing of Chongqing and the fall of Xuzhou contributed to the 14 million Chinese believed to have been killed during this horrendous conflict. It is estimated 80 million Chinese became refugees. The contribution of the Chinese during World War II should not be underestimated. They had a considerable role in the outcome of the war in the Pacific and it should be recognised and acknowledged. It is this shared history that brings us together in our community. The horrors of war never really leave a nation, and war has left a scar on the soul of our nation with so many lives lost over the last century. But it has contributed greatly to the nation we are today, where those who once either stood side by side or on the opposite sides in the trenches now all live here together. That is what is best about Auburn.

Of course there is much work to do in the electorate. Homelessness and unemployment must be tackled. Auburn Hospital, built by the Carr Labor Government, has seen its services run down under this Government. Local constituents expect more than just childbirth services at Auburn Hospital. I hope that in the future the Minister for Health will sit down with me to talk about, at the least, the return of a fracture clinic to this hospital. It is concerning to have children arrive at an emergency ward at their local hospital with a fracture, only to be sent to another hospital to be treated when diagnosed. I note the member for Murray shared the same concerns in her inaugural speech. When the Government talks in this Chamber about customer service, it is incumbent upon it to provide the services. The reductions of service at Auburn Hospital do not give me confidence in the Government's claims to improving customer service.

Highest on the list of customer service complaints that this Government might want to deal with is its decision to dramatically cut local train services. At Regents Park, Berala, Lidcombe, Auburn and Granville stations the complaint is the same: the new train timetables have been a disaster. Traffic congestion is also a major headache for local residents. The reintroduction of tolls on the M4 has served to drive motorists off the M4 and onto the local roads of Auburn. Of course, the Government is well aware of the problem as it was predicted in the Government's own traffic reports for its business case. Mona Street and Wellington Road turn into continuous parking lots during peak hour. At Wentworth Point the continued failure to ensure any cohesive traffic management plan is particularly frustrating for residents as Roads and Maritime Services [RMS] and Parramatta Council continue to find excuses to fail to put in any traffic measurements at the Hill Road-Bennelong Parkway intersection.

A year after signing a memorandum of understanding for the site of a new high school at Sydney Olympic Park, little appears to have happened. Fortunately, we now have a new Minister for Customer Service, who, I am sure, will be on the phone after my speech, fixing these customer service complaints immediately. I think he can expect a bit more of that. As I said earlier, it is a great honour to represent the electorate of Auburn. It contains my spiritual home, Lidcombe Oval—home during my youth of the mighty Western Suburbs Magpies. It is a dynamic place, its schools punch above their weight, it is fast becoming the festival capital of Australia and it contains the most vibrant food, poets, artists and storytellers in the country. Quite frankly, if you want to hear a good yarn, you should come to Auburn.

Before I start the long list of those I need to thank for their support outside this place, I thank my colleagues in the other place. Much of the work in the Legislative Council appears to be unappreciated outside that Chamber—I note some of my colleagues here are from there—but it is often the place of greatest reform in the Parliament. Indeed, I am sure the Premier will want to embrace with open arms the reforms they have been talking about today. I also thank all the long-suffering staff of the Legislative Council for their hard work, often into the wee hours of the morning; on a couple of occasions into the next day.

My staff over the past 12 years as a member of the other place also deserve a medal: Sheena Borbe, Charisma Kaliyanda, Katrina Byrne, Luke McCaskie, Mustapha Khodr Agha and, particularly, Saskia Mulder and Helen Samardzic. I thank also my campaign director in the seat of Auburn, Anthony D'Adam, who is now in the other place as well. I am sure he appreciated the new military precision that was brought to local campaigning. While there are far too many to name everyone who worked on the campaign and gave me support, their commitment and hard work are greatly appreciated. I particularly single out Barbara Dundas, Michael Spicer, Nadia Repin, Kassem Chalabi, Rafah Chalabi, Mustapha Hamed, Ibrahim Taha, Fahad Mahmood, Glen Elmore, Martin Byrne, Sabrin Farooqui, Ali Khan, Ali Ulutas, George Campbell, Steve and Josephine Christou, Baris Atayman, Taha Jamil, Ashlee Kearney, Mark Styles, Tom Mortimer, Kun Huang, Ernest Kulauzovic, Ghassan Alassadi, Ola Hamed and David Chen.

I pay particular tribute to our local stalwart Vince Roach, who, unfortunately, passed away during the campaign. Not only was Vince a fearsome campaigner for the Labor movement, but he was also a vital cog in community transport and the local RSL sub-branch. He will be greatly missed by all in the Labor movement. I thank also for their community support The Association of Bhanin El-Minieh, the Turkish Welfare Centre, Iraqi Renaissance, the Palestinian workers association, the Australia Alevi Cultural Centre and the Australian Chinese Workers Association. There were some particularly special hard workers, who may be small in stature but make up for it with gusto on the campaign field who deserve a special mention. They are Elmina and Ahmed Kulauzovic; Inez, Samuel and Atticus D'Adam; and Nicola and Isabella Christou. I thank my good mate Rita Mallia from the Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union [CFMEU], alongside Darren and all the other CFMEU delegates, for their support over many years. I acknowledge my union, the Public Service Association of NSW, and, in particular, my good mate Greg Shaw, for his support over many years.

The work unions do is vitally important. I know that recently the CFMEU has been shaken by another loss on a job site when Christopher Cassaniti, only 18 years old, was killed when scaffolding collapsed on the site where he worked as an apprentice. That was a tragic loss and Christopher's parents are heartbroken. Christopher's mother bravely spoke about him at the recent May Day rally in Hyde Park. She spoke of the devastation to their lives due to the loss of their young son. Importantly, she urged governments to do more, particularly regarding legislation introducing more stringent penalties to prevent deaths in the workplace. Members on this side of the Chamber will continue to fight for the introduction of laws that would provide heavy penalties for corporations where workplace death results from breaches of workplace safety obligations. We will also continue to pursue significant jail penalties in appropriate cases where individuals are found to be morally culpable for a death.

Last but not least, I thank my family. I start by thanking my brothers, Mark, David and Anthony, for all their help. While David is a seasoned campaigner at every election, Mark flew in from Austria to spend his holiday standing at pre-poll and banging in garden stakes for posters. It was quite the holiday treat for him! My little brother, Anthony, single-handedly letterboxed Granville South and had the entire suburb covered with such speed and efficiency that I always ended up being called to drop off more boxes to try to keep up. To my mother, Maureen Walsh, and my stepfather, Laurie Ferguson, thank you for not only your hard work on my campaign, but also the ongoing selfless work you continue to do on behalf of the community. Regardless of the strain, you always turn up. I thank my father, Bruce Voltz, and Francis Quayle for all their hard work during the campaign. It is always worthwhile having a former salesman on your team, who believes you are capable of anything and when you need someone to sell your story.

I thank also my big fat Greek family. To Elias, thank you for your friendship and level-headedness in the face of whatever chaos is happening around you. Miltos and Vicky Bampos, thank you for all your ongoing support and love and generous quantities of food. To Voula Pimbas, Alex Pimbas and Joanna Passaportis, your ongoing belief and support are very important to us all. Finally, to my not-so-little monsters, Katerina and Anastasia Bampos, it has been said many times that politics is very hard on children. I believe given the breadth of politics in our family, it has been harder on both of you than most. I promise not to make you do too many translations for me for Greek constituents, although I have already broken that rule. I only want to tell you both, for the record, that I love you and I thank you for all your support. Thank you to all those who will be my colleagues in this Chamber. And, as they say in the classics, game on.

Members stood in their places and applauded.

TEMPORARY SPEAKER (Mr Greg Piper): I acknowledge the member for Auburn and welcome her to this Chamber. It has been wonderful to work with the member over the years in her other role. I wish her all the best in this House.