



Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Council, 9 May 2007, Corrected Copy)

< H2 >

Extract from NSW Legislative Council Hansard and Papers Wednesday, 9 May 2007.

INAUGURAL SPEECH

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind members that the Hon. Trevor Khan is about to make his first speech in this place. I ask members to extend to him the usual courtesies.

The Hon. TREVOR KHAN [4.23 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Mr President, as this is my inaugural speech may I take this opportunity to thank honourable members and all the officers and staff of the Legislative Council for the assistance and advice given to me during recent weeks. I observe that I was the last person elected to this Chamber but, ironically, I am the first of the new members to make an inaugural speech. With no compatriot's speech to model mine upon, I must admit that I have scoured *Hansard* to see what others before me have said. Indeed, I have sought and been given advice from members on both sides of this Chamber as to what I should, and should not, say.

It would seem that the general advice is that I should attempt to give members some insight into myself, and also to thank those who have been of assistance to me in reaching this place. I will therefore start with the latter task and then move to the former. I start by thanking my wife, Libby, for her support over the 21 years of our marriage. Lib has supported me through thick and thin, whilst at the same time maintaining her own full-time employment. Lib is not just my wife; she is my confidante, my friend, my rock. I thank her from the bottom of my heart.

It is indeed an honour and a privilege to be elected to the Legislative Council. In no small part my elevation is due to the efforts of the many members of my own party, The Nationals. There are far too many people within the party whom I have to thank, and should I start to I run the risk of forgetting someone and perhaps offending them. I will take that risk, however, and first mention someone who is no longer with us. I speak of the late Sir Adrian Solomons, MLC. It was Sir Adrian who in December 1985 first interviewed me for a job as a lawyer. At that time he was a consultant to his former firm, Everingham Solomons, and being in Sydney he was given the task of running the ruler over me. I well remember climbing the steps of this Parliament on a day in December 1985 and waiting for Sir Adrian to meet me in the foyer. It was my very first visit to this Parliament. A kind man with a generous smile and bright eyes eventually greeted me. I grew to know Sir Adrian as a thorough gentleman with a sharp mind and true compassion for his fellow man.

There are two other people whom I should thank. The first is Senator Sandy Macdonald, and the other is Mr Jim Booth. Both have stood by me over my many years of involvement in the party, and both have encouraged me to seek higher office. I thank them both. I must, however, thank the wider membership of The Nationals. The energy and dedication of the membership of the party was demonstrated in the last election. In the lead-up to the election that energy and enthusiasm was shown in the preselection process. In a seat such as Tamworth 100 ordinary members showed up to participate in the truly democratic process of selecting a candidate.

This was a preselection in which every member of the party branches in an electorate with more than six months membership was entitled to come along and vote, and vote they did. In electorates such as Barwon as many as 300 ordinary members attended and took part in the preselection process. This was true democracy in action by a party that actively encourages that process.

The quality of the candidates preselected was unsurpassed. Not only did we see Geoff Provost in Tweed, John Williams in Murray-Darling, and Kevin Humphries in Barwon but we also saw preselected candidates such as Kevin Anderson in Tamworth, Trevor Hollingshed in Cessnock, Leslie Williams in Port Macquarie, Greg Matthews in Dubbo, Susan Williams in Bathurst, and David Madew in Monaro. All these candidates gave generously of their time and energy. All committed to doing their best in the election, and met that commitment in spades. Not one of these candidates was preselected simply to fill a place on the ballot paper. All candidates were there to win, and all fought to achieve that objective.

The success of the party was demonstrated not only by the efforts of the candidates but also by the party membership. In a seat such as Tamworth, on election day almost 290 people gave generously of their time as booth workers. This level of commitment and energy was repeated in each of the seats contested. Once again it was a demonstration of true participatory democracy.

I well remember the words of my friend and mentor Duncan Maclean. Duncan is a lawyer who practises his profession with dignity and style and lives by the adage, "You always gain the most satisfaction by fighting the fight you think you cannot win." Duncan taught me that the most important thing is for your client to know that

you have done your best. He also demonstrated that there are still people of principle and enormous talent within my profession.

What I have also learnt over the past 20 years is that our justice system is perhaps one of the best in the world. Certainly there are deficiencies, but it is composed of a body of men and women committed to ensuring that the system works. I fear that all too often criticisms are made of the system by people who have no experience of it, with an eye more to the next headline than upon achieving beneficial change. There are principles in our system that appear to be under threat. The growth of strict liability offences, the shifting of the onus of proof, the lessening of the criminal standard of proof, are all matters of concern. Of equal concern is the trend to remove decision making from the judiciary and place responsibility with members of the executive or quasi-judicial tribunals. All these moves involve a lessening of the protections previously available to the ordinary citizen and must therefore be resisted.

However, I feel in detailing my legal career it is only fair that I pay tribute to the many hardworking and talented teachers who saw me overcome early difficulties to eventually enter this profession. I was privileged to attend what was then a small private school, The Illawarra Grammar School in Wollongong. That school provided me with a quality education throughout the time of my schooling from 1962 until the completion of my Higher School Certificate in 1975—in fact, 11 November 1975 was the day of my final economics exam. There can be no doubt that it is the teachers in the early years of my education who are owed the greatest debt, for it was those teachers who identified a reading difficulty which was then simply described as dyslexia.

I well remember those times in the special reading classes. I well remember as a child my school friends speeding along in their reading exercises whilst I struggled with much simpler tasks. It was a difficult and embarrassing time. As I say, if it were not for those teachers who identified my difficulties I may well not have had the opportunity for the higher studies that I have had. But my gratitude to the teaching profession does not end there. As a result of my university years I became a firm believer in the values of the State public education system. This belief in the public education system arose for a number of reasons, but principally because of the significant contribution that a public education system plays in ensuring the homogeneity of our society.

Let me add also, for those who believe in the dreams of Menzies, that a quality education system is one of the great levellers in our community. A quality public education system can help lift those who are less fortunate from their poverty and disadvantage and give to them the chance to share in the wealth and opportunity of our community. My belief in the benefits of the public education system came to be tested when it was time for my children to attend school. Both my children first attended Tamworth Public School and then Oxley High School.

My daughter, Jen, has completed her secondary schooling and is now at university studying to be a physical education teacher. Her achievements are in no small part due to the dedication, support, nurturing and commitment of her teachers. My son, Nick, still attends Oxley High School and he also receives a level of professional tuition and care that I believe is difficult to match. If it were not for the quality of care that my son receives, if it were not for the positive influences that his school has had upon him, I do not believe it would be possible for me to leave my family in Tamworth and travel to sit in this Chamber.

Plainly, my personal gratitude to the teachers is important, but, equally, the deficiencies in the funding and management of the public education system are all too often taken as a criticism of the educators themselves. I welcome the opportunity to say our teachers need our support. I, for one, will happily spend my time in this Chamber repeating the message that we cannot let our teachers down.