



# Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 3 May 2011, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday, 3 May 2011.

Mr JOHN ROBERTSON (Blacktown) [6.47 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to them and their elders, past and present. I am honoured and privileged to be given the second opportunity in the New South Wales Parliament to give an inaugural speech, after having served in the other place since October 2008.

I would like to start this evening by saying thank you to the people of Blacktown. Blacktown is unique. It is a thriving and vibrant community. I know that the people of Blacktown will tell you what is on their mind, and not be afraid to say it. They have a great respect for each other, and a keen interest in improving the area for the benefit of all. I have spoken to thousands of Blacktown residents over the past months. I want to say thank you to those Blacktown residents who shared their personal stories with me, to those who invited me into their homes, and to each person who stopped me on the street or a train station to speak to me about the issues that are most important to them.

During the election campaign I knocked on doors in neighbourhoods where people struggle to make ends meet. And on 40-degree days in the height of summer, day after day I was touched by the kindness of strangers who invited me into their homes for a cool drink and some respite from the sun. They are the salt of the earth—a term that seems to be commonly used when members talk about their electorates. The people of Blacktown are warm, caring people, and it is a humbling experience to have the opportunity to represent them—to represent people like Theresa, who through tragedy and circumstance has been left in a home where the rent is so much she can barely afford to eat, and she has no family left to care for her. I hope that as her local member I can continue to provide Theresa with the support she needs to get back on her feet.

The support that the people of the electorate of Blacktown have given me will not be taken for granted. I know I have been elected to do a job. My election campaign slogan was "Standing up for Blacktown". To some it may seem like a throwaway line, some words to put on a campaign flyer, but to me it means much more. I have been standing up for working people all my working life. It is a privilege to stand up for the people of Blacktown—to stand up for our local community to ensure that our kids get access to world class education opportunities; stand up for our local community to secure more police and more police resources to drive down crime and make our streets safer; stand up for our local community to improve transport services in and around Blacktown; and stand up for our local community to secure more investment in Blacktown Hospital to make sure that our health system keeps up with the demands of Blacktown's growing population. These are the sorts of things I will fight for as the member for Blacktown.

During the months leading up to the election I had the opportunity to meet with a number of leaders of local community organisations and to learn about the services they provide. As the new member for Blacktown I look forward to further engaging with these community organisations and assisting them to fulfil their goals. These community organisations focus on making sure that young people, newly arrived migrants, the elderly and the disabled are given a fair go and receive the extra support they need to make ends meet. These are the values I have always identified with. The dedicated people who work in these organisations understand that the measure of a strong economy is not about credit ratings, the size of the stock market or the strength of the dollar. They know that the measure of a strong economy is how well the least well off are doing in our communities.

The questions that we should all be asking are: Do people have access to a job, can they afford to pay their bills, and do they have access to education and health services? These are the basics that make all the difference. I promise I will stand up for the people who need extra assistance to make ends meet and I will fight for the policies that encourage a society that focuses on the fair distribution of opportunity.

As is the case with every inaugural address, I would like to take some time to thank those in the Blacktown community, my family, my friends and my colleagues for their continuing support, particularly during the long months of the election campaign. To each person that contributed I say thank you, but there are a few individuals that I would like to mention. Firstly, I want to thank each of the branch members in the electorate of Blacktown. Thank you for your overwhelming endorsement of me as your candidate in the rank and file preselection for the seat of Blacktown. I say to members from Blacktown, Doonside, Prospect, Marayong South and Quakers Hill branches: Your support, experience and advice was invaluable.

Special thanks to those who turned up to train stations almost every morning, those who stood on street stalls in the midday sun, and those who helped out in the campaign office and supported the campaign in the local media. Thank you to those who worked pre-poll and, of course, to all those who handed out cards at the polling booths on election day. In particular, I would like to thank Councillor Steven Bali and Anne Bali, Diana and Michael Beacroft, Councillor Kathy Collins, Councillor Leo Kelly, Neil Galang, Geoff and Cherie Harrison, Arturo and Tess Sayas, Stephen Frost, Elias and Dimitra Kinnas, Satish Kumar, Martha Lynch, Val McKinnon,

Joan McDonald, Jack Miller, Joan Husic, Chris Pilao, Lucas Cayan, Balraj Sangha, Dennis Riddell, Roger Hennessy, Faustino Aboka and Stuart McKinder, many of whom are in the gallery tonight.

To my Federal parliamentary colleagues Michelle Rowland and Ed Husic, and Blacktown Mayor Alan Pendleton, thank you for your support, your guidance and your unfailing assistance. Thank you to the campaign team and also to the many young up-and-coming Labor supporters who got behind me and became involved in my campaign. Thank you in particular to Dan Kildea, Salim Barber, Ed McDougall, Brendan Cavanagh, James Fox, Lawrence Coleman, Tully Smith, Nick Staikos and Dom Ofner.

There is one important Blacktown personality I would especially like to thank. That person is Paul Gibson. Gibbo has been a tireless and vocal advocate for the people of Blacktown. He has never shied away from speaking his mind or indeed saying all the things that the people of Blacktown were thinking. He was a great support during the campaign and I know that he will continue to contribute great things to the local community.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank the ministerial staff and public servants that I had the privilege to work with in Government—Kelly Hutchison, Lucy Muirhead, Mark Gilham and Pete Cleary, who I worked with for the entire period I was a Minister in the previous Government. Thank you also to Chris Minns, Justin Mining and Cara Varian, each of whom served as my Chief of Staff at different times. Thanks also to each and every staff member I worked with. I am grateful for your advice and your professionalism.

To my family, most of whom are here this evening, I say that I doubt there are many members of Parliament who have the level of support that you give me. To my wife, Julie, I say that I could not have succeeded without your time, understanding, love and support and I will not be able to do this job without your continued love and support. I thank my children, Brianna, Aidan and Kass for their understanding in what has been a very tough time and one in which I have been away from home a lot. My brother and his family are also here tonight and I especially thank him and my eldest niece, Olivia, who handed out how-to-vote cards on election day for the first time. I am sure it will be the first of many such occasions. Thank you all very much for your support.

I am of course now not only the member for Blacktown but also the Leader of the Opposition. The people of Blacktown, the very people I have talked about so warmly today, will help to ground me in that job. Labor has always been the party of working people and of standing for those most vulnerable in our community. There is perhaps no electorate quite like the one I now represent that so completely embodies the reasons for the Labor Party's existence. The people of Blacktown will ensure that I, as leader, am always driven by those core Labor values that once made us proud, but which were too often lost in the last term of Government.

I make no apologies for putting the people of Blacktown first. I believe the first priority of all members should be to advocate and care for the community for which they hold their seat in Parliament. The duty of each member to his or her constituents is one that should never be overlooked. It is why I have encouraged every member of the caucus to think of himself or herself always as leaders in our communities. I intend to lead by example in that regard.

I have talked a lot since I was elected Opposition Leader about the need for Labor to reconnect with the community. It is why I have visited 29 of the 30 seats Labor lost at the last election. I have turned up and walked down the main street, visited community groups and met with community leaders, but mostly I have just listened—listened to mums at shopping centres, listened to pensioners at the senior citizens club and listened to workers on their lunch breaks about what it is that they want from a government in New South Wales. In the interests of these people I intend to lead a constructive Opposition, an Opposition that always acts in the interests of the people of New South Wales. I would like to reaffirm the commitment I made in the other place when delivering my inaugural address there:

...that I will continue to be an advocate on issues that are important, even where there is an inclination to say nothing because it goes against the grain.

I do not pretend for a moment that the task will be easy. The picture already looks very different in this Parliament. Each and every Labor member will need to make an extraordinary contribution if we are to be heard in this place. But I would not have taken this job if I did not believe in Labor's capacity, and the capacity of the Labor members in this House, to rebuild and reconnect with the people of New South Wales.

In conclusion, I thank members opposite for listening so quietly. I am sure it is the last time I will be listened to so quietly in this place. Thank you.