



Inaugural Speeches

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Mr LUKE FOLEY (Auburn) [12.00 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): On 1 September 2010 I delivered my inaugural speech as a member of the Parliament of New South Wales. I refer honourable members to it. That speech speaks for itself. It tells a story of my values and what I believe in. I feel no need to retell that story today. What I do intend to do is to make some remarks about the electoral district of Auburn and its people who have sent me to this place as their representative.

My uncle Brian Jackson, my mother's brother, was like a father to me for most of my childhood years. His best mate was Peter Cox. They worked together at the old Department of Motor Transport at Rosebery, before Peter Cox entered this place in 1965. He served eight terms as the member for Auburn. He crafted Labor's transport policy that was such a major vote-winner in the 1976 election campaign that returned Labor to government and brought Neville Wran to the premiership. Peter Cox then served as a Cabinet Minister for every day of Labor's 12-year period in government, until he retired at the 1988 election. Peter Cox was the first Labor politician I ever met. He sat with me at my uncle's funeral; I was 15 years old. I attended Peter's funeral in 2008. Peter Cox is one of the finest men I have ever met, the very best of old Labor. Never did I dream that I would one day succeed him as the member for Auburn. It is an honour beyond words to follow in Peter Cox's footsteps.

Jack Lang also served eight terms in this place as the member for Auburn, in addition to two terms as the member for Granville and three as the member for Parramatta. The contest for history inside the Labor Party between the admirers and the critics of Lang has never ended. Suffice to say that it is Bill McKell's portrait, not Lang's, that hangs on the office wall of the current leader of the State parliamentary Labor Party. But Lang's contribution to the histories of Auburn, the Labor Party and the State of New South Wales can never be denied. Whatever your view of Jack Lang—whether you consider him saint or villain—his place as a giant in the history of our State and its politics cannot be denied. Of course, Lang lies today in his eternal rest at Rookwood Cemetery in the heart of the Auburn electorate.

I want to pay tribute to my immediate predecessor as member for Auburn and dear friend, Barbara Perry. The very first person who suggested to me that I might one day contest Auburn for the Labor Party was Barbara Perry. In fact, she badgered me on the matter for some years and she eventually got her way, although not in the circumstances that either of us envisaged.

For 14 years Barbara was a loved representative of Auburn, the place where she grew up and has spent all of her life. Barbara's commitment to her local community and this State is unquestionable. As a local member she worked her heart out—upgrading Auburn railway station, securing new resources for Lidcombe TAFE and working hard with local religious and community leaders to hold this multicultural cornerstone of our city together in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. When it comes to legacies, they will not have to build a monument to Barbara because it is already there: the Auburn Hospital. When Barbara was elected in 2001 the Department of Health was planning to close the Auburn Hospital. Barbara not only turned around that decision, she secured a \$160 million rebuild of the Auburn Hospital from the ground up. She has been a truly wonderful advocate for her local community, leaving shoes that are impossible to fill. She will continue to be an indispensable source of counsel to me as member for Auburn.

There is not enough time to thank the very large number of people who helped in my Auburn campaign. They were there; I was not—I was everywhere but Auburn for 12 weeks. Very briefly, I want to place on record my appreciation to Barbara Perry, Clayton James, Donna Davis, Felix Eldridge, Michael Ng, Kun Huang, Councillor George Campbell and the many branch members and community members who worked tirelessly on the Labor campaign for Auburn. Today, Auburn is a very different place to the one served by Jack Lang and even Peter Cox. The district is home to the highest proportion of residents born overseas and residents born in non-English speaking countries. Literally scores of diverse multicultural communities exist within the borders of Auburn. A multitude of religious faiths co-exist in harmony. On any given street one might find a mosque, a temple or a church. In its cheerful embrace of multiculturalism, its egalitarian and aspirational culture, Auburn truly reflects the diversity of our great city and nation.

As the local member I am keenly aware that Auburn faces many major health, education, transport and developmental pressures. It is a community that will require careful planning and attention from government. Of the 350,000 additional new school places we will need to find by 2031, 6,000 of them will be in Auburn. I see it as my duty to ensure that as the population expands the investment from government keeps pace, and that new housing must be accompanied by new amenities and infrastructure. No longer can we tolerate unemployment and youth unemployment numbers in Auburn that are well above the State average, or the fact that Auburn has the second-lowest rate of female workforce participation of any electoral district in New South Wales.

The Government's plan to move the Rural Fire Service from its settled headquarters at Olympic Park to make way for an urban activation precinct is ill advised. Our Rural Fire Service is perhaps the best in the world and does not deserve this dislocation. As the Auburn community struggles to get to work on congested roads, we cannot afford the current cuts to rail services at Granville and the overcrowding that now occurs at Lidcombe station. Middle-ring Sydney communities such as Auburn represent the heart of Sydney, and when the heart is strong our city is strong. Delivering services worthy of our growing community and helping the people of Auburn to reach their full potential will be a priority of mine, whatever else I do, over the next four years.

It was with pride and humility that on 5 January this year I was elected to lead Australia's oldest and most storied political party: New South Wales Labor. Labor has governed New South Wales for the clear majority of the past 100 years. Labor governments have achieved humane and civilising reforms that have made New South Wales perhaps the most harmonious, prosperous and fair society anywhere on earth. Yet a glorious past does not guarantee the Labor Party any sort of future, and nor should it. Labor must be relevant to the here and now; Labor must earn its future, and under my leadership we will.

The vision I outlined for New South Wales when I assumed leadership of the Labor Party was this: I want New South Wales to be the great economic powerhouse of Australia, the great employment generator in our nation and, at the same time, Australia's social conscience. The revived and revitalised State parliamentary Labor Party that I now lead will be an effective opposition in this Parliament, and I am determined that we will also become a credible alternative government. As leader of the alternative government of this State, I feel an obligation to offer an alternative program to the people over the years ahead. Over this term we will review our policies and challenge ourselves to develop new initiatives to address the challenges facing our State today. I am determined that the Labor Party I lead will be a party of solutions and never a mere party of protest.

I thank the people of New South Wales for bringing Labor back to relevance at the March election. I am proud to lead a revived New South Wales Labor Party. I am proud of the 20 new Labor members who have entered the Fifty-sixth Parliament. Labor's journey of renewal and change must continue. Under my leadership the New South Wales Labor Party will always be guided by our timeless Labor values: a fair go for all, a decent life for everyone and a helping hand to those who need it most in life. I thank the House for its courtesy.

The SPEAKER: Order! Thank you and congratulations to the Leader of the Opposition.