



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 25 May 2011.

Mr KEVIN CONOLLY (Riverstone) [6.54 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I rise today for the first time to address this, the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales, conscious of the great privilege and the great responsibility bestowed on me by the people of the Riverstone electorate. It is wonderful to stand here as a member of a Government led by Barry O'Farrell and Andrew Stoner. The trust placed in me is humbling, the challenges ahead are daunting and the opportunity to do good is exciting. As I stand here I thank God for the talents He has given me, for the upbringing and education that have allowed me to develop those talents, and for the opportunities that He has presented to me throughout my life to this point.

First, let me reflect on the wonderful thing that is democracy in New South Wales and Australia. We are so blessed to live in a country at a time when we enjoy peace, stability and freedom. We live in a State where the views of citizens can find their expression in this place and where we are all afforded the benefits of the rule of law, freedom of association and religion, freedom of speech, and the opportunity to lead our own lives according to our own vision. These blessings have largely been inherited rather than earned. We owe so much to so many generations who went before us. We owe more than we generally recognise to our Christian heritage, from which the moral basis of our law and culture has evolved and which has driven much of the enlightened and compassionate reform of western societies.

We owe a great deal too to the British heritage that spawned the institutions and constitutional arrangements in which our freedom has prospered. We owe an enormous debt to those who have fought for this country to protect those freedoms. I note that today this House acknowledged the ultimate sacrifice made by Sergeant Brett Wood on behalf of our country earlier this week. We also owe a great deal to those many good men and women over generations who have served in our parliaments, courts, public service and free press, because freedom must be nurtured and supported to survive. We cannot take for granted that our State and country will always enjoy the political freedom we now have. It is our duty to carry out our responsibilities in such a way as to pass on this blessed heritage to future generations of people in New South Wales.

For those reasons I encourage people, especially young people, who are considering making a contribution to the political process at whatever level to take the plunge and become involved so that our democratic system is constantly reinvigorated and refreshed. If more people take an active part, our democracy can only be the better for it. My working life has been spent in the worthy vocation of education. As a high school teacher I had the privilege of helping young people discover their talents and abilities. It is a delight—and has been for a number of years now—to come across former students who have done well for themselves and who are making worthwhile contributions to their community. While dealing with adolescents all day can have its challenges, I can honestly say that when I moved from classroom teaching into the "back office" of educational administration, I missed the interaction with the kids whom I used to teach.

While working for the Catholic Education Office in the Diocese of Parramatta, I was fortunate to have as colleagues an array of people of talent, principle and commitment, whose service to the children and young people in that diocese has been outstanding. From them I learnt lessons about service, responsibility and integrity, which I trust will assist me in my new role. The founding director of the Catholic Education Office in the diocese of Parramatta, Ann Clark, used to remind those of us who worked in Catholic education that we stood on the shoulders of giants—those who had founded the system of Catholic schools in Australia. In the same vein I can say that I have had the privilege of working alongside giants in the schools and in the office during my time at Parramatta Catholic Education.

Prior to entering Parliament, I was fortunate enough to serve my local community as a councillor in local government. In this role, I have enjoyed being able to make a difference to outcomes for people in a hands-on and up-close manner. It has been inspiring to meet so many generous people engaged in voluntary activities, in many cases serving their local community over many decades. The experience of working with good-hearted local volunteers can be inspiring and enriching. As other local councillors such as the Acting-Speaker Mr Gareth Ward will know, there is also the reality of regular scrutiny and criticism to keep one humble. It is, of course, impossible to please all of the people all of the time.

My election as member for Riverstone would not have been possible without the help of my family. I could not be standing here today without the role played by my wife, Cathie, over many years. It has been a long journey for me and there have been some difficult moments in that journey. I pay tribute to Cathie for the role she has played in keeping me on the straight and narrow—keeping me standing up throughout it all. Our six children, Jessica, Joe, Patrick, Megan, Ben and Olivia, and my parents, Clarrie and Joan, have been an immense source of strength and support over the years that I have engaged in the political journey that has seen me arrive here in 2011.

As I first ran for Parliament in 1999 and had been involved in Federal, State and local campaigns since I joined the Liberal Party some years earlier than that, polling booths and election campaigns have been a very large part of my family's life. I cannot thank them enough for their support, enthusiasm and patience. In 2010 and 2011 Pat, in particular, made a huge contribution to my campaign and can take credit for a fair share of the 30 per cent swing we achieved. At two years old and two months old, my little granddaughters Millie and Lexie, who are here tonight in the gallery, are a tad too young to be press-ganged as booth workers, but they definitely help me to remember what life is all about and have opened up to me the joys of being a grandparent.

I am indebted to an enormous number of Liberal Party members, friends and supporters. There are so many people who deserve my thanks that I hesitate to mention some people and not others, but I really do have to put on the record my gratitude to Helen Russell, who was an absolute dynamo in the campaign office, Chris Winslow, Elizabeth Banks, Nathan Zamprogno, Brett Sprague, Sean Fannin, Jared Jacobsen, Jaymes Diaz, all of the Diaz family, Wal Smith, Judy and Bob Newland, and June and Barry Locock. There were so many others—hundreds of others—who were willing, energetic and generous of their time and effort to help me to complete this task and achieve the goal that I had set myself on behalf of the people of Riverstone. I am thankful to all of them for that.

Special thanks must go to Mark Hrycek, Chris Stone and Mark Neeham of the Liberal Party campaign team. I have never seen a campaign managed better. I thank also Paul Fakes, Eric and Joan Jordan, Ian Gilbertson and Rod Rose, who were so generous in their support of me in earlier campaigns. I need to acknowledge too the generous support of Mike Gallacher, Greg Smith and his family, Marie Ficarra, David Clarke, Chris Hartcher and many other members of the Liberal parliamentary party. My thanks go as well to Louise Markus, Kerry Bartlett and Alan Cadman, who have been friends and supportive colleagues over many years. I would like to record my gratitude for the support and trust shown to me by Peter Debnam in the 2007 campaign.

In recent months I was delighted to receive warm encouragement from a number of religious, ethnic and cultural communities represented within the Riverstone electorate. I thank Yadu Singh and Jagwinder Virk of the Indian community, Prasan Ulluwishewa and Lal Rankothge of the Sri Lankan community, Manny Villon of the Filipino Australian Cultural Centre at Schofields, Mahmood Ahmed of the Ahmadiyya Muslim community at Marsden Park and Zahir Ahmed for their assistance. I am looking forward to working with each of the various ethnic, religious and cultural groups within my electorate so that together we can help to make a better life for all members of our wider community. The Riverstone electorate was created in 1981 and has been represented by three members prior to my election, all from the Labor Party. The first of those who I acknowledge in the Chamber this evening now represents the seat of Mount Druitt in this Parliament. I acknowledge too the contribution made by my predecessor John Aquilina, who retires after 30 years with widespread respect and regard within the community. I wish him well for the future.

As members of the class of 2011 have been making their inaugural speeches, there has been something of a competition among them in praise of their electorates. I am not going to argue, as the previous speaker mentioned, with the member for Strathfield when he claims that people in his electorate walk faster than anywhere else, and I will allow the member for Blue Mountains her rhapsody over the beauty of the rugged mountain scenery in her electorate, but I do believe that in Riverstone we have a combination of heritage and youthful dynamism unmatched anywhere in the State. Throughout the electorate of Riverstone there are numerous sites at which it is possible to find evidence of the long history of the Darug people who lived in western Sydney for so long before the arrival of Europeans. In the townships of Windsor and Riverstone, at Rouse Hill and elsewhere we have everyday reminders of the early days of the colony of New South Wales.

The town of Windsor was established in 1794 as the settlement of Green Hills. An ancestor of mine, Thomas Gosper, was one of the pioneer settlers, albeit an involuntary one, who received a land grant in the district at the time. The fine public architecture of Francis Greenway, the humble homes of early settlers and the industrial architecture of the Riverstone meatworks each tell their story about the early days of the district, as does the Richmond railway line, which was built in the 1860s linking Windsor with Sydney via country stops at Riverstone, Schofields and Quakers Hill, pretty much as it does today. The newer suburbs of Acacia Gardens, Glenwood, Stanhope Gardens and Kellyville Ridge are dynamic places bristling with energy and ideas, as is the Nirimba education precinct at Quakers Hill. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

Since the 1980s thousands of people have moved to these suburbs in search of a good life for themselves and their families. Elsewhere in the electorate we have some of the most rapidly developing parts of the State, with new housing springing up in The Ponds and Colebee almost as I speak. As a result, the electorate has the largest number of enrolled voters of any in the State. Whichever one of these localities people live in, they are proud and protective of their neck of the woods and they expect no less of their Government than communities anywhere else in the State.

Rapid growth provides the context for many of the challenges facing the electorate. The timely provision of necessary infrastructure, especially in transport, is foremost among these. The lack of a rail line serving the new suburbs, the lack of an overpass at Riverstone and the traffic bottlenecks throughout the district remain to be confronted. The need for new schools, a police station, extra hospital capacity and other services loom as issues for the term of this Parliament. I mean to be a persistent and consistent advocate for the people of Riverstone in meeting these and other needs as they present themselves. It is wonderful to see that

already steps are being taken to progress the much-needed North West Rail Link.

A particular challenge facing people in the northern and western parts of the Riverstone electorate is the risk posed by major flooding. While the Hawkesbury-Nepean river system has not experienced a major flood since 1992, we all saw in late 2010 and early this year what floods can do when Queensland, parts of northern and southern New South Wales and Victoria experienced major downpours. Should the Hawkesbury-Nepean catchment one day experience rainfall on the scale that affected south-east Queensland in January this year, the devastation across western Sydney would be immense and the risk of large-scale loss of life very real. Planning to address these risks cannot be overlooked.

Much of what happens in this Parliament occurs on an adversarial basis and it often appears that members of different parties or factions are enemies. While there certainly is plenty of rivalry in politics, I believe that my real enemies are not other members of Parliament but those things that would undermine the welfare of and reduce the opportunities available to the people of New South Wales. These enemies include poverty, disease, homelessness, corruption and the breakdown of family relationships. It will be my goal to confront those enemies on behalf of the people I represent and to do whatever I can to maximise the opportunities for a good life for all. In particular, I want to contribute to policies which will support marriage and family life and which assist people to build communities that are nurturing and supportive of their members.

I am proud to be a member of the Liberal Party. This is the party that respects both the rights and the responsibilities of individuals. It is committed to personal freedom and to the protection of those unable to fend for themselves. The Liberal Party is not the party of any one interest group, but is broad based and draws support from across the full spectrum of the community. Its members comprise small business people, self-employed people and employees, people from a wide variety of ethnic backgrounds and faith traditions, city and country folk and the young and old. Importantly, it spans the conservative and liberal traditions within Australian politics and respects the conscience of individual members.

Liberal philosophy and values have much to offer in the task of ensuring that our State is a great place to live and offers the best chance of a good life to all its citizens. I would like to think that when my time here is done I will be able to look back and say that I have made a positive difference both to my local area and to the people of New South Wales. I would like to think that I will be able to say that I stood by my principles and contributed to good government based on good values. I look forward to working with everyone of goodwill in this place for the betterment of our society in New South Wales.