



## Full Day Hansard Transcript (Legislative Assembly, 11 May 2011, Corrected Copy)

Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday, 11 May 2011.

**Mr RYAN PARK** (Keira) [12.33 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. This place, the oldest Parliament in our nation is special. It is special for so many reasons to so many people, and it means different things to different people. Today I shall use my first speech in this Chamber to outline to the House and those in the gallery why it is such a special place to a working class boy born back in 1977. That same year as a country we decided that our national song will be *Advance Australia Fair*. It was a year when we mourned the loss of 83 people in our worst ever rail disaster at Granville. It was also a time when St George won another premiership but had not realised how much better they would be until almost two decades down the track they combined with the almighty Illawarra Steelers.

Affectionately known as the bear pit, this place is special because it is one of the forums in which the concerns, struggles and ideas of those in the Keira electorate can be listened to by all and advanced through determination and commitment by all sides. The Keira electorate is known for its natural beauty. Nestled between our great Illawarra escarpment and the clear waters of the Pacific Ocean, it is home to approximately 65,000 people from all different social and ethnic backgrounds. Whilst its natural beauty has remained relatively unchanged, it is its economic and social development that I am particularly fond of as it mirrors my own life experiences in many ways. As a child of a family who earned its weekly income from the steel and mining industries, both of which still play a key role in the electorate and broader region, I remember with great fondness the contributions that these industries made, whether through the employment of young people as apprentices or the assistance and sponsorship they gave local sporting teams and community groups.

But the electorate and the Illawarra have undergone significant changes. As I progressed through childhood the community became geared around education with a world-class university and TAFE institute that other regions could only dream about. This change meant that those of us who had interests and skills outside of the traditional heavy industries were now able to apply them and gain qualifications at tertiary institutions that carried out leading-edge research and training and have made the Illawarra an education city as much as a steel city. This change has not been easy and the evolution of the electorate has not been without its difficulties. We still have a higher than average unemployment rate, particularly for young people, an issue that all governments at all levels must actively work to address. We have witnessed natural disasters through flood and fire that have changed the way we live, and we have focussed on mitigating these events as well protecting against their occurrence.

But what has not changed is Keira's people—their kindness, their down to earth approach and their parochial affection for the Illawarra. In Keira people tell you how it is. From Woonona in the north down to Figtree in the south one message came through very clearly in this election: people want results, not rhetoric. They expect commitment not cowardice, and they are interested in integrity, not ideologies. I have heard that message loud and clear. To me this place is special because of those men and women who have gone before me and paced the corridors and halls of power with a fierce determination and passion, and who have represented their communities and advocated to make this great State of ours even better—whether it be the iconic Sir Henry Parkes whose image is adorned throughout this wonderful building, Millicent Preston-Stanley, the first woman ever to be elected to this New South Wales Legislative Assembly, or the greats of Wran and Carr, who dominated the political landscape of New South Wales during the past three decades.

And, of course, it is the place where the Hon. Linda Burney, the first Aboriginal to be elected to the New South Wales Parliament, still carries out her duties as Deputy Leader of the Opposition. It is not simply the individuals themselves who have served as role models and heroes; it is the debates they have endured, the fights they have won, the victories they have celebrated and the defeats they have witnessed all in cause of making our community better tomorrow than it is today. It is a special place because these battles and debates, carried out in this very Chamber, have shaped who I am and why I was so determined to one day take a seat in this wonderful theatre of democracy.

This place needs people with the passion, commitment and vision to debate ideas and bring about substantial reform that has a positive impact on the community and who we represent. As a child I remember well my father talking fondly about Wran, who oversaw the redevelopment of Darling Harbour to make a place that families from out of town, like mine, in places like the Illawarra, could come to, walk around and visit the cultural attractions, many that we had not seen before, free of charge. It was in this Chamber that we witnessed Wran and his team electrify the railway to areas that had never been serviced, by a faster, cleaner and more reliable mode of public transport. In later years the Chamber became the place where Carr's leadership shone, as he and his team went about improving the State's literacy and numeracy levels to standards above many other countries in the world, a place where he legislated the establishment of more than 400 national parks to be enjoyed and explored by generations to come.

The lessons that new members like myself must take from the reforms and changes that have been made in the past is a simple one: the community demands that we put their interests first, second and third, and anyone or any party who decides that they will take an alternative approach will be doomed when individuals cast their vote in March 2015. The reforms I have touched on have not come about because we carry out our business in the beautiful surrounds of this Chamber. They have come about because people, individuals and parties had ideas, stayed the course, and had such strength in their convictions that they could bring the community along and make New South Wales a better place. This Chamber should never play host to fence sitters, to those who see their role as a path to personal benefit, to those who lack the ticker and fight to take up issues on behalf of their community, no matter how many times they get knocked down or criticised. This place is for reformers, for doers and for courageous individuals who put their community first, second and third.

In 2011, it is time for conviction politicians to lead our community. Just because a policy idea is perhaps a little too complex or difficult for Twitter or Facebook does not mean that we should not be pursuing it. Just because the issue may take time and perseverance, more than the 10-second news grabs allow, does not make it less worthwhile. At the heart of everything we do in this place should be the development of sound and robust policy that inspires communities—not because of the pictures that can be broadcast about it or the tweets that can be sent but because it means an improvement to the lives of people like those in the electorate Keira and every other seat represented in this historic place.

Those of us in Opposition know all too well that the community will not and should not put up with individuals or parties who feel their own interests come before those of the people they represent. I know that this Chamber, under the leadership of John Robertson, a Labor man to the core, will see a renewed Australian Labor Party, one where people's ideas, policies and convictions reflect the communities they serve and a party that will once again be given the confidence of the people to serve those less fortunate, those workers and their families and small business owners who in many cases have risked their life savings in the pursuit of free enterprise, as well as those who come from distant lands to be their representatives.

But this trust will not come overnight. Like any relationship that has experienced difficulties, it will need to be continually worked on and it will need to be transparent in its approach. As a party, we will need to demonstrate that we have listened by focusing on policies and reforms that help restore confidence in our principles of social justice, a fair go for all, and equal rights and access to employment, education, information and housing. These are Labor values and they are my values. They will be the values that will guide me as I fight for a new library at Figtree High School, policies and initiatives that encourage jobs and investment in the electorate, a MetroBus to ease congestion around our world-class university, improvements to Bulli Hospital, and funding for walking tracks along our escarpment. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

What makes this Chamber so special to me are those who are not actually with us here today—in fact, many of them may never even have visited this Parliament, or may even see this place as foreign to their daily lives—the people of Keira. Each and every one of them, through me, will have their concerns, grievances, issues and aspirations reflected in this very special place. They include people like Robyn Alderton from the Bellambi Neighbourhood Centre, who with her team of volunteers support, care for and listen to the stories of some of the most disadvantaged people in our community, and do it with a spring in their step and smile on their face that makes helping them out a pleasure not a chore. It is individuals like Dave, a man I met recently when I was helping out with Mission Australia in the electorate. Dave has been unemployed for over 15 years, but week in and week out he volunteers his time to assist others with clothes and food in the colder winter months.

It is those organisations, like the Illawarra Forum and Southern Youth and Family Services, which support and provide a second chance to our homeless, those with a disability, those who have suffered abuse, and those struggling with mental health issues, especially our young people. It is the people I meet at my local coffee shop over a cappuccino made by Netty the barista, who make sure I know what ordinary people are concerned about—their interests, their concerns, their frustrations and their hopes, all of which contribute to ensuring that, no matter where I am, the decisions I make will always be based on my desire to improve the communities in which these people live and work, and which they contribute to.

Finally, all of us who have an opportunity to represent do so only because of the support and encouragement from those closest to them. To my campaign team, led by Gino Mandarino, can I say a big thank you for the 7,000 doors we knocked on, for the more than 110 telephone calls we made every day, standing out in hot, wet and windy conditions to show your support for me and to affirm your beliefs in the Australian Labor Party. My thanks especially to Neil Barnett, Tania Brown, Ian Hunt, Chris Lacey, Liz Hilton, Chris Monnox, Cathy Haney, Alison and Paul Scully and Sara Howson. To Gino in particular, a big thanks for your support, advice and encouragement even when things didn't look too good or the road ahead seemed fraught with danger. To the branch members, the trade union movement, my fellow Labor MPs and supporters who, under the most difficult of circumstances, went out there and stood at polling booths on election day and supported the Labor cause.

My thanks to the New South Wales Labor Party and its officials, in particular George Houssos, who took time away from his own family to help and support me and the team during a very difficult and hard fought election campaign. To friends, many of whom have no interest in politics but rolled up their sleeves to support me, I will never forget this and I am truly grateful. To my electorate

staff, Jenelle Rimmer, Judy Hunt, Jess Sparks and Amy Langston, a big thanks for your energy and enthusiasm over the last few months. That has meant we have hit the ground running, as the community would expect. Thanks to elder statesman in our great party that have provided me throughout my career with the support and belief in myself to take on this task, in particular, Bob Carr, Carl Scully and former Premiers Kristina Keneally, Nathan Rees and Morris Iemma, who can hold their heads high for the contribution they made to New South Wales, particularly in the important areas of mental health reform, disability support and local and regional infrastructure.

I thank my great friend, David Campbell, who has made an enormous contribution to the electorate of Keira. I am forever grateful to him. His hard work and efforts will live on in our local community for years to come. To Philip and Robyn, thanks for your support and good humour over many years. To my two sisters Lisa and Kylie, thanks for being, without a doubt, the best sisters a brother could ask for in his journey through life. To my parents, thank you for the foundation you provided me—a foundation that taught me about caring for others and believing in myself.

I thank the two most important people in my life, my wife, Kara, and my son, Preston, who I hope is having a sleep now. Both of them make me a better person every day because of who they are. My wife has been through more struggles than I could ever fathom and more heartache than one deserves to go through at her age but her strength, determination and grace make her the very best life partner someone could ask for and the best mother to my little angel Preston.

Finally, I again thank the community of Keira. You have given me, through the most sacred of our democratic freedoms—that is, the right to vote in the privacy and security of the ballot box—your trust to serve you in this place, to advocate and argue on your behalf, and to keep up the fight even if that fight seems overwhelming. To all of you I say simply this: I will not let you down. I end my first speech in this Chamber with the words adapted from the George Banks lyrical titled *What I live for*—words that will guide me on my journey in this very special place:

For the poor and for the slighted.  
For the wrongs that must be righted  
For the cause that needs assistance  
For the foe that needs resistance  
For the future in the distance.  
... And the Good that I can do

I thank the House.