



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

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

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Fourth Day's Debate

[*Business resumed.*]

Mr CLAYTON BARR (Cessnock) [12.54 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is a pleasure to follow the contribution of the member for Keira. I am excited by the history and the future of this great State. I stand proudly in the Chamber today as the new member for Cessnock. Congratulations to the Coalition Government on its success at the recent election. I think the message from the New South Wales electorate was clear: We do not mind giving a good kick in the backside to a government. Brace yourselves—it hurts! I am brimming with optimism for the potential of governments to make a real difference to the people, and to provide the tools for communities to build their own prosperity. I suspect that this optimism is true of most politicians across the land, and I suggest that pessimistic politicians leave it to others.

First, I congratulate and thank the former member for Cessnock, Mr Kerry Hickey. One generally hears Kerry's laughter long before one sees him, and he has an in-your-face honesty that sometimes makes people a little uncomfortable and causes a little chaos. But I suspect that Kerry likes the chaos. Kerry served his constituency without fear and favour, and undoubtedly made the electorate of Cessnock a better place to live. Congratulations are extended to the other six candidates who ran for the seat of Cessnock: Wayne Riley, Alison Davey, Alan Stapleford, Alan McCudden, Dale Troy and James Ryan. Everyone in this House knows that running an election campaign takes a lot of energy and emotion. It is the most public of all job applications. We have 50,000 people interviewing us, and unfortunately only one person can win.

The people of the electorate of Cessnock have given me an amazing opportunity. They have pride in their hearts and stars in their eyes. They expect that life will be hard—hard but fair—and they send their member off to Parliament to make sure of the fairness. It is difficult to think of an electorate that has such diverse competing interests. We have coalmines beside vineyards, farmland beside world-class hospitality and tourism, and new industry beside heritage villages, and we have a population explosion amidst failing infrastructure, obsolete to the extreme. The electorate is 70 kilometres from east to west and 50 kilometres from north to south, and I touch base with five local council areas. It is by no means the State's largest electorate, but I mention this point to help the House understand that members from country and regional areas bring a diverse set of issues to the Chamber.

So what can this great House do for the people in the State seat of Cessnock? I start with education. There is an unfortunate set of statistics about education levels in the seat of Cessnock. They are the lowest in the State—lowest completion of secondary education and post-school education. This House is asked to understand that the people of Cessnock need opportunity—opportunity for education in the earliest years of preschool and childhood through existing schools, new schools, intervention programs, career guidance, access to TAFE and university outreach. With regard to health, the electorate has one of the State's fastest growing populations, yet we have two hospitals with their best years well and truly behind them.

With ongoing and considerable investment, these two hospitals will suffice for the coming decade but not beyond. The Government of today must continue the work of the former member and the former Government to plan for a new hospital in the future—a hospital that will service a community of, by then, almost 100,000 people. In industry, we are fortunate to have thriving industrial estates to the east in the electorate—Beresfield and Cameron Park—but we have yet to achieve similar success in the suburbs to the west. We must continue to find ways to allow mining to co-exist with wine and farming, but we must ensure that wine and tourism are protected from coal gas extraction.

The building industry must be supported by intelligent planning and approval processes. We must make the most of the opportunities provided by the new Hunter Expressway—the region will boom. And Hydro must achieve a guaranteed supply of electricity to save crucial jobs in my electorate. We are 45 days into the first 100 days of this new Government and during campaigning I was happy to hear that it would be an immediate "fix priority" for the Coalition, and I implore it now to do that.

Unfortunately, while famous for its wines, the electorate of Cessnock is also infamous for its roads. We had the misfortune of Oprah criticising those roads to a worldwide audience—thank you very much, Oprah. The previous Labor Government invested heavily in

the roads in Cessnock. It was fixing the State's roads, and we need to finish that job. The election promise of the Coalition to deliver \$5 million per annum for regional roads, particularly in the vineyards, is a welcome announcement. But there is much, much more to be done. State roads such as Main Road at Edgeworth, the Newcastle Link Road, Weakleys Drive at Beresfield, Wine Country Drive in North Rothbury and Maitland Road at Abermain all require finishing. Regional roads such as Carrington Street in West Wallsend, Minmi Road in Cameron Park and Wollombi Road in Cessnock all require solutions for the future too—solutions that are beyond the capacity of local councils.

It is crucial that I state the importance of the train line into Newcastle for constituents of Branxton, Greta and Beresfield—the young and the elderly rely on those trains as their only means of transport. And public transport will be a crucial link in empowering the residents of West Wallsend, Edgeworth and Cameron Park in accessing the neighbouring suburbs of Lake Macquarie and Newcastle. Meanwhile, the people of Cessnock will continue to be the least educated in the State while transport barriers prevent them from accessing institutions such as the University of Newcastle, and Glendale and Tighes Hill TAFEs. The people of our communities right across this State are entitled to an expectation of safety. Economic drivers have seen the closure and scaling back of many police stations in the electorate of Cessnock. In particular, that has left the people of Beresfield exposed and afraid. Beresfield station stands idle unless graffiti artists turn their attention to it, just as they have done to the rest of the business district in this community. So much crime goes unreported while the Neighbourhood Watch group works tirelessly.

The Beresfield story can be repeated for Edgeworth and West Wallsend—both communities crying out for an ongoing commitment to the Glendale superstation. The community of Kurri Kurri is awaiting the finalisation of works for the reopening of its station as a regional highway patrol base, and the people of Cessnock are looking for the construction of a new police station to replace the hopelessly outdated building in which they operate. I implore the Coalition Government to expand investment in policing, to make our community safe and to increase the number of officers on patrol, please. And our families must once again ingrain in their children that the police are our protectors and friends. Stop telling them that they are our enemy. That message has been lost in just a single generation.

Our greatest asset is our people, a resource of unlimited potential. But as we strive more than ever before to realise wealth and capital assets, have we lost our willingness to commit to the smaller gift of time? Sporting groups rely increasingly on a small core of volunteers. School canteens cannot open because not enough people are available to man—or person—them. Service clubs such as Rotary and Lions have rapidly declining memberships. Where will we be in the future? This is National Volunteer Week. Governments have a role to play. The Community Building Partnership program was one of the most empowering initiatives for small and localised community groups in the past 50 years. It must continue. So, too, we must continue to partner with all levels of government to build greater community-focused infrastructure: sporting facilities, libraries, galleries, museums, parks, police and community youth clubs, playgrounds and cycle paths. We must get people out of their lounge rooms and put them into spaces where they meet and mix and create opportunities to build relationships, build communities and build healthy lifestyles. This will cost money up-front but the return will be a reduction in ill health, both mental and physical, and a more prosperous society.

My journey through life has been a fortunate and fruitful one, not always full of sunny days but a life that has shown me considerable love and care. I reflect happily on a childhood full of friends and sport, holidays and adventure, winning and losing, learning graciousness in both victory and defeat. The member that stands before this House grew up since birth with a mother and a father who gave willingly and abundantly to their community. I reflect on a childhood at school where I met with both challenge and success, but a time that had teachers so willing to offer support, encouragement and opportunity for growth. A school, and teachers, should be valued for much more than an academic score. They should be valued for the individuals that they produce—individuals who come with respect, manners, discipline and dreams. I hope that the students who were in the public gallery earlier sat there and dreamed big dreams. We must recognise that mainstream schooling is not a perfect fit for all. Education will require ongoing innovation.

In speaking so highly of education, it will come as no surprise that this inaugural speech will recognise several teachers of significant note who have surely shaped the hearts and minds of thousands of students in my electorate. Brian Davey, the husband of one of my adversaries at the recent election, was a primary school teacher who taught students the foundation lessons in reading, writing, arithmetic and, importantly, that success was being the best that you could be. John Tobin was a secondary school teacher, and now principal, who would accept nothing but students who were well mannered, rippling with confidence, showing pride in their appearance and offering respect to all others. John taught students that they always represented more than just themselves; they represented a family, a school, a culture, a team, a larger group, and that a person had to think beyond their own needs and think instead of the needs of the many. Frank Connell taught, and still teaches, students to cut to the core of the topic, know your content and deliver with conviction. Frank was a "no-nonsense" man. I take this time to pay tribute to all teachers in this State and country and around the globe.

My working life has been full of people willing to give me a go—opportunity repaid with loyal service, a willingness to learn and dedication to the task. I make mention of Phil Papworth at Mount View High School, Jolanda Horsburgh at CanTeen and Jason Linnane at Port Stephens Council. I trust that each of those persons would willingly endorse that their trust and faith in this bloke

from Cessnock was well founded, well served and repaid in full. And now I owe that debt and service to the people of Cessnock. If the House will indulge me, there is a crucial shaping of the member who now stands before it—lessons from seven years working at CanTeen, the Australian Organisation for Young People Living with Cancer. During this time, the wisdom and will of the young people was a constant source of learning. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

These young people, aged between 12 and 24, faced with cancer and faced with mortality, would face each day so bravely. The lesson to be learnt, and learnt well, was the lesson of the eternal fight between fear and courage. One young fellow with whom I worked required a second stem cell transplant. Things were dire. The stem cells were to be farmed from his sister. The lad was 13, his sister just 16. All preparations were made and the procedure began. Unfortunately, in the early stages, due to complications, it was recognised that the procedure would jeopardise the life of the sister if she were given anaesthetic. People need to understand that a stem cell transplant procedure is performed with a needle the size of a pen being drilled into the hip bone. The girl felt there was no choice. With great courage, she decided to go ahead with the procedure without anaesthetic—wide awake, alert and lucid. The needle was drilled into her hip and the marrow was farmed for her brother's survival—her courage, his life.

In essence, our decisions are all born out of this basic, natural state—driven by fear or driven by courage. Put simply, are we working to avoid something or to build something? Those who avoid are driven by fear. Those who build are driven by courage. Those who stood in this great House before us, and those who will stand here after us, most certainly encountered that same battle. Madam Speaker, you must have some fears about that chair but at the same time you had the courage to accept the challenge. So what role do fear and courage play in this House? It would seem quite simple, and yet so elusive. This House, this Government—any government—must govern with courage. Too many governments have governed with fear: the fear of losing the next election, the fear of upsetting colleagues or the fear of standing against a media poll. Governments must govern with a courage that extends beyond the next election. I ask all members of this Fifty-fifth Parliament to share the spirit of this wonderful young girl and honour her courage with similar willingness.

And now to my thanks. To my campaign team, who in the face of defeat rescued victory, I salute you. As every member of Parliament would know, campaign teams give so willingly of their time. It is just incredible how hard they work. There is no personal gain for them, no elevation to office, no headlines and no paparazzi. Thank you so much to those who attended and participated: to my campaign manager, Kim Pagan, and her incredibly hardworking assistants and strategists, Jay, Jamie and Richard; and to Mark for all the media releases and doorknocking that he did with me—hopefully you shed a few kilos like me, my friend. I must make particular mention of Colleen and Arthur Hartcher, octogenarians, who made sure that the campaign office was open for business every day of the campaign—all eight long weeks of it.

To Catherine, Warren, John, Anne, Darrin, Phil, Perri, Morgan, Damien, Bob, Bob—that is not a stutter—and Mary, thank you for all your work and effort, wisdom, knowledge, insight, experience and belief. To the Labor head office, thanks for your time and conviction. To Andrew, our double-decker billboard was a crushing blow to our opponents every time it went out. To Kerry Hickey, Stan Neilly, Joel Fitzgibbon and Eric Fitzgibbon, who are former and current members, thanks for your wisdom and support. To Kristina Keneally and Tony Kelly, who took time out of their busy schedules to visit my electorate, thank you for your assistance. And to my lifelong mate Mark Trowbridge: Champion, I could never buy you enough beers for all that you did—and, remember, it is not polite to ask for them. You would think that this list is a long and comprehensive one, but the reality is that it is just the beginning. There were a hundred more people who helped me in the lead-up to the election and on the day. To everyone who helped, thank you. To my hardworking office staff, Perri and Anne: We are on this ride together. Thank you for the flying start that we have made. Your skills and knowledge will complement the community incredibly well. Thanks for joining me. Strap in!

And now for the family. I have a mother who, in spite of terrible life hardships, is the warmest, friendliest, most polite, loving and caring individual you could ever hope to meet. Right across my community people speak so highly of the woman called Margaret Barr—in fact, her reputation may well have gotten me across the line on the day. She had to be worth at least 2 or 3 percentage points! I salute my mother in this speech. My time on this planet has never known a moment when it was not shown great love, sacrifice and patience. To my brothers and sister, who have all been provided with a life of love, care and warmth from this same woman and have all found their own success on this planet, Leanne, Justin and Kipton; to my in-laws and out-laws; my extended family; and my friends and former work colleagues: Thank you for being all that you are and for doing so much to support.

And to my wife, my Lisa, where do I start? Perhaps with sorry—I won. We have been together since we were just children on this planet. You have grown with me and shaped me. You have let me run loose at times and reined me in at others. You have made space for me to chase my dreams. You have always shared me with the community, and you have been very supportive at every step—except my most recent surf trip to Papua New Guinea. You have now committed yourself to single parenting for the next four years, and possibly beyond. Why would you do this? Are you mad? No, you are not mad. You, like me, believe in the courage of dreams and a better place. You and I share a love for our children and for the community in which we would like them to grow up. You and I share a love for each other that has no boundaries but certainly has a homestead—and we always leave the light on.

To those who call me "Daddy"—Isla, Mali, Aubrey and Elsie—you are giving so much of your dad to this State, to the people. You

are my life and, while I will undoubtedly miss so much of your growing, I want to model for you and shape for you a potential in life that has no bounds. Most importantly, I want to give to you the gifts of love and life that were so abundantly gifted to me by my mother. I want you to grow up in a home, in a family and in a world where your self-esteem and self-confidence will conquer any challenge, where manners and respect are things that you can offer anyone at any time, where you will smile far, far, far more than you will ever cry.

Today I have spoken of courage and fear, family and love, friends and foes. I look forward to my time in this Chamber. I commit to the people of New South Wales, my party and my peers that this House will get the best of me—but, like a good wine, I will undoubtedly get better with age. I acknowledge that in politics things are not all black and white; there is a lot of grey. We will argue over the grey, but we must argue with passion. Passion shows a deep love and belief in a person's view. An argument without passion is really just blah, blah, and already in these first few weeks I have seen far too much of that.