



Inaugural Speeches

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Page: 1027

The ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Andrew Fraser): I call on the member for Bathurst and congratulate him on his election to this place.

Mr PAUL TOOLE (Bathurst—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.31 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Fellow members of the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales, National Party staff and executive, family and friends in the gallery, and all my constituents in the Bathurst electorate watching this live, what a great moment. This is for all of us to share! The privilege that has been given to me is a reflection of the confidence and trust that has been placed in me by those I represent. I undertake to take the journey that lies ahead of me with commitment, dedication and enthusiasm, and with the belief that I have an opportunity and a responsibility to make a difference. If that difference is just changing the life of one person, then that will empower me to continue to ensure that the people of regional New South Wales will continue to grow and prosper for future generations.

In the recent election, yes, we set unprecedented records. We changed the voting patterns of some people for the very first time and we will endeavour to hold their confidence. We will not take them for granted and we will deliver a progressive electorate for all to enjoy. During the campaign I met so many people who made the move to support the National Party. They were mums and dads who lie awake after their children have fallen asleep, wondering how they will pay their mortgage; pensioners wondering how they will pay their next electricity bill; miners worrying about whether they will have a job tomorrow; farmers worrying about food security for the region; and so on.

On 26 March 2011 a vote for the Coalition meant that there was new energy to harness, new jobs to be created, and new hospitals and new schools to be built. The road ahead will be challenging and long: There is much to do and many wrongs to right. We may not get there in one year or in one term, but I am confident that the Coalition Government will put us back on the right path and return New South Wales to its rightful place as the leading State in this nation. Along the way there will be false starts and setbacks, there will be some who do not agree with every decision or policy made. We have a large job ahead of us and I know the Government cannot solve every problem. But by being honest and listening to and communicating with the electorate we can work alongside the community and deliver real results for each of our electorates.

I joined the National Party because I believe it is the only party that truly represents regional and rural communities. It is a party made up of local champions who want the best for their local areas and who are willing to fight for their local communities. This high standard of representation is embodied in outstanding members in the Central West—Andrew Gee in Orange and Troy Grant in Dubbo—and my other colleagues who have recently been elected, Leslie Williams in Port Macquarie, Kevin Anderson in Tamworth, Stephen Bromhead in Myall Lakes and John Barilaro in Monaro. The National Party is back and will remain a significant voice. We will deliver for each of our communities.

My pathway to this place began some three generations ago when my grandfather, Jack Toole, ran as the Liberal candidate back in 1956. However, in 1984 my dad saw the light and joined the National Party. In 1996 he ran as The Nationals' candidate, only to narrowly miss out by several hundred votes that came from Greens preferences to give Labor victory. My dad, who is my idol, is the person whom I have followed in the political arena since I was three years of age. He was a local councillor for 21 years and a mayor for 16 of those years. During his various campaigns I would keep him company in the ute; we visited and doorknocked so many rural constituents. My job was to walk up to the door and hand over the brochure or to open the gate of rural properties and stay there as he took off, leaving me in a puff of smoke, only to wait for his return, sometimes half an hour later, close the gate and go to the next property.

Meeting these people over so many years gave me the impetus to stand for local government when my father decided to retire. I have been a councillor for the past 16 years, representing both the rural and urban communities of the Bathurst district. During that time I have also been deputy mayor and mayor. Those opportunities and experiences have provided me with the skills and knowledge that I bring to this place today. One thing that stands out to me in every election that I have experienced is the high respect that my dad has in the community. People say to me all the time, "If you're as half as good as your dad, then you'll be

okay."

I grew up on a farm some 15 kilometres outside Bathurst. I am one of nine children. Yes, David, I know you are going to ask if we had a television—we had two. I also pay tribute to my mum, who is also in the gallery today, for her unyielding love and support she has given to each and every one of us.

I acknowledge on the public record the work of the former member, Mr Gerard Martin. His contribution both as a councillor on Lithgow City Council and as a State member for the past 12 years has seen him give 37 continuous years of service to his community. I wish him and his wife, Kathy, all the best in his retirement.

I would also like acknowledge the support of the Premier and Deputy Premier of New South Wales. Both Barry and Andrew have become friends to the people of the Bathurst electorate. It was never a problem for either of them to visit my electorate or to attend the various functions held during the campaign. I thank them for their support and the trust that they have placed in me.

The electorate of Bathurst is one of the State's most diverse districts. It takes in some 71 hamlets and includes regional centres like Lithgow, which is dominated by coalmining and electricity generation, as well as Bathurst, which has varied industries and government departments that were attracted to the region in the 1970s when the city was part of the Whitlam Government's decentralisation plans. The electorate also takes in the surrounding areas of Oberon, Blayney, Rylstone and Kandos. The electorate covers 14,875 square kilometres and has a population of just under 66,000 people.

The election had many firsts and many stories that will be told for generations to come. One that comes to mind, however, is the fact that when I put up my hand to be the National Party candidate for the Bathurst electorate many people said, "You will struggle to win the people of Lithgow over. That is Labor heartland." Before Christmas last year I walked into the Lansdowne Hotel, which is in the main street of Lithgow. I grabbed a beer and walked up to a table where about 10 people were sitting. They were watching the television and I asked them how the cricket test had ended up. They looked at me and one piped up and said, "You're Paul Toole, aren't you?" I said, "Yes", and then it came, "Well, you've got the audacity, haven't you? This is a Labor pub and we've never seen a conservative walk into this pub at all."

Not knowing whether I was to be thrown out or dragged out, I just made the comment, "Well, we are all Australians and we like a beer." After a 20-minute conversation about the world and various matters, one of them said, "I'm going to vote for you, and it will be the first time, you know." Another bloke put his hands on his head and said, "I'm a Labor voter and now I'm really confused because I don't know who I'm going to vote for." Before I left, three others signed up straightaway and offered to help on election day and in our campaign office. I walked into that pub with zero out of 10 and walked out of it with five out of 10. After that response I thought to myself: these people are looking for someone to listen to their stories, to listen to their concerns and to be their voice in Macquarie Street—they just want to be heard.

From that point on, we worked in Lithgow and on polling day we won every booth in the Lithgow district. We earned that trust and we will not lose it. Since then I have formed many new friendships and have been welcomed back to the Lithgow area. I have been invited to many functions, including the recent Lithgow Catholic ball, Ironfest, and the opening of the new Commonwealth Bank. Only last weekend I was invited to the sixtieth wedding anniversary of community members Emile and Madeleine Douthiel.

In regional areas The Nationals face many challenges. In regional New South Wales we have a great lifestyle: We have affordable housing, cheap industrial land, pristine environments and strong communities with some of the most resilient and outspoken people on this earth. But there are big challenges ahead. There are declines in many of our smaller towns in the form of job losses, lower income levels and crumbling infrastructure. A government will not provide all the answers, but it must act responsibly so that the creation of wealth in regional New South Wales, and in particular in the Bathurst electorate, will see New South Wales become number one again. To do this we must be innovative; we must seize opportunities and think outside the square. With Government members on this side of the House I am confident that this can and will happen.

My electorate also has a growing tourist industry, as many people discover the values of our lifestyle and the area's many beautiful and historical features. In Bathurst we have the premier racing circuit in the whole world—Mount Panorama—which the V8 supercars go around every year. In Oberon we have the Jenolan Caves. In Lithgow we have the Zig Zag Railway. In Blayney we have the Cadia mine as well as many other attractions. Many of the rural villages in my electorate are run by some of the very best progress associations, and I have enjoyed working with each of them over the years. I look forward to that relationship continuing. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

The progress associations have done so much for their local communities. Many of the villages that they represent have been restored to their original heritage state and take visitors back to a bygone era. For example, Hill End is renowned for its discovery of gold in the nineteenth century. However, I believe that we must do more to support these areas and these industries.

Let us not forget that Sydney is a global city and should be seen not only as a destination itself but also as a gateway and hub to

regional New South Wales. The Bathurst electorate is a little west of that great sandstone curtain called the Blue Mountains or the Great Dividing Range. I say "curtain" because many people and some politicians living on the coast have never been over the Great Dividing Range; they have never passed through that curtain to see that life does exist beyond the mountains.

We must invest more in our roads and rail. There has to be greater focus on regional infrastructure and, in particular, our roads and rail systems. That is why I was pleased that during the election campaign the now Premier announced that we will look at all options when it comes to providing a daily rail return service between Bathurst and Sydney.

Agriculture is an important industry and employer in my electorate, which is why food security issues must be addressed. We produce some of the best beef, wheat, lamb and wines. We must support our primary producers once again. Many of them have suffered over the years from drought, bushfires and, more recently, floods.

Decentralisation is also another policy that we must embrace and get right, and I welcome the opportunity for consideration of a decade of decentralisation. With Sydney expected to grow by 1.5 million over the next 25 years, it is essential that we put programs in place to take the pressure off Sydney and to ensure that regional communities that are keen to grow their population can do so by stimulating their local economies and attracting new skills and investment.

To me, health has always been at the heart of every election, whether it be at a State or Federal level. I note that the Minister for Health is present in the Chamber. I thank her for making regular visits to my electorate and I look forward to a very long association with her in the years to come. It is critical that in the Bathurst electorate we see the return of essential services and that we stop the bleeding of various services from regional centres. More needs to be done to attract professional health workers to our area. Country hospitals are already short of specialised staff, and I strongly support the push by Charles Sturt University in its bid for a medical school. To see this come to fruition would not only address the issue of the massive shortage of doctors in rural areas but also it would result in many students who study in regional and rural areas staying on and practising medicine in these areas.

Another project that is crucial to the development of the entire Central West is the road over the Blue Mountains. The current major route from Sydney to the west is the Great Western Highway, which is now, and has been for a number of years, undergoing major upgrades. But it will not deliver a road that will open up the Central West for future economic development. The current route through the Blue Mountains is heavily urbanised, and even the four-lane sections are subject to various speed limits. That is a significant barrier to the transport of goods and materials to the eastern seaboard. I welcome the Premier's announcement to look at these types of projects of significance through Infrastructure NSW.

In planning, a good system should enjoy public support and confidence, and provide certainty to residents, investors and communities. I cannot wait to see the end of 30-year-old planning legislation that is in such desperate need of an overhaul.

I would not be standing here today without the unyielding support of my best friend for the past 11 years, the love of my life, my wife, Joanne, and our three beautiful children Rhayne, Keely and Scout. I thank all of them for the opportunity that has been given to me to be able to go on this journey. I know that at times it will be tough and it will be lonely, and that at times it will be demanding for you on your own. But remember at all times that I love you all. At times I did not know whether I would stand as a candidate, but Joanne's push and support along the way helped me to make a firm decision. And kids, if you think that dad was slow going down the street before because he was being stopped by people, then all I can say to you is that it is not going to get any better.

To my grandmother, who is at St Catherine's in Bathurst watching: I know you are very proud and I thank you for playing such a pivotal role in my life. To my in-laws, Gary and Barbara Field: Thank you for all your assistance and your response to last-minute requests for babysitting. It has not ended; I will need you much more now.

To my campaign manager, Gary Rush and the entire Nationals team comprising Kay Martin, the duty member of the Legislative Council for Bathurst the Hon. Rick Colless, Ben Franklin, Douglas Martin, Nathan Quigley, Peter Pilbeam, Tony Sarks, David Veness, Terry Clarke, Sam Faraway, former shadow Ministers and now Ministers, Mike Baird and all our 400-plus polling booth helpers: You made this happen. We formed one of the most formidable campaign teams ever gathered in the history of politics. I am forever grateful to you for what you have all sacrificed to make this happen. Your tremendous loyalty, support and professionalism and your 24-hour dedication achieved this great result for the people of our electorate.

To my dearest friends at the Assumption Primary School, at which I taught for 17 years: What an amazing time we had together. I will admit on the public record that sometimes I was the bad boy on the staff. However, the executive, comprising Peter Nugent, Di Walkowiak, Therese Hooper, and all the staff gave me the best support and friendship that anyone could ask for. Thank you.

Finally, I want my electorate to get back to providing local services for our local communities, whether that be better roads, hospital boards that listen to our communities, improvements in our PCYC centres, flashing lights for schools, full-time fire stations, additional teachers and nurses, more police officers or better infrastructure. As elected representatives it is critical that we stand up for the interests of our communities. There will be tough decisions to make along the way and at times we will confront steep mountains to

climb. However, those decisions must be made so that the New South Wales economy may once again flourish, and so that this State is open for business and number one again.

I will conclude by offering a quote to my electorate and members in this Chamber: "We are happy, we are joyful that the verdict has been given by the Australian people but never forget the fact that governments are elected to govern not only for the people who vote for them, but also for the people who voted against them."