



Inaugural Speeches

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[*Business resumed.*]

Mr DAVID ELLIOTT (Baulkham Hills) [6.57 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I rise in reply to Her Excellency's address to the House on 3 May 2011 and appreciate this opportunity to make my inaugural speech to the Legislative Assembly. Like so many members of the Class of 2011, I am humbled, if not a little surprised, at the size of the endorsement the Liberal and National parties received on 26 March. Having survived a couple of attempts at preselection, it is indeed a great honour to serve the people of my community in this, the oldest Parliament on the continent. I vividly recall visiting this place as a young boy on excursion from Picnic Point Public School in the late 1970s. Even then I realised the importance of our parliamentary democracy as a safeguard to our way of life, and this place personified the fact that people are the centre of the Westminster system, a system that I will defend until my last breath.

My presence on the conservative side of politics is another surprising aspect of modern politics considering, like so many other liberals today, I am the grandson of trade unionists. I am proudly wearing the gold watch given to my late pop, Arthur Frederick Elliott, in July 1966 for his 25 years of diligent service as an electrician with Standard Telephone and Cables. Arthur and my maternal grandfather, Andy Arbuckle, were proud advocates of organised labour. I, however, had a different experience when, as a teenage labourer working to put myself through university, I was locked out of a construction site when the union bosses called a snap strike because there was no salt and pepper on the meal room table. Since then, whenever I need direction in my political activities, I recall that mindless act of thuggery.

I have the honour of representing the people of Baulkham Hills. It is an electorate populated by the type of people Sir Robert Menzies would have labelled as "forgotten". It is an electorate nestled peacefully within the garden shire of Sydney's Hills district and the historic second oldest Australian settlement, Parramatta. But you cannot inherit a Liberal seat unless your predecessor has served it well before you. Tonight I want to pay tribute to one of the Parliament's favourite sons: a man who diligently and passionately advocated for the people of Carlingford, and then Baulkham Hills, for nearly a quarter of a century. A man who lived the Christian message silently, honoured the institutions that made this State great, and who, with his wonderful wife and trusted advisor, Olwyn, worked tirelessly to ensure so many of us western Sydney Liberals never lost sight of the winner's circle. Tonight I formally acknowledge and thank my friend and mentor Wayne Merton.

During the election my predecessor was called upon to assist other candidates across western Sydney so his experience was complemented locally by the Baulkham Hills conference of the Liberal Party which put together a team entrusted with our message. And what a team it was. Tonight I wish to recognise the hard work of my campaign director, Mr Ken Norris, for his zeal and loyalty, my campaign manager, Brad Williams, for his unruffled and objective advice, my operations manager, Keith Topolski, for his understanding of modern day campaigning, my community liaison officer, Jacqi Walker, for her dedication and humour and, of course, the whole team would have been in real trouble without the professionalism of our treasurer, Ben Potts.

Members of the Liberal Party would readily identify that three of my campaign team are, like me, alumnae of the Young Liberal movement school of politics so it would be remiss of me not to thank Young Liberal President Scott Farlow for the high quality of graduate he is producing. I must say, given that I spent my Young Liberal years under the presidency of Senator Marise Payne, the Hon. Catherine Cusack and the Hon. Don Harwin, nothing proved to me more that times had changed than when, at the Saturday afternoon campaign debriefs at the Bull and Bush Hotel, an icon in The Hills, all my Young Liberals ordered diet coke or orange juice, not even a mineral water. As a club director and former hotel industry lobbyist, you can imagine my surprise.

But that was not the only surprise I had during my campaign. Indeed, as I doorknocked along Windsor Road, Northmead, one summer's afternoon I recall entering the home of a family who proudly displayed its surname on the front porch. At the time I did not think much of the word "Lang" when I noticed it and it was not until I observed what could only be described as a shrine to the former Premier that, after brief questioning, I found I had called upon the granddaughter of the "Big Fella" himself. As a clear omen to what later became Labor's worst ever result in western Sydney I am pleased to report that on leaving that house I was told by Mrs Lang that she would, in fact, vote Liberal.

Like the Army and the Returned Services League, the church and my family, the Liberal Party has been one of the great constants in my life. Joining Bankstown Young Liberals as a 16-year-old student at Christian Community High School, Regents Park, I immediately announced to my family, friends and teachers that I wanted to serve my party in Parliament. It has been an eventful journey and one which I believe has well equipped me to assist in the job of making New South Wales number one again. Like most new members, I arrive at this place with preconceived notions of how modern day liberalism should be interpreted. The strength of liberalism is its ability to evolve. That is what sets us apart from other political theories.

We are called a "centre right", or in my case "conservative", party which, however, ended the White Australia Policy and recruited the first Aboriginal and Chinese Australians into the Parliament, and it is our party which introduced economic policies such as the universal old age pension. It was our party that so courageously reformed firearms laws in this country, and it was a Liberal Government that committed Australian forces to the liberation of the East Timorese. At every level our party has engaged with the community and agitated for change as the times dictated. We must continue this approach into the future if we are to survive. Our approach to government is simple: If your ship does not come in, swim out to it. I, for one, am at the coast of New South Wales waiting for the next big ship.

My 20 years in the workforce have been both professionally and personally rewarding. I am thrilled at the fact that nearly every former employer of mine has worked, in some way, towards my election to this place. Leaving school at 17 and working as a labourer, gardener, television extra and bank teller reinforced my desire to capitalise on any opportunity so, as an 18-year-old arts undergraduate from the University of Western Sydney, I was privileged to work in the Parramatta offices of then Senator Bronwyn Bishop. Mrs Bishop was the first female conservative senator from New South Wales and remains one of Australia's most energetic parliamentarians. Her friendship was never more appreciated than years later when I was a nervous and newly commissioned army officer and then defence personnel Minister Bishop visited my unit in the field. She brushed past senior officers to come and give me a hug and to ask how I was going. Needless to say I did not get much trouble from the brass after that very public display of affection from the Minister.

One of the greatest professional honours I have had was the opportunity of serving Australia's second longest serving Prime Minister, the Hon. John Howard, AC. Readers of history may recall that working for Mr Howard for four years in the early 1990s would have been a very lonely time but, as one of only five employees, I had the opportunity to observe and befriend a parliamentarian of Churchillian proportions. Given I was working towards a degree in modern Australian history at the time, it also allowed me access to what I often cited in essays as "primary sources". Mr Howard's support of my studies, and more recently my campaign for preselection, was one of those extraordinarily generous acts that can never be repaid.

A desire to "get a real job" resulted in my appointment to the New South Wales Police Media Unit which, in the mid-1990s had the unenviable task of steering our major law enforcement agency through the backpacker murders investigation, as well as the Wood royal commission. Much has been said about both these blots on our State's history, and the royal commission into police corruption was both a just and essential means of reminding those entrusted with enforcing the law that they are not above it. However, whilst a member of this House, I will use every opportunity to remind the people of New South Wales that a very small number of untrustworthy individuals should not discredit the work of the majority of police who, from my experience, are brave, compassionate and professional custodians of statutory and common law.

Given my first childhood dream was to serve as an Australian Army officer, I cannot miss this opportunity to commend and congratulate the men and women who serve our nation in peace and war. I recall my first day as a student of the Royal Military College, Duntroon, as a humbling one given that, like this place, so many great Australians had perfected the art of leadership at that institution. I have to admit that my military career was an unremarkable one with two notable exceptions. I did have the great privilege of once answering to a genteel brigadier named Peter Cosgrove who, in 1996, told me that he was grateful to have reached his ceiling rank and that he would probably retire very soon. History was to prove somewhat different and General Cosgrove later became a household name following his outstanding achievements as a military commander.

In January 2000 I was also posted to the multinational Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville as a staff officer attached to the headquarters. Serving on a military operation in a Third World country recuperating after an eight-year civil war was a life-altering experience and I was thrilled to learn recently that our own Parliament is now working with the House of Representatives of the new autonomous province of Bougainville to assist it in achieving its democratic dream. Soldiering can be a dangerous occupation, and I would seek your approval to acknowledge the service of Lance Corporal Shane Lewis, who served with me and whose life was so tragically cut short on 20 May 2000 whilst serving his country and the Peace Monitoring Group in Bougainville.

One of the great political debates of our time has been the role of the Crown in our Constitution. In 1999 the people of Australia were given the chance to reaffirm their commitment to the current constitutional arrangements and I was thrilled to have been asked by Professor David Flint, AM, and Mrs Kerry Jones to lead the national no case campaign. Needless to say, it was also an interesting year for me to have chosen to write my masters thesis on political communication. Nevertheless, the result in New South Wales was decisive and any politician who chooses to dismiss the result of the 1999 referendum does so at his or her own risk.

[Extension of time agreed to.]

After 16 years of republicanism by stealth, I am very much looking forward to the O'Farrell Government's renewed commitment to our constitutional monarchy, starting with the returning of the Governor to Government House. In recent years I have been fortunate enough to work for a number of associations, including the Order of St John, and I commend to the House the work of this important charity. The charity started in the industrial revolution when workers had little occupational health and safety protection. I acknowledge the leadership of St John Ambulance, including former President Sir Laurence Street, AC, Chairman Mark Compton, AM, Commissioner General Warren Glenny, AO, and chief executives John Davies, AM, and Mr Sean Gavin.

Longstanding members of this House will also recall the hardworking former hotel industry advocate John Thorpe, AM, whom I had the privilege to serve for more than four years. Mr Thorpe's commitment to the hospitality and tourism industry is legendary and I will be forever grateful for his personal support and advice over many years. I should also acknowledge so many other friends and supporters from the hospitality and tourism industry, including Arthur Laundy, AM, George Thomas, George Bedwani, Patrick Griffin, OAM, Scott Leach, Anthony Ball, Jayson Westbury and Bill Galvin, OAM. For all the challenges facing the hospitality industry it should be noted that many of these individuals serve their industry association without payment.

Finally, it would be remiss of me not to acknowledge the Civil Contractors Federation. For just over three years I was honoured to serve this industry association as its chief executive and I thank the federation's board for its commitment to improving the quality of infrastructure in New South Wales. Life member Don Stein, AM, former president Joseph Cato, serving president John Wade and Andrew Gifford are known to some members of this House, and I suspect that their presence will remain prominent over the course of my term in this place.

The best thing about being a Liberal backbencher is the universal right, if not obligation, to speak freely on all matters of policy. One of the most disturbing things I observed during my time with the Australian Hotels Association and the Civil Contractors Federation was the way business in this State has become fearful of government. It is gut-wrenching to see men and women who have taken significant personal risks in establishing businesses only to have them threatened by punitive and arrogant government departments. I want all businesses in this State to now know that they have an advocate against bureaucratic bullying. We need to return the word "service" to the public service and return confidence in our government agencies through transparency and simplicity. I will be using my time in this place to agitate for a bigger role for the non-government agencies in providing community services. Too often we have seen government fail the poor and destitute, whilst charities are forced to do more with less.

As a director of Life Education Australia, a charity committed to educating our youth of the dangers of illicit drugs, I will be working to make zero tolerance the norm when it comes to drug education in this State. As someone who has worked in various combat agencies, I will be working to provide more recognition of our volunteer emergency service workers—volunteers who regularly put their lives on the line without thought of payment or personal safety. I will spend my time in this place advocating for practical reconciliation with Indigenous Australians, a cause to which I have been deeply committed since I was a 15-year-old volunteer at the Bimbadeen Aboriginal Bible College near Cootamundra. During this time, I was able to experience firsthand how the commitment of Pastor Jacques resulted in a positive and tangible response from Aboriginal young people under his care. This emphatically demonstrated to me the benefits that can be obtained when an Aboriginal elder has the determination to teach personal responsibility to his own people.

As for those who have fallen foul of the criminal law, it is the role of the State to punish and correct offenders. Australians have different views on what punishment should be enforced on so-called white collar criminals, many of whom have no prior criminal record and do not present a danger or a threat to the community. I believe that we should look at providing a sentencing mechanism that involves a period of custodial detention, but mixed with a stronger emphasis on fines. This penalty could be paid in lieu of time served. Why should the taxpayer spend up to \$80,000 a year on keeping a non-violent criminal in jail? Indeed, surely white collar criminals should pay for the cost of incarceration as well as the cost of their criminal activities. It makes no sense to see corporate criminals cost the State only to be picked up in their limousines and return to their affluent lifestyle.

A hefty "pay or stay" policy would not only save taxpayers, but also act as a necessary deterrent factor, which is essential within our criminal law. As members of the Coalition are well aware, the growth of New South Wales is interdependent with the growth of our regional centres. For far too long governments thought that NSW stood for Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. The decentralisation of our State should be the main focus of a government committed to the whole State's prosperity and that can begin with a staggered taxation policy. It is unjust for businesses in remote areas to be burdened with Sydney rates of State Government taxes and charges when they are receiving only a fraction of the service levels enjoyed in our capital city.

Most members would be reluctant to use their inaugural speeches to thank friends and family lest they forget someone of great significance. I will, however, make an attempt. From the local community I begin with thanking Jenny McCarthy, Alan Manly, Rudy Limantono, Alan and Karen Ward, Tom Moore, Bob Dwyer, Rees John, Linda and Joseph Seagrove, Dr Jim Taggart, OAM, Brian McHenry, Reverend Ross Hathway, Rahul Jethri and the local Indian community, Fred Lloyd, Colonel Don Tait, OAM, Joan Andrew

and Roz Rigby. I am forever grateful for the support and brutal honesty of local councillors Michelle Byrne, Greg Burnett, Justin Taunton, Andrew Jeffries and Scott Lloyd, as well as my peers Ray Williams, Alex Hawke and Dominic Perrottet. As the team knows, I would not have survived without the support of my long-suffering secretary, Rachael Taylor.

It would not have been a competition without competitors. I was fortunate enough to have three of the finest individuals as candidates in Baulkham Hills. I thank my great friend and fellow rugby enthusiast, Tony Hay, the Labor candidate, the ever-smiling Kiai Thorpe from the Christian Democrats and the plain-speaking Dr Mick Hollins from the Greens. The Liberal Party excelled itself during the 2011 State election campaign and that could not have been achieved without the professionalism of Mark Neeham, the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, Nick Campbell, Michael Photios, Arthur Sinodinos, AM, and the irreplaceable Paul Nicolaou, whose remarkable drive and energy exhausts the rest of us mere mortals.

This entire Liberal team would have worked in vain if not for the superior leadership skills of the Premier, Barry O'Farrell. I have known Barry for some 20 years and he has been a great mate. I say "mate" because he has helped, advised, forgiven and encouraged me at times when many others might have hoped I would simply go away. Now that my mate is the Premier I am confident that he will do one more thing for me and I look forward to commuting on the north-west railway with him before my time in this place expires.

To my parents, Noel and Yvonne, who have shared this dream with me for some 25 years, I hope I have not been too much of a disappointment to you both. To my mother-in-law, Laraine, and my father-in-law, Fred, thank you both for your endless support and encouragement. My sisters, Megan and Donna, have both, at some stage, been dragged into campaigns to fill gaps and are no doubt relieved to be released from servitude. I am compelled to thank my dear friends David and Gina Jehnic as well as Helen and Simon Kelava, Paul and Sophie Nicolaou and Colin and Julie Parras for their constant support. To my close friend and former boss, the Hon. Peter Collins, AM, thank you for making me an adopted member of your family and for your never-ending generosity and advice. To the member for Lane Cove, with whom I have shared so many of life's joys, disappointments and challenges, I suspect that the best days are ahead.

I was amused to be warned upon election to this place that members of the media are not our friends. I will therefore have to reject the first lesson of New South Wales politics by thanking a prominent media identity who joined me on this journey 20 ago years when we were both unremarkable wannabes. It is appropriate therefore that Jason Morrison also started a new career this year and I wish him every success and thank him for his ongoing friendship. It was just over a year ago that, having suffered yet another setback in my political apprenticeship, I had strong doubt as to whether I would ever get to this position. It was at that time that my then eight-year-old son, Lachlan, came up to me and said "Dad, you know you are only a quitter when you stop trying". For that reason I have to dedicate my inaugural speech to my two sons, whose presence in my life gives me reason. Unfortunately for Lachlan and William, they will have a similar response from me should they ever feel the need to walk away from a challenge later in life.

To our little angel, William, who asked so many questions during the campaign that I expect he could now lecture in politics at Oxford, I thank him for his energy and humour beyond his years. William will, I am sure, spend many years in this place later in his life but I just warn members of the House that it may, unfortunately, be in the press gallery. Finally, to my beautiful wife, Nicole, who, against my family's advice, made me the happiest man alive 15 years ago. She nursed and supported me through professional ups and downs, one bout of pneumonia, two post-graduate degrees, three attempts at preselection, packed me off peacekeeping with six days' notice and gave me two healthy sons, all while trying to manage her own career. In fact, every morning when I wake up I almost half expect her to have ridden off into the sunset. As we settle into this new chapter of our lives I remind Nicole, Lachlan and William, as well as the good people of Baulkham Hills, of Napoleon Bonaparte's advice when he said to the French army, "Impossible is a word to be found only in the dictionary of fools."