



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Wednesday 1 June 2011.

Mr JOHN SIDOTI (Drummoyne) [7.15 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): This evening I speak in this Parliament in front of so many people who have shaped my life. I am deeply honoured and gratified, yet very humbled to be a newly elected member of Parliament, part of a newly elected Government, and now a small part of this great institution which is proud and rich in history and tradition. I am especially proud to be representing the people of my electorate, Drummoyne. The last Liberal member for Drummoyne, Walter Lawrence, stood here some 49 years ago in 1962—before I was even born. I thank the hardworking Liberal candidates before me who fought the good fight in Drummoyne against the tide. I know Greg Long put in a lot of work in the previous two elections. In fact John Howard was unsuccessful in winning Drummoyne in 1968, but thankfully went on to serve as one of the greatest Prime Ministers this country has ever seen.

Drummoyne is my home, my priority and my future. Drummoyne reflects the evolving nature of our country, with its rich, diverse, multicultural origins and its wide spectrum of socioeconomic groups. Mostly the people of Drummoyne are representative of the great Australian character—very tolerant, very understanding, irreverent humour in all things, and of course strong allegiances to and pride in their homes. Every member in every seat in every inaugural speech since the election trumps the beauties of their electorates. Yesterday the member for Kiama went so far as to say his electorate must surely be the prize because most members holiday in his electorate. Well, not to be outdone, when I wake up every morning and look out my window, I wake up to that holiday in Drummoyne where there are beautiful waterways, parks, schools, churches, gourmet delicatessens, Sydney's best cafés, golf courses and Italian patisseries—we have got it all. But best of all, we have a community, so much so that when my wife sends me to the shop to buy milk, it takes me about two hours because I bump into people all the time.

I owe eternal gratitude to the people of Drummoyne for the trust and the faith placed in me by them. My pledge is that I will work tirelessly to be an outstanding member. My relationship with the electorate began when I was about six years old. I was educated at All Hallows Primary School in Five Dock and then in the secondary school at De La Salle College, Ashfield. The member for Fairfield also attended De La Salle College. I furthered my studies at the Ryde College of TAFE, as it was then known, specialising in hospitality. Small business runs deep in my veins. As children, my sister and I would work every weekend at the markets with our parents who had fruit and vegetable stands. I grew up at the markets. To this day I can confidently say that salt of the earth people are bred there. It was a real exercise in character building.

Some 20 years later, it was very pleasant to find myself with the Premier, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, and other parliamentary colleagues at the Flemington Markets in the middle of an election campaign. Years of face-to-face work with the public exposed me to the harsh realities of business and the hardships faced by the ordinary person. My most recent work has been in the family-owned function centre in Five Dock. My parents, my wife and I successfully ran this business for over 15 years, picking up a swag of industry awards for excellence along the way. I compered in excess of 3,000 weddings, social and corporate functions. Drummoyne residents joke all the time that I have gone from John Sidoti the MC to John Sidoti the MP.

My true passion has always been politics—politics as a channel for growth and change, and as a means of serving the public. I have had the honour of being elected a councillor and the privilege of serving the people of Burwood as their mayor. Some of my main achievements in a short time included the restructuring of four directors to two making council leaner and more efficient, restructuring the rubbish removal service saving residents half a million dollars a year and achieving the record sale price of council properties to fund our council strategic visions.

I embarked on a number of community infrastructure projects as well as funding a part scholarship for the Joan Sutherland Foundation. Now as a member of the Legislative Assembly in this Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales, I can continue to work to fulfil my ambition to serve the community I love and grew up with. None of these achievements could have been possible without a strong foundation of core values. I am certainly tremendously proud of my Italian heritage. My father, Richard, is from the Aeolian islands of Sicily and my mother, Catherine, is from a tiny town in Calabria called Terra Nuova. Together they instilled in me an unwavering work ethic: belief in the family and respect for those around me. Interestingly, the Drummoyne electorate has the highest proportion of residents from southern Europe. So the very fact that I am the son of migrant Italians has symmetry to it, of which I am extremely proud.

I am passionate about Drummoyne. In fact, I joke with my father-in-law, who is in the gallery tonight, that there is no life outside Five Dock. I call it God's country. I am proud to address this Parliament in this important week recognising Italy's 150 years of unification and the sixty-fifth anniversary of its referendum that ultimately led to Italy becoming a republic. Members know that history is very important. If there is no history, there is no future. So I get upset when people say that James Cook was the first to step from his boat onto Botany Bay in 1770. The truth was that it was not James Cook. You guessed it—it was an Italian. It was a guy

called Giacomo Matra, hence the suburb of Matraville—give me full marks for trying. Like many electorates, Drummoyne has suffered under 16 years of Labor rule. Overdevelopment not matched by proper infrastructure, traffic congestion and crowded public transport are all urgent challenges. I am confident that this Government will face these challenges with talent, enthusiasm, fairness and vision. Albert Einstein said:

The significant problems we face, cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we crafted them.

This Government is this new level of thinking and the people of New South Wales deserve nothing less. Like the rest of New South Wales, the people of Drummoyne spoke emphatically and directly at the March election. However, local issues of importance also featured: they do not want a marina at Kendall Bay, they do not appreciate the waste of \$175 million on a duplicate Iron Cove bridge that has not improved motorist travel times, and they expect the M4 East extension to be prioritised—that will be something my colleague Charles Casuscelli, MP, the member for Strathfield and I will fight for. Rat-running has reached unacceptable levels since the toll was removed on the M4. We must improve the RiverCat services that many residents have been crying out for. Wherever possible we must work hard to provide Concord hospital with the funds and resources needed to provide the services the residents deserve.

I also note that many mayors and councillors have been elected to Parliament this time. I hope that the message from the coalface is loud and clear. Local government has been treated with contempt and cost shifting became common practice under the previous Government—I hope that that is now in the past. I have made many friends of all political persuasions in local government across New South Wales, many of whom are here tonight. Thank you for your friendship. The community expects its Government to exercise responsibility and fairness across all issues, whether of State significance or of local importance. Government decisions affect each and every person in the State, not just those who vote. It is the responsibility of government to deliver strategies that not only will prepare us for the future but will add to our economic wellbeing. We live in an ever-changing environment where information is a mere click away and news is measured in microseconds.

As a member of Parliament, I am one of those people entrusted with ratifying laws that determine the way we live. I do not for one moment take that for granted. It is about being accountable. It is about understanding. More importantly, it is about listening. Being a member of Parliament means that I can make a difference to the way we live. That alone gives me enormous drive and energy and was one of the main reasons I chose to run for the seat of Drummoyne. I had a vision of how I perceived this State should be run and thought we could do better. A key area of reform for the O'Farrell Government and one that will help to kickstart the economy and create jobs is small business. I talk about small business because I have been involved in small business.

I know how difficult it is to get through red tape, the forms and the accounting procedures required by government. It is hard enough to run a small business without the added burdens imposed by governments. Under this Government, I am pleased to say that this will be reversed. We have a plan to tackle the problems associated with the hiring of staff by reducing the payroll tax threshold and thereby having the ability to reduce costs for employers. This was very well received when the member for Manly, the Treasurer, the Hon. Mike Baird, visited Drummoyne. Over the years I have seen many small business operators in the Drummoyne electorate struggle through unfair taxes and an overburden of bureaucratic red tape. The electorate of Drummoyne has a high density of small businesses and as I doorknocked in excess of 17,000 homes and businesses during the election campaign, I heard the same story time and again that government regulation was killing the ability to make a profit and preventing the possibility of employing more staff. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

This Government has given a firm undertaking to the people of this State to do something about it. I am delighted to be able to stand in this Chamber tonight and assure all those small businesses in my area that we are there for you. During our first term we will honour an election promise to ensure that the first 100,000 new jobs will be payroll tax free. This not only will give operators the ability to hire more staff but also will reduce the burden of yet another tax to pay and yet more red tape to wade through. Businesses can survive and prosper only if given the opportunity to do business. Operators do not want to be tied down filling out forms to justify their existence; they want to run their businesses to achieve positive results and profits. I decided to run as a Liberal candidate because I always believed that the creation of a strong business environment will serve to establish a framework from which all members of society will benefit.

Governments rely on a viable private sector and the business sector relies on governments. It is essential that governments encourage business and not inhibit their ability to operate. The O'Farrell-Stoner Government will do just that. I mention proudly O'Farrell-Stoner, Liberal-Nationals, because it is a partnership. I am proud of The Nationals as well. We have a lot in common. Just visit Five Dock and I will show you a real veggie patch. I stand in this Chamber tonight committed to work for a better deal for the people of Drummoyne and the people of New South Wales. We can do better. We can restore investment in this State by working on the basics, reducing taxes, creating employment opportunities and creating a stable environment where business can thrive. It is a great privilege for this Drummoyne boy to speak tonight as the member for Drummoyne. I come here with much hope and an abundance of energy and vision. I am indeed so fortunate to be part of an outstanding and talented Liberal-Nationals team that forms this Government.

I look forward to bringing fresh ideas and debate on topics such as land tax, small business, multicultural affairs and local government reform. Those areas are very important and affect how people live and work, and therefore are of paramount importance. I must acknowledge the tremendous efforts of those supporting me, as without that support I could not have achieved such an outstanding election result for Drummoyne—a 24.3 per cent swing. My team was strong, determined and tireless. My campaign manager, Mr Joe Tannous, deserves the highest praise and thanks. My sincerest thanks to you, Joe—his apologies are sent tonight as his son is not well. My thanks also are extended to the Hon. Don Harwin, a great tactician, strategist and intellectual. Thank you, Don. Thank you to my great friend and colleague the Hon. Marie Ficarra and to Vincent De Luca. Thank you very much.

[Interruption]

It is like an Italian wedding. My campaign team were magnificent. Thanks to the Hon. John Jobling, who is present; Neil Harley, who was absolutely brilliant; Morgan Forrest, terrific; Zac Miles; Sarah Lawrance; Susanna and Phil Montone—thank you for all your help. Thanks to the very hardworking volunteers like Joseph Del Duca; John Caputo, who was fantastic and brought the Manly team over to help; George Orban and very hardworking members like Alan and Lorna Wright, Jeanette and Michael York and George Orban Senior, who have assisted over so many years. These are people who have devoted their lives to Liberal values and to the party—congratulations. I must single out also Bill and Margaret Garling for their help and Mr Michael Photios. I must thank Michael Megna and his family, particularly my godmother, Frances Megna, for their support that has been unwavering over so many years. These are friendships that span more than 35 years. Michael Ross deserves special mention as he was the first to come out and help, and probably one of the last to stop. It was not easy. It was a yearlong campaign for us in Drummoyne.

I think Biaggio Meli, who is in the gallery, and Luigi Buccarelli for their help. These are people who have helped me unconditionally whenever I have needed help. I thank John Lutman and Dennis Bennet for their wisdom. These are people who are not members of the party—well, we might fix that soon. I also acknowledge George and Arthur Coorey for their friendship and support, and all the members of Parliament who visited the electorate throughout the campaign. They are numerous. But I might as well take this opportunity and mention them: the Hon. Mike Baird, the Hon. Chris Hartcher, the Hon. Mike Gallacher, the Hon. Jillian Skinner, the Hon. Gladys Berejiklian, the Hon. Don Harwin, the Hon. Marie Ficarra, the Hon. Kevin Humphries, Andrew Fraser, the Hon. Don Page, the Hon. Victor Dominello, and of course the Hon. David Clarke. Thank you all for your help. That shows the level of support I had in Drummoyne. I would like to pay special tribute to the Premier, the Hon. Barry O'Farrell, for visiting Drummoyne no fewer than five times and the Hon. Joe Hockey for his presence at the opening of our campaign office.

I know the community was impressed and it showed the candidate that he was well supported. There are so many thank-yous, but I would like to thank Mark Neeham and the team at Liberal Party headquarters, Chris Stone, Lisa-Maree Scheel and all the crew. Of course, James Boland-Rudder was brilliant. But there are no prouder people in the gallery tonight than my parents. They are representative of the success stories that fill the Australian immigrant landscape. They came to Sydney in the 1950s young, hopeful and willing to work. They fell in love with this country, adopted its language, culture and traditions, and made it their home. They added enormous contribution in terms of work and culture, and now their children form the fabric of its future. What an honour for me to extend their vision for their own family and this country. I love them both. Any success I have had, or will have in the future, is due to their strong values passed on to me. On the subject of my parents, I would like to share a story—if I may indulge the gallery—because my campaign was definitely anything but dull.

My parents' contribution could only be described as enthusiastic and determined. Let me say that my father, Richard, went as far as converting his silver Camry into a drive-by advertisement. It was brilliant, complete with homemade crooked A-frame perched on his roof rack with my photo on a corflute. He drove that car with pride and gusto—so much so that one day he drove into Westfield and took out the boom gate with the A-frame. Dad, what a legend. Now let us not forget my mother, Catherine, who is probably covering her face at this moment. She was the queen bee at the pre-polling booths. She would first greet every constituent with a big cheesy grin, then she would slyly pull out the voting form and say, "Isn't he gorgeous? Vote for my son." The public were pleasantly surprised by her approach and, before they knew it, she was escorting them, arm in arm, to the ballot box. Mum, what would I do without you? I thank my sister Lisa for her guidance and my brother-in-law for his wisdom, and my extended family, my in-laws, my sisters-in-law and brothers-in-law for their unfailing support and advice.

To all those who manned the booths, the volunteers and the Canada Bay councillors who fought the heat and the rain on railway stations and the ferry wharves, thank you. As all members know, this job could not be done without the support of your better half. My wife, Sandra, is beautiful, intelligent, wonderful, remarkable—sorry, Sandra, I can't read your writing. I will be sleeping with the cat tonight. Seriously, my beautiful wife, Sandra, has been unflinching in her support. I married my childhood sweetheart 17 years ago and without her understanding and commitment I could not have achieved this result. Sandra is a wonderful mother to our three amazing children, Julian, Fabian and Ava. Thank you to all my family and friends. I still have not come to terms with the positive community reception that I received following the election. I have been mobbed by kind wishes and have been emotionally touched by people's gestures. It has been heart warming, and at times overwhelming.

I tell regularly the story of when I went to buy the newspaper to read the election results the morning after the election and I was met by a little old Italian lady whom I had seen before but did not know well. She hugged me and cried in my arms, and said in Italian, "Like a son, you deserve it". Such is the level of emotion displayed to me by so many people. In fact, I am proud to have in the gallery tonight somebody whom I did not know prior to the election and whom I got to know during the campaign and who followed me every step of the way. That is 91-year-old Mr Gaetano Barbato, who when asked by the *Sydney Morning Herald* journalist who he voted for replied, "I voted for Sidoti with two hands". In conclusion, I will say that the depth of desire for change, a Liberal change, is reflected in these gestures. This is a most powerful reminder of what our community expects. My electorate, like so many around this State, is desperate to trust again, is desperate to hope again, is desperate to feel the optimism of being number one again. Thank you.