



Inaugural Speeches

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

Mr LEE EVANS (Heathcote) [6.46 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Madam Speaker, distinguished guests, friends and family: I recognise the Speaker of the House, the first woman to break through the mahogany ceiling. Congratulations on your ascendency. I stand here before you today with a sense of mission accomplished. Every journey starts with a single step. The one that has led me here today began 49 years ago, when I was born in the suburb where I now live and have the privilege to represent. I am truly humbled by the people of Heathcote's support and their trust that I may represent them in the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales. I regret that both my parents, Keith and Rita Evans, are not here to witness me take my place in this Parliament; my father Keith passed away in February last year and my mother Rita suffers from dementia. I owe my father a great debt. Just one month before his death he reinforced his belief that I would win Heathcote. He made me promise not give up under any circumstances.

As a qualified chef the question might be asked, "How did you end up in this place?" My career up to now has been, some would say, diverse. I have worked in some of the best restaurants in Sydney as well as in food service sales; in 2000 I was fortunate enough to be the Supply/Purchasing Manager for the Sydney Olympic Village. I have taught Hospitality and Tourism at TAFE, and prior to entering this place I co-owned an Australian gourmet food distribution business. I was involved in the World's Longest Buffet Organising Committee, culminating in 140,000 people enjoying the event at Darling Harbour. I owe my business partner and best mate, Steve Fletcher, a great debt. He has supported me in my political endeavours—I am sure secretly wishing I would not succeed. I trust he will continue to build this small business into a much bigger one. To Steve and his wife, Cherise, thank you.

My first step, the first of many, was taken when I began helping my father campaign back in the Askin days. My father helped establish the Liberal Party in the Sutherland shire by doorknocking for Menzies with fellow stalwarts Evelyn Thompson and Jack Hicks. Sadly, we lost all three last year. My father, Keith, never took a backward step. Indeed, those who know me will attest that I may have inherited his tenacity. I have proven that anyone can do whatever they want to do in this country as long as they have passion. I have always stood by my belief that if I was going to be successful in politics I would have to stand for a seat I live in. This journey has taken a while, but it has been worth the wait to win my seat. This helped the Liberal Party to take Government.

I remember working on booths in every election since 1970 with my father. We worked at local council, State and Federal elections, not to mention by-elections and referendums. I officially joined the Liberal Party in 1996 after Nick Greiner left Government. I made the decision when my dad said, "Son, be a part of the solution, not part of the problem." I would like to acknowledge Mr Greiner, who helped on my campaign. He even manned a booth at Coledale. Despite that, we won Coledale. We thank him for his efforts. I thank him for his support. Unfortunately he cannot be here this evening. I live in the same suburb that I was born in and I have seen many changes, for better and for worse. In this place we represent the people. We must always remember the people we represent. I pledge to the people of Heathcote that I will consider everything that comes before me on the basis of how it will affect the people of Heathcote first, then the people of New South Wales.

The seat of Heathcote spans from Sutherland to Bulli taking in some of New South Wales most spectacular scenery and, arguably, the best in the world. Heathcote spans 458 square kilometres. Ninety-one per cent of my constituents speak English as their first language and 76 per cent live in a separate house on an individual block. The Grand Pacific Drive is one of New South Wales best kept secrets. I have heard many parliamentary representatives wax lyrical that their electorates are the best. There is no need to say it in Heathcote's case; Heathcote is the best kept secret in New South Wales. It is my task to tell the wider population of New South Wales to come to Heathcote electorate and to discover all she has to offer.

While speaking of Heathcote, the jewel of the south, I cannot go on without mentioning the past member, Paul McLeay. Without his vision and persistence I am sure we would not be enjoying one of this State's greatest assets, the Seacliff Bridge. Mr McLeay assisted in opening the Seacliff Bridge and the Grand Pacific Drive. I thank Paul for his service to the people of Heathcote, in the way he conducted the campaign and the way he went out of his way to make sure we had a smooth transition into the electorate office I wish Paul, Cassy and the family very well. The Seacliff Bridge is an example of thinking outside the square in the design of public assets and is an architectural statement applauded by international car companies around the world, whose advertising campaigns feature this spectacular bridge. I encourage all of you to experience the drive for yourselves.

The people of Heathcote expect me to deliver. During the campaign one of the subjects raised constantly was the Wollongong council elections. Just weeks into government I have already set the date for these elections. I am proud we have already given this commitment a big tick. New South Wales residents expect their Government to deliver infrastructure. That infrastructure needs to be in place before we release great tracts of land for housing. The Illawarra and the people of Heathcote need a better way to get to work. I have heard the people of Heathcote. The F6 extension needs to be and should be considered as soon as possible. We trust Infrastructure NSW will consider this project as a matter of urgency.

The Princes Highway's Heathcote Shopping Centre traffic bottleneck was another subject raised by everyone in Heathcote and even by those outside the Heathcote electorate. The impact of this traffic snarl on tens of thousands of commuters travelling to their work and home has been ignored by the previous Government. We, on the other hand, will make traffic on the entrance to Sydney from the south flow freely. Policing in Heathcote is like many other electorates; we need more resources. I would like to mention the growing area of Helensburgh, which has a police station that is not manned to levels that match demand. A fully functioning police station in the area would cover 18,000 constituents and run from Bundeena to Thirroul. Police and would have quick access to the F6. Over the period of the Fifty-fifth Parliament I will fight for a fully manned police station for Helensburgh.

I was proud to walk Dharawal State Reserve with Barry O'Farrell when we made the commitment to make it a national park. This will preserve the headwaters of the Georges River and priceless Aboriginal rock carvings. It is the water catchment area for the Woronora Dam. This area, with its natural swamplands, filters our drinking water. The whole area needs careful management. I look forward to again joining Barry O'Farrell at the commitment ceremony. Many of my constituents have great concerns with methane gas exploration in our electorate. The water source for the Illawarra and Sutherland shire must be protected. I will represent the many concerns of my constituents and make their voices heard. My focus as the member for Heathcote is to encourage economic growth and environmental sustainability. These tasks are not taken lightly.

One of Heathcote's major sources of business and employment is coalmining, the history of which spans 120 years in Helensburgh. The coalmining industry is well established. We need to now develop a vibrant tourism industry focusing on the Grand Pacific Drive and other treasures that are waiting to be discovered. I imagine towns like Helensburgh, with its rich history of coalmining, being the start and finishing point of the Grand Pacific Drive, whilst villages like Stanwell Park, Coledale, Scarborough and Austinmer offer bed and breakfasts, cafes and restaurants, all employing locals. Thirroul and Bulli could have more shops with curios and antiques, encouraging visitors to spend their time and their money in our region.

It is traditional that in their inaugural speech new members lay out what they stand for. I believe that the community has the power. We as members of Parliament have just reached the pinnacle of our careers. We have just become the ultimate public servants. As a consequence, I have a great interest in making our communities' lives better. For those who do not have a voice—the homeless, the disabled and members of our communities who have fallen between the gaps—I look forward to making their lives better.

I also have a passion—and some might say a talent—for making things happen. For seven years I was the president of the parents and citizens group at my boys' school, Endeavour Sports High School. At my first parents and citizens meeting I was confronted with parents who had been lobbying for decades to get sports facilities. Their will to fight the system had extinguished. Funnily enough, Endeavour was a sporting school without any sporting facilities. State and international representatives used to make the best of a bad situation and go on to represent our State and our nation in their chosen sports. Students in the basketball program used the canteen to practise, yet some of these guys and girls have gone on to represent us at the Commonwealth Games and the Olympics. How hard could it be to get sporting facilities for a sporting school, I thought? The principal supported me in doing anything I could to get something. The revolving door of Labor education Ministers frustrated me for 18 months. Most would have given up.

I contacted Alan Jones and organised a meeting with the then education Minister. At the same time I wrote to the Federal education Minister, Brendan Nelson, asking for a direct grant to my school. The look on the Minister's face when Alan Jones walked in told the story. "We need sporting facilities at a sports school, don't we?" he said. "But there is no money," he said. I received a positive response from the Federal Minister and a direct grant was made to Endeavour Sports High School of \$2.5 million. With great fanfare the boffins from the department came out to make the announcement. They proudly announced that \$2.4 million had been granted directly to Endeavour Sports High School. Where the other \$100,000 went must be a story for another day.
[*Extension of time agreed to.*]

A new sports basketball stadium, and multipurpose all-weather Astroturf fields and netball courts under lights was the result and cost the New South Wales taxpayer nothing; it was a public-private partnership with the company. It took only seven years to get through all of the red tape. Needless to say, when I am driving home past Endeavour now, it is starting to look like a sporting school. There are many firsts in the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales and I would like to indulge myself for just one moment. This year marks the passing of my fiftieth birthday. Fifty years ago there was a pharmacological disaster known as Thalidomide—a terrible drug prescribed to women to relieve morning sickness. I stand here before you as the first Thalidomide baby to be elected to Parliament, and appointed Acting-Speaker in any Parliament anywhere in the world. This is something that needs to be said but not dwelt on. I pray that a disaster of this magnitude will never happen again.

I turn now to those people without whose support I would not be standing before you. First, I acknowledge my wife, Gayle—to borrow a line from Danna Vale, the Heathcote patron and former member for Hughes, "My long-suffering wife". As all members understand, your partner can make or break your political career. Gayle has always supported me in all my endeavours as I do hers. Gayle, you have stood beside me ever since we met at school back in 1978. We support each other and we make an

awesome team. We have been married for 26 years and have two great boys. You have succeeded in your chosen field and I am confident you will reach your ultimate career goal. Gayle, you complete me. I thank my boys, Cameron and Adam, and although they do not hold the same passion for politics as their old man, they still support Gayle and me. Cameron has chosen to work in one of the most difficult areas, the disability sector, and he does it without any fuss. Adam is turning into a fine young man. He is still studying at school and has great potential, if he takes it out for a run. Oh yes, Adam, we will get Foxtel; it is now in *Hansard*.

The Heathcote campaign team is an experienced one, a well oiled machine some say. When we decided to run our campaign as a military exercise it took on a life of its own. Because of the geographical footprint of Heathcote we set up four separate beachheads and "Operation Overlord Heathcote" was born. Four commanders were appointed. Sword was Bill Meehan, covering Sutherland to Yarrawarrah; Gold was Garry Law, Engadine to Heathcote; Juno was Peter Colacino, Helensburgh to Coalcliff; and Utah was Brian Beecroft, Scarborough to Bulli. It has been suggested that the former member for Heathcote was Omaha, where the Allies sustained massive casualties. Overlord supreme commander was Brett Thomas. Brett kept me grounded, dubbing me "Precious Candidate" if I ever inquired about anything that took my focus off campaigning. Thanks are not enough, Brett. I owe you a great debt.

The "Minister for the Exchequer", Peter Vermeer, was a former candidate in Heathcote in 2003. Without his first strike in 2003, this victory would have been less impressive. Peter had the hardest job, balancing the finances. Coral Slattery needs a special mention. Coral was our pre-poll coordinator and she did this difficult task thoroughly. Even though she endured a serious operation on her foot during the campaign, she battled on regardless. Thank you, Coral. Once endorsement was confirmed at the end of October the team swung into action. Like Operation Overlord we went for the "shock and awe" approach. Railway stations were a particular focus of course and I can attest that Thirroul railway station starts its day no later than 5.00 a.m. The morning crew need a special mention: supporters like Brett Thomas, Daniel McIlgorm, Bob Osborne, Marc Landrigan and Susan Kelly. I thank them for their early morning reveilles. My doorknocking team, Ian Kolln, Brett Thomas and John Ajaka, MLC, spent many uncomfortable hours accompanying me. I will single out John Ajaka for special mention. Thank you for your never-ending support, John.

Mention must be made also of Senator Marise Payne, whose quiet confidence in me gave me strength to achieve my goals. Susan Kelly came onto the team, helping not only Heathcote but Menai and Miranda. I thank her for her herculean efforts in keeping me on time. I thank all my booth workers, who are too many to mention individually. Mr O'Farrell warned me that without Heathcote we would not take government; Heathcote was the pivotal seat where the Coalition achieved the majority. I trust we did okay. Although some thought we could not do it, I hope the final results prove that one should never underestimate passion. We started behind with a margin to win of 8.8 per cent and achieved a final result of a 12.9 per cent margin, a turnaround of 21.8 per cent. This is a direct result of the campaign and booth workers hard work.

As I reflect on the outcome I must mention a few more people who made this result possible, such as Chris Hall, battleground director; thanks for a great campaign. I am sure campaigns are not supposed to be so much fun. Thanks also to Susan Kelly, fundraising-campaign coordinator; Jen Havilah, media handler, who was responsible for making me the most visible candidate ever known in Bundeena, which we won; and Craig Kelly, Federal member for Hughes. I thank him for his support. I also need to pause and to remember those Liberal members who have represented parts of the now Heathcote seat in the past: the Hon. Chris Downy, for whom I spent many enjoyable hours campaigning back in the day; Allan Andrews, who was unfortunately redistributed out of his seat; and Lorna Stone, who had a brief dalliance with being a member, and has gone on serving her community with grace and tenacity. I would also like to mention the staff of Heathcote electorate office: Mrs Nancy Meehan whose decades of experience in administration and management make my job easy; and Robert Bates, whose journalistic experience is proving invaluable not only to me but also to my constituents.

During the campaign I met one interesting person on the hustings at a street stall in Thirroul. He bowled up to me accompanied by his wife, identifying himself as an Electrical Trades Union organiser. Dropping several expletives, he explained that he had voted Labor all his life and that his father and his grandfather before him had been Labor voters. They had supported the Labor Party all their lives. He explained he was never going to vote Labor again. "Why?" I asked. It was because he was responsible for cutting the power to those who could not pay their bills. He told me, "No more." He could not stand by and support a government or a party that was happy to cut off power to widows and the disabled. He told me he had even paid outstanding bills for pensioners and war veterans out of his own money. This illustrates why the Labor Party is now on the opposition benches.

As I draw my speech to an end I would like to thank two people who have also stood by me for the over 33 years that I have been in their lives: Ray and Jean MacDonald, Gayle's parents: Thank you for all your support over the years, sometimes questioning my sanity, but always standing by my decisions. You have lived through Gayle's and my ups and downs and have always been there for us. I told you it would be all right and I hope you think the outcome is okay. I take this opportunity once more to thank Gayle, Cameron, Adam and Lindsay, Cameron's girlfriend, for their love and support. Every journey starts with a single step. I now start the journey to be part of the solution, not part of the problem. I know my dad would have been proud. Thank you.