



Inaugural Speeches

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

Mr JAI ROWELL (Wollondilly) [6.21 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I stand before you today by the grace of God, humbled by this magnificent place, humbled by the trust that has been placed in me by the people of Wollondilly, and honoured to have the opportunity to create real change for my community and the people of New South Wales. My journey to this place has not been an easy one and my upbringing has taught me that one of the most important things is the notion of choice and the value of perseverance. The choices we make on a daily basis affect not only ourselves but those around us. They shape our path through life as we change and evolve. The choices we make are what define us. I have always believed that one measure of a man is how persistent he is to achieve what he sets out to accomplish and the choices he makes to get there.

I believe this sentiment to be of the utmost importance, especially in this place. We enter this place with the expectations of our own electorates and the expectations of the people of New South Wales that we will achieve what we set out to do. Perseverance to achieve our election promises, for the betterment of my constituents, is what drives me. My desire to serve the people began as a boy, raised in public housing. I have experienced firsthand what many treat with mild neglect. Department of Housing residents deserve greater recognition in our society, and I intend to make positive changes in this field.

There is a great need within these communities for better services, better support and coordination from both State and Federal governments, as well as for governments to give opportunities, not just slogans and rhetoric. Most people within these communities are hardworking mums and dads who have fallen on hard times, as was the case with my parents. Whilst my childhood was enjoyable, nurtured by a loving mother and father, I had a number of setbacks. When aged 15 I was declared clinically dead—albeit only briefly. I had slipped into anaphylactic shock followed by an adverse reaction to the medication used to treat me. Against the odds and after several months, I recovered. Motivated by this, I made a choice to make the most of my second chance and pursue life to the fullest.

Stories of sacrifice and examples of adversity can be found from one end of my electorate to the other. While the natural beauty and various landmarks in my electorate are the best in the world, so too are the people who reside there. For it is those individuals who are truly the heart of the Wollondilly electorate and it is them, as a group, who define it. We have families like the Lynchs and the Gillmartins from Silverdale and Warragamba, where many homes were decimated by the 2001 bushfires. Those families and many others made a choice to defend their homes, in many instances rebuilding what they had lost, demonstrating incredible courage and resilience. In Theresa Park we find Sarah Hilt. Whilst in her early years at university, Sarah went to bed one afternoon with a temperature and woke up from a coma, weeks later, with her limbs removed after contracting meningococcal. Sarah had a choice to give up her studies and become dependent on others, but she chose to persevere, finishing her studies with honours despite losing all fingers on both hands and both her legs.

Sarah is now a motivational speaker and meningococcal awareness campaigner. She has started the Sarah Hilt Foundation and is competing at the Para Pan Pacific Games later this year. Rosemeadow and Ambarvale are the home of the 3Ms—a place where three housing commission streets connect. It is also the place that saw the riots that featured on our television screens. Many residents,

however, chose not to be typecast, such as Uncle Ivan and Granddad Whui, two elders who were instrumental in the peacemaking and rebuilding process. They are gentlemen in every sense of the word who persevered to make their community a better place. Picton, steeped in historic beauty, is home to one of the most influential and determined women I have ever met. Glenda Grabin, together with a band of local mums including Darien Gray, Angela Longbottom and Nicole Robinson, are an inspiration to us all. After their children were born with Down syndrome they made a choice—a choice to fight every day to make a positive change in our society. From changing the name of the Birth Defects Register, to your endeavours to set up the first Down syndrome specific centre in Australia, you epitomise the word "persistent", and I look forward to working with you and everyone at The Right Start to achieve everything you set out to accomplish.

These local people and their stories, along with many others, inspire me each and every day, and together I am confident that we can do great things for our area. They are testament to fact that the choices we make on a daily basis affect the path our lives take and that we, present in this place, must take nothing for granted over these next four years. There are similar tales throughout the entire electorate of Wollondilly as it is a place as rich in spirit as it is rich in history. The town of Appin has just celebrated 200 years since settlement—one of only five towns to reach this great milestone. Menangle is home to Australia's first pastoral company, home of the Macarthur family's Camden Park Estate, which was renowned for its groundbreaking agricultural practices for many decades, including the famous Rotorlactor. Just as those towns have a proud history, so too does the seat of Wollondilly.

The Hon. Sir George Fuller and the Hon. Tom Lewis, both former conservative members for Wollondilly, ascended to the esteemed position of Premier and these great representatives of Wollondilly have had a strong influence on the evolution of this State. I wish to carry on their strong tradition of progress and conservation with determination to achieve for the people of Wollondilly. I will fight for the creation of the Dharawal national park. I will fight to upgrade Campbelltown Hospital, which is located in my electorate. I will fight for the widening of Narellan Road, the upgrade of rural roads and the delivery of vital infrastructure, including sewerage connection to rural towns that are desperate to ease the burden of pump-out fees.

As the fourteenth member for Wollondilly, I am honoured to stand before you tonight but I take this opportunity to pay my respects to the thirteenth member, the Hon. Phil Costa. I wish you well for the future and acknowledge your contribution. I am the product of a public education, starting my school years at Cartwright Public and finishing at Bowral High School. I am a proud alumni of the University of Western Sydney, Macarthur Campus, which is also located in my electorate, graduating with a Bachelor of Laws. It was at this fine institution that I was first introduced to the practical workings of politics, later becoming president of the Student Representative Council, where I instigated many programs such as free shuttle bus services and affordable food on campus.

From here my love of politics grew deeper and I have since progressed to hold many Liberal Party positions, including my current place on the New South Wales State Executive. It is true that the Liberal Party is the party that rewards hard work, and my upbringing has taught me that with hard work and perseverance anything is achievable. These sentiments were further developed during my years working for the Hon. Charlie Lynn, who took me across the Kokoda Track. Walking to Isurava Memorial located in the highlands of Papua New Guinea, as the sheets of rain drenched me to core,

all I could think about was the sacrifice of those brave young men giving their lives and allowing me to stand before you today. I thank you, Charlie, and tonight I take this opportunity to salute our members of the armed forces.

My election to Campbelltown City Council allowed me the opportunity to make choices that affect the great people of Campbelltown. I was fortunate to meet the general manager, Paul Tosi, and current mayor, Paul Lake, and I thank them for their support and wisdom. I also take this opportunity to mention Les McMahon, General Manager of Wollondilly Shire Council, and Mayor Michael Banasik and thank them for their help and wealth of local knowledge. My time on council ensured that I was able to see firsthand the positive changes that I could make as an elected representative and where I developed a strong vision for our community. This vision is for Wollondilly thriving as a tourist destination, utilising the fantastic local attractions we have, including the redeveloped Trainworks Steam Train Museum in Thirlmere, Bargo's Wirrimbirra Wildlife Sanctuary, Mowbray Park Farm and the famous Warragamba Dam—one of five dams in my electorate that supply more than 80 per cent of Sydney's drinking water—to name but a few. Increased tourism will boost the local economy and help create more local jobs.

Job creation is another big issue that affects people throughout Wollondilly, from Bradbury to Bargo, from Warragamba to Wilton. There is a lack of local job opportunities, as well as a skills shortage, within the area. More than 70 per cent of my constituents travel outside the area for work each day. Therefore, it is essential that we as a Government invest not only to create local jobs but also to develop productivity centres, and business and technology parks in consultation with the local community to generate growth within the region. As I look around this Chamber I see my good friend Chris Patterson, the member for Camden, and Bryan Doyle, the member for Campbelltown, who both share my vision for our region.

Chris has worked tirelessly as the mayor of Camden and his knowledge of the local area is second to none. He has become a close friend over the years and I am glad to sit in this Chamber with him. Their election to this place is a testament to their hard work, perseverance and dedication. Finally, the Federal member for Macarthur, my very good friend Russell Matheson, a proud local member. When Russell made the choice to run in the 2010 Federal election, Macarthur gained an avid campaigner for job creation, infrastructure for a growing region and a dedicated local member of Parliament. Unfortunately, Federal Parliament is sitting tonight so he cannot be here, but his wife, Sharryn, and their two daughters, Alana and Jessica, who supported me are here tonight.

Finally, to my equally good friend the Federal member for Hume and his wife, Glo, I thank them for always encouraging me and strongly advocating for our local community. From the beginning we have made it very clear that we will be a Government that will govern for all of New South Wales. Already, we have seen alterations to the planning laws, giving local planning decisions back to the community. I commend the Government for this decision. I am grateful to serve under our Premier, Barry O'Farrell, who shows a strong commitment to south-western Sydney. I thank you, Premier, and your Ministers, together with my colleagues in both Houses, for their assistance during the campaign. Your help and advice were invaluable.

Election day on 26 March 2011 was one of the most rewarding, thrilling and exciting days of my life. It was a great day, and the community shared with me not just its frustrations with the previous Government, but also its vision, hopes and dreams for the future. Many people were voting Liberal

for the first time and they told me not to take them for granted, as Labor had done for so many years. It was a great result and we will go on to do great things. But great things cannot be achieved by one individual alone. They are achieved by great teams, and I am most privileged to have the most talented and determined team working for me. You are all like family to me and many of you have been supporting me for well over a decade. I will never forget the sacrifice and hard work that each and every one of you made to my campaign. The journey we took together will be etched in my memory forever and I am forever grateful.

At the risk of failing to mention someone, I thank those who greatly contributed to my campaign. First, I must thank my campaign director, Michael Shaw, who is now my office manager. Mike, what can I say about you? I see you as a great friend, confidant and brother. You put your life on hold for an entire 18 months to make this election win possible. I thank you in advance for putting your life on hold for the next 25 years so that together we can achieve so much more for our community. To my deputy campaign director, Benn Banasik, your family may have forgotten what you look like, but hopefully your wife has now forgiven me for the fact that you were not home every night—but we did it. You were always there for me, and I thank you for your support. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

To Jean Newton, my treasurer and my former conference president, I thank you for all you do for me. You have supported me from day one and I appreciate your counsel. By the way, your sabbatical is now cancelled. To Jeff Gray, my conference president, and his wife, Janet, words will never express the gratitude for all that you do. Jeff, you are like a brother to me, and I thank you for everything. To Councillor Paul Hawker and his wife, Sigrid, thank you. We both started our tilt at public life together and I am proud to work with you at a local level for our community. To Lou Amato, you have stood solid as a true friend and I thank you for your belief in me. To Joel Matthews, who took all his annual leave to work night and day on the campaign, thank you for being a true friend through good and bad.

To Matthew Mason-Cox, my former boss, my good friend and now colleague, I thank you for the countless hours and sleepless nights you gave to my campaign, ensuring its success. I appreciate your wise counsel in helping me to settle into this great place. Thanks must also go to the State director, Mark Neeham; my good friend, the deputy State campaign director, Richard Shields; Chris Stone; Lisa Maree-Schell; Simon McGuinness; Jen Havilah; Jeremy Vine; and all the staff at the secretariat. To the rest of my campaign team, I give you my heartfelt thanks and appreciation for everything you did. Tonight I acknowledge Michael and Anne Banasik for putting their lives on hold and assisting in every possible way to ensure that the job got done; Sharryn Hilton, the former Liberal candidate and her husband, John, who have supported me; Brooke Hilton; Toese Faapito and his extended family for their help and support; my aunty Dawn for assisting mum with the lunch-making duties to feed a massive army of volunteers, together with Julie Percival, Anne Shaw and Beryl Shaw.

To Paul Hilbrick, thank you for overseeing the polling booths. I thank Eleni Petinos, who has been helping me since we first met; Chairman of the Wollondilly branch of The Nationals, Mr Alan Hay; Kathryn Steinweiss, who constantly challenges my thoughts; Ashleigh Moss with her can-do attitude; Dr John Chew; Tanya Harris; Jared Hilliard; Scott Percival; Zaya Toma; Anna Grace Millward; Reece White; Corey White; Lizzy Lambert; Brett McGrath; Jason Buschetti-Zanotti; Bruno and Marie Lopriato; Tony O'Toole; Debbie Stevens; David Gavin; Errol Gavin; Matthew Gould; Lorri and Richard

Harrison; Dean Jones; George Greiss; Glenda Grabin; Nicole Robinson; Darien Gray; Nathan, Sam and Sharon Bishop; Karl Klein; Tony Higgs.

I also thank Senator the Hon. Concetta Feirravanti-Wells; Cr John Chedid; Chris Rath; Alex Clarke; Wayne Brown; Peter Poulos; the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps; Dominic Perrettot; Aaron Johnson; David; Anthony Spagnolo; Bill Gouritis; John Corrigan; Phil, Sam and Ricardo Abusail, who I have worked with since our university days; Eric and June Heise; my cousin Don Edmonds for his support; Paul Dangar; Clive and Lorraine Johnson; Anne and Mervyn Youl; Barry, Tony and Adita; Greg McCabe; Karina Ralston; Alan Buxton; Deidre Darcy; Roger Golding; and Jaymes Boland-Rudder, the go-to man who was always happy to answer the 100 questions we asked him every day. To my good mate and Aussie legend, Angry Anderson, who came out to campaign with me, thank you.

I also thank the flying squads that came out and to the rest of the 200-plus army—some of them are here tonight—who gave up their time to hand out on election day, scrutineer, organise booths and make election day run like clockwork. Although I have already mentioned them, I thank my staff: Mike, Kathryn, Ashleigh and Michael. You are doing a fantastic job, and I am so proud of what we are achieving already for our community. I am proud of each of you and I know the great lengths you go to each day in servicing our constituents. Special thanks must also go to my parents, Ted and Yvonne Rowell. From an early age you instilled a strong sense that you can achieve anything as long as you put in the hard work—an attitude that has greatly assisted me throughout my life.

I remember my mum sitting down with me every afternoon after school helping me with my homework, ensuring that I was given the best opportunity to succeed. My dad and I have enjoyed many a political conversation, and I recall these from an early age. Dad, you have always encouraged me politically and for that I am forever grateful. My parents have always supported me in my political endeavours at every election, including the old days of painting bed sheets for university elections, then driving around in the middle of the night to put them up. Thanks must also go to my dad for travelling with me on election day and to mum for organising the election-night party with my sister, Ebony. It was second to none and everyone in attendance was amazed at the quality of preparations, including the election posters and the election cake.

Also, thanks to my sister, Ebony, and her partner, Lutfi, who helped me throughout the campaign and worked very hard. Sis, you continue to make me proud. I give my heartfelt thanks to my in-laws, John and Annette Frisken. Your help and support meant more to me than you will ever know. To my brothers-in-law Daniel, Matthew and David, grandparents-in-law, Barbara Jolly and the Reverend Bob Frisken, for all their love, support and friendship; to my uncle-in-law Steven Frisken who handed out for me and had to change the colour of his political flavouring to support me. To paraphrase one of my favourite singers, Alan Jackson:

... the greatest contribution I will ever make is the ones I leave behind.

With that in mind, I thank my beautiful wife and my two best friends, our amazing sons, Will and Menzies. Their inspiration, love and support are the reason I wake up every day in an attempt to do them proud. My Mr Monkey, Will, aged almost nine, and my Mr Caterpillar, Menzies, aged 19 months, have shared in this journey with me. Will, you are turning into a fine young man with wisdom beyond your years. I love you very much and know that you will do great things. You continually amaze me and have taught me some of the most important things in life. Menzies, you

are a great son and are very loving. Your daddy cuddles make me smile even at the end of a long drawn-out day. Your enthusiasm to do what the big people are doing is great to watch, and I know that you too will do great things. I love you. I look forward to being part of both your lives, watching you grow and doing the best job I have, and will ever be given, to be your dad. Everything I do will be to make this world a better place for you.

To my loving wife, Belinda, for reasons I will never understand, you chose me, put up with me and support me. You are my rock, and grow more beautiful each and every day. You are no doubt the best mum in the world and the greatest wife that has ever been. You have taught me how to love, and if it were not for you I would not be in this place. I share this victory with you. When we first got engaged I remember we said that our goal was to grow old together, leaving great footprints in the world in which we live. This still remains our goal, and I love you so, so much. The people of Wollondilly will also benefit from you, as we both share a passion for our community and are determined to make it a better place. Finally, to the people of Wollondilly, thank you for placing your trust in me. I will deliver. I will not let you down. I am immensely aware of the expectations you have of me and I will always have my arms and door open to you. Together, we can make a difference and together we will make Wollondilly an even greater place to live.

The ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Gareth Ward): I congratulate the member for Wollondilly on his inaugural speech, and welcome him to the class of 2011.