



## Inaugural Speeches

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**Mr GARETH WARD:** It is without equivocation that I express my deepest sense of honour and privilege to serve in this, the oldest Parliament in the country. I hope that I can uphold and build upon the traditions of the most distinguished service and respect that have been developed through the creditable contributions of so many outstanding individuals who came here to articulate the views and concerns of their local community and with a desire for a brighter future for our State. I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of my mother, Margaret Bowcher, and my father, Malcom Ward: a son could not have asked for more diligent, dedicated and loving parents. Like most parents, my mum and dad worked hard to give me every opportunity they could afford. Without their best efforts I would not be the person I am today. I thank them both for so frequently giving up so much so that I could have the best chance in life of reaching my potential.

When I was born the doctors quickly diagnosed me with ocular coetaneous albinism, which has rendered me legally blind since birth. My parents were told by the doctors in the 1980s, "You'll need to keep him in the dark and behind closed doors". Today I say to those doctors, "Thanks for the advice", but I think they may wish to reconsider their prescription. At age 2½ my mother started me on the violin—with a tissue box and a ruler to develop my bowing technique. At age five I was entered in the local violin section of the Shoalhaven Eisteddfod and, to my mother's surprise, I won. I would later play in the local youth orchestra, study at the Conservatorium of Music and complete several grades through the Australian Music Examinations Board—all by the age of 16. I later played in jazz bands in clubs and pubs, and count these as some of my most memorable musical moments. All arts disciplines are a fundamental part of any civilised society and play an important role as an outlet for expression and talent. I still practice today but rarely play in public—after all, no-one is a fan of a fiddling politician, particularly those on that side.

Growing up in a small business family I quickly learnt the value of hard work and I remember well what Keating and Labor did to those who yearned for effort to be met with reward by government. Even at an early age I developed a passion for those who were prepared to take a risk and carve out a future fuelled by unwavering determination and unbridled aspiration. Small business people represent the backbone of this State's economy. These people rarely complain, because it is not in their nature to do so, but each of these merchant pioneers makes up the engine room of opportunity and represents what can be achieved when government takes a back seat as opposed to taking the front. I commend Barry O'Farrell and the Coalition for committing to removing two old regulations for every one that is introduced by this Parliament.

Whilst I will always stand up for what is fair and right for working families, occupational health and safety law in this State remains an encumbrance to small business and a barrier to jobs growth and employment. The law has become so cumbersome that the more business attempts to comply, the more those same businesses are undercut by those who fail or even ignore their obligations entirely. I place the House on notice that common sense must replace a system of common failure. I am a product of a public school education, having commenced my education at Kiama and Lyrebird preschools, through Nowra East Public and Bomaderry Public primary schools, and then Bomaderry High School.

I am proud of the strength of our State school system, and its intelligent and diligent teachers and staff. My teachers were good people who worked hard to provide a quality experience at all levels of

my learning career. It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge Jo Parsons, the relieving principal of Bomaderry High School and my former year adviser, who is here with us in the gallery today. I thank Mrs Parsons and all my teachers who were such a great credit to their profession and for whom I hold a deep and unwavering regard and respect. I am proud of the education I obtained from the University of Wollongong and I acknowledge the significant contribution this institution has made to the Shoalhaven and the Illawarra.

It gives me great pleasure to acknowledge the Vice-Chancellor of the University of Wollongong, Professor Gerard Sutton, who is present in the gallery. Professor Sutton will be retiring later this year, in the university's sixtieth year. I record in my first speech my deep level of respect for a man who has made a good university great. Professor Sutton has been integral to diversifying the Illawarra; the academic maturity of this institution grew enormously under his leadership. My journey to this place has been anything but easy but, as I have often found, rarely does anyone slip into Parliament by accident. I joined the Shoalhaven Young Liberals at the age of 16.

If ever there was a point in my life on which the rest of it turned, no doubt that was it. I quickly became involved in branch activities and before too long became the branch president. After I finished my Higher School Certificate the then President of the Young Liberals, Tony Chappell, asked me to serve on the policy committee. After a short disagreement with the then president and now member for Bega—a dispute I resoundingly won—I became the rural and regional officer of the New South Wales Young Liberals. I later served as the membership officer and the political officer, and established the first Young Liberal branch in the Illawarra: the Throsby Young Liberal branch was established with almost 200 members.

The Young Liberal movement has played a critical role in training the next generation of leaders. The challenge to leaders is to create more leaders, not more followers. As I look around this Chamber I see my friends Mark Coure the member for Oatley, Melanie Gibbons the member for Menai, Matt Kean the member for Hornsby and Dominic Perrottet the member for Castle Hill. They are all fine examples of young people who are passionate about their local communities and their service in Parliament. They all have benefited from the incredible tutelage that the Young Liberal movement provides. Regardless of politics or persuasion I encourage all young people to take an active interest in politics and public affairs; after all, it is your future that is up for debate.

As a student at the University of Wollongong, student politics frequently took precedence over my study. I was proud to establish the University of Wollongong Liberal Club and I acknowledge the presence in the gallery of its current president, Chris Whittaker. The university Liberal Club is, without dispute, the most active political club on campus eclipsing Labor, which now is even more irrelevant than the campus Greens. I am conscious that I am the first person from the University Liberal Club to be elected to Parliament. I sincerely hope that I am the first of many. I am proud of my ongoing connection with the University of Wollongong and continue to serve the university as a graduate member of the University Council alongside my friend and fellow graduate Kelly Knowles-Lyon.

At the age of 22, I was elected to Shoalhaven City Council as the youngest councillor in our city's history. It was not long before I found the headlines—warring with the then mayor, Councillor Greg Watson. If you learn more from your enemies than you do from your friends then Councillor Watson has continued to be a veritable fountain of knowledge. In spite of our disagreements, I respect and

commend his 38 years of service to local government in our district and acknowledge his continued contribution to the Shoalhaven. Local government was where I cut my teeth on the issues that matter, but, more importantly, I had the unique opportunity to meet some amazing people, and I have been fortunate to maintain these outstanding connections with our local community. Be it standing up for the residents of Lyndhurst Drive and fighting, alongside Ken and Louise Karger, the imposition of thousands of dollars in resident contributions towards local footpaths, or be it standing alongside the Kangaroo Valley community to oppose the then New South Wales Labor Government plans to extract billions of litres of water from Tallowa Dam, local government is the melting pot of so many interesting personalities and unique individuals.

In 2008 I was re-elected to Shoalhaven City Council and subsequently elected deputy mayor unopposed. This was a position I held until I stood down to contest the State election. I met many good friends during my local government journey but one that stands out above all others is my friend the Mayor of the Shoalhaven and newly elected member of the Legislative Council, the Hon. Paul Green. Paul has been like the older brother I never had—and there is probably a reason for that—and in spite of our political differences on some matters, his friendship has enriched my life. I thank Paul, his wife, Michelle, and their wonderful family for allowing me to share a space in their life which means so much to me.

It is certainly tradition that one should thank those that assisted us arriving in this place. At the outset, I believe it is appropriate to thank the former member for Kiama, Matt Brown. Matt Brown and I share one thing—a passion for serving a district we love. I thank him for his service to our community and wish him well in his life's journey. Whilst time prevents me from acknowledging all those who made a contribution, rest assured I am so very grateful for each of your tremendous contributions and support. First, I must thank the thousands of dedicated Liberal voters in Kiama who have faced so many disappointments, but have remained faithfully loyal to our party. To the hundreds of Liberal Party members from Gerringong, Berry, Bomaderry and Kiama branches and in particular Shoalhaven Young Liberals and the University of Wollongong Liberal Club, thank you.

To former Senator John Tierney—thank you for being a great employer, a wonderful mentor and a reliable friend. I note your presence in the gallery today and thank you most sincerely for the opportunities you gave me and the advice you continue to provide. Another friendship that has grown out of my local government beginnings is my friendship with Colin Waller. Whilst Colin is now the Secretary/Treasurer of the New South Wales Australian Hotels Association, he was then the local Berry publican where my Apex Club used to meet. Colin has been a genuine supporter of local young people. He talks the talk when it comes to building opportunities for the next generation. In so many respects, I can only aspire to follow in his footsteps. To my polling booth co-ordinator, great friend and outstanding supporter Paul Terrett and his partner Jason Horton, thank you for your continued friendship and support.

To Ashley Priest, Mark Grimson, Paul Rolland, Philip Motby, former Senator Tony Messner, Neil Hartwell, Anthony Strik, Leigh Nelson, Dennis and Marilyn O'Keefe, David Boyd, James Parrish, Morgan Forrest, Al Cameron, Alex Dore, Rob Leigo, Phillip Pease, Matthew Jackson, Fiona Hudson, Olga Stoutchilina, James Stevens, Steven Marshall, MP, Councillor Warren Steel, Councillor Trevor Fredericks, Councillor Juliet Arkwright, Councillor Jim Mager, Arthur Dean, Brendan Lyon, Michaela Packer, Chris Hall, Matt Cross, Bede Crasnich and Clayton McInness—my thanks for your support and

friendship. To my local government colleagues, David Bennett and Nigel Soames, thank you for your enduring friendship and support. You have always gone well out of your way to help and sustain my goals and objectives for our community. I am extremely grateful for all you have done and continue to do. To Shoalhaven City Council General Manager Russ Pigg and senior staff Rob Donaldson, Peter Dunn, Tim Fletcher, Bill Paterson, Peter Adams and Carmel Krogh, I thank and highly commend you for your dedication to serving local residents.

Whilst the media do not tell us what to think, they do tell us what to think about, and in regional New South Wales the local media play an important part in public debate. I would like to thank John Hanscombe, Adam Wright, Glenn Ellard, Claire Dressler, Melissa Jaros, Matt Snelson, Kristia Thomas, Adam Straney, Danielle Cetinski, Alex Arnold, Ben McClellan, Kerrylyn Clark, Nicole Hasham, Nick Rheinberger, Nick McLean and Peter Riley for always allowing me an opportunity to have my say. A special thank you must be reserved for the Yoda of local news radio, Graham French. I call him the "Yoda" of local news radio not just because of his journalistic longevity, but because his appearance is strikingly similar in all respects. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I must thank the well-oiled team at Liberal headquarters, led by State Director Mark Neeham and the incredibly patient campaign director, Chris Stone. Your success has been our success. You ran an incredible campaign and I thank you for exceeding even my expectations. To Michael Photios—I advise the House that Michael was my good friend well before he was a lobbyist—thanks for all your encouragement over many years. To Robyn Bramley, Shirley Hollis and Paula Turnbull for weathering every condition for hours on end at the pre-poll, thank you for never giving up hope; you are truly an inspiration. To local upper House member John Ajaka, thank you for your never-ending advice, support and friendship. To my aunt Brenda: None of you has ever witnessed anything quite like my aunty. She flew halfway around the world from Edinburgh to spend 10 weeks on the campaign trail. For a woman who used to campaign for the Scottish National Party, boy, could she pack a punch.

To my electorate office staff, Vicki Henry and Bryan Fishpool, my thanks for your continued service to our community. I must make mention of the senior members of my campaign committee. To Nathan Barton, thank you for going well out of your way to ensure we had a campaign that was equipped with the best information technology resources that eBay could buy. To Paul Ell, a young man who was raised by his grandparents and has achieved so much in spite of all the obstacles placed in front of him, thank you for never ever giving up hope, for always being there and for being a tireless worker. To Nicholas Mickovski, you could not ask for a more dedicated and loyal friend and supporter. Nick ensured the campaign office was not only fully staffed, but frequently amused and entertained. Nick was our campaign fixer, and I thank him for his outstanding dedication to the cause. I cannot go past my friend, council colleague and campaign manager Andrew Guile who provided the maturity and considered opinion required for this campaign. My only hope is that you will one day be given the opportunity to serve in Parliament so that your true talent and abilities can be realised.

To my parliamentary colleague and close friend Rob Stokes, thank you for giving up so much of your spare time to support a campaign in a world away from your own. Now I must turn to five very important people without whom I would not be here. To Jaymes Bolland-Rudder: Jaymes is unquestionably without peer when it comes to simply getting on with the job. This always fearless, sometimes shameless but never capricious character was one lean, mean campaigning machine.

Thank you for your support. Madam Speaker, when I first met you almost 10 years ago when you were serving as Deputy Mayor of Shoalhaven City Council, I would have never thought we would be part of this most amazing journey. From your pre-selection battle in 2002 to your stunning victories in 2003 and 2007, both you and Ossie have been a warm source of advice and truly wonderful and invaluable friends. I simply would not be here without you both.

To the Hon Don Harwin, his intellect and political ability are renowned and respected, but his friendship means so much more. If there is one trait that defines Don Harwin, it would be his commitment to helping others make their contribution in public life. I think this is one of those rare occasions when I can speak for both of us, Madam Speaker, in saying that Don Harwin has been critical to our mutual success. Whilst many may talk of what they achieve in politics, Don Harwin's achievements now speak for ourselves. Ben Blackburn is someone who is known to many people in this place. I first came into contact with Ben through the child care and protection agency Bravehearts. Ben is a remarkable young man in whom I have enormous trust and confidence. His passionate dedication to the campaign was nothing short of impressive and his continued contribution as one of my electorate office staff and close friend is invaluable to say the very least.

It is appropriate that I conclude my long list of thanks with a person who has backed me right from the start. Luke Sikora has been a part of every successful election campaign I have ever contested in public life. Everyone in politics needs someone like Luke, and to those who do, none of you has anyone half as good as he is. Apart from being a skilled campaigner, a relentless worker and enthusiastic Liberal, he is a friend I simply could not do without. Whilst success has many fathers, I have no doubt that I would not be standing here today if it were not for a great mate and a wonderful friend. I know that there has been somewhat of a competition between new members presenting their inaugural speeches as to who has the best electorate. Whilst all of you have been sterling advocates for your individual communities and have extolled their virtues with passion, I know you would all rather be representing Kiama, and you know it is true for why else would most of you holiday in my electorate. Kiama is truly where the mountains touch the sea.

From the lush green fields and natural waterways of the northern Shoalhaven, to the picturesque and seemingly never-ending undulation of the Southern Highlands through to the sweeping sandy coastal towns of Gerringong, Kiama and Minnamurra and up into the City of Shellharbour including Shell Cove and Albion Park, Kiama is without doubt a magnificent place to call home. Be it the best beaches in Australia, bush walking in Kangaroo Valley, a quiet lunch at the Burrawang Hotel, a picnic at Killalea State Park, a coffee in Berry, seeking a thrill at Jamberoo Action Park or taking in the sights at the Illawarra Fly, the electorate of Kiama is a moving portrait of magnificent beauty and natural diversity.

With such an environmental résumé, is it any wonder that residents in my electorate were concerned about a regressive State planning system that progressively saw communities lose their right to have a say in the future of their urban environment and a Labor Government that saw only financial value in public open space, not the real social value for families and communities. I am a committed environmentalist; but this important debate is often lost on pseudo greens that see only the politics of protectionism—rather than the true value of conservationism. Environmental protectionists would rather defend the need to do nothing with our environment than recognise that life is about balancing the need for sustainable progress whilst conserving what defines our

district. How else can you make the case about protecting our environment if people cannot be allowed to experience what is so important?

As someone who has witnessed the loss of life on our local roads, I look forward to joining with you in taking up the battle to see the upgrade of the Princes Highway. This is not just about safety—this is a major artery for economic investment and jobs. It will be with great alacrity that I shall continue to stand up and fight for funding and see the delivery of necessary improvements to the Princes Highway. Indeed, I thank all of those who travelled by coach or car up the Princes Highway to be here in the gallery, in the Waratah Room or out in the Foyer today. I am delighted that I could share this special moment with you as I commence this most interesting chapter of my life. Thank you all for making the considerable effort to be here.

In addition to the Princes Highway, I will deliver better safety measures to prevent accident and injury on the Kiama bends, an upgrade to hospital car parking at Shoalhaven Hospital, and improvements and upgrades at Shellharbour Hospital. I will fight to see the preservation of public open space such as Killalea State Park. I will continue to advocate for those with disabilities and in particular young people with impairments to ensure they get the best chance in life, and I will champion the work of such groups as Bravehearts for stronger child care and protection laws in New South Wales. On this point, I acknowledge Wendy and Roger Woodward—the founders of the South Coast chapter of Bravehearts who are here with us in the gallery today.

To quote former US Speaker of the House of Representatives Tip O'Neil, "all politics is local" and local government plays a critical part in the delivery of the most vital services. However, my experience to date is that city areas are serviced by simply too many councils and that has produced an unnecessary duplication of municipal services and all local councils would be better off with governance changes that produce more efficient local government. The 1993 Local Government Act has weakened the ability of elected representatives to participate in civic process; conversely, the distinct lack of accountability measures such as a requirement for local representatives to exercise due diligence and fiduciary responsibility, such as company directors, must be made. These changes should coincide with a reduction in the number of councillors, which should correspond with an increase in remuneration.

I stand here today with a lot to live up to. The seat of Kiama has been held by some amazing figures including former Premier Sir Henry Parkes. Former Premier Sir Joseph Curruthers was born in the district. However, my most memorable and regarded would have to be Sir George Fuller, a former member for Kiama and Premier whose Government passed the Harbour Bridge Act in 1922 and outlawed monopolies in 1923. Fuller was an economic rationalist and a social liberal—a category in which I firmly and proudly reside. So much of what Fuller faced is history repeating—the need to streamline government in an effort to ensure infrastructure investment and economic growth against the might of a union movement consumed only with itself and not the broader needs of New South Wales.

I am proud to stand here today as the first ever Liberal member for Kiama. I am a progressive liberal who believes that government must provide services to those who need them and opportunities to those who want them. The business of government should never hinder the inalienable right of every individual to reach their full potential. I have no doubt that this Government will be the people's vanguard of a free and confident society. I thank the House.