



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 31 May 2011.

Mr CHRIS PATTERSON (Camden) [6.02 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is a humbling experience standing in this Chamber tonight before my colleagues, family and friends. I would like to start by thanking my parents, Lynn and Stewart Patterson, who have always been tremendously supportive of me, and standing for Parliament was no exception. I remember being at a good friend's birthday one night when I had just left the family hotel after 20-odd years of service to concentrate full time on being mayor and running for Parliament. One of the guests asked dad would he cope without me. Without batting an eyelid, he said, "Absolutely, he is never at work anymore. If he hadn't left I was going to sack him anyway." We all waited for the punch line. It never came.

Move forward 15 months, and it was the Wednesday before the election and all the Coalition candidates stopped at our family hotel in Camden on the bus tour. There dad pulled the then Leader of the Opposition aside and asked him, "Do you think Chris will get elected on Saturday?" Mr O'Farrell answered, "If he doesn't, Stewart, I won't." Dad said, "Good, because I'm not giving him his job back on Monday." That said, I could not have two bigger supporters than mum and dad. My mother-in-law, Gai Watts, has been extremely supportive of me and her help along the way, in particular with our children, has been invaluable. To Gai and her partner, Kym Peters, I say thank you.

To my four wonderful children, Amelia 10; my twins, Tom and Sophie, eight; and Matthew, nearly three, I thank you for your love and understanding that only children can give. Let me tell you all here tonight that whether it be their school achievements, Tom and Sophie—my twins—winning this year's school cross country, Amelia perfecting her kartas and executing a great round kick, or Matthew coming out with a new expression, I cannot contain the pride I have in my children and the people they are becoming. If they read this speech when they are older, I ask only one thing of them.

Never forget that the only important thing is family. I expect that you will always look after each other and stand side by side in good and bad times alike. To my wife, Vicki, I cannot thank you enough for the love and support you have always given me, for the balancing act you achieve to ensure that our children are our number one priority and for the normality you bring to our household. I would also like to say how proud I am of you for what you have achieved in both your business and personal life. Thank you for your unconditional support.

My predecessor, Geoff Corrigan, who was the State member from 2003 to 2011. Ironically it was Geoff who first suggested to me that I run for council in 2000 in a by-election after the sad passing of a former Liberal member of this place, Phillip White. I only found out later that I was the missing number that Geoff needed that year to secure the mayorship. Geoff continues to be a good friend and I sincerely wish him well in the future. I would like to acknowledge another former member for Camden who I replaced on Camden council in another by-election in 2005 following her sad passing, the colourful Dr Liz Kernohan, AM. I had retired from council in 2004 because my twins were then only nine months old, and with Liz's sad passing I became the first Camden councillor to be elected at two by-elections after the sad passing of two former Liberal members of Parliament. Law of averages says I will not be going back to council after my parliamentary career ends.

Liz Kernohan, in making her first speech, said that she was conscious not only of her loyalty to the party of which she was a proud member, but also of her duty to the electors of the Camden

electorate, who had done her the honour of electing her to represent them in this House. As I read her words, spoken here 20 years ago, I realised that they expressed my feelings accurately, and that in tribute to Liz I should repeat them here tonight. Liz is an icon in Camden. I am the first to acknowledge that I will not be filling her shoes, but rather will do everything I can to serve the people of Camden as she did. I must mention a current member from the other place who lives in Camden, Charlie Lynn. Charlie has been extremely supportive of me and I look forward to working with Charlie for the good of the people of Camden as he shares my passion for our area.

I will give an example of Charlie at his best. It was before the 2007 State election at a press conference in Camden when Charlie announced me and Jai Rowell as the candidates for both Camden and Wollondilly, in front of a packed house full of media. Not only were we not preselected at the time, but the newly elected member for Wollondilly did not even run for pre-selection that year. As you can imagine, everyone was aghast at Charlie's announcement. My problem was not with him pre-empting the pre-selection process, but with him announcing that Jai and I were the new Batman and Robin of the south-west. As a result, the local papers were only interested in whom out of Jai and I was Batman and who was Robin.

Now onto Robin, the newly elected member for Wollondilly: I thank you for your support along the way as we are not just geographical neighbours, but now very firm friends. I wish you well in your journey in politics and in life. The final member I mention has been a tremendous support over the last two election campaigns. Her help has been invaluable—and she has a very good sense of timing. I am not singling her out to swing the pendulum back to the left; nor, Mr Acting-Speaker, am I singling her out because my new mode of transport to this place is CityRail. I am singling her out because in two campaigns and post being elected, Gladys Berejiklian has been a tremendous support, and I genuinely appreciate it.

I moved to Camden in 1984 and started at Macarthur Anglican School in year 7 as a foundation pupil when there were only three classes and 93 children. Now the school has approximately 1,100 children, and I am very happy to say that my three school-age children now attend Macarthur. I am very proud that I was the first alumni to be elected to local government, the first alumni to be elected mayor, and now the first alumni to be elected to State Parliament. I know the current headmaster, Dr David Knockles, would be very proud for the school if I was the first alumni to become a Minister. So Premier, for fear of disappointing the school, I thought I would bring that up this evening.

From school I went on and did an Associate Diploma in Hospitality and then went on to manage the family hotel for 20-odd years. I have the utmost respect for anybody who has a university degree. I know a number of my colleagues bring that knowledge and experience to this Parliament. Having tried that for just long enough to have received a Higher Education Contribution Scheme [HECS] bill, I realised it was not for me. I genuinely admire those who have achieved in their studies. That said, I would not have swapped my time in the family hotel for anything and I hope that, if nothing else, it has enabled me to bring the ability to mix with, and respect the views of, people from every walk of life. Each day I went to work I got to deal with, and talk to, a great cross-section of our community. I hope that stands me in good stead to represent those very cross-sections of my community equally.

The hospitality industry, my industry, is one of which I am very proud. I acknowledge Sally Fielke, the Australian Hotels Association chief executive officer, and long-time family friend, Max Hitchens, an

icon in our industry, who are here this evening. It is an industry with extremely hardworking people who are very generous and contribute so much to their local communities through providing employment, financial support and in helping to build social fabric within their communities. It is an industry that carries with it a social responsibility. The vast majority of operators understand that responsibility and do the right thing. I say to the minority of operators that do not that there is no place for them in hospitality. This Government and the New South Wales Police Force have my total support in outing them.

The other detractor of our industry is that for far too long people have not been made accountable for their actions. Alcohol use is no excuse for misbehaving, becoming violent and negatively impacting on society. I am proud that this O'Farrell-Stoner Government has done more in two months than my counterparts achieved in four terms of government in bringing responsibility back to the individual for their actions. Mr Acting-Speaker, the job is not finished. This Government must still do more to make people accountable for their own actions. The Camden area has always had a very strong basis of community organisations in which volunteers have worked hard to achieve their shared aims and objectives.

One example of this is the Camden Show Society. This wonderful organisation has just celebrated its 125th anniversary by holding another highly successful Camden Show that was attended by more than 38,000 people. A highlight of the show this year was the visit by Her Excellency, Ms Quentin Bryce, AC, the Governor-General of Australia, who opened the show. The whole district was also delighted when this year the Camden Showgirl, Ms Hilary Scott, won the overall State award at the Royal Easter Show. Camden's proud history of individual achievement is again highlighted by Harrington Park resident Danny Geale, who is the newly crowned Middleweight World Boxing Champion. I single Danny out for the role model he is to all Australians. Graham Annesley and I recently went out to congratulate Danny at the gym where he trains. We were both genuinely impressed by this humble Australian.

Camden is forecast to achieve a population growth from its current 55,000 people to nearly 300,000 people over the next two to three decades. With that comes the huge issue of infrastructure provision, which is by far the biggest issue facing our community. I am very aware that as mayor, the Liberal candidate during the March 2011 election and the Liberal State member of Parliament, I have been the most vocal person in our community about the shortfalls of the former Labor Government in relation to the provision of, and planning for, infrastructure in our community. That all changes now. It is not nearly good enough to talk about former failings. I must now be part of a Government that comes up with and delivers real solutions to the Camden area. Tonight I take ownership of that issue and charge this Coalition Government with working towards providing much-needed infrastructure for the people of my community so that we are not just building housing estates but real communities that families want to live in and are proud to live in.

In relation to Camden, former Premier Bob Carr coined the phrase "infrastructure before people", and it has been used by successive Labor Premiers at will. The people of Camden will not accept that rhetoric any longer. Premier, the people of Camden have put our Government on notice to deliver. We must provide upgraded roads, rail links, new police stations, hospitals and schools to meet the demands of the huge population increase that is being thrust upon my community. Every speaker before me has highlighted the virtues of their electorate. Only today, the member for Kiama told us

how his is the best electorate because we all holiday down there. Members will hear me yelling Camden's virtues from a soapbox out the front in Macquarie Street when, and only when, this Government commits to fixing, and fixes, the goat track that is Camden Valley Way. Until that time, I am happy to keep Camden's jewels a secret for fear that Camden Valley Way will not handle the extra traffic. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

I have been extremely fortunate to serve the people of the Camden local government area since 2000 in my capacity as a Camden councillor and for the past five years as mayor. The Camden State electorate takes in areas outside the Camden local government area—Raby, Eagle Vale, Blairmount, Claymore, Kearns and Eschol Park. I look forward to representing the constituents of those areas, and make them the promise that they are not the forgotten part of the Camden State electorate. I will represent them with the same passion with which I represent the areas within the Camden local government area. I believe that in life it is not the destination that is important but the journey along the way. This journey will not always be easy and at times I will falter. However, I will always endeavour to put the interests of the people of Camden first.

I mention the Camden Council and its entire staff. I thank you for your efforts. It was a privilege to be mayor and to work with you all. I am standing down on Tuesday 14 June and I can say it will be with a heavy heart that I do so. To be elected to Parliament I have had a team of volunteers who have worked tirelessly on my behalf. Together we have achieved a great outcome. If you are one of the doorknockers, booth workers, street stall volunteers, pre-poll workers or letterbox droppers, I truly thank you. Of those groups just mentioned I single out Peter Sidgreaves, Jim Reilly, Talitha Tribe, Daniel Try, Sue Carne, Alex Carne, Brooke Longoetomooa, and David and Charlotte Funnel. Thank you all for your efforts.

Everyone has a doorknocking story, so it is appropriate that I share one with the House. Our current Federal member for Macarthur, Russell Matheson, was a great help in the campaign and is also a good mate. When Russ and I were doorknocking we came to a house where a lady answered the door in the sheerest, holey nightie I have ever seen. She was in dire need of the member for Blue Mountains' skills—a dentist. She said to Russ, "I know you, you are my favourite councillor. Can I have a kiss please?" Russ, always the team player, said "If I do will you vote for Patto?" I am a staunch monarchist, and just as Will and Kate's balcony kiss is indelibly etched in my memory so too is the day that Russ took one for the team and secured a much-needed vote. Thanks mate.

I thank my parliamentary colleagues who wore out their shoe leather in the hot sun: Mike Gallagher, Mathew Mason-Cox, Ray Williams and Natasha McLaren-Jones, I appreciate your support. Peter Johnson, I thank you for all your help and friendship before the campaign and during the campaign. I look forward to our continuing friendship into the future. Your counsel and friendship is greatly appreciated. Lara Symkowiak, I thank you for all the support and advice you have given to me since joining me on Camden Council, and everything you did to help with my campaign. I could not have asked for a better, more loyal deputy mayor. I look forward to the time when you lead Camden Council, as I know you will. Debby Dewberry, thanks for everything you have done for me, not only supporting me on council, but working tirelessly as my campaign manager. I look forward to our relationship growing in the future, with you as my office manager. Finally, John Tooby, thanks for your friendship and support. Your counsel and advice along the way is greatly appreciated.

It is very rare that in life a true friend comes along. The four people I have just mentioned are true friends and offer the one thing that I value—loyalty. Just as you have offered me yours, I want you to know that you have mine. I look forward to working with my new parliamentary colleagues. It is a privilege to serve in this class of 2011 with you. I sincerely wish all my colleagues every success in their parliamentary careers. On our orientation day I was dismayed to hear from former members of Parliament that this is not a place where friendships are formed. I hope I am not being naive, but I disagree and look forward to forging friendships based on trust and respect with many of the people sitting in this Chamber tonight.

I thank the Liberal Party for the opportunity and privilege to stand as its candidate for Camden in 2007 and again in 2011. On both occasions the support I received from head office, the parliamentary team and staffers was outstanding. Jaymes Boland-Rudder [JBR] and Chris Hall were invaluable. JBR assures me that when times got tough, I was not the only Liberal candidate offered a cup of cement and, Mr Acting-Speaker, you know the rest. I must single out the Premier for his support and guidance along the way and state what an honour it is to play a very minor role in this O'Farrell-Stoner Government. Thank you again for the opportunity; it is not something that is taken for granted. I thank my colleagues for their indulgence this evening. On a personal level, our family has just experienced a very sad loss with the passing of my brother-in-law John Dooner on 22 May. To Jacqui, my wife's sister, and your three beautiful children Brianna, Olivia and William, I want you to know that Vicki and I, and Amelia, Sophie, Tom and Matthew love you very much.