



Inaugural Speeches

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Mr KEVIN ANDERSON (Tamworth) [1.07 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is with a great deal of pride that I deliver my inaugural speech to the Fifty-fifth Parliament of New South Wales, buoyed by the optimism of being part of the O'Farrell-Stoner Government. I look to the gallery and see familiar faces in family and friends—obviously, they had nothing better to do today—but I thank them for coming. It means a lot to me to have them here to share this important occasion. They have travelled from Tamworth and Gunnedah—Frogmore Park, to be exact; I can see Judy, Will and Tom—as well as Quirindi, with my parents-in-law, Don and Kath Davidson. Thank you for travelling here today.

A number of people could not make it today, and I have received many good luck messages, including the crew from Tamworth—the Wolfgangs, represented today by Grayson—he is the head of the family when his wife says he can be; Grayson, thank you for coming—the Omaras, the Fraters, the Dalitzs, Paul Dooley and the Tremains—basically, our sounding board and the executive. To my father Jim and sister Jenny, who took the bus early from Canberra today, it is great to have you here. Thank you. Unfortunately other members of my family could not be here today, but we are thinking of them, and I know my mother, who passed away a number of years ago, would be very proud indeed. I express my sincere thanks to many of my parliamentary colleagues and their staff, including the Premier and the Deputy Premier, who came to the electorate and supported me. I note their presence in the House today. Thank you.

To head office, headed by Ben Franklin, with Greg, Nathan, Douglas, Laura and Felicity—thank you for your total support, on occasions! Also, to the Hon. Jennifer Gardiner and the Hon. Trevor Khan who have played important roles as duty members of the Legislative Council for Tamworth in the past and kept things going. As well I note the former member for Armidale, Ray Chappell, who is in the public gallery. Thank you for coming, I do appreciate your time.

To the many who helped in 2007 and then backed up in 2011. Throughout my campaign I was constantly amazed by the many volunteers who gave their time so freely and without complaint. I remember stuffing envelopes until late on Christmas Eve and having a travelling companion on the long drive to many of the evening meetings I attended and visiting home after home and town after town with an utterly dedicated team of doorknockers. Everybody talks about doorknocking but, let me tell you, in Tamworth we had it down to a fine art every day, including Sundays. There were still six of us hard at it at 6.30 p.m. on Friday 25 March and we said, "We had better let these people have their dinner." I remember when I doorknocked at a gentleman's house and introduced myself before giving the spiel. I said to him, "Kevin Anderson". He said, "Ah, Kevin Anderson?" I said, "Yes". He said, "I wouldn't vote for you unless hell froze over". I gently reminded him that we had had a very cold winter and would he like to reconsider. Unfortunately I did not catch his answer as he slammed the door in my face but I will catch up with him next time and he is always welcome in my electorate.

It can take a lot of courage to stand up and to show your political colours and allegiance. It sometimes leaves one open to criticism and attack, and in a regional centre it can be a particularly risky thing to do, costing your business and in some cases friendships. I have been humbled by the number of people keen to fly the flag and show their support, either appearing in the media, on ads or putting up a corflute in their front yard. They are the people who are not only my supporters but are passionate about where we live and passionate about getting the best deal possible for our communities, and in the Tamworth electorate there are lots of them. Like Bede and Narelle Burke and their family, part of the many who stood for months and toiled beside me, always by my side. Another by my side was my campaign manager, who is in the public gallery today and who has made the transition to be the electorate manager as well, that is, Angela Lyle from Gunnedah. Thank you, Ange. Ange gave me the drive and incentive to continue to push hard and, to be honest, without her I do not know what we would have done. I can honestly say we would get in there in the mornings and have our meetings and, regardless of the time, Ange would say, "Here's your door knocking box, it'll be fine. I'll get it all sorted. Have a good day." And it was, we would come back at night, sign documents and then go home at about 1.00 a.m. So, thank you, Ange, and it is great to have you with me still.

On the home front I would not be making this speech today if it were not for my wife, Anna. There is no doubt, as many have said, that I have married up. The sun was shining on the day I met Anna, and it is still shining. I don't know how you put up with me, but

you have faith in what I do, where I want to go and everything we take part in, and that is a very powerful thing. We are on a journey and there is still a long way to go, and I am loving it. There are our three beautiful kids sitting in the front row. William who is 12—Wilbur, stand up. This bloke is my right-hand man. I would be lost without him and he is starting to shoulder the responsibility of taking care of everyone when I am away—and he's got a mean outswinger on the boil! William, thank you. Ella who is nine—this girl has the kindest heart of anyone I know. She finds the good in everyone, it doesn't matter who they are. She does take after her mother, thank you! She is just so sweet and I have got a message for the Australian netball team, "You had better look out because Ella Anderson is coming through".

And Sam Anderson—look at that little rascal! He is five and he is all over it. He is the king of walking backwards. You are the king of tying shoelaces, and the king of fake pop-offs! I have got to tell you, he laughs so hard he literally wets himself, and he takes after his dad! I have to pass some things on, and I am quite happy to do that. Don't start laughing. Will, Ella and Sam, thanks for taking the time off school today. I know it was a very tough decision for you and I only had to ask once—yes, normally it is 10 times. When it comes to the family, I need to give special thanks and it must go to Lyn and John Davy. Without them, Anna and I could not do what we do. So Mr Deputy-Speaker, life is never dull in the Anderson household.

I am the product of hardworking parents who raised five children and like most found difficult at times trying to carve a living out of a primary industry and in this case it was professional fishing. As a result we spent a fair bit time on boats—starting in Victoria and ending up in Papua New Guinea. A hell of a journey. Mum loved the mountains, the sea and warm weather so dad had to keep packing us up and heading north. I remember one occasion we were off the east coast on our way further north, and we were in the middle of a filthy storm. The waves were breaking green over the wheelhouse and it was rough. As the old man picked his way through the sets the five of us and mum were all huddled on the wheelhouse floor, clinging to whatever we could with the old man yelling "Hang on!" Mum was playing I-spy to keep us all occupied. I can imagine if she said, "I spy with my little eye, something beginning with B" one of us smarty-pants would have said "Big wave". But we got there and we were always in safe hands. I never ever felt frightened, never ever felt like I was in any sort of trouble whenever I stepped on board a boat and my old man was behind the wheel.

I remember another occasion when we were heading north. We were coming home from a fishing trip and we were off Samarai Island with about two hours' steaming time ahead and we could see a big black cloud coming up from the point of Papua New Guinea. If you looked to your right as you headed east you could see all the way to New Zealand—that is how much space there is. I said to my old man, "Open up the governor, let's get home. Come on, we've been out two weeks, we're a couple of hours away, let's get going." He said, "No, no, let's just park ourselves in behind this island for a couple of hours and let this puppy dog blow over." We were loaded to the hilt, down to the bulwarks. About three or four days later it blew its guts out and we got out from behind that island. I will never, ever question him ever again.

Like any agricultural or fishing business I worked with dad on the boat so I did all my high school education by correspondence and if it was not for my sister Jen and mum, who forced me to catch up on schoolwork when we came in from fishing trips, I would certainly not have passed English. I was not too fussed about the other subjects—I did not like them and they did not like me either! And it was lucky that I was good at English because for some reason I wanted to be a radio announcer. When I stepped off the boats I chased a career in media and communications, starting as a signals operator with the Royal Australian Air Force. I put myself through night school to gain the qualifications needed to be a broadcaster and journalist. After various locations and radio stations I found myself in Tamworth in the early 1990s, and began work at Prime Television and enjoyed 11 good years there. I had some time with the New England Area Health Service and most recently ran a marketing business.

Over that time, I became heavily involved in community groups and service organisations, playing an active role on boards and committees, assisting wherever I could. One project that I was very proud to be a part of was building a Ronald McDonald House in Tamworth. Ronald McDonald House is essentially a home away from home for sick kids and their families. The Tamworth house has five bedrooms all with en suites, a family room, a quiet room, a kids' play room, a television room, kitchen, the whole lot. The most incredible thing about this was that the house was built in two days—think about that—by an army of tradies. The building company that organised everything was Single Builders. When the blitz began there no less than 40 brickies at dawn, and labourers to back them up, and they had the walls of that house up in two hours. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

That epitomised the community spirit that we have in our region and I am delighted that Mark and Loanna Single from Single Builders are in the gallery today. Great effort! Thank you for coming; I really appreciate it. It was a logistical nightmare, but we will do it all again one day. My community involvement gave me an insight into what is possible when good people get involved and get jobs done, like David and Brenda Lodge from the Salvation Army, tireless community workers who run our local Salvo store. Their job is getting tougher as hardship in the community increases. These people—like many others—needed help, so I started to think about the region's concerns and issues and how to take things to the next level.

The road to representation has been a challenging one, and here I acknowledge the efforts of the former member for Tamworth Mr Peter Draper and his contribution to the community. I challenged Peter in 2007, but I came second. Close, but no cigar—but let me

tell you: I could smell the smoke. After the election I had to knuckle back down into my business, but I stayed involved in the community and activities. In 2010 a bold move was driven by The Nationals State Director Ben Franklin, who is with us today. Tamworth was chosen to trial a community pre-selection. This was a first in Australian political history where the community was asked to choose The Nationals candidate to contest the 2011 State election. Voting was non-compulsory, but still 4,293 people from our community turned up to vote at one of the eight polling booths throughout the electorate. There were four Nationals candidates in that community pre-selection and I was humbled to win. It was a totally open and democratic process that ran with the slogan "Your Voice Your Choice". The Tamworth community was given full ownership over the entire selection procedure.

It is interesting to note that Tamworth has been independent heartland since 1991. There was a brief 18-month period in the middle where it was held by Nationals member John Cull, but for the most part it has been independent. I acknowledge my parliamentary colleague Richard Torbay, the member for Northern Tablelands. I understand why. Tamworth is an electorate that will not tolerate being told what to do. It is an electorate that wants to know that its concerns will be more important to its local member of Parliament than anything else and where people want their voice heard and then acted upon. In short, they want their representative to put them first and any party second—and I get that. I make that commitment and will always make their voice heard.

I am delighted to be joined here by my parliamentary colleagues Leslie Williams from Port Macquarie and Troy Grant from Dubbo, who I know will also fight for their electorates—thanks very much. Our communities want this Government to know that those who choose to live in regional New South Wales should not be disadvantaged or forgotten. We can and should receive the same services as those who choose to live in metropolitan centres. We need to get our fair share, and it will be my job to do that and to take advantage of every opportunity that presents itself.

Our communities must come first. Each is unique with special qualities that contribute to our region as a whole, like the Tamworth Country Music Festival, one of the top ten festivals in the world; the Nundle "Go for Gold" festival embracing Chinese culture; Manilla's famous Mount Borah, home of the world paragliding championships; Werris Creek, the first railway town in New South Wales with a beautiful station to boot; Gunnedah, the koala capital of the world; and Barraba, with its frost over Barraba festival—all great areas and events that play an important role in strengthening our region and exposing it to more and more visitors each year.

Each community in the electorate has its own needs and wants, and I do not believe that one size fits all. Decisions affecting our people must be made in consultation with them, not directed from the thirty-fifth floor of an office block in Sydney. If there is battle to be had to ensure our people are looked after then we will have that battle. We will stand side by side and contest. If we are to continue to grow and prosper, we need to embrace new ideas. We need to explore boundaries, we need a vision, we need a communication plan and we need a roadmap, and we need our communities to have ownership. This plan must be developed with meaningful consultation at every level.

There are so many areas critical to the future of regional New South Wales and they must be considered holistically. In the area of health we need to break down the tyranny of distance and look at providing safe sustainable services closer to home. The recruitment and retention of doctors and dentists is critical, as is looking after staff and building facilities that have the capacity for training and population growth. We have an excellent Minister for Health in Jillian Skinner, who I appreciate is in the Chamber today and who completely understands regional hospitals and the importance of delivering services in the best facilities. I am very pleased to say that we have already honoured our election promise of delivering \$100 million to the redevelopment of Tamworth Base Hospital, which with the Federal money and the Minister's good work will commence in due course. On behalf of our communities, thank you Minister.

In education—the key on so many levels—we have fantastic schools manned by some of the best teachers and administrators in the State. However, we need to stay abreast of changing technology and our students need to be offered every opportunity to thrive and the tools to chart their course. Our home-grown workforce is a priority, but we must provide flexible options for looking to further education and training, whether it is through TAFE or a university, and Tamworth needs to have both. Our communities are growing and there is a need to ensure that our police are resourced to manage that growth. They are our front line in providing a safe and secure environment in which to live. In my view, regional policing needs special attention, and the geography quite simply demands it. Our region is at the forefront of the resources boom and we need to embrace it. We are in a unique position in that we have the opportunity to set the agenda and to manage that growth. We have the power to ensure that our environment is protected.

We have direct input into the process. Never before has a community or region been given that opportunity. We should not and will not squander the chance to form a cooperative, balanced approach to agriculture and mining, gas extraction and the resources industry. They must co-exist and they will. As a community, we are measured by the way we treat those in need and the less fortunate. Everyone in our community deserves an opportunity, the chance for an even break—those who are struggling with the rising cost of living; those who can only just make ends meet. My door will be open and they will not be turned away.

Transport is a major component of our infrastructure and is fundamental to any regional area's economic growth and sustainability. I will push for rail lines to be reopened and for more efficient and cost-effective means of carting goods and cattle to be implemented.

Air travel is another issue. Gunnedah is on the verge of expansion and needs to be on the radar. I look forward to leading the discussion in relation to the Sydney-Tamworth air route and the options available to us and expanding. We are ready to absorb some sections of government departments. Decentralisation will be a key. That dovetails nicely with our jobs action plan, which was detailed during the election campaign.

We are blessed with a great region. To represent this great region and its people is indeed an honour that I will never lose sight of. I thank them for putting their trust and faith in me. I will serve with honesty, integrity and passion. I will never forget that it was the people of the Tamworth electorate who put their trust in me by electing me to be their voice. They decided to give this bloke a go. I accept the responsibility and will do my best to do them proud. I thank the House for the opportunity to deliver my inaugural speech.