



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Thursday 12 May 2011.

Mr MARK COURE (Oatley) [11.29 a.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is my great honour to be here today in Australia's oldest Parliament to make my maiden speech to the House. Let me first congratulate you, Madam Speaker, on your election to this most important position in the Chamber. I am sure the House will benefit greatly from your guidance and leadership. I stand here as the representative for the people of Oatley, a dynamic, vibrant and multicultural community in which I had the privilege to be born and raised, and which, to my mind, represents the heart of modern Sydney. Encompassing the suburbs of Hurstville, South Hurstville, Hurstville Grove, Lugarno, Beverly Hills, Mortdale, Narwee, Oatley, Peakhurst, Peakhurst Heights and Penshurst my electorate is home to the people of Australian, Chinese, Greek, Macedonian and Middle Eastern descent and of all faiths, educational backgrounds and occupations.

Oatley predominantly is a suburban community with commercial hubs of dynamic small businesses and the buzz of Hurstville Chinatown. Bounded by the Georges River to the south, it also is a community conscious of preserving and improving the local environment. The name of the electorate comes from James Oatley Junior, son of a convict sentenced to transportation for life arriving in Australia in 1815. Despite his criminal beginnings, James went on to become a landholder, a farmer and a businessman. He fathered a son, also named James Oatley Junior, who entered this place as a parliamentarian in 1868 after a career as a farmer and an innkeeper. Another adopted son, Frederick Stokes Oatley, was a watchmaker and ultimately inspector of the local abattoirs.

The story of this family is like so many other stories of early Australian settlers; a story of triumph against the odds in a strange and unforgiving land. The hard work of early Australians like the Oatleys laid the foundation of our great State of New South Wales, the State that was at the forefront of colonies and later the Federation. We all can take inspiration from the achievements of the pioneers and battlers of nineteenth century New South Wales. I am truly blessed to be able to stand here in this place and represent the community that bears the name Oatley. I have had the great privilege to call the community I now represent my home for all my life.

Born and raised in the St George area, home of the mighty St George Illawarra Dragons, I attended St Joseph's Primary School at Oatley, Penshurst Marist College and Kogarah Marist College before going on to study at university. My achievements until this point can be pointed squarely at the sound, quality education I received. I think all of us in this place recognise the important role that education and our teachers play in providing the skills set that young people in our communities need to live a full, prosperous and independent life. The importance of education is perhaps best captured by the thirty-fifth President of the United States of America, John F. Kennedy, when he said:

All of us do not have equal talent, but all of us should have an equal opportunity to develop our talents.

As a small business owner and councillor for Kogarah City Council representing west ward since 2004 I have seen up close the challenges our community faces. On Kogarah council I successfully campaigned to upgrade Oatley memorial, lower the speed limit on Hillcrest Avenue, increase funding for local parks and reserves, clean up the Georges River and, of course, fight against inappropriate overdevelopment. I also worked closely with local schools, businesses and residents to

provide better outcomes for the local community. It has been a pleasure to represent those members of the St George community on council for the past seven years.

Politics has an old saying: All politics is local. My time as a councillor has put me in good stead to champion the needs of my electorate. A need for better public transport and less congested roads, upgrading our local train stations, additional funding for St George Hospital, more funding for local schools and, of course, turning the Dharawal State conservation area into a national park to protect it from mining are all issues that were neglected by the Labor Party over the past 16 years. I will fight against inappropriate overdevelopment, thanks to changes to planning laws by Frank Sartor. By no means is this task easy, but to work for and deliver for my community is what drives me and will continue to drive me in this place.

The Constitution Act 1902 provides the best advice and foundation stone for all of us in this place "to make laws for the peace, welfare, and good Government of New South Wales". I intend to serve by that principle, which, by any measure, is a most noble aim. Perhaps those who now reside on the Opposition benches should have paid more attention to this particular tenet. Since growing up in the St George region I have had a passion and desire to serve and make a difference in my community, to put back what I have been fortunate enough to enjoy, and to help those less fortunate and disadvantaged in my community. I joined the Liberal Party, or the young Liberal movement, at 15 years of age going on 16, as the party that best represents the values that I hold dear and a belief in the basic rights and freedoms of all people, including the freedom of thought, worship, speech and association, along with equal opportunity and a government that minimises interference in our daily lives and maximises individual and private sector initiative and potential.

In the words of John Stuart Mill, one of the fathers of liberalism, a party of order or stability and a party of progress or reform are both necessary elements of a healthy state of political life. To my mind, there is no better description of the Liberal Party and the role it has played in Australian political life since its formation in 1944. We are not a party of the privileged. Our founder Sir Robert Menzies created a party that has been fittingly described by former Prime Minister John Howard as a broad church. It is a party that governs for big and small, regardless of race, religion, sexuality or skin colour. Menzies, in his well-known series of speeches *The Forgotten People* in 1942, said:

The case for the middle class is the case for a dynamic democracy as against a stagnant one.

Whilst notions of class may have changed since 1942, the sentiment remains the same: the Liberal Party stands for all Australians and all people here in New South Wales. Perhaps there is no better representation of the broad and inclusive nature of the modern Liberal Party than my colleagues on this side of the Chamber and, of course, that side as well, as part of the Fifty-fifth Parliament. The O'Farrell Liberal team is a mix of people from all walks of life and backgrounds who offer the best opportunity to take New South Wales forward, and to restore its position as the number one economy in Australia, as a hub of investment and tourism and an attractive place to raise a family. The election on 26 March 2011 saw a significant number of people in New South Wales vote Liberal for the first time; my electorate is no exception, with a swing of 14.9 per cent and a few days of nervous waiting on my part after doorknocking 11,000 households, attending train stations and shopping centres for six or seven months.

My area has not had a Liberal representative since 1999, although at that time the seat was known as the State seat of Georges River. Names and boundaries may come and go as seemingly artificial barriers, but the principles for which I stand are consistent and my commitment is genuine. I put to the people of my community that their faith in me has not been misplaced. I am sure some of my peers in the ministry have seen already the fruits of my energy, enthusiasm and advocacy after a number of ministerial representations and letters to them, along with meeting and ministerial visit requests for my community. I want my colleagues to see firsthand the challenges the St George community faces, to hear from locals the issues that concern them and how they think an O'Farrell Government can help improve their daily lives by reducing cost of living pressures, reducing hospital waiting lists and reducing time spent waiting for a train or on the M5.

Already I have written to the Premier about holding a Community Cabinet in my community and hosting the Georges River Community Awards presentation later this year. Within my electorate, as with many others throughout this State, there are individuals and families who are finding it hard to make ends meet. That is why in partnership with St Vincent de Paul, Narwee Salvation Army and Mission Australia we have launched a winter appeal so members of our community can play a part in assisting those most in need by the donation of clothes and blankets. This goes a small way on my commitment to social justice and helping those less fortunate.

I would like to conclude by placing on record my sincere thanks to a number of people. The first is the previous local member, Kevin Greene, and his wife Frances because ultimately, as Adla and I realise, politics is a partnership, and both Kevin and Frances have given great service to my community over the years. I wish them all the very best. This election saw the election of many Young Liberals and friends, a new generation, people like Gareth Ward in Kiama, Mel Gibbons in Menai and Matt Kean in Hornsby. I would like to thank former Young Liberal Presidents Andrew Constance, the Minister for Disability Services and Ageing; Gladys Berejiklian, Minister for Transport; Don Harwin, President of the New South Wales upper House; Catherine Cusack of the Legislative Council; Councillor Shane Mallard; and Senator Marise Payne, all of whom have supported, encouraged and assisted greatly on my journey to this Chamber as the member for Oatley.

As a community-focused member of Parliament, I want to thank a number of community groups that I have had the pleasure of being involved with over the years. They include the Oatley RSL and Community Club as a former director; St George Lions Club; St George and Sutherland Shire Business Enterprise Centre; Mortdale Community Services; and the school councils of Oatley and Mortdale public schools where I served as a community representative and saw firsthand the great work done in our public schools. I was a former chair of St George Relay for Life and a strong supporter of the local Neighbourhood Watch and the creation of the first men's shed in the St George community. All of those organisations do a great service to my community and there are many more organisations and charities like them. *[Extension of time agreed to.]*

I would like to thank John Ajaka, MLC, Parliamentary Secretary for Transport and Roads, and Natasha Maclaren-Jones, MLC, President of the New South Wales Liberal Party. I thank as well my campaign team, people like Betty Taylor, Terry O'Brien, Brad Row, Bruce Morrow, Dan Simpson, Jackson Haynes, Tim Feng, Dong Dong Yang, Helen Reid, Penny George, Matt Cross, Louise and Justin De Domenico, James Boland-Rudder, Chantel Taylor, Alice Barnett, Brendan Lyon, Adam Mazzaferro, Abdallah Elmir and Ned Mannoun for their help. I thank Hussein Awada, Gus Balloot and Rami

Abdullah, along with Robert Boulos, Peter and George El Khouri, Peter Ristevski, Steve Tiricovski and Warren Hudson, along with Robert Tregenza and Doug and Deborah Williams.

I would like to thank Jack Jacovou and my fellow local councillors like Andrew Istephan and Sam Elmir. I would also like to thank members of the State Executive of the Liberal Party Michael Photios, Trent Zimmerman, David Begg, Kelly Knowles and Nick Campbell, as well as my staff Patrick Seveque and Christian Dunk. I would like to thank Bishop Kevin Manning, former Bishop of the Diocese of Parramatta, Reverend Father Peter Williams, Vicar-General of the Diocese of Parramatta, who is here today, along with Reverend Father Dave Hume, and former parish priest at St Joseph's at Oatley, Father McCarthy, for their guidance and support over the years.

I would also like to thank the shadow Ministers, now Ministers in the O'Farrell Government, who supported me throughout a tough campaign, including Mike Baird, Chris Hartcher, Mike Gallacher, Pru Goward, Brad Hazzard, Don Page and Robyn Parker and also Scott Morrison, Federal member for Cook, along with Craig Kelly, the Federal member for Hughes, for their support during the campaign. I would like to pay particular tribute to Joe Hockey, shadow Treasurer in the Federal Parliament, who provided me with the opportunity to work and learn in his office for five years. It served as a great experience for me to cut my teeth and develop my political skills and passion to work with someone who is just as passionate for his electorate of North Sydney.

Of course, great thanks must go to the man who has ably guided all of us in this place to the historic result on 26 March, the Premier, Barry O'Farrell. Barry was an effective Opposition leader and is now even more effective as Premier. His leadership has breathed new life into New South Wales, and all of us here and in the community will continue to benefit from his sound policies and approach to making this State number one again. I owe him personal thanks for the five trips he made to my electorate during the campaign, and I do not doubt the difference his presence and energy made to the campaign. I thank Con Hindi, Deputy Mayor of Hurstville, and Miray Hindi for their ongoing support and loyalty. I remain indebted to you both. Miray was an outstanding candidate for the State seat of Kogarah and would have been an even better member and representative of that neighbouring community.

I would like to thank my father, Alfred Coure, for his ongoing love and support on the campaign, along with his wife Mary Anne. I would like to thank my brother Paul, who has been able to set up polling booths at every election that I have contested at 1 o'clock or maybe 2 o'clock in the morning, and of course his wife Rebecca, for their ongoing friendship and support. To my brother John and his girlfriend Benita, who live in Dubai and were able to vote using iVote, thank you. Those two votes were greatly appreciated, winning as I did by only 400 votes. To my uncles and aunties who assisted greatly on the campaign, along with my friends, it was all greatly appreciated. To my in-laws Sam and Jamal Abraham, my sister-in-law Patricia and my niece Emily, thank you for your support during the election and beyond.

I also want to thank those who are not here today, like my grandparents, who are no doubt looking down from heaven. I want to thank them for their love and guidance, along with my late mother, Mary Coure, who has always inspired me to be the best. My mother was the most generous and kind person. She gave me the greatest encouragement to follow my dreams. It was an honour to be sworn in using her Bible. Finally, and most importantly, I would like to thank my wife, Adla, a Five Dock high school teacher whom I have known for over 15 years; we have been together ever since.

We met through the Young Liberal Movement and she has been my strongest supporter and confidante, and to her I say thank you.