

The Hon. ERNEST WONG (Inaugural Speech): I support the Aboriginal Land Rights Amendment Bill 2013. I thank the House for this welcome. I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are gathered, the Gadigal people. I offer my respects to them and elders past and present. Today is a deeply humbling experience for me as I make my first contribution within Australia's oldest Parliament. I feel honoured to join my fellow members and feel that I should offer them some introduction to me and what I stand for as a community representative, as a legislator, and as a person. Perhaps I might begin with the latter and provide some personal background: After all, as lawmakers, we are each shaped by our lives before Parliament.

For me, that life began in Hong Kong where I was lucky enough to be born to a middle-class family with devoted parents and two sisters. Slightly different to the Hong Kong of today, this was the Hong Kong of British dominion and as such offered a unique upbringing. My life was from an early age shaped by multiple cultural influences. I was educated in an English school, providing not only my English language but an insight into western culture and education. Yet in my home, this was balanced by the traditional upbringing by my parents and their desire to impart traditional Chinese values to me. These were values such as the closeness of family ties, respect for elder generations, and concern for one's local community.

Another layer of cultural influence was added by my parent's choice of a Jesuit senior school in which the additional values of Catholic social justice, ethical thinking and deep respect for education featured prominently. From these combined influences I emerged as a young adult with two core lessons held close: that life is most rewarding when one gives more than one takes, and that tolerance for diverse cultures and ideas is the door to a richer life. It was perhaps natural then that I would seek to extend my education in another country. With the Australian university timetable the earliest in the year to start, I was bound for Sydney. Arriving in Australia was a revelation of opportunity. People may find this interesting because Hong Kong was, and is, also regarded as a place of great opportunity. Indeed, its historical development is nothing short of miraculous. This is all true. But the opportunities that Hong Kong offered had a different focus: a more economic and material focus. In Australia, money was less important—although probably not everyone would agree with me.

But, more importantly, what Australia proves time and time again is that there are some riches in life that simply cannot be bought. The opportunities that Australia offered were opportunities of freedom—freedom of space, freedom of movement, freedom of career, freedom of ideas. That is not to say that these were suppressed in Hong Kong, but rather that the Australian way of life and the diversity of the Australian population gave these freedoms a strength and prominence in daily life that had to be experienced to be understood. And once you have experienced it, you are changed. It is a story common to all immigrants to this country—the moment of realisation that not only is there nowhere like Australia but, more importantly, there is nothing like what Australia offers. It did not take me long to realise that while I would always love my country of birth, I had now found the country of my life.

It was a conscious decision to choose Australia and to choose New South Wales as well as to say, as an adult, "This is where I want to be, to live my life, to raise my family." It is the best decision of my life and one that I always reflect on with gratitude. Living in Australia also gave me the freedom and space to undertake self-assessment to

consider what I wanted to do, free of the expectations of what I should do had I stayed in Hong Kong. From this, two passions would emerge, and they would set my career path in Australia. The first was my passion for social justice and equity. I found that I had no time for unfair dealing and exploitation of those who were vulnerable. While many shrug at minor injustices and say, "The world is a hard place", I find that I cannot. I must intervene. The world may be a hard place, but that does not mean we should be indifferent. I soon found myself volunteering to work with community organisations, in particular assisting migrants with limited English to both improve their language and understand their legal rights. I found from these experiences that supporting communities and standing up for people who need help is a deeply enriching experience.

Perhaps then it was fortuitous that I had chosen the land of the "fair go" as my home. I still believe that our commitment to fairness and equity remains one of the greatest strengths of New South Wales to this day. As a legislator, it is a quality that is worth protecting, always. The second passion was my love for multiculturalism and what it offers any great society. I say this without a hint of irony, but it took immigrating to Australia to make me feel Chinese. Yes, I was raised in a Chinese family with Chinese culture, but when this culture is all you know, then it is all you know, and often that which is all around us is the hardest to really appreciate. Members who have studied another language will no doubt recall how, for example, learning different grammar suddenly allowed them to see their own language with fresh appreciation for how it works. Similarly, when I came to Australia I had the opportunity to gain a much richer sense of my Chinese heritage, the language and the philosophy. It was a chance to see my home culture, not just from an Australian perspective but from multiple perspectives.

Having access to people from so many different cultures, beliefs and educations served to give me a new appreciation of my own background. It also gave me an instant appreciation for how a diversity of backgrounds creates a diversity of intellectual capital, and how powerful this is for our State. I do not see diversity as something to be accommodated but to be actively pursued. It is one of the driving forces that have made Australia one of the greatest places to live anywhere in the world. Many nations have been enriched by diversity, but it defines the Australian contemporary society and has underpinned our economic transformation in the post-war period. It has been an underlying strength of our industry, innovation and creativity, and our mix of cultures and thinking provides a diversity of knowledge and skill that most countries envy.

As we enter the so-called Asian century, this richness of background is helping New South Wales businesses, both big and small, compete on a global stage every day. Diversity is Australia's great success story, a benchmark that the world looks to. Of course, many cultures have played a role in that success story, but I would be remiss in not noting that Chinese Australians have made one of the longest contributions. The Chinese community was instrumental in building rural New South Wales, with more than 30,000 Chinese coming to help build our regional centres in the nineteenth century. The Chinese community was instrumental in building our early trade and export, with Chinatown sitting next to Darling Harbour, Australia's primary port for 150 years. The Chinese community was instrumental in the defence of Australia, serving in every external conflict since Federation. More recently, the Chinese community has been instrumental in the rapid development of bilateral investment

between New South Wales and China. Chinese Australians have played a rich role in our economic and national development. It is a legacy that I hope to make a small contribution to as a member of this House.

With these principles of diversity and social justice now underpinning my life, it was unsurprising that my interest in community work would expand until it became an interest in community representation. From my community work I had come to see numerous examples of how simple and practical policy decisions can make major differences to the quality of life and opportunity of thousands. I began to pursue an interest in life as a community representative, which led to my election to Burwood Council in 2000, where I would also have the honour of being mayor. As all members know, pursuing a life of public office involves identifying with the political movement that most supports our own aspirations and values. In short, you need to choose a team to play within. No team is perfect. No team ever mirrors our own individual beliefs perfectly. That is not the nature of a democratic process. But all political parties are underpinned by a selection of core values and, given the background I have described, it is no surprise that my choice was always Labor.

Building on legacies of former Labor governments, both Federal and State, Australian Labor's approach to policy and economic management has shattered a long-held myth of economic growth. That myth is that societies need to make a choice between prosperity and fairness. The story of Australia during my time here has broken that myth utterly. We have shown that societies need not choose between fairness and prosperity. They can have both. The reforms of the Hawke-Keating era remodelled Australian economic competitiveness, yet did so in a way that brought every Australian with them. Mocked at the time for being honest with Australians about the necessary pain of reform, history has shown the economic and social reforms of the Hawke-Keating era to be pivotal in lifting the living standards of Australians. Once again, it was never a choice between what was prosperous or fair. The choice was always to serve both. They floated the dollar and created Medicare; they reformed our financial system and our industrial accords.

In New South Wales, the record of Labor during my time here has been equally inspiring. I am proud to represent Labor in New South Wales because Labor's record in New South Wales is a great one. Our record of renewal, reform and practical improvement to the lives of families in this State is impressive. We need only look to the achievements in New South Wales during the life of the last Government. In infrastructure, Labor completed the Anzac Bridge and built the Sydney Orbital Network, the Epping to Chatswood rail line, the Cronulla rail line duplication, the Richmond rail line duplication, the Inner West Light Rail and the Metrobus network.

Labor began testing every child's hearing at birth, ending generations of children who struggled until the early years of primary school before anyone noticed that they had a hearing problem. Labor built an education system that achieved the best literacy and numeracy results in the nation, and amongst the best in the world. Labor cleaned up our beaches and harbour and protected our great national parks. Labor created the best equipped and most respected police force this State has known, and property crime in New South Wales halved during the life of the previous Government.

Labor in New South Wales took a leadership approach to making disability care a public endeavour, not a private problem, through the investments of Stronger Together and Stronger Together 2. I note the Premier's bipartisan approach to this matter and commend him for signing New South Wales to the Federal Labor Government's landmark National Disability Insurance Scheme. Labor secured a landmark new funding arrangement for the New South Wales health system and ensured that the position that New South Wales took to Canberra was the position that prevailed nationally. The New South Wales Labor Government did all of this while protecting the State's credit rating, even during the worst financial crisis since the Depression, and indeed New South Wales led Australia out of the global financial crisis.

I chose to pursue a career in public office because I believe in community responsibility and recognition; because I believe that our diversity is our strength, both socially and economically; because I believe that our economic success is measured by how the least affluent are brought along; because I believe that politics is a positive response to inequity, with our democratic systems created to act on behalf of people and to allocate resources fairly amid stakeholders and communities. Given that these were the things that I believed, the Labor Party was my natural and only choice.

I wish to thank the Labor Party for bestowing upon me the great responsibility of being a representative of both my community and the Labor movement. It is a responsibility and a legacy that I take most seriously. I particularly thank Senator Sam Dastyari, former General Secretary of New South Wales Labor, for his support and mentoring. I also want to thank Jamie Clements, John Graham and Kaila Murnain, all of whom I have worked very closely with during my time in the party office, and my Burwood Council colleagues who have inspired me in many ways in politics.

A special and personal thank you goes to Mr Hatton Kwok, who is a lifetime member of the Labor Party and who guided me to the Labor Party, a direction for which I will always be grateful. I want to thank the many community groups, some of which are here today, for supporting me and providing me a chance to work with them in serving the community. While time does not allow me to mention every member of my electoral team, they have been my greatest help in every election. I wish to thank Sydney's Chinese language media, many of whom are colleagues of mine from my own writing and presenting roles, who have worked with me on countless occasions to highlight issues of significance to the New South Wales Chinese community. I trust that our positive working relationship will continue.

I must thank my parents, who provided me with the best education and the values of generosity, tolerance and consideration. These became my principles for dealing with people. I also thank my sisters, who have supported me throughout my career in politics, particularly my elder sister, Virginia, who from my childhood taught me English and Mandarin and inspired me to be an outspoken person working for what I believe. I also note my niece who, while pursuing her study in Australia, inspired me about the essence of good parenting, which of course leads me to my family. To my wife Rita and my children, Francesca and Charlton, with whom I have not spent adequate time: I know that sharing your husband and father with the time demands of a public office is not always easy, but I also know that we all share the values of this work, and you have been the bedrock of my career.

Ultimately, my thanks and respect must go to the generations of Australians who have made this day in this place possible; the generations who steadfastly shaped a colony into a State and who peacefully secured a democracy from autocracy; those who migrated with great courage and those who had the courage to welcome them. It is an amazing story of prosperity, law, justice and fairness, one in which a young nation still has much to show the older world and one that I am deeply proud to be able to play a small role in. Australia has provided me with so many opportunities, but none more humbling than to serve in our nation's oldest Parliament as a member of the Australian Labor Party. Before I close my speech, I am going to challenge Hansard by saying the following:

謝謝大家的支持,我承諾以我最大的努力維護澳大利亞民族的和諧,爭取澳大利亞及新南威爾斯州人民最大及最公平的利益

That means—besides "I love you all"—Thank you for your support, I pledge to serve the community in my best endeavour for the harmony of Australia and the best and fairest interest of the people of New South Wales and people of Australia, I thank the House for its consideration.