

## INAUGURAL SPEECH OF THE HONOURABLE LOU AMATO

**The Hon. LOU AMATO** [5.04 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): In 1956 after having to flee persecution in Egypt, my parents, Ben and Anita Amato, arrived in Australia as penniless refugees. My oldest brother, Albert, was only a few months old and made the long journey by boat with my parents to their new and beloved home, Australia. For four generations, Italian expatriates had worked in Egypt building infrastructure such as the Suez Canal and had maintained a tight-knit community where the old country's traditions were maintained in peace. My father worked as a marine engineer for the British Navy whilst my mother worked as a nurse in the French expatriate hospital. Prosperity and peace became the norm for the Italian expatriates.

My parents enjoyed the privileges of a society that even by today's standards would have been considered wealthy. However, a change in the Egyptian regime changed my parent's fortunes to one of homeless poverty. All of their assets were seized. They were in great personal danger and feared for the safety of their young son, Albert. My parents were fortunate to be able to pack their entire belongings into a suitcase and make the long journey by sea to Australia. Why Australia? My father chose Australia because he had heard of the great opportunities that existed in the great southern land. He had heard of Robert Menzies and the great prosperity that was available to all those who worked hard. And work hard he did. He settled in Ultimo, one of Sydney's poorest areas at that time.

The 1950s were a difficult time for newly arrived migrants. Australian society had not yet embraced the benefits of diversity, which found many families marginalised with a limited support network. This, coupled with the difficulties in obtaining sufficient income from low-paid factory work, made the transition into mainstream Australia difficult. However, my father—as always—found the positive in these initial barriers. He knew that if he was willing to work hard the great Australian dream of home ownership in the suburbs could be his. He, like many other migrant families, worked up to 16 hours a day, seven days a week to realise this great dream.

In 1959 my brother, Albert, at the age of three was diagnosed with cancer of the right eye. The cancer had, by the time of detection, infiltrated into the optic nerve. The only form of treatment available was complete removal of the eye. My brother fought this terrible disease and even though his odds of survival were low, progressed into remission where he remains to this day. It is wonderful to see him in the gallery, along with my beautiful sister, Gina. I love you both very much. Unfortunately, the pain of this was too great for my mother. Under the strain, she had a mental breakdown. My mother's breakdown caused severe deterioration of her health and she required ongoing treatment for the rest of her life. Despite all the hardship, heartache and disappointment, my father soldiered on. He ensured that his family was cared for and the dream of home ownership remained alive.

In 1963, the year of my birth, my parents, Albert and I moved into our own humble fibro home in the quiet suburb of Padstow. One year later, in 1964, my sister, Gina, was born and the family was now complete. For the next 10 years my father continued to work seven days a week. He saved hard for the fulfilment of his next dream: running his own business. In 1974 my father purchased a service station, complete with its own mechanical workshop, at Greenacre. My father, through hard work and determination, had transitioned from an employee to an employer and he continued to grow his business. I proudly worked side-by-side with my father completing my automotive mechanical apprenticeship and studies. Part

of the plan was that I would eventually take over the business but sadly, due to an economic downturn, the business had to be sold.

My father's struggle to make sure that his family was always well looked after and my mother's struggle to continue on every day in spite of her debilitating illness had a profound effect on me. The lesson that I learned is that life itself is a struggle and hard work and determination are required if we are to make a difference. Even though my father's business was ultimately sold, I too, just like my father, maintained the dream that with hard work and determination I could one day run my own business.

For more than 20 years I have been a small business operator. Small business is the lifeblood of many families in our great State. It offers the opportunity of employment to others and further education through apprenticeships and training. A small business owner is at the grassroots of our community. Small business ownership is not easy. When employees are involved there is an increased responsibility to ensure continuity of operations. Employees, many of whom have children, rely on the ongoing success of the business no less than the owner for their livelihood and wellbeing. In a very real and direct sense the decisions that a small business owner makes must take into account the impact on the lives of those who help run and support the business with their expertise and commitment. I am grateful that I have been very fortunate to have received the valuable training and life lessons as a small business owner.

In my time in this place one important focus for me will be to ensure that small businesses receive the representation that they thoroughly deserve. When my endorsement as a candidate for the New South Wales Legislative Council was announced there were some who felt that I was not a suitable nominee for the job. The fact that I do not possess certain academic qualifications was held against me. The fact that I move in different social circles was also held against me. Tonight I want you all to know this. Yes, I am just an ordinary bloke from the suburbs who has earned his stripes in the school of hard knocks. Yes, I am a successful small business owner who works with real people each and every day to make a better future for my family and my community. And, you know what, I am fiercely proud of that.

However, it is true that no-one in advance can be sure whether they are worthy of such an honourable position in this place. It will only be after the completion of my term that my actions and my contribution to this place can be truly judged. I hope that the great lessons learned from the university of life and through my parents' example will sustain me during this time—lessons like, "You don't give in when times get tough; you just toughen up and keep on going."

I have been fortunate to have been born in this great State and have never had to witness the trials that my parents endured. However, the lessons they taught me will be a guide for me in my duties to ensure that as a member of this House of review I will represent the people of New South Wales with honesty and integrity. Indeed, this is my solemn duty. It is my holy oath, given on my first day in this place and it is exactly what I will do in my time in this historic Chamber. In discharging these duties in this place, I will draw upon my experience as the deputy mayor of Wollondilly Shire Council. There I learnt that it is vitally important to listen to people's concerns and to take the time to assess all the evidence in making decisions that affect people's lives. This will be the approach I take in considering issues before this Chamber.

It is with a joyful heart that I thank God for granting me the privilege of serving as a member of the Legislative Council. I also ask God to continue to offer me guidance and wisdom so that I may discharge my duties with honesty and integrity. I also wish to thank the many people who have given their time and friendship in my journey to this place. Firstly, I thank the Liberal Party of New South Wales. This wonderful State, our home, has gone from being at the bottom end of the Australian economy to emerge as the star achiever of the Australian States. This economic turnaround is not a miracle. It is the product of policies centred on employment, infrastructure and growth. It has been the product of a Government working in unison under the great leadership and foresight of our Premier, the Hon. Mike Baird.

I am excited and indeed privileged to be a member of the Fifty-sixth Parliament of New South Wales where great change is in motion and the future of New South Wales is one of optimism. As a provincial representative of the Liberal Party, I am proud to represent south-west Sydney. This includes State seats such as Camden, East Hills and Wollondilly held by Chris Patterson, Glenn Brookes and Jai Rowell respectively, as well as the Federal seat of Macarthur held by Russell Matheson and the seat of Hume held by Angus Taylor.

To the south-west Sydney branches of the Liberal Party I offer my heartfelt thanks. All the voluntary work that you do for the party is much appreciated. In an election campaign there are so many unglamorous but vitally important tasks that must be undertaken, such as doorknocking, letterbox dropping plus the hard work done on polling day. Without the dedication and determination of the great people of our branches we could not have achieved such a great result at the last election. Thank you for all your hard work and devotion.

I especially thank my dear friend Jai Rowell, MP, member for Wollondilly, and his beautiful wife, Belinda, who have been the inspiration behind my dream of representing the people of New South Wales in this place. I hope that I can deliver for the people of New South Wales in this Chamber in the same way that Jai delivers for the good people of Wollondilly. Thank you, Jai, for being at my side again tonight despite having pneumonia. I also thank my good friend Jeff Gray. Jeff, like me, is a man who always tells it how it is. I appreciate your honesty and openness and know that you, Janet and Maddie are always there with a helping hand. Thanks to Stan and Theresa Cichocki—you are both as true as the day is long and your support and friendship are greatly appreciated.

Thank you to my dear friend Brooke Hilton. Brooke's kindness and beautiful heart has always been a great source of strength in my journey to this place. Thank you also to my good friends the Deputy Mayor of Campbelltown, Councillor Ted Rowell, and his wife, Eve Rowell. Thanks for always being there. I thank the New South Wales Liberal Party State Director, Tony Nutt, for believing in me when there were some who felt that a motor mechanic from Picton should not have aspirations as great as being elected to the New South Wales Legislative Council. Thank you Tony; I will not let you down. Special thanks to my oldest friend, Darron Fenton, who has been like a brother to me since I was four years old. Few friendships last a whole lifetime and ours has been one of the great blessings of my life. Thanks mate.

To my Mum and Dad, who are no longer with us, I just want to say thanks for loving me. Of all the support and encouragement that I have received in my life, yours was the greatest. I know that you are still sending your love and encouragement to me even now. To make you proud of me has always been my greatest goal. Dad, I hope that I can be as good a person and

maintain the same level of determination that you did throughout your life. Mum, I pray that I learn to love with the same purity and simplicity that you were able to do all of your life. To my family, especially my beautiful children, Ben, James, Jessica, Brooke and Christian, from the bottom of my heart, I love you all. Thank you for all of your support and understanding. Your patience and love do not go unnoticed. Thank you for all that you do for me. Without your support, I would not be here today.

To the following people I extend my thanks for the great work that you have done for the Liberal Party and, most importantly, for your friendship: Chris Patterson, MP, member for Camden, Eleni Petinos, MP, member for Miranda, Councillor Hilton Gibbs and his wife, Pat Gibbs, Councillor George Greiss and his wife, Michelle, the former general manager of Wollondilly Shire Council, Les McMahon, Lara Symkowviak, former Senator and former member for Macarthur Michael Baume and his lovely wife, Toni, Jo Down, Alana Matheson, Jean Newton, Michael Shaw, Scott Percival, Kathryn Steinweiss, Brett McGrath, Councillor Michael Banasik, David Gavin, Councillor Paul Hawker and Sigrid Hawker, Tim and Kelli Bennet-Smith, Allan and Vennie Dadd, Tony Higgs, Tracy Watkins, John Desisto, Arthur and Angela Moulas, Mark, Bruno and Maria Lopriato, John Chedid, Michael and Judy Lynch, David Tricca, David and Wendy Squirrell, Essam and Eman Eskaros, Ebony Rowell, Lutfi Hady, Sharon and Tim Bishop, Sam Cavanagh, Lorrie and Richard Harrison, Allan Amato, Tony Catton, Gary and Jo and Beavan and their sons Nicholas and Lachlan, Tony O'Toole, Sharryn and John Hilton, Eric and June Heise, Gary Brennan, John Chew and many others who also gave of their time. Finally, I leave the biggest thank you for last—the wonderful people of New South Wales. Thank you for putting your trust in me. I will not let you down.