



Inaugural Speeches

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Extract from NSW Legislative Assembly Hansard and Papers Tuesday 29 May 2007.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [7.30 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): Less than 100 feet from this very Chamber is a bronze statue erected in honour of Governor Lachlan Macquarie. Macquarie, acclaimed by history as New South Wales' most influential leader, is remembered for many things, like the partnership with Francis Greenway that set a standard for design, for funding a hospital from rum licences, for building roads and infrastructure and for making the first land grants in an area that later became known as Manly. He was an example of what a visionary leader can achieve for this State. In 1810 Macquarie issued two land grants, totalling 130 acres, extending from the southern side of The Corso up to St Patrick's estate. Later, in the first transaction ever for the Northern Beaches property market, these grants were sold to Henry Gilbert Smith, who is now known as the Father of Manly.

The wealthy Smith was elected to the New South Wales Parliament in its first year of responsible government, in 1856, and I pay tribute to him and all the following members for Manly who have worked so hard for our community. Maybe it was because of Smith and his wealth that a young friend of my 10-year-old daughter Laura said to her after my election "Your Dad is so lucky—he has now become the richest man in Manly." If only he knew the truth. Seriously though, in many respects that young boy is right, and I take my place as the member for Manly thankful for the opportunity, in awe of the responsibility and determined to live up to the trust placed in me by my local community. To them I give my thanks, and to them will I give my all.

Manly is rich in history, from its beginnings with the Guringai tribe, its formal naming by Captain Phillip five days before the birth of our entire nation, the provision of many to our armed services over many wars, overseeing the birth of surfing in this country and year after year providing more Olympic heroes than any other electorate in New South Wales. It is rich in environmental wonder, with North Head a treasure that extends well beyond the bounds of our community. It is a global delight, providing a rich historical backdrop to a nature wonderland of penguins, bandicoots, sea horses, shovel nose sharks and all that should be enjoyed with wonder in our creation. The community remains steadfast in opposition to further development of this place, and I intend to stand with them in defence of it so that future generations may enjoy these assets.

The community has many great sporting clubs reflecting its sporting tradition, with weekends full of volunteers at our six surf lifesaving clubs, thousands listening to the shrill whistle of netball at John Fisher Park or the thud of leather at Manly and Brookvale ovals. It is what we enjoy. It is what brings us together. If we reflect solely on this tradition then it would be easy to think that we have no problems and that State Government has served us well. I need to report that this is not the case. We remain a community desperate for a new hospital. We want a significant expansion and improvement in public transport and the clean-up of Manly and Curl Curl lagoons, which remain so poisoned even dredged sand from them is considered toxic. We need the completion of longstanding capital works at many of our schools and, dare I say it, a solution for the Spit Bridge to Warringah expressway corridor rather than the farce we have had to endure in the past few years. These will be my priorities in my term in office, for we can do much better.

Many have said that my election marked Manly returning home to the Liberal Party. I do not hold that view. History has shown that Manly is not a traditional seat owned by any party or political grouping. Over the past 30 years the Liberal Party has held the seat for only seven years. The seat in fact has the singular honour of being won and lost by the Liberals, Labor and the Independents. The

past 16 years of its being held by Independent members provides what I believe is an insight into genuine community concern. As the first Liberal to ever win back a seat that has been represented by Independents for a long time let me say this about what I discovered in the last campaign from the electors of Manly. I discovered that the two-party system is breaking—and it is breaking down under a belief by electors that representatives of a major party will always give their loyalty to their party and not their community.

If one question was asked of me again and again it was a question about whether my first loyalty was to my party or to the community. The question asked of me is in fact being asked of all the representatives of the major parties in this place. There is no better place to see this than in the results themselves. In the 1978 State election 96 per cent of all voters voted for the Labor, Liberal or Country parties. In this past election that number had fallen to 77 per cent. This Parliament marks the first time in the modern era when a New South Wales government was elected to office with less than 40 per cent of the primary vote. Or in other words, for the first time more than 60 per cent of voters did not see their first choice government elected. We need to hear and heed what the electorate is saying, for to achieve for our communities the two-party system must work.

Tonight I want to talk about three ideas that I believe will restore and strengthen public trust in our major political parties and in this wonderful institution. Firstly, I am proud of the Liberal Party and its tradition of seeking freedom for the individual to excel and achieve dreams through personal effort. I am also proud that it is the party that has always allowed members to exercise their discretion in relation to matters of conscience. It is a discretion and responsibility used rarely and wisely by those who have done so in this Parliament. However, I believe we need to take this further and in coming months I will seek to introduce into the party room of the Liberal Party another discretion, that is, the discretion that also allows members a free vote in matters that relate to the direct interests of their own community.

The Premier, with the full backing of the Coalition, appointed an Independent Speaker to lift standards in this Parliament. The next step in that journey is to free up our party rooms: we need unity on the essentials and wisdom and strength in areas of conscience and community. I expect the Liberal Party to lead the restoration of a community-based party in this place. We should never be ashamed of listening to our conscience nor to our community—in essence this is why we are here. In part, this view has been developed by listening to the thousands of residents I have met over the past year—and also by watching one parliamentarian who has demonstrated to me through his actions what parliamentary service should be about.

I am referring to my father, whose presence in the gallery I am delighted to acknowledge tonight. He is a man of achievement, compassion and conscience. He is admired by his friends, his community and all sides of politics. Whilst some say his greatest achievement was as Minister for the Olympic bid, bringing the 2000 Olympiad to Sydney, others say it was getting the trains to run on time as Minister for Transport. I say his greatest achievement was visiting every immigration camp across Australia, and through this experience standing for and taking a position that was first and foremost a response to his experience of sustained human desperation. His position was at odds with many in his party and often with mainstream public opinion, but it was right. As a son, and now as a parliamentarian, I say thank you for the standard you have set me and the values you have imparted.

My admiration also extends to my mother, Judy, who sits beside my father tonight, as she has done for over 40 years, without fuss or recognition. That is a long 40 years, I have to say, as well! However, as I watched her work in typing pools until 3.00 a.m. to fund further studies I learnt the benefit of hard work. As I also watched her regularly meeting with some of the State's toughest women criminals to feed, encourage and love them I learnt there is life and hope in those we are quick to dismiss. As I, my sister, Julia, and brother, Steve, looked at them both we saw a life lived in Jesus. I believe that compassion is not a unique value of the left side of politics; nor is justice one of the right. Compassion and justice are required of all who serve in Parliament—and that is the approach I will take. My faith will ground me, shape me and provide my motivation to serve until my time here is done.

Secondly, in arguing that we need to repair public confidence in the two-party system I am very aware that one of the principal areas of public distrust relates to donations and the concern that donations, be they from trade unions or corporations, are resulting in the erosion of integrity of Australian politics. We need to reform the political donation system. We need to put caps on donations from unions, corporations and individuals—and at the same time strengthen public funding of candidates. In arguing for these reforms I make the point that donations themselves are not inherently bad. They are the way that many involve themselves in the political process, no different from letterboxing, writing letters to papers or handing out brochures on polling day.

Political donations are corrosive when the donors seek to influence outcomes, and directly taint or corrupt an impartial process. The potential remains today to buy legislation and this alone highlights how serious the issue has become. I have formed the view that donations are at a corrosive level in New South Wales and significant donation limits, combined with stronger public funding, can ensure that electors are properly informed and also confident in the integrity of the electoral process. I will be arguing for this reform over coming months.

Finally on this issue, public confidence can be lifted in the electoral process by putting to an end the manipulation that occurs through government advertising. According to A. C. Nielsen Media Research the New South Wales Government spent \$75 million to \$80 million during 2006 on government advertising. It was the seventh-largest advertiser in Australia, up with a bullet from tenth in 2005, spending more than companies such as Procter and Gamble, Coca-Cola, McDonalds, the Commonwealth Bank, Toyota, Myer, Kellogg's, David Jones, Ford, Cadbury, Qantas and Westpac—and the list goes on. All of these companies sell things; all the Government was doing was selling Morris. Think about it again: last year more was spent in New South Wales selling Morris than was spent in all of Australia selling the combined products of Coca-Cola and McDonalds. I might add that all three when consumed in excessive quantities can have a bad effect on your health. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

As shadow Minister for Finance I believe the widespread misuse of government advertising reduces trust in the political process. I believe we need a six-month ban on State Government radio and television advertising before a State election, with the only exceptions being advertising in the public interest—that is, approved by both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition or similar independent arbiter. This was Bob Carr's approach in 1996 and is yet to happen. The community wants a government that does not clap itself on brilliantly executed political strategies whilst

problems it has been elected to fix remain untouched. How much could be done for this State with \$80 million alone?

At the next election this Government will have been in office for 16 years. Such a stretch in office can create mindsets for both governments and oppositions. For the Government, it can and has created a sense of retaining permanent power as the priority, and in recent years a sense of inertia, which has seen this State no longer perform to its potential. For an Opposition, the job of opposing and questioning every policy can blind us to the good work of government and in particular of the 297,000 people who serve it every day. It is these good people who give their best in our hospitals and schools, in child protection and in working with people with disabilities. They care for our mothers and fathers and children, and protect us from illness. The challenge in this place is to help them make government work, and there are many wonderful examples of this service in Manly.

Just over eight years ago my daughter Cate was born with the help of Manly MidWives. She had a great shock of black hair, a radiant glow and a beautiful peacefulness that only parents can sense. Whilst she slept in my arms 30 minutes after birth, and following the departure of the resident doctor, my wife Kerryn, who had been happily chatting to me, began to bleed. In the following few minutes Kerryn passed into unconsciousness and two unsung heroes sprang into action to fight the onset of a vicious post-partum haemorrhage. In helplessness and fear I clung to a new life while watching another pass away. Those moments cannot be described in words but I know that two women in Ann Kearney and Emma Lane—whom I am delighted to acknowledge in the gallery tonight—saved my wife's life and that of my son. These moments define a man and ultimately provide a compass to what government is all about. I will forever owe a debt to two nurses who did their job—and I will forever remember a public hospital system that served me well in what were the darkest moments of my life. Thank you.

It is because of them that I look out at this gallery and see Kerryn, Laura, Cate and Luke, who are the joy, sustenance and wonder of my soul. They are my strength and to them I owe everything. They are my cotravellers on this journey and I am nothing without them. My challenge in this place is to ensure that I can help make government work for the next family that turns to it in its moment of need.

The campaign for Manly was spirited and passionate. Over 400 people volunteered and participated in my campaign. I was humbled by the sheer magnitude of effort. I dare not try to name them all, but I do want to thank them collectively for a team effort that saw a victory that would not have been possible without the amazing contribution of so many. Thank you to all the people, many of who sit in the gallery tonight, who rightly share in this victory. Thank you all. I want to single out Walter Villatora for his amazing role in support—surely the only local campaign manager in the history of New South Wales to work full time alongside the candidate for the duration of the campaign. Thank you.

I also want to make a single political acknowledgment to one who was foundational in my standing here today. That is Peter Debnam. Again and again Peter supported me on this journey; he stood by me through the ups and downs and worked tirelessly to help me win Manly. He is a man resolute and determined, and a man you would want by your side in any storm. Thank you.

About seven miles from this place stands another statue proudly in honour of Manly's favourite son. Sir Arthur Roden Cutler stands alone as the example of courage, resilience and a true model of servant leadership. His statue is found not in the grounds of Government House where he lived and served this State for so long, not in a foreign battlefield where he served with valour, but in the grounds of his local primary school, Manly Village Public School. His presence reminds both its students and the many residents who pass by every day of a life lived in service of others and indeed of a hope for future achievement in the face of many obstacles.

As I take my place in this Parliament I bring the hope of another trying to make a difference, a determination to bring a voice for Manly to this Parliament, and I trust that when my time is done my community would collectively put its hands upon my shoulders to say, "Well done!" Thank you.