

GOVERNOR'S SPEECH: ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

The PRESIDENT: Order! As this is the inaugural speech of the Hon. Natasha Maclaren-Jones, I ask members to extend to her the traditional courtesies.

The Hon. NATASHA MACLAREN-JONES [5.00 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): It is with significant pride and honour that I rise this evening to make my maiden speech. Mr President, I commence my remarks by offering my congratulations to you on your election to the office of President. I extend my congratulations to all members elected at the 2011 election—in particular, those elected for the first time. I also extend my appreciation to the Clerk and the staff of the Legislative Council for the assistance I have received in recent weeks and for their kind advice.

As the last member of this Chamber from the class of 2011 to make my inaugural speech, I have listened with interest to the speeches of my colleagues. I have been impressed by the diversity of opinions, ability and unique life experiences that each one brings to this place. Our term expires in 2019 and I am conscious that we have an opportunity and enormous responsibility of charting a new direction for New South Wales—a responsibility I will not take lightly. My parents instilled in me the important values and beliefs of personal responsibility, Christianity and, through hard work and effort, in both employment and study, that opportunities can be created.

Growing up as a daughter of a submariner who served 25 years in the Royal Australian Navy, I was astonished by the lack of respect shown to our veterans who served in Vietnam. In high school I experienced it first hand when I was criticised by a teacher of history for having a father who served. I am pleased this is no longer the case, and under a Federal Coalition Government our service men and women were afforded the full recognition for their service, sacrifice and bravery. It is encouraging that with each year that passes there is an increase in national pride within our community, with a strong sense of gratitude and recognition of our Defence Force personnel, not only for what they have done in the past but also for what they are continuing to do in serving and defending our great country.

I was again reminded of the true sacrifice that young Australians had made in defending and protecting our freedom—which we can sometimes take for granted—when in 2002 I had the opportunity to walk the Kokoda Track in Papua New Guinea along with a few of my now colleagues, the Hon. Charlie Lynn, MLC, the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, MP, the Hon. Anthony Roberts, MP, as well my now husband, Damien. Over that week I learnt to truly appreciate the harsh realities endured by our Australian soldiers when they landed, with little to no preparation for what was ahead apart from a strong will and determination and when combined with the great Australian spirit, made them true warriors in pursuit of freedom.

I am humbly reminded every day that I can only stand in this place today, as a free woman, elected to Parliament because of the sacrifices made by young Australians protecting our democracy. As a nation we will remain eternally indebted to them. I want to say thank you to Charlie—who at times dragged me across the track—for showing me that in conquering the track, with all its challenges, I could then face whatever life threw at me. Too often we allow ourselves to be limited by our illusionary boundaries, but with physical endurance and inner strength one can achieve absolutely anything.

It was through my father's service in the Navy that I first gained my own sense of community. He instilled in me the importance of hard work and giving back to your neighbour through community service, values I still believe in today. I was only a teenager when my father, Anthony, passed away, which hit our family hard, leaving my mother to raise two girls on her own. I know she found it tough at times, choosing to make do with less so as to provide for our future. We never went without the things we needed. My mother taught me that with hard work and determination no ambition was beyond my reach. Without that I would not be standing here today, and I thank her for that.

Being part of a very close-knit family myself, based on Christian values, I strongly believe in the traditional family unit as being the bedrock of Australian society, where a mother and a father are encouraged and supported in raising their family. Whilst some people may wish to erode and attack traditional family values, I am committed to fighting to ensure that traditional Australian families and values, which have stood the test of time, are defended. As a civilised society, it is our responsibility as legislators in this place to ensure that everything we do encourages young families to achieve their full potential. We need to make it easier for families and not harder. We need to encourage and reward hard work, not penalise and punish working families because they want to provide a stable future for their children.

Hard work is something that I, too, understand. I got my first job at the age of 15 as a shop assistant, a role I kept whilst studying at university. I learnt to juggle work, study and family life, much like anybody else. It was during my university days that I developed a desire to defend the fundamental rights and real freedoms upon which liberalism is founded: to think, to worship, to choose, to be ambitious, to be independent, to be industrious, to acquire skill and to seek reward for effort—ideals that I strongly believe in.

I am proud of the fact that in the Liberal Party those freedoms are available equally to men and women. We get ahead on merit, and Liberal women make their contribution to the Party and to Parliament without the aid of affirmative action or quota systems. A great example of that is Helen Wayland, one of the longest-serving presidents of the New South Wales Liberal Women's Council. I take this opportunity to thank Helen for her support and guidance.

One of my earliest university campaigns saw me elected to the Sydney University Union, on a platform for voluntary student unionism. What I could never understand was why an individual who does not use union facilities or services should be compelled to join a union on the threat of not being able to graduate—a similar quandary I faced when I entered the nursing workforce. Those on the other side of the Chamber would argue that voluntary student unionism is just an ideological obsession of the Liberal Party. The fact is, Mr President, it is not. Put simply, voluntary student unionism is a pursuit of an individual's right to choose whether to join a union or not.

In 2005, under a Coalition Federal Government, we saw the introduction of voluntary student unionism. Despite the threat from left-wing activists, we have not seen the end to student activities or life on campus. Sadly, however, I note that the Federal Labor Government is again considering the re-introduction of compulsory student unionism. I acknowledge the Australian Liberal Students in the gallery today and thank Sasha Uher for her work as Australian Liberal Students' Federation President leading the fight in protecting individuals' rights.

It was during my final year at university that I was asked to stand as a candidate for the Constitutional Convention on the No Republic—Australians for Constitutional Monarchy ticket. I record my gratitude to Kerry Jones, former National Executive Director, and Professor David Flint, AM, the National Convenor of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy. I am forever grateful for the opportunities they provided to me; it was certainly the start of my political journey.

As a member of Australians for Constitutional Monarchy and a member of its national council, I will remain a defender of our system of government and the instrumental role the Crown plays within our Constitution. I will also uphold our flag as a timeless symbol of the values and virtues of our society. I believe in the principles of federalism and the bicameral parliamentary system, and therefore am honoured to have been elected to the Legislative Council. I believe passionately that politics is for the people and that power should be divided, because it is the best way for the people to keep control of it.

As legislators in the second Chamber we have a mandate from the people of New South Wales to review, reject and amend legislation, and maintain a sensible check on the powers of the Executive, for me, it is an essential part of our democracy. Australia's system of government is one the longest-running democracies in the world. And, of course, like all sound democracies, the establishment of the Australian Federal system did not happen overnight, taking more than a decade of debate between the colonies.

When the Commonwealth was formed the States proposed to transfer only limited powers and intended to retain the maximum constitutional powers for themselves. Over time, we have seen erosion on areas of State responsibility by the Commonwealth too often camouflaged as cooperative federalism. The true reason for recent interest in Federal control, be it health or education, is that the States have failed to address some of these issues. I do not see how removing responsibility from the States will address the problems; instead they would be magnified. It is easier to hide failure in the national bureaucracy, therefore dragging otherwise well-performing States down to meet the underperforming. The solution is not to hand power to the Commonwealth but rather to hold governments to account and to ensure that voters have the information to hold them accountable.

After graduating as a registered nurse I went to work at Royal North Shore Hospital. It was during my time as a nurse, when I became frustrated by the lack of autonomy and the failure to deliver services efficiently, that I decided to pursue a career in politics. Leaving nursing was one of the hardest decisions for me to make, but I decided that I wanted to be one of the decision-makers rather than have decisions made for me. I believe one should not waste energy complaining, rather one should be active in changing policy directions. Mental health is an area I am particularly concerned about. As a young nurse in psychiatry I unfortunately worked a shift when a young man who was not much older than me at that time committed suicide hours before he was to be released. What he feared more than death was being released into the community with no prospect of support or services to help him transition back into everyday life. He was let down. We have seen that same story over the past 16 years of a Labor Government that only ever payed lip-service to the mental health issues facing New South Wales.

Working in psychiatry opened my eyes to the erosion of social values and family unity often confronted by young professionals or even high school students experiencing an early psychotic episode, often through drug use. The illicit drug debate has been allowed to be

taken over by left-wing ideologues who have waged a campaign through softened language—a campaign that I am determined to take back. I am totally opposed to the terms "harm minimisation" and "recreational drug use". Frankly, I find them a contradiction in terms and they are increasingly being used by policy makers, commentators and academics. I know we must help those who are addicted. However, the message must be unequivocal: Illicit drug use is unacceptable. We have an obligation to educate young children about the dangers of drug use.

Let the facts be known: Long-term cannabis use can lead to mental illness, early psychosis and suicide. What sort of a country do we live in where we send mixed messages about drug use, making it illegal whilst providing a tax-funded injecting room just up the road from this Parliament? As legislators we have a responsibility to seriously address social issues such as mental health and homelessness. For far too long we have seen the poverty gap in Australia continue to widen. It is my belief that we have to start questioning our foreign aid commitments. Whilst I agree that they are important, I do not believe they should come at the detriment of our own people. One only has to walk out of this place at night to see the hundreds of people, often young people, sleeping on the streets.

It was during my time as a nurse that I joined the Liberal Party as a member of the Young Liberal Movement. I acknowledge Scott Farlow, New South Wales Young Liberal President, and other Young Liberals, Simon Fontana and Tobias Lehmann, for their stewardship of one of the largest youth political wings in Australia. I am proud to be a member of one of the most successful centre right political parties in the world, which has seen Sir Robert Menzies and John Howard become the longest and second longest serving Prime Ministers and with Barry O'Farrell achieving the largest mandate in political history demonstrates the key to our political success is that we represent mainstream Australia.

Over the past decade I have had the privilege of serving in various senior positions within the Liberal Party. I served firstly as the New South Wales Young Liberal President, then as State Vice President and, more recently, as State President. I am acutely aware not only of the great number of people who founded the Liberal Party in 1944 but also of those thousands of party members who have given so much to deliver government. Over the past 12 months I have had the honour to serve the Liberal Party as its State President. I would like to take this opportunity to note that I am the first New South Wales President to be elected to this Chamber. Being the youngest State President, at 34, I know some thought I would be a pushover. But I am tenacious, I do not give up and I do not go away easily—Kokoda showed me that.

I could not have achieved my personal political success without the support of my former employers but, more importantly, my mentors: the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, MP, and Senator the Hon. Helen Coonan. I have learnt a great deal from both of them. Helen taught me patience when it comes to negotiating, which she demonstrated when she negotiated major telecommunications reforms through the Senate and in Bronwyn—who also could not be here today as it is a Federal parliamentary sitting day; I know she is watching from Canberra—taught me tenacity and passion to fight for what I believe in. As members might appreciate, I have had cause to use these skills during my time as president, and they will serve me well in this place. As Margaret Thatcher once said:

Disciplining yourself to do what you know is right and of importance, although difficult, is the highroad to pride, self-esteem, and personal satisfaction.

It was gratifying that my final campaign after seven years on the party's governing body saw the Coalition achieve a historic election result, with a swing of nearly 17 per cent. I acknowledge the support of the people of New South Wales who so overwhelmingly endorsed the Coalition on 26 March this year. To them I say: This Government will not let you down. It would be remiss of me not to mention the important role branch members played in choosing the candidates for this election—candidates who will uphold mainstream Liberal values and represent the needs of the wider community. They are too numerous to thank individually, but I specifically note the efforts of those who carried the Liberal flag in the seats that we did not win. I would not be here today without them.

I believe one of the greatest strengths the Liberal Party has to offer is that we govern for mainstream Australia and that we have mastered the art of combining good policy with good politics. I stand here today as a representative of the people of New South Wales. Once we lose sight of what we are elected to do and start looking after our own interests rather than the interests of the people who have entrusted us, we should no longer be in this place. I know there are many things that I have not yet experienced, but I feel that through my own experiences so far, and those of my peers, I can positively represent the issues, aspirations and challenges facing all of us.

I come to this place after 16 years of a Labor Government that was dedicated to the pursuit of an outdated ideology operating beyond the bounds of its competence as though government debt did not matter. The Liberal Party believes in the free markets, encouraging enterprise and initiative. As a government we have the responsibility of creating a business environment that encourages employment and allows business to grow. Our economy is driven by population growth, participation in the workforce and productivity. If the economy is not growing it does not matter what workplace relations system one has in place; people will lose their jobs. The only guarantee of job security is a strong economy.

I believe at the heart of economic growth and welfare improvement is innovation, through research, development and manufacturing. Innovation is about good ideas, and manufacturing turns those ideas into products and services. We need to encourage investment. Governments can provide incentives but it is through business that we will stimulate innovation, job creation and training, and strengthen manufacturing. I also believe a vibrant arts sector fosters innovation, creativity and diversity—helping to define and shape who we are. It is through our words, images and music that Australia establishes its unique identity. Art touches aspects of our daily lives in a way that no other medium can. It allows us to tell stories and connect with other people on all levels. It can offer new perspectives, challenge our beliefs, and make us think about things bigger than we are. Without a doubt Australian directors and playwrights are among the best and most respected in the world. I believe we have a role in helping to build the foundations of a strong entertainment and production industry in New South Wales.

Like all members of this place, my passage here would not have been possible without the help and support of many people who, unfortunately, are too numerous to identify and mention by name. Many of those people have honoured me again today by attending in the public gallery and being on the floor of the Chamber. I cannot describe how humbling it is

that you are all here, and I offer my deepest thanks. Then there are also those who have made immeasurable sacrifices for me through my political journey. In politics the highs can be captivating and the lows can be soul destroying, and without the encouragement, fierce loyalty and support of friends the journey would not be possible.

I have been fortunate to have in Nick Campbell, my predecessor as State President, a true friend and supporter. I thank him for his wise counsel in my political pursuits over the years. To my Federal colleague Alex Hawke, MP, I thank you for your motivation and guidance, even on those occasions when I did not ask for it! Alex, I know you will make a significant contribution to Australian politics. To my colleague the Hon. Dr Peter Phelps, MLC, I thank you for supporting me, your invaluable advice and your friendship.

I also acknowledge the Federal member for Mackellar, the Hon. Bronwyn Bishop, MP, who, as I said, is watching in Canberra with some of my other Federal colleagues. I thank you for having the faith to take on a nurse and provide professional opportunities and guidance over the past 10 years. Your long-term investment in me cannot be repaid but it will always be remembered. Bronwyn's commitment to the betterment of Australian politics, the community and the Liberal Party has been demonstrated by her integrity and a career dedicated to public and political life. It is fair to say that there is only one Bronwyn Bishop, a woman who will go down in history as making a significant contribution not only to conservative politics but also to our nation.

I also acknowledge a dear friend, Lady Sonia McMahon, who passed away last year. Even in her final weeks she was there for me. Sonia was a remarkable Australian whose legacy will span generations. She was a committed Liberal and well known for her outspoken views. I will always value her friendship and support. To my friends here in Sydney, interstate and abroad, I thank you for your support, patience and understanding.

Finding the words to thank one's family is particularly difficult. In my life I have been fortunate to have been influenced by my mother, Heather. I thank you for your patience, your faith and all that you have done and will continue to do for me. To my sister, Susannah, I deeply appreciate your optimism, guidance and friendship. I simply could not have done this without you. To my dear husband, Damien, this has been a journey travelled together. You gave me the encouragement, strength and support to carry on even in times of opposition.

Finally, I thank my extended family and all of you in the public gallery today, for without you none of this would have been possible. My commitment to you and the people of New South Wales is to work hard, to contribute and to represent the interests and concerns of the community while at the same time to uphold those beliefs and values that we as Liberals hold so dear.