



## INAUGURAL SPEECHES

**The PRESIDENT:** I welcome and acknowledge the family and friends of the Hon. Nichole Overall who are present in the gallery today, including, in particular, three former members of the Legislative Council: the Hon. Rick Colless, the current chairman of the New South Wales National Party; the Hon. Duncan Gay, a former Deputy President, Minister and Leader of the Government in this place; and the Hon. Bronnie Taylor, the former Deputy Leader of The Nationals. I welcome also two former members of the other place the Hon. Wendy Machin and Ms Melanie Gibbons. You are all most welcome.

**Mrs NICHOLE OVERALL (14:32):** Today I am filled with gratitude, inspired by purpose and deeply committed to making a contribution that truly matters. Firstly to you, Mr President, the officers and staff of the Legislative Council and this Parliament—acknowledging the connections to the land on which it stands—to honourable members and members of the Legislative Assembly, particularly from our Nationals team, and to all of you here with us today, as well as those watching on and sharing in this moment, I offer my most heartfelt thanks. Many of you have contributed to and been part of the journey that sees me now in this place.

To paraphrase mathematician, scientist and parliamentarian Sir Isaac Newton, this opportunity to see further and do more comes through being uplifted on the shoulders of giants. I am honoured to have among us many of those Nationals giants, as pointed out by the President, including the Hon. Larry Anthony, AO, former Federal member for Richmond and past Federal President of the National Party. He is one of an outstanding family of Nationals representatives with whom the Overalls have an early connection. My father-in-law and the inaugural commissioner of the National Capital Development Commission, Sir John Overall, worked closely with Larry's dad, Doug Anthony, while he was Minister responsible for Canberra and Deputy Prime Minister. There are other Nationals luminaries watching from afar, including the Hon. Don Page, member for Ballina for 27 years and grandson of one of the most influential figures in the esteemed history of The Nationals, formerly the Country Party, Sir Earle Page.

I am thankful also to those Nationals who have gone before me in this place for their efforts in forging our future. Among them is Sam Faraway, who is now fighting to resecure the Federal seat of Calare for The Nationals. I took no offence at the Hon. Mark Latham's observation that in my role I will probably be more like Sam than I will Thomas Ley, a 1920s New South Wales politician and possible serial killer. Thanks for the vote of confidence, Mark! In an early show of bipartisanship, I take note also of the Hon. Penny Sharpe's comment at my swearing in yesterday that I was welcome to join them on that side of the Chamber. Thanks, Minister, but you can be sure I will stand firm over here. My gratitude extends also to the Chairman of the NSW Nationals, the Hon. Rick Colless; and to the Hon. Duncan Gay, AM, former Leader of the Government in this House. As you have heard, both of them are here with us today, and I am very pleased for it.

Just as I was humbled and proud to serve previously as the member for Monaro—the first female to do so in its 165-odd year journey—I am equally humbled and proud to take my seat in this House as member No. 866 since the establishment of the Legislative Council in 1824, which last year celebrated its bicentenary. As it turns out, 2025 marks 100 years of women in this Parliament. All 133 of us have come here since spirited journalist and business advocate—someone after my own heart—Millicent Preston-Stanley became the first, elected as the Nationalist Party member for the Eastern Suburbs in 1925, with women only having gained the right to run in 1918. It is lovely to note the first woman elected to the New South Wales lower House for The Nationals, the Hon. Wendy Machin, is also in the gallery with us today.

In recognition of this significant centenary, this milestone, I would like to mention a few other Nationals women at this time, though not for a moment am I suggesting there is anything wrong with the blokes—more or less. But I am sure you will agree that it is fitting, given the occasion. For us, the very first to be elected to this Legislative Council in 1984 was the Hon. Judy Jakins, AM, a long-serving and devoted torchbearer for The Nationals movement. I mention also the Hon. Jenny Gardiner and the Hon. Mel Pavey. To use the description of the Hon. Damien Tudehope, Mel was another of the "select few" to serve in both Houses, and she has been right beside me on my rollercoaster ride. Finally, I mention the Shirley to my Laverne—or, for a more modern reference for you young'uns, and I would wager it is another first for *Hansard*, *Friends'* Rachel to my Monica—the Hon. Bronnie Taylor.

When things are going well, demonstrating loyalty and standing up for what you believe in can be easier, but it is when the battle rages around you that it really counts and is so much more valued. Bronnie, there were moments when we would have happily ditched each other somewhere out on the vast plains of the Monaro—I say that with love—but I will always be grateful for all you have done, not only for me, but also for many others, and for The Nationals as a whole. Then there is my friend the Hon. Sarah Mitchell, another terrific leader from whom I continue to learn so much. I look forward to working with you in this capacity, Sar. I note the fellas in our tightknit team, too—the Hon. Wes Fang and the Hon. Scott Barrett—and the wonderful support team we have around us. Along with being very thankful, I stand here before you in this place filled with a great sense of purpose. In fact, that purpose was only reinforced following a turn in the road, shall we say—less a detour and more a beneficial pit stop.

As so powerfully expressed by America's twenty-sixth president, Theodore Roosevelt, it is about being a doer of deeds—wanting to be in the arena, to know what it is to strive and sometimes falter, because there is no effort without error. Or the poet Robert Frost, who wrote, "The utmost reward of daring should still be to dare"—to know the great enthusiasms and the worthy cause, because ultimately, even in the face of obstacles, it is the chance to make a difference. And that is why I am here: to make a real lasting impact for the people of regional, rural and remote New South Wales.

During my time working as a presenter with 2CC radio in Canberra I interviewed former Labor Senator the Hon. Kim Carr. A 40-year political player, he was passionate in his belief that politics is, or should be, a vocation, a genuine calling to represent and to serve. While it may be hard for some to believe that I could be in furious agreement with a staunch Labor Party member, I can say that at least in this, I most certainly am. But, in a nod I know my sons and their mates will appreciate, with a great calling comes great responsibility. Part of that responsibility is keeping it real. While I am certainly fired up at the chance to be here again, this is not a game, political or otherwise. What we do here, the decisions that we make and the outcomes that we reach must be based on a respect for reality—not overreach, promising the world and delivering a road map. Nor is it a popularity contest. We are not, after all, participants in *The Farmer Wants a Wife*—though the very best of luck in finding love in our regions to all who are.

The privilege we have been afforded and our duty is to do all possible to help improve the daily lives of the people of New South Wales, to hear and prioritise the things that matter most to them: their health, secure jobs, a good education for their kids, keeping their family safe and the chance to retire with dignity. It is about creating opportunity, offering a realistic but optimistic plan, and making today better and the future brighter still. For me, we Nationals are here to ensure that all of those who call our regional, rural and remote communities home are not left behind. What matters to them matters to us because we live and know the daily realities of life in the regions.

I grew up in the Riverina and raised a family in the Monaro. I know the battle it is for regional mums and dads, grandparents and carers when it comes to choices and options around childcare and education. I was proud to be part of a Nationals-Liberal Government that responded with critical commitments like fee-free community preschool and 500 pre-kindergarten facilities throughout New South Wales. Sadly, it is those mums and dads who are frustrated to see Labor reduce this to just 100, with only one delivered thus far, at Liverpool—and that started in our time. Our regional communities deserve better.

It was also our Nationals-Liberal Government that delivered record investment in schools, such as the newly opened, very impressive Jindabyne education precinct. Other initiatives, too, like the country university centres, started in Cooma and are now expanding around Australia. That is what real vision looks like. It is what is needed to empower our regional communities, to drive their growth and to ensure their amazing potential is maximised. Governing well does take vision, and we must prioritise solutions, not excuses. Whether it is tackling escalating regional crime and its impact on victims; properly providing for end-of-life care, in light of \$150 million in funding being cut; or enabling councils to more efficiently and sustainably deliver for their communities, be it in the rates they levy for services and infrastructure that they are expected to provide and maintain.

I am pleased to note that present among my guests today are many who have served our communities in local government, including current councillors and great mates of mine: Mareeta Grundy, who was re-elected to the Queanbeyan-Palerang Regional Council; Dr Simon Kinny, newly elected to the Ballina Shire Council; and Mayor of Orange Tony Mileto. Good governance is also investing in our people, providing for their ongoing needs and ensuring they get value for money for the taxes they pay. Good governance is encouraging innovation and incentivising, not impeding, business confidence. One critical example can be found in our next generations of tradies. They desperately need and deserve real attention. When it comes to housing, 377,000 new homes have been promised for New South Wales to be delivered by 2029. Of those, 55,000 are in regional New South Wales. If there is any real chance of that happening, there needs to be more support and ongoing investment in trade education, including not-for-profit registered training organisations.

In building pathways of opportunity and optimism in our regions, we also have to get real about mental wellbeing. It is unlikely there is a person here who has not been touched by this growing scourge in one way or another. Its grasping fingers are spread wide, from rural mums trying to care for little ones with no real help, to remote teens confused about their life path, or husbands and dads doubting their worth as a provider in the face of regional industries being shut down. My experience as the chair of headspace in Queanbeyan showed me that alternative care models and a more holistic approach must be embraced. And there is hope. A great example—more than 10,000 kids in about 400 schools across the State benefitted from our previous Government's \$60 million investment in 100 wellbeing nurses. That is making a real difference.

Concerningly, small business people dealing with mental health distress have increased from around 12 per cent to closer to 35 per cent, and it is not hard to see why. I have owned and run small businesses and employed people, and I am very aware of just how taxing it can be in every way. The hairdresser, the accountants, the cafe owners—all of them are the economic heart and backbone of our communities, everywhere. But in the past financial year alone, almost 4,000 New South Wales businesses have closed their doors, impacted by a cost-of-living crisis and skyrocketing costs. We have to get real about providing an environment where people want to invest their hard-earned cash in employing others, in growing our economies and our communities, be it by eliminating over-the-top paperwork or addressing payroll tax, which will help to get businesses back on track and keep them there.

Just like small business, our regional media is also suffering. Much of my professional life has been spent working in that field. A lot of that work has been about listening—really listening—to the voices of others and nothing how to tell their stories, be they farmers and police officers, nurses and teachers, carpenters and hospitality workers. More than just news, local media is at the core of so many communities, part of their very social fabric. But between 2019 and 2024, New South Wales saw almost 150 closures or reductions in news outlets. That is not to be dismissed as just newspapers no longer available; those are jobs and livelihoods. It is access to verified, on-the-ground local information.

In telling our stories, another priority for me—and I do not think I will shock too many of you—is protecting and promoting our regional history and heritage from an educational, as well as tourism perspective. Along with being the repositories of our stories, our shared experiences and journey, whether it is the unusual Age of Fishes Museum at Canowindra, home of the New South Wales fossil, or the iconic and self-funded 1834 Berrima Courthouse—and yes, they have a great ghost tour—these historical and cultural institutions are beacons for the exploration of our regions and are usually run by local champions who devote so much to preserving those links to who we are, where we have come from and what we have created. They deserve to be more effectively resourced. The social and economic benefits are obvious.

While my passion for the past is no secret, with many years spent illuminating regional history, that passion to reach back is also about better informing our future. I am about a real and inspiring vision for the future of our regions, a vision that encompasses more options for our kids and grandkids, from education to training and career choices in the face of, among other things, an artificial intelligence revolution. It is a vision that prioritises connections, innovation and small business, and a vision that respects the reality of the lives of regional people as they strive to realise their aspirations. My commitment is giving back—giving back the attention and support that those living, working, running farms and businesses and raising families in the regions of New South Wales need and deserve. It is about giving back confidence to our regional communities that know what they stand to lose and to do all I can to make sure they do not come off second best, be it hospitals or schools, social and sporting facilities, or housing opportunities for those starting out or being forced to leave home for the cities as they grow older.

It is about giving back the loyalty and dedication shown by those who believe in me to fight for a fair go for our regions. I am here to give back to the people of regional, rural and remote New South Wales. The current Premier has previously declared that the Liberal Party is a party, but Labor is a tribe. He failed to mention that The Nationals are a family, with everything that conveys, from ultra-energetic "cousins" always egging you on—I am looking at you, Josh Booyens and Leah Evans—to the support of aunt-like figures, such as Lyndall Weatherby. Ultimately, the support of family is needed by all who seek to fulfil this calling to the best of their abilities. I continue to be humbled to receive much support from The Nationals family, including our secretariat, overseen by Tory Mencshelyi, and previously Joe Lundy, and our central council, with the endorsement of its members affording me this next great privilege.

I give a shout-out to the former New South Wales chairman from my time as the member for Monaro, Andrew Fraser. I acknowledge our mighty Monaro branch, including George Lemon, Shane Taylor and Brent Hunter, some of them representing us today. I acknowledge Nationals members and supporters from around the State, as well as our New South Wales parliamentary team, guided by Dugald Saunders. It is a team that recognises that we cannot achieve without each other. Despite what was said by another US president, Harry Truman, that if you want a friend in politics, get a dog, I have had the good fortune to make many friends in this political world and to have the support of a very large family of friends from all walks of life. I am delighted to be joined by more than a few of them from all points of the compass, from Lismore to Wagga Wagga, Bathurst to Coffs, Griffith to Armidale and the South Coast to Dungog. While I would love to mention them all individually, I could not possibly without being called to order by the President, in what would be the first time but unlikely the last. Each of you know who you are, and I hope you know how much you mean to me.

The very heart of me, my actual family—my sister, Michelle; brother-in-law, Simon; niece Ella; and her partner, Josh—have travelled from Albury to be here with us. In the village helping to raise our family is Deb Stephens. To the great loves of my life, our sons, Nick and Alex, of whom we could not be more proud, without your support and encouragement I could not and, quite frankly, would not want to do this. Also, to their partners, Ella and Lana, and their families, I say thank you. In one of the many examples of how the boys keep me grounded, they have made it clear that there is no chance that they will ever refer to me as "the honourable".

Then there is my husband of 28 years—our anniversary being in about one week's time—Tim Overall, Emeritus Mayor of Queanbeyan-Palerang for 13 years, who said that I was not to talk about him. Showing that I do listen to him, I will not—well, maybe just a little. As I have been going over the Legislative Council's *Standing Rules and Orders*, which is obviously recommended bedside reading, Tim has expressed quite an interest in Standing Order 102. That is the one that calls for the member to "be no longer heard". My point of order in response is that it will never be employed at home. Seriously, Tim, thank you for the life that we have created together and what is yet to come.

To conclude, as I take my seat here on these beautiful leather benches—which, as it turns out, were proudly reupholstered for the Legislative Council bicentenary by Smart Upholstery of Queanbeyan—as member 866, and, of that, the sixty-ninth female representative in the New South Wales Legislative Council, I highlight another woman of a different parliament. There is every likelihood that you will not know her name, despite her accomplishments. Mrs Ivy Weber, born at tiny Captains Flat, in Monaro, in 1937 was the first woman elected at a general election to the Victorian Legislative Assembly, having run a wholesome campaign around mother, child, family, home and health. Reluctant to describe herself as a "feminist", Ivy was nonetheless a great champion of women's causes. In addition, her diverse commitments throughout her life ranged from organiser for the Country Party to the National Council of Women. Twice widowed, on top of all of that, Ivy was a mother to 11 children.

One of my favourite discoveries about Ivy is that she was described by some of her political opponents as a "little ferret who was always nosing around doing everything". Clearly, they were acknowledging, in their curmudgeonly way, that Ivy was a political representative of great principle, character and conviction, demonstrating integrity and tenacity. Ferret or no, she was an inspiring example of the qualities needed by anyone keen to more than just earn a place in politics but actually do what needs to be done. As a woman of and for the regions, I am here to do what needs to be done in championing regional, rural and remote New South Wales, keeping it real and giving back, building our tomorrows with optimism and courage, and being willing to dare and dare again greatly. Thank you all so much for sharing in this significant moment with me as we strive together to see further and do more.

*Members and officers of the House stood and applauded.*