

18 February 2008

Governor-General's Speech (Maiden Speech)

Address-in-Reply

Mr BRADBURY (Lindsay) (7.39 p.m.)—It is with great honour that I rise to speak for the first time in this House. In doing so, I wish to acknowledge the trust that the people of Lindsay have invested in me. Bounded at the east by Ropes Creek and South Creek, the Lindsay electorate extends across the Cumberland plain and the majestic Nepean River to the foothills of the Blue Mountains. At its northern boundary is Castlereagh, one of the historic Macquarie towns, and at its southern boundary is Mulgoa, named after the local Dharug tribe that once inhabited those parts. Wholly situated within the city of Penrith, the Lindsay electorate is part of a community that I have proudly served as a councillor and a former mayor for almost nine years. In this time, I have come to the clear and unmistakable conclusion that the greatest asset of this community is its people—hard working, generous, passionate and enterprising.

Apart from being the place where my wife and I are raising our four young children, this is the place where my ancestors first settled in this country. Around 170 years ago, my great-grandfather's grandfather, Walter Bradbury, settled in the Penrith area. He had travelled to the new colony on convict escort duty as a member of the 80th Regiment of Foot, Staffordshire Volunteers. In 1843, Walter came to local prominence when, as a constable posted at Penrith, he was granted a substantial reward from the Governor for apprehending a group of deserters armed with muskets from the 99th Regiment at Parramatta. Acting on a secret tip-off, he apprehended a group of rogue elements who had been threatening the peace and order of the local community by engaging in despicable and clandestine acts. These events bear a striking resemblance to the events that took place in Lindsay in the final days of the 2007 election campaign.

A century after Walter Bradbury's arrival, my mother and her parents, Anthony and Paola Tedesco, came to these shores from war-torn Malta in search of new opportunities. They were a part of that other great wave of migration that enriched our nation in the years after the Second World War. My family's story encapsulates only two of the many different threads of that rich tapestry that is the story of the great region that has been my home since birth. As the place that one in 10 Australians call home, Western Sydney is now the third largest regional economy in Australia. It also represents one of the most diverse and cosmopolitan regions in this nation.

But, before becoming all of these things, Western Sydney was home to the first Australians. I pay my respects to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who I recognise as the traditional owners or custodians of the lands and waters of this country. As the first member for Lindsay to do so, I add my voice to the apology issued by this parliament and say sorry to our Aboriginal people for past mistreatment, including the stolen generations. Before European settlement, the local Aboriginal tribes called the area that now constitutes Penrith city Muru Marak, which means 'mountain pathway'. Indeed, it is Penrith's proximity to the Blue Mountains that provides a central reference point to its history, which is shared by both its Indigenous and its non-Indigenous inhabitants.

After setting out from his South Creek farm in 1813, Gregory Blaxland, along with William Lawson and WC Wentworth, became the first European to cross the Blue Mountains. Where other Europeans had failed, Blaxland's strategy of following the high ridges proved successful. Apart from marking out Penrith as a place from which great journeys might be launched, the Blue Mountains crossing opened up more land for the young colony, which had been fast running out of grazing land for its cattle. The real historical significance of the Blue Mountains crossing is that it became the expedition that allowed the young colony to overcome the geographical barrier that had stopped it from further expansion and growth.

I passionately believe that, in the same way that the first crossing of the Blue Mountains helped the infant colony scale the heights of one of the natural barriers that had prevented it from reaching its potential, it is the role of government to help all individuals overcome the barriers that prevent them from reaching their potential and fulfilling their destiny. In short, the objective of government action should always be, as former Labor Prime Minister Andrew Fisher once said, to ensure that every Australian is given 'the fullest opportunity to rise in life'. This is why I believe in the power of government. It is a simple but enduring belief: that governments have the power to change people's lives and that governments are capable of creating and extending opportunities to all. This is the one conviction that has guided me in my life and the one belief that has led me to this place.

I believe in the relative efficiency of the market but I also believe that our nation and all of our people will only realise their full potential with the carefully targeted intervention of government. Where hope and optimism are shackled by disadvantage and despair, government must intervene. Where ability and promise are restrained by dysfunction and disincentive, government must intervene. Where opportunity and competition are frustrated by market power and privilege, government must intervene. To realise our nation's potential, we must liberate the talents and abilities of all of our people. Australia will only realise its potential when every person in this country is given the opportunity to bridge the gap between what they are and what they are capable of becoming.

We must rebuild the architecture of the state to align it more closely with the vision we hold for our nation's future. We must overcome inertia and indifference with investment and incentive. We must entrench reward for economic and social contribution and we must use the instruments of public policy to discourage anything less. Most importantly, we must reach for a future where every person in this country is valued. Every person has a contribution to make and it is the responsibility of government to make sure they can. This is the moral imperative that dictates that government must do all that it can to empower people to realise their potential.

Whilst it is the responsibility of government to provide opportunities, the social compact demands that individuals make the most of these opportunities. Government must invest in the social infrastructure needed to empower individuals and communities to take advantage of the opportunities that are created. A strong and effective state must be accompanied by a strong society underpinned by resilient communities. Governments can strengthen communities but they cannot do the job on their own. Ultimately, communities are defined by the interrelationships between the people that comprise them. Family, however described, is at the very heart of this notion of community.

We must promote policies that support and sustain the relationships between people, their families and their communities, because a strong and cohesive society is the only foundation upon which the architecture of the state can be securely built. We must embrace the benefits of investing in our

social infrastructure. We must act upon the evidence of the long-term benefits of prevention and early intervention. We must equip our parents and grandparents, our families and our communities with the tools required to build resilience and social cohesion.

We must accept the importance of early childhood education. We know from the work of the Nobel laureate Professor James Heckman that the events of a person's first 60 months of their life will be more important in their emotional and intellectual development than anything that happens in their next 60 years. Government has a greater role to play in these formative years. Every child must be nurtured and provided with the access to early learning that success in life requires. Where families and communities are denying children these opportunities, government must take some responsibility. Family visits, parental support and education, access to early learning, breakfast clubs, literacy programs and mentoring programs are all essential.

Apart from the moral imperative, there are also powerful economic reasons why government should provide opportunities to all. If we are to compete in a global economy with nations that are 50 times our population, we simply cannot afford to give up on a single person. This is why it is in our national economic interest to provide opportunities to help every person unlock their full potential. If we are to realise our economic potential as a nation, we must create opportunities for lifelong learning and training. We must lift participation in the workforce and the voluntary sector. We must restore incentive to our tax system. We must take greater responsibility for our health and wellbeing. We must invest in the arteries of the modern economy with new and upgraded infrastructure.

In part, this is what Labor's education revolution is about. It is about providing opportunities to overcome the barriers that prevent us from reaching our economic potential as a nation. It is about recognising the realities of globalisation. With globalisation we are facing a world where our nation's prospects are inextricably linked to our ability to mobilise the skills and talents of our people. It is about recognising that we cannot compete with the armies of unskilled labour emerging in India and China, nor can we fight the march of automation and technological change. But the opportunities that globalisation presents are already beginning to become available to those who have benefited from the opportunities provided by government over the last 30 years. To the highly skilled, the global economy offers almost unlimited opportunities. Young Australians with highly developed skills are in great demand right across the globe. For many, the global economy has elevated their prospects of social mobility to a new stratosphere. With these people, the challenge is to ensure that their skills, their enterprise and their creativity are not lost to another country.

That is why Australia must not lose sight of its comparative advantages. We have a reputation for being home to some of the greatest cities in the world, and our lifestyle is second to none. But under the pressures of ad hoc growth and repeated failures to deliver the infrastructure that our cities require, the livability of our cities is under threat. Gridlock on our roads and freeways and inadequate and limited choice of public transport are all combining to have a corrosive impact on social and family life. These transport and infrastructure challenges that threaten the livability of our cities and suburbs must not be seen as peripheral to the great economic challenge of globalisation, because they are at its very heart.

These and other barriers that prevent our nation from reaching its potential require new policy approaches and new leadership. In the same way as the young colony's expansion required the leadership of the Blue Mountains explorers, our nation needs to embark upon a new expedition, driven

by new leadership—leadership that nurtures, cultivates and harvests the talents and abilities of our people, leadership that looks into the eyes of each Australian and sees success as their destiny rather than failure as their fate. It is leadership that expunges the shadow cast by the politics of fear and illuminates our nation with a message of hope.

This is the leadership that Australians have always looked to the Australian Labor Party to provide. As the great custodian of the progressive political tradition in this nation, the Labor Party has always dedicated its energies to the pursuit of social justice, fairness and the creation and extension of opportunities for and to all. As Labor we believe that all Australians, regardless of their circumstances, should have the opportunity to liberate their talents and realise their potential. With hard work, discipline and determination, no Australian should be denied reward in a society that allows them to fully exploit their talents and rise in life. These values constitute our moral and political compass and guide us in the pursuit of our work. We are committed to delivering a strong economy and a fair society in the social democratic tradition, with hard heads and kind hearts.

It is because of these values that we support an education revolution, fairness and decency in our workplaces, universal access to health care and accessible and affordable child care. These are the values that will guide us as we confront the challenges that lie ahead for the nation. These challenges include responding to the nation's skills crisis, restoring fairness to our workplaces, addressing the balance between work and family, building better cities whilst fighting the housing affordability crisis, and improving transport and other physical infrastructure.

We must close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. We must rebuild our hospitals and health system. We must confront the pressures of an ageing population and fight the scourge of drug and alcohol abuse. We must secure sustainable solutions to our energy needs and confront the challenges of climate change and water. We must redesign our Federation and improve our confidence in the institutions of governance. We must restore our leadership role in the international community and defend our nation from the threat of terrorism.

These are some of the great challenges to which I dedicate myself on behalf of the people of Lindsay. As I begin my work in this parliament, confronting these challenges as a legislator, I am inspired by the words of Robert F Kennedy, who said:

An honourable profession calls forth the chance for responsibility and the opportunity for achievement; against these measures politics is a truly exciting adventure.

Labor's victory in Lindsay was the product of the hard work of many people who have contributed to my last three campaigns. I thank all of the party members, the branches, the union members and members of the local community, some of whom are in the gallery this evening. I thank them for having been involved in this victory.

In particular, I wish to thank Senator Steve Hutchins, who has been by my side throughout the last three campaigns. I also wish to thank Mark Arbib, Karl Bitar, Diane Beamer, Chris Bowen, my councillor colleagues, especially Pat Sheehy, Greg Davies and John Thain, Ron Mulock and Faye Lo Po, Prue Guillaume, Justin Koek, Julia Hine, Linda Bourke, Todd Carney, David Latham, Camden Gilchrist, the Allison and McKeown families, Russell Boserio, Steve and Sheryl Vine, Sandra Lyle, Gai and Michael

Maskell, Paul and Elaine Talbert, Keven Cross, the Genovese family, Rien and Margaret Koek, Bill Buckley, Brian and Dorothy O'Farrell, Lois and Colin Fisher, Russell Baker, Matt Hazell, Mark Greenhill, Ann Keating, Angela Humphries, New South Wales Young Labor and my many supporters from the local Filipino, Indian, Nepalese and Sri Lankan communities.

I wish to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of the men and women of the Australian trade union movement for their role in ensuring the election of the Rudd Labor government. In particular, I wish to thank Michael Williamson, Gerard Hayes, Mike O'Donnell and the entire team at the HSU, Tony Sheldon and the TWU, Andrew Ferguson and the CFMEU, Geoff Derrick and the FSU, the ETU and Matt Thistlethwaite, Mary Yaager and the Lindsay Your Rights at Work team. Let there be no mistake: our victory represents a clear mandate from the working families of Lindsay to repeal the Howard government's extreme and unfair Work Choices laws.

I wish to thank my old mates Scott Connolly, Matthew Martyn-Jones, John Degen and Ben Heraghty, my good friend Robert Ishak and his team at William Roberts and my former colleagues at my old law firm, Blake Dawson, especially those in the tax group.

Most importantly, I thank my family, who are in the gallery tonight—some of them behind sound-proof glass. Family has been the greatest inspiration in my life. To my beautiful wife, Kylie, and my four beautiful children, Anna, Helena, Rose and Nicholas: I thank you for giving me this opportunity and I hope that I can honour your selflessness through the quality of the contribution I make to public life.

To my parents, John and Carmen: I hope I make you as proud of me as I am of you. In my successes, I see your sacrifices. To my siblings and their spouses, Natalie and my good friend Troy, two of my greatest supporters, with whom I have learnt so much in politics, Catherine, Trish and Charlie, and Stephen: thank you for your support and for giving me some great political advice around the dinner table. To Michael and Beverley Addison: thank you for your tremendous support. To Babs, Ben and Flo, Michael, Byron, Marcus and Hayley, and Wendell: thank you for your support. I also thank my extended family of uncles, aunts and cousins, many of whom worked hard for me on many election days. All of you have made this day possible. I also acknowledge the assistance provided to me by Lorraine Stacker from Penrith Library.

I acknowledge the two previous members for Lindsay—in particular, my good friend Ross Free, who was also first elected to serve in this parliament on his third attempt. I also acknowledge Tony Luchetti and the great Joseph Benedict Chifley, who both served my local community before the seat of Lindsay was created. Like Ben Chifley, I had the great privilege of being educated by the Patrician Brothers, whom I also acknowledge and thank today.

After two earlier unsuccessful attempts to reach this place, I know only too well that I am here to serve the people of Lindsay and will only remain here for as long as I continue to enjoy their trust and confidence. As I stand in this parliament today, I am reminded of the words of Gregory Blaxland, who, upon crossing the Blue Mountains, remarked:

This expedition, which has proved so completely successful, resulted from two previous attempts.

Like Blaxland, I know that, after having just overcome the seemingly insurmountable, now the real work begins.