

The first Parliamentary speech of Sophie Cotsis



Madam President
I rise to support the COURTS AND CRIMES LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL.

Thank You, Madam President

I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land we are gathered on here today and pay my respects to Aboriginal Elders past and present.

Madam President,

It is an extraordinary privilege to speak as a member of Australia's oldest Parliament. It is with humility, enthusiasm and complete resolve that I commit myself to the service of this Parliament and to serving the people of New South Wales.

I thank the men and women of the Australian Labor Party for the opportunity to make a contribution to improving the lives of the people of this state. I would also acknowledge the Hon John Della Bosca, my predecessor, who remained true to his strong Labor values and commitment to social justice throughout his time in this place.

Entering parliament requires a commitment not just by a new member but by those closest to them.

That is why this is a proud moment not just for me but for my family; I acknowledge and thank my loving husband Arthur for his wise counsel, understanding and loyalty, and a dedicated and doting father to our children. Our son and daughter, George and Cassandra, remain a source of constant inspiration and strength to us both. Like all working parents with young kids, my own children help ensure I retain a sense of perspective and a healthy dose of reality. Above all, George and Cassandra are constant reminders to me of why the work of this parliament is so important. As members we are all striving to build a better NSW, not just for today, but for future generations.

Madam President,

This evening I will share the values that will motivate my service to the people of NSW.

Above all, I believe in equality. I believe every member of the NSW community deserves, and is entitled to, equal access. Equal access to opportunity, to fairness, to public services and social justice.

As someone who has been fortunate in life, to have enjoyed opportunities, a good education, family support and a strong community.

I believe these opportunities should be available to all people in our great state. That's why I will pursue those values throughout my time in this parliament.

The provision of services however, is never enough. The strongest communities are always built on strong partnerships between governments and the people. That's why I will devote my time here to supporting what I believe is the most important role of any parliament - to be the catalyst for real, lasting and effective partnerships between community and government.



Sophie Cotsis MLC with the Board of the Macquarie University Hellenic Studies Foundation, Bill Kritharas and the Press Consul of the Hellenic Consulate-General in Sydney, Mr Nikolaos Oikonomides.

Madam President,

My story, and that of my family, began in Greece during a terrible period after World War II, followed by civil war and a severe famine in the 1950's. It was a period of great turmoil

Madam President,

At this point I would like to pay tribute to the many courageous Australian soldiers who selflessly gave their lives to defend the home of my ancestors during the second world war in mainland Greece and on the Island of Crete where they will never be forgotten. In marking the spirit of valour it would be remiss of me not to mention the 70th Anniversary of OXI Day, NO to FASCISM

GREEK National DAY will be celebrated around the world tomorrow 28th October.

In subsequent years, the devastating effect of conflict and misfortune severely limited opportunities for education, for jobs and for investment. It was during the famine that a 37-year-old mother of five lost her battle to live. In an instant, life was turned upside down for her children. This woman was my maternal grandmother, Cassandra. Devastated and facing an epic struggle to care for his five children

alone, my grandfather withdrew his nine year old daughter from school to help care for her siblings.

That young girl was and is my mother - a strong, driven and compassionate woman who took on massive responsibility from such an early age. This tragic event deprived my mother not just of her childhood but an education and the opportunities that should have followed. Like so many migrants, my mother's desire to build a better life and future brought her to this wonderful country and to NSW.

This state has provided stability and much more to so many new Australians. Access to jobs, decent education and opportunities for a stable and prosperous life for their children.

It has also allowed many to give back and make a valued contribution to this country and this state.

My father's childhood in Greece was as challenging as my mother's and he too came to Sydney to seek out a better life. My parents met and married in inner city, Sydney and later settled in the St George district, where my brother and I grew up. The area remains one of Sydney's major economic, social and cultural hubs, enriched by a diverse community and the hopes and potential of its families and young people.

Madam President,

My parents and the values they instilled in my brother and me from an early age will always be a great source of inspiration to me. They taught us the value of hard work and self reliance, resourcefulness and self discipline, a strong sense of community and to help others who were less fortunate. They worked difficult jobs but performed them with dignity and pride, always with an eye on the future and determined to provide a secure upbringing for their children. As Mum would often remind us, "We have no safety net, we must build one."

My mother performed a range of unskilled jobs whilst my father was a painter who worked on sites all over Sydney. Their limited English meant limited job opportunities and little protection from workplaces that didn't offer decent conditions and entitlements. Over time, through strong campaigns, the union movement fought for better working conditions and eventually helped many decent, hard-working Australians like my parents to enjoy a sense of dignity in the workplace.

However, I can only begin to imagine what my parents and many of their generation endured in those early years. I will always admire their dedication to building a better life for their children and for continuing to enrich my life and that of my children.

Watching my parents overcome these challenges taught me from an early age the true value of Education, not just as a great enabler, but also for its fundamental role in any society truly committed to social justice.

I was lucky to enjoy a great education at

Canterbury South Public School and then Kingsgrove High School, which placed a high value on helping students reach their full potential and contributing to society through community service. A school is nothing without its teachers and I had many who were

excellent. But there is one in particular that inspired my passion for history and politics. My History teacher from years 7 to 12 was Mr Graham - (PAUSE) sorry, Allan Graham, who is here tonight.

He led us in debates, challenged us to think outside the square, explore new ideas and encouraged us to always be inquisitive - fundamentals that later guided my undergraduate years at Macquarie University. We enjoyed lively discussions about Australian and World History and Politics. I thank him and my lifelong friends from Kingsgrove High.

At Macquarie University I learned for the first time the power of genuine community engagement. Through a number of campus groups, and later becoming a member of the Macquarie University Hellenic Studies Foundation. Our vision was to raise adequate funds to establish a permanent program preserving the perpetuity of the Greek language and Hellenic heritage at Macquarie University and we launched a campaign. Our efforts paid off and we secured course options for the wider university student population who wanted to study Hellenic History, Literature, culture, and the Greek Language

Above all, the experience taught me genuine community engagement will always be the key to securing a win for the greater good. I value the long lasting friendships forged during that campaign. I acknowledge the committee, who are in the gallery tonight.

Madam President,

From the earliest stages of my working life I have confronted the challenges of striving for fairness, equality and balance in the workplace. For nearly four years I was a hospitality shift-worker at Sydney

Airport. During that time I had the privilege of being part of a diverse workforce that kept the international gateway to Australia working around the clock, 365 days a year. Hours were long and schedules were demanding for everyone, from cleaners and security guards to airline staff, storemen and mechanics, retail, transport workers and bus drivers and electricians. The roles were diverse but it was a workforce united by commitment to their jobs and, for many, the drive to provide a better future for their families. There is no better example of this than the 5am start of the Christmas Day shift, when you'd often find workers sharing a joke and light hearted banter despite having