

Research Note

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This paper provides guidance to new Members of Parliament for making their inaugural speech. It covers inaugural speech protocols and suggests key items to include in the speech, as well as links to further resources.

The inaugural speech: notes for new Members

The inaugural speech – formerly known as a ‘maiden speech’; also referred to as a ‘first speech’ (Elder, 2018, p. 146) – is made by a new Member of Parliament following their election to the Legislative Assembly or Legislative Council. This speech usually occurs at the start of a new Parliament as part of the debate known as the address-in-reply. The address-in-reply debate is in response to the Governor’s speech, which is delivered on the opening day of Parliament. The Assembly and Council both respond separately to this speech.

Some Members choose to make their inaugural speech during debate on appropriation bills, which, like the address-in-reply, also allow Members to speak on a number of issues, free of the usual relevancy requirements. Many new Members take the opportunity to highlight their political views and aspirations, priorities for their work as a Member and any specific issues affecting their electorate. In other words, these debates permit Members to speak across a wide range of issues

Protocol

It is the convention in Westminster-style parliaments that a Member making their inaugural speech is traditionally heard in silence without interjection or other interruption. This is a sign of respect, and in return for this courtesy, the new Member avoids engaging in controversy or provocative debate. A further convention adhered to in the United Kingdom House of Lords and the Australian Senate is that a first speech should not directly criticise another Member of the same house (Odgers, 2016, p. 274).

Convention also dictates that the chamber be well attended to hear a new Member's inaugural speech, after which other Members offer their congratulations to the new Member. Further, Members are expected to remain seated and not enter or leave the chamber during a Member's inaugural speech (Bostrom-Westwood et al., 2013, p. 1).

Members who have previously been in the 'other house' are still afforded the opportunity of delivering an inaugural speech in their new house (Elder, 2018, p. 146). However, as outlined in Erskine May, 'A Member subsequently returned for a different constituency cannot claim the privilege for a second time' (May, 2019, paragraph 21.9).

Another custom in the United Kingdom House of Commons, but not an absolute rule, is that new Members should not participate in proceedings of the Chamber (such as asking a question) prior to making their inaugural speech.

Members are permitted to read their inaugural speeches from written notes.

Key points for making an inaugural speech

While there are no formal rules for the content of a Member's inaugural speech, there are a number of practices that are commonly followed. Some of these are listed below.

Opening remarks and congratulations

Many Members begin their inaugural speech by thanking the Presiding Officer for inviting them to speak to the motion. Where appropriate, new Members can congratulate the Presiding Officer on their appointment to their position as Speaker or President.

Early in their speech, Members may wish to acknowledge and pay their respects to the Traditional Owners of the land on which Parliament meets, the Wurundjeri people, and the First Nations communities in their own electorates.

Members usually thank a variety of people and organisations, noting their appreciation of their electors, and may begin with comments on their electorate, its people and their interests. This might be followed by a description of their journey to being successfully elected.

Former Members

Members will often acknowledge previous Members of their electorate, and in particular their immediate predecessor. This often includes an overview or some reference to the work of the former Member and their contribution to the electorate and the Parliament. In some cases, this can be extended to Members from much earlier periods (even those from the 19th century).

Party organisation and workers

Some Members use their speech to thank their party organisation, local electorate, campaign workers and office staff, but these comments are usually brief in nature.

Family and community

The Member's family are often thanked for their support and contribution. Likewise, the local community, or specific groups who have made significant contributions to the Member's election campaign, are usually mentioned.

Issues and concerns

An inaugural speech gives the Member the opportunity to discuss issues of concern or importance to them, or a matter about which they feel passionate. Members can address their areas of expertise in prior roles. For example, Members with experience in the field of education might discuss matters pertinent to education.

The potential area for discussion is broad and could include social policy, society, ethics or even definitions of political philosophy. It could also include a discussion of the principles, values and ideas that guide the individual Member and their involvement in politics. A first speech is an opportunity for a new Member to inform the House about their own personal history and background.

Some Members use this occasion to link their area of interest to their electorate and it is very common for a Member to speak about the characteristics, challenges and goals that they see in relation to their local electorate and their role as the local representative. Some Members, often on the government side, will also link topics in their speech to subjects outlined in the Governor's speech.

Achievements and unique features

Some Members may choose to highlight a unique personal aspect or achievement, such as being the first woman or youngest Member to represent their electorate. They may alternatively choose to highlight unique aspects of their electorate, such as an electorate having the largest population of a specific cultural or ethnic group, possessing some historical significance or containing prominent industries. Incorporating statistics can also serve to highlight these features.

Every electorate will have some special features which set it apart from other electorates. Focusing and elaborating upon these features can help inject greater interest and substance into an inaugural speech. Data on electorates can be found on the Library section of the parliamentary intranet. Members can also contact the Library to enquire about other resources.

Quotations

Some Members include quotations from significant figures in history, politics or literature in their inaugural speech. The Library can assist in finding quotations based on particular themes or from notable speeches.

Commitments

Members may conclude their speech by making a commitment to their electorate, either in general terms or on some specific issue of concern that they say they intend to pursue during their term. Many Members pledge themselves to working to their utmost ability for the whole of their electorate. Members can also make comments more broadly about public policy in relation to the whole state or an institution, signalling that area as one they intend to commit to as a Member of the Parliament.

Tone

There is no one 'style' for an inaugural speech, and each Member speaks in the way appropriate to them. While Members are free to speak in the manner they choose, a first speech does not generally attack or denigrate other Members, nor is it an opportunity to criticise or insult an individual or group. The 'spirit' of the inaugural address is more about making a contribution to the discourse of the Parliament on a topic or topics of real concern to the Member. In this sense, contributions can be expressed in passionate and articulate terms but should not be at the expense of other Members. The speech provides the opportunity for a new Member to articulate new ideas and an opportunity to signal their interests, values and concerns to the Parliament.

Time limit

Standing Orders on time limits for speeches may vary between the houses. In the Assembly, the limits for speaking on the address-in-reply for the 59th Parliament are 20 minutes each for the mover and seconder and 15 minutes for any other Member (Legislative Assembly, 2021, SO 131). In the Council, Members can speak for up to 30 minutes during their inaugural speeches (Legislative Council, 2020, SO 5.03). Members should also check the Sessional Orders for their respective house.

The debate on the address-in-reply can take days to conclude and may extend into subsequent sitting weeks.

Resources

Standing Orders

- [Legislative Council](#)
- [Legislative Assembly](#)

Video

The Parliament of Victoria website has further resources on the Opening of Parliament, including a brief [video about the address-in-reply](#).

Finding other inaugural speeches

Inaugural speeches are uploaded to each [Member](#) (or for former Members, [Re-Member](#)) profile and published on the associated web page.

[Hansard database \(1991 – present\)](#)

In the searchable Hansard database, navigate to the '[advanced search](#)' page. Choose a Member's name, and from the search results select their earliest speech in Parliament (to narrow the search results, select the 'Activity' drop-down and then 'Governor's speech'). Check to see if the Member refers to this as being their first speech.

[Re-Member database](#)

The Hansard online database only displays speeches from 1991 onwards. To find earlier speeches, check the [Re-Member database](#) for speeches by former Members or ask the Library.

Contact the Library Enquiry Desk for further assistance:

Phone: 9651 8640

Email: research@parliament.vic.gov.au

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