

NSW Parliamentary Chronicle

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On 27 July 2005 the NSW Premier Bob Carr announced that he would resign as Premier in early August. The Premier's announcement prompted two other senior and long-serving Ministers, Deputy Premier, Andrew Refshauge and the Minister for Infrastructure and Planning, Craig Knowles, to announce in the days following that they too would leave politics. There were two main contenders for the position, Police Minister Carl Scully and Health Minister Morris Iemma. Mr Scully later withdrew from the race and Mr Iemma was elected unopposed as leader of the ALP and the 40th Premier of NSW.

Morris Iemma was sworn in as Premier on 3 August, when Bob Carr formally resigned having been Premier for 10 years, 3 months 30 days, a record period of service in a single term, although behind Henry Parkes's record of 11 years 9 Months and 14 days, over five separate terms.

The Minister for Transport, John Watkins, was promoted to Deputy Premier and new appointments to the ministry were Cherie Burton, Milton Orkopoulos and Eric Roozendaal MLC. Education Minister, Carmel Tebbutt, resigned from the upper house and, in one of three by elections held in mid September, successfully contested the seat of Marrickville, formerly held by Andrew Refshauge. The ALP also retained the seats previously held by Bob Carr and Craig Knowles, although with swings against the government in all three seats; 13% in the case of Macquarie Fields. A joint sitting of the two houses met on 11 October and elected Penny Sharpe to fill the Legislative Council vacancy caused by Carmel Tebbutt's transfer to the lower house.

In August allegations appeared in the press that the Leader of the Opposition, John Brogden, had behaved inappropriately at a function and made offensive remarks about Helena Carr, the wife of the former Premier. Mr Brogden resigned as Leader of the Liberal Party, amidst allegations that factional opponents within the party had circulated the story about Mr. Brogden's behaviour. The Shadow Minister for Transport Services, Peter Debnam, was elected unopposed as Leader of the Opposition on 1 September 2005.

Shortly after resigning as Leader of the Opposition, John Brogden was found in his electorate office, apparently having inflicted an act of self-harm. Mr Brogden resigned from Parliament in late September.

When Parliament resumed on 13 September, after the eleven week winter recess, a new Premier and new Leader of the Opposition faced each other across the Legislative Assembly chamber for the first time. One has to go back to 1901, when a number of senior politicians resigned from the NSW Parliament to serve in the Federal Parliament, to find a comparable situation of new leaders taking up their posts in a recess and within such a short time of each other. Two new and comparatively unknown leaders would make the period leading up to the 24 March 2007 poll an especially interesting one.

The by-election for John Brogden's seat of Pittwater, held on 26 November, was won by an independent, Alex McTaggart, with a swing against the Liberal Party of over 20%. The result increased the number of independents to seven in the 93 seat Legislative Assembly.

The recently opened Cross City Tunnel, a public private partnership, was the cause of difficulties for the government, because of the high price of the toll and the closure of surrounding streets, forcing motorists to use the tunnel. In November, the Legislative Council General Purpose Standing Committee No 4 resolved to proceed with a self-reference into issues related to the tunnel. However, the government in the Legislative Council successfully moved a motion to appoint a joint select committee into the tunnel, which included an instruction to GPSC4 not to undertake any inquiry into the matter. During the joint committee's hearings there was much media attention to the evidence given by Bob Carr and other former senior ministers, including Michael Egan.

In December racially motivated riots and violence broke out in Cronulla and other beachside suburbs, allegedly in response to earlier attacks on volunteer lifesavers. Having adjourned for the Christmas recess, Parliament was recalled on 15 December to debate and pass special law enforcement legislation to give police additional powers to prevent or defuse large-scale public disorder, by enabling police to declare an area and authorise a lockdown, involving the setting up of roadblocks, the power to stop and search vehicles and other related provisions.

The Legislative Assembly has a reputation as being a combative chamber and over the years there has been some media comment about parliamentary standards. In late October, the Shadow Minister for Housing and Small Business, Andrew Fraser, physically attacked Joe Tripodi, the Minister for Roads, during a debate on funding for the Pacific Highway. Mr Fraser was suspended from the house for eight days and stood down from the shadow cabinet.

2006 is the sesquicentenary of responsible government in NSW. The formal celebrations were low key, with an official opening of the new session of

Parliament on 22 May, the 150th anniversary of the first meeting of the NSW Parliament. In the absence of the Governor, Professor Marie Bashir, who was in Canberra as the Administrator of the Commonwealth, the Lieutenant Governor, Chief Justice James Spigelman, opened the new session. On a more informal note, the Parliament held an Open Weekend on 20–21 May, with tours of the two chambers and other parts of the building, musical performances and a colloquium on the writing and research of party history. The former Premier, Bob Carr, had established a committee on the sesquicentenary of responsible government, chaired by a former Minister for Education, Rodney Cavalier, to approve funding for the writing and research NSW on parliamentary and political history. Two of the committee's lighthouse publications — the history of the NSW Parliament and a two volume collection of biographies of all NSW Premiers from 1856 until 2005 — were launched in the Legislative Assembly chamber on 31 March by former Premier, Neville Wran, and with speeches by the Speaker, John Aquilina, the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Barry O'Farrell and Rodney Cavalier.

The Premier reshuffled his cabinet mid February, concentrating on the portfolios dealing with economic development. Importantly, Premier Iemma added State Development to his responsibilities and relinquished Treasury, which was taken by upper house minister, Michael Costa. Opposition Leader Peter Debnam also reshuffled the shadow cabinet, in part because of the proposed retirement at the 2007 election of senior Liberal Andrew Tink.

In February the government issued both the findings of the NSW Audit of Expenditure and Assets Report, conducted by Michael Vertigan and Nigel Stokes, and its response to the audit, the Economic and Financial Statement. The government's economic program included a business development program and further infrastructure projects, while undertaking public sector savings and reforms, including the amalgamation of departments and agencies and other changes. The parliament also lost part of its funding for the operation of the catering services.

The NSW Budget was presented by the Treasurer Michael Costa on 6 June, in the last sitting week, and was passed by houses within two days. However, the Legislative Council estimates hearings, conducted by the General Purpose Standing Committees, took place when the house resumed after the winter recess. However, during the recess there was some dispute about the timetabling of the committee hearings, with a threat by the Opposition and cross benchers in the upper house to recall the house to resolve the issue. The matter, however, was resolved without the necessity for any recall.

A number of symbolic changes occurred during 2006. In March the Parliament passed the private member's bill of Labor backbencher Paul Lynch to change the oath and affirmation taken by Members of Parliament and the Executive Councillors' oath and affirmation. In future Members will no longer swear an oath to the Queen, but pledge loyalty '...to Australia and to the people of NSW.' The Legislative Council approved a motion in September to remove the Royal Coat of

Arms, situated above the President's chair, and to replace it with the NSW Coat of Arms. The motion implemented the terms of the State Arms, Symbols and Emblems Act 2004. When Parliament resumed in October, the NSW Coat of Arms was in place in the Legislative Council chamber. At the time of writing the Legislative Assembly had not yet passed its motion to remove the Royal Coat of Arms.

There were two Legislative Council resignations in 2006. John Tingle, of the Shooters' Party, resigned and was replaced at a May joint sitting by Robert Brown. Senior Liberal Patricia Forsythe resigned in September to take a position in the private sector. Mrs Forsythe had lost pre-selection for the 2007 election some months earlier and a joint sitting elected Matthew Mason-Cox to serve the remainder of her term.

The issue of party pre-selection was a matter of controversy on both sides of politics. With the election only months away, the major parties were finalising the pre-selection of their candidates. In the case of the Labor Party, the selection of candidates in five seats was determined by the national executive of the ALP, at the request of Premier Iemma. There was some disquiet in party branches and in two of the seats, Newcastle and Shellharbour, the Lord Mayors of Newcastle and Wollongong announced their intention to stand as independent candidates. The Liberal Party pre-selection process had its share of difficulties. There was considerable interest in the pre-selection for the seat of Epping, with two high profile candidates: the Deputy Director of Public Prosecutions, Greg Smith, and the Federal Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Pru Goward. Ms Goward lost the Epping ballot, but soon afterwards, Peta Seaton, the sitting Member who was to run in the new seat of Goulburn, announced her retirement from politics. After a local candidate withdrew, Ms Goward won the pre-selection ballot unopposed, although the mayor of Goulburn announced that he would run as an independent candidate. Following the pre-selection loss in the seat of Hawkesbury the sitting Liberal Party Member, Steven Pringle, resigned from the party and said that he would contest the 2007 election as an independent. Mr Pringle's departure increased the independents' representation in the lower house to eight Members.

Members prepared for the final weeks of sittings before the Christmas recess and the election campaign, which would begin in earnest in February. ▲