



Martin John McManus

House of Assembly

Date: 31 October 2001

Electorate: Franklin

Mr McMANUS (Franklin - Motion - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I move –

That this House:

- (1) Notes the opportunity for potential growth in southern Tasmania.
- (2) Calls on the Bacon Government to utilise its majority position to encourage the progress that should be occurring in our State.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am honoured today to have the opportunity to make my first speech in this House. I begin by expressing my strong support of the Westminster parliamentary system of government. This system of government has served us well - and many other places throughout the world - and has stood the test of time. To this Parliament I bring more than 10 years of political experience at an organisational and local level. I bring a varied employment background, sound education and personal values which I hold strongly and hope never to lose sight of.

I began my working life as an apprentice electrician for the then Housing Department of Tasmania in 1979. I learnt very quickly that respect, decency and hard work were much more important than whether you wore trendy clothes or spoke with perfect diction. I enjoyed my time immensely learning the skills of a trade, furthering these with qualifications in electronics and being awarded two best apprentice awards along the way.

None of this early career success would have been possible without the foundation laid during my childhood and so it is at this point I would like to pay special tribute to my family for all they have given me. Throughout my childhood the important values of honesty, good manners, courtesy, correct speech and personal integrity were imbued. I witnessed them on a daily basis and if I forgot them my parents reminded me quickly. It was as a child I learned also what could be achieved with hard work. So looking back, it is not surprising that my entry into the work force was a modestly successful one. I take this opportunity to thank my parents for that grounding.

With trade qualifications under my belt and the confidence of youth, I set off overseas on more than one occasion to explore. For all the wonders I saw, what struck me most was the difference between the people and the countries that have, compared to the people and the countries that have not. The differences in living standards between democratic countries and non-democratic countries was stark. I think it was in my 20s that my interest in systems of government and politics began. Tertiary study was still some time away. The opportunity to travel and experience other places

and people led me to appreciate how special Tasmania is. I realised then and still acknowledge now that our environment, peace, beauty, resources and opportunities are world class.

After working for some time I began my first degree in education, initially with the intention of teaching my trade skills to others. But by the time of completion I had developed the knowledge, skills and desire to teach a broader range of subjects and decided to teach schoolchildren instead. Mr Deputy Speaker, as I wrote this speech I looked through the many cards I received from current and former students, staff and friends upon hearing the news of my election to this House. The recurring themes of thanks and genuine respect in those cards contrast strikingly with the apparent lack of respect with which members of parliament are generally held today. Sadly, in the space of one weekend, I moved from being a person regarded for who I am, the values I hold and the job I was doing, to a position considered generally of lower standing.

I have a family of my own now with four wonderful children. They have heard me say so often, 'Speak nicely to one another. Treat others as you wish to be treated yourself'. How do I explain question time in the House of Parliament under the Westminster system to my children? What messages do we wish to send to the wider community? Mr Speaker, regardless of our political differences, surely all people elected to public office should do everything within their individual and collective abilities to address this matter.

The interpretation of what occurs in Parliament of course is affected greatly by the understanding one has of it. My family knows from personal experience, something of what politics is about.

The primary school curriculum in Tasmania explains the three levels of government and the basis of the Westminster parliamentary system, so, as my children have grown up, they have learnt perhaps more than others about how we are governed. My observations are that beyond primary school very little attention is given to the teaching of the way our society is governed. This needs to be addressed.

Society expects school leavers to be ready to exercise their democratic right to vote, yet many students are given little, if any, real understanding about the way we are governed. A civics-in-school program ought to be part of all secondary school curriculums so that future generations will have the opportunity to learn and more accurately understand how our systems of government work.

Perhaps lack of opportunity for secondary students to study civics means a lack of understanding of what we, as members of parliament, actually do. Engagement in serious political debate and discussion in the home today rarely occurs. Much of what is considered to be political information is advertising circulated in the context of political campaigns or that which is reported by mass media. Because of this and the way in which it is

transmitted, the information is often seen as either a political illusion or treated with a great deal of scepticism.

Giving teenagers and young adults in particular a genuine feeling of inclusion in our political system is, I believe, vital to a long-term, robust, democratic system of government. The traditional ways of communicating political messages are, in many ways, no longer relevant to them. We need to meet young people on their territory and the Internet can help us do that. This is a particularly effective means of communicating to a dispersed population such as many pockets of my electorate, Franklin, and elsewhere in Tasmania.

The Internet is a world young people understand and it could be used by government to reconnect politically with them. Internet chat rooms and bulletin boards, which cover a broad range of topics, have become very popular and there is no reason why such a forum could not become a vehicle for genuinely engaging young people in political discussions, activities and in the future decision making of Tasmania.

I can see a time where there will be voting online as an addition to the traditional ballot box. Young people of eligible age could then cast their votes in an environment which is meaningful, relevant and convenient to them. Mr Deputy Speaker, such initiatives I believe have the potential to recapture an interest in politics in young people, an interest that was there, albeit many years ago.

Such a reconnection with young Tasmanians would make them significantly more involved in the democratic decision-making processes in Tasmania. Combined with a proper civics-in-schools program, this would go a long way in lifting young Tasmanians knowledge of, and participation in, the governance of our State.

The central responsibility of a Tasmanian government of course and particularly a majority Tasmanian government is to ensure that our State makes real progress. This will only happen if we find smarter ways of doing things. We need to become smarter in the way we do business, smarter in the way we allocate our resources, smarter in the way we care for our environment and smarter in the way we use taxpayers' money.

Unfortunately, Mr Deputy Speaker, much of what is happening in Tasmania today is not very smart. The unnecessary overlap of government roles and responsibilities, the lack of clarity of many governmental duties in the minds of the public, the over-regulation of business, industry in the lives of the Tasmanian people are obstacles which stifle growth, stifle development and impact negatively upon the future of this State.

Mr Deputy Speaker, laws and regulations are becoming so all-pervading that there is almost no aspect of daily life which is not regulated in one way or another. I am of the strong belief that the more regulated the lives of people

become, the more personal decision-making capacity we erode. Over-regulation lessens personal liberties and if not addressed leads to an unhealthy welfare state mind-set.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the principle of subsidiarity is a favourite one of mine. It has relevance for anyone responsible for lawmaking. Put simply the principle of subsidiarity states that government should not do for people those things which they can reasonably do for themselves.

Each level of government according to this principle should only do for people those things which a closer level of government could not reasonably do. Individuals look after their homes, local government collects domestic waste, State governments provide the police force, the Federal Government provides the defence force and so on. There is a clear hierarchy and rationale for it with each level taking responsibility only for those things which could not reasonably be done by the former.

Likewise, higher levels of government should not perform functions which can be performed reasonably by a level of government closer to the people. I wonder whether or not the propensity which exists to pass more and more laws is an unconscious response driven by a desire for us to regain a feeling of control in a rapidly changing global environment.

Mr Deputy Speaker, the forces of globalisation are strong. Many of the changes occurring are beyond the controls of individuals, States and countries. Certainly at a time when global markets, a global economy and off-shore companies are affecting our way of life there may be some comfort in passing more laws and making more regulations.

While this may bring some short-term feeling of regaining control in our minds and the minds of the community I do not believe that long-term benefits from such an approach are sustainable. With our young people continuing to leave Tasmania to work elsewhere due to lack of local opportunities, we need to become smarter in attracting innovative new businesses. We need to look at our comparative advantages and pursue these opportunities vigorously.

The establishment of new businesses will only occur if new businesses are able to set up and conduct their business in an efficient and progressive outcome-driven legislative and regulatory environment.

Mr Deputy Speaker, over-regulation protects neither what we have, nor what we could become. Much work needs to be done to rationalise existing legislation. The current Roads and Jetties Act illustrates this point. Under this act, if a local council wishes to build a footpath alongside a State highway for pedestrians, that local council is then deemed responsible for meeting all associated maintenance costs of not just the new footpath but the adjacent highway as well.

This is just one example of legislation which makes it too difficult to progress the interests of Tasmanians. Local government is responsible for funding and maintaining much of Tasmania's road network, yet it does not have the authority to make simple traffic signage and other minor decisions without first receiving approval from the relevant State government department. Councils can build a car park but do not have the authority to paint a line on a local road. They can in other States of Australia; they should be able to do so here.

Local communities can have a bus stop on a local council street with local approval but if the street belongs to the State government the relevant local council cannot approve the bus stop. Mr Deputy Speaker, the overlap of roles and responsibilities of State and local government is an area which generates confusion and angst in the minds of the public. It diminishes proper accountability and communication between the public and the responsible authority. Unnecessary overlap is also inefficient and costly. Maintenance of contiguous land reserves in Tasmania demonstrates this point. We have hills in Tasmania being maintained by two levels of government simultaneously. By this I mean part of the hill is maintained by the State and another part by a council. Duplicate staff, duplicate equipment and duplication of administration often occurs. Is it any wonder the public does not know who to contact when a management or other problem arises? A smarter approach would be to consolidate land regions so that one level of government or the other is responsible for the whole parcel of land.

In Tasmania during the past three years we have seen a rise in a range of social problems. Older Tasmanians feel less safe than they used to, and there are ongoing problems with certain types of criminal behaviour. We need to become smarter in the way in which we deal with these matters. We ought not look simplistically at the number of police in Tasmania, important as this is, but look further at where and when they are deployed and how we can use them for maximum benefit. A majority government should ensure that the community is satisfied that legitimate complaints made to police are followed up and action is taken. There is a widespread view in the community that much of what is reported to police is not adequately followed up. This may be in part a perception issue, but nonetheless we need to be smarter about the way we deal with these matters.

Mr Deputy Speaker, Tasmania has one of the finest education systems in Australia, and indeed the world. We represent much of the best in education at every level, from teacher training to classroom practice. For a number of years now we have regularly received visitors from overseas keen to see how it is that we have achieved such an excellent system. We should market our education system far and wide. There are very real opportunities for Tasmania to attract significant numbers of fee-paying international students to all levels of Tasmanian education. This is an excellent opportunity for Tasmania. Overseas students would receive a first-rate education while bringing significant benefits to local communities and economies. The cultural and social opportunities are obvious. Under the Rundle Liberal Government, one of the most exciting, forward-looking education initiatives was in respect to information technology in schools. This vision was a tremendous one and,

in my view, ought to be vigorously pursued regardless of who is in government. I acknowledge that good things are happening in schools. However, more progress can be made. Secondary schools in particular are having difficulty appropriately integrating information technology resources in some key areas of the curriculum.

As the use of computers continues to grow both at school and in the home, our young people are becoming skilled at using word processors and a range of other computer-based programs to produce better academic results. Paradoxically the school system does not provide senior secondary school students with access to word processors for their most important end-of-year written exams. The only time the students are required to write continuously for hours on end is in the context of a demanding formal exam, and many find they do not have the handwriting skills well enough developed to produce their best exam results.

One of the big social issues confronting young people in and out of schools in my electorate, and indeed throughout Tasmania, is the issue of recreational drug use. There used to be an excellent drug education program in infant and primary schools called Life Education. It was axed only a few years ago and, Mr Speaker, I place on record my wholehearted support for this excellent program. I am convinced that it made a real difference in the choices young people make, particularly later in their teenage years. The skills learnt from the time the education caravans were in the schools helped young people in a range of other ways as well. I know, as an educator, the quality of that program and I call for its immediate reinstatement.

Mr Speaker, my electorate of Franklin is a large electorate geographically. The public transport system is particularly important to the young and elderly people living within it. For many of them it is their preferred means of independent transport. The current system is tired, dated and needs to be improved. There is a lack of equity in the fare pricing structure and this should be addressed. It should not cost more to catch a bus to Kingston than it does to South Arm. It is time to have a look at how we can better provide for public transport now and into the future. As our population continues to age and with the rapid growth of families in the Kingston and Blackmans Bay area, as well as further south, the demands for a better public transport system with more frequent and extended services will become even more important.

Mr Speaker, this is not the occasion to speak about every issue which concerns me, however I hope this speech has given you, my parliamentary colleagues and the people I have been elected to represent, a better sense of who I am and what I stand for.

I conclude by again committing myself to the highest standards of conduct. I intend to keep my comments firmly directed at the matters being considered and I have no desire to make comments of a personal nature.

Mr Speaker, I stand before you this afternoon conscious of the fact that 110 years ago my great-grandfather, Edward Mulcahy, made his first speech also

in the Tasmanian House of Assembly. He, too, was a conservative member also elected as a result of a casual vacancy. He went on to become a minister and served in the House of Assembly for 21 years. My great-grandfather was a sitting member 100 years ago today. He was described as a moderate man with a firm belief in the importance of personal freedom. He was considered a man who put service to his State ahead of personal gain. I hope to follow in his footsteps.

As Peter Hodgman's replacement in this House, I commit myself to progressing the interests of the people of Franklin and our island State of Tasmania.