



Ivan Dean MLC

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Windermere

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL 2003 (No. 36)

Noting of Budget Papers

Mr PRESIDENT - Before calling on the honourable member for Windermere to make his inaugural speech I would just remind honourable members that it is convention that the honourable member making an inaugural speech is heard in silence and without interjection. I know that the usual courtesies will be extended to the honourable member for Windermere.

Mr DEAN (Windermere - Inaugural) - Thank you, Mr President. I have looked forward to this moment ever since I announced my intention to stand for the seat of Windermere in the Legislative Council. While I think it is true to say that my campaigning team were probably that confident, I was not. After all, I was standing against an entrenched and confident member. I look forward to the next six years with the Legislative Council and working within this environment and with the learned members that make up the Council and those supporting staff who are critical to any organisation. I wish to place on record my commiserations to the outgoing member, Silvia Smith, and I wish her well in whatever pursuits she now wishes to take on.

Mr President, I place on record my gratitude and admiration for my campaigning team members, all of whom are amateurs in the true sense of the word. They were committed to the task and from the outset committed to knocking on the doors of at least 95 per cent of the electorate. This and more was accomplished. They were indeed, without doubt, brilliant and without peers in my opinion.

My wife Anne and our three sons, Jason, Brett and Troy, were dedicated and absolutely committed to the cause. I also want to place on record the names of those members within my campaigning team - Susan Stanley, my campaign manager, Sue and Harry Tholen, Chris Wells, Michael Parry, Paul Hodges and my adviser and authorising member, Mr Frank Nott. Other people also assisted quite capably with the campaign that I took on.

There are a number of issues that I stood on when I campaigned and I refer to those issues now. Law and order and the right of people to live in a safe and secure environment. Very clearly that came as part of my background, which I have a very strong interest in and a strong passion for. Youth - providing youth with improved opportunities for activities and employment and in particular working with youth at risk. Senior citizens - improvements to services, their security and their safety. Working to improve medical and hospital access and, most importantly, I stood on the issue of independence.

The issues that arose from within the electorate were not dissimilar to the issues that I was standing on. One of their most important issues was in fact law and order, and their right to live in a safe and secure environment. They also referred to transparency of this House, honesty and the ethical stand of the representatives, which is a burning issue with a lot of people.

The provision of activity centres in the northern suburbs for youth and senior citizens. Health, medical issues and access to hospitals and, in particular, the waiting lists. Access to a dentist for adults living in the George Town area, accessibility of members, housing issues, both

availability and relocation issues - and I will expand on that a little more in a moment - and again the matter of independence arose very frequently.

Mr President, in raising these issues it should be remembered that the electorate of Windermere has a large number of low socioeconomic group areas and probably more than any other electorate in this State. Having said that, the majority of these people are amongst the nicest people in this State.

I want to focus on some of the points that were raised with me. The dentist in George Town in particular was a burning issue with the people in the northern part of this State who say that whilst they have access to a dentist for their children, they themselves do not have access to a dentist.

I am aware of the dearth of dentists in this State but I fail to see why this Government cannot create access to a dentist for adults in the area at intervals, probably two to three days per fortnight and/or even a month. I think that access ought to be provided. Periodic services are provided to other professionals to the more remote areas for specialists services. If some form of subsidy is necessary by the Government then so be it as these people are deserving of this service. If this Government is sincere in wanting to improve health - and it is a health issue - then access periodically to a dentist should be available for the people in the north of this State. From George Town it would take at least half a day to travel into Launceston to acquire the medical assistance of a dentist that they needed. It is a big impost on people living in that locality.

Housing. As I said, Mr President, the area serviced by Windermere is predominantly in the lower socioeconomic group area. This is to say that many of the residents are dependent on assistance from Housing Tasmania. Many complaints were made by my campaigning members, including myself, concerning the unavailability of housing and relocating tenants hell bent on making life miserable for other tenants. The latter creates a dilemma for Housing Tasmania because where do you relocate a family that persists in destroying all other families in their vicinity? Most here could not relate to such a scenario as they have not had to live in low-rent locations. From my previous position I do understand the concerns held by people living close to a family with little or no self-esteem and intent on causing mayhem. I will pursue these issues with Housing Tasmania at the appropriate time.

The honourable members for Montgomery and Murchison raised a number of questions last week concerning housing availability, sales, erection of homes and other questions relative to low-cost housing rentals in their electorates. Montgomery and Murchison are not unique in this regard as the questions raised by the honourable members would tend to raise similar concerns within the electorate of Windermere. Windermere does have a plethora of housing problems and no doubt I will be asking questions of the Government concerning those issues in the near future.

I have witnessed on many occasions a trashing of Housing Tasmania homes - government homes, that is - and I am not quite sure, other than monetary incentives to occupiers to look after homes, what the real answer is. However, I do know that it is a State responsibility to ensure that every Tasmanian fitting into that category is given a fair go and an opportunity to have a roof over their head - particularly Tasmanians with dependants fitting into that category. The Budget does provide some relief and I will reflect on that point a little more a little later on. As the honourable member for Montgomery said, perhaps there is a real need to look into the private market for a deal that would help resolve this problem for low-income families, and that is a matter that I think we should go down the track of in the near future.

Activity centres in the northern suburbs: police statistics will show that the greatest crime rate for northern Tasmania is centred in the northern suburbs of Launceston and that youth, predominantly, make up the numbers of offenders in that category. What concerns me immensely is the fact that there are no facilities for youth in those suburbs. What I am saying is that we, both State and local government in my view, are letting these people down. We have facilities in Launceston, the eastern, southern and western suburbs but not in the north -

none in the north. These families in the northern suburbs are the ones least capable of transporting and funding entertainment for their kids but yet, in my view, have been dealt with ordinarily by us - that is, the governments. I can say that in another role - and I might say that is a sore point for some of my critics - I am pursuing the reopening of the Mowbray Memorial Pool complex as a facility to assist youth in the area. I am confident of such a facility coming to fruition. Mr President, these kids normally do not want too much. I went to a meeting about 18 months ago in Waverley, an area where there is absolutely no real support given to youth and particularly young kids out of school. All those kids wanted at the end of the day was the dumping of a truck load of dirt in a nearby park. That was inexpensive and, at the end of the day, almost satisfied the kids there who were looking for something to do. So a lot of these areas are very inexpensive to provide.

Independence, this is a real factor in my election. Most people, and particularly the middle-aged and senior people, are quite wise when it comes to politics; some are confused, some do not care. It was a point I stood on as I am 100 per cent independent and I use the phrase '100 per cent' because that is something that people very clearly understand the numerical value of. It was a critical issue and I was continually questioned on my independence and the independence of the upper House. Some here will question the independence factor and refer to it as a nonsense or of no consequence. The greater majority will not, in my opinion, take that position.

Mr President, I will just touch a little bit on the history of it. In the President's message in 'The Legislative Council of Tasmania: An Outline of its History and its Proceedings' booklet - and I was unable to find a date of print of that booklet - your good self referred to this House as probably the only House in the world that has never been controlled by any government or any political party. I subscribe to the view that for the House to remain a truly genuine House of review it must maintain its independent status. If I had my way of course all members would be independent and without party affiliation.

In the book A Century of Responsible Government 1856-1956 at page 30, the author, Frank Green, in referring to this House as a second Chamber, said it was 'necessary to put a healthy check upon innovating tendencies' - his words. He is no doubt inferring in that statement, in my opinion, that independence of the House is a requirement, particularly for it to perform the duty it was set up to do. The statement would not be intelligible if that were not the case.

We represent the electors within our electorates and we should not just support the view of the government of the day. When it comes to determining any issue coming before this House, we should be able to do so without any bias whatsoever. During the elections I understand a member openly stated on an important bill coming before the House that he/she would vote in accordance with the wishes of the Government. I pose the question: does that position demonstrate bias and does it accord with the true position of this House? I think it does demonstrate bias and, further, it does not sit comfortably with what this House is about, in my opinion.

I was taken aback by the statement; I questioned my position - that is, the one I was taking - whether or not it was the right direction as, clearly, it was my desire to represent the people. I thought that was the clear direction of the House. It will be a sad day, in my view, if this House was to be party-controlled. It will have lost what it was set up to do, that is to independently review and consider proposed legislation. In other words, providing a parliamentary check on the government of the day. I have made this statement on numerous occasions and I make it here again today that should the House become party-controlled, its existence should be reconsidered, as the only task it would perform, in my opinion, would be as a rubber stamp for the Government. That is not what this House is intended to do, in my view. I will pursue this issue in whatever way is available to me during my term of office.

Education. I was careful to say that most middle-aged and senior people had a fair understanding of government, the Houses and, more particularly, the role of the upper House. In the under-age group, the Legislative Council did not register with many of the eligible voting

youth. I know of several youths who have approached me since that election, saying that the only reason they voted and voted for me was the fact that they were always facing a black and white sign, and that they were interested in that catchy little jingle that I had. They voted for no other reason than those two matters. While I am aware that government is a part of the curricula for schools, I cannot be satisfied that it touches all students, or indeed is presented in a way that effectively covers the position of this House. Having said that, I must say that I have not properly researched the educative process, and I will continue to do research on this matter in the very near future.

The Budget. I previously referred to a number of areas of immense interest to me and of concern to my constituents. I am pleased to be able to say that the Budget, as handed down on Thursday last, touches on most of those areas that I have referred to in some way and/or another. While the financial assistance provided in these areas is welcomed, I now wait with bated breath to see how much of that money and all those benefits will be received by the people living in the Windermere electorate. As I previously said, this electorate does have a high percentage of Housing Tasmania tenants, and has the largest percentage of unemployed in any northern electorate, and probably similar to other southern electorates in the State.

Health receives an extra \$49.5 million recurrent funding. I can only hope that a fair share of the extra slice of the pie is fed out to the northern part of the State, and in such a way that there is a direct benefit for those people who are in that long queue waiting for urgent medical assistance. During the campaign, I had a lady come to me with a walking stick, saying that she had to undergo a hip replacement. She said that she had been on the list for a number of years for that hip replacement. She said that she had been recently told that once she was unable to walk she would be then placed on the high priority list for the operation to occur. I would like to think that this extra funding will help in some way in reducing the queue. I do congratulate the Government on the extra funding as it is an area of significant concern to my electorate, and they are clearly not unique in that regard.

Housing. The provision of the extra \$8 million funding for housing is welcomed and I am optimistic that these funds will be expended on providing low-rental housing to those in most need. I would urge the Government to ensure that the proper assessments are done to ensure that the low-cost housing is procured and established in the areas of greatest need. I would suggest very clearly that some of those areas of greatest need are some of those areas serviced within Windermere.

The concessions offered to Tasmanians on low incomes for electricity will very clearly assist a lot of those people. Senior people and pensioners - I am not so sure that our ageing population fared well from this Budget. The electricity concessions should impact on those responsible for running their own houses, though a lot more, in my view, needs to be done for those people who are solely dependent on the pension.

Youth. This is an area for which I have a passion. I was particularly pleased to see that the Government has provided funding for the Ashley Youth Detention Centre. The benefits should be felt within my electorate as in the year 2001-02 about 70 per cent of the detainees at Ashley were from the northern part of the State and that was from the Launceston north-eastern part of the State. Concern has been expressed in a number of circles, and was by me in my previous position as Commander of Police, in relation to the support given youth on their release from Ashley. The necessary support was not there and I would hope that the appropriate department does address this aspect as a matter of some urgency. A way to turn young people away from crime is to also ensure that those people being released are released into meaningful programs and with financial support. The police service with the appointment of youth intervention officers is playing their part in providing at-risk children with direction and an opportunity to move outside the environment that unfortunately does align them with a life of crime in many instances.

The police service. I was pleased to see the extra funding to police and particularly in support of a CrimTrac program and that is certainly welcomed and it will be welcomed by the police

service. The members who watched the 60 Minutes program on Sunday night had a further insight into paedophilic activity. Not only is this activity a major concern to this State and to the country, it is a major concern to the world. Paedophilic activity is a major part of the CrimTrac program.

Mr President, in conclusion I would like it recorded that I will continue to work closely with the community and in particular youth within the electorate of Windermere and I thank the people of Windermere for the confidence that they have demonstrated in me in this recent election.

Members - Hear, hear.