



Luke Edmunds MLC

Legislative Council

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Electorate: Pembroke

[12.03 p.m.]

Mr EDMUNDS (Pembroke)(Inaugural) - Mr President, I extend my thanks to the member for Rumney for your efforts to accommodate the flow of guests coming in today. I did not think after my few weeks of silence in this Chamber that the challenge we would face is not having enough people to talk, or not being able to talk for long enough.

I guess delays is a good place to start. This speech was scheduled for other weeks this Chamber was sitting. I had a few challenges with availability of family members. Having grown up in the north of the state, those became insurmountable unless you wanted to wait until next April.

So we have bitten the bullet. I might touch on some of the reasons why some of them are not here later in the address. There was my hospitalisation, about which the member for Elwick joked that I did not have the stomach for the Legislative Council when I had to have my appendix removed about 4 a.m. or 4.30 a.m. after our condensed sitting week before Hobart Show day. I place on the record my thanks to the incredible staff at the Royal Hobart Hospital for how quickly they dealt with that. Anna and the kids dropped me off about 4.30 a.m. and my appendix was in a bag headed for - wherever that stuff goes, by about 10.30 a.m. I knew that was quite serious when the nurse approached me and said, 'You are not going to die'. I said 'I didn't realise dying was on the table here'. I digress. We made it, though.

I thank all members, particularly the members for Elwick, Rumney and Derwent for their patience and especially the members on the Floor for having to carry our party's issue through. I appreciated that, and getting the chance to listen and learn. Also, thanks to the Legislative Council and parliamentary staff for their guidance in the first few months here. I promise I will keep listening as much as I have tried to these last few months.

The first speech is obviously a chance to introduce ourselves to the parliament. So, hello, I am Luke, I am 40, I live on the eastern shore in Bellerive with my wife, Anna, and our children Olive, Eli and Thomas who are here with us today.

Before I get rolling, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today and pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I acknowledge the passing of the Queen and the inauguration of the King, who we are still figuring out if I was the first politician to take the affirmation to. I also acknowledge the passing of the former member for Huon, Paul Harriss and place on record my condolences to the current member for Huon, Dean Harriss and his family.

I acknowledge the previous member for Pembroke, Jo Siejka for her efforts on behalf of the community in which I live, and the party we both represent, in two barnstorming wins within the space of 18 months. Thank you, Jo, for endorsing me to take your place and for all your efforts in the community as the member. I also place on record Vanessa Goodwin, who was as equally beloved in this Chamber as she was in the electorate, ahead of her health struggles and passing in 2017.

Mr President, that is a lot of life and death for the first few moments of the speech, but unfortunately, strap in.

On the night of my election, I dedicated that to two people who I know had had big years, Karelle Logan who works in the Leader's office and my good friend and former work colleagues, Michael Stedman and Zoe Yates who had both had tough years but had fought through it. I leant on the attitude with which they have faced their challenges. It is not fair to compare that to an election, but it is worth putting that on record.

There is no doubt anyone who was there at Labor House that night knows that I had a bit of a moment. I do not know whether it was the build-up to election night, the emotions of getting the results from the worst booth first, the lack of appetite all afternoon - all I ate that day were two democracy sausages; and /or the Mercury cider that was the only cold drink I was able to deliver to Labor House as we arrived. Everything else did go in the fridge; so I went the Mercury cider route that night on an empty stomach. Whatever it was, it had hold of me, and it was like my life flashed before my eyes. It was like the montage in the Rocky movies, before the last round. I am not saying I was going out to fight; but I am talking about cinematically - those moments where every pivotal moment is in the build-up; Mr Stallone does the montages so well.

That is what it felt like. I remembered my childhood. I remembered Dad bouncing out of his armchair during the 1993 election, with 'I like him' when Paul Keating walked out of the radio studio and he saw the press pack were there. Somebody played *Stayin' Alive* by the Bee Gees, so Keating went back and then brought the strut out. That was Dad, and I wondered, 'Why does Dad like this bloke so much?' That probably lit the fuse in me that has led me here today to be the Labor member for Pembroke.

I remembered my childhood with my brother and sister, Scott and Christy in Campbell Town; in Mowbray; and living at Windermere. The Atari; the endless backyard cricket; walking home from school; catching the bus to and from school. I remembered the toughness of my Nan, Elaine - or Polly, as we could not call her to her face - on Dad's side. The most no-nonsense person I have known, who still had the kindest heart; and my Pop, Bill, who died when I was quite small, but had the ultimate reputation to be able to withstand the biggest punches in the stomach from the tougher cousins, and still laugh away.

I thought about my Nanna, Gwen, who was here when I signed the affirmation, and is one of my biggest supporters. A woman who turns 94 on 5 December, but despite government red tape, still works as an accountant to this day. She is a remarkable, unheralded person. As far back as the early 1990s - possibly the early signs of my pro-

worker, pro-fairness roots - I would grab Nanna's diary and scrub out days for her to take a day off. She took most of them, I think. However, I remember her coming to me with a heavy heart and a guilty look to tell me she had to cancel my day off, from time to time. In hindsight, it was probably the only leverage I would ever knowingly hold over her. The highlight for me was the summer of 2001-02, when I lived with Nanna in Newnham. There were plenty of chats about politics and history doing the washing up, and she definitely turned a blind eye to how late I would occasionally get home. She is a lifelong Liberal voter, but I have been able to bring her over as a supporter to good Labor candidates, when the circumstances allow.

I thought about everyone I love, my own family, my in-laws, my Aunty Sue, and Pete, my dad's partner Ann, and my friends who have come and gone in the last 40 years. I even thought of the family pets that we had growing up; anything that would get you emotional. Most of all, I thought about my Mum. Her death in 1999, when I was in Grade 12, is probably something I have never fully come to grips with. Her last words to me were to live life to the fullest and not to take things too seriously. Some people I know might argue I have taken these words too literally at times.

I did an eight sentence Facebook post when I was declared the winner in Pembroke, and signed off that Mum was most in my thoughts, and had never left me. A friend from local government, who lost their own mother, sent me a text afterwards which in part said:

It's never the tough times that I miss mum but it can hit me like a ton of bricks when something great happens and she isn't around to be a part of it.

Honestly, I cannot put it any better than that.

Thank you to those people who were there that night, or in spirit, refreshing the TEC website, or on the phone - like my Dad and Labor Leader, Rebecca White, who were able to decipher me at my most emotional, on an empty stomach with some - by that stage, room temperature - Mercury ciders.

It was good later that evening to run into the Liberal candidate, Greg Brown, and have a chat. We had quite a good relationship from our first meeting on the campaign trail. I also place on record my congratulations to the other candidates who had a go and kept it focused on the issues. It is no small thing to put your hand up for election.

Mr President, during the campaign, I and the dedicated rotation of volunteers doorknocked thousands of homes in Pembroke. We had hundreds of conversations about health, transport, schools, jobs, climate change. However, there was one issue consistently at the top of everyone's mind: the skyrocketing cost of living.

Very early in the campaign, one person said to me that we should be paying Tasmanian prices for Tasmanian power. They were right; taxpayers have invested heavily in our energy utilities over generations, precisely so that they can work in the best interests of all Tasmanians. I could not explain why people living in Warrane, Mornington or Lindisfarne, should have to cop a 12 per cent increase to electricity bills when we generate enough power here to be fully self-sufficient.

We spent a weekend in Geilston Bay hearing about how people are paying almost 20 percent more to rent than they were just 12 months earlier. That is an extra \$4680 on a medium rental and official data.

As a Clarence councillor, I was the first in the state to speak out about the bin tax. It has put rates up for local people on the eastern shore and will not make a real difference to tackling our waste and recycling problems.

There have also been increases to grocery, increases to water bills. The wages are not keeping pace. While inflation is skyrocketing, our public servants, nurses, teachers, firefighters et cetera, are seeing their real pay go backwards while facing tougher conditions.

The fact of the matter is that only the Government has the power to lighten the load on Tasmanian families. However, rather than come in here and chuck around rocks, I am proposing a way forward.

During the campaign, I committed to seek support for the Legislative Council inquiring into power prices, but today I am flagging I will seek support for a full-blown cost of living inquiry to see what we, the parliament, and the Government, can do to take pressure off Tasmanians, their families, workplaces and community organisation.

We won our election with a two-party preferred rate of 63.33 per cent. The word 'mandate' is overused in politics, but it is obvious Tasmanians want us to be working on solutions to the cost of living crisis. With the hopefully unanimous support of this Chamber, we can interrogate the issues and get to the bottom of all questions people are asking about CPI and cost of living.

Mr President, despite what some people might think, I have actually enjoyed being effectively gagged ahead of this speech. You can learn a lot more about people and places by listening. Around this room are representatives of many places I have lived and/or worked in. At least seven of them.

For example, when I first spoke to the member for Windermere, it was 1997 when I left the Brooks High School camcorder on a Duigan Coaches bus in Grade 10. Thank you again for returning that. I am not sure what the bursar was going to do to me if it did not come back, they were very precious items in 1997.

In this Council we have a number of graduates from local government, and we have a number from the media, and journalism. So, I ask you, who better to take the Pembroke vacancy than a journalist from local government?

I started at *The Examiner* as a cadet in 2003, fresh out of university starting in a now extinct or at least heavily endangered role as a subeditor. To begin with, I did the socials pages, the crosswords pages and the racing pages.

Occasionally, if the wire services were dragging their feet, I would do my own horse racing tips, or rewrite the star signs if I did not like the attitude towards Sagittarius. They cannot sack me now.

Not long after this, I was looking after the race guide lift-out, the cars lift-out, and X-Static, the music lift-out. It is no shock that one of the grizzled old subs called me Lift-out Luke.

My most famous error occurred in this time when I incorrectly transcribed '042 X-STATIC' text line for a competition that required readers to text in their name, address and expletive-filled title of a Machine Gun Fellatio album or DVD to win a prize. The problem was the number I had put down was a Western Australian truckie who, because of the time difference, started getting barraged with swears text messages from about 4.30 a.m. from our loyal readership.

Since this moment, I have been a big one for checklists, to check and double-check for errors. Despite copping it for them, 'Don't forget to hit send,' I have never had this sort of cock-up since.

After *The Examiner* it was back to Hobart for some post grad, and I can remember one grumpy old photographer wrote in my going-away card, 'Good luck learning at uni what you couldn't learn here'. Thanks mate.

Before what some might call the opportunity of a lifetime, or political career suicide, I went to work as a subeditor at the infamous *Zoo Weekly* magazine, in Sydney. It was a whirlwind 12 months, and when I arrived the magazine industry was flying high. I still remember the work lunch a week into my time there, where the editor signed off on a \$4000 bill, only to put the card back over the bar. I was in awe. This was big money to a 25-year-old from Tasmania.

Zoo Weekly was a creature of its era. Would I work there now? I do not think I would. For one it is not being published anymore, but I also challenge anyone who gets too high and mighty on these things, to pay the bills and build a CV. If I had not gone to *Zoo Weekly*, I would never have had my next job, nor would I have the experience of working, in fact, the most professional production environment of my career.

The next stop was the *Mercury*, a brilliant workplace where I did two proper tours of duty and worked as a freelancer, which is a fancy word for casual or unemployed, until my election.

It was probably here in mid-2008 when I realised subeditors were in strife as 10 - mostly subs - were made redundant. There have been waves of redundancies since then and at other publications which have put pressure on a dwindling number of over-performers.

I also did a tour of duty at *The Advocate* where I was lucky enough to be sports editor. I loved my time there in a young workplace, shepherding through the newbies and imparting old war stories from other newsrooms, like I am probably overdoing now.

Speaking of talking a lot - local government. I was on the Clarence Council from 2018 to 2022. There are no conventions about not speaking there until you make your

first speech. I remember being chirped at for 'saying more in the *Mercury*' than I did in the Chamber when I first started.

The lack of a time limit on speeches in this place brings into perspective the 5-minute yawners some of my former Clarence Council colleagues would deliver.

I ran for Clarence because I wanted it to be relevant and in touch with its residents. Along the way I delivered on this with the campaign to try to save the Rosny Golf Course, introducing an inclusive play policy for playgrounds - which I believe needs to be turbocharged and implemented statewide - fighting for secretive property matters to be considered in open meetings, being the first elected representative to highlight and oppose the bin tax and working with dog owners to deliver a fairer dog policy.

I am a champion for local government and what it can deliver for local communities. I will miss it and I will miss seeing my former colleagues on a weekly basis, but I have some nice ones now.

Among many other lessons, local government taught me that politics is ultimately a numbers game and you get a lot further working with people but also that sometimes when you lose, you win, and to never interrupt your opponent when they are making a mistake.

There will always be critics of people in local government who run for state or federal parliament but let us face it, there will always be critics full stop.

Have any of these critics ever interviewed for a promotion or for another job or done a preseason in sport in a higher league? I am almost misquoting here but I remember Dad always said, 'Don't knock ambition and don't knock success'.

Speaking of Dad, before he was an Australian over-70s cricketer doing Silver Ashes tours of England - they actually have a national tournament in Tasmania this week and that is why he is not here - he was a teacher and a school principal. That meant we moved around a bit growing up. I am a product of Campbell Town District High School, Mowbray Primary School, Brooks High School, Newstead College, Jane Franklin Hall and the University of Tasmania.

I know from my time at those schools, Mowbray and Brooks in particular, kids have no less capacity than those at other schools but might not be quite as aware of the fact that they do not.

I have seen some absolute spuds with private school education when I was at uni and I have a lot of friends who probably did not go past grade 10 who I could not argue have not reached their potential.

The list of people I should thank is long enough for me to rival some of the records set for speeches in this Chamber and I know everyone wants me wrapped up before lunch. I thank my campaign teams - some of whom are here today - Stuart, Celeste, Kate, Stephen, Tom, Sam, Marcus, Martyn. I thank the grassroots volunteer doorknockers - Simon, Heidi, Heidi, Jimmy, Morris, Tahnee, Bish, Ash, Simon, Jakob, Lachie, Mark, Heather, Julie, Ben, Ollie, Michelle, Sam, John, Luke, Jordan, Isaac,

Toby, Anne, Claire, Kev and Rach, and all the other people who gave up their own time to help me.

I thank the people who hosted my head in their front yards - especially those people who had never done so before or who usually had blue or green signs in previous elections. Thank you for hosting my mug in your yard for more than a month despite the risk of you going down a notch in your neighbours' books, which is actually true.

I thank former members of parliament - Michael Aird, Lara Giddings, Alison Standen, Bryan Green, Paul Lennon and others for their support, campaign advice and encouragement. I particularly thank former state MP and senator Terry Aulich. Terry is well into his 70s. I remember when I was sidelined with illness, he asked, 'Where are we going today?', and I said, 'I'm not going to be able to make it'. He asked, 'Where are we going?' and I told him we were in Howrah. He just went on his own. He had a few fliers and was just out grinding away. That is so impressive and the people I respect most and the MPs I respect most in our party are the ones who stick around and help out. It is amazing how Terry is still so willing to stick his shoulders to the wheel. As all members would know, there are some lonely times on the campaign trail where you probably think you are slogging away on your own and then it is Tuesday morning and there is Terry, flying along talking about the Swans. I thank Terry, the federal Parliamentary Labor Party (FPLP), Julie Collins, Catryna Bilyk, Helen Polley and their teams. Also particularly, Senator Carol Brown, who has been a supporter of mine for about a decade.

I have had a few tours of duty working with Carol and I admire Carol's application. It does not always grab headlines, but there are a lot of people she has helped who you would know about, and her passion around disability services, for example. I thank the state Parliamentary Labor Party (SPLP). We have Ella here today, hello; and I particularly thank Rebecca White for her unwavering support of me and my candidacy; and also, Pembroke's Labor Party member downstairs, Dean Winter, for his help and support.

Labor House, Stuart, thank you for all your support, I admire you so much for your dedication to getting Labor people into positions like this and for your work to support me as a candidate. It is a thankless job, as a state secretary. Well, I am thanking you now, but I see what you do and I appreciate what you do. Jane, even more, I recognise the amount of work that you put in, in and out of working hours, for the party. You are beloved by the entire membership base, but it is probably not put on record enough, so thank you.

I thank the unions in Tasmania for their support, particularly the United Workers Union and the Australian Workers Union, I also place on record my thanks to my in-laws, the McKenzie-O'Rourke family, especially Anna's parents, Philip and Marian, and Auntie Aileen, who joins us today, for their emotional and wide-ranging support of me and our family during the campaign.

Of course, I thank my family. Anna, if anyone has deserved a spell, it is you. It has been a hectic few days, even a hectic morning, actually. I was tracking Anna as she came in, you know how you can share location data. I was refreshing it because everyone is obviously filibustering their best to get to them in and it was like an OJ

Simpson chase - she is going past Government House, past Murray Street, she is at the gate, she is downstairs.

Anyway, thank you. Yes, it has been a hectic few days, few weeks, few months, few years. You are the most dedicated parent to these three, you are a passionate educator, brilliant wife and undervalued campaign and comms strategist and average chauffeur. I have not been able to drive for four weeks since my operation, so poor old Anna has been driving me around as well, and I am a terrible passenger actually.

You are stronger than you know, you are the most determined person I have known. I love you so much. Anna and I welcomed Olive in late 2014. Olive is 8 next month and she is very excited about it. We are so proud of you, Olive, and the young person you are becoming. Next up, in late 2016 was the big news that we were told that we were expecting identical twins, well not we actually, it was just Anna. I was too busy with GBEs to attend that appointment, which we joke about now. It has given me a new perspective on work and life, missing that appointment, and 28 weeks in, it was time for Eli and Thomas to arrive. Those two little men in this room, who are five and a half, tipped the scales at 1.1 kilograms and 913 or 917 grams each. Eli held the title for the smallest person in Tasmania for some time. I am so proud of our boys and us as a family for getting to where we are now.

I could not let this platform pass by without making some comments on early intervention and child disability services in this state. Our family spent five-and-a-half years navigating what I guess passes in this state for early intervention services. If we were to sit back and take what we were given by doctors, services and the like, I shudder to think about where we would be now. Our son, Thomas, has a disability. He has a cerebral palsy diagnosis. We, and more specifically, Anna, have had to scarp for every leg-up that we can get for Thomas.

Unable to get real help from overburdened or stuck-in-their-ways services in Tasmania, we have turned to people on the mainland and overseas to complement local services and get our boy the help he deserves. We have met other families like ours who have cut and run from the state entirely and exclusively utilise services on the mainland, which you can imagine, would have been a lot of fun over the COVID-19 lockdown years.

I do not come in here to proclaim to have all the answers, nor to criticise those doing their best in this space. However, I do say that now that I am a member of this parliament, that at every step from diagnosis the system lacks the will and probably the resources to help our youngest Tasmanians. There seems to be a 'set and forget' attitude and a one-size-fits-all model with the state's most complex young people. I am afraid ignorance is no longer an excuse. We have an Australian of the Year in a wheelchair whose words I cannot top. If anyone is unaware of them, they should listen to what Dylan Alcott said in his acceptance speech.

How can it be acceptable that when young children go to the playground, the equipment provided to their parents, and/or the equipment at the playground or park means that that child stays with the parents while the other kids make friends? What are the knock-on messages to those other small people about people with a disability? How is a child at one of our schools supposed to make friends at recess in the

playground when their support teacher takes them for a walk around the oval to keep them occupied? Attitudes have to change. The NDIS has opened up a huge opportunity for Tasmanians with a disability. There is so far to go in Tasmania as we have largely a sector that is living in a pre-NDIS world. NDIS is about empowering families and people with a disability, but my experience is that the empowerment and control is probably still being held by the old guard.

We are lucky in this Chamber to have a Minister for Disability Services, in the member for Rosevears, Ms Palmer, and shadow minister next to me in my seat, Ms Lovell and before her, Ms Siejka. I also listened intently, I think it was my first day, when the inquiry into disability services was debated. With a new federal minister for the NDIS, indeed the architect of the scheme, Bill Shorten, we can make significant inroads on behalf of those relying on us to do it.

After I was elected, Rebecca sent me an email that most new members have, a few pointers about your first speech. One of the things was, why did you join the Labor Party? I have given some insight but my friend, Tom, and I just walked into Labor House in 2006 to join. On and off since then I have been a branch member and a staffer. I believe in what we are doing and what we stand for. I still think the Labor Party's best days are ahead of it and the nonsense and nuisance of the past few years are where they ought to be, firmly in the rear-view mirror. My campaign showed that when we pull together and pull people from across the party, we can achieve anything. However, we need everyone in our movement on board the Labor bus for a tilt at the next state election. If you are not going to pull in that direction, you can hop off the bus. We are members of the Labor Party to try to win Labor government. I am not sure why else you would be a member.

Hopefully from my words today, you have some insights into what makes me tick and why I wanted to join this Chamber and represent my community. I am a product of public education, and as within the last month, I have relied on public health. So does my family. We need a parliament that is looking out for the state's best interests and delivering key services for all Tasmanians, especially our most vulnerable.

Politically, the vast majority of Tasmanians are in the middle, probably 80 to 90 per cent of us are not logged in to the hard left or hard right, so to speak. The reasonable ones mostly agree on so much and most people want governments of all levels to function and make their lives and the state better.

I am passionate about this state, I am passionate about the eastern shore and I want all of us to have relevant and in-touch representatives who work on solutions that benefit all of us. I am here to be constructive and build relationships, I am here to listen and come up with solutions.

Mr President, colleagues, friends and family in the Chamber and watching online, thank you for your patience both today and in the build-up to this speech and your attention today and for letting me introduce myself to you.

Members - Hear, hear.