

Inaugural Speech – Adriana Taylor MLC



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Legislative Council

Date: 23 June 2010

Electorate: Elwick

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 1) 2010 (No. 16) CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL (No. 2) 2010 (No. 17) Noting of Budget Papers

Mrs TAYLOR (Elwick - Inaugural) - Thank you, Madam President. It is with some delight and a fair degree of trepidation that I rise to speak. Thank you, honourable members, for your warm welcome and for your very kind and encouraging words upon my election. I admire the work and I believe in the independence of this House and its importance to the Tasmanian people. A House of review like ours has the capacity to add value to our parliamentary system by speaking wisely and by working in cooperation with the Government of the day and I hope to contribute to that.

Earlier today I was walking in the gardens at the front of this building under the majestic trees thinking about the history of this place and in particular of what it means to me and to the people of Tasmania for me to be here today. The gum trees have been there a long time, the European trees much less time but they blend harmoniously as we do when we choose to walk together valuing each other and making it our business to treat each other well and to desire to build the nation together. So I would like to begin by acknowledging the Mouheneener people, the original owners and custodians of this land on which we meet and pay my respects to their customs and their elders past and present.

I was fortunate enough to be in Walgett as a young university student working at the hospital when Charlie Perkins, then a young Aboriginal activist, brought his freedom ride to town. I saw at first hand the terrible dilemma when two cultures clash. There were then 3 000 white people living in the town and 1 000 Aboriginal people who lived mostly on the riverbank. The local shire council had no way of resolving the genuine desire of the townspeople to have a clean swimming pool for their children with the right of the indigenous children to also be able to use the pool despite their very different understanding of hygiene. Both were right, it was an impossible situation and we really have not made very great strides since then. The first people of our nation still have higher rates of disease and incarceration, still have lower levels of education and employment and still die, on average, 12 years younger than their white and even our recently arrived counterparts. They still suffer and die from preventable diseases like glaucoma, diabetes and alcoholism, diseases which white civilisation brought to them.

I have been blessed by friends like Auntie Ida West whose strength and generosity of spirit and willingness to share this land, and to forgive the past, drives me to recognise the harm we have done to the first people of this land and to strive to do better. In the last 200 years Tasmania's early settlers were the forerunners of most of us who are migrants or the children of migrants. My only family comes from the Netherlands. When we arrived we knew who we were, we were new Australians. We came because we wanted to make our home in our new country and we were grateful for the privileges and rights and prepared to accept the responsibilities of being Australian citizens. We considered ourselves fortunate. There was then no ESL in schools nor much, I recall, in services for migrants but there were jobs for my father and my older siblings and good educational opportunities for me.

I remember the evening of our arrival by ship very well. We sailed into Port Phillip Bay late on a summer's evening. I vividly remember the lights twinkling on the hillsides around Melbourne. For a child coming from the flat lands of Holland it looked like fairyland. The Australian summer, which my mother found taxing, I found delightful. The gum trees, the noise of the cicadas around Bonegilla Camp were all new and striking. Dad soon found work in Sydney and we moved to Villawood, now the detention centre. By July I was settled in school at Sacred Heart Cabramatta along with many other migrant children like Rose Attard from Malta and Stephanie Zuk, a white Russian, as well as children like Marilyn Percival, my soon very best friend from a proper Australian family.

I do not recall learning to speak English but I received a book for being third in my class in November grade 4 of that year. Children adapt and adjust very quickly. It is not so easy for adult new arrivals. They find it hard to get jobs because of their accents, their strange foods and their cultural habits. As it was for my generation

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and the waves of post-war European migrants so it has been for succeeding waves of Vietnamese, Hmongs, Asians, Africans and others.

Each has enriched us as a nation. We understand better now the services that help our new arrivals to settle and become productive members of our society. We provide health, language and training services and we encourage them to adopt our Australian identity, values and traditions as well as treasuring and sharing their culture that they bring with them.

My father applied for citizenship as soon as he could and I grew up believing that I was an Australian, indeed I have a certificate to prove it. It was not until I retraced my roots and visited my country of birth many years later that I realised that there had been great losses for me as well as gains.

I found again then my extended family of which it seemed I had always remained a part. We were just the branch that had gone to live in Australia. But I fitted into a crowd of look-alike cousins as though I had just been away for a long holiday. Indeed, I could not believe how comfortable it was to be in a cultural group that I understood and within which I fitted. This story of mine is not unique. I remember soon after my own first visit hearing fashion designer Carla Zampatti echoing those exact sentiments. The sudden realisation that although we felt as though we had fully adopted the Australian culture there was another part of us, which was just a little odd.

I was astounded to find how Dutch I was, and indeed I probably still am. The characteristics of determination, stubbornness, hard work ethic, willingness to learn, listen and debate all come from there.

How fortunate we are as a nation in having so much cultural diversity as we now know it to be. How foolish we would be not to let ourselves benefit from that. Today's arrivals whether they be through the same kind of migration as mine, or whether they are refugees seeking as we did a new homeland, have exactly the same aspirations as mine did to provide a safe secure, healthy future for their children.

Their children will fit into our society if we let them. They will work hard for their own family's prosperity and for the prosperity of our nation in exactly the same way. We now have people who arrived 20 years ago as boat people providing the next generation of professional and trades people just as my generation did before them. Indeed, in the same way as even the first generation of arrivals in the early 1800s did with all their diversity of culture, religion and education.

I will work not just for a safe and prosperous and healthy future for the first Australians but for those who come today and tomorrow. It is both an injustice and a stupidity to vilify as illegal, as somehow a threat to our prosperity and wellbeing, to treat those who arrive at our shores today as unwanted. Let us offer them the same opportunities that Australia offered us and reap the same rewards as a nation by doing so.

I have been a very fortunate person, blessed with role models like Nell Williams and Auntie Ida West from whom I have learnt courage, endurance, balance and perspective. I have learnt to love the peace and strength of the Dalai Lama, Nelson Mandela, St Francis of Assisi, the Mahatma and Martin Luther King.

My upbringing was in a Catholic Christian family and there I learnt the Gospel values of honesty, truth, sharing resources, faithfulness and caring for others. As a result I have strong social justice values and in this place hope to contribute to making a fairer and more connected society where basic human rights to food, shelter, education, health services and employment are available to all.

I would like to comment on the establishment of the Integrity Commission and commend the Government for funding it in this year's and future budgets. This commission has the capacity to have an educative not just a punitive role. Most of the parliamentarians I know are dedicated, hardworking, unselfish people. The fact that expediency or party politics or impatience has in the recent past led to poor process and poor decision-making has damaged that reputation. I find that a matter of great regret. The establishment of the commission will, I hope, assist in helping politicians and senior public servants to be true to what they say and promise and follow due process. There are of course local issues in my electorate that are important. I have a professional background in education which gives me a strong interest in giving all our children the best chance possible to achieve their potential. My own education in New South Wales was at good schools and universities but always as a scholarship student. I have taught in country schools, in schools in low socio-economic areas, and in good private schools as well as in industry.

I have seen at first hand what opportunities become available with a good education and how opportunities are limited by low literacy, in particular. I believe firmly in educational and training opportunities being available to all, not just to the well-off. We, as a State, need to provide greater equality to students with disadvantages, whether that is from economic, social or distance circumstances. It should always be our aim to provide the best facilities in areas of greatest need where we can make the most difference. Even if we consider only the economic bottom line to be important, it is obvious how wasteful it is not to use the talents

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and skills potential of all our young people. As Chair of the Claremont College Association I have been critical of the Tasmania Tomorrow reforms. While the aim of increasing post-year 10 retention is admirable and fully supported, the hurried way it was forced through, without real consultation and understanding of the effects it would have on some communities, was deplorable.

The unjust criticism and portrayal of teachers who opposed the changes, as being self-interested, has done a great deal of harm to their morale and to their enthusiasm for their profession. I know from my personal experience that dedication to teaching, and the concern for providing the best educational opportunities for all their students, that the vast majority of teachers have. The recognition by the Government, now, that indeed the system was not as well thought out and set up as it might have been, justifies their concerns. I am encouraged by Minister Lin Thorp's understanding that there needs to be change and her determination to get it right. She has made a great start. I implore her to make sure that she continues to listen to not just the so-called experts but teachers, parents and communities who are all deeply affected by these changes and to test the changes against their criteria before any further implementation. Despite the pressure of time, unless all the stakeholders are taken along, the difficulties will not be resolved.

Local government, as you would expect, is another area of interest for me. Until 10 or 11 years ago I had not the slightest thought of being directly involved in the political process. I was lobbied and persuaded by Tom Dempsey, a friend and a highly respected and long-serving alderman who was retiring from Glenorchy City Council, to stand for his seat. Upon his urging and the strong support of my family I stood, was duly elected and found, to my surprise, that I loved the role. As a long-time volunteer in my community I found I was able to be so much more effective as an elected councillor. I now unashamedly do the same thing, encourage others of good heart and skills to serve as elected members of their communities. I took to the alderman's role with enthusiasm and energy five years ago when it became evident that Glenorchy was going to need a new mayor, after 15 years of dedication by former mayor Terry Martin who led the council to become strongly community focused.

I considered I had something to offer, set myself a fairly ambitious program and have been enormously enjoying the challenges of carrying that out. In that time Glenorchy council has seen the city make big strides culturally, has seen increasing business confidence, a change in demographics and growing community strength. It is wonderful to be privileged to be along for that ride. During that time the council has also suffered a serious financial blow through the effects of water and sewerage reforms, threats to its only inclusive and public senior secondary college and increasing traffic slowdown on its main artery, the Brooker Highway. We had to fight for a share of the new State Health Plan, but fortunately now have a budget allocation of \$21 million as promised for a three-tier medical centre. This facility will provide a large range of health services right in the Glenorchy CBD for the benefit of the entire region, including the Derwent Valley and Southern Midlands.

While I note, as others have, that there is no funding for the refurbishment or rebuilding of the Royal Hobart Hospital, I will again raise the thought with the State Government that if they cannot consider moving the Royal Hobart Hospital out of the Hobart CBD, they might look at building a brand new annexe out of the CBD to serve as a children's hospital, maybe a geriatric hospital. That would take pressure off the Royal Hobart Hospital and at the same time provide an excellent facility fully accessible for families on a greenfield site. I am sure the Glenorchy council will be happy to discuss the possibilities with the Health minister.

We have achieved, through State and Australian Government funding, to secure the infrastructure for an iconic foreshore arts precinct and Glenorchy council continues to develop appropriate sporting and recreational facilities. State Government funding for lights and an electronic scoreboard for King George V Oval will help with that.

We continue to face challenges in addressing the needs of our young people in a challenging socio-economic demographic. At the same time council is being innovative not just in the arts but in water conservation and re-use schemes and in urban renewal projects. It is not afraid of its ageing demographic, nor afraid of its growing multicultural population but embraces both as opportunities for employment and training in service deliveries.

There are challenges facing not just Glenorchy council but local government generally in this State. I was involved only at the edges of the amalgamation debate in the late 1990s but I am well aware that there are some who feel very strongly that it is time for another round. What are they trying to achieve? Is it just that 29 councils sounds like too many? Is it that they see bigger as necessarily better? Is it because the councils are financially unviable or inefficient or too expensive? That is what the debate needs to be about.

If we want to make local government better or stronger or cheaper or more efficient, let us look at it from that viewpoint - how do we achieve that? Not blindly from an emotive and uninformed viewpoint that says without evidence or strategic planning that bigger must be better; that 29 opportunities for local representation must be too much. Let us look at economies of scale or efficiencies or regional co-operation or service delivery that might be achieved without necessarily losing local representation, without losing the 'local' in local government.

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That is why the previous Government made changes to the existing water and sewerage structures but so far, although bigger, no economies of scale, no new capital works that were not already funded and far greater cost to the consumer both now and predicted has been the result. Added to that, the loss of water and sewerage responsibilities has put stress on the viability of some councils, particularly some small rural councils who have lost capability in other professional areas as a direct result.

The legislation is flawed in that it has set up supposedly independent regional corporations owned by councils but controlled by State Government almost as though they were GBEs. Owners have almost no control over boards, prices, works programs or assets. Added to that, a fourth corporation has been set up to provide services to the three water and sewerage entities, owned by councils but controlled by the chief executive officers and the common chairperson of the other three. To whom are these directors responsible and where does their loyalty lie? Are they primarily responsible to the water and sewerage corporations or to the service corporation? There appears to be a direct conflict of interest. I look forward to debating this topic in far more detail in the months to come.

My own council has been challenged by these changes. Has it made Glenorchy unviable? I believe not. Has it made it look at where and how it spends every dollar and how it might achieve the same or better service delivery with less money and more efficiency? You bet. In some ways, despite our railing against the injustice dealt out to our ratepayers, it has been a blessing. We will end up doing more with less, pulling together better as a team because of the challenges, examining what is important and what is not. Council will be more innovative and more daring and more entrepreneurial than if this had not happened and I trust that one day I will be able to say to the Treasurer that I am grateful for the stress he put on Glenorchy. That day is certainly not yet and I aim to work for significant changes to the legislation to give the owners greater control over their businesses so that they too can achieve more with less.

On the issue of public transport, I welcome the funding in this Budget for rail infrastructure, for better bus services and in particular for the honouring of the election promise of funding a feasibility study for the northern suburbs light rail.

In this Parliament at the moment I am almost afraid to say that I am a bike rider but you would expect that from someone born in Holland. As a consequence I am keen to encourage the extension of dedicated cycling corridors but properly separated from other road transport. We will not see large numbers of commuters or children using cycling as a transport means unless they not only are safe but feel safe. I look forward to the extension of the intercity cycleway between Hobart and Glenorchy, eventually to Bridgewater, Brighton and perhaps even to Launceston as a tourism cycling route. This project has so far been funded at various times and in various ways by all levels of government and I see no reason that cannot continue into the future.

I am concerned to see nothing in the Budget for the urgent work needed to make traffic flow better on the Brooker Highway, particularly between Goodwood and Montrose. The funding previously allocated to relieving congestion at the Elwick lights has been taken away. A promised traffic plan for that whole section of highway is still eagerly awaited and I need to emphasise to the Government that the implication of some parts of that plan when it finally arrives is urgent so that Montrose Bay High School will be able to take its full complement of students in 2011.

While on the subject of local Elwick matters, may I take this opportunity to congratulate Michael Hodgman, AM, recently retired from this Parliament, on being recognised in the Queen's birthday honours and I express my delight at the swift action to recognise his work in this way for the community of Tasmania. The electorate of Denison, which he represented for so many years, has much to thank him for. In the legal field, he generously represented many people free of charge, always followed up issues constituents raised with him and he was an all-round good friend to hundreds and hundreds of ordinary people. He is admired and trusted by all sides of the political spectrum and deserves our greatest respect.

I want to also pay tribute to the former member of Elwick, Terry Martin. Until a short time ago I expected him to be where I stand today. I regret sincerely that Terry found himself through other circumstances unable to recontest this seat. He filled this role with distinction in a clever and caring career. Terry's work in helping to establish an integrity commission, his work for local government even while in this House and his committee work to tackle the problem of shortage of public housing, homelessness and youth justice are valuable legacies which I hope continue to be recognised. If anyone filled the Premier's wish for Tasmanians to be kind, clever and connected, it was Terry.

On a broader scale I am at the front edge of the baby boomers. My generation, purely because of our numbers, has shaped our post-war world, which gives us enormous advantages in all sorts of ways. Because our numbers have created a population bubble, kindergartens and schools were built to cope with us, we needed more hospital beds in children's wards and we created the need for better children's medicine. We demanded more schools, university places and more jobs. When we began work, we began to reshape the workplace. We wanted better conditions, equality for women and childcare for our children. We wanted our own homes and we drove housing demand. Just as we drove research in children's health care when we were young, we have now begun to age and we are driving research in organ and joint replacement, into the causes and prevention of dementia and any other diseases that we think are going to prevent us from living

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long, full and satisfying lives. We are determined to live forever and to do it in style. Education for older people, tourism opportunities for grey nomads have exploded and, as we age, everywhere we go has to become accessible. We also have the numbers in elections so any government or political candidate who takes us for granted is foolish and any appeal to the things we believe important is likely to have a good chance of success. Is that good or bad? It certainly does place a responsibility on us not to be purely selfish for our own generation's needs. As just one instance, we do not have sufficient superannuation to provide for our own futures and, as the popular saying goes, we are spending our kids' inheritance. I note the comments made by the honourable members for Murchison and Huon that as a State we are not fully funding our super liabilities. We could make life very difficult for succeeding generations who are in much smaller numbers and are going to have to provide for us for the next 30 or more years. Margaret Lindley has done most interesting and formative research on this at the Tasmanian university and I commend her work to you.

On an even grander scale, the biggest challenge facing our world is that of the effects of climate change and that is a local, national and international challenge. It is also urgent. I want to be part of the solution. Greater awareness has been created in the last few years by such things as Al Gore's movie and we have all become interested in trying to make small changes to our lifestyles to conserve energy and to be less wasteful of all our resources. In the big picture, however, this is only nibbling at the edges of the problem. We still have some scientists and politicians doubting the evidence while our polar caps melt around us. Even if the predictions turn out to be overstated, should we not be erring on the side of caution? I applaud this Government's recognising this issue in the Budget but neither as a State nor as a nation are we yet taking the bold steps needed. Indeed, that responsibility lies largely with all of us as electors. Our politicians, locally and nationally, will only take the steps needed when they are confident we will support them electorally. I am of the firm belief, however, that faced with the choice of a slight lowering of our standard of living or no future for life on our planet and for future generations, Australian mums and dads and grandparents will make the right choices.

I want to thank the electors of Elwick for putting their trust in me, my friends and supporters for their unswerving faith, advice and generosity in working to have me elected, and finally my family and especially my loyal and supportive husband Beres who makes his time and skills generously available to fill the many gaps I find or create. Our sons Patrick and Stephen who, while they have encouraged me every step along the way and I believe hold me in high regard, are nevertheless even more surprised than I am in the direction my life has taken since they became adults.

Being the member for Elwick is a great responsibility as well as an honour that I will do my best to justify. Madam President, I support the motion that the budget papers be noted.

Members - Hear, hear.