



## James Alexander Bacon

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Denison

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**Mr SPEAKER** - The honourable member for Denison, Mr Bacon. Could I remind honourable members that this is the honourable member's first speech and by tradition he should be heard without interruption. The honourable member.

**Members** - Hear, hear.

**Mr BACON** (Denison) - Thank you, Mr Speaker, and I thank the House for that courtesy though I do think that in the current circumstances that it is quite unnecessary, your warning to the House. Others have commented on the appropriateness of a solemn overhang, if you like, to the debate in the current circumstances. I certainly appreciate that and have enjoyed this afternoon listening to all the members from the different parties and the Independent member, Mr Goodluck, speaking about their reaction to this terrible tragedy.

But it is my first speech and so I will take the opportunity very briefly to put a few things on the formal record. The first is that it is of course a great pleasure as well as an honour to be able to speak for the first time as a member of this House. Perhaps the pleasure is a little diminished by what has happened and perhaps the honour in some ways is more onerous than I had anticipated but nevertheless it is a pleasure and an honour and I would like to say that on the first occasion that I speak here.

It is now, or it seems to be, a very long time since the election and certainly it seems to be an even longer time since I and others started campaigning for it. I suppose at the time and when we were campaigning, we all had big ideas about what we wanted to do when we got into parliament, what we wanted to say, the things we wanted to pursue, the issues that we wanted to raise. But we do not always get the opportunity to decide what circumstances we have to work in, we do not get the opportunity to always decide what issues we can raise or what things we have to talk about but instead have to respond to events that have happened.

So I want to start by firstly thanking all the people who are responsible for my now being a member of this House. That of course includes all the people who voted for me, the very many people that I was fortunate to have as supporters in the campaign, many of whom worked extremely hard on my behalf - and I think that it is most important in Hare-Clark campaigning to have individuals speaking on your behalf in the community. And of course most of all and with all of us I would like to place on the record my thanks to my family, my wife Honey, my sons Mark and Scott and Honey's son Shane who without their support I think I am in the same boat as everyone else: if you do not have the support of those who are closest to you then in fact it is impossible to do all the things that standing for parliament and actually being a member of Parliament demands of us.

So having got that out of the way, and also congratulating the others who have been elected here - particularly of course the new members and particularly the new members on our side, to Brenton Best, who is not here today, Lara Giddings and Paula Wriedt, I congratulate them on having won seats. I believe that, far from just being because they are young but far more because of the ability and the commitment they have got, the three of them will make very great contributions in this House and I certainly look forward to working not only with them and my other colleagues in the Labor Party but all members of the House in the future.

As I said, we did have different expectations when we set out to get elected here. I had not expected of course to be talking in these circumstances and I must say that I would much prefer to be able to speak for the first time here in much happier circumstances - I somewhat envy those members who made their first speech prior to this tragedy. Some things were said at the time that perhaps I would have answered but in the current circumstances I think that is not appropriate and instead we have to look at the actual events that have happened, the way the world is now rather than how we would have wished it to be and we do have to talk about things some of which are very painful to talk about. I do greatly admire all those who have spoken this afternoon and particularly the three leaders who spoke at the special sitting last week, who I thought all spoke very well. Certainly I felt that I greatly admired the strength they showed in being able to speak here and publicly about this dreadful thing.

But we do not get any choice in it, the fact is it has happened and we as members of what is after all the community's forum have no choice but to address it. For all the cynicism that there is in the community now, and which perhaps in the past I may have added to quite deliberately on some occasions, I think, not deliberately on others, the fact remains that this forum here is the only forum that the community has for discussing issues which are of common concern, for dealing with crises as they occur and for making decisions for resolving as best we can issues as they arise. This is the only forum the community has so despite the cynicism we do have to take that very seriously.

So whatever we prefer about what we might have been talking about here the fact is we have to address the events that have happened and the events which it seems so many words have been said about and yet we each have to say too what we think about it.

Of course it is a very great tragedy that has occurred. I have never experienced in my life such a level of shock that has gone through the whole community. Other members here this afternoon have spoken of their experiences. I do not want to go into that, I do find it painful. But I think my experience has been as a member of this House - and I think all of us have experienced it - is the very great shock that we all feel and of course we are hearing it in letters, telephone calls, comments from so many people in the community.

It is an unprecedented level of shock and I think in many ways the pain that we are feeling in fact has been magnified by the fact that we know that this one single event has had a bigger audience across the whole world than any event in Tasmania's history - any event. More people now know of Tasmania because of this one single event than ever have known of the existence of Tasmania before. So of course that makes it more painful for us but I agree with others that have said that we do have to look at the positive in this dreadful situation. However dreadful it is, there has been enormously positive things come out of it.

People have spoken this afternoon in the previous debate about the great contribution that was made, the magnificent efforts of all those whose job it was to actually deal with the events on a first hand basis. I know there were others there who were not actually working and of course the comments go for them as well. But as

someone who has spent most of my life representing working people and seeing them deal with all sorts of tragedies, industrial accidents, all sorts of things like that, to see all of those workers - and I include the police, the ambulance workers, the hospital workers, the Port Arthur site workers, all of them - just as part of doing their job having to put up with the most appalling circumstances, the most appalling sights and deeds and things that will stay with them for the rest of their lives. I think that we have seen an enormous positive strength in the community, really a great strength in people to be able to respond as they did. Part of that response is demand for greater restriction on ownership and use of guns and I certainly do not regret having to make my first speech on this matter. As I said, it is the issue of the day and for many days on, I fear, but it is something that the community is saying very clearly to us that we must take action on.

So I support the bill and particularly I support the agreement that has been reached between the three parties which underpins it. I am no expert on guns either. I have far less experience than the member for Denison, who spoke before me, in actually firing weapons. I have got a little bit more experience than some people around the House, from what I have heard, but not very much. I am a city boy. I grew up in the city. I have spent very little time living in the country and I have never seen much point in having a gun if you live in the city. I was given a gun once and I had it for a couple of years sitting in the cupboard. I never actually fired it, and in the end I decided that there really was not much sense in keeping it and particularly when my sons were born I did not think it was appropriate to have a weapon in the house so I got rid of it. But, nevertheless, you do not have to be an expert to know that the community is saying very clearly that a number of steps have to be taken about the gun situation at the moment.

I do congratulate the three leaders and the shadow spokesman and the minister, for reaching an agreement so quickly that I think does address the concerns of the community. It is significant that it has been done in a tripartite way, I think, because it is a matter of such importance and also because we are all getting the same message from the people we deal with in the community, the people who look to us for political leadership whether it is the Labor Party, the Greens, or the Liberal Party. We are all getting the same message from people so it is appropriate that we put that into legislation.

In particular it addresses the question of a national registry and support for that and I think we all hope that the Prime Minister - and I certainly did not expect when I first got elected to the House to be saying this - is successful in his stand on this and gets the support from other States that Tasmania has said it is going to give. It particularly looks at those weapons which are of most concern: the assault rifles and weapons of that sort. It certainly looks at strengthening the genuine reasons that would need to be put forward for owning or using a gun for significantly strengthening those provisions. It looks at the question of secure storage of weapons. It most significantly - I am talking about the agreement here - refers to police powers being strengthened to deal with the inappropriate use of guns in the vicinity of persons and dwelling houses and that the police be given power to confiscate weapons so used, subject to later review by a magistrate. I think that is very important. There are, we have heard in recent days partly as a response to the tragedy but in other respects, people referring back to incidents that they were aware of where weapons have been used in a threatening sense or have actually been fired in greatly inappropriate situations. Of course people would feel more comfortable if they believed the police could easily go and confiscate weapons so inappropriately used.

It also bans anything other than sale of guns between licensed gun dealers. It looks at periodic renewal of gun licences and looks at the question of ammunition. So I think in all of those respects it is addressing the concerns that people have put.

I said it was significant that this has been approached in a multi-partisan way and I believe that is so. I must say I do not agree with the Leader of the Greens, Mrs Milne, when she says that this is a result of the balance of power situation. I think in a way, and I am sure this was not intended, it actually belittles what has happened because to me a tripartite, multi-partisan, whatever we want to call it, is an appropriate response at any time of great crisis for the community. It is simply a time when we have to do the right thing. Similar circumstances may well be, I do not think it is exaggerating to say, such things as a time of war, great natural disaster and so on. In those circumstances no one on our side, none of us, had the slightest hesitation about it because we knew that that was what had to be done and I am sure the feeling was on the other side. So I do not agree it is because of the current situation in the Parliament. I prefer to have the belief that whatever the situation

this Parliament faced with the same events we would all react in the same way, and I am sure that is so.

There are preconditions of course to being able to operate in that sort of fashion. Firstly, there has to be an event which brings people together which makes people look at things in a more cooperative way. But then of course for it to succeed - and I do not want to pour cold water on people's hopes for this attitude continuing, of course we would like to work together into the future, but unless people's input is treated equally, unless people feel that they have a genuine role to play in it and that their words will genuinely be heard, then I do not think there is much hope for that happening. On these issues I am sure that will continue and I hope to be a part of that.

The comments I want to make now will be made in that spirit but I think it is very important that we do not believe that, having addressed gun laws, we have fixed the problem or we have found the solution. There are of course lots of different reasons why these things occur and perhaps we will never know one single answer why it happened, perhaps we will never be able to say, 'This is the explanation for what happened', but of course people will want solutions and they will want explanations to be given. The first response that has come up, if you like, is the question of gun laws but I do not think any of us believe that just making these changes to the gun laws, support them as we do, will not actually alter the situation to an extent where the people will be confident that such a thing could not happen again, and we will feel vastly more secure in the community. I see the public debate has already shifted a bit towards videos, films, television, all this sort of thing, but to me that too is just a symptom of the problem, it is not the actual problem. We can deal with that too and no doubt at some time we will have debate in this House about those questions. But that in itself is not the only thing that we have to look at.

There are a number of issues that in the months ahead we are going to have to deal with arising out of this tragedy. As I said, we start on a multi-partisan basis and I am sure with these issues arising out of that tragedy it will be the wish of us all to continue in that fashion. It may not always be possible because the fact of life is we do have different opinions, different belief systems, we

respond to different people in the community. So I think it would be a forlorn hope that we always agree on the solution to everything arising out of this. It is not likely to happen, I think with all the good will in the world there will be disagreements about it, but the important thing from my point of view is that we come to the debate about issues arising out of this terrible tragedy with the same attitude that we do this time. Then if there is disagreement, if people's input is valued equally, then we can have a proper debate and we can properly consider the views of all of us and come to a solution that is acceptable to the community in the same way that I believe this move on gun laws will be acceptable.

I was drawn to an article in the *Australian* last Saturday by Hugh McKay who looked at this question of looking for a solution to the issues, looking for an explanation, and in fact he says:

'The truth is almost always more complex and less satisfying than our plausible attempts to explain it. We must drive ourselves, force ourselves to confront the fact that the human species is characterised by its capacity to blend the rational and the irrational. Even having addressed gun laws, videos, all these other questions about a culture of violence, there is still the possibility of these dreadful things happening.'

That is not to say that we have got a bad community or that there is something sick with our society or anything like that. It is certainly not to say that people are innately bad or anything else. All it is saying is that there is a capacity for good and evil for all of us, and what we have to do I think is look in all of these different issues at how we can help make - perhaps just a little bit, but a little bit nevertheless - our society much safer.

**Sitting suspended from 6 p.m. to 7.30 p.m.**