



Hon. Jo Siejka MLC

Legislative Council

Date: 22 November 2017

Electorate: Pembroke

Ms SIEJKA (Pembroke - Inaugural) - Mr Deputy President, before I speak to the bill at hand, I take this opportunity to deliver my inaugural speech to the Chamber.

I begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land on which we are gathered today and I pay my respects to their Elders past and present.

I feel honoured to have been elected by my community and it is a privilege to represent the people of Pembroke. I take this responsibility seriously and I will work hard to repay their confidence in me.

Mr Deputy President, I have been overwhelmed by the warm welcome I have received from yourself, the honourable Leader, honourable members and all the staff.

I am very fortunate to have the support of my Labor colleagues, particularly here in the upper House, Craig Farrell, Sarah Lovell and Josh Willie. I have appreciated your advice, assistance and humour as I find my way in this Chamber.

I thank my dedicated and hardworking campaign manager and team, my parents, family and friends for their support and time, as well as the many people who volunteered for me - doorknocking, letterboxing, making calls, putting up signs, even walking my dog and making my meals. I appreciate all that you have contributed towards my being here today and I thank you for your ongoing support.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge my predecessor, Dr Vanessa Goodwin. Dr Goodwin is very well respected, both within this Chamber and in the community, for her integrity, hard work and commitment to representing her constituents. Many of the people of Pembroke that I met during my campaign spoke highly of her and her work. I know that Dr Goodwin left this Chamber in unimaginably sad and difficult circumstances and I send her my very best.

Unlike many who seek to enter politics, I do not come from a political family. I am Tasmanian born and bred and, for the most part, public school educated. My mother, Jan, was a teacher librarian, teaching in many of our public schools, and my father, John, a tradesman. My sister is an aged care worker in Pembroke.

One of my earliest memories, perhaps around the age of three, is being really excited about going with my parents to vote at the local school. When we came out, I cried. I thought we had been about to go on a boat.

Members laughing.

Ms SIEJKA - Voting had not lived up to my expectations.

As a child I was always very determined and possibly a little competitive. Despite being in a car accident at the age of 10, I still insisted on competing in the school athletics carnival the next day. It never occurred to me that there was something that I could not do. If I tried hard enough or thought about it enough, there was always a way to do something. Despite several bouts of illness when I was younger, I was able to manage to continue to achieve, albeit in different ways.

My sister and I were given every opportunity and encouraged to follow our interests. However, I was always aware, through family conversations and through what I observed, that not everyone had the same opportunities that I did, and that some people faced much harder challenges in their lives than others.

The values I was shown during my upbringing have led me to where I am now. Growing up, the values of social justice, respect and humour and the practices of life-long learning, mentoring and supporting others were actively demonstrated by my parents and grandparents. This need to contribute to a fair and equal society led to my decision to be a Labor candidate and to be in this Chamber today.

I have always been a person who is driven to do the best I can do with whatever resources are at hand. This, combined with my belief in social justice, is what led me to work in the community sector. As many of you are aware, I previously worked as the CEO of the Youth Network of Tasmania - YNOT. YNOT is the peak body for the youth sector and young people aged 12 to 25 years in Tasmania. Integral to the work of YNOT is the youth participation structure, the Tasmanian Youth Forum.

This work involved research, policy development and legislative review, advocacy, consultation, and mentoring and community awareness events, such as the international campaign I coordinated through the National Youth Coalition for Housing, Youth Homelessness Matters Day.

I was also involved in several other boards in this area, as well as in the areas of housing and homelessness, education, skills and training, and my further studies in social impact and investment also follow these lines.

Shaping and supporting our children and young Tasmanians is critical to the future of our state. I am proud of having been able to do this work and to be able to work alongside so many wonderful people whilst doing so. Much of the focus of my work history has been to ensure that those who are most vulnerable in our community have access to the resources they need to reach their potential.

This work has involved consulting with young people to enable them to have a say on issues of importance to them and, importantly, to provide them with the opportunity to identify and contribute solutions. During my time at YNOT I consulted with several thousand young people from diverse backgrounds from across Tasmania, and discussed issues from mental health to discrimination, population, education and employment.

Of course, these issues are important to all of us in the community, and this approach of listening, consulting and focusing on issues was what I took to my campaign as a candidate in the election for the seat of Pembroke. During my campaign, I found that the people in my community appreciated the opportunity to meet their candidate, to raise issues of concern to them and to be able to shape policy that makes a difference.

My campaign was a positive one. I focused on the issues that were important to the electorate of Pembroke and not on personality politics. This was appreciated and raised consistently by those who we spoke to. There were many issues raised from the community. Along with many others, Warren and his lovely wife spoke of their concerns about the health system. Many were worried about their ability to access the hospital, the ramping of ambulances and the impact of defunding early intervention and prevention services.

I spoke with many about their concerns for planning decisions occurring within the area, including the Kangaroo Bay development and Rosny Hill, as well as issues on a neighbourhood level. Of greatest concern was a lack of transparency, communication and consultation in regard to planning processes and decision-making. Traffic congestion, the East Derwent Highway, the Mornington roundabout and the bridge were also raised consistently. Many felt they had been raising concerns for years and wanted to contribute to solutions on these matters.

Of course, many Pembroke residents were also concerned about the future of their children, young people and grandchildren. We shared conversations about education, training and employment opportunities and what could be done to improve the outlook for our state.

Access to affordable and adequate housing was an issue raised with me by a number of residents. Having chaired a national peak body for housing and homelessness for the past six years, I know how critical it is to ensure that everyone has access to appropriate housing and support services when they need it most.

Conversely, many elderly residents contacted me regarding a range of issues. I had several long conversations with residents who felt isolated from their community and were interested in many issues from the marriage equality survey, the critical role of neighbourhood houses to euthanasia.

Many residents reached out to me to talk about poker machines and recent advocacy around the removal of these machines from pubs and clubs. As with any feedback received during the campaign, I ensured this was contributed to policy development processes occurring within the party.

Despite this election being referred to as a referendum on TasWater, a state government takeover was not a priority for any Pembroke residents I met. While some had questions about TasWater, the cost of living and prices, water quality and testing, they did not see a takeover as a concern for them.

Mr Deputy President, one thing above all was made absolutely clear: people want to be heard. People want to contribute to decision-making in their community. People want their elected representatives to listen to them and understand their concerns. People want to be included.

It probably helped that I also come from a family that enjoys talking to new people and who love a good story,

as there were plenty of these to be found on the campaign trail. My campaign reinforced how invaluable providing the time to listen and empathise with people really is. It also provided me with many new learnings; taking your dog with you is not always a good idea being just one of these.

Pembroke is a diverse community. It ranges from Tranmere through Warrane and on to Lindisfarne. Currently more than 23 000 people live in Pembroke. I am a proud local resident and enjoy being part of this community. There are many wonderful things about this area such as the people, beaches, parks, local shops, cafes and restaurants. However, I know from meeting people on the campaign trail that many in my community are struggling and facing challenges. There are many who are not able to access affordable housing and who are experiencing lengthy waiting lists for public housing or to have their basic housing needs fixed.

My experiences during the campaign have also demonstrated that despite all the good being done across Tasmania, the number of people who need help is growing. We can do more to support our communities and people who live in them, and we need to act to alleviate vulnerability, not entrench it. We need to focus on how we can help people when things start to get tough and not reactively when it is too late. We need to create strategies and programs that provide for early intervention and prevention across all government areas, be it health, housing, justice and corrections or education. We need to aspire to inspire, we need to strive to build capacity and, above all, we need to represent our communities and foster social inclusion.

My vision for Pembroke is our community is one we can all share in and be proud of - inclusive, healthier, smarter, safer, innovative and creative. Integral to this is the opportunity for people to feel empowered to have a say on issues of importance to them, to be heard and, more importantly, to know this will be acted upon.

I consider myself a pragmatic person and I have a background in advocacy and community service. I am able to make informed decisions based on research and evidence. I am able to consider diverse and opposing viewpoints, and I believe collaboration and consideration are key components of decision-making.

While I believe my work experience, skills and approach to representation align well with this House of review, I know I still have much to learn about how it operates.

I take my role as the member for Pembroke seriously and I will ensure that the trust the community has placed in me is rewarded. I look forward to hearing the debate on the matter before us. My colleague, the member for Rumney, will state Labor's case. I thank the Chamber.

Members - Hear, hear