



Lisa Singh MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Denison

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Ms SINGH (Denison - Inaugural) - I rise to formally second the motion. I would like to start by acknowledging the land on which we stand, that of the Mouheneenner people. I feel blessed that I live in a place that is home to one of the oldest living cultures on the planet. In the spirit of reconciliation I would like to acknowledge the Tasmanian Aboriginal community and apologise for the past injustices committed against them with the confidence and purpose of looking forward to a positive, reconciled future that includes respect and dignity for all.

Mr Speaker, first and foremost I owe my success here today to the many thousands of Denison voters who put their faith in me and gave me their vote on 18 March. I thank all of them.

I would also like to acknowledge in the Reserve my mother and father, my godmother, my stepmother and many other friends, family and supporters and also my brilliant campaign team who I can see up there in the Gallery. I also thank my two sons, Darcy and Jack, who patiently rode along with me on the campaign trail.

Mr Speaker, may I congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker, and I also congratulate all members of this House on their re-election. I look forward to working with all of you and advancing the interests of our wonderful State.

Being one of only two new members, I congratulate my parliamentary colleague and friend, Michelle O'Byrne, on her election to this House as well. I would like to make special note of my fellow Labor members for Denison - David Bartlett and Graeme Sturges. They have both been very supportive and encouraging towards my entering parliament and I am very pleased to be in this House today with them.

I wish to thank my party, the Australian Labor Party. The opportunity to represent Australia's oldest and proudest political party in our community and in the parliament is a great honour and responsibility and it provides me with the chance to publicly identify with the party's proud history as the primary party of reform and social justice.

Mr Speaker, I also want to especially acknowledge two well-known and widely respected identities, both of whom I admire and respect immensely and who provided me with enormous support and assistance during my election campaign.

I want to thank the honourable member for Elwick, Terry Martin MLC, who recognised my passion and commitment to social justice, and gave his time freely to doorknock with me. I have great respect and admiration for the honourable member for Elwick, for his compassion towards people, his sense of humanity and the amazing contribution he has made and continues to make to the wonderful people of the City of Glenorchy.

I also want to acknowledge and thank Adriana Taylor, the new Mayor of Glenorchy for her support and mentoring during my campaign. Having been through her own local government election campaign just five months earlier, she knows that we both share the challenges and achievements of being a candidate. Both Terry and Adriana can be enormously proud of their City of Glenorchy and their own personal contributions to it.

Glenorchy is part of my electorate that I have grown to love. It is a city with a strong economic and industrial heart, but also a proud identity with a rich history and strong social justice focus. Having doorknocked many houses in it, and having met thousands of people in it and listened to their stories, their struggles and their hopes, I firmly believe Glenorchy has a community that still knows how to look after each other. I look forward to working with and representing the community for many years to come.

I also would like to pay tribute to the former Premier Jim Bacon, for whom I hold great admiration. Jim had a vision for Tasmania when Labor took office in 1998, a vision to make life better for all Tasmanians, and that vision has continued through the years of his leadership and now with our current Premier Paul Lennon. The proof of the vision of these premiers of Tasmania is evident and something of which all Tasmanians should be proud - our great tourism industry, renewed business confidence, record jobs growth, progressive social reform and important cultural events such as Ten Days on the Island and the AFL games.

I have a vision too, a vision of opportunity, a vision whereby every Tasmanian, no matter what their circumstances, no matter where they live, no matter what their race, gender or background, is given an opportunity to develop and to shine, a vision whereby we respect, foster and value diversity and where everyone can fairly share in the benefits of economic prosperity and growth. It is diversity that makes our society so interesting and successful. A mix of ideas creates imaginative, broad-ranging outcomes and the diversity that already exists in our community is further enhanced by the many migrants who come to Tasmania determined to make a better life for themselves and their kids and who thus contribute to this rich social fabric.

As the Governor has mentioned today in his address, Tasmania is a very special place and we enjoy a unique lifestyle that is the envy of many of our mainland counterparts. It has been said many times that this is the best place to bring up kids and I agree. We have so much to offer: our beautiful waterfront, idyllic mountains, a pristine environment, the amazing talent in the arts, craft and design and the beautiful timber species that are only found in Tasmania.

Creative energies are today at the fore in Tasmanian communities and I recognise their contribution in my own electorate, which includes many renowned artists. The arts and tourism are important elements of a dynamic economy and the employment opportunities that tourism creates in Tasmania help build a future for our young people.

Today, Tasmania is so much a better place, both socially and economically, than ever before but we know economic prosperity has not been shared amongst all Tasmanians. The divide between those who have and those who have not has widened and issues such as mental health services, affordable housing, child care and education are of great importance in my electorate. I am equally passionate about those issues and will continue that interest as the new member in this House.

We all know that our strong economy leads to more jobs but, as Major Jenny Beagent from the Salvation Army mentioned at the launch this year of the Red Shield Appeal, we cannot have economic development without social justice. Whilst most of us may benefit from our growing economy, there are those who fall through the cracks and need our support. That is why I am very honoured to be a part of this Parliament and of the Lennon Labor Government. Being a member of parliament is something I have long wanted to do because it provides me with the opportunity to assist people to achieve what they want in their lives and to make a real difference. I have reached that point in my life where I am ready to take the next step into formal politics and I very much look forward to the next four years of fulfilling my role as the people's representative in Denison. The work I have done over the years in politics, the community sector, the public sector or in the union movement that has achieved positive changes for people's lives has been most rewarding.

Growing up in the inner city suburbs of Hobart, most of that time across the road from the North Hobart football oval, and going to an all-girls Catholic school I became involved in the

school's St Vincent de Paul Society Group, organising events and volunteering in the Vinnie's Opp Shop in North Hobart that is still there today. That focused me from an early age on the disadvantaged in our society, be they the young, unemployed, homeless or the elderly. From that young age I felt that it was not right that some people missed out on basic services and things that most people took for granted.

I followed that path of interest throughout my university years and completed my honours thesis, focusing on petty crime and street kids in the Hobart CBD. This was at a time when the Hobart City Council was considering closed-circuit TV cameras in the Elizabeth Mall prior to its redevelopment. My study argued the need for both social and physical prevention measures for petty crime.

Working in the union movement, striving for people's rights at work, for job security, for a workplace that is fair and safe and then also as the director of the Working Women's Centre giving women a voice to be heard on issues such as child care, bullying, discrimination, harassment and paid maternity leave all gave me the opportunity to make a positive contribution to help people. We know, as the member for Bass, Michelle O'Byrne, has mentioned here today, how so many of those rights of working people are being eroded as a result of Prime Minister Howard's abysmal industrial relations changes, rights for which working people fought for 150 years. What hope will working families have of buying a home or getting a loan from a bank if they are on contracts that offer little job security and reduce their wages and conditions. I am proud to be part of this Lennon Labor Government that has joined other States in the High Court challenge against the Federal Government on this issue.

Mr Speaker, being involved in a political system must be based on a personal commitment and a sense of purpose. For me, that starts by playing an active role in community life. It is at the community level that we build our social capital, where informal networks develop and community groups empower each other.

Throughout my community life one common thread has been apparent through most things I have done and that is the significance of our human rights. Whether people are black, white, young, old, disabled, female, sick or injured, they all have basic rights and Tasmania has led the way in the area of human rights with some of the best legislation in the nation - our Anti-Discrimination Act 1998. This act allows individuals to seek justice if they have been discriminated against on the grounds of any of the 20 attributes listed in the act - race, gender, marital status and so on. Those attributes cover just about everything, making our State act much more comprehensive than the Federal Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Act.

This is an area I feel very passionate about and want to pursue as a member of parliament in the footsteps of the former Attorney-General who, this February, engaged the Tasmanian Law Reform Institute to investigate suitable options for human rights protection in Tasmania. I want to work with our Attorney-General, other members of parliament and the local community on encouraging discussion about these suitable options that would enshrine and protect the rights of every Tasmanian. In this I draw on my experience as the current president of the United Nations Association, Tasmanian branch, which has remained very active on human rights.

I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge those Tasmanians who work so hard towards equality, those who make up our civil society - the NGOs, volunteer groups, the unsung heroes out of the limelight who care so much about people and put in hours of tireless work to bring humanity into people's lives. As a human rights advocate, I was awarded Hobart Citizen of the Year in 2004 for my work in the Hobart peace movement, especially for highlighting the rights of women and children during wartimes, most notably the Iraq war. Three years on, the death and destruction of war in Iraq continue, a war we should never have entered into and a war not sanctioned by the UN. But I would like to highlight my respect for Australian soldiers, for their courage and strength in that war and past wars, and currently in East Timor. Those who have died had no choice in their deaths and must never be forgotten.

What has amazed me is that there are so many Tasmanians who strongly and openly support peace and want to show their support. In 2003 hundreds of Tasmanians came out to show such support. Similarly, at Anzac Day each year the numbers continue to grow and families continue to come out and show their respect and love for our diggers who have suffered, survived or died in our name.

I am a spiritual person who believes in the positive energy that people can create. I see that in the Tasmanian spirit through times of suffering and need, such as recently with the Beaconsfield mine accident and 10 years ago with Port Arthur.

Mr Speaker, today I wish also to highlight that I am very proud of Tasmanian women's suffrage and I am pleased to be sharing this House today with seven women. Three years ago, on 10 December 2003, Tasmanian women gathered on the steps of Parliament House to celebrate 100 years since women were given the vote in Tasmania. Tasmania was the fourth state in Australia to allow women the vote, but it could have been sooner had the Legislative Council not previously blocked the legislation. It took another 18 years, though, before Tasmanian women were allowed to stand for Parliament. Today I would like to pay tribute to those suffragettes, including the first woman in Australia to be elected to the House of Representatives in Federal Parliament, Dame Enid Lyons, who held the electorate of Darwin in north-west Tasmania and described the way men saw her as a 'risky political experiment'.

Through 10 years of hard campaigning led by the Women's Christian Temperance Union, women began winning equal rights, but gender equality is no longer about women's representation; it is about women's voices being heard and their participation being valued. We have come a long way since women's suffrage in 1903 but we still live in a world where many women do not have freedom or equality, so there is still much to be done.

I am honoured to be, together with my colleague, the member for Bass, Michelle O'Byrne, one of only two new faces in the new Tasmanian Parliament. I am also pleased that the two of us have replaced the outgoing female members, Judy Jackson and Kathryn Hay. I am also particularly proud to be entering this Parliament in the footsteps of the former member for Denison, Judy Jackson. Judy was a true champion for women and others marginalised in our society. As Health minister, she closed Willow Court in recognition that people with an intellectual disability are entitled to the support they need to fully participate in the life of our community and should not be hidden away in institutions. Also, whilst Health minister, Judy introduced the private member's bill that, when passed, guaranteed women in Tasmania the right to access safe abortion services. The passing of that legislation, whilst hugely important to the lives of individual women, was also remarkable for achieving the support of all 10 women in the Parliament at that time - and I acknowledge the role that Sue Napier and Peg Putt played in that.

Judy, as Attorney-General, presided over two other groundbreaking pieces of legislation: the Relationships Act and the Safe at Home legislation. The Safe at Home legislation has ensured that this State is a safer place, particularly for women and children, by marking perpetrators of family violence responsible for their behaviour. On the other hand, with the Relationships Act Judy acknowledged that loving, caring relationships should be recognised, supported and celebrated regardless of the gender or sexuality of those within the relationship. Judy was a tireless reformer who used her time in this place to help build a strong, diverse and compassionate Tasmania and I hope that I can continue to build on her achievements.

There are many other figures who have inspired me deeply on this journey of political life and it would be remiss of me not to mention some of them. In seeking out identity with my own heritage as a woman, I was inspired many years ago by Arundhati Roy, a courageous woman who for years has fought for the struggle of the powerless. Best known for her Booker Prize winning novel, *The God of Small Things*, she was awarded the Sydney Peace Prize 2004, and is an inspiration to women seeking justice anywhere. In her prize lecture, where she argues for peace in Iraq, she states that 'a political struggle that does not have women at the heart of it, above it, below it and within it, is no struggle at all'.

I have been one woman among the many sisters in our nation who have been active in the push for equality for women. I played an integral role, along with other Tasmanian women, in setting up a new organisation in Tasmania for young women - the YWCA of Tasmania - which I presided over from its inception in 2000 to 2002. The aim is to assist young women in becoming leaders in our community and to be role models for other young women. The YWCA is part of a global network of young women who want to advance social justice and create opportunities and services for the development of women and their families. Notably, we were known in Tasmania for the Week Without Violence campaign, leadership workshops and events highlighting problems with gender stereotyping, particularly in relation to body image and the subsequent eating disorders that many teenage girls face.

I have also been an active committee member of Emily's List, a political network that gives direct support to progressive women seeking election. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Emily's List, not only for me but for the other 100 women they have supported across Australian parliaments since its inception in 1996. Its founder in Australia, former Premier of Victoria, Joan Kirner, has been a strong support to me and so dedicated to striving for more progressive women in our parliaments.

ACTU President, Sharan Burrow, has led a crusade on the need for family-friendly workplaces and for the rights of all workers. I believe she is definitely part of the future of our political landscape. One of her most inspirational speeches for me was the 2003 National Press Club speech where she said:

'Public policy challenge for all political parties is to support a revolution that promotes a world of work where 21st century workplaces are family friendly. For more than 100 years our workplaces and work patterns have been structured around the role of men as the sole breadwinner, with women bearing the load of domestic labour. Twenty years ago, single breadwinner families accounted for over half of couple families with children; today they only account for one third.'

What she articulated was that families have changed, and so work has to change too. This is the challenge of the 21st century workplace. Someone close to home who has mentored me and for many years encouraged me to stand for Parliament is former Federal Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Status of Women, Margaret Reynolds. I remember she gave me a book for my thirtieth birthday, written by herself, about Labor women in Parliament, entitled *The Last Bastion*, and she wrote, 'A successful politician in waiting' on the inside cover. I thought, 'Gee, I'd better get a move on with this career because soon I'll be 40 and what will she be giving me for my fortieth birthday when that comes around'. I also remember a line in the foreword of that book written by Paul Keating where he said: 'The fact that our Parliaments are overwhelmingly male is a great flaw in our Australian democracy'.

Mr Speaker, there are many, many more women whom I have admired but one campaigner for Aboriginal women's health and social issues must not go unmentioned. Auntie Ida West, your wisdom is still here with me and many of us here today. But despite the influence of women in politics and women crusaders in my life, Mr Speaker, there were actually two important men who played key roles in my pursuing the career I have today. They are my two grandfathers, both of whom have now left this world. My Fijian Indian grandfather, the Honourable Ram Jati Singh OBE, was also a member of Parliament. His efforts to make Fiji an inclusive place for all cultures, his aim as a schoolteacher for increased education for indigenous people and his push for independence for Fiji, which he took to Prime Minister Indira Gandhi in India and then all the way to London, is something which I really admire. He has been an inspiration in my life and I think it is interesting that my other hero for peace, Mahatma Gandhi and my grandfather both had the same mission for independence of a nation, both of which were successful. Perhaps in part that is where I get my strong desire to see Australia become a republic. I hope that with my fellow members in this place we can continue to contribute to that debate over the years to come.

My other grandfather, Inspector Les Southern of the Tasmania Police Hobart Division, was the other inspiration. I remember vividly many visits to his house on hero's hill, as they call it,

in Moonah where he would tell me stories of his time in Papua New Guinea during the war and his time in the police force. Les was not only my grandfather but also a great humanitarian and a tower of strength for his family. He had the greatest respect for women, he was raised by women and then he raised an all female family after my grandmother took ill. He was a man of incredible wisdom and always had the wonderful knack of making one feel as if everything was going to work out well in the end.

He served in the Tasmania Police Force for 40 years, receiving the Queen's Police Medal upon his retirement. He had an incredible memory and was able to recite the Criminal Code verbatim as well as pluck beautiful verses of Australian poetry from his mind on command. His legendary wit, sense of humour and the greatness of his mind will always remain with me and I know he would be very proud of me that I have realised my dream this far.

Members - Hear, hear.

Ms SINGH - I have learnt so much from all of these amazing people and I feel very blessed to have so many different influences in my life. If I can make a contribution to Parliament and to my constituents that is even only partly as dedicated and compassionate as these people I will have achieved a great deal. But it has not only been people as such, Mr Speaker, but often music that has inspired me to want to do something to make this world a better place.

As my fellow member for Bass, Michelle O'Byrne, mentioned, music has great power to reach out to the community and to share political messages, especially with young people. It brings a sense of togetherness and community as we sing and dance together and it can also elicit a sense of joy and happiness. Music, in particular the band U2, has had that impact on me since an early age.

In conclusion, Mr Speaker, a lot of people have said to me that it is uncommon for candidates to be elected the first time they stand for Parliament. I like to think the reason I won this seat, other than from the hard work campaigning this year, was that a lot of people recognised the work I have been involved in for many years and the commitment I have given to important issues. As I said at the outset, Mr Speaker, it is an honour to be in this place. Being a member of parliament has to be one of the best jobs anyone could have because you are there to represent thousands of people, you are there to assist them, to change laws for their betterment, to listen to them and to be a voice for them. Advocacy is something I have always been attracted to because it allows me to give a voice to someone who might otherwise go unheard.

I now hold this seat and have the vital role of giving a voice in this Parliament to the members of my electorate and that is exactly what I intend to do and I am certain that, together with my parliamentary Labor colleagues, this Labor Government will continue to represent the people of Tasmania with the vision and compassion that we all want for Tasmania.

I thank the House for the courtesy of listening to my inaugural speech and I support the motion.