



Paula Wriedt MP

House of Assembly

Date: 8 May 1996

Electorate: Franklin

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

***Mr SPEAKER** - The honourable member for Franklin, Ms Wriedt. Could I remind members it is the honourable member's first speech and ask them to accord her the courtesy of allowing it to be heard without interruption.*

Ms WRIEDT (Franklin) - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I must say it is indeed a very humbling experience for me to be standing here today making my first speech in the State Parliament. As cliched as it may sound I really do feel that the people of the electorate of Franklin have bestowed a great honour on me by choosing me to be one of their representatives.

I would like to congratulate my fellow newly-elected members, especially Lara Giddings, Jim Bacon, Jim Cox and Brenton Best. Also to other members who retained their seats. My commiserations also go to those who were unsuccessful in retaining their seats.

Like everyone here today I feel a little subdued. There is no doubt that the tragic events at Port Arthur have cast a grey shadow over the whole of the Tasmanian community. Everyone feels for the victims of this senseless massacre as well as for their friends and relatives. I know that I walked around in a cloud of shock and utter disbelief for days after the event but what really brought it all home to me was the State service at St David's Cathedral last Wednesday. Seeing the overwhelming grief etched on the faces of the relatives of the victims really upset me. The victims were no longer just names in the newspaper, they were the husbands, the wives, the children and parents of so many of these people.

I extend my deepest sympathy to everybody who has been touched by this tragedy. I cannot even begin to imagine the pain that they are going through but my thoughts are definitely with them. I also congratulate the great efforts and dedication of all the emergency services personnel and hospital staff who worked so tirelessly to lessen the impact of the gunman's rampage.

In light of these events I sat down at my desk a few days ago to rewrite my speech. I somehow felt that perhaps it would be inappropriate for me to speak about anything other than this tragedy and what we must do now in terms of gun control. But then I thought better of it. When I re-read my speech I realised that there was a theme running through it, one of cooperation and displaying a sense of caring for one another, bringing about a sense of community. Now more than ever before, these things are going to be important to this State so I decided to stick to my original thoughts.

I would like to begin by taking this opportunity to thank the many people who have assisted me during the twelve months in which I campaigned. First of all my very dedicated and hardworking campaign committee who were prepared to sacrifice many a cold evening to attend committee meetings and spent many weekends out on the hustings with me. I know for a fact that many of them would have preferred to be spending time with their families or perhaps spending a day at a cricket match at Bellerive Oval. So I fixed that. On several occasions I took my campaigning to cricket matches at Bellerive Oval, we stood outside the gates and we handed out pamphlets and we were actually placed in the unique position of having spectators queuing up to get one of the pamphlets - they did not know what it was they were getting. It proved to be quite an effective campaigning mechanism but I do not think it was quite what my campaign committee had in mind in terms of a day at the cricket.

I would also like to thank the many volunteers who worked tirelessly in folding letters and pamphlets, delivering things and doorknocking for me. Also to the many people who so generously offered valuable poster sites. Thanks must also go to Michael Field and the staff in his office who all provided me with many pearls of wisdom, unfailing support and encouragement. Similarly my partner and my family all endured a sometimes stressful campaign and never let me down.

I would particularly like to thank my father, who took on the arduous role of my campaign manager. I have often been asked in the last few years what he has been doing in retirement, apart from attending a royal commission and writing letters to the editor. Well, he has been working hard for me, he has been working very hard and I do not mean just the easy stuff. He has doorknocked in the rain with me, he has letterboxed hilly areas. He spent days standing at the photocopier, photocopying thousands of pamphlets and then folding them. He personally put up 100 election posters, but perhaps his most difficult task was to be my main source of advice and main soundingboard. His was definitely not an easy job but he never complained, although we did disagree on a number of occasions. I know that my father is very proud at the election result and he can be pleased that he played such a big part in it. When I was doorknocking many people commented to me that they thought that my father was a very honest, hardworking and caring member of Parliament. As his daughter who is emulating his footsteps in the political arena I know that I have very big shoes to fill and it is my sincere hope that I can do him proud.

Anyway, that is enough of the thankyou's. Many people here, especially those of you who do not know me, may be wondering what it is that prompts a relatively normal 27-year-old female into running for parliament. I must admit that when I nominated many of my friends thought that perhaps their deep suspicions about me being a little crazy were now founded, but of course I put that down to their lack of knowledge of our wonderful parliamentary system.

There is of course my obvious family connection to politics. It would have been impossible for me to escape some influence when you consider that my father was involved in politics for the first twenty one years of my life. Indeed, my political involvement as such began when I was just four years old. In 1972 I paraded around proudly in a bright orange 'It's time' T-shirt singing the 'It's time' song. Apart from heartily embarrassing my mother in the local grocery shop I really did not have any

idea about what it was all about but I knew it must have been important when the family went on the plane to Canberra.

Our household was always full of lively political debate and as I became older I found that I began to contribute more and more as I formed opinions of my own. I realised that I could make a valuable contribution and decided that I wanted to work in politics to see whether I did have a political mind. I began working for the Labor Party in 1989 when I was employed by Peter Patmore as a research officer. This was the start of my career in politics that would prompt me to eventually nominate. It was in this role, and later in my role working for Michael Field, that it opened my eyes up to the many problems facing Tasmanians today.

I realised how lucky I was compared to many people. I started to study politics at university, and learning the theory and working in a practice opened up my eyes to this huge gap of reality between what was supposed to happen and what was actually happening. I realised that I had the skills, much of the theoretical background and the energy and drive to make a valuable contribution as a grassroots member for Franklin.

I also realised that there seemed to be a lack of representation in our State Parliament in two key areas: both young people and females were truly underrepresented. Much to my disappointment there has been a reluctance over the years for women, particularly those under 30, to enter politics. This I guess has been in part a hangover from the early part of this century where women were not even trusted with the right to vote. However all that has now changed. Women have become as much a part of the work force as men and although not yet in the top echelon of industry and commerce in the same numbers, the trend is unmistakable and there will be no turning back the clock.

I am pleased to see that these trends in both the private and public sectors have now been reflected in both State and Federal parliaments. I am proud to be a member of the House of Assembly which has the largest proportion of females than any other parliament in Australia. I would like to take this opportunity to especially congratulate my colleague, Lara Giddings, on her election. At 23, Lara is the youngest member of this House and I have great admiration for the hard work which she put in during the campaign and her great result. Much has been said in recent years about the different approach that women take in parliament, and I will be interested to see whether the atmosphere of exchange in this Chamber will be any different with ten of us here.

My decision to stand was also tempered by the fact that I felt that young people, especially given the high levels of youth unemployment, were perhaps not being adequately represented in parliament. I know that I may offend some existing members of this House when I say this, but I truly believe that young people did not feel that they have someone close to their age in parliament that they could come to with their problems. Believe me when I say that being a young candidate was certainly not an easy task but I was heartened by the fact that each of our politicians had to start somewhere and some of our most successful ones began at an early age. Paul Keating was 25 when he was elected, former Tasmanian Premier, Bill Neilson was just 21, as was the gentleman that I have the pleasure of sitting next to normally, Michael Polley. State Labor Leader here, Michael Field, was 28. All of these people had the great advantage of having the time to serve an apprenticeship before being

called on for higher duties, giving weight to the argument that perhaps you should start out young. So here I am.

It is a big decision for any person to stand for parliament. It is not simply the obvious financial costs involved, but the exposure of the individual to the public gaze, the loss of privacy and the preparedness to be available at any time to respond to the needs of the electorate. All of these factors place an enormous load on an MP which makes it quite out of character with any other occupation. Just what determines the attributes of individuals to be singled out by the electors to take a seat in State Parliament is the eternal question, the answer to which every political aspirant would dearly love to know. But there is one thing that we do know and that is that the people elect us because they believe we are going to act in their best interest to do those things which will benefit the State and the people who live in it. To what extent do we as parliamentarians live up to those expectations - well, all information available from surveys, opinion polls, everyday conversation, suggests that the public at least are not greatly impressed with our collective performance. I think from memory the survey suggested that the credibility of politicians was on the scale with used car salesmen.

The perception is that we come to this place to feather our own nests, to get what we can out of a well paid job with a few lurks and perks thrown in. At the start of what I hope will be a long parliamentary career I believe that unless parliamentarians can demonstrate that self interest is not the motivation that brings us here then the public will continue to see us as the lucky few in society. However it must be said that all of us - and I mean all of us - come here believing that we can make a contribution, that we can make a difference, and that we can safely represent the people of our electorates, whether they are our supporters or not. We know that many members over the years could have probably done much better for themselves had they not had all the hassles of public life.

I believe therefore that a priority for all parliamentarians is to demonstrate that we are here to serve the community to the best of our ability and to contribute to the workings of this place. Of course it is to be expected that because we come from different political perspectives we will differ in our ways and means of achieving our objectives. But let us foster a new healthy environment of an exchange of ideas and new thinking without rancour and dogmatism. Like most people here I do not shy away from a good argument, especially if it is something that I feel passionate about, but let us do it in a more ordered fashion. From what we have seen in this House yesterday and this morning, it is possible for us to do that. Yesterday would have to be one of the quietest and most well behaved days on record in the House of Assembly. Mr Speaker I make a plea to everyone sitting in this House today, to try and refrain from the traditional mud slinging and name calling that has become a part of life in this House. Let us clean up our act so that the credibility of politicians can be restored in the eyes of the community.

I daresay it is traditional for new members making their first speech to set out a personal philosophy of where they want the State to go, or at least where they want to go. At the age of 27 and having had only a few years' involvement on the periphery of political life, I daresay it would be presumptuous of me to try and set out such a program; to claim to have all the answers before one knows all the problems is a sure pass to dogmatism and political and moral isolation. But it is equally important as

individuals just as a society, to know where we are going, to know and believe that there is a light on the hill that we espy to. I am sure that all of us share some common thoughts on basic problems in our community - youth unemployment, health and education, the aged, the environment. All areas in which real problems exist and will continue to exist unless we can collectively strive to remedy them.

On the other hand there will be issues that are not easy to resolve such as gay law reform and no doubt many others. Many of these issues will unfortunately be with us for a long time and with the increasing tendency of governments to withdraw from the broader economic picture because of the process of privatisation, the resources available to governments to remedy many of these problems will be reduced accordingly. Every person has the right to live with dignity, but the rich are getting richer and the poor are finding it harder and harder to make ends meet. No one can solve these problems overnight but for my part I will concentrate my energies in this Parliament to work, together with my colleagues, towards the implementation of many of the Labor Party's social policies, which will help to alleviate many present inequities. Young people do not know where to turn to build an existence in this State, and too many intelligent and gifted people are leaving for the mainland. But also the elderly, and in particular Social Security recipients, are burdened with many indirect taxes such as the HEC network charge.

There are several issues which I would like to raise that I believe successive governments of all persuasions have all overlooked. In his inaugural speech a few weeks ago my newly-elected colleague, Brenton Best, mentioned an issue in the electorate of Braddon which is also relevant in Franklin. I do not feel that I can pass up this opportunity without making mention of it. This issue is the provision of MTT bus services. The Municipality of Kingborough, in which I am proud to say I am a resident, is the second fastest growing region in the State, behind Sorell. In most respects we have magnificent services and access to nearly everything that we require, yet apart from a few MTT buses that travel into the Channel Court area from Tarooma, we still do not have a proper MTT bus service. ABS statistics have shown that many young families are moving into the Kingborough area and not all of them have access to a second family car. There is also a very large percentage of young people in the area who, apart from a bit of sport to occupy their time, would probably still have to travel into the city if they wanted to do something like catching a film. As is the case with Devonport, what justification could there possibly be for successive governments to overlook the introduction of a full MTT bus service in Kingborough?

Another pressing issue is the condition of the Bruny Island road. As a regular visitor to this beautiful part of our State, I know only too well the treacherous condition of the road. The last time I visited there it rained so badly and so heavily on my return to the ferry that on the slippery and heavily-corrugated gravel road I was forced to drive at around 45 kph. I, like many people caught in that downpour, missed the ferry because of it. Bruny Island is a welcome retreat for hundreds of residents of many parts of the State who spend their holidays and weekends there to get away from the rat race of city life. It has the potential to be a great tourism destination, which its picturesque views and abundant wildlife. But the fact is the road has such a terrible reputation as being one of the worst in the State that it puts many people off from going there. The road now has the same reputation as the once infamous road leading

to Coles Bay, and we all know you used to be able to buy bumper stickers proclaiming 'I survived the Coles Bay Road'.

But Mr Speaker, of course it is not just the shackowners and tourists that we must think of when we are talking about the Bruny Island road, but the residents themselves. There are over 500 people who call Bruny Island their home. Why should they be subjected to treacherous driving conditions every time they leave their houses? Past governments have tried to disclaim responsibility, saying that the road should be up to the council to fix. This issue is one that has plagued successive governments for many years, and it will rightly continue to do so until something is done about it.

In recent months I have spoken much about the problems facing the youth of Tasmania. However I do not by any means want to be seen as a one-issue member of this Parliament. There are many issues that concern me, but which are also of concern to young Tasmanians. If one is to try and encapsulate the philosophy of what I believe should be the motivation of a member without, as I mentioned earlier, spelling out a program, it would be in one word, 'caring': caring about what happens to our State; caring about its property and the prosperity of its citizens; caring about those whose fortunes have not kept up with the general run of their fellow Tasmanians, for many reasons, often reasons beyond their control. They could have been the victims of unemployment, sickness, broken homes, drug dependency and so on. Not that governments can solve all these problems of everyone in our community, but within their limits, and every consideration must be given to this end. I do not accept the view that in the community we are all caught up in a rat race of self-interest. That we all need to provide for our families and ourselves is self-evident, but it is necessary to see ourselves as part of the broader community and to act responsibly towards others.

In 1994 the Australian Science and Technology Council undertook a study entitled 'Matching Science and Technology to Future Needs', the main purpose of which was to examine Australia's social, economic and environmental needs through to the year 2010. The study involved speaking to over 800 young Australians aged between 15 and 24, and I believe that everyone here should be aware of what young Australians expressed as issues of concern to them. These issues included pollution; environmental destruction, including the impact of growing populations; the gulf between rich and poor; high unemployment, including the perceived effect of automation and immigration; conflict; crime and violence; family breakdown; discrimination and prejudice; and the current state of the Australian economy. Young people are also very concerned about the widespread use of drugs amongst young people.

As you can see, these issues are not merely self-interested ones but ones that affect many people in Australian society. Young people not only expressed what they believed was wrong in Australia but they also articulated ways in which these problems could be resolved, or even lessened. Increased family harmony and the building of stronger family units were rated as being extremely important, as was more involvement in community activities, in order to bring back a sense of values and involvement with others; a re-thinking of the education system to make it more relevant to what students want and need rather than what the system thinks they need.

Yes, there is an unfortunate air of pessimism about this survey and the young people involved in it but these are entirely their thoughts but there is actually a positive side to it. This survey shows that young people are thinking not just about themselves but that they care about what happens in both Australia and the rest of the world. So let us take heart in the fact that young Australians care about what happens in the future. But they will be looking towards governments, both Federal and State, to take positive action to grapple with these problems. The challenge for all of us here today is to take on board the concerns which have been expressed about Australia's future and take some positive action to remedy them. I am under no illusion that to solve any of these problems is going to be easy but I am definitely looking forward to this challenge.

Mr Speaker, my final words to you today will be in the form of a plea to all of you: let us get on with the job; let us prove to all Tasmanians that we are serious about making positive changes for the future. I know that I am.

Members - Hear, hear.