



Matthew John Smith

House of Assembly

Date: 7 October 1998

Electorate: Franklin

Mr SPEAKER - The honourable member, Mr Smith.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr SMITH (Franklin - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I would like to affirm my allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth the Second and to her representative in our State, the Governor, His Excellency Sir Guy Green.

Mr Speaker, Premier, Leader of the Opposition and friends. Over two months ago I embarked on what has certainly been one of the most interesting, informative and productive journeys of my life. I am pleased to say that it is still going. In fact the journey is growing each and every day as new boundaries open up with broad and far-reaching opportunities, and that is why I am here today because I believe all people have the God-given right to explore, expand and enrich the boundaries in their lives. Everyone deserves the right to see not just how far they can go but what they can do for others along the way.

Many people have asked why I am in politics, why I stand here today and shape our State's future. There are so many answers to that which I hope will be part answered here today. However, one of my burning desires in entering this political arena is my desire to be someone that all people, no matter what political alliance, race or creed, feel they can always come to and relate with. It is certainly a great honour to be able to sit as a member of the House, as I am sure all here can attest to. I pray that this feeling of intense privilege of being singled out and selected amongst such strong candidates to represent so many people will remain with me for the rest of my life.

It is an even greater honour to be Tasmania and Australia's youngest ever member of an Australian parliament.

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr SMITH - I would like to firstly congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the post, and I also thank you for pointing out to the House yesterday so kindly that when you first joined, I was seven years not born.

Members laughing.

Mr SMITH - May I just clarify for the House and yourself, Mr Speaker, that not only when you first came to this Parliament was I seven years not born, but my parents had not yet met.

Members laughing.

Mr Jim Bacon - I knew you were old, Polley, but –

Mr SPEAKER - We had invented the wheel, though.

Mr SMITH - It is certainly an honour which I take with a great deal of respect, and also take it on board as a challenge, not only to represent those of my age but all Tasmanians. However, this privilege of being a member is not one for which I can take any credit. There are many people whom I must not only thank, but express my deepest gratitude to. Firstly, my father, Ken and step-mother Maggie; it would be wrong of me to talk of one and not the other. Both have been such great pillars of strength and support to me, not just through this campaign but through the trials of life that come to all of us. Their concern, their patience and wisdom have been bright lights since some dark days and nights. They put up with me in good and bad times; they have had to go through periods of seeing not an awful lot of me to times when they probably thought they saw an awful lot of me.

There are so many others who have contributed and supported me throughout this time, and I feel I do an injustice to all of them by not going into great depth. However, I must thank my great friends who have had to endure a friend who is either not around, or when he is is normally catching up on some sleep. I would like to single out my best friend, Ben Jessup, who not only listened to my ear bashing at times, but made sure that I was always following the right path and not floating too high off the ground. I would like to thank so many others - my church, the Lower Sandy Bay branch, who have supported me even though I am now a member for Franklin, and the Franklin Liberal electorate members who so warmly accepted me and supported my every move, and those who thought so thoughtfully, more often than not forsaking their own time and energy for my campaign.

I especially would like to thank Senators Abetz, Calvert and Gibson, the Honourable John Cleary and the Honourable Peter Hodgman for their support in the community, and their words of wisdom and advice which they often passed on to me. I would like to thank Penny Gaunson who was a driving force and a great friend in this campaign, also Brendan Bromeley, Peter Pepper, Peter Rowe, Phil Butler and Geoff Rosan who have all contributed to this result. I would also like personally to thank my God who I know has been there for me through many hard times, and will be there through many more.

Finally, all those who thought highly enough of me to vote for me in the election, especially a lovely old lady who told me she had voted for me first, and that lovely Bob Cheek second.

Members laughing.

Mr Cheek - You spoilt the story; it was a good story for a while.

Mr SMITH - But what am I doing here? It is a question I will gladly admit to asking myself each and every day, even during the campaign. I can tell you, at the moment I am here to learn, I am here to contribute and I am here to serve. This, I believe, is the entire aim of being a member of parliament at any level: to learn each day so that I am forever being equipped for the next challenge in life; to contribute not only what I have learnt, but what I hear, feel and believe to those around me who are making decisions, and to serve. That is the core reason of my running in this campaign: to aim to become a member of parliament so that I can serve at a greater level. As ideological and pie in the sky as this sounds it is my core reason for being here. My roles will always be changing and the areas and means of my serving the community, electorate and Government will always change but the core desire beneath it all should never change. And if that desire is within us all then Tasmania will have the best Parliament that it possibly could have.

I know that we will not agree on everything all the time and that is fine. I know that there will be times of frustration as well as times of satisfaction and achievement. Obviously, as with every member, there are special areas of interest that I believe in and want to see Tasmania flourish in, areas such as the development and nourishment of a strong and viable information technology industry. Technology is certainly taking hold of our lives. We are slowly changing into a paperless society bound by computer chips and processors, not walls and doors. To many, both inside and beyond the industry, this is a daunting and frightening prospect. Some loathe modern technology because of the threat that they perceive coming from this IT age.

However, I believe that this influx of technology and the drastic impact which it is having on our society can be harnessed and enhanced to ensure that not only Tasmania but all its people can enjoy the benefits that this new technology can bring. As I said many times throughout the campaign I believe that Tasmania is uniquely positioned not only to be a world leader but to place itself on the technological world stage if it can equip and educate the people now. The education however needs to not only focus on how businesses and commerce can be enhanced and grow due to revolutionary changes occurring in the new technologies but how the everyday person can use or at least relate to the effects that technology is having on our society.

The benefits to Tasmania that lie in our full implementation of the current and developing technology extend far beyond the computer-only industries and to all networks of our society. So many Tasmanians will benefit from the continued implementation of the Rundle Government Directions statement, especially the computers-in-schools project. If we do not equip our future generations with the tools which are rapidly extending beyond being an advantage to becoming necessary for success in this modern world, then what future do they have? Future generations face technological extinction if changes do not rapidly occur. I believe that Tasmania and its people hold in their hands the opportunities to take the world by storm. We have the chance to lead Australia as it heads into the twenty-first century.

I believe that young and old need to feel ownership of their community, to be involved and make a difference in their own community. I want to see the establishment and encouragement of community ownership programs from the town clean-up day to the ongoing positive community action which is finally exhibited in the Bridgewater Urban Renewal Group for example. I sincerely believe that a key to turning the attitude and mind set of the community relies on giving that community the tools and resources for them to change it themselves. As people start feeling the ownership of their community, their towns and their State, then their attitudes towards the future of those areas will also change for the better.

I believe in our young people. I see their potential and I share their problems. Young people nowadays face so many trials and obstacles in their path to success in life. There is no need for these trials to lead to failure or, even worse, giving up personal dreams and plans. With strong and effective leadership from all levels of government and community positions there can be proper support and social networks needed to help those young people who are struggling to achieve their goals in life.

If there can be one thing which becomes a benchmark of my political career, let it be that I always support the efforts and achievements across all society in all age groups and genders to reach their goals and that I can be one of those now in a position of leadership to help those in our communities achieve their dreams. I want to make a difference for young and old, to be a reference point for the youth and a visionary for the future. I look forward to all the opportunities that are coming my way, opportunities to serve in whatever way I can, to be a constructive opposition member and spokesperson and help shape a positive future for Tasmanians. The challenge lies before me to learn and serve. I want to see all Tasmanians rally their morale and vigour and set to the task that is before us. The task is to set about wholeheartedly to create a strong and vibrant Tasmania which I can one day pass on to my own children.

Members - Hear, hear