



David O'Byrne MP

House of Assembly

Date: 9 June 2010

Electorate: Franklin

---

### **ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

**Mr O'BYRNE** (Franklin - Minister for Environment, Parks and Heritage - Inaugural) - I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we meet on today and their associated traditions, customs and living culture.

I congratulate all members of the House on their election success and acknowledge all the candidates in the election for standing up to represent their community. Along with those of us fortunate to take our places in this House, they have all demonstrated a passion and a significant commitment to our State. I would like to say how proud I am to be standing here as a new member of this House, with the added responsibility of being a minister. I acknowledge that I am indeed fortunate to be given such a responsibility in my first term in this House.

Since becoming minister, I have been humbled by the support and goodwill that has greeted me, and I look forward to the many challenges ahead. These are challenging times in our history as Tasmanians and people around the world face threats to their economic and environmental security, but in these challenges there are also opportunities, especially for Tasmania. In this last election, Tasmanians asked for a new way of doing our work, a way that brings people together, and heals the bickering and polarisation that too often characterises our political debates and silences the real needs of the people. I stand here today, humbled, knowing we face enormous challenges but also hopeful that we have within our grasp an opportunity to create a more positive, progressive politics, one that always keeps our eyes on why we have all been sent here - to make people's lives better.

I am proud to be a member for Franklin. From Old Beach to Opossum Bay, from Richmond to Dover and all places in between, Franklin is a diverse electorate - economically, geographically and culturally. Many groups of people contribute to Franklin's strong sense of community: sporting clubs, community groups and the amazing network of Neighbourhood Houses that are working so hard to assist people in need, and to build the capacity of our community to grow and to prosper. I have met some of the most amazing people in these last 12 months, knocking on thousands of doors, each with their own story. Their lives and their dreams have touched me and it is my great honour to represent the people of Franklin.

What I heard in hundreds of conversations was that most people simply want political leaders to make their decisions based on core values - like justice, fairness, equality and family - not political calculation. These are the values I hold and they are Labor values. We must always remember: issues come and go, but values remain.

My personal journey and the values that have been handed to me are a big part of the reason I ran for Franklin. My father was a swampy from Launceston, a tradie painter, a shop steward and a life member of his union. Dad instilled in us a worker's comradely spirit and a strong sense of decency. He believed that decency was the cornerstone of character; something that has shaped my journey.

My mum is the daughter of a Coral Sea veteran and council clerk who worked for a number of Tasmanian municipalities. She had learned from her parents the importance of doing right by family and community. Mum passed that on to three very grateful kids, whom she spent a lifetime caring for. Eventually, when we all left home - some of us came back and left again - she returned to the work force as a cleaner and was elected by her peers as a shop steward for her union. Mum instilled in us a passion for social justice, for equity and above all an ability to be compassionate and to be able to walk in another people's shoes to understand their perspective. Mum was someone who never sat around feeling sorry for someone. Rather, she always asked us what we could do to help. The values that my parents instilled in me led me to work within the union movement. These were the values that made me a member of the Labor Party and these values, the sense that government has a responsibility to do right by people, especially for those who are most vulnerable, are the values that I will bring to my role as a minister and a member of parliament.

For me, Labor and working people are not only my family but also are where I learnt my most important lessons in life. My experiences working in the union movement and as the leader of the LHMU have given me insight into so many different people's lives, from cleaners to croupiers, brewery workers to bakers, early-years professionals to custodial officers. The LHMU gave me the honour of working with ordinary, everyday working people who came together to win decent pay and conditions, safe workplaces, the right to organise into a union and the right to express their views and live their lives with dignity.

Many experiences working within the union movement have inspired me but two experiences do stand out. Firstly, my role as chair of SmokeFree Tasmania, fighting to protect hospitality workers and hotel patrons from the deadly impact of second-hand smoke. I will never forget sitting in my office talking to a single mum in her 40s about her battle with breast cancer. She

explained the successful procedure that saved her life but was then faced with the intolerable choice of either quitting her life-long job working behind a bar, a job she dearly loved and that provided for her family, or continuing to work in an environment that was unsafe and that would most likely cost her her life. This story, a story not uncommon in this industry, inspired me to fight for change. This led me to work and convene a diverse group of community and health groups bound together by a common purpose of safe and healthy work environments. After a four-year campaign we helped make Tasmania the first State in Australia to declare all fully enclosed areas smoke free. This was an historic result and one that quite literally saved lives. It showed me that collective action by a few brave people can move government to act for the benefit of all. I look forward to meeting and giving voice to other community campaigners so long as I am in this place.

The second experience that stands out is leading the campaign to bring respect and dignity to the childcare sector. This was a campaign about respect and for recognition of the amazingly inspirational work that early childhood professionals perform every day of every week, caring, nurturing and educating our children. It was not a campaign simply about money, although money was very important, but those who choose to work with children are driven by motives far deeper than money. This is a profession that everyone said is the most important work in the world but it is often overlooked, unorganised and even demeaned. Over a number of years we built relationships, forged common interests, rallied, signed petitions and we made a hell of a noise. I am proud of playing a role in helping early years professionals find their voice and now they will never be silenced.

I hope to continue helping those marginalised within our community to find full voice in government. Government must be there for all in our community, to help those who are silent to gain voice and those made invisible on the margins to emerge powerful from the shadows.

The members of the LHMU do not derive their strength from money or powerful connections or old school relationships. Many do not have higher education skills. They derive their strength from each other, from their ability to work together, talking with one voice, upholding the principles of solidarity, respecting each other and demanding respect for the inherent value of their work.

So why did I decide to run for Parliament? Why did I leave a job I so dearly loved and found extraordinarily rewarding? Why this journey? One word - WorkChoices. For many years I was cynical about politics and its capacity to make people's lives better. In my mind, being a campaigner for social justice through the union movement and my involvement with community

groups was the most effective way to achieve positive outcomes. That all changed with the Howard Federal Government's WorkChoices legislation in 2005. In this legislation we saw a Federal government legislate to create injustice and tip the scale of power to the already powerful at the expense of ordinary workers. We saw a Federal government legislate away fairness and balance in the workplace to allow employers to unfairly dismiss workers, and legislate for pay cuts and to hurt families that were already struggling to keep their head above water. We had a government in concert with State Liberal Party machines across the country dividing our community and acting in the best interests of a few and not the many. Mr Speaker, this was not the Australian way. These were not the actions of a country founded on rewarding people with a fair day's pay for a fair day's work. These were not the values that I and countless other Australians were raised on. At this moment I knew that we needed people in parliament, not only fighting to protect the community from such divisive legislation as WorkChoices, but parliamentarians who understood that positive change happens when we work hand-in-hand with members of the community to listen to make better laws, fairer laws and to put it simply, making people's lives better. It was at that moment that I decided to put up or shut up. I needed to be one of those parliamentarians in the State I love, surrounded by family and friends, and they are here today.

I stand here as a new Labor member of parliament and a member of the next generation of the Labor movement. This is a tremendous honour but also a tremendous responsibility for, as the current custodians of our movement, we have a duty to carry our cause forward and deliver social justice, fairness and a quality of opportunity, not only today but for future generations. Our Labor movement is an international movement that has been around for more than 150 years. It is steeped in victories and great achievements and it is the Labor Party, as its electoral arm, that legislates in the name of working people. We have lifted workers out of poverty and fought for workers to be able to lead their lives with dignity. We have fought for safer workplaces. We have fought for equal pay. We have argued and won the right for all people to have access to quality health care and education. We have demanded a fuller and more accountable democracy. We have argued for freedom. We have reconstructed a nation after two world wars. We have brought the troops home from Vietnam and Iraq, and we have stood on the docks in Fremantle saying no to the apartheid regime. We in the Labor movement understand that the struggle never ends and our desire to improve the lives of people will never be quenched.

Entering the first decade of the twenty-first century, the Labor movement must respond to many converging challenges. These are the challenges that we too must face. Around the world we see lives affected by food and water shortages, threats to energy security, driving up the cost of living, the global

financial crisis and climate change that brings an immediate environmental threat as well as the need to transform to low-carbon economies. It is at this critical time that in Tasmania the Labor movement has joined forces with the Greens movement to govern in the interests of all Tasmanians. Some may see this as a calamity, other as convenience. I believe we are on the cusp of great things, Mr Speaker. To me, these next four years represent incredible opportunity. These two movements coming together forced us to think anew, adopt different approaches and ideas to the new challenges we face.

Mr Speaker, as island people, Tasmanians are resourceful, resilient and creative and it is these qualities that we as parliamentarians need to foster and draw upon. If we engage in positive, progressive, community-based politics, we will help position Tasmania's economy and prepare our communities to seize the opportunities that lie ahead. When I say positive politics, I mean the kind of politics that give people a greater say in their future and greater control over their lives.

I hope to be a strong contributor to the Tasmanian Government and Parliament using the experience and lessons I have learnt in my life to my new role as the member for Franklin. I have learnt that positive leadership based on sound values can inspire and elevate people. I have learnt that by working together with people with the intent to find what unites us, rather than what differences can be exploited to divide us, always leads to a better outcome for all. I have learnt that by empowering individuals to make their own decisions, helping them find their own voice and giving them the support they need and the opportunity to act, we can find lasting solutions. I have learnt that building good relationships based on respect, dignity and thoughtful compromise makes it possible for all of us to build something positive across differences. I have learnt that harnessing all the skills, knowledge and goodwill of those around us to unite and act collectively, achieves so much more than when individuals act alone.

I also understand that people are angry when they see their Government not working and certainly not working in their best interest. They want their leaders to have a plan. They need their leaders to give them hope that our problems can be fixed and not just covered over with a quick bandaid political solution. Most importantly, they need their leaders to listen to them and enable them to take action to assist in the resolution. I have learnt that with leadership comes responsibility. I am still new and, most importantly of all, I acknowledge I still have much to learn. These lessons will be my compass in the days ahead to help navigate the important work we all have ahead of us. We need to invest in the early years so that all children can get the best start in life, and an education system that will serve all children, regardless of who they are or where they were born.

We need a better health system that focuses on preventive health, that will ensure all people receive the highest quality primary and acute health services possible. We need to fight for the rights of all workers to be able to work with dignity and have their rights of work respected. We need to confront the massive challenge of climate change and continue building a strong economy. And, finally, this is my personal pledge: I will work every day to ensure that this Government is compassionate and solutions-focused rather than blame-focused. I want to be accountable to this pledge, to practise positive politics that bring people together, and I promise to bring this approach to my ministerial duties as Minister for the Environment, Parks, Heritage, Workplace Relations, Arts, Sport and Recreation and Hospitality.

Mr Speaker, as with all things in life I could not be taking this seat in Parliament without the support and love of so many people, so I would like to thank my union, the amazing LHMU. Firstly the national secretary, Louise Tarrant, the national union and the national leadership group, in particular Dave Kelly, Sue Lines, Mark Boyd, Lyndall Ryan and Gary Bullock. I also want to thank the LHMU Tas branch, the executive council and the delegates who put themselves on the line every day of every week, Helen Gibbons and the amazing team of organisers who have so passionately fought to build a powerful voice for working people.

I thank my campaign team: Mel, Rod, Mark, Scott, Wayne, Nathan, Josh and Helen. A more amazing bunch of passionate, strategic, supportive people I challenge you to find. Thanks to my field marshal of field operations and general all-round legend, Henry Pill, my mate and fellow Collingwood and Minnesota Vikings fan Erik Petersen, who is currently in the Ozark Mountains in USA - hello, Erik. I would also like to thank my campaign volunteers, too many to name personally, who doorknocked, letterboxed, put up posters, cooked snags, had thousands of conversations with the people of Franklin about the issues they felt strongly about, and how together we could build something better.

I thank the Premier and my parliamentary colleagues for believing in me and entrusting me with the ministerial roles I have been allocated, which I am humbled and honoured to take on. It will be a pleasure working with you all. I would like to thank my office, Josh and the staff. I am in awe of their skills and their talent but, more importantly, I am in awe of their passion for Tasmania. We will be an office that will listen. We will care about people and we will do some decent things.

I would like to thank my family for all they have given me and for all they continue to give me. The O'Byrne family is a formidable bunch and, as they always do when one of the clan steps up, they mobilised and hit the

campaign trail for me and gave me so much support. I thank my mum and dad, who have given me so much, the most important being unconditional love and support; my brother Michael who has always been there for me, who has always been a source of great inspiration to me and who has pushed me and challenged me to think deeply and strive to be better; and my sister, Michelle. Many of us are lucky to have people assist you on your journey. I am even luckier to have someone of such intellect and compassion. Michelle, I walk in your footsteps and am eternally grateful for your support and for lighting the path ahead. I thank Tonia, the love of my life, and I know it is customary to talk about your wife being your best friend, but until she declares her support for the Collingwood Football Club she will just be the love of my life. I thank her for her support, without which I could not take on this amazing adventure. Thanks to our children, Lily and Ava, whom I adore and love and, finally, the people of Franklin for putting their faith in me. I acknowledge the trust they have placed in me and promise to repay this trust.

To conclude, during the campaign, when I was talking to people on their doorsteps, they quite rightly asked me somewhat suspiciously what I was promising and how they could know whether or not I would deliver on my promises. I think people are very cynical about politicians claiming to be the white knight and that they can fix everything. No person alone can do this, and talk is cheap, so I make no grandiose promises. I alone will not be able to deliver lasting solutions because I know by experience that lasting solutions can only be found by people working together harnessing all the goodwill and spirit around us. But I will promise one thing: to commit my heart and soul to the people of Franklin in Tasmania and to uphold my values every day of every week of every month of every year. I commit to give life to those values by acting transparently, ethically and with integrity.

Trying to define the role of a politician is very difficult. Are we simply mouthpieces or message carriers, or are we builders constructing better lives? Are we architects constantly enhancing the design in which we work, or are we gardeners planting 1 000 seeds and tending the earth so that flowers can grow? In reality we are all of these things and more. We have an enormous responsibility placed upon our shoulders and, Mr Speaker, to quote the inspirational US Senator for Minnesota, the late Paul Wellstone, 'We all do better when we all do better'. In Tasmania over the next four years, together we will indeed all do better.

**Members** - Hear, hear