



Scott Bacon MP

House of Assembly

Date: 9 June 2010

Electorate: Denison

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr BACON (Denison - Inaugural) - Thank you, Mr Speaker. I am very proud to be elected as a Labor member for Denison. I rise today to deliver my inaugural speech and formally begin my endeavours to represent the people of Denison and the people of Tasmania. This is a great honour and one that I will not take for granted.

I grew up in a family with strong Labor values where fairness, compassion and equality were impressed on my brother Mark and me from an early age. My parents taught Mark and me the importance of looking after those less fortunate than ourselves and respecting the rights of others. I saw my father Jim first as a trade unionist and then later as a member of parliament acting out these values to improve the lives of all Tasmanians. My mother Lynn has spent most of her working life as a dedicated and compassionate carer in the disability sector. I wish to thank my family for the ideas and experiences they have provided me with and for encouraging and supporting my desire to become a member of parliament.

Being elected is a very humbling experience. My family and my involvement in the Labor movement have made me aware that a true measure of a society is the opportunities it provides for those most in need. I believe that governments should be about providing the opportunity for every person to realise their own potential, regardless of their background.

The outcome of the recent election has meant that we are in a new phase of Labor government. This is a new challenge and a new opportunity for those of us on this side of the House and I believe it is an opportunity to re-evaluate what the community want from their Government and those who represent them. Labor values never change; they remain constant, be it in majority or minority government, but there is a need to consider how we deliver on these values in the twenty-first century. It is time to open up the debate for new solutions and new ideas to address the age-old problems that have dogged our State.

The Labor Party is the party of ideas. This is one of our greatest strengths. Principles of equality and compassion can remain firm while the contest continues about the best ways to enact those principles. The challenge now for Labor in Tasmania is to draw on that capacity for ideas. The community has given us a clear message to re-think and re-evaluate the way we go about our task. I have heard that message and I am willing to make my contribution for the benefit of our State.

Mr Speaker, no member of this House should accept that Tasmania has the lowest standard of living in the nation in regard to income, educational attainment, participation in the work force and health outcomes. To ensure a fair go for all Tasmanians we must guarantee long-term prosperity for the State. This will only be achieved through an innovative and strong economy. We need to actively foster economic growth and job creation. I believe it is a role of government to create an environment that maximises investment leading to the creation of jobs.

Tasmania faces many inherent disadvantages such as isolation, high transport costs, a small and ageing population, low productivity and a limited skills base. Given these inherent disadvantages we need a taxation and regulatory environment that is not middle of the pack. We must lead the nation in this area. For example, last year's Budget delivered a significant incentive on payroll tax. It ensured that every new job would not be subject to this tax. This made Tasmania the lowest cost jurisdiction for any business looking to create a new job. This must be the blueprint for further action. I believe it represents a more sustainable approach to industry development than handouts and bail-outs.

Economic reform has the capacity to deliver valuable social dividends. One of the most significant economic reforms achieved by this Labor Government was the deregulation of shop trading hours. This reform was opposed by many at the time but in Labor's reformist tradition, the tough decision was taken, which has since seen the creation of thousands of additional retail jobs. However the reform job is not over. I believe the benefits of greater competition can help alleviate rising costs to essential services. There are many economic arguments for why competition is good, but ultimately history has proven it to be one of the most powerful forces for reducing prices and driving innovation. Competition reminds businesses that they are there to serve the consumer, and

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not the other way round. I believe government has a critical role in ensuring that competition is maximised so that its benefits can continue to flow throughout the community.

To encourage future growth, the State Government must put in place modern infrastructure driven by demand. The development of a natural gas industry has the potential to be a key driver for Tasmania's economic growth by offering commercial, industrial and residential consumers an alternative, competitively priced energy source. I believe we can do more to encourage residents and businesses to take up the gas option. We must build infrastructure that leverages on our natural assets and converts them into competitive advantages. This is what the Government's long-term infrastructure strategy is all about. It gives certainty to the community and industry and guides infrastructure investment to where it can deliver the best outcomes for the Tasmanian economy.

We must invest in vital infrastructure but this can only come from a strong budgetary position. I believe that maintaining the fiscal strategy was the most important Labor election commitment of all. However, I believe we can go further. Responsible financial management must be forward-looking, building reserves to get us through the tough times. The provision of essential government services must not be at the mercy of volatile financial markets. All Tasmanians should be able to share in the benefits of increased prosperity. I believe that one of the most valuable contributions I can make to Tasmania through this Parliament is to concentrate on developing and promoting policies that will grow our economy. We can have the best of intentions and the grace of goodwill informing government policy, but unless we have the financial resources to fund them these commitments will mean nothing.

We know that education is one of the greatest social benefits. We also know that lack of education lasts a lifetime if it is not addressed. Lack of education creates a social burden through underemployment, social alienation and welfare dependency. It permanently limits and excludes people from giving their best. It excludes them from taking advantage of opportunities and from contributing to our community. I believe that valuing education is fundamental to improving our way of life. In my electorate I have seen what happens when the community values education and puts students and teaching first. The northern suburbs community have amalgamated some schools to create strong and vibrant school communities that will serve our students long into the future. I commend them for this initiative and for their willingness to work together in the best interests of students and the community.

Mr Speaker, the needs of the old and the frail -

Members laughing.

Mr SPEAKER - I shall resist the temptation to respond.

Members laughing.

Mr BACON - of indigenous Tasmanians, of recent arrivals from other countries and cultures, are all live issues in our society and not all can be dealt with through the State or Federal governments. In these matters, as in many others, local communities are often best at determining and carrying out what works for them. There is no end to the creativity of local communities. I have seen it first hand in everything from community gardens to cooperative educational arrangements. We need to encourage local solutions to local problems. Sometimes government and opposition parties just need to shut up and listen.

The greatest contribution this Parliament can make to the wellbeing of Tasmanians is to create the conditions for our economy to thrive. A strong economy means jobs and for most people in the community this is what matters. The financial gains from employment for both the individual and for our community are significant. Having a job of course means more than just financial reward. It means being part of something and making a contribution. It is also about self-esteem and dignity. It also considerably eases pressure on families and relationships. Any member of parliament should want to be part of creating the conditions that will enable our economy to thrive. If we are serious we have to look hard at what we are doing and ask ourselves where we can do better.

Tasmania's future is dependent on the endeavour of all Tasmanians. We must encourage opportunity, creativity and enterprise. We must reward hard work, achievement and success. With only 500 000 people living in this State we cannot afford to waste the talent or potential of any Tasmanian, regardless of age, gender, background or income. All Tasmanians should have the opportunity for employment, quality education, decent health care and affordable housing. All Tasmanians should be able to enjoy our beautiful natural environment and built heritage, our cultural and artistic assets, and our sporting and community events.

We must take advantage of the talents of young Tasmanians and provide the skills and training needed for their future careers and endeavours. We must also take advantage of the experience of older members of our

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community and of those who have come here from other States or other countries. Tasmanians must learn to live without differences and tolerate different views.

I believe public debate should be treated with respect and held with good intentions. Tasmania must be a place where anyone can feel free to express their opinion. We should never assume that those who speak the loudest have the best ideas. Politicians who refuse to accept that anyone else could possibly have a point of view worth considering in a complex policy argument, are unlikely to find real solutions. Debate is healthy, but it must be fair and balanced. Silencing those with an alternative opinion is counterproductive to progress.

A range of issues will be in the public domain over the coming months, from the future of the forest industry, the size of parliament and the impact of national health reforms. I would like to see a range of views considered and respected as we move forward. The best outcome will be achieved this way. In issues such as these, we must put aside vested interests and make decisions for the long-term benefit of all Tasmanians. Being in government is not about shying away from reform or shirking tough decisions. Government is about leadership and making the often tough decisions for the long-term benefit of all who live here.

I look forward to being part of a new Labor government that has the courage to make tough decisions, that provides the leadership to keep our economy strong and has the heart to protect and build socially inclusive communities. Tasmanians want us to do more than keep an eye on what matters. They rightly expect us to get on with fixing the problems. However, what has become clear to me as a new member of this Parliament and of this Government is that it is very easy to identify problems but much harder to create the solutions.

My purpose in raising the issues I have spoken about today is to flag my intentions so that the people of Tasmania know that my goal in this Parliament will always be to work my hardest to ensure that the solutions and benefits flow to where they are most needed. I wish to thank all those people who have supported me in my efforts to be elected to Parliament. I had a small but dedicated campaign team who worked tirelessly from letterboxing to doorknocking to pretty much whatever was required. I was overwhelmed by their willingness to support me and I will not let them down.

A special thank you to my mother, Lynn, and my brother, Mark, for their help and support throughout the campaign and through the ups and downs of the past 32 years. I would also like to thank my partner, Jess, for all her support. I think we both know I couldn't have done it without you, so thanks very much. I have been warmly welcomed in the Parliamentary Labor Party and have great respect for all my colleagues. I would like to thank each of them for their support and encouragement, especially my fellow member for Denison, Premier David Bartlett.

Members laughing.

Mr BACON - I will say I would like to congratulate Brian Wightman, Bec White and David O'Byrne as fellow new Labor members and I look forward very much to the work ahead.

Members - Hear, hear.