



Mr Josh Willie MP

House of Assembly

Date: 16 May 2024

Electorate: Clark

[11.47 a.m.]

Mr WILLIE (Clark) (Inaugural) - Madam Speaker, in recognition of the deep history and culture of this island, I would like to acknowledge the muwinina people, the traditional owners and custodians of the land on which we meet today, nipaluna/Hobart in lutruwita Tasmania. I acknowledge and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. I pay my respects to any members of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community here today.

I acknowledge the continued connection of the Tasmanian Aboriginal people to this land for well over 40,000 years. I acknowledge this land was never ceded and that the Tasmanian Aboriginal people survived invasion and dispossession and they continue to maintain their identity and culture.

It is with great pride I rise to deliver my inaugural speech in this place. Inaugural can mean new beginning, and for me, at this moment it is a new beginning in the House of Assembly. Others might say I am moving out of the frying pan and into the fire. As I embark on this new journey, it is important to acknowledge my time in the other place where I have learnt so much, as well as building an understanding of different perspectives.

If my former colleagues from the other place are listening, it was not you, it was me who changed in the end, but I cherished the time we spent together. I now have the rare opportunity to deliver one of these speeches in each House of the Tasmanian parliament. The privilege to serve in both Houses is not lost on me and it is a responsibility I take very seriously. I would like to thank the people of Elwick for allowing me to represent them for eight years. I am still a part of that community, and I will always work for them.

I now thank the people of Clark for trusting me to represent them too. In my first speech I made a commitment to work at all times with determination, compassion and commitment. Today, I not only make that commitment as the member for Clark, but to the whole island in my new role as shadow treasurer. I know the understanding that I have built over time in different regions will inform my work in these new roles.

Like so many Tasmanians, I have family connections across the state. I had grandparents from Braddon, John and Marie. I spent a lot of my childhood visiting them in Somerset. I love the north west coast and feel deeply connected to the region through my family. I remember all of the day trips to nearby towns like Wynyard, Penguin and Ulverstone.

I also have a set of grandparents from Bass, Alf and Mary. They were small business owners. Their business, Glasgow Engineering, has been running continuously in Launceston for 132 years. It is a fourth-generation family business and my uncle John is the managing director.

I say this tongue in cheek, but it was a great disappointment for my Nanna that I ended up in this place and not as the fifth generation running the Glasgow. She did tell me she was immensely proud of me when I was elected back in 2016, but she later noted that I was on the wrong team. Spending all my childhood living a couple of doors down the road from Alf and Mary they had a big influence on my life and how to live it, but definitely not on my politics. I know there are members of Bass here today who knew Alf and Mary well. Great people.

I grew up in Launceston but I have lived my adult life in Hobart. The mates I had then, I still have today, and we are close. Like many Launceston kids I left to go to university. I followed the trail, blazed by many before me with the experiences of share houses and pubs and the occasional lecture thrown in. Other friends left to pursue their dreams, working in hospitality on the mainland, and they have become very good at what they do.

Whilst this trend has always been there, we lose too many good, hard working Tasmanians for better opportunities elsewhere, which is costing our state dearly in terms of skills shortages and economic growth. On a personal level, it makes it exceptionally hard to catch up with close friends when they are so far away, especially when we all have young families.

One of my goals in this place is to encourage more skilled Tasmanians to come back to the state and encourage others to stay. My close friends have been so important to me during difficult times in my life, but it was in Hobart where I met my wife, Holly. We share the aspirations of our community. Holly is everything to me. My colleagues will attest that she makes me a better person through her intelligence, understanding and care.

In my first speech, I spoke about us expecting our first child. Well, Alfie arrived healthy and happy, and now all of a sudden, he is seven. He is a delightful kid, but where does the time go? He loves YouTube and like many parents with children, we constantly struggle with screen time. I would be happy to take any advice on that matter.

Teddy, his little brother, arrived not long after. He is a lot like his dad. He likes a bit of trouble or fun. He is very active, loves sport and this year he started school full time. Of course, he attends a fantastic local public school.

Elsie is their baby sister who is here today. She has a happy nature and a cheeky grin. We celebrated her first birthday during the campaign, but I was so time poor that her birthday decorations served as a backdrop for my Zoom meetings for the remainder of the campaign.

Like others who work in this place, our families make huge sacrifices. I am not seeking sympathy, and there is certainly not much of that in the community for politicians, but I want to express my gratitude to my family. I feel it deeply every day when I am with them and when I am away. I know sometimes the kids would like dad to have a job like some of the other parents at school because they tell me, but I also know they want to support me, to be here, to make good decisions for our community, and that they are proud of me. I guess there is a balance.

I would also like to thank my parents-in-law, Marilyn and Bruce, who are here today, who give so much love and support to our family at the drop of a hat when I might not be present.

Speaking of gratitude, I would like to thank my campaign team who supported my election to this Chamber. There are many people to thank. We ran a very grassroots campaign and I was wonderfully supported by many letterboxers, doorknockers, and people helping me get the message out in the community. Like all campaigns, there is a small group of individuals who put their lives on hold to support me whenever it was required. Thank you so much to Ellie Morris, Jordie, Tessa and my mum, Jenny. Your commitment to the Labor Party and to me has been unwavering and I appreciate your solidarity.

Madam Speaker, I know it is cliché, but the saying life is a journey, not a destination rings so true to me. People often hear me say it because it can bring perspective to a difficult decision or experience, and we learn from it.

I have experienced highs and lows like many others. I spoke in my first speech how I miss my dad, Mike, who would be so proud of moments like this. That will never go away. As an education leader in his community and a person with very humble beginnings and strong Labor values, I really wish I could turn to him for advice. Luckily, my mum provides plenty of support and encouragement. She is very proud too. She spent her life teaching in Tasmanian schools across the state and has a deep understanding of inequality in our communities. We are very close and I am thankful for the guidance of both my parents. I am acutely aware not everyone is so lucky. I guess when both of your parents have such strong social justice values, it is inevitable to become part of you too.

I will always miss my brother, Jonathan, who died at a young age. Even all these years on, his loss is still very raw. I will never forget the support and understanding of my mates during those teenage years that were so tough.

Madam Speaker, we are all shaped by our life experience, and I know my experience has given me an insight into the importance and strength of community. At times, I have relied on strength, understanding and compassion of the community around me. Caring and kind communities make us all stronger.

I am a son, a brother, a husband, a father, a teacher, a member of parliament and always a learner. I approach everyday wanting to make a difference. That is how I came to be here. I have learned that hard work accompanies opportunity and education is lifelong. I know the difference having an opportunity can make to a life. Not everyone is so fortunate to have that choice, and sometimes it does not have to be that complicated.

Like access to transport. I was particularly interested in a *Mercury* article recently where Oscar Wattersley and Conan Masuda spoke out about Tasmania's youth brain drain through their participation on the Committee for Greater Hobart. Among other important issues, they highlighted limited public transport options being a barrier to access other services like education and job opportunities.

As a teacher, I know education is a tool of social justice and a vehicle for opportunity. As a member of this place, I know education is a fundamental driver of economic development and it will underpin how we move into the future. Tasmanians in our regions need to have equal access to opportunity, equal access to education and skills and training to make their communities stronger. That is why being part of the Labor movement is so important to me.

I am aware that I stand on the shoulders of giants in being in this place today. The Labor movement is a guiding light. It has been the forefront of advocating for the rights of workers, challenging oppressive systems and championing social justice. It is a natural progression for me to be drawn to the Labor movement, a movement that reflects the resilience and strength of ordinary people who refuse to accept injustice. It knows true prosperity cannot be achieved when wealth and power are in the hands of a privileged few. It seeks to empower marginalised people and uplift their voices to create an inclusive society where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.

Fighting for these values extends well beyond the workplace, and it crosses into every aspect of our lives, our communities, political systems and, importantly, policies that impact education, healthcare, housing and the environment. It offers hope for communities where everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

That is why being a member of parliament for Tasmanian Labor has been the greatest privilege. The party is over 100 years old and still going strong because of the values and the extraordinary people committed to the cause. I will always be a servant, trying to give back and contribute after the opportunities it has afforded me.

Along with the Labor Party, I love this place. Over my 40 years, Tasmania has given me a good life. I am grateful for the opportunities I have had and I see my purpose here is to fight for others. The Tasmanian people have my greatest respect. I firmly believe Tasmania can become a beacon of hope and innovation in a world grappling with the urgent challenges of climate change, inequality and unsustainable development.

At the heart of this are our people, but we need to give them a fair go, not just some. I am still passionately committed to improving education outcomes across our state because I believe it is the strongest thing that any state government could do to improve lives, not only economically, but socially too. Without an improved education system, our workforce issues will continue and we will not be prepared for the changing world.

We need to plan to make the most of our opportunities as a state and realise our human potential. Better education and training will mean we have workers where we need them the most, and that, of course, means more jobs and better lives for Tasmanians. Despite these historical challenges, Tasmanians are resilient and determined. We share a unique island with rugged landscapes and we are isolated, yet connected more than ever to other parts of the world.

Living on an island brings a culture of creativeness. We need to harness all the skills of our people in every sector to come together. We need to support small

businesses too and work to bring jobs and opportunity to everyone, but also make sure Tasmanians are supported to live their best lives with quality education, skills and training, healthcare, housing, infrastructure and transport. We have such an opportunity at this moment to be smart, sustainable and inclusive as we confront climate change.

We need to learn the lessons of the past and sometimes they are painful lessons which are ingrained in our history. These lessons demonstrate the need to build a future that is rooted in empathy, compassion and solidarity. We live in a time of great uncertainty and chaos, yet in this environment we live in one of the most beautiful places on Earth. As an island, if we are smart and agile, we can lead the way.

We have done it before. Tasmanians built the Hydro. We invested in it for 100 years and we have preserved large parts of our natural environment. The developed and developing world wants so much of what we have: a zero-emissions economy powered by clean, renewable energy resources. Tasmania's emissions profile and renewable electricity assets provide a strong foundation for us to be leaders in emissions reduction and climate change mitigation whilst also growing the economy and jobs.

However, we cannot rest on our laurels. We need to redouble our efforts developing more renewable energy, particularly wind and hydrogen projects, to drive our economy. It is staggering that we have not built any new generation assets since 2013. With more renewable energy production underpinning the Tasmanian economy, we can become world leaders in many other sectors, like transport in its different modes. I can think of one magnificent example of what is possible with innovative thinking and that is Incat's new battery-powered passenger ship which is being built in the heart of my electorate. There are other opportunities too in agriculture, aquaculture and other advanced manufacturing, and eventually doing the hard things like producing green metals right here in Tasmania.

Progress does not need to come at the expense of the planet, but most of all, what we need to do is invest in and look after our people. On our small island, our communities and our fates are intertwined. Actions and decisions can reverberate across the entire community. That is why inclusivity lies at the heart of the way forward. We need to hear young people's voices. They are going to be the ones that lead us into an uncertain world. It is not good enough that there are young people who cannot get to school on time because of poor public transport, like the young Tasmanians I heard on ABC Radio during the election campaign. It is not good enough that rents are too high, and that young people are stuck in the rent trap and that the housing they can afford is nowhere near their workplaces.

We have to put more effort into making sure every voice is heard, every perspective is valued, and it empowers Tasmanians to contribute to the common good. We need to make sure that our decision-making processes are transparent and participatory to ensure that no-one is left behind in our quest for progress.

It is going to take a lot of work to improve our decision-making processes in this parliament and in the parliaments of the future. Processes need to move beyond the rhetoric of serving governments and become woven into the fabric of our societies. Our island should celebrate its diversity. It enriches all of us and if we collectively work together, our differences make us stronger. That includes in this place where we make

decisions. From our schools and our workplaces, every corner of our island state should reflect the richness of the human experience; cultures, traditions and beliefs coming together for the common good. Parliament can and should do this too.

In summary, when we live on an island, we need to defend each other. Our relative isolation in this place is deeply ingrained in our consciousness. In isolation, we can flourish by harnessing the power of innovation, investing in our people, lifting education standards, making our established industries more sustainable, and creating a society that is truly self-sufficient. Living on an island, we should understand that our strength lies in togetherness, collaboration and solidarity.

Madam Speaker, I might have disappointed my nanna by not becoming an engineer, but in this place my sleeves are rolled up and I am ready to get to work.