



Mr Andrew Jenner MP

House of Assembly

Date: 11 June 2024

Electorate: Lyons

[2.30 p.m.]

Mr JENNER (Lyons) (Inaugural) - Madam Speaker, I know you have heard this many times before, but I congratulate you on your appointment. It has not been since 1959 that there has been an opposition Speaker. It is an amazing achievement. To put that into context, I was born in 1959. That is 65 years ago.

What a great honour it is to be here today representing the residents of Lyons. I first take this opportunity to thank everybody who supported me throughout the election. The JLN worked tirelessly behind the scenes and all my friends and family.

I stand here today to assure Tasmanians that my voice and my accountability is to them and them alone. We did not have a big team - just the four of us on the ground. It was my amazing wife, who has been my rock for this election and for the last 40 years. I also had my brother, Steve, who has been my inspiration. He was a finalist in the Tasmanian of the Year awards, has had international recognition for his work with Young Aussie and Healthy Active Resilient Kids (HARK), has been an Olympic torch carrier, and has worked within the education system in Tasmania for over 40 years. So there is not a lot of pressure on me. I will also not forget my dog, Bentley, who helped put a smile back on my face, even after those challenging campaign days, which I am sure we have all had.

The JLN made a commitment to work with the Liberal government to create a stable economy for all Tasmania. That said, we stood for transparency and accountability and putting people before politics. You cannot truly have a government that works for the people without being accountable to the people. That will be our objective.

I look forward to working with all my colleagues to make Tasmania a better place to live in. I know that although we may be on different sides of this room and have different ideas, we all share that same goal.

I was born in the United Kingdom, as you probably noticed, in a beautiful part of the south-east of England called Buckinghamshire. I grew up in a three-bedroom house in a social housing area in which between seven and nine of us lived. We only had one toilet but, thank goodness, it was an outside toilet because no one stayed in it for very long.

I thought, Madam Speaker, this would be the perfect opportunity for me to inform members of my past experiences and expertise, which I hope to contribute in my role as a member of this parliament.

I first visited Tasmania when I was 14. I migrated here when I was 19 in the 1970s and two of my three children, Kirsty and Kylie, were born at the Queen Alex Hospital, as it was called then, in the 1980s. My wife, Julia, was pregnant with my son when we had to return to England, so technically he was made in Tasmania, assembled in flight, and born in England.

At that time, we were living between our home in Lewisham and above a cafe in town. I worked for the SBT Bank and owned the Queen Bee Cafe, which I renamed the Harbour Lights, which I think a few of you have used from time to time.

I was also a martial arts instructor at the Tasmanian Police Academy for eight years and taught at several different schools around the state a non-aggressive way of handling conflict situations. I have four different black belts plus my masters in weapons, which I thought, Madam Speaker, might be useful here in question time - metaphorically speaking, of course.

In the early 1990s, I had to return to the United Kingdom, supposedly for six weeks, to run our family business. My father was very ill and I was told he only had weeks to live. Technically, this was true. He should have been a politician. He died 1300 weeks later, or 25 years.

I took over running our small family business and expanded the company to incorporate several cafes and other leisure activities such as crazy golf, putting courses, mooring for boats, car parks, et cetera, and I have run that business now for the last 33 years. I say this because I am fully aware of the trials and tribulations of owning and running a small business, not only here in Tasmania but in the United Kingdom. As the past president of the Chamber of Commerce, I know small businesses in Tasmania, like the UK, make up 97 per cent of employers who employ 20 people or fewer, so they are not just the major employer but they are a major financial contributor to the economy.

Whilst in the UK, I tried to become a magistrate and a justice of the peace, a position which has existed for over 650 years, put into place by Edward I in 1285. I have always been interested in criminal law, so started my training which was ongoing for the next 20 years-plus. I must point out that there seems to be some misconception that UK magistrates are like JPs and that we do not sit in court. Nothing could be further from the truth. Our main courts are the Adult Court, the Family Court and the Youth Court. UK magistrates deal with over 95 per cent of all criminal cases, from motoring offences to public order offences, theft, assault occasioning bodily harm, et cetera. Even murder, rape and robbery all start in my courts.

In England, the Lord Chancellor, through the Chief Justice, appoints magistrates. We are selected from the community on gender, age, and ethnic background, and we bring a broad breadth of experience to the bench. At 32, I was one of the youngest ever to be appointed in the south-east of England. I can only comment on my own training, but it was extensive and lasted the entire period of my time on the bench, which was over 20 years. I spent the first seven years studying so that I could become a qualified chairman and presiding justice. This then allowed me to sit in the Crown Court on appeals with judges.

It is also a prerequisite that you visit every prison and detention centre in your division so that when you sentence someone to prison or a detention centre, you are aware of the ramifications of your decisions. Throughout my 20 years-plus service in the Adult Court and 18 years on the Youth Court, I would do everything in my power to keep youths out of these detention centres. Do not get me wrong, there are some youths who do not want to be helped, but in my experience over 90 per cent of the crimes committed by youths were just cries for help. I hope to be putting this experience and knowledge to some use while I am here in parliament.

In 2000 I ran for council in the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and left in 2015 with a small gap in between. It is one of the largest borough councils in the south-east of England, with then over 57 councillors. I held the position of cabinet member for leisure, culture and tourism.

Tasmania has a large tourism industry and I am fully aware of the impact of tourism on the economy. Windsor Castle has 1.6 million visitors a year and Windsor Legoland has 2.4 million visitors, making it the most popular theme park in England. However, just as important is the impact on residents who have to live with it, and there is a balancing act that is important to get right.

I was chairman of planning and licencing. The royal borough deals with over 12,000 planning applications per year, from house extensions to multi-million pound developments. I was then elected to deputy mayor and then mayor from 2012 to 2014. The mayors date back to 1685 in Maidenhead and 1369 in Windsor. I had approximately 1200 functions a year - that is seven a day - plus chaired all the full council meetings, and with 57 councillors, you can imagine, it was like trying to herd cats.

My mayoral office was next to Windsor Castle at the Guildhall. I would meet the late Queen or the Duke, depending on engagements, once a month approximately, and the rest of the Royal Family at different times of the year. The Queen was an amazing person. She had that ability to make you feel like the most important person in the room. It was a rather surreal experience, being that I had grown up in a rented council house in one of the toughest social housing areas around that even the police did not want to venture down to, and here I was having lunch with the Queen at Windsor Castle, Buckingham Palace, or attending Ascot racecourse.

I remember once talking to the Queen and I apologised about my facial hair. I had not shaved due to the fact that I was raising money for Movember. She asked about the charity and asked if I had won. The Duke chipped in, 'It's a bloody moustache, not a horse race!'. Another time, when attending Windsor Castle, one of the corgis took a fancy to my leg, and I can tell you they have got grip, which as you can imagine, was rather embarrassing. No-one seemed to notice. The Queen was happily chatting away and I am trying to flick this dog off. I was saved by the Duke, who came over and told the corgi to bugger off with winks; he had an amazing sense of humour.

Madam Speaker, I have spent most of my life serving the community in different capacities - as a magistrate, councillor, president of several different charities, and chairman of non-profit organisations, mainly for raising funds for children and adults with learning difficulties. I have enjoyed every moment.

I was diagnosed with dyslexia and suffer from ADHD. At the age of 14, I was taken to Mount Nelson teacher training college, where an amazing lady, Sister Christine, who specialised in learning difficulties, helped me read with these phonological what they call now kinesthetics which is being able to read by using other senses. I went from never being able to read to reading a book a week within two years.

I thought I would take this opportunity to bring awareness to people with this problem. The sad fact is, even though now we are in the 21st century, people and employers have this preconceived idea that people with dyslexia or individuals who have learning difficulties are somehow less. In a report in 2021, the Bureau of Statistics found that nearly half of adult Tasmanians were functionally illiterate, so you can imagine it is an issue here. The day-to-day tasks you take for granted, like reading a paper, computer screen, or reading to your children, even safety labels or ingredients, are difficult or impossible for people who are neurodivergent.

I know the government works hard in Tasmania for literacy and numeracy and you have a council for both of those, plus the government has a body of 26Ten. I thank the minister, Jo Palmer, for all the information she has given me. However, in my humble opinion, there is a huge issue with society because one of the biggest hurdles for neurodivergent individuals is self-embarrassment - like I have here. Society has to change and remove that stigma. Without it, it will just keep perpetuating, so I encourage all others who have learning difficulties not to hide it, but own it.

A pillar of the agreement made between the government and the JLN is transparency. Transparency will be the cornerstone of my time in parliament. I will endeavour to ensure that in the spirit of transparency, I will pursue reforms in right to information laws and transparency in political donations. It is impossible to know a party's true intention if you do not know who is funding them. It was once said that politicians should wear sponsor jackets like racing car drivers then you would know who owns them.

The Ashley Detention Centre and child sex abuse on a wider scale must be addressed. We owe it to these children and it must be done sooner rather than later. As I said before, nearly half of adult Tasmanians are functionally illiterate and I would like to use my own experience to help others reach their full potential. The logging of old-growth forests must be addressed. Tasmania is home to some of the world's largest living giants. They were here before us and they deserve to be here long after we are gone.

The internationally owned salmon farms are pushing uniquely Tasmanian species to the brink of extinction, destroying Tasmania's waterways and extinguishing livelihoods for many Tasmanians who live off them. While I understand the economic implications of closing down water-based salmon farms, we must look for better solutions. After all, there are more sustainable alternative ways of farming salmon - land-based aquaculture facilities using the new Recirculating Aquaculture Systems (RAS) technology for one. Yes, the initial costs are more expensive but, in the long term, they are more cost-effective and far less polluting while sustaining long-term employment.

Tasmania's natural beauty has long been celebrated. We are lucky enough to live somewhere renowned for its natural beauty. Our stunning unique flora and fauna and coastal waterways are at the forefront of the tourist industry and it is essential we fight to protect them and safeguard them for future generations.

We must put Tasmania and the people who live here first and foremost. After all, along with the original Aboriginal owners, we are the custodians of this amazing, beautiful island.

Members - Hear, hear.