

Inaugural Speech – Hon. Lin Thorp MLC



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Legislative Council

Date: 29 September 1999

Electorate: Rumney

PREMIER'S ADDRESS

Ms THORP (Rumney) - Mr President, I thank honourable members for the opportunity to speak to this debate but I do appreciate that it may well be the only opportunity I have to do so and come out relatively unscathed. My congratulations to the honourable members for Pembroke and Murchison on their election. I look forward to working with them in this place.

I would like to thank the President for his gracious welcome and I thank my fellow members for their congratulations and offers of assistance as I learn the ropes. A particular thanks to the Clerk of the Council for his kind assistance and to the staff of the Council who have been unstinting in their help since my arrival. Of course my presence here is due to the support and faith shown in me by the people of Rumney who have given me the opportunity to promote our electorate, assist the constituency and contribute to the advancement of Rumney.

Mr President, I have consistently voiced my intention to be a hardworking and very accessible representative, and the voters of Rumney have given me that opportunity. It was a difficult and exhausting campaign, as honourable members would appreciate. My opponent, Steve Wilson, was a long-serving member of this place. My grassroots campaign involved many hours of doorknocking. In fact, Mr President, I doorknocked the entire electorate twice from South Arm to Lauderdale; from Clarendon Vale to Rokeby and Cremorne; from Mornington to Richmond; Midway Point to Sorell; Dodges Ferry, Lewisham, Park Beach; from Carlton to Primrose Sands; from Dunalley to Murdunna and from Eaglehawk Neck to Nubeena and White Beach. I know those areas very well.

I have visited dozens of community groups, attended sporting events and visited local businesses. I received a great deal of help from volunteer rank-and-file members of the Labor Party; students, retirees, pensioners and working people who generously gave of their time to help a Labor Party candidate. I stand here, Mr President, unashamedly as the Labor member for Rumney. As a Labor person I have declared myself to believe in the principles of the Labor Party and I believe the voters of Rumney have appreciated that honesty. As such, I believe in strengthening and reinforcing existing rights, the elimination of discrimination and inequity, the extension of standards of freedom and justice to all members of our community and in the promotion of peace.

I believe it is our goal to ensure that all members of the community are afforded dignity and fairness by Government, by the legal process and by each other. This goal is best achieved by fair distribution of resources and I am committed to empowering those who are disadvantaged or discriminated against. The people of Rumney can be

Inaugural Speech – Hon. Lin Thorp MLC

confident that in all my actions I will be striving for a just, safe and more tolerant community.

Mr President, this will include working to ensure that our roads are safe. Particularly pressing is the need to improve both the Arthur Highway and South Arm Road. These less than adequate roads link together some of the most beautiful communities in the State. They include the historic towns of Richmond and Port Arthur, the beach communities of Clifton, Dodges Ferry and Seven Mile Beach and close-knit communities like Rokeby and Midway Point. Sorell is growing quickly as evidenced by the thriving industrial estate. Dunalley, Nubeena and Eaglehawk Neck have flourishing aquaculture and fisheries developments and South Arm is the home of emu farms and protea nurseries, and living in these communities, Mr President, are the most diverse, creative and welcoming people you could hope to meet.

We need to ensure that the wonderful natural resources of Rumney, its fisheries and its forests, beaches and mountains are treated with respect and used sustainably with the maximum long-term benefit to the people of the area. We need to ensure that the Rumney communities have proper access to services, including banking and postal services, health services and equitable access to education. I will continue to work towards getting a doctor into Rokeby and for adequate ambulance services for all the Rumney area.

Mr President, it is with equity of access in mind that I turn to *Tasmania Together*. As the Premier stated in his address to Parliament, we are proud of our initiative to develop *Tasmania Together*, a social, economic and environmental plan for Tasmania in partnership with the community. The Labor Government is committed to working with Tasmanians to develop a vision for the next millennium. *Tasmania Together* will provide a framework to identify medium and long-term goals and to clearly state our objectives.

The Government is committed to *Tasmania Together* being owned and driven by the community and it is therefore critical that the plan has bipartisan support across the political spectrum. It is pleasing to note that the Community Leaders Group, which will oversee the development of *Tasmania Together*, was endorsed by all political parties. The people of Rumney can be assured that my efforts will go to ensuring that our area will be at the forefront of that development.

Tasmania Together has highlighted the clear role that education will play in any plan to improve the lifestyle and the employment prospects of our young people and the growth of the economy. Mr President, as a teacher and a mother, education has long been and will remain close to my heart.

True equity in education is not easy to achieve but we must strive towards it if we believe in equality for all members of our community. This must be regardless of gender, language background, culture, location, socioeconomic background or disability. I base this on my belief that all children have a right to a quality education. It is an unpalatable fact that many of our students by virtue of their background or the way that their education is provided derive less benefit from that education than others. The commendable efforts of the minister, Paula Wriedt, to address these issues are made all the more difficult by the Federal Government's bias towards non-

Inaugural Speech – Hon. Lin Thorp MLC

government schools in its funding decisions. In its 1998-99 Budget the Federal Government provided over \$2.5 million to non-government schools with plans to increase that by 29 per cent in 2002-03. In the same period it plans to increase government school funding by only 12 per cent. This equates to an additional \$800 per year for a child in a non-government school compared to \$100 additional per child in a government school.

We know many groups of children in our State schools are disadvantaged: Aboriginal students, students with disabilities and learning difficulties, students with language backgrounds other than English and students who are poor or of low social status, students who are geographically isolated and students who are at risk of leaving home early through homelessness, child abuse, substance abuse and being pregnant or a young mother.

Mr President, in our community many students have multiple disadvantages through belonging to more than one group and what contributes to that disadvantage? Some of our students are educationally disadvantaged by issues of access and attendance. Out of school experiences may include household responsibilities such as looking after younger brothers and sisters, doing housework, helping in the family business or seasonal work. Other students experience poor health and/or sleep patterns. They may be victims of domestic violence or abuse or suffer from conditions such as school phobia. Some families cannot afford school uniforms or levies, excursion costs or money for the school tuckshop. Other students find the physical structure of the school impedes their access or that there is a lack of appropriate transport or modified equipment. Some students fear harassment and bullying. Not all our students have equal access to the curriculum. The cost of some subjects may preclude students. Not all our parents feel confident to become involved in school life through lack of self-confidence, their own school experiences or problems with language or transport. Attendance rates are much lower for our Aboriginal students, they are over-represented in special schools and tend to leave school earlier.

These problems are exacerbated by our lack of valuing and recognition of Aboriginal cultural heritage and difference in social perspectives. Aboriginal students experience high levels of poverty and socioeconomic disadvantage which mitigate against their chance of educational success.

Mr President, we know from statistical evidence that students with intellectual disabilities have less access to education through physical, personnel and attitudinal factors. They often experience resource restrictions and harassment. Many students with disabilities have restricted access to school because of their need for specialised equipment and staffing needs. Physical restrictions may make access to buildings in different parts of the school problematic. Students with disabilities tend to leave school earlier.

We also know that students living in poverty have difficulties accessing education. They often miss school through housing changes as families move to find work or more affordable housing. When people are poor, Mr President, hunger, lack of warmth, increased illness and accident and simply trying to survive day to day seem to take priority over school. Our schools tend to be middle class with teachers from middle-class backgrounds and often this clash of culture means that students from low

Inaugural Speech – Hon. Lin Thorp MLC

socioeconomic backgrounds are more often suspended and expelled, and what are we doing about it?

The Minister for Education has initiated a review of the inclusion policy which has examined the provision of education to students with disabilities. The important issues of behaviour management and curriculum development remain departmental priorities yet as we speak the social workers, guidance officers, speech therapists and support teachers of the regional support services are working themselves into the ground trying to overcome these problems. They are supported by many progressive and compassionate teachers in our schools. Mr President, they need our recognition of their invaluable work and our promise to support them adequately; they have mine and I know they have that of my colleagues.

As well as the need for equity in education we need to strive to ensure equity in the provision of health services to all people in our community. We need to have sensible, sustainable use of our natural resources and we need to protect our State as a carbon sink. We need to move into the next millennium with optimism and as part of a new republic, as a completely independent nation . The Premier's Address last week in the House of Assembly described the vision for Tasmania which is clean, green, clever and progressive. I am sure that this vision will be embraced by the members of this House.