



Rene Hidding MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Lyons

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr HIDDING (Lyons) - I am pleased to second this motion before the House and I also record my agreement with the mover and his comments about the Governor.

May I begin by congratulating all the other members of the House on their election and offer an expression of goodwill to each of them as we set about managing the affairs of this State.

I also extend my congratulations to you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the august position and if I may be allowed a little levity I think you look as cool in that Chair as you do on your Harley.

Members laughing.

Mr HIDDING - I take this opportunity to address the House for the first time with a great deal of pride and pleasure. The electors of Lyons have extended to me and six others in this place the privilege of serving them. At this early stage I have gained what I think is a reasonably solid understanding of the responsibility that this task confers on me but I accept that the learning continues steeply upward.

The path leading to my election featured much face-to-face contact with the electors of Lyons and it took various forms but at all times clear messages were available that are now burned into my conscience.

The Lyons electorate, Mr Speaker, while a relatively ridiculous size and shape is a very tough taskmaster for a representative like me that attempts to work all ends equally but it is an electorate however which provides a rich tapestry of the Tasmanian community. This tapestry includes complete opposites in terms of wealth and in low income; in terms of enterprise and in people in retirement and in terms of urban dwellers and some seriously displaced families. A description of the tapestry could well be a courageous people in courageous enterprises.

While some of the larger agricultural enterprises may seem to have a reasonable income the return on their net assets are of a level that is laughable compared to other industries. Many of the smaller agricultural enterprises indeed continue to operate well below the breadline in a commercial and personal income sense.

Make no mistake, Mr Speaker, in my opinion our farmers are the contemporary heroes of Tasmania's economy. Recently they faced major change in climatic conditions; a world crash in wool prices; Asian markets being skewed by America's economic programs, and still they're in there, working long hard hours, walking financial tightropes and changing their businesses smoothly to international best practice - and in most cases, with their lifestyles extremely modest. On top of all that they manage to maintain an excellent industry body, the TFGA. Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to record my sincere admiration for this sector of industry.

The oceans that wash the shores of the Lyons electorate also provide a great income for Tasmania. The brave people of the wild fishery industry are not much different from our farmers. High capital inputs, uncertain market conditions, and a constant worry for the future of their industry. The task for any government in making decisions to protect the future of their fisheries in an equitable manner is one which will take much consultation and education for all parties involved. I am delighted to see that a person such as the Minister for Fisheries is in charge of that portfolio.

A shining light in the fishing industry is the abalone industry. This industry has always had the great good fortune to have strong leaders, people prepared to forgo immediate profits for the sake of long-term security. This industry has a strong message for other industries; they have made the hard decisions when they present themselves. They do not put them off and they have got strong self-discipline and they promote this to others in their industry. This industry has displayed courage and intellectual imagination to build an industry worth a big percentage of the State's GDP. The Government owes this industry respect for what they have done and respect for what they can still achieve.

Another exciting industry in the tapestry of the Lyons electorate is the aquaculture industry, and I am not just referring to the fish farms in Macquarie Harbour, but the leading edge of the industry found in some of these amazing facilities on the east coast: oyster hatcheries with huge potential; abalone hatcheries that are among the first in the world, and if not the first they at least have the genetics of the most desirable species under constant research and development. There is an air of excitement in these facilities. They are well placed to become very successful enterprises indeed and the Government should give them every form of encouragement it can.

The timber industry in the Lyons electorate is a huge employer of people and of assets. The operators in this industry have also been courageous in their investment decisions. While knowing that the resource is there, the political environment has waxed and waned at the whim of a single Federal minister who, by the stroke of a pen, could put thousands out of work. I am a positive person and I believe that the forest and timber industry and the environmental lobby will one day work side by side in harmony to properly harness the wealth available from the truism that Tasmania grows trees better and quicker than anywhere in the world. The quality of our native species, our temperate climate, will ultimately prevail to make Tasmania a showplace for the world in forest management practices.

I also have a vision that in the not too distant future farmers will be able to describe themselves as tree farmers, as well as graziers or croppers. I am aware that there are substantial landowners who have the business plans, environmental plans and the financial resources to commence private forestry on a major scale, almost immediately creating many new jobs. The Federal and State governments both owe these people the respect due to them as major potential employers and should not just insult them by treating them as potential environmental vandals.

All Tasmanians should also be excited by what is happening in the western part of the Lyons electorate. The Mount Lyell mine is a showpiece of enterprise in modern Australia, striving towards latest international best practice, mixed with good tough horse sense, all working with a great local community to produce excellent outputs. The future of the other mines in the area, such as Pasma Deep, Henty Gold and Savage River also feel me with great anticipation.

But, Mr Speaker, the rich tapestry of the community in the Lyons electorate is not all about enterprise, and the stitching that holds this tapestry together is the community itself. A positive attitude, a wry lift of the shoulders in times of adversity and a kind word for others in more need is easy to find in the townships and backblocks of Lyons, and I know that all other elected members of Lyons would share this view. A genuine concern for Australia and, in particular, Tasmania is a feature in their conversations. A healthy cynicism about the services that are available to city dwellers and not to themselves keeps their elected representatives well on their toes. They also display a keen sense of economics. They might not know about macro or micro or otherwise, but they do know that most enterprises in the world these days are about the distribution of wealth, but the generation of that wealth in the first place comes down to the real workers of the world like themselves. The elected representatives of these people, including local councillors upper House members and the seven MHAs in this place are very fortunate indeed to be part of this rich tapestry.

Whatever vision for Tasmania each one of us carry in our minds we would all agree that we want to leave Tasmania in at least the order it is in today, preferably in better condition for our children and our grandchildren. Many of the good things about Tasmania today however have come about through good economic performance for one reason or another. Tasmania in the past has had cheap power and it has had mineral abundance and those happy circumstances do not necessarily go on forever. We should be about setting the scene for the next 25-odd years in Tasmania.

My two year old granddaughter, Amy, in the year - I will take the year that my colleague for Denison used - 2020 will by the grace of God have her own children by then and they will be wondering if I, back in 1996, had 20/20 vision in both senses of the word. The major power generation capacity available to industries then will be available from one or more sources decided upon by us in the very near future. We have to get those options right and the sources we choose have to aim at oversupply, not break even. How on earth can we expect industry to think big in Tasmania if the Government does not think big as well?

Much has been recently made of business and industry groups calling upon this place to turn a negative into a positive, to use the hung Parliament as a method to achieve a bipartisan approach to State development. I will take that advice in the spirit it was intended but I do call upon business and industry groups themselves to come closer to the heart of the issue and participate more strongly in the process. It will not do any more for these groups to be over the fence throwing missiles into our compound. If business and industry groups are genuine about economic development then they should become familiar with the Government's long-term fiscal strategies and the budget process and should make submissions to the budget process and when they want changes to things like industrial relations or to workers compensation they should provide strong but balanced input into the process and when the Government makes the moves they wanted, not go and hide and be nowhere to be found in the public debate that follows. Business and industry need to have the same courage of their convictions that a government needs.

A vision for the future should not, as I said, only be about economic development, things that affect the well-being and pride of a community can be diverse. Each town and each region in Tasmania has its issues of cultural significance but we as a government have a role in preserving in a way that transcends dry economics. Only in that way will each community still have in that year 2020 the focal points that give a heart to communities. In a general sense, however, I think the best thing I can do for my grandchildren is to ensure that in 2020 Tasmania is at least still Tasmania.

I shudder when I hear Jeff Kennett talk about an economic bloc alliance between Victoria, Tasmania and South Australia. I see red when I realise that Australia, the nation, has signed protocols that forbid Tasmania, the State, from branding its produce as Tasmanian-made rather than Australian. I worry when I see arguments every month now about problematic Commonwealth and State relationships and taxation equities. Mr Speaker, if we do not watch it we will lose the very uniqueness that gives us our special position in this nation and on God's earth.

In an environmental sense this uniqueness includes the fact that because of our isolation we could quite properly aim to be the last bastion of clean and green on this planet in 2020. Being dictated to by States on development matters will not help that aim and neither will, in a merchandising sense, having our produce lumped together with other States, each with their own disease problems. This uniqueness of Tasmania in a political sense is the great deal that we were handed at the time of Federation. Tasmania got twelve seats at Federation and there are of course those States with 5 million-odd people who only have twelve seats themselves. In personal discussions with some of the centralists in politics on both sides that aberration in their minds is something that creates much teeth gritting. Of course the Northern Territory is pushing for statehood, and quite properly too and in due course I think they will get it. How many senators do they get? If we were to succumb to the popular view that they should have, say, three senators then Tasmania will find itself on the wrong end of the argument that population should not be a determining factor in these issues. What happens then? Northern Territory gets twelve senators and those huge population centres get their influence diluted even further. They are going to fight hard and dirty to ensure that this does not happen.

Mr Speaker, the changes that Australia faces in the next few years in the republic debate and in the flag debate and in the constitution debate is a box of issues with grave significance for Tasmania. I would have to say though on the flag debate I have changed my mind a little bit this afternoon, Mr Speaker, because I have not seen you all day because my colleague for Denison has put a flag exactly where -

Mr White - You know where you can put it.

Mr SPEAKER - Order.

Mr HIDDING - I moved it across but then I could not see the member for Denison so I will put it about halfway if you do not mind, Mr Speaker.

Mr Rundle - He's not the member for Denison - the member for Braddon.

Mr SPEAKER - Order. I ask the House to come to order. It is the member's maiden speech and should by courtesy be heard in silence.

Mr HIDDING - Thank you and I do apologise for that error to the Opposition Leader.

Preserving the uniqueness of Tasmania in the cultural sense is something however I do not lose a lot of sleep over. Cultural development is I believe a community issue preferably not to be engineered by governments. We have developed a civilised society largely on top of the big issues such as law and order, health and education, although there is much work to be done in these areas aiming for continual improvement.

The one factor which holds Tasmania back, as alluded to by my colleague from Denison, is the lack of population. For one reason or another Tasmania did not attract the big numbers of migrants that other States did, with the result that our population is static. Australian immigration in the last twenty years has had a large component of family migration and it is exponential in that sense. Hundreds of thousands of migrants have moved to cities like Sydney and Perth simply because their families had already migrated there in the first place. In Tasmania we missed those first waves of migration and therefore we missed the next waves. The result is a society that is predominantly Anglosaxon or at least Anglo-Celtic probably even in some ways more so than in England or Ireland. The very good news is of course that a goodly number of migrants did manage to sneak into this State around the forties and fifties, even the odd Dutchman or three.

It is a measure of the proportion of the migrants in Tasmania that it has taken until today for a European migrant to be sworn into this House where in other States of course this has been the case for some time. I am not absolutely sure whether I am the first European migrant to be sworn into this House but an eminent historian on my left tells me that he cannot remember another one.

Mr White - Gabby Haros.

Mr HIDDING - Okay, so there was another one.

Mr Michael Hodgman - He was born in Australia.

Mr HIDDING - I was born in Holland.

Mr Michael Hodgman - He was born in Holland; Haros was born in Australia.

Mr HIDDING - It is also probably a measure of the proportion of migrants in Tasmania that this particular Dutchman on a recent visit to Europe felt more at home in the streets of London than I did in the streets of Amsterdam. In all seriousness however the Tasmanian community may need to broaden its thinking on multicultural issues by that year 2020.

On a global scale, the next cultural dilemma facing the world will be the overpopulation of the world in especially areas of Asia. As a nation making its money out of Asia Australia will be looked to for relief in this dilemma and Tasmania will not in its wildest dreams miss out on being forced to see its responsibilities in this matter.

The motion that I have seconded uses the term that the measures which will be laid before us during the session will receive our careful consideration. I look forward to applying my careful consideration to these measures which by all accounts will be coming in thick and fast from all sides due to the particular circumstance of numbers in this place.

My careful consideration will use the input that I will continually seek from my constituents. It will utilise careful study of the issue and it will also utilise my Christian faith that is at the base of everything I do. Let there be no mistake about it I am a committed and practising Christian and the principles that are the fruits of that faith are not for sale. That is not to say that some Christians might think that in the secular and pluralistic society we have I should be imposing my Christian will on every issue before us. There is room in this House for all views and where appropriate I will be on my feet calling it as I see it from a Christian viewpoint.

The Government will do well to continue to protect and enhance the standing of churches in our society and to provide an environment where the mainstream Christian faith can flourish. I was delighted to be at the church service of this first session of the Forty-third Parliament this morning.

As this is my maiden speech in this place I ask the House's indulgence - just to finalise - to place on public record a particular record of thanks. Many people need to be thanked for their part in the fact that I am standing here today including my wife and my family but I have pared down my thoughts to this: I want to thank a then young couple who forty years ago, in a giant leap of faith, took the decision to leave behind large and loving families a familiar country and climate to pack a few suitcases, pick up their four kids, step on a ship and sail off to the other side of the world. That they were responding to over-the-top advertising in Europe about how wonderful it was in Tasmania and in Australia meant nothing really. Their great faith in their God and Saviour and his providence gave them a courage and a cheerfulness that still has not faltered. Within a few weeks of arriving in Australia my father had built a bungalow for his family and was holding down two jobs.

I also want to thank that same couple for, almost to the week after the minimum time was up - five years - deciding to become Australian with their four children. This decision led to a beautiful naturalisation ceremony in the township of Evandale in Lyons where we lived at that time not far from the home of my Denison colleague, Mr Cheek. In fact it was to a young Queen Elizabeth the Second that, through my mother and father, I pleaded allegiance in 1961. I have not had the opportunity to do so since and it is my distinct honour to do so again today both in the swearing-in ceremony and in this motion. To my parents Max and Therese Hidding I extend my profound thanks and admiration for those early decisions. Mr Speaker, I thank the House for its respectful attention and commend the motion before it.

Members - Hear, hear.