



Ms Helen Burnet MP

House of Assembly

Date: 15 May 2024

Electorate: Clark

[3.55 p.m.]

Ms BURNET (Clark) (Inaugural) - Thank you, Madam Speaker. Ya, and I would like to acknowledge the Aboriginal people and their deep connection to Tasmania/lutruwita, from this place situated on the banks of timtumili minanya under the enduring presence of kunanyi. Our work here is not complete if we do not strive for truth, treaty and justice for Aboriginal and other First Nations people from here in lutruwita to Gaza in Palestine.

We are here in Clark, host to the seat of government for the State of Tasmania, connected to the physical beauty of Hobart and its proximity to nature, the river and mountain. The beauty of this entire state is truly inspirational.

It is with tremendous honour and with a sense of responsibility that I take this place in parliament as a custodian of the vote of the people of Clark. I thank those voters who put their trust in me and for those who have continued to vote for me over many years, in far too many elections to count. It is my intention to represent everyone in Clark to the best of my abilities.

I thank the parliament for this opportunity to address the House today. Inaugural speeches are a time to thank those who have helped along the way, reflect on things that are important and have shaped one's life and thinking, and on current events that have had a profound impact.

I would like to congratulate every one of you elected to this 51st parliament of Tasmania. All of us are here for a brief time relative to the 168-year lifespan of the Tasmanian parliament. I want to work with each and everyone here who is willing to work with me and the Greens to make the most of our time here to make a positive difference. I want to use my time in parliament and as an elected representative for the state of Tasmania to make a difference for the future, for the benefit of all but particularly for those of the next generation.

I am here to act because we need to act with urgency to take real action on climate, to find solutions to the housing crisis, to ensure we have a robust, functioning medical system, meaningful education, a reliable and active transport system and to make sure we have access to safe water and clean waterways. It is not good enough to want the basics. We should be world leaders in health, housing, water security, never settling for second-best for our community and this island.

We have the power to make decisions that increase connectedness, bringing people together so their communities thrive, connecting and reconnecting us to the incredible natural world surrounding us, learning from each other and the world around us. We also have the power to make decisions that reduce inequities, because when we

reduce inequities, we allow everyone to participate. In turn, a more just society is better for everyone.

I come here after spending 19 years as an elected representative, including time as Deputy Lord Mayor on the Hobart City Council. I would like to acknowledge newly elected councillor Gemma Kitsos, who has taken my place on the recount. I also want to acknowledge that many of us here have had that experience of representing constituents on Tasmanian councils before entering parliament where we are super-connected to the needs of the local community.

I miss council colleagues and staff who strove to do their best for their community and the environment. Over that time, we sought to improve social outcomes, such as providing social connection for young and old at Youth ARC and Mathers House, supporting multicultural festivals and the many multicultural communities that call Tasmania and Hobart home, and changing the date and working with the Aboriginal community for greater understanding.

I thank the many volunteer Bushcare groups who have improved our bushland reserves and rivulets and the work implemented for a zero waste to landfill strategy. Hobart was the first capital city to declare a climate and biodiversity emergency. I thank the members of the community who provided advice on heritage planning, architectural and landscape design. The diversity of local government services and capacity is astonishing. I am particularly proud of securing the Bicentennial Park at Mount Nelson with the aid of the federal government at the time, and protecting kunanyi, which is an essential part of our city's identity.

I now look forward to representing constituents in the broader electorate of Clark, taking in Tarooma, Firthside and Bonnet Hill to the south and the Glenorchy municipality to the north of the City of Hobart. I have observed discrimination and disadvantage throughout my life. My choice of profession and political involvement was underscored by wanting to make a difference.

During my childhood, growing up in the rural village, at the time, of Hahndorf in the Adelaide Hills, I learned about religious discrimination from German Lutheran migrants who had fled religious persecution to settle the area in the 1830s. When I was 17, on a year-long Rotary exchange scholarship in rural apartheid South Africa, I witnessed blatant and systemic racial discrimination and learnt a lot about my own country at the same time. My time at university in Adelaide was spent undertaking a vocational study, but also being involved in political discussion.

I moved to Tasmania in 1994 to work as a podiatrist in the public system, where I felt that I could help those most in need of care, treating the manifestations of chronic disease such as diabetes. I worked mostly in the public health system at the Royal Hobart Hospital and at community health centres in rural southern Tasmania and suburbs of greater Hobart. I managed a fantastic team of caring health professionals recruited from across Australia and beyond.

It was unfortunate that many of us gathered last week at a funeral of one of my former colleagues, Helen MacKenzie, who died from motor neurone disease, a life taken far too early from this cruel disease. I would like to acknowledge her husband Chris and her extended family.

Tasmania's allied health professional pays, when I first started in Tasmania in 1994, were lower than mainland counterparts until my union, the Health and Community Services Union (HACSU), won substantial gains in workplace negotiations. However, at that time it was affordable to rent a home, even as a young, allied health professional with a small family. Kinder and school were close to our home in Lenah Valley for my children. I could ride or walk to work or catch public transport that was more reliable than it is now.

Someone in the same position as I was, living here now, wanting to gain experience and move to Hobart from elsewhere, would not be able to afford to live close to the hospital. They would depend on a less reliable Metro bus service or must drive and pay significantly more for petrol - that is, if they could find a suitable rental. What happens when allied health professionals, or any other health professionals, want to work in Tasmania but cannot afford it? They miss the chance to gain experience in the health system and the people who need their help miss out on the care they need.

More broadly, the gap between rich and poor is widening. This inequity brings poorer health and wellbeing outcomes, poorer educational outcomes, and more people at risk of finding themselves without shelter. Women with children are becoming more likely to end up homeless and are vulnerable to domestic violence. We have recently witnessed thousands of Australians rallying for governments to act so that this relentless cycle of violence and femicide stops. We must act, and act with urgency, in this place so that those people do not suffer the treacheries of domestic violence from poor systems and growing social inequity.

We see conflicts at the domestic, global and local level, and it is from this we must learn. With the backdrop of current wars and unrest in Gaza, South Sudan, Myanmar and Ukraine, to name a few, and past conflicts on these shores from the Black Wars to forest wars, how do we act? Ongoing conflict is good for only the profiteers of war and the harbinger of division. After learning from our mistakes and past conflicts on these shores, can we not also inspire the rest of the world? Tasmania, this heart-shaped island at the bottom of the globe, could be a crucible of and inspiration for peace. We live in a place of beauty which inspires our many artists, writers, musicians and athletes, where Tasmanians are known for their ability to innovate and reimagine. It is here, in this 51st Parliament, in the place where intelligent debate can and should replace performative shouting matches, that we should start. Is it too ridiculous a notion to consider peace as something to strive for, to come from this place?

I will reflect on the journey of the Greens in this parliament. Here now, as a member of the Tasmanian Greens, I take my seat beside my colleagues, Dr Rosalie Woodruff, Vica Bayley, Tabatha Badger and Cecily Rosol. I acknowledge the work done by Cassy O'Connor, who has now made her way and made history as the first Greens member in the Legislative Council, representing the people of Hobart.

I also acknowledge Greens who have held the seat of Denison-Clark before me: the enduring leadership of Bob Brown, first elected in January 1983, here for the next 10 years, whose actions inspired me some years earlier, as a high school student, watching news coverage of the Franklin campaign; Peg Putt, who staunchly remained as the only Greens when the parliament was diminished to 25 seats some 25 years ago,

representing the people of Denison from March 1993 through the lonely years to July 2008; then Cassy O'Connor; and, most recently, Vica Bayley, who has already left his mark on this place. I acknowledge former member for Lyons Christine Milne, here from May 1989, after the successful Wesley Vale pulp mill campaign, to August 1998 - the first female leader of the Greens, both at state and federal level. These are names writ large on the political scene and environmental, social justice and broader Greens movement over the past 41 years.

The four pillars of the Greens - ecological sustainability, grassroots participatory democracy, social justice, and peace and non-violence - are fundamental for this island to flourish. None of those can be seen in isolation. We need them all to survive. We have everything we need to design and fund affordable housing, education and healthcare systems, to invest in an abundant natural environment with safe water and soils, and species diversity, and to create a thriving economy that supports our children and future generations. It is a political choice. I am here because of the tremendous faith and support from people who want to see politicians like us designing better ways for us to live in communities in the built and natural environments, better ways for us to foster connectedness, and better and more equitable ways to make sure everyone can contribute to the extent of their abilities.

Finally, there are the people I would like to thank. I spoke before of Greens who have had the honour of being elected to serve in parliament. I would also like to remember today two friends who died in the past 12 months, Hilary Bennell and Rob O'Connor. Hilary and Rob may not have served as Greens in parliament like Bob, Christine and Peg. However, their contribution through encouragement and faith in myself and others who have dared to enter the political fray is as important as the leaders I acknowledged today. They are greatly missed.

I would also like to acknowledge the hard-working and talented Clark ticket who stood alongside Vica and myself: Janet Shelley, Trenton Hoare, Nathan Volf, James Zalotockyj and Peter Jones. It is often a tough gig to run as a candidate, but I know each of you has great capacity and commitment. Thank you.

To the fabulous team of supporters and volunteers, especially Bill Harvey, Adam Mooney, Ingrid Nicklason, Angie McGowan and Carol Riley and the extended Greens network and friends who worked so tirelessly to deliver such a strong result for the Greens: you believed we could make history and win this second seat for the Greens in Clark, and we have.

Finally, to my family. I thank my husband, Frank Nicklason, for showing me patience and being able to turn problems around to consider them from a different perspective. To my sons, Thomas and Lachlan, and to Cass and Britt, to Christine Boyce, to Ellie, Aoife and Jobelle, thank you for showing the support you do. Thank you to my family from the mainland, represented by my sister Alexandra Chapman, who is here today, and the extended Nicklason family. You all make my job so much easier with your love and support. Thank you.