



Lara Giddings MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Franklin

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr DEPUTY SPEAKER - The honourable member for Lyons, Ms Giddings. I welcome Ms Giddings to her first speech in the House and ask obviously that the House will afford her the relevant courtesy.

Ms GIDDINGS (Lyons) - Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to make my inaugural speech in this Chamber today.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I am sure my colleagues on both sides of the House would agree that we must be possibly the saddest people to have made their inaugural speeches on the Floor of this House. The events of 28 April at Port Arthur have overwhelmed the people of the Tasman Peninsula, the people of Tasmania, indeed all Australians and they have overwhelmed me. This tragedy took place in my electorate, the electorate of Lyons. Like many other Tasmanians I spent last week comforting and being comforted by my friends, family and colleagues, while the professionals, whose praise cannot be sung highly enough, set to the task of tending to the victims, counselling the witnesses and residents, cleaning up the murder sites and beginning the healing process for the wider community by the organisation of a State memorial service.

When the nurse from interstate so vividly described the murder scene in the car park at the Broad Arrow restaurant on the 7.30 Report I was terrified, frightened and traumatised by her description of implacable horror and pitiful heartache. I was also humbled by her bravery and day by day I have been humbled again and again as the personal stories unfolded of the courage and bravery of those caught up in the horror.

I want to express my heartfelt sympathy to the families and friends of the victims who died or were wounded and to the whole community of the Tasman Peninsula and I want to honour the bravery of those who somehow in chaos and mayhem found the courage to respond selflessly and with dignity and professionalism. This tragedy has stirred the community spirit bringing out the best in people. The level of support for one another and the support for the people of Port Arthur has been stirring and powerful as we all go through the emotions of shock, grief and sadness.

But today we are not only sad we are also angry. The people killed and wounded at Port Arthur were not ready to die. Young or old they were fit and well enough to be sightseeing, to be picnicking, to be taking their photos - they were on holiday. Or they were people making a happy memory for the holidaymakers by being at work, being at their posts and going about their duties. The silent majority have been intimidated by the vocal minority of the gun lobby who have successfully played one political party against the other. They have called our bluff. They have claimed credit, be it true or exaggerated, of being instrumental in bringing down other State governments. But now with tripartite support the gun lobby has nowhere to go so long as we can hold firm. Solidarity is a stronger and a more potent weapon than threats and intimidation. This Parliament must not only legislate to implement tighter gun laws it must also exert pressure on the political parties at the Federal level to do the same. We cannot afford to have any more weak links in the chain.

Every day last week the newspapers printed articles, letters to the editor and cartoons showing so clearly with facts and statistics that tighter gun laws do save lives. Thirty-four deaths in a year in Japan with a population of 125 million people, about 70 in the UK with a population of 57 million; people and about 520 in Australia with a third of the population of the United Kingdom. On the 28 April at Port Arthur 35 people were killed, more than twice as many as were killed at the battle of Long Tan, Australia's worst battle in Vietnam. I was touched when the member for Lyons, Mrs Milne, said yesterday each one of us in this Chamber represents one of the victims of Port Arthur.

In an article in the Age on Wednesday, 1 May, a past premier of Victoria, John Cain, detailed the gun reforms his government tried to implement both before and after the Hoddle Street and Queen Street massacres. He noted that he was astonished at the way support dissolved on the issue. He said and I quote:

'Following the agony of Hoddle Street and Queen Street the Government enjoyed almost unprecedented support. However, in the space of two or three months in which the gun lobby mounted a frenzied rally in the city streets

most of this support evaporated. The speakers at last Saturday's rally on the lawns of this House begged us not to lose our motivation, not to become weak at the knees again.'

We cannot fail them this time and when we have got it right here, which I believe we have at this stage, we must maintain our determination to support the uniform national gun laws. At this point I would like to congratulate all three political parties for the swift and cooperative approach they have taken to bring in the changes to our gun laws. Wherever you go people are still talking the tragedy through as we all look to find answers as to why. In a way, devoting a good part of my speech today discussing this event is also part of the healing process for me.

On Tuesday 23 April I took my seat in the House of Assembly for the first time. I am proud to be a member of this Chamber and to sit down in one of these green chairs is a privilege, a privilege that I thank the members of Lyons for giving me. Prior to the election not many people gave me a chance of winning a seat. I was an unknown in the electorate and I was only 23 years old. The prophets of doom warned that Lyons was a conservative rural electorate, however I decided to stand in this election, because I felt the time was right for a young woman to be elected. We did not have anyone under 40 years of age in the previous Parliament and there were only seven women present. The last person to be elected younger than myself, was my colleague, Michael Polley, in 1972, the year that I was born.

Members laughing.

Ms GIDDINGS - On the doorsteps of many of the 5 000 houses that I visited in Lyons, I found that the general public agreed with me. The constant message that I was getting was there was a need for more women and a younger voice in parliament and they were pleased that I was giving it a go. I am honoured that the electors of Lyons had confidence in me to give it a go, and I hope I will not disappoint them.

I am proud to say that the Labor Party in Tasmania is demonstrating a fairer representation of Labor voters today than ever before. In fact, 50 per cent of the ten women represented in this Parliament are from the Labor Party, as are the three youngest members of this House. The election of myself, Paula Wriedt and Brenton Best has signalled the beginning of the new generation participating in the decision making processes. In my capacity as the assistant to the shadow minister for youth, and as a young person, I can and will give a voice in this Parliament to the concerns of young people. In order to do so effectively new channels of communication must be opened for young people to express their opinions, and verbalise their needs direct to parliamentarians. Structures are currently being designed to enable this flow of information.

We are all having to come to terms with living in a technological society. The traditional jobs that used to exist, especially in manual labour, can no longer be guaranteed. Perhaps the people to suffer most from this shifting employment opportunities have been young people. Few people can leave school today and walk into a job. We are therefore left of the legacy of 40 per cent youth unemployment. The problem of youth unemployment cannot be simply solved by continuing secondary and tertiary education. We know that it is not just the unskilled and semiskilled jobs that are disappearing. We all know of people who are overqualified for the work in which they are employed, a disheartening experience for those who have put hard work into years of study. But it is not only sad for the university graduate who drives the taxi cab, it is also sad for the less educated person he or she displaces who could not be a teacher or a scientist or an archaeologist.

There are no easy solutions to the problems of unemployment, as seen by the efforts of governments both at State and Federal level for two decades. Yet, if people look anywhere for answers, it is to the politicians and political parties. For all of their cynicism about us, ultimately we are their hope and they try to improve their prospects by voting us in or out.

While there is a place for attracting 'quick-fix' industries, more importantly we need to develop further alternative working structures such as job sharing. My impression is that there is a reticence by employers and many employees to depart from the security of traditional structures and framework. They fear the loss of continuity, they fear a fall in their standard of living, they take pride in their work and are jealous of sharing it. However, this may be the only way we can really bring unemployment down in real terms and provide more job security for more people.

Part of this cultural shift in employment may have a side effect such as a lower standard of living, especially for families who have enjoyed dual incomes, a phenomenon which grew during the 1980s. This was partly due to the pressure on people to pay the ever-increasing interest rates on their mortgages, as well as the emergence of an exaggerated, materialistic culture, flamed by the force of consumer advertising with a compelling for sophisticated allure.

How we deal with the problem of materialism in our information packed society I do not know but at least let us begin thinking about how we can improve the society in which we will live in the twenty-first century. As parliamentarians we must show leadership. We must help to meld a different culture for future generations. I am

not sure what this new culture will be but we could lead the way in the public service by making job sharing more common, hours more flexible with more people working from the home. If these new ideas have a positive impact on family as parents of both sexes enjoy more time with their children, have more leisure time and experience an enriched family life, they may start to embrace change with enthusiasm.

Sadly, as a consequence of few employment opportunities in Tasmania too many of our young people are drifting to the mainland looking for work, leaving behind parents and grandparents and dislocating the structure of their extended families. The broader community cannot afford to ignore this drift and must try to stop this exodus of young people from our State year after year. This means creating employment opportunities for them here.

While in a small way our specialised markets in foods, wine and accommodation have created some employment and industries such as International Catamarans have brought a substantial number of jobs, I believe we should work towards making Tasmania the education state, the Oxford and Cambridge of Australia. We were for example successful in bringing the Maritime College to Launceston but to my great disappointment we were unsuccessful in attracting the civil aviation training centre which, if I remember correctly, went to Armidale. I would like to verbalise this vision so that we are thought of around the Commonwealth as the Oxford and Cambridge of Australia; so that we are thought of as a natural repository for future institutions. We must sell ourselves for having the best climate for studying and the best recreational environment for the times in between. Not only would this decrease the brain drain out of our State it would create jobs in Tasmania as diverse as cleaning, cooking and serving tables through to administrative and clerical work to tutoring, lecturing and undertaking research with minimal damage to the environment, enabling us to sustain our clean, green image. As more heavy industries leave I believe this Government and future governments must fight to attract more national education institutions into this State and must encourage private enterprise to do the same as recently done by Ansett.

A more pressing problem however is the immediate threat of Federal funding cutbacks. I was pleased to read that the Premier was preparing a case to present to his Federal colleagues to spare us from cutbacks to the funding of the University of Tasmania. Any cutbacks would mean loss of courses, loss of research, loss of staff and students and loss of jobs for those who support the institution.

I should also like publicly to acknowledge my support for Richard Flanagan's vision for the Government to support the establishment of a film company in Tasmania. Tasmania is a Mecca for artists of all descriptions and we can only benefit if we take the initiative. Florence, Paris, Vienna and Venice are all cities known and visited because of their artistic heritage. Films such as *They Found a Cave* are still spoken about today. Let us encourage this industry in our beautiful State and create employment for our local talent.

We have award winning writers in Tasmania. We have exported numerous talented actors from Errol Flynn to Genevieve Picot and most of all we have the ideal film set in the diversity of our natural scenery. Lets use it and show it off to the rest of the world. We keep speaking of tourism as our growth industry so lets put ourselves on the map, instead of tourists beating tracks to *Pride and Prejudice* country and *Heartbeat* country and *Pie in the Sky* towns in England, or if you look closer to home - Ramsay Street in Melbourne - let us draw them here with the interest local productions could generate.

There is ongoing debate as to whether or not sixteen year olds should be given the right to vote. I have an open mind on this issue and I am willing to listen to the view of young people. However, what concerns me is that there is a group of people who have the right to vote but are not enrolled. During my doorknocking I met a young man who admitted to me that he was not on the electoral roll although he would like to be but he was not because he was worried that he would be fined for all the elections that he had missed. At that time I too was under the impression that if a person had not enrolled at the proper time he or she would be fined for the elections at which they had failed to cast a vote. On ringing the electoral office I was told that this would not happen, that the electoral office is not there to discourage people from voting and that anyone over eighteen years could enrol without risking a fine. I believe that is a very important message that must be broadcast in the community otherwise we will continue to have disenfranchised members of our community interested to vote when they have matured a few years past their eighteenth birthday but nervous that it will cost them too much in fines to enrol. I do not believe that the young man to whom I have spoken was an isolated case.

A theme which is coming through strongly from the inaugural speeches is that we need to rebuild our communities. I believe that over the past twenty years families have become far more self-reliant and isolated from the communities in which they live. No longer do we always know who our neighbours are, let alone actually socialise with them. The community support structure has therefore to a large extent broken down. The past week has proved that community spirit is not far from the surface and will realise its potential if given the chance.

We need to nurture this spirit so that it does not only surface in the bad times but is there to support and strengthen in the good. Only if the community unite behind each other will effective change occur. I have been in close contact with a group of people on Midway Point who see the need for more facilities for young people in the area. We have been very successful in bringing about change. The Sorell Council has been supportive of the group, encouraging our ideas and helping the development of those ideas into something more concrete. In the long term

we hope to have achieved a playground for toddlers, a park for teenagers, and a place where families can go and have a picnic. We must all make sure that we not only take from but also give back to the communities we live in by actively supporting our local community groups.

I look forward to working within and outside of this Chamber for the people of Lyons - young and old, as well as generally for and with the young people of our community - as I assist the shadow minister for youth to fulfil his portfolio responsibility. I wish to also take this opportunity to congratulate the new members of this Chamber. I have listened with interest to their inaugural speeches and look forward to working with them and the other re-elected members of this House.

Finally I remember again the people who lost their lives at Port Arthur and the people left to deal with their grief. Perhaps we will never know why this event occurred. But the important thing now is that we do not forget the people of the Peninsula as we begin to get back into the routine of our own lives.

Members - Hear, hear.