

Inaugural Speech – Hon. Sue Napier MP



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House of Assembly

Date: 14 April 1992

Electorate: Bass

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mrs NAPIER (Bass) - Mr Speaker, I have the honour to move -

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor in reply to His Excellency's speech:

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the members of the House of Assembly of Tasmania, in Parliament assembled, desire to thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to both Houses of Parliament.

We desire to record our continued loyalty to the Throne and Person of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, and at the same time to assure Your Excellency that the measures which will be laid before us during the session will receive our careful consideration.

I am pleased and honoured to move this Address-in-Reply and I am proud to swear allegiance to Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth the Second, and to her representative in Tasmania, Sir Phillip Bennett.

General Sir Phillip Bennett is our thirtieth governor, having been sworn in in 1987 and he not only has family ties to Tasmania spanning a century but most actively contributes to Tasmanian life, interacting well with all people of varying interests and backgrounds. He is known for researching his topic. On behalf of members of this House and the electors whom I represent I thank him most sincerely.

I would like to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the Chair. You are well qualified to hold this high office consequent upon your fifteen years of experience in this House. I am confident you will distinguish yourself and rule on all matters in this House without fear or favour.

The people of Tasmania demand that the Parliament conduct itself with dignity and decorum. From perusal of previous Hansards I see that this matter has been noted regularly, yet from media reports and in the public view there is frustration and a deploring of unseemly behaviour such that it is often asked whether we dare allow our children to visit as they may be disillusioned by the behaviour of their leaders. This is the responsibility of all members of the House, not only you, Mr Speaker, so the challenge is ours.

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Parliament could also do well to observe that effective, successful managers in industry and the community are adopting 'win/win' strategies, recognising that when complex problems which have no easy solutions are to be resolved, cooperative rather than competitive behaviour succeeds.

There are a number of issues that the public would have treated as apolitical, such as: anti-discrimination legislation; action on domestic violence; the protection of minors from the display of pornographic material; an active move towards reducing the export of raw primary resources and towards secondary processing - wool and forestry being key examples; and job-creating industrial growth within high-standard environmental parameters.

I would like to congratulate all members newly elected to this House; all re-elected members; my parliamentary colleagues who have been elected to ministerial office; our Premier; and in particular Robin Gray whose vote topped the poll with 2.5 quotas, which I read as a clear expression from the electors that they reject the tortuous inquisition of the royal commission. No valid new information was raised which could justify the enormous expense to the taxpayers, who might rightly complain that this could have been better used for State debt reduction, our struggling community health and education systems, or industry facilitation and job creation.

On 1 February the majority of Tasmanian people - 54 per cent - did not reject the need for stringent economic policies but they did ask for stability of government, sound business management, balanced State development and growth - including job generation - and a government that was in touch with the people. The combination of a scorched earth policy of massive public restraint and an inability to create a secure investment environment showed a lack of regard for the devastating effect it had on ordinary people's lives. The social injustices done to those people in the 1990s may well undermine our future in an economic and social sense in that the jobless, broken families, the alienated - especially youth - the less educated, and the burgeoning aged population are less easily fixed than jobs themselves. We need economic rationalism combined with a social conscience and administrative creativity. Whilst a strong believer in the need to get the Tasmanian economy on the move, reduce the State debt, spend within our capacity and maintain government accounts which accurately reflect the Government's true financial situation, I have a number of other particular concerns that I wish to raise, the first being primary or community care.

The development of a caring community is a crucial focus particularly identified by women in the community. When surveyed during the election their main concern, as it was with men, was jobs; however they saw unemployment in a more family-oriented and social manner. They were concerned for their children and grandchildren - the youth of society; the consequent stress that impacted on families; and the stifling of women's job and career opportunities - which were not shown in the unemployment figures. Women were forced into the job market rather than staying at home with their children, often into lowly-paid jobs and with inadequate access to support mechanisms such as child-care, compounded of course for the three-job woman: the person who has a job, children and is caring for the aged or ill.

Jobs are important but we must also come to terms with how we are to harness our most important resource: that of the many support groups and individuals - voluntary

and paid - who enable our aged, ill, disabled, alienated and children to achieve a desirable quality of life. I also note that over 70 per cent of these carers are women. It is vital to encourage families and communities to care for themselves, continuing the move away from institutionalisation, which I commend. Without our support and real recognition, these groups and individuals will find it increasingly difficult to cope with the burgeoning demand for their help. Social support agencies such as the Salvation Army and Lifeline indicate that the tide is threatening to break the banks, but I often see that we are running around with sandbags and it seems to me that we ought to move upstream and try to prevent the problem before it actually breaks the banks themselves.

Amongst issues regularly identified in women's forums are the need for respite care and support services for carers; better interpreter services for the ethnic populations, especially the aged; the need for the expansion of neighbourhood houses and community centres; the difficulty of accessing appropriate housing for the aged and youth; and the need for more responsive women's health services. There is a need not only for mammography screening - given that this is a policy of this Government - but also for bone densitometry screening and other menopausal health support services. If we look at the potential savings to the community offered by such things as bone densitometry screening in reducing the cost and personal trauma of bone fractures and osteoporosis, we might see that it is probably a question of managing the funds we have rather than trying to look for more ways of spending money.

Another issue is the question of domestic violence, because unless we stop the spiral now we will still be talking about this topic in thirty years' time. I welcome our Government's intention to pursue relevant legislation.

Of course that list of issues raised would send shivers through the lean pockets of any Treasurer but it seems to me that we need to look at the question of better management. There are times we need to build a new shed rather than patching up the old shed by putting more palings on and hoping it will last that little bit longer.

As one example we must reassert the importance of primary medical care over the use of tertiary and specialist services. The Tasmanian public must be made aware of the dilemma we face in providing health care within a limited budget. We cannot afford the best for everybody, and there are doubts that continuing to spend more and more on health will bring about better health. Dramatic life-saving and expensive medicine - such as a cardiothoracic surgery unit, CAT scanners and organ transplants - is exciting material for a media story but it is an insatiable money-eating monster that affects few in a direct sense. The leftovers - 3 per cent or less - of State and Federal budgets remain for common problems as well as health promotion and illness prevention.

If I could take an example to support this argument, heart disease was responsible for 32 per cent of deaths in Tasmania in 1990. Studies have estimated that 25 per cent of the reduction in deaths from heart disease in Australia is due to medical treatment; 75 per cent can be attributed to modified lifestyle factors such as a reduction in smoking, high blood pressure and high cholesterol levels. I think we really need to look at this very carefully. While some regional health boards are increasing their efficiency within the hospital structures - such as the Launceston General Hospital which has

downsized by 10 per cent over two years for a 14 per cent increase in productivity - it is clear that community health programs are not receiving the funding they need to escape the ever-upward spiral in medical costs. Only 12 per cent of the budget in the north is available for non-acute and primary care, and that includes day care, routine and out-patient work. The bulk is really going to tertiary care.

I am reminded of the vision of the ambulance carrying a guy's dad away from home. The son said, 'Why couldn't dad get care at home? It must be less expensive than a hospital bed' and the wife said, 'You know that; I know that; they know that and dear dad would be happier, but it doesn't happen'. I suggest that we ought to look at ways of making that happen and putting the ordinary person's perception into the midst of our deliberations in this House.

Whilst the move to a flatter profile for the health system is an objective of the regionalised health scheme - and could well result in service for those who need it - an inherent problem is the likelihood that the demand for bricks and mortar and expensive new equipment will reflect local wants and not Tasmania's needs. I personally doubt the wisdom of establishing a heart unit in Tasmania to service 400 000 people, as might three CAT scanners, and the list could probably go on. I would argue that we are caught in an illness industry and the sooner we move to a 'wellness' model the better.

Similarly Home and Community Care programs appear to be strangled in the mesh of Federal-State financial relations, and the sooner we sort that out the better. Home care services might be much more effectively and economically supplied if an integrated system of community services were offered whereby the equivalent of a small team of trained auxiliary nurses linked to a level 2 nurse would give us better value for the dollars we have. I am sure there are many other ways of dealing with that issue.

There are also community groups which are in trouble right now. I visited Lifeline in Launceston which provides an excellent telephone befriending and counselling service but it is clearly in urgent need of extended premises. I think it is most unfortunate that both this Government and the previous Government found it not possible to arrange a mutually agreeable understanding with the Northern Disability Support Services, and I live in hope that it will be possible to keep such a support group for the disabled going because we realise that the Rocherlea Training Centre is at full capacity and there are few places for such people to go.

Another component of creating a caring community is to consider the structural changes to employment that are required, and there are implications here for industrial relations and for industry. More flexible employment - such as part-time work, job sharing and flex hours - is needed by carers, not only in the traditional areas in which women typically find themselves but in the non-traditional areas within which we rarely find women. Many carers face poverty in the future, for they not only lack superannuation, which is an area we need to look at closely - and I realise there are a number of groups looking at this at this stage - they also lack personal savings. They suffer costs to their health, to their incomes and to their psychological well-being so I think we owe it to the carers to come up with a better way of harnessing their talents and looking after them as well.

Similarly, the provision within communities of an appropriate range of housing and infrastructure - such as transport - for the aged, young and disabled calls on planners to be radical but responsive to a new age. Whether this is to be in the vein of abbey housing, modular unit housing or whatever, perhaps there are experts who know more than I; but at least we can see that this is the demand and the need that is facing us. I regard the rationalisation of local governments into larger units, capable of employing competent professionals to respond to these and other challenges, as a very welcome move.

Before leaving this concept, I would like to draw particular attention to the needs of youth. In addition to initiatives proposed by this Government for youth employment, and for training which is responsive to their and industry's needs, there is a need for the development of greater youth liaison and support services, including housing outreach programs.

I would like now to turn to the issue of education. I really feel that Tasmania must regain its reputation as having one of the best education systems in Australia. Our small population and geographic location dictate that we must sustain a high standard of education. If, at the very worst, our kids are going to have to leave this country, I would rather put them on a boat with a good education than put them on a boat with a shovel.

It is of concern that with our disadvantages of scale we now spend less than three other States - Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia - according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, catalogue 4220.0, and taking into account the 1990-91 State budget allocations. I am mindful of the fact that, although we are improving our retention rates, for example in Year 12 we are still well below the Australian average - I think by 19 per cent according to the latest figures I read. Our participation rate in technical and further education is the second-lowest in Australia, and in higher education it is also the lowest. If we are to come out of this recession, being a clever country and having highly educated workers is an important component of that, especially if we are to benefit from the rich resources we have.

My concern is not that we necessarily spend more money, but that we should better manage the system. The offloading of administrative, budgeting and maintenance responsibilities to schools, without adequate resources, appears to be resulting in increased stress on staff and students, larger class sizes and inadequately-resourced schools. Several headmasters and senior teachers within northern high schools have indicated that senior experienced staff are spending a greater proportion of their time in administration and considerably less in the classroom. Administration, as we should all know, by its very nature steals time from planning, preparing materials and attention to individual student's needs. Does this explain why class sizes are growing - because if we talk to the teachers, the children and the parents out there, the class sizes are growing.

Are we getting the best value out of the experienced teachers? We need a clearer picture of what our real teacher/student and administrator/student ratios are. I would like to see those figures pulled out separately, to see what people are really doing. Let us not call them simply teachers. Let us see how much time they are spending on administration and how much time they are really spending in teaching. Perhaps we

should provide administrative support to schools and free teachers to use their professional skills. That, again, means getting value for the dollars spent on the teachers we are employing.

The move to eight regions will work only if it results in a flatter organisation so that teachers and students get the support services and class sizes they need. The State should concern itself with helping to identify the outcomes of the education system and enable the professional educators to achieve them. The key to effective self-management in schools may be to give the schools the right to choose and develop their own staff in close cooperation with their school councils, within clear guiding principles provided by the State. Perhaps we should be looking at a system of State independent schools. It is a concept worth examining.

Further, we should have a register of the expertise of our teachers, for I regularly meet with teachers who are required to teach in areas in which they are not trained. If members have met such people, it is equally disturbing that it is quite often in maths and science that this is occurring. Among the results from this are stress and dissatisfaction among our teachers, and this will of course be exacerbated even more when we see changes that are happening in the LOTE - or languages other than English - area, and the move away from emphasising French. I think this is a challenge we need to meet; in fact I am quite happy with the move away from French in that I regard Indonesian, Japanese and so on as being much more relevant.

So I would argue that we have been mismanaging our education system, heaping massive change on our teachers such as the Tasmanian Certificate of Education, administrative restructuring and Cresap. Some of these changes might be justifiable in themselves but implementing them with such rapidity and expecting people to be able to take into account those changes as well as do the job they are really there for, which is to teach the children, is quite unacceptable.

A current concern is the possible loss of curriculum resources centres, and I am aware that our Government is looking to ensure that the resource centres are maintained. I personally have doubts as to whether the Tasmanian library system can offer the quality of service that the regional centres provide. I would be reassured if that were possible but, whatever happens, the resource centres must be available within the regions.

Similarly I would ask that some attention be given to the transitional years 7 and 8. Parents to whom one talks are not happy with what is occurring in those first two years of high school and I would like us to look at a recent New South Wales development of a K-10 campus which allows schools and communities to create their own sub-school systems. It may well be that if we can benefit from that experience that would be part of a solution.

Further, the rational use of school facilities is important. I welcome this Government's move to encourage schools to open their facilities to community use by allowing schools to set appropriate fees and use money recouped from hire. This is an excellent move which should have happened years ago and the design of future schools should reflect this imperative. These should be community complexes in which school happens to occur by day. The community should use the facilities at night, during

holidays and after school; that includes adult education, recreation programs and many other community groups. The Launceston College sports complex is an excellent example though I do query why it is not fully utilised during the school holidays. Currently there is a real need for a community recreation complex in the northern suburbs of Launceston, particularly but not solely to meet the needs of youth. It seems to me that future school complexes built or modified in the area could help accommodate this need.

On another point, I have a headline here that reads 'Hillwood'. The smoke-laden skies of the Tamar valley over the past week bring me to the issue of balanced sustainable development within a quality living environment. To put it another way, everyone has some green in them so let not any government pretend otherwise lest it face the wrath of current and future generations. I left my door on Monday 6 April choking with smoke caught in an inversion over Launceston and actually thinking my house was on fire, to find that by accident a large bark dump, 50-feet high, had caught alight while a burn-off was being conducted by Forest Resources with due approval from the Department of Environment and Planning and the Tasmania Fire Service.

This should never have happened; such an accident should have been foreseen. However what we need to look at now is what we are going to do not only for the people of Hillwood but for the Tamar valley because at the moment the Tamar valley is choking and I cannot see it continuing for the next six months. I realise the Government is very urgently trying to take steps to resolve this problem. Of course it was not helped by the fire bombing of a reforestation area at Lilydale at the same time. However the proposed installation of a high-temperature incinerator has been rejected by another company, in part due to the difficulty of ensuring that air pollution will not result. I believe that Associated Pulp and Paper Mills Ltd is turning a deal of this waste into mulch and taking the rest back to the forests and I say hear, hear.

This issue should not be confused with my support for the significant steps taken by forestry and related industries in accepting the Forest Practices Code inclusive of skyline retention, creek bed preservation, the breeding of high quality rapid growth cultivars, and the regeneration and plantation policies.

True, I look forward to our producing our own paper and allied forestry products, especially in the design area, rather than exporting woodchips. However woodchips are one of Tasmania's major exports and were worth \$200 million in 1990-91 out of a total of \$1 347 million, as can be readily seen from the recent Curran Report. But I am sure that both the forest industries and the Government can creatively respond to these challenges which include the question of disposal of waste.

Last but not least I commend this Government for its commitment to support the Office of the Status of Women and the regional women's advisory councils, for they provide essential tools to ensure that we work towards enabling women to achieve equality of choice, opportunity, income and status with men in society. Of significant impact on women are the areas of employment, education and training. A women's employment and training strategy for those wishing to re-enter the work force, anti-discrimination legislation, equal employment opportunity legislation and, most important, an examination of the superannuation needs of women are some of the important issues.

Inaugural Speech – Hon. Sue Napier MP

So a common thread in the matters I have chosen to raise during this speech is that, within the limits of very tight budget constraints, we must be conscious of the effects that our decisions have on ordinary people - and it is sometimes very hard to keep in touch with ordinary people. I am finding that out already, in terms of actually trying to find some time to sit in parliament amongst my other parliamentary duties.

Similarly, I would urge members to search for efficient management structures that equitably provide services to the community. I have particularly focused on health and education, but it may well be that other areas might similarly benefit not from more money but from a really close look at modern-day management structures that are becoming flatter, and putting the money where the people are, so that the services are actually out there on the ground. I commend the motion to the House.

Members - Hear, hear.