



Kathryn Hay MHA

House of Assembly

Date: 24 September 2002

Electorate: Bass

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Ms HAY (Bass - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I formally second the motion. I stand before this House at a time of great international uncertainty. Although sometimes it seems in the relative safety of Tasmania that we are far removed from such concerns as the threat of war, I appreciate for many the possibility of conflict is a very close and frightening reality. I too have a very special interest in this decision which is made. My fiancé, Michael Creighton, is in Iraq. Every day he risks his life for the safety of others. Michael Creighton works for the United Nations leading a team of brave people who carry out the painstaking and dangerous work of ridding northern Iraq of landmines. These mines kill innocent children at play, maim farmers trying to provide for their families. They are the deadly reminders of past conflicts which still make their lethal presence known. I am very proud that the man I plan to marry next year is making this part of the world a safer place by helping to remove this danger. He is grasping the opportunity to do the right thing. As I stand before this House for the first time I intend to make the theme of my inaugural address grasping the opportunity to do the right thing and looking at what is possible and making it happen. Mr Speaker, this has also been the theme of the Labor Government of which I am now proud to be a part. Jim Bacon and the Labor team in their previous term in office have grasped the opportunities, they have created opportunities and, Mr Speaker, they have done the right thing.

I am humbled to be given the chance by my constituents of Bass to become one of their representatives. Even at the age of 26 it has been a long journey. Mr Speaker, I am Aboriginal. I am from the Launceston suburb of Ravenswood and I am one of seven children. It is no exaggeration, Mr Speaker, to say that on the balance of probability someone like me was not likely to be standing before you addressing this Parliament but we live in a place and during a time when anything is possible.

Mr Speaker, I am honoured to be the first Aboriginal member of this House.

Members - Hear, hear.

Ms HAY - I am proud to come from Ravenswood. I love the fact that I belong to a large family and I want to pay tribute at this time to mother, Ruby Hay. She brought her children up in difficult circumstances and all seven of us owe our success to this most wonderful of mothers. Ruby Hay is a tireless worker, a giving friend, a wealth of information and a source of strength. She instilled in me passion. She showed me the value of selflessness. She demonstrated to me that it is a far more rewarding thing to do something for someone else than for oneself. Thanks, mum.

Mr Speaker, that is why I ran for Parliament. I believe it is the right time for me to give something back to the community and I do know that I will give my all for the people of Bass and for all Tasmanians. This is my opportunity to do the right thing.

I know my strengths and as for my weaknesses I am sure there are plenty of people who are ready to make me aware of them. I am the first to admit that it is daunting to take on the responsibility of representing the needs of others but I am ready to face this challenge. I say to every member of this House we all need to look and really see, to listen and truly hear.

I have been blessed to come into contact with people who have given me special gifts such as the need for reflection and respect and the power of perspective and attitude and, most importantly, the belief that anything is possible.

For many, in addition to inspirational people, there is also an event, a catalyst that spurs them on to greater achievements, to try or actually do things which previously they had not thought possible. The year 1999 was the turning point in my life. I had the opportunity to work with and for people with disabilities. Such a fulfilling role gave me so much, not least the inspiration to overcome my own perceived inadequacies and insecurities. By promoting the abilities rather than the disabilities of people, either the physically and/or intellectually impaired, I was able to see clearly my strengths without the need for close and critical comparison with others' competencies and to embrace my weaknesses not as inadequacies but as areas to develop - even as opportunities. These are lessons I shall treasure and utilise throughout my life.

Look at the person next to you - really look. We are all able to do some things better than the person sitting next to us, while they can do some things with which we may struggle. Do we choose to think poorly of ourselves or the person sitting next to us for not coming up to a preconceived standard, or do we choose to acknowledge that we each have unique skills and talents and that it is indeed this difference that should be celebrated? I choose the latter.

Attitude has the power to stop us or to kick-start us. A can-do attitude is one of the major reasons for the recent electoral success of the Labor Government. This Government does not think small and it does not think it is beaten before it begins. Instead it believes, it creates opportunities and it grasps the possibilities. Jim Bacon and the Labor team, in consultation with the people of Tasmania, coupled with sound economic planning, have set this State back on the path to prosperity - and, Mr Speaker, the people of Tasmania know it.

Take our two new ferries. The Government did not choose to play it safe, to go on with already explored avenues, sticking with what we knew and were comfortable with. The Government was decisive and knew this State had to grasp the opportunity with both hands. We could not know what was going to happen, but with thorough research, risk assessment and budgeting we invested in what this State has to offer interstate visitors, took the plunge and the twins were born. Only yesterday I heard that an extra four daylight crossings were needed to meet the increased demand. This Government has grasped the opportunity to do the right thing.

The same could be said of having AFL games in Tasmania. Did we hang our heads and say, 'There will never be AFL games in Tasmania; we are just too small, we don't have the population to support them'? No. The Government again saw the possibilities, again believed in what this State has to offer, invested in the potential and look at the result - more games being played and more teams wanting to come and play in front of our sports-loving Tasmanian people.

It is exciting to be part of a government that believes that anything is possible, and one that is actively creating the future that Tasmanians want. My belief is that this attitude is an integral part of the Labor team, an attitude of 'it can be done' that starts at the top and winds its way through the levels of the party, enthusing this strong and unified team.

At the top is the Premier, Jim Bacon. My respect and admiration for the Premier as Leader and as a person is immense. He is a man who is always learning, and transforming new ideas into practical policies, but his best attribute is that he has a passion for this State and works tirelessly to ensure that it surges forward. Indeed, his energy is inspirational for every member of the party. The Premier provides an example to follow: energy that inspired my fellow Bass candidates and myself to doorknock, letterbox and really get out there and meet the people for the honour of representing them in this Parliament; energy that is creating the new Tasmania, a new level of optimism, a new level of regard for our beautiful State in Melbourne, Sydney and beyond; energy that is not just in Labor but flowing through this State in the form

of gas power, wind power, and soon through Basslink, just some of the tangible by-products of a hard-working, unified, well-led team.

I would like to thank my fellow members who have assisted me on the journey of making the transition into political life. I cannot fail to mention the support and guidance given by the Minister for Education, Paula Wriedt, and you, Mr Speaker, the Honourable Michael Polley.

Members laughing.

Ms HAY - May I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your re-election as Speaker of this House. I would also like to thank Senator Nick Sherry who, although from a different electorate and a Federal Member, gave his time freely to doorknock with me.

During the campaign so many people confided to me that they were voting Labor because they recognised the great work that had been started and they wanted to let the Bacon Government see it through. They recognised that Tasmania is a work in progress and wanted to give us the chance to complete the job. As the campaign slogan went, we are 'moving in the right direction'. We acknowledge that we are not there yet, but we are on the way.

I have spoken to people from all walks of life over the past 10 months - businesspeople, young people, pensioners, home-makers, footy fans. They all repeat the same sentiment. They all want to see more of what they have already experienced, such as the continuation of the Government's sensible debt reduction strategy, reducing interest payments and channelling this money into far more deserving areas. We all have opinions on what these deserving areas are. After less than 10 weeks in office it is already obvious to us what problems affect many of our constituents: law and order issues, health services and always our children's education. No single group in society is more important than our children. With government initiatives, such as Learning Together, identifying an overall vision for our education system - a world-class system with guiding values and principles with achievable goals, strategies and sensible ways to measure success and progress - this Government is enabling our children to grasp hold of the possibilities to take on the opportunities.

The Minister for Education in her minister's statement for Learning Together acknowledged that the goal of achieving world-class education may seem overly ambitious and perhaps unachievable in one term of government. The minister would be encouraged that the people of Tasmania have given a clear mandate for this Government to continue with such ambitious schemes and to continue moving in the right direction. Once more, we have the right attitude.

I have received much media focus, both in Tasmania and nationally, since becoming elected. Without fail, I am asked two questions. One is what being elected Tasmania's first Aboriginal member of the House of Assembly means to me. I would be less than truthful if I said it did not daunt me. I am proud to be Aboriginal and to be the first Aboriginal member of the House of Assembly in Tasmania. I believe that by being the first it is almost as if you are setting the scene for what can follow, you are helping to oversee what is possible. I feel the need to make clear that even though I was born in Tasmania, my Aboriginal ancestors are Western Australian and my mother's people are the Noongar people. I say this because I do feel an identity with the Tasmanian Aboriginals and can appreciate issues affecting them, although I cannot and will not claim to be anything I am not.

I look forward to interacting with the Aboriginal community. I will embrace this opportunity, the opportunity to assist, to encourage, and to learn. I feel a great respect for the Aboriginal community in Tasmania and wish to thank them for identifying with me and yet never putting pressure on me to do anything other than what is best for our State.

The second question I am asked is: who is it that I believe I represent as an elected member? The only way I can answer this question is to look close to home. As a daughter, a sister and an auntie, I want to ensure that life is good for my family and therefore, as a State parliamentarian, I want to ensure that this life is good for all Tasmanians. I want to ensure that

my mother feels and is safe in her community. We are the safest State in Australia and we must ensure that we remain so. I want to ensure that she has access to a quality health system, which means training and recruitment of more health professionals and making these occupations attractive with fair pay and fair conditions, so that should it become necessary - and mum, it will not for a long time yet - she can be assured of having a caring and well-equipped place of residence in later years, should she choose to leave her beloved home. This means ensuring that facilities for the elderly are maintained and administered carefully, so that she and others have access to services and facilities; that she finds support as one who seeks never to stop learning; and that she has access to places which enable interaction with her peers.

For my brothers and sisters, I want to ensure that they can gain the employment they seek and be assured of continued employment; that they find Tasmania a wonderful place in which to bring up a family, a home State which we can be proud to live in, to grow in and to promote; and that they have the opportunity to enjoy a lifestyle often thought limited to the mainland by ensuring access to entertainment and leisure activities and adequate transport systems while enjoying our natural healthy environment.

For my nephews and nieces, I want to ensure that they continue to have access to a quality, inclusive and fair education system which encourages the concept of 'giving it your all' which recognises and applauds personal growth and achievement. Attainment of this goal for all Tasmanian families means sensible class sizes, financial assistance for those in need, addressing issues of absenteeism, assisting single parent families and addressing mental health issues. I also want to ensure that society never turns its back on them, but should they become disconnected from the wider community, they can feel secure in the knowledge that there is a place to go and that there is someone wanting to help; that they can choose an occupation they are passionate about and actively pursue it with a confident attitude, made possible by an environment of increased employment opportunities; that they appreciate and utilise their freedom of expression; and that they have adequate recreational facilities and can participate in sport without the risk of increased public liability premiums.

As a politician and a human being, I want to make this better life possible for all of the mothers and fathers, sisters, brothers, nephews and nieces across Tasmania.

Now for the thank-yous. I am a member of Parliament because of the dedication, hours of unpaid work, support and belief of so many. I thank my old school friends Jane McGee and Megan Nicholas, and my entire family. I want to thank Helen Polley, my neighbour Tamara Johnston, Peter and Una Reece and other members of my committees, Paul and Bradi Maloney, Kate and Geoff Hawes, Steven Neville, Alison and Lola Murfett, Bev Myers, Desma Lovegrove, Brodwyn and Stephanie Blyth, Jane and Christopher Lee, and too many others to name here today.

It is really quite overwhelming to consider how much of themselves people have given, helping me in my quest to become a member of Parliament, and I mean it when I say their dedication was extraordinary. I need only to go through my core committee to prove this point. No-one was spared! One suffered for eight months with a very bad back condition; one got the flu; one learned how appealing bronchitis can be; a couple wore the skin off their knuckles from months of doorknocking; another got glandular fever and also had to have two of her wisdom teeth removed; and one went so far to show his commitment to the cause by helping to doorknock and deliver pamphlets only two weeks after having suffered a heart attack. You will be relieved to know that everybody is now fully recovered.

Members laughing.

Ms HAY - I can say with honesty, with certainty and with appreciation that I am here today because of the interaction with the people, and the unflinching perseverance of all of those who so willingly helped me. So, Mr Speaker, finally I say to all members of this House, regardless of which side of the aisle they are on, let us commit ourselves today to grasp the possibilities,

let us commit ourselves today to create more opportunities, and let us commit ourselves today to enhance this great State, our State, Tasmania.

Members - Hear, hear.