



Brian Wightman MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Bass

Mr WIGHTMAN (Bass - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, I rise today to formally second the Address-in-Reply motion and offer my inaugural address to the House of Assembly. Can I also say it is great to have the majority of people here today and I wish all the newcomers the very best in presenting their inaugural speeches.

Humbly, Mr Speaker, I would like to thank the House and the people of Bass for the opportunity to speak today. It is indeed a significant honour bestowed upon the newest members of this, the historic forty-seventh Parliament, to be provided the opportunity to deliver commentary concerning how we as community leaders will aim to represent the people of Tasmania. This afternoon also provides an opportunity for me to share with you the story so far - the narrative of my aspirations, hopes and beliefs and my commitment to measures which lead to improvements to the electorate of Bass and all Tasmanians.

Each one of us in this House could attest, Mr Speaker, that our rise to the ranks of parliamentarians representing our constituents and our electorates would not, and could not, be possible without the support of our families. The pride that I feel in welcoming my family here today is all consuming and totally undeniable. They are all in that corner up there.

In particular I recognise my wife, Katie, and our precious twins William and Beatrix. Thank you. Katie is undoubtedly my best friend, my confidante and the person I turn to when I need perspective - and sometimes when I don't as well. She has taught me so much about appreciating life, culture and the arts while also teaching me how not to ignore matters which are difficult to discuss. Katie and the children have more recently sacrificed many daily interactions with a husband and father in order to provide me with the opportunity to pursue a dream. I will never be able to repay their love and commitment and tolerance; however I will always aim to make them feel proud - proud of the man they have played a crucial role in shaping.

Literally, Mr Speaker, election to the House of Assembly has been quite a journey for my family. I cannot explain what it was like for my brother, David and me to grow up as one of four some 18 000 kilometres from our extended family whom I have met only three times. I do know however that the bravest decision my parents ever made was to leave Belfast and move to Tasmania because without that courage I would not be standing here today. I remain absolutely clear about that fact, and with all due respect to their spiritual home, they left a culture of hatred which comes as a birthright and a set of learned beliefs - a culture which so savagely pervaded the way of life during the 1970s, where families without true religion became protectors of the cause. That was not a cause of faith, but one of violence and terrible loss of life which lasted well over 30 years, and was commonly known as 'The Troubles' - a term which significantly understated the impact that sectarian violence delivered upon far too many families and communities.

The horrors that I remember as an 11-year-old visiting family in Northern Ireland for the very first time when a bomb at Enniskillen killed and injured plenty, remain with me today. The Remembrance Day bombing of 8 November 1987 was one of the most notable events of The Troubles. Eleven people were killed and hundreds injured. What an awakening for a grade 5 student from Trevallyn Primary School. I will always remember the young nurse who was killed, Marie Wilson, whose father, Gordon Wilson, went on to become a leading campaigner for an end to violence in Northern Ireland. This experience has remained as a sobering reminder that leadership towards a positive and proactive set of goals should always form our mantra, and Tasmania, its people and our communities, provide us with this opportunity every day.

Interpreting, gathering and collecting stories is important to my family, and I share my family history with you today. Not to say my life was harder than yours, or we had it tough, because we did not. We always had a great meal, nice clothes, good friends, and difficult times of course, but plenty of laughter, plenty of loyalty and plenty of love. I share my history with you today because, above all, my parents' courageous decision provided opportunity - opportunity which presents so frequently in our great State and country, and opportunity that provides a wonderful way of life which should never be taken for granted. Australia, and in particular Tasmania, is the greatest place to live in the world. Just ask my mum and dad.

Grabbing every opportunity is an essential element of a productive life. Opportunities are presented in myriad ways, often filled with risk and at times disappointment, but always with a great sense of excitement. Whether these opportunities present as large or small, the way we recognise them and react remains crucial. Education is the opportunity that presented for me at an early age, and it would not surprise anyone here today when I declare that education has been, along with our families, the most important aspect of Katie's and my life, and of course our work, which has been dedicated to the pursuit of world class public education.

My parents were presented with limited educational opportunities. My father finished school at the end of grade 6 in order to earn money for the family, and my mum passed the dreaded 11-plus in the inaugural year of testing in Britain. This resulted in her attending what may be termed a 'school of choice', something which unknowingly would resonate strongly with her son some 60 years on. While mum and dad did not have educational opportunities, due to circumstance, they did realise that their sons' educational experience had to be first class. That was their opportunity, and Tasmania provided it.

Because of that, like many students before me, it was not getting into trouble at school that would require fast talking, it was when we got home that we knew fast talking would be required to save our hides. There were two key components to the troubles in the Wightman house - bringing our small and very loyal family into disrepute, and, if it was to do with school, wasting a day. Then you were in deep trouble because you had wasted your education and, above all, you had missed an opportunity.

Hindsight has afforded me the time to realise that I had the great fortune of attending fabulous public schools in which I feel great pride. I often reflect on fond memories of mateship, the very occasional academic achievement, which my mum will attest to, and of course sporting heroics which, like fine wine, mature and become more elaborate with time. Trevallyn Primary School and Riverside High School were the making of me as an individual, as a member of a team and as a member of the larger community. We were blessed not only to have a fantastic team of teachers whom I

have had the pleasure of reacquainting with as part of my work as a teacher and principal, but we also went to schools which reflected positive feelings of pride and achievement in the communities that they served. The underpinning beliefs of my educational philosophies were unwittingly formed during these early days of schooling, and remain with me at my core to this day.

To say that I yearned for PE and the weekly challenges that sport would provide, Mr Speaker, would be an understatement. The occasional flukes such as hat tricks at soccer or the one at cricket, which my brother can talk about if you would like to hear it, made the interactions with English, Maths and Science teachers just that little bit easier. Sport was in fact my educational attainment and achievement in those early years and it was my opportunity to feel great. Because of this it is my firm opinion that team sport in particular remains an essential aspect of school and community life.

The Tasmanian Government, through Sport and Recreation Tasmania, continues to support our communities through providing \$2 million per annum to sporting community groups in order to improve participation and recreational activities. I have seen first-hand the impact that this funding has made across the Bass electorate and I am extremely proud of our record on delivering for local communities.

On reflection, it was also during my teens that I learned the importance of working conditions, and in particular a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. My father spent all his Tasmanian working life at Amcor Fibre Packaging or Tas Fibre Containers as it was known in those days. Some of my great lessons in life were learned each summer working in the factory while at high school and university as I graduated from punching the holes out of raspberry dividers to feeding the back of a machine shooting out 160 apple boxes per minute to be sent around Tasmania and Australia, supporting a vital industry.

My father by this time was a life member of the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union after 25 years of service and dedication to ensuring that families had a job and a decent wage to support an aspirational lifestyle. It was because of this commitment by both the union and the factory's management to supply a decent wage that families such as ours never wanted for much. A fair day's work for a fair day's pay made a massive difference to our lives and when I began working the opportunities that the factory presented became real to me as it funded an overseas trip. At the same time, my brother worked long hours for much less money and I was struck by the inequity of those who did not have to respond to the collectivism which actually provided our family with a wonderful opportunity to prosper, achieve and improve and for us as young adults to make the most of our abilities.

I welcome the \$26 a week pay rise for Australia's 1.4 million minimum wage earners handed down by Fair Work Australia's decision last week. I understand the importance of a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. As union president Anne Urquhart stated recently, 'This decision is a very good outcome for working Tasmanians and will restore fairness into our economy.'

Not surprisingly, fairness and equality have continued to remain important to me upon entering the teaching profession, which provided the opportunity to engage and lead communities, and that is another reason why I stand here today. In particular, my work at Port Dalrymple School in George Town and Winnaleah District High School provided me with wonderful opportunities that arise when one deals with the challenges of day-to-day teaching and the complexities that are faced when working, living and socialising in a small town. The north-east of Tasmania is a vibrant, parochial and very

proud corner of Tasmania - just ask me about the NEFU, if you like - whose people continue to punch above their weight - maybe an unfortunate phrase to use.

Members laughing.

Mr WIGHTMAN - In recent times there have been challenges in a number of industries pertinent to this area and it is with great pride that I have seen first hand the ability of government to support a group of people who have fallen on difficult times. Through persistent lobbying and active and collective leadership within communities, the north-east has attracted a series of grants, assistance packages and capital funding totalling more than \$40 million. This has not only led to improved infrastructure but also improved opportunities for many business owners and working families.

I remain absolutely convinced that the north-east, and in particular the school community of Winnaleah, who have so willingly embraced my family, have taught me a great deal about the importance of people working together and the vibrancy, commitment and friendship that small and unique areas of Tasmania can provide. While my colleagues on both sides of the House stir me every day about finding a real job without the holidays, I will miss teaching every day. Teaching in Tasmanian schools, which are now blessed with fantastic infrastructure and some of the most technologically advanced learning opportunities in Australia, and which will only be improved further with the rollout of the high-speed broadband network, has been an absolute thrill. Therefore, I remain convinced by and committed to the notion that every school is a preferred school and I strongly believe that we as community leaders must ensure this is the message we deliver.

In recent times public schools have been much maligned for innovation, when many of us in the profession are acutely aware that it is for this reason we should be celebrated. Public schools and their teachers are the epicentre of innovation and should always remain so because it is innovation that can lead to improved encounters with kids, while often providing the catalyst for realising opportunities. We live in a technologically advanced world that is not a remnant of the 1950s and we should never treat education in that manner. For those of us who have struggled day-to-day in attempting to engage young learners from a wide variety of backgrounds, some of which are extremely tough, we do not innovate through choice; we innovate because it is a requirement, our lifeblood and our ability to connect. With difficult times comes action research, innovation and new ways of working which not only changes and challenges our profession and our schools - it also changes lives.

The State and Federal Labor governments' support of Launching into Learning, Raising the Bar and Closing the Gap, child and family centres and, a result of passionate debate, collaborative reforms that strive to improve our appalling post-year 10 retention rates which the traditional college system has been unable to address, are all innovative educational approaches aimed at providing our learners with the very best opportunity.

Long live public education as the centre of innovation -

Members - Hear, hear.

Mr WIGHTMAN - because in the minds and hearts of generations to come we will not be criticised for substantial educational innovation but we will be remembered if we deliver a public education system which, devoid of innovation, could never be considered public education for all.

Honestly, I have great hope for the young people currently in our schools and making their way in our communities. Like public education, they are at times maligned by our leaders and public figures who hold romantic notions of days gone past, usually beginning or concluding with the phrase, 'the youth of today', often accompanied with a downward inflection denoting a superior past.

I stand here today determined to promote and harness the intellect, capacity and commitment of our young people, who continue to achieve amazing outcomes in a time of constant change. Every day I am convinced that each generation becomes more aware of social justice and more capable of addressing inequalities and injustices. For those who doubt, please feel assured that the majority of our younger Tasmanians do respect their elders and do value others' opinions. Above all, the majority recognise that nothing cuts more deeply than a respected person's disappointment. Even on the odd day when I doubt this belief myself, I cast my mind back to 2003 when I was standing in Hellfire Pass on the Thai-Burma Railway with a large group of grade 10, Queechy, George Town and Kingston High students who, without prompting, stood in absolute silence and reflected.

The youth of today are our future; they are our opportunity and they are the reason I entered politics. It is and will always remain our role to harness their collective capacity to make our State an even better place to live.

I look forward, with great hope, to working with a variety of stakeholders to negate the negative publicity that has recently found its way onto the front page of our daily in Launceston. In the youth who frequent our mall and congregate we will attempt to find the solutions, innovative solutions, that are not always recognised by adults sitting around a table. We must both engage with our young people and encourage reflection upon how we view them as a cohort, because as a city, community and society we do need to embrace cultural diversity and accept difference as an element of a modern twenty-first century society. However, we should never walk away from those who commit acts which undermine our need and our want for social decency.

Each evening at 6 p.m. my brother's and my political education, which always had a strong focus on social decency, would begin by watching at least two versions of the news and then the *7.30 Report*, at which time the politics would be discussed, debated and argued. There were only two channels at that time and I can only remember the news.

Federal politics in many ways dominated the forum, with Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Paul Keating, John Howard and, of course, to my dad, Margaret Thatcher, often the target of support or extreme criticism. Criticism was often aimed at those who made working conditions more difficult for families who were trying to make ends meet and create better opportunities. Let me assure you that the politics of Thatcherism and those associated with the treatment of Australian workers on the waterfront during 1998 will never be forgotten in the Wightman household.

However, as the years progressed, my first Labor Party history was quenched with stories of John Curtin, Ben Chifley and Paul Keating. The aforementioned prime ministers, in both their leadership of Australia during extremely difficult periods and their commitment to a socially progressive agenda, resonated with me and provided inspiration. The fact they also faced the challenges associated with public life, including dealing with self doubt, depression and alcoholism while also demonstrating the consciousness and intestinal fortitude required to make very tough decisions, continues to intrigue me. They are leaders who championed capital growth. However,

they also understood the moral responsibility that comes with capital and, in particular, its distribution. And for Paul Keating, he unequivocally believed an essential goal of the Labor Party was to provide opportunities and an economy that allowed people to rise from the factory floor and into their own businesses, as his father had done. They are the core beliefs that I as a Tasmanian Labor Party member will continue to espouse.

Interestingly enough, the philosophy of Tasmanian Labor politics was cemented into my consciousness around 2003 when I met the late and much revered Jim Bacon for the first time. His charisma and ability to make extremely tough decisions, that made him even more popular, remain a template for us all. His style of grassroots Labor politics was reinforced during the campaign for Bass where I was mentored, supported, and encouraged by an outstanding and dedicated team including - it is not quite as long as Bec's but there are a few there - Adam Clarke, Donna Sargent, Brian Bransden, Karin Eastoe, Paul Kindermann, Ian Pattie, Rohan Wade, Bernie Brown, Andrew Gray, Martin Rees, Les Scott and Sarah and James Barrett, who provided so much support to Katie during the campaign.

Of course it was most pleasing to receive the support of retiring MHA Jim Cox, who credits himself with the right man for Bass, and current MHAs Minister Michelle O'Byrne and, of course, Premier David Bartlett. I look forward to delivering outcomes for the people of Bass in this a history-making parliament that will be underpinned by collaboration and cooperation.

Like all my parliamentary colleagues, I found that the 2010 election campaign provided us with an opportunity to engage and re-engage with our communities in a significant way. To return to Launceston after 10 years in the north-east and enjoy the millions of dollars of investment successive State Labor Governments, the Federal Government and the local council have injected into the economy has changed the face of my home town forever. Our relationship with the Hawthorn Football Club, the development of Aurora Stadium, the Inveresk Arts Precinct, the Aquatic Centre, the continued upgrades of the Gorge and Basin and the obvious increase in local restaurants, retail, fine food and wine, and iconic tourism, that has resulted in more than one million people visiting our State each year, has delivered a far more vibrant city than Katie and I can ever remember. In addition, to have a multi-million dollar investment in the Launceston health precinct, including the new renal satellite unit, is infrastructure that means a whole lot more to my family than simply another example of outstanding health services. The improvement and obvious potential of Bass continues to provide me with the inspiration that will shape my political leadership now and into the future.

Lastly, Mr Speaker, I remain confident that the State of Tasmania will continue to be celebrated and recognised for our economic prosperity and our way of life where tolerance, decency, diversity, kindness and equality are the underpinning beliefs. Collectively, we as community leaders will play a key role in this challenge and because of this we should always remember that it is not our role to tell people how to think, or that their lifestyle is not good enough just because it is different from ours. It is our role to support those who struggle, assist those who aspire and to encourage those who continue to achieve. It is not clamping down, punishing more or removing support that will create victories for people. Rather it is the leadership with aspiration of hope and belief that will have the greatest impact.

Mr Speaker, my narrative is Labor, my mind is Labor and, above all, my heart is Labor. Long may Tasmania prosper through writing its own story.

Members - Hear, hear.