



Honourable Dr Bastian Manfred Seidel

Legislative Council

Date: 25 August 2020

Electorate: Huon

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[4.18 p.m.]

**Dr SEIDEL** (Huon) - Mr President, thank you very much indeed. May I commend the member for Murchison on her outstanding advocacy in this matter? It is an issue close to my heart and of significance to and for my community. We all must do better.

I take this opportunity to deliver my inaugural speech in the Legislative Council of Tasmania today, on 25 August 2020. I start by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land we are meeting on, but I also acknowledge the Traditional Owners in my electorate. I recognise Aboriginal people on their own land still face unjust and unfair inequalities to this day. I do like to pay my respects to Elders past, present and emerging. Together we must commit to making a difference in our communities. I also congratulate the new member for Rosevears, the honourable Jo Palmer. Today really begins a new chapter for both of us. Congratulations.

We are living in challenging times - I know that - but standing in this Chamber today, with my wife Alex, the honourable members of the Legislative Council and members of the House of Assembly in the Gallery means everything to me. It is an absolute privilege to be the elected member for Huon. It is Australia's southernmost electorate and includes the Huon Valley, Blackmans Bay, the Channel, Bruny Island, and, of course, Macquarie Island. It is Tasmania's most spectacular electorate too.

**Members** laughing.

**Dr SEIDEL** - I knew that was coming. But how lucky am I to live in an area of outstanding beauty? How lucky am I to live in a community that is welcoming kind, close-knit and at times a little bit quirky?

Many families in the Huon have been living there for generations but over the last few years more people have been moving from interstate or from other countries. Some even have similar accents to mine.

Of course, we can hear that I was not born in Tasmania. Forty-five years ago, I was born in a small town in Germany's Ruhr Valley. My parents Gisela and Manfred were our local greengrocers. I have two older sisters, Bettina and Birgit. They are a kindergarten teacher and a nurse.

Of course, I went to the local public schools. I did my national service in the army. I was the first in my family to go to university. I did a medical degree and later obtained a doctorate in paediatric immunology. I studied, trained and worked in South Africa, England, the USA and Hong Kong. I came to Australia on a medical research scholarship, but knew that once I visited Tasmania I was never going to leave. I actually

had a made-up Tasmanian passport from my community way before I had the official government passport.

It all sounds great but it has not been that straightforward. Without a good amount of resilience, optimism, the support of my friends and the love of my family, I would not be here today.

The Huon has become my true home. I just love it. It is where I live and work. It is where my fabulous wife and I are bringing up my two cheeky sons, Henry and Freddie. Our future is very much in the Huon. When I used to travel to the mainland, people asked me where my accent was from and I would proudly answer, 'I am from Mountain River in Tasmania's Huon Valley. We all talk like this'. Of course, the good mainlanders would easily believe me. Anything was possible when you claim to come from the Huon.

I pledge to represent my community with commitment, courage and competence. I will represent the values and the interests of the people of the Huon, and I pledge to be a very vocal advocate for my community here in the Legislative Council of Tasmania.

As a local GP, I have cared for thousands of people over the last 10 years in Huonville, Cygnet and Franklin and on Bruny Island. I have seen people at their best and I have seen people at their worst. I understand the concerns in my community. I have listened to many people who feel they are being left behind.

I am worried that many of us feel we are just being taken for granted. I believe that we as a community deserve better. Our community has experienced rapid change. The decline of forestry, the rise in aquaculture and tourism, the loss of jobs in our region and the rise of traffic due to ever-longer commutes to work for better paying jobs in greater Hobart. What we really need is good jobs in our region. We must offer attractive public schools and opportunities for higher education. Our children cannot be disadvantaged or sent away.

We live in an area of outstanding beauty, but we also live in a very fragile environment. The devastating bushfires in Geeveston, Dover, Franklin and Glen Huon just over 12 months ago and the far-reaching effects of smoke to our health should have been a wake-up call but not much has actually happened. Rural issues. Our way of life does not seem to matter much. That needs to stop and we deserve better.

The services in our electorate are stretched on a good day. Our ambulance services rely on dedicated volunteers and goodwill. The police presence is patchy at best and our brave firefighters are continually under-resourced and on the edge. They deserve better too.

I certainly know that health services are struggling. Funding cuts to health have disadvantaged our community disproportionately. In addition, waiting lists for the Royal Hobart Hospital are getting longer by the day. That has consequences for patients in my community. The life expectancy in regional Tasmania is the second lowest in the country, just above the Australian Outback. Nobody seems to care; I do, and we deserve better.

It is not clear to me why regional Tasmanians should be systematically disadvantaged. It is not clear to my community either. We pay the same taxes, the same levies and the same rates. There is no discounting of living costs; there should not be any discounting for health services either.

We all know that the health burden in our region is disproportionately higher compared to the city. There are many reasons for that; the population is older, public transport and access to allied health and medical services is limited. The social determinants of health are complex and hard to address without decent and continuous funding and support. That is why at the very least, and urgently, we must invest appropriately in our emergency and ambulance services.

Last year alone, over 420 Tasmanians arrived in hospital emergency departments, dead. It is a sickening statistic and should be a wake-up call for all of us. Before becoming a statistical and health policy footnote, those Tasmanians were members of our community - they were us. That was the state of our health system even before COVID-19.

The first case of coronavirus was reported in Tasmania on 2 March and shortly after in my community. What followed was a cascade of events that resulted in hospital closures, a lockdown of communities and our borders shut down. And not too soon. When you are dealing with exponential growth of virus cases the right time to act is when it feels too early.

The regional response to the global pandemic has left us all on the edge. Thirteen people have died from COVID-19 in Tasmania; more than 500 people in Australia, more than 800 000 people worldwide. Many in our families, many of our friends have lost their jobs, many of us face a very, very uncertain future. I see the effects of stress and anxiety in my community. I feel the uncertainty businesses in all sectors experience. I am hearing the call for leadership and advocacy, but what I am seeing is even more uncertainty and also fear and anger.

Many Tasmanians are at breaking point. We cannot ignore that. That is why strategically we need to support those in our community who have been hardest hit by COVID-19. We need to get people into jobs; we need to build a fairer, kinder and healthier Tasmania. Mental health issues in our community are real. Family violence is real. We should not pretend that concerns about domestic violence in regional Tasmania are overstated. The concerns are genuine.

Over the last five years alone presentations to the Huon domestic violence service have doubled, yet the service still has only funding for two part-time staff. There is no counsellor specifically for children or adolescents.

We have a dedicated safe house in Kingston and we are forced to turn away more than a dozen women from the Huon, not per year, per month. Supporting victims and educating the public must be an absolute priority for all of us. We, all of us here in this Chamber and in parliament, represent our communities with passion and conviction. We are given the label 'politician' and far too often that automatically comes with a negative sentiment.

We are not here to choose the easy options, though. We are here to appraise the challenging issues and to make the difficult decisions. We are parliamentarians first and foremost, and there is inherent virtue in that. That is why we are here - we are here because we want to make a genuine difference to our communities, we are here because we want to advance Tasmania.

When I announced my candidature for the seat of Huon back in February, I did not expect to win. My aim was to run a credible grassroots campaign that connected with people in my community in a genuine and meaningful way.

One of my favourite phrases is in Latin, *ut desint vires, tamen est laudanda voluntas*, which basically translates as 'although strengths may be lacking, the will is commendable.'. I used to write that phrase as the last line in many high school and university assignments often to no avail, so it is with gratitude and immense pride that I acknowledge that the strength of my campaign was the many volunteers who worked tirelessly with me, out in the community doorknocking every day, letterboxing, putting up signs, making phone calls or wobble boarding on the highway in the morning at a freezing 2 degrees.

It was an extraordinary effort and made me being the candidate look so easy. I will never forget the unconditional support I had from so many. I thank my campaign committee which strategised, analysed and volunteered their time to help implement and execute our plan to the point. This is the first time since 1942 that Labor has won the seat of Huon - and it is your win, Stuart Benson, Julie Collins, Catryna Bilyk, Carol Brown, Alison Standen, David O'Byrne, Jessica Munday, Gordon Luckman and the outstanding Jane Atkinson and Morris Malone.

I thank the many volunteers from the union movement who supported the campaign. Thank you to HACSU, the United Workers Union, CPSU-PSU, ASU and my own union, the NTEU, whose members volunteered their weekends and evenings for the campaign.

I acknowledge the great support I had from the Labor Party, in particular, the very active branches in Kingborough, the Channel, Battery Point, Glenorchy and Howrah, Bellerive and, of course, my deepest gratitude is to my own Huon branch. When I joined in 2014, none of us thought I would be a member of the Legislative Council in 2020.

I know that many of you are watching this speech online right now, so thank you to Andrew, Julie, Paul, Raymond, Angela, Rodney, Eleanor, John, Marie, Peter, Ashley, Phillip, Stuart, Mary, Richard, Rod, Ian, Deidree, Gabrielle, Audun, Charlee, Dee, Trisha, Leon, Kathleen, Timothy, Robert, Brian, Tania, Wayne, Carolyn, Lee, Michael, Helen, Mick, Jacqui and Danilo. We actually did it.

I would also like to thank Angela Conley, Henryl, Shelley and Stuart Griggs, Ian Magill, Kath and Brian Shearer, Susan Fahey, Jan Simmons and the fabulous Pam Lane for your generous endorsements. Thank you to Matt Rush, Roald Versteeg, Nick Smith, Ian Nicolson Martyn and Bronwyn Summers, Phil Pullinger, Sam Meyer and Lesley Smith. You have been there when I have needed you. Thank you.

I also thank my colleagues of the Parliamentary Labor Party and in particular our Leader, Rebecca White, who is in the Gallery today, for making me feel so welcome. It is such a privilege to be part of our dedicated team genuinely committed to putting people first.

I must thank my fabulous wife Alex who is here in the Gallery today. Your love saved me. You are my true soulmate, my everything. You inspire me and you keep me pretty grounded when I am flying a bit too close to the sun. I would not be here without you. I love you.

Thank you, Mr President for allowing me to rise and speak today. Thank you to the members and the outstanding staff of the Legislative Council for your welcome, your generous support and your expert advice.

Thank you.

**Members** - Hear, hear.