



Simon Behrakis MP

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Electorate: Clark

Mr BEHRAKIS (Clark) - Mr Speaker, it is not only a great honour, but very humbling to be giving my first speech today in this place. As a proud son of Clark, I acknowledge this seat has been home to some great minds and committed representatives who have graced this Chamber before me. I stand here inspired by their contributions and driven by responsibility to uphold their legacy.

Tasmania, our island home, has always been a unique tapestry of natural beauty, rich history and resilient communities. The seat of Clark stands as a testament to this blend of heritage and progress. Nestled between the majestic Mount Wellington and the shimmering waters of the River Derwent, Clark is more than just picturesque landscapes. It is a melting pot of creativity, innovation and community spirit.

Our people, a diverse blend of Indigenous custodians, descendants of early settlers and waves of migrants, including my own family, have collectively woven the narrative that speaks to both pride and traditions and hopes for the future. Each individual, whether they have been here for generations or have more recently chosen Clark as their home, contributes to its vibrancy and assures it remains an inclusive, prosperous part of our state.

My own family story is a story of contemporary Tasmania itself: people travelling to a new land and working to build a better future, not for themselves but for those who come after them. My parents have lived this story. It is because of their dedication to family to provide a better future for their children and to instil in myself and my brothers those very values I am able to stand here today.

My mother's family immigrated to Australia from Greece in the mid-1950s to northern Tasmania, first to a farm in Moorleah. They then ran the post office-general store in Irish Town. Not speaking any English, they made it work and were able to do so, only through the support and kindness of the local community. In the early 1970s, they moved their family to Hobart for more work and educational opportunities. Mum had her background in the fashion/retail industry. She worked in various outlets before opening her own women's clothing store in Hobart CBD which I very much appreciated as a younger teenager as it allowed my friends and me to use it as a base of operations in the city after school.

Sadly, I did not get to know either of my grandfathers, with my father's father passing away long before I was born. I remember meeting my mother's father only once when I was quite young. Both of my grandmothers, my *yia yias*, Sophia and Labrini were very active in the lives of my brothers and me, looking after us when our parents were busy at work and fattening us up with all sorts of Greek dishes, as all good Greek *yia yias* do. They have both since passed and I miss them dearly.

My father grew up in Kalamata in Greece, home of the kalamata olive. He was one of four siblings and had a very modest upbringing spending his earlier years in Greece, working in various locations, as a driver in the Greek army during his conscription, as a tow-truck driver, and getting his trade as a stonemason. He joined his two older brothers in 1983 who had already immigrated to Australia. He worked for his brothers, Peter and Dennis, in their Salamanca business when he initially moved here. Being a stonemason by trade in Greece, he eventually opened up a stonemason business with his other brother, Taki, in North Hobart.

I remember vividly as a young child, my father working in the marble and granite business, leaving home for work before us kids had got up to go to school. I remember him coming home as late as eight or nine o'clock at night, covered from head to toe in stone dust, looking like a character out of one of those 1990s cartoons with something having blown up in their face, eating dinner and immediately falling asleep on the couch, exhausted from a day's work. These are deeply touching memories for me. They are memories of a father who sacrificed more time, blood, sweat and tears not just to provide for his family but to build a better future for them.

It is this ethos and work ethic that is at the core of the Tasmanian way and how our state has grown to be one of the best places in the world to live and raise a family. It is embodied in the recent story of our own Tasmanian Liberal Government which has, since its election in 2014, steadily built our state out of the economic doldrums. It is also something that has been instilled in me from a very young age from working with Dad in the grocery store he ran in Sorell when I was as young as 12 years old - although at that age I am not sure he would call that 'work' - through to working in the family business in Salamanca while studying for my Economics degree, to getting my start in politics, working for Eric Abetz from whom I learnt so much before then having the privilege of being elected to Hobart City Council.

My service on our capital city's council taught me what makes the city tick, talking to people on a day-to-day basis, learning what issues they are facing and their concerns for the future was certainly eye-opening. Contrary to my expectations, I learnt that it is the little moments that were the most rewarding, not the big, high-profile controversial debates and decisions covered on the front page of the news but being able to help one person with one problem that may seem small in the grand scheme of things to some but meant something for that individual. I saw what great things a government can do when it listens and acts in the interests of the people it serves, as well as the frustrations it can cause when it does not.

My interest in the political world started at a young age when the then Labor government's shop trading hours amendment bill sent many small family-owned businesses to the wall overnight, including my father's store in Sorell, which had its business smashed not long after by the large-chain supermarket that had opened across the street. I remember the sight - one which I am sure is a familiar one in many Tasmanian households during that time - My parents sitting at a dining table covered in paperwork and bills, quietly stressed out of their minds from the pressures of trying to keep their small business afloat in the face of increasing challenges and a government that had no regard for them or other small business owners, all while trying to raise a young family.

I was 11 years old at time. I remember not quite understanding the details of what was happening or why but recognising nonetheless the impact it was having on my parents and my family. It made a strong impression on me that governments should listen to what is going on in the community before making up any decisions at the behest of big corporations. I firmly believe that small business is not only the engine room of our economy, it is where the soul and character of our citizen towns reside.

As I grew older my interest in civic duty grew, in learning what government actions and policies worked for those I cared about and what did not. This interest only accelerated once I started studying Economics at the University of Tasmania. Between being raised in the world of family business to my studies in economics, it was only inevitable my political values would find a home in the party of Sir Robert Menzies.

The values of the Liberal Party, as laid out by Menzies, remain relevant today. We believe in the individual, in their individuality and their agency. We believe in the rule of law and that given good will, mutual tolerance and understanding, energy and individual sense of purpose, there is no task we cannot perform, no difficulty we cannot overcome.

We have seen this play out. We have made some really tough decisions as a state over the years but the people of Tasmania pull through during tough times. We did what was needed: we took care of our neighbours.

The Liberal Party's original 'We Believe' document includes these important points:

We believe that the 'class war' is a false war. The real conflict of our time are not between 'classes' in the old sense, but between the iron discipline of autocracy - whether Communist or Fascist - and the self-imposed discipline of the free man. The spirit of man must prevail.

In a world where socialist and fascist voices are louder than they have been for decades such sentiments are more relevant and important now than ever before. The world continues to look to Liberal democracies for leadership and moral compass, so rather than looking at matters with a foolish and hateful ends of the politics of envy, the real fight is against authoritarianism and for individual liberty.

It also states:

We believe in the great human freedoms: to worship; to think; to speak; to choose; to be ambitious; to be independent; to be industrious, to acquire skill, to seek and earn reward.

We are reminded of the bedrock upon which our society is built, the undeniable rights of freedom of expression and action. These freedoms are not mere privileges, but the very essence of our way of life in Tasmania. They underpin every success story, every innovation and every act of courage within our borders. These freedoms allow each Tasmanian to dream, to strive and to excel. In recognising these rights, we

empower our citizens not just to live but to thrive, to not merely exist within the system but actively shape their own destiny.

This is the Tasmania I believe in, one where each individual has the right to worship as they choose, to speak their mind without fear, to engage in honest toil and to be duly rewarded for it.

As we journey forward, the echoes of our past convictions must guide our steps. We must remain vigilant against the encroachment of controls that threaten to stifle our economic vitality or constrain the liberties of our people. These principles have stood the test of time because they fundamentally align with the human spirit, a spirit that yearns for autonomy, achievement and fair reward for its labours.

I give particular regard to the freedoms of speech and political expression. Liberty is fundamental to the fabric of our democracy. It is only through the robust exchange of ideas, the unfettered discourse for matters of state, that we distil the essence of progress. Yes, this means engaging in conversations that can at times be uncomfortable or confronting. It means we must brace ourselves against the friction of dissent, for it is only by confronting our challenges, by naming them and debating them in a fearless and yet mature and respectful way, that we may forge solutions together.

I remember as a university student the prevailing wisdom was that once you graduated you fled the state in search of opportunity. Since March 2014, we have built those opportunities here at home and today Tasmania has nearly 55 000 more people employed. The unemployment rate is almost halved and in contrast with before, people are flocking to our great state in search of those opportunities. Tasmania has become the envy of the nation for tourism and world-class attractions like MONA and the Salamanca Market, our local shops and entertainment precincts and our state's unparalleled natural beauty, which have countless people coming from around the world to experience all Tasmania has to offer.

I intend spending my time in this place working to keep the state building for those who come after us, building houses to ensure all Tasmanians have a roof over their head, building infrastructure so Tasmanians can make their way around this great state, and building our economy so Tasmanians can chase their own aspirations. This is what this state needs from this place and from their local representatives, to work and to build a better future for our children and for their children.

I intend using my time in this place to support the people in the community who are grinding it out to do the same: Howard's Battlers, the Quiet Australians, Sir Robert Menzies' Forgotten people. Sir Robert once said in his famous speech, The Forgotten People:

I do not believe that the real life of this nation is to be found in either great luxury hotels and the petty gossip of so-called fashionable suburbs, or in the officialdom of the organised masses. It is to be found in the homes of people who are nameless and unadvertised, and who, whatever their individual religious conviction or dogma, see in their children their greatest contribution to the immortality of their race.

Mr Speaker, our children and young people represent today's greatest contribution to tomorrow. They are the future of this state, which we all surely must agree is the greatest place on Earth to live and raise a family. Tasmania's future is one of boundless potential and we owe it to future Tasmanians, our community, to seize that potential and leave Tasmania a place where those who come after us are free to pursue their ambitions and work to leave a better tomorrow for their families.

Amongst all the economic discussions and statistics, it is important to remember that we are talking about human lives, individuals and families with values and aspirations of their own. The role of the state should be to enable the economic conditions that allow people to live according to their values and principles and to follow their dreams. When I say 'aspirations', I am not simply talking about careers and bank accounts, but the whole range of things that people can aspire to in life: to find somewhere to call home, to find love, to raise a family, to be able to be there for those who matter to them. Some have said that politics sometimes focuses too much on the economy, but a strong economy does influence the ability of everyday Tasmanians to chase their aspirations. Governments should not aim to provide their people with mere subsistence, but empower them to truly live their lives with agency, according to their own ideals and values.

We must resist the privileged minority who would have Tasmania frozen in stasis, who would have Hobart turned into 'Slowbart', who oppose the construction of critical housing, who chain themselves to the machinery of productive and sustainable industry in our state to the detriment of Tasmanian jobs, who always say 'no'. I saw this attitude firsthand on numerous occasions during my time as an alderman in the Hobart City Council. On one hand, we had a council that declared a housing crisis and on the other we had a council that was blocking critical housing projects for spurious reasons, even rejecting housing being built in non-Heritage-listed properties, with heritage reasons listed as a reason for refusal.

If we want to create a Tasmania where our people thrive, we must not make the mistake of attempting to appease the unappeasable; of listening to the professional activists who want to wreck our job creating industries; who attack those who employ, grow our economy and build the infrastructure and housing Tasmanians desperately need. We do not need to speculate to know what the outcome would be if we allowed the 'not in my backyard' anti-everything activists to dictate the decisions we make for our state. We would be back to the dying days of the Labor-Greens government in a flash, where we were the basket case of the nation, with the highest unemployment by a country mile and a brain drain caused by so many bright young Tasmanians fleeing our state to chase opportunities elsewhere.

We cannot repeat the mistakes of the past. If we want a future where we attract and retain those looking for opportunity, rather than losing our best and brightest to other states, we must build that future today, build the homes to house families, build the infrastructure and industry to keep our state moving and keep Tasmanians in productive jobs. That is how we ensure a strong and vibrant state that has the resources to support our most vulnerable and protect our state's natural beauty and resources without bringing our economy to a screeching halt.

Mr Speaker, I would like to thank a few people who have got me to this place today. First of all, I thank my brothers, Michael and Alexander, for putting up with me, keeping me grounded by mercilessly teasing me, and helping me during the craziness of the last election. I would also like to thank my mother and father for all their support. I would not have been able to survive what was such a hectic campaign without being able to lean on them.

My father, in particular, operated as a one-man Corflute crew for the duration of the campaign. In the last two weeks of the campaign, when some signs were being subject to nightly vandalism, he would go out by himself late at night and take down every Corflute he could spot, leaving the frames and star pickets. He would then get out of bed at the crack of dawn every morning, drive back out by himself and put them all back up again. Each time he refused my assistance, wanting to ensure that I remained focused on getting out there and talking to the community.

I also would like to thank the talented Mr Gillie, who took every one of my phone calls and messages. No matter how unreasonable my questions or the hour, Daniel was always a true source of wisdom and sage counsel to me, and so many times he helped me stay on track and kept me grounded.

I want to thank my great friend, Quinten, my brother from another mother. The second I told him I would be running in the 2021 election, he jumped in a car with me, no hesitation, spent hours on the phone and has backed me at every opportunity.

I thank my family in the Liberal Party who assisted and supported me: Clark electorate chair, Corey Mingari, Ross Copping and Gemma Milling, who always reminded me to make good choices and dedicated herself to ensuring that my head did not get too big to fit through the door; Claire Chandler and Chris Edwards, who have both been great supports and sounding boards for my wild ideas. To Ed Boutchard for all of his support, Jack McShane, Melanie Mingari and the rest of the Young Liberals Movement. The Young Liberals Movement holds a special place in my heart as the future of the Liberal Party and it remains true that the Young Liberals are the backbone of the volunteer force that helps so many candidates.

A special thank you to the late Alan Ashbarry, my campaign manager who kept me organised, a former colleague, a dedicated servant to the community, an unparalleled encyclopedia of anything to do with forestry or Tasmanian political history, a man with all the maps and a great friend. The world is just that bit more colourful for having had you in it.

Thank you to Eric Abetz and Michael Ferguson, who both gave me opportunities in civic life and also taught me so much.

Finally, to my darling love, Lauren, my whole heart. Every moment with you is enough to get me through anything.

The world of small business bears many similarities to running for office: the risks we take, the vulnerabilities we expose ourselves to, the hope of achieving our aspirations. As members of this place, and as Tasmanians, we must hold lofty goals for the future of our state and, if we are to realise them, have the courage to take risks, to

have those sometimes uncomfortable conversations and to make difficult decisions for the sake of those who entrust that responsibility to us.

Theodore Roosevelt summed this up best when he said:

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at worst, if he fails at least fails, while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who know neither victory nor defeat.

Tasmania's history is full of those who have devoted themselves to worthy causes and built our state, who risked defeat and lost to strive towards great triumphs. Our state is so much the better for them.

As I said earlier, Tasmania's future is full of boundless potential. We must do as those who came before us: we must strive and dare greatly to create a society that our young people deserve, one that allows hope, aspiration and opportunity but, at the same time, one that cares for and supports our most vulnerable so that they may also live their life and chase their own aspirations.

Since 2014 we have built a state we can be proud of. We owe it to every single Tasmanian to continue that work. I dedicate myself to this goal in my time in this place. I truly believe that, regardless of political strife or differences of opinion, everybody who puts their hands up to serve as representatives of this place does so out of a genuine passion for Tasmania and for their community. We may sometimes disagree on what is the best course of action but I know that we do so in good faith and from a place of genuine care. That is something we can surely work with. I look forward to the hard work of progressing Tasmania in this place to the benefit of all who live in our great state.

Members - Hear, hear.