



Mrs Rebekah Pentland MP

House of Assembly

Date: 30 July 2024

Electorate: Bass

[2.31 p.m.]

Mrs PENTLAND (Bass) - Honourable Speaker, I am excited and honoured to be standing here today. I congratulate you on your appointment to the role of Speaker of the House. May I say what a wonderful job you are doing in keeping everything in order. Bravo to you.

The SPEAKER - You can say that as much as you like.

Mrs PENTLAND - I congratulate my fellow members, both re-elected and newly elected to the House of Assembly and thank the members who previously served their communities for their contributions to parliament.

Congratulations to Premier Rockliff on your reappointment to the position of Premier of Tasmania, and to your Liberal Party for taking on the role of government.

I also thank the community of Bass for this opportunity to serve and be their voice on the matters that mean most to them.

On 20 February 1978, at the Royal Women's Hospital in Paddington, Sydney, a middle child was born, Rebekah Samantha Bowcock, daughter to Susan and Ian Bowcock, and middle child to older brother, Daniel, and yet-to-be-born younger sister, Danica.

Daniel and Danica have been my greatest friends both in childhood and adult life. My sister, Danica, is a constant presence in my everyday life. Her daily chats and unwavering support are invaluable to me. She has always been there, providing a listening ear and offering encouragement, for which I am deeply grateful.

My brother, Daniel, played a pivotal role in fostering my competitive spirit and love for sport. The three of us would spend hours playing out on the streets as we grew up, and we knew we had to be home when the street lights came on. We were fortunate with lots of freedom and always managed to stay out after dark. Daniel, a gifted cricketer, would always talk us into one more bowl of the ball and I could bowl a mean yorker back in those days. Backyard cricket often resulted in broken windows, and I do not remember a time when all our windows were not smashed.

I enjoyed playing sport growing up: netball, basketball, representative touch football, and swimming, in which I excelled. I won the Jack Campbell Award while being part of the Coogee Bay Surf Life Saving Club. During the school holidays, I often spent more time in the water than out. Without both my sister and brother, I do not know if I would be as strong and confident as I am here today.

This sport-loving nature also fitted into my ambition to achieve a rescue scuba diving licence. This later fuelled many trips to Thailand, where I tried to spend more time under the water than on land.

I come from a loving but dysfunctional family. My parents, though separated, remained under the same roof, creating an atmosphere that was far from peaceful. My sister, Danica, and I lost our bedroom and spent our childhood living on a landing. No bedroom door, no internal walls, no privacy. Each night I prayed to God for a bedroom door, a symbol of my desire of my own space.

Years later, in an unexpected turn of events, God answered my prayers, and in a grand way. Today, as the owner of accommodation businesses, I now have more than my fair share of bedroom doors. What was once a simple childhood wish has manifested into a reality far beyond my childhood imagination. This has taught me that even during dysfunction, determination and hard work can lead to incredible outcomes.

Growing up during this time, I understood the impact of having an identity crisis. I witnessed my own mother struggle with her identity due to being adopted. This was traumatic and very difficult growing up as I watched her struggle to understand where she came from and who she was, and how this disconnect to her biological family impacted her mental health. Still, to this day, we do not know my mother's biological family.

Our home was quite difficult at times and I often found solace out of the family home. Growing up I spent a lot of time away. I feel like the choices I made during this time made me who I am today. Others may view these choices as poor decisions that potentially could have led down a different path. I, however, learned much about myself and the world.

I wish to pay homage to my mum for instilling her lateral thinking and Christian values in me. I thank her for her wisdom and guidance in helping me become the woman I am today.

At the age of 19, I decided to live with my grandmother. This was an incredibly special time as it allowed me to further develop my communication skills. As a young person, I listened to my grandmother telling me her life stories growing up in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s. Gran was a true lady who always acted with decorum and grace. I will always cherish this time and how it impacted me.

I stand before you to share a glimpse into my early journey into the world of work, a journey that began when I was 12 years old. My father, a TAB agent, instilled in me the values of hard work and responsibility from a young age. His first agency was nestled on William Street, just a stone's throw away from the iconic Coca-Cola sign in Kings Cross. Every Saturday afternoon I eagerly lent a hand to my father, aiding him in meticulous tasks of recording dividends, managing late scratchings, rider changes and relaying the late mail. One such day was Melbourne Cup day, and I can remember having to teach the punters how to correctly fill out the betting tickets - probably the only 12-year-old who knew how to put on a boxed trifecta.

In the heart of Kings Cross, I encountered a diverse range of individuals, from the homeless seeking respite to the hustling working girls and the astute businessmen. Yet along with the display of humanity, there were lessons learned that went beyond mere transactions and the individuals behind the transactions. My father's steadfast refusal to lend money to the homeless, despite their pleas, left a significant mark on me. It was a lesson in compassion tempered by pragmatism - a lesson that taught me the harsh realities of the world. There were, however, moments when empathy overruled obedience of listening to my dad, and I extended a helping hand only to witness the painful cycle of addiction and gambling.

These experiences were invaluable lessons that shaped my understanding of the human condition and the importance of discernment in extending aid. They taught me that true compassion lies not only in helping, but also in empowering individuals to make choices that lead to lasting change.

Transitioning into retail, I served as a cashier at a local supermarket and later a food packer, mastering the art of organisation and attention to detail, and learning the importance of customer satisfaction and efficiency in service.

Whilst I was studying, I casually worked as a beverage attendant at the Sydney Football Stadium and Sydney Cricket Ground. I was promoted to bar manager within two months and was later awarded the bar in the Members' Stand. It was at the Member's Stand that I had the privilege of serving esteemed guests including Prime Minister John Howard and Tom Cruise. My involvement in the Sydney Olympics further solidified my experience as I hosted families and players alike whilst managing bars at the stadiums.

I then took an unexpected turn into the world of finance, where I delved into accounting and bookkeeping across different industries, mastering the language of numbers and ensuring financial integrity. However, it was in the arena of sales that I found my true calling.

I studied exercise science and aerobic instruction and became a qualified aerobics instructor and personal trainer. I met with the general manager of Randwick Fitness First, interviewing for an aerobics instructor position. Right now, dancing around on a podium wearing tight Lycra would be a lot less terrifying than standing here doing this in front of all of them.

The club manager had other plans and talked me around to accepting a role as a membership consultant. As a sales consultant for Fitness First, I shattered records and surpassed expectations earning accolades such as Australian Sales Consultant of the Year not once, but twice, and Australian Sales Manager of the Year. During this role, I had the opportunity of sitting and meeting with potential clients and listening to their stories, and often found myself offering counsel. Often the reasons to join a gym would vary from a death in the family or marriages falling apart, to losing weight, bulking up or improving overall general fitness. This was the reason for the change in their lives and I was privileged to help. The reward was seeing their hard work pay off, their confidence grow and happiness improve.

At the age of 23, I was the youngest person promoted into club management. Here I had the daunting task of overseeing a new club, Auburn Fitness First, in the western suburbs of Sydney. With plenty of racial wars out west, including a violent incident on my first day, I continued to demonstrate leadership and perseverance.

Eventually, I found myself back in the eastern suburbs managing Bondi Fitness First, where I continued to thrive and lead by example. This club consisted of 14,000 members and 75 staff. The facility included a childcare centre, a cafe, a Pilates studio, massage therapist, personal trainers, exercise instructors, receptionist, cleaning staff, a customer care team and, my personal favourite, the sales team. It often reminded me of hospitality but on steroids - literally.

From here I had the amazing opportunity of travel and I was offered a position of working with a tennis player, Arantxa Sánchez. Arantxa and her brother, Emilio, ran a tennis academy in Barcelona, Spain. I was employed to help train and mentor teenagers at their academy. I lived in Barcelona for four months and made sure I did not miss any of the Spanish festivals. I then travelled for a further five months, cramming in as much as I could.

When I returned to Sydney, I wanted to fulfil my goal of buying my first apartment by the age of 25. At Fitness First, I worked long hours and saved enough money that two months shy of my 25th birthday, I was able to achieve this goal.

I then ventured from Fitness First to Novartis and began my career as a pharmaceutical business consultant. I have over 15 years' experience looking at ways to improve pharmacy business and patient outcomes by providing affordable medication through generic brands. I have been nominated many times as Australian Pharmaceutical Business Consultant of the Year.

Sport, health and fitness have provided me with incredible career opportunities, so it is fitting that a debate about a sports stadium should pave the way for my entry into this arena.

On 15 April 2010, Cupid was working hard and who would have thought that on a cold, rainy Thursday night at the Coogee Bay Hotel I would meet the love of my life, Alex. Alex was in the army as a commando based at Holsworthy Barracks. After a short time together, it became apparent to me that we would be apart for a significant amount of time due to Alex being deployed overseas. It was during these two months of courtship that Alex took me on our first adventure to his hometown of Launceston, which included visiting the family shack in Bridport. We visited wineries and tasted amazing Tamar Valley produce. We travelled to Bridport via Lilydale and both Alex and Tasmania stole my heart along the way. Alex sealed the deal and Cupid had done his job.

In June 2010, Alex was deployed for his third tour to Afghanistan and we spent six months apart. On that deployment, not even a week in, a Black Hawk helicopter crashed during an operation resulting in the death of three commandos. The not knowing was gut wrenching. Alex made a call to me to let me know that he was in fact alive and that I was not on the end of a very different type of phone call. It was a very difficult realisation that this was going to be an ongoing factor in each deployment moving forward. Thankfully, Alex decided to leave the army to pursue a career in the building and construction industry. We lost 47 Australians fighting the Afghanistan war, 13 of whom were commandos.

Shortly after, we started trying for a family and, very sadly, we had an ectopic pregnancy. This was extremely difficult. We started working towards our lives together, both with building a family and our professional work lives. Instead of having a baby, we bought our first investment property together, a disgusting renovator's delight in Sydney in a prime location. We tried for a baby again and, luckily, we became pregnant with Jasper. Becoming pregnant with Jasper was also not an easy journey. Alex and I were living in our renovator's delight and I still remember laying the floors and finishing the furnishings at 39 weeks pregnant, just before Jasper's arrival.

It was at the 20-week scan that both Alex and I were made aware that Jasper had a heart condition, a coarctation of the aorta and aortic valve stenosis. As parents, Alex and I were thrust into a world of uncertainty and fear when we grappled with the weight of Jasper's diagnosis, unsure what the future held for our precious child. Amidst the chaos we found comfort in the hands of skilled medical professionals who offered us a glimmer of light in our darkest hours.

Today, I stand before you to share the courageous story of a young warrior, Jasper. At just three days old, he had his aorta repaired, and at six days old he underwent a ballooning of the valve to address his aortic valve stenosis, a procedure intended to buy crucial time for a more serious intervention. A month after the initial procedure, during a routine check-up, it became evident that the first ballooning had not achieved the desired results. The surgeon attempted to repeat the ballooning but after three weeks it was clear that the procedure was still not working. Jasper's condition demanded urgent intervention and a decision was made to perform the Ross procedure, a complex and high-stakes open heart surgery. The road to recovery was fraught with obstacles. One of the most terrifying moments was when the medical team expressed concerns about whether Jasper's heart artery had been correctly reattached. There was a fear that he might develop a condition known as black heart, where inadequate blood flow would cause death. We anxiously awaited the surgeon's examination after we washed out the wound and, thankfully, we received good news: the artery was reattached correctly.

However, Jasper's heart was significantly enlarged and injured from the trauma. To support his recovery, the medical team decided to place him on an extracorporeal membrane oxygenation (ECMO) machine, which provided his heart and lungs with the rest they desperately needed to heal. The procedure carries a significant chance of complications, including bleeding, infection and organ damage. Additionally, the very act of connecting a patient to an ECMO means invasive surgery, further increasing the risk of complications. It is not an easy sight watching your baby lie with his heart stopped, an open chest with blood drains and rubber tubing everywhere.

For me, the road to Jasper's recovery was long and arduous. For 13 agonising days, he remained tethered to the ECMO machine, his fragile existence hanging in the balance. Through sheer determination and the unwavering dedication of his medical team, Jasper defied the odds and emerged victorious against the spectre of death.

As a new mother, I was on a stressful road with my newborn son. Due to many medical interventions required, I was unable to hold Jasper which, of itself, was heartbreaking. However, I managed to remain steadfast to Jasper and was committed and disciplined to visiting the express room every three hours to provide Jasper with liquid gold: milk.

During this time, Alex was a first-year apprentice and studying his Certificate IV in building. Whilst Alex was away during the weeks, I was at Westmead Hospital living by myself on-site with Jasper. Overall, this was an incredibly depressing and precarious three months. It was difficult, isolating and stressful. On top of this, Alex had been involved in a car crash. Luckily, there were no serious injuries, just a painful price tag for the repair.

Today, I stand before you and I am filled with an overwhelming sense of gratitude to the Lord, my God, whom I pray to, praise be to God. He provided Jasper with the miracles of modern medicine that saved his life, and for the unwavering support of friends and family who stood by our side, and for the fighting spirit of a little boy who refused to give up. I love you, Jasper.

I do not want today's speech to focus on the negative experience Jasper has had with the Tasmanian health system but, rather, bring attention to why I take this responsibility so seriously. The Tasmanian health system needs to improve. If I could not get Jasper to Sydney for urgent medical care, there is a good chance that Jasper would not be sitting in the gallery today. We are becoming a state where only the wealthy can keep healthy. It is my personal passion in making sure that every Tasmanian has access to the required treatments and/or health services when needed.

Having children for me has not been an easy ride. In trying to build our family, once again tragedy struck and we suffered our first miscarriage. This was extremely difficult and, unfortunately, was not the only time this occurred. Both Alex and I were further devastated each time and often left wondering if I would be able to become pregnant again. I wish society was more understanding of the impact this has on a woman and her family. I wish it was not taboo to talk about miscarriages and pregnancy mishaps.

Close to four years later, Reuben arrived and what a joy he is. A little legend who spends more time upside down than right way up. I am not going to lie; I feel a bit of pressure in here today because my biggest performance critic is sitting right behind me. I love you, Reuben.

Alex and I have always been focused on our work endeavours. We both work incredibly hard. This included Alex working in a high management role in a respectable building company and I was working as a pharmaceutical business consultant. I sold my Sydney apartment and we started our own business in Tasmania. This included our CBD apartments in Launceston. We then built apartments in our back yard and created another short-term accommodation business. We established a construction cleaning business. We built and sold a huge family home. We are also part-owners of the Mercure Hotel in Launceston, where Alex is a company director. This accommodation encompasses 80 rooms, a bar and restaurant. Alex has completed project-managing the entire hotel renovation, including the renovation of the facade, which have beautifully lit up Brisbane Street opposite City Park. It was no easy feat managing this hotel during the COVID closures.

I have always thought we would have three kids, so again we tried for another baby and again we were unlucky and experienced miscarriages. After five years of trying, I had a difficult discussion with my doctor, who addressed the risks of getting pregnant, especially at my age. It was at this point I was ready to give up. However, God had other plans and I was shocked to learn I was pregnant with our youngest, Miriam, our little rainbow baby. At 46, I know I am blessed with another baby. I love you, Miriam, and we are forever grateful for the three children we have.

When I reflect on what made me start this career, it comes down to me questioning my own land tax. I remember how angry I was when I received the bill and how, compared to the year prior, it had almost doubled. As I mentioned, I questioned the increase. The response I received was that it had been advertised in the *Tasmanian Government Gazette* and I no longer had enough time to challenge it. Honourable Speaker, who reads the *Gazette*? It made me think about the cost-of-living crisis, what this could mean for others in a similar situation and how these individuals would struggle to afford the increase.

I know the rules clearly state that I am not supposed to bring props when I speak here, but if you look over there, sitting in the gallery, you will see a few props of mine. And no, they are not the usual kind. They are my family and, believe me, they are a tougher crowd than anyone else in this room ever could be.

During the campaign, the Jacqui Lambie Network received a fair bit of flak for supposedly lacking policy. As you know, the three of us act as independents under the JLN umbrella, so I thought it was time to come clean and share with you all exactly what my personal policy is. My personal policy is derived from my family.

My father: when I look into my father's eyes, I see the elderly and what they represent. Their experiences and their sacrifices are the backbone of our society. They are the pioneers, the generation that fought hard to raise families and put food on the table. They toiled for our country, instilling values of hard work, dedication and resilience. Their legacy is a testament to the strength and perseverance that built our nation. It is imperative that my policies honour and support this invaluable segment of our population. We must not marginalise the elderly in their golden years.

My husband: when I have conversations with my husband, I hear the present and the drive for progress. He embodies the spirit of seeking opportunities, striving for prosperity and finding ways to succeed. This perspective is crucial for our time as it focuses on harnessing current possibilities to improve our lives and build a robust economy. My policies aim to foster innovation, support entrepreneurial endeavours and create a thriving environment where hard work and ingenuity are rewarded.

My children: when I think about my children, it becomes clear that our actions today must be guided by an environmental moral compass. It is essential to tread lightly on the Earth and leave it in a better state than when we found it. My policies emphasise sustainability and the need to ensure the test of time, ensuring that future generations can manage the delicate balance between industry, prosperity and the environment with greater ease.

By prioritising ecological responsibility, we pave the way for a healthier, more sustainable world for our children and their descendants. When we are making decisions for children, we should be making those decisions with compassion, with our own children in the forefront of our mind. The only difference between someone's journey is a decision, and that decision can be the catalyst of which road they follow.

The heart and soul of Tasmania is its people. We are known for our sense of community, our resilience and our incredible natural beauty but, most importantly, we are known for looking out for one another. My policy is rooted in making sure every Tasmanian feels heard, supported and empowered.

I wish to acknowledge my other JLN elected members, Miriam Beswick and Andrew Jenner, who are also taking on this role. I am confident they will also rise to the challenge of what their electorates require.

I would like to say thanks to a few people. To the awesome parliamentary team who works behind the scenes, what an incredible team you are. To the Clerks, the Clerk Assistants, the Parliamentary Assistants, the HR and IT teams, security staff, the dining room staff, the team downstairs in the cafe and all the cleaning staff, you are an impressive team. I am very grateful for your chit-chat and all the warm smiles you have thrown my way. Thank you.

I thank Lee-Ann Patterson, who I met in February, who volunteered on my campaign. I cannot thank you enough for everything you did from emotional support to words of encouragement; it truly meant the world.

To Jacqui Lambie, thank you for your support and faith in me. Your confidence in my abilities and your encouragement have truly been inspiring. Your hard work and dedication to serving this community are unparalleled, and you are a true inspiration to us all. Your relentless commitment and tireless efforts have set a high standard for public service. I am deeply grateful for the trust you have placed in me and together we will continue to work towards making a positive impact and achieving our shared goals.

I thank Tania Clark, Chloe Skip, Georgie Lim, and Kristen Kral, my closest friends. Your constant support and encouragement will not be forgotten. Thank you for always being by my side.

I also thank Sharon and Dale Pentland, my mother- and father-in-law for their support. This included providing and driving the trailers around the Bass electorate and finding extra potential poster locations. I have even had other Bass candidates during the state election refer to me as the trailer poster queen. Thank you.

I want to thank my siblings. Without our incredibly close bond, I do not know if I would have stayed sane during the campaign. To my sister, Danica, your support around our daily talks and reminders that I could do this will always be appreciated. To my brother, Daniel, thank you for coming down from Sydney and being part of my support system the night of the vote count - and how about the fact that you both travelled from Sydney to be here today? Thank you.

I thank my dad for the values you have instilled in me. Thank you for all the care you have shown during the campaign, cooking us meals, babysitting and doing all our washing. I also thank you for cheering me on the sidelines and always reporting back when you heard or saw me on TV. You always listened to me rant and rave when I got politically fired up and I am grateful for your support. I love you, Dad, and I hope I have made you proud in here today.

To my children, Jasper, Reuben and Miriam, it is not normal to watch your mother campaign. At your age, I always wished to see my name up in lights, but not like this. It is not easy when your friends at school let you know that they saw your mum on a corner flapping a sign and waving her hand. I am sorry that we had to pass my face many times to and from school each day. Thank you for believing in me and stepping up during this time. As I always say, never say never and never say forever. Just remember you can do anything you put your mind to. If your mum can be a politician then you are able to fly to the moon.

Alex, there will never be enough words to say how thankful I am I have you in my life. You are a perfect husband and an incredible father to our children. I will always admire your determination and workhorse attitude. You achieve in a day what most men would struggle to achieve in a week. I will always wonder how we managed to maintain our family commitments alongside the demands of the campaign. Our tag-team effort was truly a huge effort between me handling the day shift, carting around a 10-month-old baby, doorknocking and meeting with the people of Bass, and you handling the afternoon/night shift, putting up signs, driving the trailers around and making sure my campaign sign was both visible and in a new location every couple of days to maximise visibility with the community.

I will forever be grateful for your support and for everything you do and have done for our family and for me while I have chased and ultimately undertaken this massive challenge. We both push each other to our limit and we are taking up too much space if we are not living on the edge. You inspire me every day. Thank you, Alex, and from a proud wife to a humble husband, I would like to formally thank you for your service. You are the true hero in this House today.

Honourable Speaker, it is truly an honour to be standing in front of you today as an elected member for the electorate of Bass. I acknowledge that I have much to learn and I am excited to take on this challenge and opportunity. I thank the people of Bass for putting their faith in me to represent them on the matters that concern them most.

Members - Hear, hear.