



Brenton Best MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Braddon

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr SPEAKER - Mr Best, and could I remind all honourable members that this is - I do not believe that the honourable member will require any assistance at all. It is the custom of the House to hear a member's first speech without interjection. The honourable member for Braddon, Mr Best.

Mr BEST (Braddon) - Thank you. Thank you, for those words of confidence, Mr Speaker. I would just like to begin by firstly a note of congratulations to my elected colleagues and a special thank you to my family and supporters and the electors of Braddon and those people who obviously elected me. I appreciate the trust they have in me to represent them in parliament and in particular I would like to congratulate our Leader, the Leader of the Opposition, the Honourable Michael Field for the wonderful campaign that he led throughout the election and which was reflected in his vote in particular in Braddon in topping the poll and the swing that has occurred in relation to the Labor Party, in fact it is an historic swing towards the Labor Party and I sincerely congratulate his leadership.

Of course running for parliament does create a lot of hard work as members would be aware. Myself, I wore out three pairs of shoes on the hustings and I know what it is like to get in there and battle because it had been a long campaign. One of the things that came out within the campaign was the fact that there is a degree of cynicism out there in the electorate and certainly there is a looking towards, or a strong view in relation, Mr Speaker, to leadership issues and what will happen in areas both of economy and direction because the electorate likes to have something to look forward to and unfortunately the last four years they have been doing it pretty tough. Consequently I think some of the results that happened in relation to the election happened for the mere fact that people are looking for some leadership on many issues. My role in assisting Dr David Crean on the north-west coast in economic development is a position that I relish. I have had experience both on economic boards and on boards of management in general in different areas and one of the things that I have learnt through my experience within that spectrum has been the importance of being involved, being involved in assisting people and what they are doing - not sitting back from a distance and watching what happens but getting involved and ruling by inclusion. I think that is the main point: if we want to see things happen within this State, people in positions of authority, people who are in positions where they wish to represent people need to make the first step forward in both including people and assisting people, facilitating things that need to happen.

One of the groups that I have been involved with has been Devonport Commercial Promotions and one of the experiences that we have had is in relation to small business and retailers who are covered within the central business district of Devonport has been an attitudinal change in the fact that people have been now given the confidence not only to put forward ideas but to actually push for those things to come into fruition and to take a degree of responsibility in trying to make things happen for themselves. I think this is important because it is talking about being proactive.

Unfortunately in the electorate of Braddon we do have 48 per cent of the population in Devonport on some form of welfare, and Burnie I think is 50 per cent. That is a sad reflection but it does not have to be like this. It is a matter of what our focus is in life and what we intend to do about the issues that confront us. Of course some of the social problems that come from this, as well as the economic ones, are quite severe; the electorate of Braddon has the highest youth suicide rate and it is quite a depressing situation. So these matters that I raise are very important in that I guess I liken myself as more of a grassroots style politician and I take these things that I have been involved with within the community quite seriously.

I have spoken to many business people across the electorate on many issues and one thing that I have found is that we do have a large amount of skills within Braddon, and no doubt there are other people with many skills and ability in other electorates within Tasmania. I believe that it is important for us, as I have said, to support those people. I think we need to look within a bit more first before we look outside. That does not mean that we do not look at what is happening on an international scale - and we have heard other speakers this afternoon talk about the focus in trends and what is happening in relation to multi-media and other things, but I think the importance is that we do not lose sight of the fact that we do have a large skill base here and we do have people with good ideas. We do not have to look for consultants outside of Tasmania, we do not have to look for skills. Basically I think we have got it here and the sooner that we start working on that basis the better it is going to be for everybody.

Again, I think that we have to get away from this narrow focus - I think that is a big problem within Tasmania - and we have to work on the basis of inclusion. A lot of the people that I have spoken to tend to feel that there is an inner sanctum

Inaugural Speech – Brenton Best MP

that does go on. I have seen it on the local government level, where basically, unless you are in with the crowd, you miss out. There are battling people out there, there are people who are not battling so much, there are people that almost made it in terms of the businesses that they are involved in, but because they do not crack into the inner sanctum they are always on the outer and the things that they want to do never get a guernsey. So I believe everyone deserves a fair go in that area.

We need to focus not just on employers but also the workers as well because after all they are the people that basically carry out the work. In a lot of instances the work that other people do not wish to carry out - most of the times they are the ones that get busted up or broken in the amount of time and lifespan that they spend in serving in industry in one way or another. I am not trying to detract anything in relation to Bob Clifford and the catamarans, but it is not very often that you hear praise of the workmanship and the skill of the workers that carry out the construction of a lot of those catamarans out there. I think that is very important and we need to keep focused that it is the people of Tasmania that are very important.

On the north-west coast the food industry is an area that I think has great opportunity. Particularly when you look at some of the discussions that have been carried out about overseas markets. I think it is an area that again government has not really got itself involved in and I do not think that we have taken a full handle on the opportunities that exist. I believe the situation is ripe there for expansion. In the electorate of Braddon we have some of the best farming land around and we have got some factories there at the moment that are capitalising on that, but we need to work a bit harder in those area.

I can speak, I suppose, from a personal perspective in relation to some of these industries because I have been involved in the best-practice program in quite a few of these industries. One of the sites that I was involved - the Edgells Ulverstone plant now owned by Simplot. We introduced the best-practice program and it is about giving responsibility to workers. I had heard some comments yesterday about this and that in relation to enterprise agreements but the point is that everybody deserves the right to be represented and I do not see why it should be more difficult for working people to be represented than it is for employers. When we look at the situation at the factory at Edgells Ulverstone, which is now Simplot Ulverstone, we see that the framework was put in place for workers to participate for the common good of all and they did participate and there were some quite dramatic changes that were carried in the work practices on the site.

There were also some financial rewards at the end of the day but it was all carried out under the framework of the fact that everybody participated in a fair environment so no one had an advantage over anyone else and that is the most important thing. If we want to see community growth and development in Tasmania, and we want to see things happen, we have to rule by inclusion and rule by involvement and not just segregate bits of the community off and say, well, this is okay for us but it is no good for anyone else. I have seen that happen and I certainly do not believe that that is the way in which we should focus ourselves if we are about progression for Tasmania.

I guess on a personal note I have experienced some of these things as an engine driver, working for seven years in a factory and then progressing to a site representative of my colleagues. I have seen what goes on. I have seen the self-interest. We have had numerous debates on the shop floor about waste that goes on between management. I have seen the incentives that are undertaken where you have a national structure with a company and management are given incentives to cut the budget in terms of maintenance and they get a load of money in their back pocket for doing that and in the meantime industry starts to drop away because there is no replacement of equipment, there is no investment going on. I have seen these things happen and I think there is need in Tasmania to make industry more accountable and certainly a role for government particularly where government has made some investments.

We can look at some of the things that have happened just recently but if government is fair dinkum about assisting industry and assisting the wellbeing of different industries then they must ensure that the companies they support are intending to invest in themselves. A classic example in my electorate of Braddon has been the recent closure or near closure of Tioxide. There is a company that has been assisted time and time again in different ways and yet there was no focus on the company having to be - or in fact accountability in terms of investment into the industry itself. Mr Speaker, I make that point that we need to be proactive in those areas. We need to maximise our investments.

Now, you would be aware, Mr Speaker, and members that the *Spirit of Tasmania* docks in East Devonport and we have recently formed an enhancement committee. What really needs to happen with instrumentalities such as this is that we need to maximise these things in order to make further gains within the community and one of the roles of the committee that we have formed in East Devonport is to maximise a sense of arrival and to capitalise the financial spin-offs of those things.

There is a role for government to be supportive of these sorts of things, there is a role there for government to be involved in the creation of a scenic corridor of beauty in terms of East Devonport because there are major spin-offs not just for East Devonport itself but for the mere fact that people that are involved grow in confidence, grow with their ideas and learn to carry it further and more people become involved. That is what I think involving communities in the growth of Tasmania is about.

I believe that we need to work on these local ideas and create a cohesiveness that has not really existed in Tasmania; it is certainly not apparent in Braddon. I am not a detractor from sister city programs that go on; I believe there is some benefit in sister cities programs. Bit it is a bit ironic when you have a sister city relationship with a Japanese city and you have got cities and towns in the same electorate that do not even have a relationship with themselves.

Inaugural Speech – Brenton Best MP

It is all very well to talk about the broader picture because the broader picture is important but there are these fundamental issues and when you talk to visitors coming into Tasmania time and time again they talk about parochial things. They talk about these things and nothing seems to happen and I think that we need to address these issues if we are to move forward. Economic growth is about building up people's confidence and inclusion and as I have said earlier we need to look within.

The member over here Mr Cleary, mentioned the issue about public transport. Well I can tell the member over here that basically transport on the north-west coast needs urgent attention; it is really in a state of disrepair at the moment. The financial benefits, I believe, that would be afforded in providing affordable access across the region would be great. The participation rate of people, the fact that you would tend to congregate industries and shopping precincts where they are all over the place in different towns and areas on the north west coast, needs to be taken into consideration. It creates severe hardship and dislocation and it creates all of these things and something needs to be done about it fairly urgently.

I am not sure when we are going to get a government that will stand up to a MTT bus service down in Devonport but I certainly know what the Leader of the Opposition has stated during the election campaign and I know what the policy is of his party, the Labor Party, in relation to this issue. You would probably find a better bus service in Chernobyl than what you would find in Devonport at the moment. It is just non-existent. And it is not the fault of the operator that this exists. The simple fact of the matter is that he is being forced to continue, often subsidising much of the transport through his school runs, and it is about time we did something about it. Devonport is the only city in Tasmania without a proper public bus transport system. The Honourable Reg Hope, President of the Legislative Council has just recently been involved with collating information and involving communities and getting all those interested parties down on paper. That work is there; all we need to do really is act on it. So as I say we need to be inclusive in our approach and holistic and not just this narrow focus. What is good for areas in the community is good for all areas in the community and not just some.

So getting to my reasoning as to why I ran for Parliament, I guess it is that I wanted to participate in the quest to make a difference. We all come from different backgrounds, some poor, some rich, some middle class. We all have shades of different motivation. Some are motivated by prestige, some by power. I am motivated because I like to work for people but I think underlying all this we believe that we can make a difference, yet I believe that very few do.

I began the quest I suppose as an engine driver. Now I have become a parliamentarian. I have seen pledges to make differences from time to time. There was one about 'Jobs, jobs, jobs!'. There was another one where the Department of Construction workers were told that they were going to make it the old DMR and then I do not recall in the Department of Construction where workers were escorted to work with security guards or locked out of their workplace but nevertheless we have seen these things happen.

We have seen things in relation to the workers compensation changes. In fact I went to what was supposed to be a forum. I was told I think the night before the forum and the public servant who rang me said, 'Brenton, there is a forum on in Burnie tomorrow'. I said, 'Why wasn't I told a bit earlier?' and he said, 'This is part of this ministerial thing' which I guess I will get to learn while I am here. But when I got to the forum I was to learn that it did not really matter what we had to say, it was already mapped out for us. So consequently the changes that were made were totally made in the absence of any full proper community input. Whilst it could be argued that the forums were held, in reality I was there, I put up several things and certainly there was no recording of anything that was put.

Mr Speaker, we need to work on these issues. The problem is I think that it is a matter of what our interest is. Mainland States, particularly with the last Federal Labor Government, we have seen many mainland States grasp the economic funding and the job placement strategies yet I think we have missed the window of opportunity here in Tasmania. Unfortunately nobody knows where we are going to end up but given some of the debate that has carried on in the last couple of days in this House and some of the things that are emanating out of Canberra, I think that is going to be considerably reduced.

Labor is about the greatest good for the greatest number but it is not enough just to believe in something, it is not enough to expect others to carry out the work for you. There are people within the electorate with ideas and drive but the important feature is that we actually become involved and facilitate those things because when people are fair dinkum about having a go and they are doing it for the general good of others, they deserve to be supported.

If you want to make a difference then you need to support people within your electorate and the difference for those that are poor and those that are rich, it is a very simple answer to this question: is it those who are poor or those who have not had the opportunities afforded to them; they have not been shown the knowledge or the experience, they have not been given the same opportunities that other people have been given? If we do not include people and we do not offer those sort of opportunities then the gap will widen and our communities will be more the poorer.

I believe that it is important to deal with the causes and not the symptoms of these things. It is very easy to patch things up and to say, 'She'll be right' and on and on we go. But I think the reality is that we need to deal with the causes because while we cease to deal with the causes these issues become more inflated as we go along. It is easy, for example, to scream 'parents' rights' and 'harsher penalties' when we pick up the newspaper yet the causes come down to parenting skills and family support. I knocked on a lot of doors during this last election and I can tell you there are a lot of broken

Inaugural Speech – Brenton Best MP

families out there and a lot of people who are doing it very hard. I can say to you that it is not that they want to do it hard, it is a fact that they do not know any better. They have not been given the opportunity, they have not been shown the things that they need to know in life. For heaven's sake, most of them do not even know how to love their own children. It is a very sad indictment that we are not addressing these issues.

On the APPM dispute, yes, I was there at the dispute on the picket line defending workers with their rights to be represented. The previous Leader - who is not here at the moment - rolled up from Hobart, in what I would call a shameful exercise. He told the workers that he supported them and then tore off back to Hobart and sent a couple of busloads of police up. He had me arrested and now he has got me in Parliament.

Members laughing.

Mr BEST - I am not ashamed to protect people and families or their children. I was told the story of Harry Lane whom I am told in 1939 was the first Labor person born in Devonport and elected first time up. Well, Mr Harry Lane, I was born in Devonport and I suppose it is sixty years on but I do intend to make a difference.