



Sarah Courtney MP

House of Assembly

Date: 6 May 2014

Electorate: Bass

ADDRESS-in-REPLY

Ms COURTNEY (Bass - Inaugural) - Madam Speaker, I have the honour to move -
That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Governor in reply to His Excellency's speech.

To His Excellency the Honourable Peter Underwood, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the State of Tasmania and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia.

MAY IT PLEASE YOUR EXCELLENCY:

We, Her Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the members of the House of Assembly of Tasmania, in Parliament assembled, desire to thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to both Houses of Parliament.

We desire to record our continued loyalty to the throne and person of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and at the same time assure Your Excellency that the measures which will be laid before us during the session will receive our careful consideration.

Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise before you, the first female Speaker in this Chamber, and congratulate you on your election. I have lived in Tasmania for just over four years and cannot imagine my life to be anywhere else. When reading the inaugural speeches of others in the Chamber today I was struck by a similar theme, a strong Tasmanian heritage born through generations of predecessors living and working in this beautiful state, pride for what their forebears achieved - well-placed pride - as so much has been achieved in Tasmania since 1825 when Van Diemen's Land became a colony in its own right. I am proud to stand here today in this Parliament surrounded by so many who feel so passionately about this state.

I am half Tasmanian but I spent my first 30 years living in Sydney. I had rarely considered setting up roots anywhere else. I had a good job, was surrounded by family and friends but something was not quite right. I enrolled in a Master of Wine Technology and Viticulture at the University of Melbourne thinking I needed to have an intellectual pursuit outside of work. I thoroughly enjoyed the learning, the appropriately nicknamed 'wine camps' held at Dookie each semester and the diverse and strong friendships I formed, acknowledging at this time my friend Lynn who is here today. Nevertheless, there was still a desire for something more.

In addition to family holidays as a child I enjoyed many trips to Tasmania as an adult. Using that as a basis I started trawling the internet looking for a property in my price range with the search criteria morphing from a cheap bush block to something with a house and then potentially a vineyard as the months passed. Several trips to Tasmania to look at properties helped galvanise my desire to start something here. A few days out from my thirtieth birthday it happened, contracts were signed. Coincidentally, the couple renting my new home at the time were Dallas and Ritchie Richardson, icons within the Tasmanian wine industry having established in the Pipers River region more than 30 years earlier. Dallas and Richard were in the process of building a new home nearby. As I made my first tentative steps towards planning a vineyard and finding my feet in my new home they extended their hand of friendship - something I now know as unique to Tasmania and has happened time and time again during the four years I have lived here.

Over the preceding months I have attempted to crystallise in my mind why I decided to get involved in politics. The answer is the sense of place I have found in my new home of northern Tasmania. I have never really understood nor contemplated the concept of a sense of place before moving here. I am an engineer and an analyst: I run my life in spreadsheets. How does this sense of place come into the equations, lists and quests for rationality that seem ever present in my life? In trying to understand a sense of place I read what others thought. A common theme through my research was nostalgia forming a fundamental component of sense of

place, but how could this be? I have very fond recollections from my childhood holidays in Nubeena visiting my aunt, uncle and dear nan, Eileen, yet none conjure the familiarities and memories normally associated with nostalgia. A sense of place can encompass other things: feeling safe, belonging, and the obvious beauty of the natural and built environment around us.

While all these aspects make Tasmania a wonderful place to live, I believe it is the people who have made Tasmania my home. Tasmanians have given me a sense of place. My neighbours, Sharon and Jason, Jill and Pete, Wayne and Anne, who have welcomed me into their homes and ensured that I never felt alone, are always available to help when asked and always welcoming with a cup of tea at the kitchen table for a chat. The camaraderie within the wine industry - and, let us be honest, my couple of thousand vines places me well and truly at the tadpole end of things - however, the generosity of advice and the desire to see me succeed from so many within the industry is humbling.

My riding buddies, my goodness, I could never have imagined, not long ago in September 2012, when I jumped on my mountain bike and jo the friendships I would form. I joined the group with the simple objective of getting fit and meeting new people. Within a few short weeks, confidence on the bike was gained and more importantly, unbelievable friendships were formed. An amazing group of inspirational and supportive women: Rowena, Sophie, Georgina and Beck to start with, followed by Ange, Jo, Liz, Celia, Katrina and many others.

While we all acknowledge that Tasmania is a special place to live, with breathtaking beauty and abundant resources, it is the people who have given me my sense of place, and that is why I have public life. I want to give back to the people who have given me so much. I want to utilise my talents, experience and energy and help Tasmania realise its full potential. I want to help provide Tasmanians now and in the future with the happiness they have gifted me.

Unfortunately, Tasmania is not a happy place now. We have the lowest weekly earnings in Australia. We are the state with the highest rates of unemployment and the most dependent on welfare. We have the lowest workforce participation as well as the lowest proportion of private sector employment to public sector employment compared with any other state. These statistics have become so commonplace and are so regularly cited that I fear they lost meaning to the previous government. But these statistics are very real for the Tasmanians who are unemployed, underemployed and who are already living beyond Bass Strait in pursuit of economic stability for their families.

It is a source of enormous frustration to me that individuals and small businesses are stuck in a quagmire of regulation and bureaucracy that drives many to throw their hands in the air with exasperation and say, 'I give up'. Do not get me wrong, I am a big fan of rules that create a level playing field for people and businesses to compete but not rules that set up roadblocks or shut down the game all together.

We need a government that will restore confidence for people to invest, whether they are large, international corporations or a small family business; a government that allows business to thrive by stepping out of the way and allowing proprietors and managers to focus on growth and opportunity rather than being ed with onerous, irrelevant and inflexible regulation; a government that provides stability, strength and also transparency in decision-making so that the greatest foe of investment - risk - is minimised, providing an incentive rather than a hazard for those wanting to capitalise on the abundant opportunity we have in this state.

I have no doubt in my mind that the current Government led by Premier Will Hodgman can provide investors with the assurance they need to think about the future optimistically, restoring economic strength and employment. I want Tasmania to be a place of prosperity and economic resilience.

My vision for Tasmania is one that capitalises on the opportunity that surrounds us with a government that assists and supports those who innovate and invest. Currently, private business investment in Tasmania is only a little over 1 per cent of Australia's total private business investment. I want Tasmania to be the destination of choice for investment capital. I also want Tasmania to be a place that embraces diversity and is tolerant of the views of others. Let us have robust debate about the things we are passionate about but let us also respect why others hold their views and focus on the things that bind us, not divide us.

I want Tasmania to be a place that encourages individuals, communities and businesses to be the best they can, always striving for improvement and not settling for mediocrity. Tasmania has taught me that happiness is neither found in the size of one's house nor the brand of car that one drives. However, we need to work together

to ensure we generate the wealth required so that the next generation is not burdened with our debt and has access to opportunity.

We need to be a place that embraces the word 'yes'. Yes to innovation, opportunity, business, ideas, development and vision. Yes to sustainability because we can have it all. We can have a vibrant society, strong economy, nurturing community and a beautiful environment.

I want to see northern Tasmania thriving again through innovation and vision that in the past meant that Launceston was the first city in the southern hemisphere to have electric street lighting due to the construction of the Duck Reach hydro power station. I want to see Bell Bay restored to its former glory, and more, not simply because government policy aspires for it to be so, but because future industry in northern Tasmania is thriving. Manufacturing has innovated using the wealth of knowledge and ideas we have, because agriculture is producing an abundance of high value products being shipped directly and regularly to market, because the forestry industry is back as a sustainable long-term industry that creates well and provides stability to regional communities, as well as showcasing our awesome natural environment. I want industry that utilises our forests in a sustainable way whilst still conserving vast tracks of wilderness untouched. Bell Bay should be bustling because we are an exporter of high quality, high value goods and produce, because our population is rising steadily due to the opportunity here. We need a smaller government, not one that shirks its responsibilities or lets the vulnerable fall behind but one that encourages individuals to take personal responsibility, a society where everyone, not just those in public office, are accountable for their actions.

Until moving to Tasmania I had never thought of myself as being particularly bold. I embarked on a chemical engineering degree and a Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Sydney, primarily because I did not know what I wanted to be. I was proficient in science and maths yet practical enough to know I needed a job at the end of it all.

During a time when graduate offers from the big firms dried up, I was fortunate to have a number of opportunities offered to me at the conclusion of these degrees and chose because of the people, the culture and the diversity of the role. I went on to work in other stockbroking and equity analysis roles, most recently as a business development manager at a successful boutique hedge fund in Sydney. None of this struck me as being particularly remarkable.

Moving to Tasmania on my own and planting a vineyard from scratch was, I must say, formative. I faced many new challenges and am an infinitely more confident and capable person for overcoming these. And now this, a step into politics. Not because it was expected of me by my family, that I had influential political friends who gave me a nudge, or because I had limited other career options, but because I want to make a positive difference to the lives of the men and women of Tasmania, and I believe I can.

I have made the decisions that have led me to be standing here today. I have made choices. Some of them difficult, and I stand by them. I intend to conduct my political career, no matter how short or long, in this manner, by being decisive. It does not mean being reckless or making spur-of-the-moment choices. It means consulting, listening and using the resources available to me to make ethical decisions that are in Tasmania's best interest.

When others may sit on the fence, I intend to have the courage to make tough decisions and be accountable for those decisions. There may be decisions I make that some, or even many, will disagree with and there may be times when I am simply wrong. I commit to this Parliament and to the people of Tasmania that I will endeavour to always put honesty and integrity first.

I reflected earlier on the importance of place and the enormous role people in my life have played in creating this. I therefore pay a tribute to my parents without whose love and support I would not be the woman I am today. My father, David, was born in Campbell Town in 1942 and spent his childhood in the Midlands. He went to Launceston for his secondary schooling before securing a job at the CBC Bank in Launceston. A few years later he took the opportunity to transfer to Sydney. My father died suddenly late last year after a successful career in property development and is missed by many. I feel quite confident that were he alive today he would be in the front row proud of what I had achieved having already told everyone he knew what his little girl had accomplished.

Dad left behind my wonderful mother, Jane, who is in the Chamber today. While the grief of my dad's death is still very raw for mum she is a woman who was never simply defined by the man beside her. My mother was not given many professional opportunities as a young woman and was obliged to resign from her role at AMP when she got engaged to my father because it was company policy. I have trouble accepting it as being acceptable at the time.

My mother then bore my two older brothers Peter and Gordon in her early twenties and then me, the exciting surprise eight years later. When dad was retrenched, with my brothers both attending the Scots School at

Bathurst, mum rejoined the workforce. I was four, the day Australia won the America's Cup, I am told. I have fond memories of playgroups I attended. I know mum felt guilty dropping me off each day on the way to work, I would like to assure you, mum, that fun times were had.

Mum worked full-time within the publishing industry until I left school, working her way to senior management roles. While there were times when I was little when I did not understand why she could not come on every excursion, my feelings of pride grew as I got older. By high school I was indeed proud that my mum was not able to do tuckshop duty because of her career. Mum's ability to have a successful career while being a nurturing, loving, supportive and fun daughter, mother, sister and wife is an achievement for which I am in awe.

My 92-year-old grandmother Mary, who lives independently in her family home, is also a source of inspiration. Her ability to make the best of any situation, her strength and her dedication to her family is humbling.

I would also like to acknowledge my former husband Michael without whose support during our marriage I would not have been able to pursue my career and the twists and turns it has taken. Our relationship also means that I have a beautiful stepdaughter in my life to make me laugh and who strangely thinks the best possible way to spend a weekend is in a Liberal Party hat and T-shirt out letterboxing. She might not think that in four years' time. Bella also keeps my feet firmly planted on the ground. On being elected she assured me, 'You're not actually important at all, just pretending to be'.

There is no way I could be standing here today without the support and friendship from my campaign volunteers. Mel Kerrison and James Williams managed to find time from their already extensive professional and family commitments to run my campaign. The practicality, optimism and dedication each displayed was incredible and I very much hope that both cleared a few months in their diaries in early 2018. Simon Wood allowed me to take over much of his business as campaign HQ and, along with Sam Hogg, spent many nights building frames and putting up campaign signs. It is impossible to think of their contribution without smiling as both gents injected much needed humour into the campaign.

An army may march on its stomach but a campaign team is kept content with coffee and breakfast so thank you Damon for fuelling the campaign, for your friendship and, most importantly, your unwavering confidence in me.

Darryl and Rowena Taylor opened their home on a number of occasions to assist with fund raising but more importantly they opened their home and invited me into their family providing support, friendship and many memorable times.

Jarrold's advice and capacity to get things done kept the campaign focused; his help was priceless.

Warren and Kerry from Scottsdale ensured that a voter could not enter the north-east region without seeing at least half a dozen of my signs and in George Town and Low Head Dennis and Ros not only ensured maximum sign coverage but also letterboxed pamphlets by the box load.

Senators Abetz, Bushby, Colbeck and Parry have all been generous with their advice and assistance throughout both the Federal election last year and the recent state election as were Andrew Nikolic, Eric Hutchinson and Brett Whiteley. I look forward to working with you all in our complementary roles that all have the same clear objective - a better Tasmania.

The Liberal Party may be seen by some as a political machine, but that is not what I have experienced. It is an organisation comprised of passionate members who have provided me with support and encouragement. So many others contributed in a meaningful way to my campaign. The aforementioned riding buddies came out in force, particularly Sophie, Georgina, Beck, Ro, Ange and Meghann. Louise, Elizabeth, John, Jo, Cuffy, Davina, Chee, Pat, Zoe, Nick, Kyle, Brodie and Sophie also contributed hours of support. Then there were all the generous individuals who assisted in funding my campaign. Every donation was significant to me. I am particularly moved by those who chose to help me, having never met me prior to the campaign and not being members of the Liberal Party. I believe that says a great deal about the type of Tasmania that so many in Bass want for their future.

Finally, to the voters of Bass, I thank you. You have entrusted me with a huge responsibility and I promise to work hard. I promise to always stand up for our region.

Members - Hear, hear