



Matthew Groom MP

House of Assembly

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Electorate: Denison

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Mr GROOM (Denison - Inaugural) - Madam Deputy Speaker, it is great to finally be here and have the opportunity to speak for the first time in this House. I would like to start by sincerely thanking the people of Denison for supporting me and affording me the great honour of representing them in this Parliament. I am a seventh generation Tasmanian and I have a great affection for this place. I am committed to doing all I can to ensure that Hobart and the broader electorate of Denison continues to be one of the greatest places in the world in which to work, live and raise a family.

I would also like to acknowledge my predecessor, the former Liberal member for Denison, Michael Hodgman. For someone to commit to public life for over 40 years is an extraordinary achievement. I commend him for his service, and I will do my best to meet his high standards in representing my electorate.

I stand here today, of course, not just as an elected member, but as a Liberal Party member. I owe the Liberal Party and its members a great debt for the opportunity they have afforded me and the support they have provided me through the election process. It fills me with enormous pride to be an elected member representing such a great Australian political party, a party that is genuinely reflective of our community. It is a party based less on ideology and more on sound, balanced, practical outcomes guided by liberal values. It recognises the important role that government plays in delivering efficient and effective services, but it remains acutely aware of the limitations of government and of the propensity of big government to frustrate rather than facilitate.

The Liberal Party recognises that we cannot turn to government for the solution to all of our woes, that as individuals and as a community we must take responsibility for our own destiny. A truly healthy society is about balance - a focused, efficient and effective government, a vibrant and competitive business sector, a strong and connected community, and based on the principle of equality of opportunity for all. Above all else the Liberal Party is of the community and for the community. It draws people from all walks of life. It celebrates diversity of opinion, and it acts in the broad community interest, not a sectional interest, not a union interest, not a party interest, but in the broad community interest. That is what the Liberal Party stands for, and I am proud to represent it in this House.

While I have always had an interest in politics, there was a period in my life where I proactively avoided participation in politics of any kind. I spent my twenties pursuing different interests, including a legal career which took me to Melbourne, and ultimately to London. My career in the law, which was focused mainly in commerce and finance, has afforded me an exposure to many different types of businesses and industries, and also to different cultures and different ways of doing business.

I am, of course, the son of a former member of this House. My father, Ray, who is present here today, was not only a member of this Chamber but he was also a member of the House of Representatives in the Federal Parliament representing the people of Braddon. As a consequence, I was exposed to politics at a very early age, and as most here would appreciate, politics can be at its worst, an all-consuming affair, not just for the member but also for their families. While I was never dissuaded by my parents from taking an active interest in politics or public issues - far from it - they were always very conscious of the need to maintain a strong family life that was not all consumed by politics.

So as I stand here now as a member, I am acutely aware of the need to strike the right balance between life in this place and my family and personal life. Your family and close friends are the ones who will stick with you through the inevitable ups and downs of politics. They are with you at the start and they will be with you at the end. We should never forget that and we should always be mindful of it in setting our expectations of one another and in how we interact.

With that introduction, I would like to acknowledge a number of people who are very special to me and to whom I owe an enormous debt for their love, support and encouragement. My wife Ruth, daughter Chloe, and Chloe's either little brother or sister - not quite sure yet; soon to be born and as yet unnamed. My parents, Ray and Gill, my parents-in-law, Ross and Judy Kile, and all of my siblings and siblings-in-law who are too many to mention, but a special mention must go to James, John and Ben for all the assistance that they provided me through the

course of the campaign. To James, I would like to say thank you for managing my campaign and for making me believe that this was all possible.

To Mum, I would like to say thank you for being the most wonderful role model in my life, and teaching me the value of community service. To Dad, I would like to thank you for being an equally wonderful role model in my life, and for teaching me the value of integrity. And to Ruth, I would like to thank you for doing amazing and being amazing in everything you do, and for allowing me and encouraging me to be myself.

I would also like to thank those friends and supporters who worked tirelessly on my campaign. Again there are too many to name, but I would like to pay a special tribute to Rod and Annette Shelley, Max and Beth Darcey, the members of the West Hobart branch, Cameron Simpkins, Ed Boutchard, Charles and Shirl Badenach, Steve Durney, Tim and Lizzie Baker and hopefully, watching all the way over in New Zealand, my very good friend Cameron Smith. To all of you a very special thank you for your hard work and dedication and your unwavering loyalty and support.

As many of you would know, I have come to this place with a strong background in and passion for renewable energy and climate change policy. I consider climate change to be a very significant issue and one which all of us, no matter our background or political creed, should do more to address. The thing I have always found fascinating about climate change as an issue is that much of the action to date has largely been undertaken at a very local level, and the government policy response has been largely driven by community attitudes. That is why I think one of the most important things government can do in response to this issue is to facilitate the provision of information and education.

I have been involved in climate change policy for over five years now, and the single most consistent theme in any discussion I have is the frustration about the lack of access to reliable, up-to-date information on the issue, mitigation measures and the potential business opportunities that it presents. While governments at both State and Federal levels have endeavoured to address this deficiency, the issue continues to exist. I am not certain that government itself is always the best provider of this information directly. There are many non-government sector groups who do it well and who, with better resources from government, could reach a much wider audience than they do at present.

In my own electorate of Denison, I commend strongly the work of Sustainable Living Tasmania and note with regret the proposed closure of Hydro Tasmania's Hands-On Energy Discovery Centre, which has serviced Tasmanian schoolchildren very well in this regard for over a decade. I repeat my call for every effort to be made to maintain this service and I continue to believe that a wonderful opportunity exists for either Hydro Tasmania or the Government to partner with Greening Australia and transfer the service to Greening Australia's proposed new science and ecology centre to be built at Mt Nelson. I would dearly love to see the next generation of Tasmania's schoolchildren continue to benefit from this resource.

Another pressing need in the area of climate change is for a greater focus on energy efficiency measures. One of the most significant cost of living pressures facing Tasmanians today is the upward trend in electricity prices and this is certain to continue - obviously a very topical subject. The increases to date have been very much a by-product of the failure to adequately invest in infrastructure over the last decade or so. Future prices will be further impacted by the introduction of a carbon price, which in my view is both inevitable and necessary. Government needs to be more honest about this issue and from a policy perspective focus both on achieving greater energy efficiency in the government sector, and also on encouraging and facilitating a greater take-up of energy efficiency by business and the broader community, particularly those most vulnerable to cost pressures.

While climate change may present plenty of challenges for Tasmania in coming years, it also presents some wonderful opportunities, and there has been no better example of this than the company I previously worked for, Roaring 40s. At its peak Roaring 40s was considered one of Asia-Pacific's up-and-coming renewable energy companies and one of the leading foreign wind development companies operating in China. I should note that the success of that company has been very much a consequence of the vision and leadership of Hydro Tasmania in exploring Tasmania's wind development potential during the mid-to-late 1990s. I should commend, in particular, the work of former chairman and now chair of Tasmania's Renewable Energy Industry Development Board, Peter Rae. I should also note that the early exploration was strongly supported by both the Rundle and Bacon governments. It was one of the great privileges of my professional career to be part of Roaring 40s' foray into China and India and to see Tasmanian expertise at the forefront of the climate change mitigation initiatives being undertaken by two of the world's largest and fastest-growing economies.

We developed strong ties with two of China's largest power companies and while Roaring 40s has since sold its Asian portfolio, I would be strongly supportive of any new proposals to leverage off those partnerships and to look for new opportunities to build our relationship with China. Roaring 40s now operates exclusively in the Australian market. The domestic renewable energy policy environment continues to be very uncertain, casting doubt over significant project opportunities within Tasmania and more broadly.

The Musselroe wind farm development in Tasmania's north-east is one of the best proposed wind projects in Australia, with the potential to significantly benefit the local economy and the environment, yet it remains under a cloud because of this uncertainty. For the sake of renewable energy development in Tasmania, I believe all members of this House should be united in calling on the Federal Parliament to pass amendments to the renewable energy targets legislation in order to restore confidence to the market and facilitate the recommencement of the Musselroe project as soon as possible.

I believe Tasmania has the potential to be a leading player in niche areas of renewable energy such as remote and distributed generation technologies, research and education, and also an incubator for emerging technologies, but renewable energy is a frighteningly competitive business and there are many clamouring for the space. If we are to realise our potential then we need to make the most of our competitive advantages. My Roaring 40s experience has given me recent practical exposure to the difficulties and frustrations of undertaking development in this State. I believe the single most significant thing that Government can do to assist business operating in this State is to focus less on grand visions and more on the delivery of efficient and effective government services and regulatory processes. We are a small State and while this may present some disadvantages in economies of scale it should present a significant competitive advantage in the efficiency of government and the ease of doing business. Central to this is the need, as far as possible, to streamline our approval and regulatory processes and ensure their integrity. We also need to foster greater consultation between government departments so that they may more effectively coordinate the multiple and sometimes disparate government objectives being pursued.

We also need a genuine commitment from the Government to ensure that all processes are undertaken in as timely and cost efficient manner as possible. It is only if we get these issues right that we can possibly hope to maximise our full potential in renewable energy or in fact in any area of development.

I have a long family association with the electorate of Denison, and Hobart in particular. The chance to get to know it even better is one of the great privileges of being an elected member. I greatly appreciated the opportunity to meet with people from throughout the electorate over the course of the election campaign, including retirees, students, public servants, office workers, tradespeople, small business owners and those working in tourism, hospitality and retail, just to mention a few. I engaged with people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds, such as those from our established Greek, Italian, Polish and Croatian communities, and also our more recently established Sudanese and Kenyan communities - again, just to name a few. I observed first-hand the incredible work of local sporting and community organisations, including those providing assistance to our most needy in mental health services, aged care and caring for children with special needs.

Hobart is truly a magnificent city. Given the sheer beauty of this place, the strength of our community and the confidence of the people, I have great faith in the future of Hobart, but Hobart, as with the whole of Tasmania, faces significant challenges ahead. It will no doubt be faced with significant economic challenges as the broader economic uncertainty continues to impact and the Federal Government stimulus starts to dry up. Hobart has, like many parts of Tasmania, been badly neglected when it comes to infrastructure investment, whether it be our port facilities, waterfront precinct, the services needed for the redevelopment of the CBD, the lack of integrated transport services or the lack of investment in our tourism infrastructure. On this last point I strongly support a proper feasibility study into the Mount Wellington cable car proposal and continue to believe we need to undertake a more comprehensive assessment of our public transport options, particularly into Hobart's northern suburbs.

In my view, the key to delivering good government outcomes for Hobart and the State of Tasmania is to fully embrace the principle of sustainability in government decision-making. Sustainable decision-making is about making a full assessment of the consequences of government action and inaction. It is about integrity in the process of government. It is about properly assessing and planning for our future needs. It is about proper community and business consultation and it is focused on achieving not just economic prosperity but positive environmental outcomes and positive community outcomes. But principles of sustainability must never be abused for narrow political means. They should never be an excuse for inaction or for obstruction. They should be clear and transparent and applied consistently and efficiently in the broad community interest. Properly applied the principles of sustainability are the foundations of a prosperous economy based on strong investment and a confident future for our traditional and emerging industries. They are the foundation for economic security. They are the foundation for the preservation of our natural environment and for a strong, healthy and connected community.

I note the reference in His Excellency the Governor's speech to the need to restore confidence in our democracy and institutions and the proposed new Integrity Commission as being critical in that regard. I have no doubt that if utilised appropriately the commission will be a positive step for Tasmania, but it cannot relieve us here of the responsibility we each have to protect confidence in our public institutions. I firmly believe that there have been subtle shifts in the nature of the relationships and roles at the centre of our public administration that we should all be wary of. These include the propensity for the public interest to be subordinated to other interests, good policy being subordinated to election strategy and media management, the professionalisation of politics, the further politicisation of the public service and a growing imbalance in the relationship between senior public

servants and ministers. Left unchecked the net effect of these trends is a greater potential for poor government outcomes and a further breakdown in public trust.

Trust matters in government. It is the foundation of the community's belief in the system. It is at the core of good policy development and it is central to the delivery of good government outcomes in the public interest. Much has been made of the new era in Tasmanian politics based on cooperation and consultation, but more than anything else Tasmanians are looking for government they can believe in and that is something I hope all members of this House are equally committed to.

Finally, I would like to make mention of our federation. I am a strong supporter of the federation. I am a firm believer in decentralised power and I think it is beyond question that the States are best placed to deliver core government services. I think we have seen more than enough mismanagement at the Federal level to make that case. That is not to say that State governments have performed well in recent years. Unfortunately many have not, but in my view one of their greatest failings has been their willing participation in the continued devolution of power from the States to the Federal Government. This is not about an old-fashioned case of State rights. This is about a proper understanding of the roles and responsibilities of this place as well as a respect for the contribution it has and can continue to make in our federation. Tasmania was central to the creation of our federation. It is one of the great strengths of our nation and I call on all members of this House to find the will and conviction to defend it.

I am sure I share with all members a great confidence in the future of our State. There will, of course, be plenty of challenges ahead but I am equally confident that there exists a collective will from all members to do the best by this State. I look forward to working alongside all of the members of this House to secure the best possible outcomes for Denison and Tasmania.

Members - Hear, hear.