

## Inaugural Speech – Norma Jamieson MLC



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Legislative Council

Date: 17 June 2003

Electorate: Mersey

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### CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL 2003 (No. 36)

In Committee

#### DIVISION 4

(Department of Health and Human Services)

#### Output group 1

Community, population and rural health

#### 1.1 Aged, rural and community health services -

[12.22 p.m.]

**Mrs JAMIESON** (Inaugural) - Mr Chairman and honourable members of the Legislative Council, it is indeed a privilege to have been elected as the current member for Mersey. It is also rather daunting, as I stand here in this most elegant Chamber knowing the high expectations that the local community has of their elected representative.

In my very low-key campaign, I made no promises that I felt that I could not keep. What I offered was, and is, my personal and professional integrity and independent impartiality, which are based on the values instilled in me throughout my childhood schooling, Methodist and farming upbringing, nursing profession and parenting background. These values and strengths have stood me in good stead when personal crises and good times have occurred. Working within the community and nursing for the past 44 years has made me very conscious of the blessings that I have received and been the reason I wish to give something back to the community.

However, I am also aware there are times when my children came second to the demands and needs of others. My husband was a solo general practitioner who died 23 years ago and I was his nurse, receptionist and manager. It was not easy juggling and balancing the physical and emotional needs of your family whilst acknowledging that your bread and butter is dependent on maintaining a solo practice of 24 hours a day.

I know what it is like to live with an alcohol-dependent spouse and with youthful cynicism due to spasmodic employment, even though your children have had a university education and been through endless competency-based training programs. These programs raise self-esteem and expectations of employment, but have absolutely no guarantee of delivering either. I have lived on the widow's pension whilst supporting my two children and an orphan student who was at university. Also at this time my father was diagnosed with prostate cancer.

When I was nine years of age my mother had a car accident, which left her in hospital for three months. My cousin, who was caring for us three young children, was killed, along with my grandfather, in another car accident 10 days later. Suddenly, you are the carer and mother who must help your father cope. This is particularly challenging when the cows still must be milked, the peas harvested and the contractors fed from 3 a.m. till 10 p.m. for three

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very intensive days. One certainly learns to be resilient, tenacious, responsible and independent from an early age.

If I had not completed my nurse training, I would have stayed down on the farm. Both occupations are most fulfilling and certainly character-building, like learning to fly light aircraft, bushwalking, singing and fundraising to keep an innovative, grossly underfunded respite service financially viable and available for those in need. Despite this individualism, I have always preferred to work in a team-like environment, thus learning how to balance my personal needs and goals.

Prior to the current election, I was nurse/manager of Orana Respite Care Centre in Devonport. We were very fortunate to have the support of my predecessor, Geoff Squibb, who regularly made representation on behalf of Orana and related health issues in the Mersey region. Mr Chairman, I wish to place on record my sincere appreciation of Geoff's efforts on behalf of the Mersey electorate in general, as well as Orana, and I do wish him well in the future.

I nominated for the Legislative Council as an independent candidate on the grounds that Council members should remain unfettered and not hindered by party politics. There is much ignorance in the community regarding the role of the Legislative Council and one of my aims is to raise the profile of the Council. However, this will be a major challenge as the wider community has a very low opinion of politicians en masse, rating them with the other self-serving entrepreneurs of this world. Believe me, the 40 per cent salary increase politicians granted themselves has not been forgotten, particularly when so many Tasmanians were facing unemployment, dole queues and other social inequities. There is also a healthy cynicism regarding the political/bureaucratic will to listen to the community. Yes, Minister is so true. This is a very well remunerated profession, yet it requires no certificate of competence or training, just to be able to hang in there for the next six years.

Perhaps it is time to consider the qualifications and suitability of all potential candidates for public life. Genuine political aspirants could attend a series of workshops relating to constitutions, political processes and procedures, the effects of public life on family and personal relationships, aptitude and interpersonal skills, before presenting themselves for election. To rid our roadsides, letterboxes, trees and gardens of distracting posters at election time, I would prefer that all candidates contribute towards a booklet that contains relevant personal details and policies. The booklet could then be posted to all households and referred to before and after elections.

Policies and legislation may well be satisfactory but the implementation and consequences for the community frequently leave a lot to be desired. For example, early hospital discharge and de-institutionalisation, along with economic rationalism, have caused chronic problems in families and services because totally inadequate resources were, and still are, available in the community and families.

Any law reform should be more responsive to a careful assessment of long-term needs, rather than being reactive. Tasmania is no longer a nine-to-five, Monday-to-Friday State, which means penalty rates and annual leave loading should be abolished, along with overtime, so that the work and wealth of the State is more equitably distributed.

The three 'Rs' of reading, writing and arithmetic should be extended to include responsibilities, resources, rights, respect, recognition and reward. If we want our rights acknowledged and upheld, then we must have the necessary resources and be responsible for the decisions we make. Society has become soft on discipline and being responsible. So many people feel quite helpless, hapless and thus hopeless. As a government, we have a duty to encourage and support, with infrastructure and advice, community and individual initiatives, research and development, which are particularly important for those who are unemployed and willing to work, but are hindered by onerous documentation.

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Without the huge band of volunteers cheerfully giving of their time and talents, many community organisations would simply not survive. Tasmania has one of the higher rates of unemployment and one of the highest rates of volunteering which means the work is there but the dollars are not forthcoming. Now volunteers, and the organisations which support them, are becoming reluctant to continue because of insurance liabilities, training demands or the difficulty encountered in dismissing an inappropriate placement. The irony is that government dollars are granted to train people to be volunteers.

There also needs to be a balance between nature and industrial development, land and water conservation. My wish list is endless, however many of the aforementioned simply require the will to change bureaucratic thinking and a redirection of available dollars.

Mr Chairman, I am not a radical person and I do not believe in change for the sake of change. However, it is time governments were proactive, not reactive. Governments should take a lead in controversial issues, such as Commonwealth/State relationships - for example, the costly lack of consistency and complexity between the three levels of government funding and regulations and the constant abrogation of responsibility when it suits the funding or the political situation. The obscenity of megamillion dollar payouts to executives who are robbing their shareholders, the vast amounts of dollars and privileges for ex-politicians and some public servants who are mostly going to live longer and may have the opportunity to find other gainful employment need to be addressed. Citizens-initiated referenda and advance directives should be given more serious consideration, along with other ethical issues, such as voluntary euthanasia, cloning, defence and the appropriate use of modern technology and pharmacology.

I am a single-issue person who is ageing positively. People are my main concern along with their families, education, health, feeling of security, finances, transport, housing and communication.

Mr Chairman, I sincerely would like to thank you and all the staff here for the warm, friendly welcome and helpfulness shown to me and I keenly look forward to the next six years, firmly committed to serving the people of Mersey, both here and in the electorate. In closing, I wish to acknowledge with much gratitude the loyal support of my family, staff and board of management at Orana Respite Care Centre and the electors of the Mersey region.

Mr Chairman, I would like to briefly address several interrelated issues in output group 1 of the health, ageing and community services. In rural areas it is difficult, as we know, to single out and separate out people's needs, simply because of the nature of being in a rural area. On page 104 I raised the question with the minister of Commonwealth and State transitional rehabilitation dollars which seems to be problematic because we have so many people blocking our beds in hospitals, yet the Commonwealth and the State have an agreement whereby these dollars are available but I understand that they are not being widely used yet. It would make so much more sense to have some of our people out of the hospital situation.

The other issue which is related to that is respite. The respite costs for elderly people, palliative care, terminal and people with psychiatric issues is quite discriminatory when you consider that people with intellectual disabilities can access free respite in the State-funded services such as in Burnie and Rocherlea in Launceston.

The definition of 'disability' as per the act does not exclude any particular group of people. It suggests here that disability means 'one which is attributable to an intellectual, psychiatric, sensory or physical impairment or a combination of those impairments and which is permanent or likely to be permanent and which results in substantially reduced capacity of a person for communication, learning or mobility and has the need for continuing support services and which may or may not be of a chronic episodic nature'. The reason I raise that is because Disability Services normally will fund only people known to Disability Services and including only those really who have an intellectual disability. So, once again, I would raise the issue of there being a discriminatory factor in the funding.

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The other issue that I would know about is the numbers of individuals who are using the disability respite services more than once annually because there is quite a lot of double-dipping going on - some also have rent assistance. It is a very expensive program for a few people to access. Unless they are known to Disability Services, other people cannot access those services. What I would like to know, though, is what happens to these people when they become more than 60 years of age. Their disability does not go away but they are going to have to use the same resources that they had been using all those years, which means they are going to end up in aged-care resources. Allied to this also is the development of a hospice on the north-west coast and the progress of it. It would be interesting to know what is happening with the transitional palliative care packages of moneys that are coming out into the community eventually, but at this stage have not been accessed.