

Inaugural Speech – Heather Butler MP



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House of Assembly

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Electorate: Lyons

CONSOLIDATED FUND APPROPRIATION BILL 2005 (No. 23) Second Reading

Mr SPEAKER - I would remind honourable members that this is the inaugural speech of the member for Lyons.

Members - Hear, hear.

[12.26 p.m.]

Mrs BUTLER (Lyons - Inaugural) - Mr Speaker, my response to the Budget is incorporated in my inaugural address. I am proud to represent the seat of Lyons following the recount as a result of the resignation of Mr Ken Bacon. If I may request the indulgence of the House, I would like to thank my wonderful husband of 33 years, Geoff Butler, more than words can say. He is my backstop, my guide and my set of scales. We worked together on the campaign of 2002 with the grassroots committee. Most of the campaign team, I am very happy to say, are present in the Speaker's Reserve today - some anyway; some are late. We had experience in running an election campaign for local government in the Dandenongs in Melbourne when Geoff became a councillor for the Shire of Sherbrooke in 1978. We also assisted in State and Federal campaigns in Victoria after helping to establish the Belgrave Heights-Selby Branch of the Australian Labor Party, which was opened by David Crean's father, Frank Crean, in direct response to the Whitlam dismissal.

However, that was only part preparation for the task ahead, which was contesting the gigantic seat of Lyons. Australian Labor Party life member, Mr Allan Yates, has been a stalwart of support and a fellow foundation member of the Break O'Day branch of the Australian Labor Party. He is a wise man who speaks his mind. He has a long memory of the Lyons electorate, and I respect his wisdom and the depth of his vision. Allan's wife, Bev, was a marvel at extracting money from people. She has an effervescent charm and a strong will. The Woolley family - Shirley, Brian and Phillip, and Brian's sister Irene Semmens - are true and trusted friends whose judgment I respect. They have good political instincts and between them know a lot of people. Their patience, initiative, work and ideas are very much appreciated. Other friends, our son and daughters, walked for many kilometres in the electorate of Lyons and help with fundraisers and advice. My thanks to them.

Branch president Fred Hannam and his wife Elaine were also members of the committee and they gave of their time, themselves and their commitment. We had fun through the campaign and remain friends. The ute certainly had a good work-out; the smiles on the faces of the proprietors at local service stations widened every time we went past, which was often. Other Lyons members will know what I am talking about.

It was apparent during that time that there were many challenges associated with governing such a large geographical area. I am pleased that so many parts of the Budget are directed at helping the people of Lyons.

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The southern growth corridor of Sorell with its high percentage of young families will see \$1.2 million spent on the redevelopment of classrooms for primary students. Triabunna and Campbell Town schools will have gymnasiums built, allowing physical activities which will give improved health and fitness to young people in those areas, plus facilitating the development of new sporting competitions and visitation to both areas. The Apprentices and Trainee Travel initiative will provide funding for travel and accommodation for up to 800 extra trainees and apprentices. This funding will help both employers and employees with skills shortages being experienced in the electorate. This is especially the case in the building and hospitality industries, which are requiring more tradespeople thanks to the growth in tourism in this electorate, home of some of the most fabulous spots in Tasmania, both on and off the beaten track. Port Arthur will receive funds of \$10 million over five years to develop sites including the penitentiary, separate prisons and dockyards, which will assist in a bid to receive National Heritage listing.

The scope for growth in the tourism sector in Lyons is fertile. There are many small operators with commitment to their localities and their clientele. There is potential in the market for these areas to further develop. European professionals especially seem to enjoy the natural beauty and small-scale facilities that are becoming available throughout the Lyons area because they are looking for a change from their overcrowded world. A background in the tourism industry has sharpened my understanding of what is required to make small tourism business sustainable. In less affluent times we built our St Helens business from employing three people with two extra staff during holidays to a business that employed 14 local people, plus casual staff, within a five-year period. Some of those people are here today.

Precinct plans will be developed for St Helens, Strahan and the Tasman Peninsula. These commercial centres have grown remarkably since the red and white Spirits were purchased by TT-Line and the driving tourists arrived to tour our State in such large numbers.

It is amazing to think that we are having problems with parking and that some members of the community now consider that perhaps we need traffic lights in the middle of some of our towns. After many years of waiting, both the West Tamar Highway and the Esk Road have received funding upgrades.

To look after the health and wellbeing of our citizens, the Budget contains \$5.3 million towards the construction of the new \$9 million West Coast District Hospital at Queenstown, a facility which has been talked about for many years.

A project near to my heart involves St Helen's youth. The worker there, Cassie Male, has received \$7 600 for the development of a comprehensive policy document. Youth in the municipality of Break O'Day are feeling empowered by the activities. These were created by this project and I look forward to seeing the results of this funding. There is very good work being done there.

To take Tasmania forward in 2005-06 the Budget has been brought down within a context that identifies, as a moral imperative, the need to provide for all citizens within our collective life. An organised society is able to progress within legitimised sets of rules. A growing population can be assured that that potential has been considered by the Lennon Government, that there is vision, planning and a responsive government that wishes to advance life chances for them.

Labor recognises that 'dependency' is not a dirty word, as seems to be the case for Federal Liberals. Our policies are based on belief in the need to provide equity for all citizens. The father of six children whose elder son is disabled, obviously will have a different life story from that of his counterpart with one child who has good health. Children and the elderly must be looked after by a caring society, especially given the levels of income that are currently enjoyed by the general population. A wide range of choices should be available to all our people, whether born into fortunate circumstances or not.

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Family breakdown is a feature of our current social milieu. I am very familiar with the sad stories of young people who are ejected from homes during this process of breakdown and reconstruction of families. The Government needs to be in touch with the community very closely and to respond to emergency situations where dependency is not a regular state but a sudden situation. Community resources are currently being stretched to assist people, both young and not so young, who find themselves suddenly in these circumstances. Having the right person available at the right time can often turn a life around; it is not simply a matter of applying money - and that is personal experience.

We live in a unique community. Most Tasmanians live within a few hours of magnificent mountains, the sea and some of the most spectacular scenery on the planet. We have abundant wildlife and flora and some of the best soils in the world. Our climate is mild and our air wonderfully fresh, as we are reminded every time we arrive in Melbourne. Where else in the world is such a combination available?

We have great characters in our populace, ruggedly individual; some we call 'rum'uns'; some have never been over the bridge in the town where I live and cannot understand why anyone would need to go to a city; some choose to live in the bush, hiding in their own construction of a social reality.

Materialism is not so rampant as in other States. I believe that Tasmanians are not as willing as others to be controlled by the class of financiers that dominate global order, both overtly and covertly. We value having a just society based on the satisfaction of human needs. We enjoy a high standard of living which we wish to protect.

Having lived in three States while our children were in schools, I can testify that Tasmania does indeed have a high standard of education. We have close relationships with friends and relatives all over our islands and the sense of community and belonging that only evolves in island setting. We quickly ascertain who we can and cannot trust and our inter-relationships are built on those perceptions.

Our style of Government is closer to the people than the norm. Politicians are more accessible and more accountable than in other Australian States. Our smaller population means that we can trial programs and test their effectiveness more efficiently and faster than can the more populous States. Thus, in many fields Tasmania leads the way, fields such as AIDS, lymphedema treatment and many areas of education and law.

I believe our people are resourceful. They rebuild when knocked by economic change and natural disaster. The recent community forum at New Norfolk showed ideas and resilience from many groups. A rebuilding is occurring based on good planning, optimism and hope. All over Lyons there are country towns with strong traditions, places with memories; the gestures of painting the public hall, planting a garden or opening a tourist information centre say that the residents have a conscious culture. Not only that, the tradition of mateship is alive and well, the spirit of mateship that sees groups of people talking on the street in Swansea, in Queenstown, or outside the post office in St Marys, the spirit of mateship that forged trade unionism, that great movement which has delivered to us the living standards that we enjoy today, based on the concept of a fair go.

Those of us who choose to live in the country are not present in those townships for value-based lifestyle enjoyment; we are there because we are committed to the traditions of Tassie country towns. We do not seek labels and are loath to self-congratulate. The forebears built that public hall to raise money for the hospital, attended church, the pub, or Rotary frequently, and survived the vagaries of world commodity prices. Governments need to be aware that wrapping citizenry in constant spin is counterproductive unless the actions match the rhetoric. Country people are down to earth; even when there are opposing philosophies among action groups, there is always a percentage, sometimes a tiny percentage, of willingness to think about the other view because of that sense of mateship forged with a history that has been shared.

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That resilience or doggedness is sometimes attractive to people from interstate or urban dwellers. A citizenry that is thinking keeps government on its toes and thus more accountable. To me it is the richness of the interaction between us that produces the outcomes we have in terms of respect for humanity, policies and government initiatives. This is the spark that ignites vision.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau wrote in 1755 of an ideal, a love of the citizens of a country; those people whom members of this House have been elected to represent:

If I had to make a choice of the place of my birth, I should have preferred a society which has an extent proportionate to the limits of the human faculties: that is, to the possibility of being well governed; in which every person being equal to his occupation, no-one should be obliged to commit to others the functions with which he was entrusted; a state in which all the individuals being well known to one another, neither the secret machinations of bias nor the modesty or virtue should be able to escape the notice and judgment of the public; and in which the pleasant custom of seeing and knowing one another should make the love of country rather a love of the citizens than of its soil.

My family history on my paternal and Jacobite side involves the ideal of public service and perhaps a love of citizens. There is a distant relationship to a member of the Opposition, actually. My grandfather's grandfather, Duncan McColl, was a member of the first council in Sale, Victoria, in 1860. His son Archibald married Elizabeth Lord from Hobart and the Tasmanian connection was established in the family. One of old Duncan's cousins was Hugh McColl, who came to Australia in 1852. He became an MP for Bendigo in Victoria and pioneered the irrigation movement.

His son, James Hiers McColl, succeeded his father upon his death in 1885. He remained member for Mandurang in the Legislative Assembly of Victoria for 15 years, being Minister for Mines and Water Supply in the Patterson Government, and Minister for Lands in the McLean Government. He retired from State politics to enter the House of Representatives in the Commonwealth Government and was elected for Echuca in 1901. He left the House of Representatives at the end of the second Parliament and was elected a senator for Victoria in 1906, where he sat until 1914. He took up farming at 72 years of age.

My mother's family, the Watts, were proud market gardeners and orchardists in the Melbourne areas of Brighton, Bentley and Mordialloc for nearly 100 years. The Sandringham Council compulsorily acquired my grandfather's market garden for a supposed railway in 1950. We can now see a beautiful golf course on the site, with the trees that he planted still standing. As with dad's family in Scotland, policies of bodies that had overriding power in the lives of working people were implemented, with dislocation to those who had no voice in the process. The so-called 'common good' theory did not resonate with either family.

Those historic situations have been carried forward in the traditions of the family. As a result, in three of the four generations who live in Tasmania there are three sets of principles or systems of belief in political alliances. Sometimes we talk for hours about those differences and sometimes we choose not to.

Having a clan background has meant that I have inherited the Calvinist notion of hard work, determination and the Celtic ideals of love of the earth and natural elements. Clan members and septs shared what they could reap, and sometimes plundered for the benefit of all. There were close relationships of interdependency which kept the whole functioning. Women on the west coast of Scotland in the 1800s were educated, as the inheritance of land passed to the eldest daughter, probably because the men had high attrition rates or were away for much of the time.

My grandfather was very keen to see me educated. The reward of a shilling - do you remember those? - for coming top in grade 1 was a significant incentive for me and I have gone on working and learning, constantly challenged by the wonderful adventures that life has

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delivered. Unlike me, my father was forced by the economic situation to remain on the farm, and although there was an offer of education from his uncle, he completed an electrical apprenticeship and then went off to war.

When I was growing up in the country town of Maffra in Victoria, dad was working long hours, ensuring that the apprentice was always paid on time, even when the wealthy farmers who were carting sheep in their Mercedes had not paid their bills for months. His frustrated intelligence has possibly been the primary motivator for my standing for election. He died at 50 of his fourth heart attack.

Much of the work that has brought me to this Parliament has been developing community, whether it be in the tourism industry, youth work or through commercial enterprise. I have noticed that social capital has been developed in those areas where hope has been created in a collaborated process and all sorts of positive outcomes have evolved. To paraphrase Dr Anthony Kelly from the University of Queensland, there are three elements of political rules that appear to me to provide a useful framework for policy development and achievable outcomes for governments. They are consistency, connectedness and flexibility. Belief should be consistent with values, values with political action, and action with principle.

This can be observed in the Budget just released, where Labor values of equity and social justice are apparent in areas such as education and health. Willingness to work with groups who disagree and to consult widely show the Lennon Government's commitment to the connectedness of all individuals who live on this group of islands, with our dispersed and diverse needs and patterns of living.

Community forums which I have attended around the State provide an avenue for most Tasmanians to talk face to face with their representatives, a legitimate mechanism where government is about 'polis' - the people. Each individual Tasmanian can take a concern forward, be heard and have an impact on policy or action - truly representative democracy. Small groups with close personal relationships are able to articulate their own political discourse undistorted by larger power groups. As a policy committee chair, I have looked back through previous Tasmanian documents for the last 10 years. It is clear that flexibility is required by governments and the Tasmanian Government has shown that it is prepared to listen to the policy makers and to the people. The ground-breaking work of the Attorney-General in areas such as family violence, same-sex relationships and the Government's decision to keep Spirit III are brave moves.

Gandhi showed the world that working with the events of the day, having flexibility built into strategies and being prepared to review directions in a world of rapidly changing realities, produces success in the end. Political processes must be responsive. Recognising changing contexts is necessary for good government. Politics is about the populus, not politicians.

I look forward to the challenges associated with the attainment of this office. I begin with a strength of purpose that surprises me. To the constituents of Lyons, I will represent your interests wherever I can. Mr Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to support the Lennon Labor Government's Budget 2005-06.

Members - Hear, hear.