



# Legislative Council

## A Better Future For Our Children Hansard

### Extract

31/05/95

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#### A BETTER FUTURE FOR OUR CHILDREN

**The Hon. A. G. CORBETT** [6.31]: It gives me great pleasure to give my first speech to this House. The unique party I founded, registered in November 1994 and led to success some four months later, is called A Better Future for Our Children. The reason I chose this party name was to tell people directly what the party would strive to achieve. There is no doubt the name and the vision it encapsulated stirred the imagination and hearts of many voters across New South Wales in the March 1995 election. This party will review legislation in terms of its present and future impact on the 1.5 million children under 18 in New South Wales. However, my particular priority will be the approximately 437,000 children under five years of age, because of the absolute importance of these early years to a child's development.

The two fundamental and underlying principles of this party are as follows: first, this party values children as individuals, loved by God. It believes that children need to be loved, nurtured, protected, guided, listened to and learnt from. Second, this party acknowledges that if we are to value our children then we must value, encourage, educate and support all those who care for, work with and protect our children and our children's future. Any policy or action undertaken by this party will be, as far as it is possible, consistent with these fundamental principles. My former reference to God is both sincere and deliberate, because it is primarily on the basis of the actions and teaching of Jesus towards and about children that this party was formed. I wanted to have a solid foundation of beliefs upon which I could make decisions about what is in the best interests of children.

Essentially these beliefs are as follows: first, children are to be valued. Each child is precious and unique. They are a blessing, a miracle of creation. Second, to care for children is to do God's work and therefore we must never abandon or neglect them, whatever their background or history. Third, there is no greater inheritance that we can leave our children than a feeling within them that they were loved by their parents. Fourth, because of their vulnerability and relative powerlessness, children must be afforded special protection. They need to be guided and protected from any action that would corrupt them in the sense of taking away their joy of the present and damaging their hope for the future. Fifth, children have a special wisdom: they can be our teachers if we are open to learning from them.

Also central to this party's philosophy, exemplified by the use of the words "our children" in the party name, is the belief that we all have an investment in the lives of children. I believe the expression "every child is everybody's child" together with a recent Barnardo's banner that showed a troubled young girl with the caption "Today's problem child, tomorrow's great Australian" capture what I am on about. This investment can be seen in that there is a fundamental link between the early years of a child's life and the adult they will become. If we care about the future of our nation and our State we must focus on the young. Children are our future and we are theirs. My party is also deeply concerned about the state of the environment. Our children will not have a future unless we acknowledge and take seriously the custodial role we have towards the planet Earth. I believe that environmental protection and renewal must necessitate a proactive and preventive approach by all governments.

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In conclusion I would like to stress three things: first, I consider that there is no greater responsibility than that of being a parent and that government must attempt to encourage potential parents to be both prepared and informed about this dramatic transition. Second, while this party will acknowledge and accept without judgment the wide variety of family structures that exist, I believe the ideal family arrangement is when children are raised, nurtured and loved by both a mum and a dad who not only love and provide for their children, but also love each other. Furthermore, that a child is best raised within the context of an extended, safe and supportive family and community network. Finally, I am only too aware of my position in this House and the great responsibility placed on my shoulders to be prudent in the decisions I make. I am willing to compromise, but I will not sacrifice the ideals nor the vision upon which this party was elected. I thank honourable members for their courtesy and warm welcome to this House.