

Second Reading

Debate resumed from 6 June 2007.

The PRESIDENT: Order! I have received a request from the Hon. Helen Westwood that a sign interpreter be permitted to stand on the floor of the House to assist people in the public gallery during the giving of her inaugural speech. After consulting with members and the Clerk I have agreed to this request on the basis that it is only for the duration of the member's speech.

Before I call the Hon. Helen Westwood I remind all members and people in the galleries that the member is about to make her first speech in this House, and I ask that all the customary courtesies be extended to her.

The Hon. HELEN WESTWOOD [5.02 p.m.] (Inaugural Speech): I speak in support of the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Bill. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, and pay my respects to their Elders past and present. The week just passed has been a commemoration of significant events for indigenous and non-indigenous Australians alike, and also a reminder of a history of severe disadvantage—regretfully, disadvantage that still exists for the majority of indigenous Australians. The commemorations have included the fortieth anniversary of the 1967 referendum, the fifteenth anniversary of the High Court's Mabo decision and the tenth anniversary of the Bringing Them Home report on the stolen generation. There was also a celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of Linkup, the very successful organisation run by indigenous people for the benefit of indigenous people. The week also saw the release of the Productivity Commission's report on overcoming indigenous disadvantage that details the wide gaps that remain in outcomes between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. The report states:

Despite Australia's world-class health system, the life expectancy of Indigenous people is estimated to be around 17 years lower than that for the total Australian population. Despite compulsory education, Indigenous students at all levels experience much worse outcomes than non-Indigenous students. And Indigenous people are significantly overrepresented in the criminal justice system, as both victims and offenders.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people make up just 2 per cent of the Australian population. It is hard to believe that a nation as wealthy as ours with all the intellectual, economic and cultural resources we have at our disposal has not been able to invest just some of those plentiful resources in overcoming this shameful blight on our nation's record. The over half a million Australians who took part in the reconciliation walk of May 2000 were an indication of the desire of Australians to rectify the wrongs of the past. The goodwill was palpable on the day I joined the 250,000 who walked the Sydney Harbour Bridge. All that was required was for the political leadership of that time to lead this nation to reconciliation. It is a tragedy that such political leadership was absent. I believe that history will judge Australia poorly for not seizing the opportunity to right the wrongs of the past.

Members' inaugural speeches are defining ones; an opportunity to thank those whose support has been invaluable, and to inform the House of the personal journey that brought us here; to reveal the life experiences and ideas that have shaped our views on public policy matters; to disclose the values and principles we hold that will guide us as we make decisions in our roles as legislators, and, most importantly, as representatives of the people— Members' inaugural speeches are defining ones; an opportunity to thank those whose support has been invaluable, and to inform the House of the personal journey that brought us here; to reveal the life experiences and ideas that have shaped our views on public policy matters; to disclose the values and principles we hold that will guide us as we make decisions in our roles as legislators, and, most importantly, as representatives of the people—on whose behalf we act in this Chamber. My speech tonight will be a very personal one because my life experiences are what have brought me here and have most definitely shaped my view on public policy matters. For me, the personal is political.

I want to acknowledge the former President of this House, the Hon. Dr Meredith Burgmann, who I replace in this Chamber and whose record on issues of social justice and human rights is highly regarded well beyond this Parliament—indeed, well beyond this State. I particularly want to acknowledge that during Dr Burgmann's presidency she ensured that this House was the people's Parliament; her commitment to the principles of parliamentary democracy opened this House up to the broader community. She made it accessible to the people and I commend her for that.

I will begin my thankyou's by thanking the people of New South Wales, who had the good sense to re-elect the Labor Government despite the aggressive anti-Labor campaign run by the Sydney media, in particular the press and radio. In addition to the re-election of this responsible Government I hope another positive outcome of the election campaign will be a rethink of the influence of shock jocks in this State. I sincerely hope that any such rethink will lead the observer to see that there is no need to give succour to their bullying, divisive style of broadcasting by genuflecting at their altar.

My sincere thanks also to the men and women of the Australian Labor Party, whose support and assistance resulted in my election to this Parliament. I joined the Bargo-Picton Branch—it no longer exists under that name; it is now the Wollondilly branch—of the Australian Labor Party in 1976. My motivation was like so many of my generation—the Whitlam years, a time that enabled us to conceive of a socially just and civilised society. We had marvelled, indeed revelled, in the reforms Whitlam and his Government had brought about only to see them whittled away by a conservative government. Add to this the dismissal, and many were politicised. All political parties in this country rely upon the support of their membership and the Labor Party, as great as its history, traditions and objectives are, would achieve little if it were not for the participation and support of rank and file members—those individuals who give their time and energy for the cause they believe in. I particularly want to thank the members of Sefton and Chester Hill branches for their unflagging support and confidence in me. There are so many in the party I want to thank but unfortunately time does not permit. However, I want to mention Jan Primrose, your good self, Mr President, Luke Foley, the Hon. John Faulkner, the Hon. Ian Macdonald, the Hon. Penny Sharpe, Sally McManus, Geoff Derrick, Glenn Martin, Mick Simpson, Neo Achidellis, Doreen Maybury and Bill Lovelee for their support and guidance over the years.

I was the first born to Harry and Cecily Wray. Harry came to Australia from England after World War II. Harry's childhood had been a tough one—one of four children in a single parent family growing up in England during the Depression—and there was never any need to convince him of the need for a good social security system. Cecily, born in Australia, was the eldest girl in a family of 10. She also lived with the deprivation of the Depression and, as a girl, was not given the opportunities of education afforded to the boys of the family—a true injustice as she was, in my view, far brighter than the boys. Both Harry and Cecily served in World War II.

I had the good fortune, therefore, of being born to parents with a great sense of social justice. For my parents this was not an ideology but a way of life. They were generous, compassionate, empathetic, community-spirited people and both staunch trade unionists. As Catholics we attended our local parish of Sefton. It was there that my mother heard of the plight of very young children who were in need of foster parents, and hence my sister Colleen joined our family at 2½ I had the good fortune, therefore, of being born to parents with a great sense of social justice. For my parents this was not an ideology but a way of life. They were generous, compassionate, empathetic, community-spirited people and both staunch trade unionists. As Catholics we attended our local parish of Sefton. It was there that my mother heard of the plight of very young children who were in need of foster parents, and hence my sister Colleen joined our family at 2½ years of age, just a few weeks after my second birthday. My brother, David, was born less than 12 months after Colleen joined our family. David was a creative and talented child, who channelled those gifts into his love of music. David is now known in the Australian music industry as Frank Bennett, the fabulous crooner.

I thank my parents for their unqualified love and support. Sadly, my father did not live to see me take my seat in this House but I know how proud and amazed he would have been that this

daughter of a cleaner is sitting in this Chamber. It is my mother who has been the greatest influence throughout my life, and still is, and I am extraordinarily grateful to my mother for her love, guidance and support. I am truly delighted that she is here in the gallery tonight.

I began my working life at 15 years of age and have had a variety of jobs including shop assistant, accounting machinist, clerical assistant, stay-at-home mum, community worker and electorate officer. As a worker I learned very quickly the value of belonging to a trade union and over my years in the paid work force I have belonged to a number of unions including the Public Service Union, the Australian Services Union and the Community and Public Sector Union. The current Federal Government has been very successful at demonising the trade union movement. Trade unions make a significant contribution to individuals, families and the broader fabric of our community.

Over this nation's recent history unions have contributed to improving the lives of working people through our industrial relations systems, through the contribution that they have made to the development of good social policy and via the work they do on specific community issues. Perhaps the best contemporary example of their work is the James Hardie campaign for the victims of asbestos. The efforts of the trade union movement in advocating for those victims illustrate the way trade unions pursue a just outcome on behalf of workers and the broader community. I express my thanks to my comrades in the trade union movement. I look forward to continuing to work with them to ensure that workers in this State have decent working conditions and wages.

Following my marriage in 1973 at the age 17 my husband, Bob, and I moved to Bargo on Sydney's south-western outskirts. In 1978 my first daughter, Jessica, was born. She was the child and is the adult who simply makes motherhood a truly joyous experience. She has grown into an outstanding young woman, who is now my best mate. The birth of my second daughter, Hayley, in 1980 was life changing. Hayley was born at 26 weeks gestation after a very complicated and difficult pregnancy and, as a consequence of this, she is profoundly deaf. At this time in my life I am sincerely grateful to have had the opportunity of entering the world of the deaf community, to learn their language, their culture and share their life experiences. The road to this point, however, was not an easy one. Understanding the nature of your child's disability and locating and accessing the services that she and my family needed required a great deal of tenacity and resourcefulness.

My experience as a parent of a child with a disability changed my life forever. I became my daughter's advocate, lobbyist, speech pathologist and teacher. I had to make decisions about what mode of communication we should use with her—oral, cueing, signed-English or Auslan. I had very little or no knowledge about these modes of communication nor did I know which one of these was in her best interests and which one would help her realise her full potential as an independent, well-educated, happy adult. I did, though, learn an awful lot about the needs of families with children with a disability and the role of the community services sector in providing information, support and resources. I discovered that the role of community services is invaluable, to say the least; in fact, in my experience it was life saving. I also came to understand the importance of being able to access services in one's local community. The personal time and cost of driving many kilometres for basic or specialised health and community services compounded the social, economic and emotional effect on our family. Like a number of other honourable members who have made their inaugural speeches these last few weeks I have great faith in our public education system to deliver the best education outcomes for the children of this State. Although most of my education was through the Catholic education system, my final years at high school were at a public school. Both my daughters attended public schools, and it is as a parent that I came to realise the full value to society of a quality, inclusive education system. The public school system has the capacity to meet the education needs of our diverse population, particularly in the field of special education. It is my experience that the more complex a child's education needs are, the more likely it is that they will be educated in a public school. The dedication and professionalism of teachers of children with special needs are something my family has enjoyed since Hayley was 18 months old. I would particularly like to thank Julie Ford, who is here interpreting for Hayley tonight. Julie is an outstanding teacher of the deaf who has made a significant difference in the lives of many deaf children, particularly Hayley.

I express my thanks to my daughters, Jessica and Hayley, and my son-in-law, Brett, for their unqualified love and support, for understanding my radicalism and forgiving me my life choices, which made their life a little different from that of most kids in the western suburbs of Sydney. I love my daughters deeply and now love the gorgeous grandchildren they have given me. Here, I have to challenge the declaration made in this Chamber last week by the Hon. Mick Veitch, who claimed to have the most gorgeous granddaughter known to humankind. This is not possible as it is indeed I who have the three most gorgeous granddaughters, who are here tonight—Isabella, Tamara and Chelsea. I have an equally gorgeous grandson, Lachlan, who is also here. However, I am willing to concede to the honourable that his granddaughter is probably equally as gorgeous as mine.

The knowledge that I gained and the skills I developed in Hayley's early years afforded me the opportunity to return to the workforce as a community worker. In the community services sector I worked in neighbourhood centres, disability services and women's health. I was involved in the management of youth services, accommodation services and drug and alcohol services. I think most workers in the community services sector would agree with me when I say that as a community worker you get to see the very best and worst of humanity. You witness firsthand the very difficult, often tragic, circumstances people in our community are living in and you develop a deep desire to find the answers to eliminating the causes of social injustice. You cannot ignore the pain of others in the hope that someone else will do what is needed.

Domestic violence was often the cause of pain and misery of many of the women I worked with as a community worker. Women sought advice and information on how they could stop the violence, how they could escape the violence or what options they had to make themselves and their children safe. Domestic violence is an issue of widespread and justifiable concern, and the level of domestic violence in our community is unacceptable. Research nationwide tells us that somewhere between 6 per cent and 9 per cent of Australian women aged over 18 are physically assaulted each year. In the majority of cases the assailant is a man they know. Domestic assaults accounted for 35 per cent to 40 per cent of annual assaults recorded by police in the years 1997 to 2004. A recent study on reporting crime to the police found that most assaults against women, where the victim knows the offender, go unreported. Further, a survey on personal safety in 2005 found that only 36 per cent of women who experienced physical assault by a male perpetrator reported it to police. The costs of domestic violence are many and perhaps are best summed up in a Commonwealth Parliamentary Library Overview of domestic violence, which states:

Domestic violence directly affects the victims, their children, their families and friends, employers, co-workers and has repercussions for the quality of life in a local community. There can be far-reaching financial, social, health and psychological consequences. The impact of violence can also have indirect costs, including the costs to the community of bringing perpetrators to justice or the costs of medical treatment.

I acknowledge workers in our State who support the victims of domestic violence, including those in the domestic violence court support schemes, the women's refuge movement, women's health centres and community legal centres. They have all contributed to our understanding of the causes of domestic violence, with the aim of preventing it. Research that has examined the relationship between certain sociodemographic factors and intimate partner physical violence found that overall the strongest risk factors were characters of the male, such as controlling behaviours, aggression and drinking habits. It is an inexcusable crime, and a gendered form of abuse of power where the majority of perpetrators are men. The message I hear from domestic violence workers is that violence against women is a global issue that pervades all cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds.

The New South Wales State Plan identifies domestic and family violence as a priority area for government to address. I am pleased to be a member of a government that has given this commitment. I am confident that our political leadership will continue to act in the interests of victims of domestic violence and send a clear message that domestic violence is totally unacceptable in a civilised and just society. In 1995, having moved back to the community I grew up in some years earlier, I stood for election to Bankstown City Council. My main motivation for standing was the absence of women on our council. I found it hard to believe,

and I did not want to continue living in a community where women did not have a voice in the decisions that affected their daily lives.

I have served on Bankstown City Council since September 1995, and was mayor of the city for nearly four years. I believe that I am the first mayor of Bankstown to be elected to the Parliament. I have also served as President of the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils [WSROC] and as a member of the New South Wales Local Government Association executive. I acknowledge the great work of these organisations, particularly the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils, which they carry out on behalf of the people of Western Sydney. I am delighted that a number of representatives from the Western Sydney Regional Organisation of Councils are in the gallery this evening, including my successor as its president, Councillor Tony Hay.

My time in local government has reinforced my belief in the important role that local government plays in people's daily lives. Good planning policies and practices shape the physical characteristics of the places where people live and work, and good leadership ensures that those places are safe, attractive, prosperous and socially cohesive. Bankstown local government area is one of the most diverse local government areas in this State, with people from 130 countries speaking 60 different languages. Its diversity is its greatest strength, and the migrants who have settled in this community have contributed greatly to its cultural and economic development. It is now one of the areas in Sydney recommended for its range of quality food outlets and restaurants.

One of the most rewarding and enjoyable duties I had as mayor was to conduct citizenship ceremonies. At Bankstown these were regular and large events. Contrary to the oft-repeated claims that migrants do not value Australian citizenship, I found that our newest citizens placed great importance on becoming an Australian citizen and were keen to contribute positively to and participate in community life. It is in part, therefore, my personal journey that began my political journey. As an individual and a representative of the people, I hold a steadfast belief in contributing to and providing leadership for a civilised, fair and socially just society.

A civilised society supports accessible quality education and health services that are available for every generation in accordance with community needs. A civilised society tends to the disadvantaged and advocates for community inclusivity. A civilised society is a safe society where all individuals are protected from crime, violence and harassment. A civilised society is a sustainable society that values its investment in social capital. Undeniably, investment in social capital has wide-ranging benefits for individuals and communities, and it is correlated with improved health outcomes. My personal journey reflects my commitment and passion for investment in social capital and the building of a civilised society.

It is not possible to name all those people in my life to whom I owe gratitude for their support, guidance, friendship and wise counsel. Many of them are in the gallery tonight so I simply say thank you to all of you. I want to mention a number of people: Robyn Williams from the Bankstown cancer women's support group; Sue McClelland from the Bankstown Women's Health Centre; Councillor Richard McLaughlin, who is a colleague from Bankstown; Councillor Susan Page from Penrith City Council and current the President of the New South Wales Local Government Women's Association; Darriea Turley, the immediate past president of the New South Wales Local Government Women's Association and a former Broken Hill councillor; my good friend Vicki McLean from Dragons Abreast; and Seide Ramadani and Christina Radburn, who are wonderful youth and community workers.

There is another person I had not initially identified as someone to whom I owe a debt of gratitude. However, as I listened to the discussion in this place last week I realised that I also need to thank the Treasurer, the Hon. Michael Costa. Last week he told honourable members that it is because he is so popular that my Labor colleagues and I were elected on 24 March. So I thank the Treasurer, and I look forward to him being as popular after the budget as he assured the House he is now.

My thanks to Amanda Hill for her support, love, friendship, and great campaigning skills, and for sharing the responsibility of parenting my daughters with me for so many years. Thank you to my soul mate and partner, Dr Laretta Luck, for her friendship, love, support and wise counsel, and for being so willing to take this journey with me. My aim while I am here is as it is in life: to leave this place a better one than I found it. I thank the House for its indulgence. I commend the bill.

The Hon. HENRY TSANG (Parliamentary Secretary) [5.30 p.m.], in reply: I thank honourable

members for their contributions to the debate on the Drug and Alcohol Treatment Bill 2007 and for the level of support and interest they have indicated. The enactment of the bill will be a major step towards trialling a new approach to the treatment of people in extreme situations of drug and alcohol dependence where their health and safety are seriously at risk and when they can no longer make decisions about seeking help. In line with the Government's commitment to make the new framework for involuntary care a therapeutic model with the least restrictive components as possible, the bill sets the parameters for testing the effectiveness of short-term involuntary treatment with a strong component of aftercare.

The Inebriates Act 1912 has been long criticised, yet has remained on our statute books as a safety net for people with substance dependence problems in the absence of any clear and viable alternatives. The Alcohol Summit recommendation and the comprehensive report of the Legislative Council Standing Committee on Social Issues have provided the opportunity for the Parliament to consider options for reform and to test an alternative approach. Importantly, the bill reflects the standing committee's recommendations for a new legislative framework for involuntary care, which took into account the expertise and personal experience of many of those who made submissions to the inquiry. In addition, the Government is grateful for the contribution of the medical profession, police and the courts administration in the development of specific provisions of the bill. In line with the Government's commitment to evidence-based policy, we will carefully consider the outcomes of the trial at the end of the two-year period. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now read a second time—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

Motion, by leave, by the Hon. Henry Tsang agreed to:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Bill read a third time and returned to the Legislative Assembly without amendment.