

Address to the ALP State Conference

Premier David Bartlett

Sunday 26 July 2009

Delegates,

There are certain things that are uniquely Tasmanian.

Things that remind me every day how fortunate all of us are to live in this place:

Breathing the cleanest air in the world at Woolnorth,

Listening to a TSO symphony under the stars,

Smelling beer being brewed at Cascade and Boags,

Watching the sparkle on the water of Wineglass Bay.

These are the things that are undeniably Tasmanian. They belong to us all, and they reveal the potential of our island State.

We are at a watershed moment in the history of this State, and I have never been more optimistic about the future of Tasmania.

We are now ten years into a 20 year transformation of this State – and we are getting on with the job.

LEADERSHIP MATTERS

Delegates,

Leadership is not about being perfect – it's about accepting the challenge to lead.

One of my Labor heroes, Tasmania's great Roy Fagan, once wrote in a letter to his son:

“For those who wish to apply their intellect, exercise their gifts and fulfil themselves, the acceptance of responsibility is what life is all about.”

We take that responsibility.

That's what Labor governments do.

We take responsibility to find solutions, to find new ways and support new ideas.

And that is what Labor Premiers have always done. That is what Reece did, and Field did, what Bacon did and what Lennon did.

And they have done so by remaining true to the values that this party has stood for and fought for through generations.

People choose this party because of core beliefs that are based not on self interest, but on an interest in the greater good.

Labor believes that every Tasmanian matters.

Labor believes that the dignity of every Tasmanian is worth fighting for.

Labor believes that at the core of that dignity is the capacity to find a job, the capacity to raise a family and the hope of building a better future.

These are not policy choices we make or trends that we follow;

They are simply a part of who we are – and who we will continue to be.

ECONOMIC CHALLENGE

Delegates,

Since I addressed you last year, we have seen the most sudden and dramatic change in global financial circumstances in generations.

We are confronted by the impacts of the deepest world recession in 70 years.

It's not what any of us expected, and it is not what any of us would have chosen.

But as a State Labor Government, we accept the responsibility of facing that challenge and guiding Tasmania through to solid ground.

Ten successive years of strong Labor economic management delivered ten straight years of budget surpluses, and that underlying strength has made a big difference.

The latest economic data shows that we are weathering the storm better than most States in Australia, but that dangers remain.

And we are acting to meet those dangers and support Tasmanian jobs;

- Through a record infrastructure spend of \$3.9 billion over four years.
- Through a \$100 million Tasmanian Industry Support Scheme and farm loans.

- Through working with unions to minimise public sector job losses.

And we are doing those things without cutting one cent out of the frontline services in health, education and law and order - services that every Tasmanian has a right to rely on, under Labor.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE FUTURE

Delegates,

We are confronted right now by the three great global challenges that will dominate the 21st Century.

- The management of scarce water resources;
- The rapid race of the telecommunications revolution; and
- The imperative for creating sustainable and renewable energy.

These are the issues being faced by every State in the nation, and by every nation on the planet.

And in each one, Tasmania has natural advantages that we must seize for the future.

We must set bold new goals to fulfil that potential – that's Labor leadership.

Delegates,

Water is already the most important resource of the 21st Century on this planet.

Tasmania constitutes only about one and a half percent of the Australian landmass, and yet we receive 12% of this continent's rainfall.

We must harness that natural water advantage to the full.

That is why today I commit to a bold new goal – that to achieve our strategy to make Tasmania the foodbowl of the nation, we will deliver close to a quarter-of-a-million additional megalitres of water per annum for irrigation by 2014.

That's the equivalent of close to a quarter-of-a-million Olympic swimming pools worth of water each and every year.

We are delivering right now on the irrigation schemes that will bring that goal to reality.

We have schemes planned or under construction in the midlands, the Meander Valley, the upper Derwent Valley, Winnaleah, Meadstone and the Upper South Esk region.

It's work that is stimulating the Tasmanian economy and supporting Tasmanian jobs right now, whilst building a strong Tasmania for the future.

Just a week ago I was up at Ashgrove Farm near Deloraine.

The Rubicon irrigation pipeline we are building right now from the Meander Dam will provide sufficient water to Ashgrove Farm to lift milk production by 20%.

That milk will then be channelled into some of the finest cheese products in the nation, which will find their way into stores and restaurants around Australia.

And most importantly, it's about providing jobs for Tasmanians, with Ashgrove already employing 45 people.

That is paddock to plate in action.

That is a continuum of food excellence in action.

That is a clever Tasmania in action, under Labor.

Delegates,

This century, the infrastructure of nations will be judged not by the number of roads they have, but by the number of homes, businesses, schools and hospitals that are connected to optic fibre.

In 1914, a Tasmanian Labor Government created the Hydro – the single greatest economic and social force in this State in the 20th Century.

Dams, poles and wires that brought electricity to our homes, and jobs to our families.

Effective ultra fast broadband infrastructure will be the dams, poles and wires of this new century.

Today, I commit to a bold new goal that by 2014, Tasmania will be the most connected place on the planet.

We are delivering right now on bringing that vision to reality.

In recent months, we announced the lighting up of the optic fibre backbone which runs up and down this island;

And in recent weeks, we've lit up the cable that runs across Bass Strait.

Cheaper, faster, more competitive broadband is now flowing across that cable, and is drawing international companies to our shores to invest.

With our partners Aurora and the Rudd Labor Government, we also have now released the first optic fibre tenders for the National Broadband Network.

Just yesterday, the Prime Minister and I announced that Scottsdale, Smithton and Midway Point will be the first towns in Tasmania to benefit from an optic fibre roll-out that will ultimately extend to 200,000 homes, schools, hospitals and businesses across Tasmania.

That is innovation in action.

That is the future happening right here, right now.

And that is a connected Tasmania, under Labor.

Delegates,

This century will be defined by the ability to produce renewable energy in a carbon constrained world.

Climate change has created a renewable energy imperative that cannot be denied.

Tasmania is already a renewable energy leader.

70% of our energy comes from renewable sources right now – something that no other State in Australia can match.

We have the strongest knowledge bank in wind and water energy anywhere in South East Asia.

And we can still do more.

I want us to boldly seize the renewable energy agenda and stamp Tasmania into the global imagination.

We are delivering right now on an energy agenda that can make that goal a reality.

Together, the current Woolnorth windfarm and the proposed Musselroe windfarm, will deliver enough sustainable energy to power the equivalent of nearly half the households in Tasmania.

Right now, national companies are exploring geothermal or hot rock energy sources in central Tasmania.

Right now companies are exploring options for tidal energy and wave energy off Tasmania's northern coastline and around King and Flinders Island.

And there will be more to come.

That is a sustainable Tasmania in action.

That is Tasmanian Labor leadership in action.

EDUCATION TRANSFORMS LIVES

Delegates,

To make the most of all the opportunities now before us, we must invest above all else in the Tasmanian people.

Labor people know that education transforms lives.

Education is central to everything we can hope to achieve for our State.

Education breaks people out of the poverty cycle.

Education will build the new generation skills that Tasmanians will need for the new generation jobs.

That is why I commit today to the bold new goal that we will lead the nation in educational outcomes in literacy and numeracy across the board by 2016.

Today, I am pleased to report that in literacy and numeracy, our investment of over \$50 million is starting to show results.

In the latest round of national testing, our results in Year 3 Reading, Writing and Numeracy placed us amongst the best in Australia.

That kind of improvement convinces me that our goal of reaching the top of the nation across the board in education is realistic and achievable.

When I spoke to you last year, I committed to building up to 30 Child and Family Centres around Tasmania to support all Tasmanian parents in helping their children flourish in the early years;

To sow the seed of a lifelong love of learning right at the start of life's journey.

I can report today that we have allocated \$76 million in this year's State Budget to bring those Child and Family Centres to reality.

We have announced that the first seven centres will be built at Clarendon Vale, Ravenswood, Chigwell, George Town, East Devonport, Beaconsfield, and Queenstown, with the eighth to be built at Risdon Cove to meet the needs of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community.

Building on all eight centres will be underway this calendar year.

Labor is getting on with the job of helping Tasmanian families as they raise the next generation of Tasmanians.

Delegates,

Currently, 86% of jobs in Australia require a post year 10 qualification; something that less than 50% of Tasmanians are now attaining.

That must change. We owe it to our kids to change it.

The reforms which have created the Tasmanian Polytechnic, Academy and Skills Institute have already resulted in a lift in post-year 10 enrolments of 12%, which is a positive beginning.

It's about giving every single Tasmanian student a better-than-even chance at getting the skills and qualifications to create opportunities for the future.

And we need to make sure we are giving every Tasmanian that may have missed out on learning the first time around, the opportunity to improve their skills.

Tasmania has the lowest adult literacy rates in Australia – bar none – and that must change if we are to seize all the opportunities of the future.

That's why we are embedding services in local communities, where they can be accessed through a single doorway.

Labor will meet Tasmanians where their lives and needs are – right in the heart of their communities.

CONNECTED COMMUNITIES

Delegates,

We have a social agenda that can build the strength of every Tasmanian community.

Let me today open a window into Tasmania's very real and very near future.

Just a week or two ago I was in George Town.

It's a Tasmanian community with heart and history and challenges – typical of any community in the State.

Within the next few years, Labor will transform that community.

A young Mum will be able to walk out her front door and within pram pushing distance access the services that she needs for her child.

Through turning the handle on one door, she will find in the George Town Child and Family Centre advice on nutrition, help with her child's early literacy, early intervention tests to see if her child has any special needs, and support for her parenting skills.

Building opportunity for her child - through one doorway.

It may be that this young Mum didn't have success at school herself the first time around.

She will be able to walk across the street, and through one door get a second chance at learning.

The George Town Learning and Information Network Centre will hold the key to building her literacy skills, IT skills and provide access to the information services of the Library network.

Building opportunity for her future – through one doorway.

The same Mum, armed with her new skills, can then access the George Town Trade Training Centre and the Tasmanian Polytechnic to build job-ready skills.

Skills that will prepare her for one of the new generation jobs that will flow to George Town through the new generation of industries.

Jobs created through the flow-on impacts of local irrigation projects;

Jobs created by the local manufacturing of components for windfarms and hot rock energy extraction;

And jobs flowing from the fastest, most deeply connected telecommunications system on the planet.

That same fibre-to-the-home technology will enable this young mum's grandmother to stay living independently in her own home – close to her granddaughter and great grandchild.

Optic fibre will allow revolutionary E-Health capabilities – through which that grandmother's vital medical signs can be monitored around the clock by medical professionals, without her leaving her own home.

It's about health and human services that enable the full living of life, without the restrictions of 24 hour monitoring in a hospital.

But of course, no amount of optic fibre technology can replace human contact.

That grandmother will be able to regularly catch up with her friends at the bowls club, because a small community bus provided through our new Community Transport Trust will pick her up direct from her front door.

Delegates – that will be the story of George Town in the very near future.

And it's the same story that will be repeated from St Helens to Queenstown, from Devonport to Geeveston, and from Chigwell to Mowbray.

And it is starting right now.

That is how we will fight the causes of disadvantage around Tasmania.

That is social inclusion in action.

That is a clever, kind and connected Tasmania, under Labor.

LEADERSHIP IN HEALTH

Delegates,

It's the same motivation that is guiding the implementation of Tasmania's Health Plan under the leadership of Deputy Premier Lara Giddings.

With resolve and persistence and sensitivity, Lara Giddings is putting in place the health care reforms that will meet the health needs of Tasmanians for a generation.

But it won't stop there.

She has worked hard to get health into a sustainable position.

This Government now has a vision to take health to the next level.

To invest to make the Tasmanian health system the most technologically advanced, patient-focussed system in the nation.

This is about ensuring that no matter where they live, Tasmanians get the best clinical and patient care possible – whether through an acute care hospital, a regional health centre, or even right in their own home.

And the health care of the future is beginning right now.

At the LGH, a pilot project is trialling the transmission of vital clinical information between the hospital, a patient's GP and their community pharmacist, to improve care for a patient once they've left hospital.

At the RHH patient records are being digitised so clinicians can access and update them online from anywhere in the hospital.

In the Southern Highlands new mobile phone towers will improve telehealth facilities and allow community nurses access to records and clinical advice while caring for patients in remote areas.

In the North West, clinicians in Burnie are already providing bedside advice to the Mersey's High Dependency Unit via video link.

And digital medical imaging is allowing us to take x-rays in areas like Queenstown, Rosebery and Smithton with immediate online support from radiographers anywhere in Tasmania or across Australia.

That is technologically connected, patient-focussed health care happening right now.

And we will do more.

Much more.

With optic fibre connecting every corner of our state, this Government will invest unprecedented amounts in new generation health technology.

We will deliver a health system that is not only sustainable for the long term but the most technologically advanced in Australia.

That is a kinder Tasmania in action, under Labor.

I congratulate Lara for her vision and commitment.

I thank her for her outstanding leadership as Deputy Premier of this State, and for the outstanding support she provides to me as Premier.

I am proud to call this a Bartlett-Giddings Labor Government, and together Lara and I will be out there every day - working to build a strong Tasmania.

ROAD SAFETY

Delegates,

In recent weeks we have seen some tragedies on Tasmanian roads, the likes of which we have not seen for a long time.

Lives lost and families shattered through unspeakable moments of trauma, the repercussions of which will last a lifetime for those left behind.

We must respond to those accidents and find ways to lower the road toll in this State.

We cannot merely accept what to me is unacceptable.

At the same time, I will not resort to knee-jerk policy changes where there is no data and no evidence to suggest they will improve the situation.

Right now, we are half-way through a 5 year, \$42.5 million road safety program that includes:

- Installation of Flexible Safety Barriers on major highways;
- Dollar-for-dollar funding for Councils to undertake traffic calming measures;
- The roll-out of Electronic Speed Limit Signs at schools;
- Trialling lower speed limits in the Kingborough and Tasman districts;
- Extending the minimum learner period from 6 to 12 months; and
- We're trialling innovative technologies, such as the Wet and Icy Traffic (WIT) system at Constitution Hill.

But we have a responsibility to do more, because every life lost on Tasmania's roads is an avoidable tragedy.

All of us – every Tasmanian driver – has a responsibility to act safely on our roads.

I have asked Ministers Cox and Sturges to provide me with advice within four weeks on the following options:

- Tougher penalties for people who break our road laws;
- Reviewing driver training;
- Making driver training a fully accredited TCE course; and
- Extending the time periods for vehicle confiscations.

We need to consider everything that can be done to save the lives of Tasmanians.

As Premier, I take responsibility for making a difference, not for making a headline.

RESPONSE TO THE CLAYTON REPORT

Delegates,

Not only must we act to keep Tasmanians safer on our roads – but so too in our workplaces.

The Labor Party began as we shall continue – as representatives of the working men and women of Tasmania.

That is why I am pleased that we have finally been able to reform the workers compensation provisions in this State, to return a fairer balance and provide the protection that workers deserve.

I have met people as Premier who have suffered terrible injuries at work.

I met a man last year who'd lost all the fingers on one hand, and yet had not been able to access the level of worker's compensation that he so clearly and richly deserved.

That is not fair, and that's why we're changing it.

Unlike our opponents, who enthusiastically supported the flawed and unfair WorkChoices regime, we stand for a fair go for Tasmanian workers.

Some will say we've gone too far.

But this is about decency and dignity.

And it's about respect for working people, and providing workers with the support and protections that they deserve.

SUPPORTING TASMANIANS NOW

Delegates,

The global recession has hit many Tasmanians hard.

I know that low income Tasmanians are struggling with the rising cost of living.

I have visited every corner of Tasmania since becoming Premier, and everywhere people have shared their stories with me.

In shopping centres and seniors' clubs, in regional towns and city suburbs – they've told me how hard they are working to balance their household budgets.

And I've listened.

The Labor Party on my watch will always do all that it can to support those doing it tough.

I know that low income earners who use Pay As You Go electricity are being hurt by a higher tariff through recent price changes.

We can't, as a Labor Government, let that stand.

At our request, Aurora has agreed to make a change.

I announce today that we will wind back the increase for all PAYG customers who are entitled to the State Government Concession.

Average price increases for eligible PAYG concession customers will now be the same as the increase recently approved by the independent regulator for other electricity users.

The change will cost around \$1.7 million, but it's a burden I would much rather see carried on the shoulders of Aurora and the Government, than on the shoulders of low income Tasmanians.

We'll also be asking the independent regulator to assess recent PAYG price rises, and whether PAYG should be regulated just like our other electricity tariffs.

When Labor promised the Tasmanian people that we would not sell the Hydro – this is why.

Because sometimes Governments need to step in and work with our utilities to make sure profit is not put before people.

In water and sewerage, the State Government in partnership with local councils has instituted the most far reaching essential services reform in Tasmanian history.

For decades, we have seen the kind of chronic underinvestment in water and sewerage infrastructure that as recently as a few weeks ago saw raw sewerage running down Tasmania's historic Salamanca Place.

This is not about finding someone to blame for that, it's about fixing what is broken.

We desperately need to bring these fundamental services up to a 21st Century standard.

But in instituting that reform, we remain committed in our responsibility to not see our least advantaged Tasmanians carry a disproportionate burden.

I want to reassure Tasmanians today – that the Government will guarantee that low-income Tasmanians will receive a concession on the new water and sewerage bills.

That concession will be in place by the time the first bills hit your letterbox.

We have listened to the low income Tasmanians that are under pressure.

And we will deliver to ease those pressures wherever we can.

These changes will support the commitment we made in the State Budget to put \$1 million into the Emergency Relief Fund.

This is money with which organisations like the Salvos, Anglicare, St Vincent de Paul, and the City Mission will reach out and help Tasmanians right across the State.

And as I announced just this week, we will continue to deliver, with full indexation, the over \$300 million worth of State Government concessions that we currently provide.

That's a kinder Tasmania in action.

Those are Labor values in action.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Delegates,

That is our vision for the future.

To grow this State by supporting new generation industries and new generation jobs.

To give Tasmanians the chance to learn new skills and access better services - right in the heart of their local communities.

We have every reason to be positive about the future.

Let us go to the people next year firm in our resolve to not let Tasmania go back.

Back to the things that our political opponents would deliver.

Back to the heartbreak of their 12% unemployment rates, which saw our young people driven from these shores in search of jobs and a future.

Back to their years of crippling debt.

Back to their government that sacked hundreds of nurses.

Back to their plans to sell off our Hydro and our optic fibre.

Delegates – we must not go back.

Tasmania cannot afford to go back.

We stand as a new generation Labor Government with the passion to lead for the future.

The Labor Party was not created to shelter in quiet corners of political comfort.

We owe it to the people of Tasmania to take on the hard issues;

To rage against disadvantage and inequality; and

To get on with the job of building a strong Tasmania.

Anything less would not be worthy of the people of this State, of the traditions of this party, or of our collective commitment to keep working for our fellow Tasmanians.

That's what Labor has done for generations.

That's what a new generation of Labor will keep doing.

That's why, in March 2010, we need a majority new generation Labor Government for Tasmania.

Thank you.