

## **Thursday, 28 July 2022 HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, Kate Chaney MP**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER:** Before I call the honourable member for Curtin, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech, and I ask that the House extend to her the usual courtesies.

**Ms CHANEY (Curtin) (11:01):** Thank you for the privilege of participating in the debate on the address-in-reply today, and I commend the member for Ryan on her speech.

I acknowledge that I'm speaking today on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri peoples, and I pay my respects to their elders and the elders of the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional custodians of my home in Western Australia.

When I was five, I visited Parliament House. The only thing I remember is that, in the cafe, I saw a man eating a banana with a knife and fork. It was very intimidating and a little bit strange—a little bit like this week has been. I never thought that I would end up here. In January this year, I was asked to run as an Independent candidate in the seat of Curtin. For two weeks, the thought of it made me feel like vomiting. There were so many reasons not to do it: my three kids, the lifestyle of a Western Australian federal politician and the inevitable public scrutiny and attack. This was a safe Liberal seat, the election was only four months away and I had no political experience. But there was one main reason to do it, and that was that it mattered.

Increasingly, our community did not feel represented in the decisions of the day. It seemed that the serious work of policy development had been overshadowed by short-termism and political point scoring. We were not addressing the big issues that would affect whether Australia flourishes over the next generation. I spoke to my husband and my three children about the decision, which obviously had serious implications for them. The next day, my 10-year old daughter said, 'Mum, I think this would be bad for me in the short term because we'll miss you, but I think it'll be good in the long term because it will be good for Australia.' That was when I knew I had to do this.

I came to be here because of a community group. The Curtin Independent group started with a cafe conversation between Tony Fairweather, who had a niggling sense of dissatisfaction and a folder of papers, and Sarah Silbert, who helped Tony turn that feeling into action. They connected with Louise Jones, Anthony Maslin, Justin Kennedy and Charlie Caruso, and the community grew, looking for a candidate. When I agreed to run, this community group formed the core of the campaign team, supplemented by some wise and trusted advisers like Sarah Allchurch, John Atkins, Fred Chaney and Liz Constable. I'm very grateful for the incredible support and energy of the whole team. We planned to launch the campaign in a park, with a week's notice. We stood in the sunshine, and then we watched as hundreds of people streamed in from all directions. We slowly realised that we were not alone in our dissatisfaction and our desire for change.

Seventeen-year-old Ruby Paterson came with her little brother, her parents and her grandmother. I'd never met Ruby before, but she became a symbol in my mind of why I was here. She's in year 12, brimming with potential and hope. Ruby and her family wanted to see politics done differently, so they turned up and they became the movement. They formed bonds of trust with a pop-up community that shared the same thirst for long-term thinking,

compassion and integrity. They arrived expecting the best from themselves and each other, and so they were not disappointed.

Change happens at the speed of trust. Trust grew rapidly, and, in four months, we achieved the improbable. Nearly 900 volunteers and 500 donors brought their diverse skills and enthusiasm to grassroots politics. Most of them had never been involved in politics before. We had Ian, a surgeon, folding T-shirts; Wendy a retired teacher, riding her campaign bike around the electorate until it faded; Jimmy, a physio, knocking on doors; and hundreds of people delivering flyers. Our campaign was positive, it was hopeful and it was fun. I'm not going to attempt to thank the campaign team and the volunteers by name as there are too many. You know who you are and I thank you for the time you put in, seen and unseen. You have done an extraordinary thing. Just thinking about this community, which didn't exist at Christmas time and is now so rich with goodwill and optimism, brings me close to tears. People are amazing. In the words of Margaret Wheatley, 'There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.'

Curtin stretches between the edge of Perth and the Indian Ocean, bordered by the beautiful Derbarl Yerrigan—the Swan River—from Mosman Park up to Gwelup. Its lakes, rivers and coastline are cared for by a network of volunteer environmental groups who form part of its rich social fabric along with sporting clubs, numerous primary and secondary schools, and nine local councils. With a university and a hospital, it's full of knowledge and experience. It has almost entirely been represented by Liberal members since its establishment in 1949, most recently by Celia Hammond and Julie Bishop before her, and I thank both of them for their service to the community.

Knocking on 10,000 doors, the team and I had a glimpse of the diversity of life experience and expertise within Curtin. No matter what their circumstances were, far from the confected outrage of social media, in person, people were kind, compassionate, wise and concerned for our future. My community expressed a deep desire to see better long-term thinking in our leadership and a more collaborative, positive approach. People told me they cared about climate action, returning integrity to politics, economic reform to meet the challenges of the future and support for inclusive, compassionate communities.

Democracy is messy and imperfect, but it gives me hope that communities can successfully put up their own candidate in the face of the historically dominant two-party system. I, and the other community Independents who now surround me, have overcome an uneven playing field. Many of us were supported by the thousands of donors to Climate 200, who could see that action on climate was going to require some new voices in the parliament. I'm grateful to Climate 200's thousands of donors and the vision of Climate 200's founders.

So why me? I was brought up in Curtin in a large family that values service to community, whether in education, business, law or politics. From my mother, Rose Chaney, I got a sense of optimism and community. My father, Michael Chaney, gave me his thinking style. My siblings, Tom, Anna and Amelia, have an incredible generosity of spirit. If you ask for help, the answer is always an immediate and genuine 'yes'. I have had the advantages of a stable, supportive family, high expectations and many opportunities, which I took up with the earnest, nerdy enthusiasm of a first child. I'm very aware that it's not fair that I had these opportunities. It's difficult to know the best way to respond to the unfairness of your own privilege. I know that good fortune is not merit. But I can use what I have to work for change.

My career in law, strategy, management and community services has prepared me for what I hope to achieve in this House. As a lawyer, I advised companies on mergers and individuals at Redfern Legal Centre on debt matters. As a strategy consultant, I grappled with problems in Sydney boardrooms and remote communities in Cape York. In the private sector, I developed reconciliation action plans and a sustainability strategy for one of Australia's largest companies, and in the community services sector I worked in partnership with government on innovative service design.

Through these jobs, I've learned different approaches to solving complex problems and how to build consensus. I've learned about the deep disadvantages experienced by some and the challenges in building support systems to reduce those disadvantages. My career so far has taught me that there is rarely a black-and-white answer, there's always room to improve a solution after consultation and there is no one right way of thinking. I believe these will be useful lessons in this House.

I worked part-time while we had young kids, and my husband, Bill, who has a significant career of his own, has shared the parenting and the domestic work. I'm very grateful for his strong support and I will miss his cooking while I am in Canberra. I'm incredibly proud of my three kids, George, Fred and Olive, and I thank them for their support in this unexpected life change.

I have agonised about how much I should talk about my wider family. I am here because of my community, but my family has contributed to who I am. I am in the extraordinary position of having five relatives across the last four generations to serve in Australian parliaments. There's a thread to my family political history of independent thought.

On my dad's side, I have two uncles who served in this parliament for the Liberal Party between the seventies and the nineties. Fred Chaney was much loved by both side of politics and was ahead of his time and his party on Aboriginal rights. Ross McLean, my other uncle, referred in his first speech to the importance of marrying free enterprise with social justice.

My grandfather, also Fred Cheney, who was a rural school teacher after returning from the war, came from a strong Labor family whom he shocked when he entered politics as a Liberal. In his first speech he acknowledged that the acceptance of new migrants was proof of Australia's coming of age.

On my mother's side my great-grandfather and his father, Hubert and Henry Parker, were both in the Western Australian parliament. My great-great-grandfather was known as 'The People's Harry' because he sided with the underdog. In fact, he ran, unsuccessfully, in 1905 as the leader of the short-lived Independent Party.

It's hard to accurately see your own influences and dangerous to retrospectively fit them into a neat narrative, but I am sure these men in my family tree have in some way contributed to my strong sense of social justice and public service.

The women in my family have served their communities in quieter ways, as was expected in their time. My grandmother Delphine Anderson, who is currently recovering from COVID at 96, told me the other day about going with her father to the meeting where Sir Robert Menzies made the case for the establishment of the modern Liberal Party in the 1940s.

I have never felt a pull towards either political party, feeling stranded in the middle, but I feel a pull when I read the words of Menzies, who said he looked forward 'to a better distribution of wealth, to a keener sense of social justice and social responsibility'. I wonder if that might've been a party I would've been willing to join.

In reflecting on the first speeches of my relatives I noticed that some things in politics don't change. They all speak about the distribution of limited resources, where the government is spending too much or too little and the balance between state and federal roles. These issues will continue to occupy the minds of the people in this House.

But I am struck by the huge challenges we faced and overcame in each generation. How we chose to address these challenges informs the assumptions of the next generation. In the 19th century it was the concept of federation and the need to develop fundamental infrastructure for an economy. A generation later it was the Depression, then nuclear war and waves of migration, and the economic headwinds of the 1970s.

The promising thing is that we managed these challenges. We built railways, ports and telegraph lines. We became a federation. We emerged from the Great Depression and various recessions. We saw off the immediate threat of nuclear war. We welcomed new migrants. It's important to remember this as we face the long-term issues of our day.

The challenges we face today require an even longer-term view than the seven generations of my family in Australia. We need to learn from the perspectives of our First Nations people, such as my friends Carol Innes and Colleen Hayward, Noongar elders who carry the local histories of not a mere seven generations but thousands. They have a collective memory of the time when Wadjemup, Rottnest Island, was joined to the mainland of my electorate more than 6,000 years ago.

Their sense of the long term brings a deeply sophisticated knowledge of a society in delicate balance with its natural resources, in tune with the cycle of time. This was dramatically interrupted by the painful arrival of a people with a linear view of time. Even in Western cultures the concept of time as linear is only 500 years old, but it's deeply embedded. We believe in the inevitability and inherent rightness of 'progress'.

We measure progress in GDP and assume that more is always better. This concept of progress has provided incredible leaps in life expectancy, population growth and interconnectedness. But we are now at an extraordinary uncomfortable juncture where even this assumption must be questioned in the policy decisions of the day. The trajectory of 'progress' that we're on as a species may cast us as the engineers of our own extinction. We're facing the reality that endless material growth is a myth built into all of our systems and decisions. We must find different ways to define and measure progress and wealth.

Questioning fundamental assumptions like this is painful. We can learn from the deep wisdom of First Nations ways of thinking and being. In Paul House's words at the opening of this parliament on Tuesday: 'Please look after the land and the rivers, and the land and the rivers will look after you.'

Our ability to address climate change depends on a uniquely human attribute. As a species we've thrived on this planet because of our ability to cooperate and work to a common purpose as communities. It's this spirit of cooperation that will be needed. The climate bill

that was introduced into this House yesterday is a symbolic step in the right direction. We need to go further, but we need to start somewhere. The opportunity is huge—Western Australia should be leading the world in renewable energy. As decision-makers in this House we must balance this long-term imperative with shorter-term, more human-scale issues, to ensure stability and a smooth and fair transition.

My community recognises that we must rebuild trust and confidence in our institutions. We'll only be able to make these long-term decisions if the people of Australia believe that we are acting in their best interests. Politicians are frequently seen as the least trusted of all professions.

Rebuilding trust in our democracy will require structural change and cultural change. Australians need to know that corruption will be uncovered and systems reformed to prevent it happening again. I'm optimistic that the proposed anticorruption commission is a step towards rebuilding trust in our public leaders. My community also wants to see transparency in political campaigns—they want to know who is funding their candidates in real time.

Cultural change will be harder. People in my electorate are sick of politics being about petty point scoring and the poor treatment of women. They want robust but constructive debate on the issues. We need to take the best ideas from wherever they come, and to treat parliament as a policy workshop not a gladiatorial battleground. I'm optimistic that this is possible, even though battles entice more clicks than respectful collaboration.

Politicians must be able to change their minds when new evidence arises, without being accused of flip-flopping, to give credit where it's due without being considered weak, to try new approaches that sometimes fail. We can't be paralysed into inaction by fear of unpopularity or criticism.

We're likely to have some tough economic times ahead, with a global downturn, rising interest rates and inflation confirmed by yesterday's announcements. We have wage stagnation, flatlining productivity, labour shortages and almost a trillion dollars in debt. Economic reform has ground to a halt over the last decade. Addressing many of our economic challenges will require bold, long-term thinking.

We need a tax system that's fair, equipped for the demographic challenges of the coming decades, and that can fund dignified support for our elders, people with disabilities and people experiencing hard times. We need a long-term plan to ensure that the purpose of housing is to provide people with homes, and that a home is within reach.

The people of Curtin want to be able to work hard and reap the rewards, but protecting individual rights need not erode our sense of community. Humans need each other, and individual rights come with community responsibilities. We are lonelier, more depressed and more stressed than we used to be. Government support systems need to be designed to empower people to support and connect with each other not to punish and isolate them.

The people of my community have told me they want to look our history in the eye and rewrite the future of our relationship with our First Nations peoples. The First Nations voice to parliament will not address the urgent issues facing remote communities, but it will give us a chance to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. It's an important piece of long-term thinking that will need to be accompanied by policies to address the immediate needs of First

Nations people. My community no longer wants to wince when it sings the second verse of our national anthem: ...

*For those who've come across the seas We've boundless plains to share; ...*

We want to treat asylum seekers with dignity and compassion and feel proud that Australia is fulfilling its international obligations in a way consistent with our great privilege. We want to live in inclusive communities, where people can be their whole selves no matter their gender, sexuality, race or religion. It's these values and priorities that I bring from my past and my community into this House.

Our challenge as leaders is to listen deeply—beyond the daily rhythm of the Twitter feed, the weekly rhythm of the lead media story, the yearly rhythm of the pandemic and the electoral cycle rhythm of the rise and fall of political parties—to the deep, slow heartbeat of the decades. Our decisions need to balance all these rhythms and turn them into the music of our generation. As a mum I am driven by the heartbeats and the future of my children. I balance the short term and the long term every day, making decisions for their long-term welfare even if they'd much rather stay glued to their screens.

At the end of this century, I hope that my great-great-grandchildren will look back with gratitude and wonder on the decisions I was part of; I hope they will see the assumptions we challenged and overcame and the way we used cooperation and ingenuity to turn our planet around.

Of course, it will all be history by then and so immutable, just as we take for granted the outcomes of wars, the ending of recessions and the granting of rights to marginalised people. I hope that, by then, we will have the luxury of taking for granted our decarbonised economy, the care of our most vulnerable, our focus on wellbeing, and the integrity of our political system. I hope that, by then, we can move on to more subtle and less existential challenges, and talk with amusement about the time when we extracted our energy from the earth, not the sky.

These are big words and concepts. They raise the inevitable question of what I, as one voice in 151, can possibly achieve. No matter your role, it's easy to feel powerless, but the only way anything changes is if people believe it's possible. My very wise uncle Fred, who's an inspiration to me, advised me to listen to Hal Wootten, an Australian judge, who said:

*I believe it is not just judges, but every man and woman who, in everything they do, can give the world little nudges that, in conjunction with all its other little nudges, can affect where the world goes.*

As I join the 1,240 people who have served in this House since Federation, I will apply little nudges in the direction that's consistent with my values and the values of my community in Curtin. I will always vote with my conscience. I will be constructive, collaborative and optimistic. I will speak truth to power when needed, driven by the desire for better outcomes—not the desire for the appearance of influence. I will act in good faith, with integrity and in the interests of our children and our grandchildren. I'm excited about the challenges ahead, and I thank the community of Curtin for the faith they've put in me to represent them.