

The SPEAKER: The member for Frome.

Mr BROCK (Frome) (19:48): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and congratulations on your appointment as the Speaker. I would also like to congratulate the other new members on their maiden speeches. Even though I have not been in the chamber, I have been listening to them in my office and they were very heartwarming and genuine.

I also rise to speak in response to the speech by His Excellency Hieu Van Le AC, the Governor of South Australia. Our state is very lucky and privileged to have a warm and caring Governor, along with his wife, Mrs Van Le, who not only are very welcoming but always recognise people across the state wherever they visit. I would like to start by thanking the people of Frome again for their confidence and trust in me to be their state representative for another term. Since being elected in 2009, the electorate of Frome has had boundary changes in 2014 with the inclusion of Balaklava. Then again in 2018 we had a major redistribution with the loss of locations such as Port Broughton, Mundoorra, Bute, Alford, Tickera, Lochiel, Snowtown and Gladstone. I then gained Hamley Bridge and Owen; both were in the previous electorate of Goyder.

Even with this very large redistribution, I was very fortunate that my two-party preferred vote dropped slightly, from 58.8 per cent to 58.2 per cent, and this was very gratifying. In some polling booths in some areas in other electorates, my two-party preferred vote was in the high 70s to low 80s. It is not only an honour to serve the people of Frome but it is also a great privilege to be able to endeavour to do my best to assist them with their various issues. I am again giving my total commitment to the people living in this great electorate of Frome to work with them and for them and to work very closely with industry, local government and also the state government to try to achieve the great outcomes that I see on the horizon for our great region.

My life has been an extraordinary one, having had the great privilege to serve as a local government councillor, as mayor of Port Pirie Regional Council, as the Independent member for Frome, as minister for regional development and minister for local government, and now again as the Independent member for Frome. My only regret is that my late wife, Arlene, and both my parents could not see this remarkable journey. However, my family, including my partner, Lyn, have been a great inspiration for my journey since that day. As candidates in this house running for any office, it takes a lot of commitment, especially from our families. In this regard, I sincerely thank my family: my partner, Lyn Akker; my daughters, Hayley and Marisa; and my stepchildren, Addy, Nick and Jackie. Special thanks also go to our 12 grandchildren, who are aged between five and 18 years old. It is these great people who get the rough end of the stick. I do not see every part of their growing up, and at times this can be very unsettling. However, in this regard I have the comfort of knowing that Lyn is at home, being there when they require the support of a grandparent or, more specifically, a parent's love.

Leading up to an election, each candidate knows that they cannot do it alone, and that has been mentioned by many others in this house today. They need a committee, and I have been very honoured to have had a small group of six people who have ventured on our way throughout the whole system. My brother-in-law, Graham Nichols, has been my campaign manager since 2009 and, along with the others—Tory Annese, Rex Lang, Mark Turner, Stax Kerr, Mary Nichols, Sav Degilio, Dino Gadaletta, plus my partner, Lyn—has advised me on issues, assisted with posters, etc., at the same time learning more about ourselves as we ventured on the great journey.

It was very interesting first up. Here was a group of people getting together to formulate a strategy for election with not one of them knowing what to do or how to go about it. However, we had a great time and learnt a lot as we went along. In 2009, we were only able to hand out how-to-vote cards at seven of the 23 polling booths, to the degree that in the following elections, in 2010, 2014 and 2018, I was able to have the assistance of over 100 volunteers and have volunteers at every polling booth across the electorate.

At the last election, I greatly appreciated the help of my great volunteers, with the youngest being 18 years old and the oldest being 92 years old. Without the support of these people, we as candidates would not be able to do what we do. With this in mind, I need to mention that, no matter who we are or who we represent, our volunteers are not the people being elected. I must point out that during the last election at a couple of polling booths there were some very arrogant people abusing the volunteers who were just doing their friends a favour by handing out their how-to-vote cards.

Our society is a free society, and every person deserves to be treated with respect. However, during the last election there were occasions when the boundaries of behaviour were being very tested. However, having said that, my team and I are looking forward in a positive manner to endeavour to provide the best opportunity for our future generations. We can do this by working collaboratively, honestly and positively to get the best results.

During my previous four years serving the state both as local member and also as minister for regional development and minister for local government, I learnt a tremendous amount not only about how government works but also about the wider areas of our great state—that is, across all regional South Australia. I also learnt a lot more about myself, about the challenges and the frustrations but, more importantly, I learnt to appreciate far more the challenges that we all face.

Over the last four years, I travelled extensively across all regional South Australia, hearing people's ambitions, their frustrations and, more importantly, their desire just to get on with it. That was a clear message I took away and brought back to cabinet. These people in regional South Australia had felt left out and not listened to for many years by both sides of politics. They found it very refreshing to see the minister actually drive in, not fly in, and partake in social events, stay the night and mix with communities.

On a personal note, after the 2014 election night my life and that of my family was turned around in a way that we were not expecting. My greatest fear, prior to that election, was for the transformation of the Port Pirie Nyrstar smelter, which was nearing a critical point with the owners in Zurich. The plant needed to be completely modernised and transformed not only to meet the strict environmental conditions but also for the financial viability of the plant to continue and the survival of the community of Port Pirie and the surrounding communities. If the transformation did not eventuate, Port Pirie would have been greatly decimated, with the risk of some 2,000 direct and indirect workers being involved.

I thank the previous premier, who, as leader of the Labor Party, committed to a guarantee to allow for the transformation of this plant to occur. Until this point, there was a great sense of uncertainty, a loss of confidence within the community and fears for our community and our future. There were also many late-night calls from Nyrstar in Zurich, asking if there was any commitment to the project. These were some very unsettling times, not only for me but also for the many people involved, specifically in Port Pirie. Port Pirie and all its residents, my family and I will be eternally grateful for this contribution.

I thank my family for their great support throughout a very trying period. I recall that our youngest grandson, Jax, just 10 months old at the time, seeing me on TV, started kissing the TV screen. The member for Badcoe, who was a journalist for a TV station, can remember that, as she put that on the TV. Jax was missing me greatly. That certainly brought me back to reality, and it just goes to show that sometimes we can lose all sense of reality. Both my children and all our grandchildren have been part of my journey in politics, whether local government or state, and it has been part of their lives ever since they have been with us.

During my ministerial duties, I travelled nearly 700,000 kilometres across the state and flew to Mount Gambier, Kangaroo Island, the APY lands, Ceduna and Port Lincoln to see firsthand the environment in these locations. I was also able to travel in excess of 150,000 kilometres across my electorate to see my people during this period of time. I also had the opportunity to accompany various state government ministers, government agencies, local government people and business people to China. This contingent was in excess of 300 people. There were great opportunities achieved during this visit, with many contracts and MOUs being signed.

I also had a great opportunity to travel to Zurich to meet firsthand with the Nyrstar board about the future and other associated opportunities for the Port Pirie smelter, and to visit numerous renewable energy companies promoting the great advantage that South Australia has, particularly Upper Spencer Gulf, with the state leading the renewable technology field.

We were able to improve local government operations in various ways; however, the Local Government Act still needs to be completely reviewed. This is an area that frustrates me, and we did not complete this area. I hope that the new government will look at the act in its current form and revise it to be more friendly and sustainable.

Although we were able to have a review of the education department bus policy, another great issue for many years has been access to regional bus services for schoolchildren. Irrespective of whether they attend government or non-government schools, they need to be able to get to the relevant schools. This is an issue I am talking to the current Minister for Education about, and I hope that we can get it completely resolved. It is an issue that will again be taken up through the parliament, and I like to hope that, in the near future, we will be able to address this anomaly.

Some years ago, centralisation was undertaken for various government agencies, which, in turn, has hurt our original communities. I will be endeavouring to have this government realise that this move is not in the best interests of our regional youth, and we will seek to have this matter further investigated. It is with this in mind that I urge the new government to work with the commonwealth immigration minister to ensure the system for skilled migration allows for more eligible points to be earned if they reside in a regional location in South Australia.

Some years ago, while I was mayor of the Port Pirie Regional Council, I spoke at a large forum on multiculturalism about the issue of skilled migrants being lured to South Australia and additional points being allocated if those skilled people resided in regional locations. This was adopted by the federal government; however, Adelaide became eligible for regional status, allowing for extra points towards their settlement. I urge the state government to look very closely at the current system and to converse with the federal minister about allowing extra points if these skilled workers and their families reside in regional South Australia, not regional Adelaide, which means they get to Adelaide but do not venture farther out into our regions.

I may not have mentioned this earlier, but I sincerely congratulate the new government and give my support to get the best opportunities for my electorate and for the state. Before I close, I would like to reinforce that in the past four years there have been many more opportunities, especially in the renewable energy field and, in particular, the resources sector. With this in mind, I see the Upper Spencer Gulf region, in particular, becoming the renewable capital of Australia and perhaps the world. Professor Ross Garnaut said recently, at a forum in Port Augusta, that the Upper Spencer Gulf region was the best place in the world for renewables, whether it be solar PV, solar thermal or pumped hydro, all with battery storage, and that in the very near future this area would have an abundance of cheap electricity and it would be foolish if manufacturing did not look at establishing something in our region.

With those remarks I will close, but I reinforce my dedication to my electorate over the next four years. I am very positive that our regions will flourish providing we all look after them. Again, I congratulate all the new members here, and my commiserations to the members who were here before and but who did not make it back. I look forward to working with this government and with this parliament to get the best opportunities for my electorate of Frome.