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Jackson Taylor, Inaugural Speech
Legislative Assembly

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Mr TAYLOR (Bayswater) (18:59): Speaker, congratulations on your appointment. I would first like to start by acknowledging the traditional owners of this land and I pay my respects to their elders past and present. Just as Hugh Jackman is the Boy from Oz, I am the boy from Dandenong from humble beginnings who is a long way from home, who stands before you as Bayswater's proud member. It is a profound moment in the life of a 26-year-old, nerves wavering, to deliver my inaugural speech in front of my parliamentary colleagues and those nearest and dearest to me. The moment is certainly not lost on me.

I would first like to congratulate the Premier on a campaign for the ages, one where not a single minute was wasted, and one where Victorians felt heard and valued. Under his leadership, Victoria is and always has been the place to be. Most importantly I owe my being here to the amazing people of the Bayswater district. You have given me the opportunity of a lifetime to be your representative and voice in this Parliament of ours and to be part of this Andrews Labor government. As I begin to allow myself to take stock of this moment and as the dust settles, I can assure you that not once nor will I ever take for granted the gravity of this position you have bestowed upon me. You have placed in me your trust to be your voice inside and outside this building, and I will not let you down.

I am honoured to represent Bayswater, which covers the suburbs of all Bayswater, Heathmont, Kilsyth South, The Basin, parts of Bayswater North, Boronia, Ringwood and Wantirna. The district is unique in that it has a stunning regional feel with views of the rolling foothills and is a matter of 30 minutes from the CBD. It is surrounded by beauty at every turn and characterised by its leafy-green vibe and its friendly, welcoming and diverse community. The area is home to substantial jobs precincts, has major health precincts right on its doorstep and is littered with shopping strips at every corner. I am a proud resident of Wantirna and I would not have it any other way.

I grew up in Dandenong with my mother, Erin Taylor, and my father, David Pearson, and with two siblings—one older, Joshua Taylor, and one younger, Oscar Taylor. I, of course, being the middle child, was in a constant struggle for attention and have constantly been reminded throughout my life that I definitely suffer from middle-child syndrome. Growing up in Dandenong, however, was not always easy. My family lived from week to week. We could not afford many of the luxuries of life. As a child I would ask, 'Why not me?'. This certainly was not unique to my family. There are many people out there struggling, wanting to have their own corner of the world they can be proud of. Each and every day there are families out there making difficult decisions about how to make ends meet and to ensure they can get their kids to school. There are families like this in the Bayswater district, feeling suffocated by the daily machinations of life and worrying how they will make it through to Friday, let alone next year, as my family did. We need to be ensuring that our families, and especially those in lower socio-economic areas, are given every opportunity to thrive.

I certainly do not have all the answers, but one of the great opportunities provided to me was an amazing public education that helped guide me. As a young boy I remember the guidance and care shown in particular by David Crozier, Lynne Greenlees and Anne Pereira, who were amazing educators at Dandenong Primary School. They knew all too well the reality of my home life. I grew up in a family home where I was witness to situations that I would not wish upon any child. Family violence was a weekly occurrence, and as a result members of Victoria

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Police were regular visitors. In addition to this my mother suffered from severe depressive and bipolar disorder throughout her adult life, spending stints in hospital. I remember the constant ups and downs, my mother having the entire house in darkness for months on end and watching her struggle through her mental health illness. It was ultimately her children who were her main support through the years.

Of course all of this was known by the Dandenong Primary staff. Aside from a short time where I was at another school for a number of months when I was placed in foster care, they were everything a child needed them to be. It was through them, through the gift of an education and through the creation of a role that had never previously existed in a play that was well into production so I could become Frank Fox, that I flourished, eventually gaining much-needed confidence. These years in school were formative for me. I could have been so many other things and could have allowed myself to easily feel that life was all too difficult, but through the great privilege that I and others have had in our first-class education system, I was able to walk a different path in life, as it gave me purpose and real direction when all else appeared hopeless.

This is a real reality we and many others in Bayswater still live today. I promise to be a fierce advocate when it comes to improving the lives of young people, especially through investment in education. This is why I am so proud to be a part of this government, which invests record amounts in the future of young people, giving them the best start in life. Let me be only one example of just how powerful that can be.

It is a reality that my family struggled through social issues like family violence, substance abuse and mental health. So too does our state and the area of Bayswater. It deeply saddens me that many parts of Bayswater have the highest rates of family violence incidents in the eastern metro area, that 1321 adult Bayswater residents will experience a severe mental illness every year and that 45 per cent of residents will experience a mental health episode in their lifetime.

While these are merely numbers, behind each and every one of them lies a person, a family, a community. People are suffering, our LGBTIQ community attempt to commit suicide at rates of up to six times that of the general population, women are being killed by their current or former partners weekly and a lot of people are doing it extremely tough, not always getting the help they need. Many of them do not feel comfortable to even begin talking about what it is that they are experiencing. I will be a Member of Parliament that not only talks the talk but walks the walk on these issues, as this Labor government has been doing.

I was so proud to watch from my lounge room the announcement about the Royal Commission into Family Violence and then again when it was announced that every single one of the 227 recommendations would be implemented. I saw that and thought, this is a government which is about people. It listens and it works to change the lives of others for the better. While I do not profess to be a beacon of all wisdom and understanding of these real issues, I have seen it in my personal life as a former member of Victoria Police and as local councillor. The numbers and stories are stark and form part of what is a sad truth about this state and this country. This government is now also in the process of delivering a royal commission into mental health, which is simply a game changer. It is one of the most important issues heard when speaking to people across the electorate, as everybody is touched by mental health in one way or another.

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It can take a lot to admit that you do not have all the answers, and being someone who has been witness to it—now being part of the revolution—moves me, inspires me and emboldens me to play my part to make a real difference.

Throughout my life I have always been someone that gained joy from changing the lives of others for the better. At the age of 19 I joined this great Labor Party because it believes in the same values that I hold dear—a belief in strong health and education systems, a fair go and decent-paying jobs. It is a party of the great union movement, a party which embraces people from all walks of life regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, religion or culture and a party which has a resolute commitment to justice and equality for all. I am so proud to hold these values, and I will fight to see them protected.

I owe a great deal of thanks to the members of Victoria Police, where I recently finished serving to be here today. I am so proud of all members and the work that they do. I know personally the tragic situations that members face on a daily basis. It is one of the most difficult jobs to do, and I hold a great deal of respect for all of you and thank you for allowing me to serve. I also wish to acknowledge and thank the work of all my friends in the emergency services that I worked alongside, from the CFA, MFB, Victoria State Emergency Service and Ambulance Victoria. Our community owes you all a great deal for keeping us safe and doing what it is that you do, which is going each day into the unknown. I have seen the heavy toll that this work takes on those involved, and can I say how proud I am that this government is introducing provisional support for emergency services workers for mental health support. I have seen colleagues struggle, I have seen them lost for hope, and I can tell you now: this will save lives. This is a government which I am proud supports our emergency services workers and our nurses and midwives, because they deserve it and absolutely need it.

I have also been privileged to serve as a councillor in the City of Knox, where I had great opportunities to work side by side with members of the community. One in particular I would like to acknowledge is a local Bayswater resident, Michael Ward. I met Michael and his family at a citizenship ceremony back in 2017, and some months later he picked up the phone and told me that he wanted to walk from Adelaide to Melbourne to raise awareness around the issue of youth suicide. I immediately said I would do everything I could, which included joining him for a day for 40 kilometres on his arduous journey. He ended up raising \$60 000 and played his role in continuing to take away the stigma which still exists around mental health and the issue of suicide. Michael is one example of the many great community persons in Bayswater. I thank my community in Collier ward, the CEO and my councillor colleagues for enabling me to work with that community.

I now want to take a moment to thank the former member for Bayswater, the Honourable Heidi Victoria, who represented the area with honour and humility, and I acknowledge and thank her for her 12 years of service to the community. I wish her the best of success into the future.

In my life there have been many people along the way who have had an impact on me, and it is those people I wish to thank.

To my great friends, the boys from Dandy high, where I went to school, Jack Main, Shane Pacarada and Josh Denholm: thanks for being my best mates and for always being my go-tos.

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To my father, David: we have had a rough road at times, but you have always done your absolute best to support me.

To my two brothers, Oscar and Josh: you are such brilliant people, and I am proud of both of you and could not have done this without your love and subtle—and at times not so subtle—sibling rivalry throughout the years. We have been through a lot, but I know we will always be there for one another.

To my grandparents, who have often been my quasi parents: you have always been there, even during difficult times. You are both brilliant, you are two people that I look up to and you are seated right behind me.

To my beautiful partner, Amy Stephenson: well, what can I say? Thanks for putting up with me. Amy is, you could say, not that interested in politics. She has been an amazing support to me, and I promise to put aside some date nights. I might even let her pick *The Bachelor* for us to watch.

To all my friends and family: it has been a long road and I am sorry for no doubt on many occasions espousing my political opinions in many circles. Thanks for supporting me in what I love, and in turn I will always do the same for each and every one of you.

And to my mother, Erin: Mum passed away over two years ago and before that tragically suffered an acquired brain injury, which left her with no speech or mobility and me as one of her carers. We were best friends. Despite my challenging childhood, my mother was my fiercest advocate. Nobody ever dared to get between Mum and her boys. She was the bear by name and the bear by trade. She is my inspiration, she was my everything, and she did not get everything right, but nor does any parent.

I wish so much that she had been here to see this as I know she would be so proud. Before Mum suddenly passed away there were two things she knew for sure: her boys when they walked into the room—her face would light up—and how to sing along to Fleetwood Mac and Beatles classics. Thank you, Mum, for giving me a chance and for always believing in me. I love you very much.

To the true believers on the campaign: you put your heart and soul into seeing us be successful in Bayswater, because you believe in what this Labor government stands for and you know what it will deliver. I thank each of you. A special thanks to James Gan and Adam Abramovich, who were my campaign managers and, importantly, friends. Thank you.

To my La Trobe friends, Simon Curtis, who taught me at Dandy high not so long ago, Declan High, Aidan Wright, Bill Brindle and Kasuni Mendis: you are such phenomenal people, and I would not be here without your guidance along the way.

Thank you to all my new colleagues, who have been so gracious in their support, and in particular member for Dandenong, the member for Oakleigh and the Honourable Shaun Leane,

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MP, for your amazing support and kindness in what has been a roller-coaster ride for the last few weeks.

I am determined to get to work now, as now is the time to roll up my sleeves and work hard each and every day for our great community, because they deserve nothing less. I will be a fierce advocate for the community and will work with them to deliver on priorities around health and education, and having a greater focus on mental health, family violence and youth issues, as well as being a strong voice for local transport projects.

I am also aware of the reality that there are many who did not vote for me nor Labor. Be assured that I will be a member of Parliament who works for all of you. And I promise this: even if we cannot agree, I will listen.

We each have opportunities in our lives to make a real difference, and here in the halls of Parliament I will not waste a single moment nor take for granted the role I have been given: the honour of being your voice and your humble member for Bayswater. Thank you.

Members applauded.