



**THE HON RICHARD MARLES MP
SHADOW MINISTER DEFENCE
MEMBER FOR CORIO**

GROW BREAKFAST

GEELONG

THURSDAY, MAY 2, 2019

Can I start by acknowledging the Wathaurong people, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet.

Can I acknowledge Christine Couzens the Member for Geelong and there are few greater pleasures in life for me than watching Christine speak and perform and shine. And as a wonderful and remarkable product of this community, she is serving broader Geelong so wonderfully as the Member for Geelong and as a representative of us all in the State Parliament and through that you do us honour. And we very much thank you for that.

Can I acknowledge Bill Mithen from Give Where You Live. Elaine Carbines from G21. Can I acknowledge Councillor Anthony Aitkens. Again a product of this community, a great friend of us all. And very much a champion of the place that he grew up in.

It is a delight. A genuine delight to be here this morning speaking with you.

Generational disadvantage, in urban settings is one of the most intractable problems that we see in Australia today. I don't stand before you feeling like I necessarily have answers to them. But you listen to Christine, what's really clear is that, the part of the answer around questions of generational disadvantage in areas like Norlane and Corio and in Newcomb and Whittington,

is in fact to champion them. To acknowledge the wonder of those communities and not to talk them down. And I think we can all be, in looking for answers and trying to diagnose problems, be guilty of at times, speaking down to communities and talking of them in a way which does create a stigma. And that's a really important message.

It is critical though that we find answers. Because it seems to me the idea that in the context of generational unemployment for example that, a person losing their job in the late 70s is having an impact on their grandchild in 2019, feels profoundly unfair.

It speaks to an idea that the postcode in which you were born is determining your outcomes, irrespective of what then occurs in your life. And it feels like, in the worst case scenario we are on the verge of potentially leaving people behind. Which if we did, would be the first time in our nation's history that, that's been the case.

Actually it's something which has characterised our country. Relative to the United States, relative to the old world countries of Europe, that we have not left people. That intrinsic to the idea of the Australian project is that we bring everyone along with us.

So this actually deeply matters. It matters not just for the people here in Norlane and Corio and it's not unique to here. There are other examples of an around Australia but it matters to the integrity of the nation of which we are all citizens.

Back in 2007, John Eren and I held a summit around employment in the north. And with a simple idea of trying to connect the economic opportunities of the north with the people who live in the north, we came up with Northern Futures.

Northern Futures is not a systemic answer to unemployment in the north. But it has over the period since then changed hundreds of lives. But it is a really important initiative.

Systemic answers to this lie in proper funding of our schools. It lies in decent access to our health system. It obviously lies in the structure of our welfare system. But it's more than that as well. There's a sort of intangible, which we need to bring to the equation, if we are actually going to change realities. And it seems to me that that intangible is the making of the decisions that we care. That as a nation we care. That this is not a set of circumstances that we are going to allow to play out. That we will change it. It's actually at that point, why I think GROW is such a wonderful initiative.

GROW is fantastic in terms of the substantive ideas. Procuring from places of disadvantage. Social investment focusing on the north and yes connecting economic opportunities of the north with the people who live in it. Great substantive ideas, but what underpins it, is a decision to care. Because this is not government architecture, it is a community based initiative.

This is a decision from the entire Geelong community. People who don't necessarily live in Norlane and Corio. People who live in Newtown. That disadvantage here is something to do with all of us. And that as a city we are going to make a decision that we do care and that we are not going to allow this to play out.

And as an organic community initiative, it is genuinely wonderful.

Those certificates that we're about to hand out today which are a number in a series of certificates, are decisions by companies that they care and they are not going to allow this to play out.

And so with that in mind it is just a delight for me to be able to say to you today that if a Shorten Labor Government were to be elected in a few weeks time, we will commit two million dollars to the work of GROW.

We hope it's a significant and important commitment, in terms of enabling GROW to do what it does. But at the end of the day, and Christine knows this and Anthony knows this as well, those of us who are serving in public office, from time to time we get to direct traffic and it is nice to be at a stand up and announce contributions such as I have today.

But really the people who have made the difference, the work that's actually being done, is not us, it's you. It's the people making the commitments today. It's the thinking which gave rise to GROW. It's the decision of everyone in this room to care.

And in making that decision and in the wonderful initiative which is GROW there is actually real hope. I think, real hope. That in a place like Geelong because of the community spirit which we have in a place like Geelong, this is as likely as any place in Australia to be able to crack the nut of the issue of generational disadvantage in our nation.

You know I think there is as much a chance of resolving the issue here in Geelong first as there is any other place in Australia. The fact that GROW is now being rolled out by the State Government in many other places speaks to that idea.

So I thank you. I really thank you for coming up with this.

I thank everyone in this room for participating in it. And for doing so, in a wonderful building. Brent is here today, that has been put together by Bapcare which speaks of the regeneration of this part of the world. It all offers hope.

And when I look at Anthony Aitkens and Christine Couzens, two remarkable products of this community, how can any of us feel anything other than completely and instilled with hope about the future of the North.

Thank you.

ENDS

Authorised by Noah Carroll, ALP, Canberra.