



NORTHERN TERRITORY *of* **AUSTRALIA**

Dr TANZIL RAHMAN MLA

Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

MAIDEN SPEECH

TUESDAY 15 OCTOBER 2024

This extract is taken from the Official Hansard of the Legislative Assembly of the Northern Territory.

In February I was endorsed to run for the CLP and began to transition into my new role, listening to constituents and using my knowledge and skills to piece together solutions from the get-go. As stated earlier, the majority of the constituents are frontline services workers, public servants, small business owners, families and senior members of our community who just want to live the Territory lifestyle in safety. I am privileged to have met a lot of the residents in the electorate through my past work in finance. I am now more privileged to assist them all on a bigger scale.

I understand the cost-of-living pressures, as I have had mortgages, raised my family in the electorate and continue to live there. As we continued to live in the electorate, many of our family, friends and acquaintances raised the issue of crime and antisocial behaviour and the flow-on effects of the rising cost of living. This motivated me to run in the seat of Wanguri and the result of that hard work and determination is me being that voice in parliament today.

When the community is at risk of crime it is no longer acceptable to stand back. The electorate deserves a member who will listen and work with a team that has lived experience and will get the Territory back on track. I am prepared to bring my work, life experience, cultural background and hard work ethic to bring the NT back to the forefront where it belongs on the map as a member of the Finocchiaro CLP government. My promise to the people of Wanguri is that I will not rest; I will work every day to make this place resemble the wonderful Territory I know and love. I will continue to fight and advocate for those who need it.

Many who know me can attest to this work ethic. I have already seen some results in the last few weeks as we began to work from the office at the Hibiscus shopping centre. I know the team at the office will work just as hard as me. I thank my team members in advance; they are led by Jade at the moment.

In closing, there are a few more thank-yous for my family, some of whom were here this morning to present me to this parliament. They have been my biggest supporters. Apolnia, Veby, Yohanes, Faizal, Michael and Benhur stood by me and letter dropped each time I asked. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To my son, Rian Amos Helwend Carlson, you made me the person I am today, fighting for everything I missed out on as a child with parents who were less fortunate. I hope that I have made you proud, as I know you have missed out on a lot as I have worked many hours and will continue to do so, always advocating for others. I hope you see a parent who wants to make this place a better place for you and your future generations.

Last but not least, thank you to my husband, Aaron Carlson, who supported me through this journey. After being together for 25 years, he has stood by me when I have made decisions for our family. He did not agree but trusted all would be good. He encouraged me to be the new voice for the people of Wanguri. He worked tirelessly in the background and continues to do so every day. Thank you for all the early mornings and late nights, and till today nothing has changed. Thank you for letting me be a part of a bigger community and helping those in need.

Madam Speaker, thank you for giving me this opportunity to thank those who helped the people of Wanguri have a new voice. Thank you to the people of Wanguri for trusting me to be their advocate for the next four years. I hope there will be many achievements in this new term to show you all that I am committed to the community.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, let me begin by thanking my colleague the Member for Wanguri for her touching and heartfelt words and for the beautiful cultural ceremony with which she entered this place this morning. I thank all others who partook in a similar ceremony; it is an honour to be witness to those kinds of proceedings.

Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your ascent to the Speakership. I commend our Chief Minister for her inspired leadership in dragging you to the seat and, no less, to the Leader of the Opposition for supporting your nomination. We all repose an enormous amount of faith in you and hope that this will be a well-functioning parliament.

Madam Speaker, colleagues, distinguished guests and fellow Territorians, almost 30 years to the day I first entered this place on 4 October 1994 as a 15-year-old member of the Darwin Schools Wind Symphonic Concert Band to participate in the inaugural sitting of the Legislative Assembly in this Parliament House. I was in awe of this place on that day, and I remain so to this day. I have carried this small commemorative token with me over the many years ever since, interstate and abroad, to remind me of the place of opportunity from which I originate. In that spirit, I am enormously proud and grateful to have the chance to return here as a member of a different sort—as the Member for Fong Lim.

Fong Lim is, by NT standards, a relatively new electorate, having been created only in 2008 as a composite of original inner Darwin and newer northern suburbs. It is named after Alec Fong Lim AM, the first-ever Chinese-Australian Lord Mayor of Darwin, who was awarded the Order of Australia in 1986 for his services to the community and local government.

It has been represented by those across the political spectrum—Hon David Tollner, Jeff Collins and Hon Mark Monaghan. They are three people of longstanding public service in business, the legal profession and the education sector respectively. I pay tribute to them all and their collective contribution to our shared electorate, hoping to build upon their legacy.

That Fong Lim has changed hands electorally is testament to its informed and passionate constituents, whom I have the privilege of engaging with daily. They motivate and inspire me, with their open-mindedness, good humour, willingness to support good ideas and courage to fight for positive change. They are the type of people I am honoured to represent—willing to take chances and take you to task. I thank them for their conversations, support, honesty and even criticisms, without which I would not be here.

Likewise, to the many volunteers and campaigners who have reposed their faith in me, to afford me the privilege of standing in this Chamber today, I say thank you. Those people include Shane Stone, Terri Hart, Fiona Darcy, Carole Miller, Ray Bail, Geoff Hunter, Peter Hopton, Glenda Stripling, Noel Land, Peter Perrin, Chris Foy, John Horgan, Lucio Mattarazzo, Manny Koulakis, Sakib Awan, Penny Tastula, Nathan Lewis, Saifur Rahman, Fahad Alam, Denise Raymond, Kamal Masum, Vic Minchin, Maria Rust, James Perrin, Michael Poulter, Luke Myall, Jason Hanna, Eddie Willoughby-Smith, John Brears, Michelle Dunham, Peter Forrest, Sheila Forrest and Shirley Hooper.

That long but still non-exhaustive and discourteously short list is indicative of a simple truth: I stand on the shoulders of others and would have little to show for myself but for the sacrifice of many. No-one sacrifices more for us, though, than our families, and mine is no exception.

I am indebted above all others to my dear father who cares for me like no other and remains my enduring source of strength. Collectively, though, my parents, uncles, aunts, siblings, cousins and I owe our bountiful lives in Australia to the courage and the tenacity of my late maternal grandparents, Muhammad Nurul Huq OAM and his loyal and loving wife, Mrs Nargis Huq.

My grandfather was an enterprising Bangladeshi hydrologist, who first toured Australia in the late 1960s to work on the Snowy Mountains on a Colombo scholarship. Thereafter, in the aftermath of the war in East Pakistan and via a stint of refuge in India, he migrated to Australia in 1971 with his wife and three children, with the support of two kindly Darwin Rotarians, Peter and Nancy Fuchs.

My grandad taught me much—to appreciate cricket, read widely, cook generously and, indeed, eat heartily, but perhaps most of all he instilled in me the idea that gratitude makes optimism sustainable. Moreover, he helped me to appreciate the virtue of expressing gratitude through service. I am deeply committed to the idea of public service and proud to wear my grandfather's Order of Australia Medal today in his memory and in recognition of his services to multiculturalism.

Thus began Darwin's Bangladeshi diaspora, seeded from just a family of five—Nurul and Nargis; my mother, Nasreen; Uncle Nazmul; and Aunt Nazneen—to today's bustling Bangladeshi masses. It is a classic migrant tale no different from countless others, of course, punctuated by the happinesses, hostilities, hardships and heroism of starting life anew in a new place. What is distinctive and worthy of reflecting upon on this occasion, though, is not the who or the how, but the where in this tale—this Territory to which we all belong and collectively will seek to make an ongoing contribution towards.

In my heart I am a kid from Karama. It is where my father, Jillur Rahman, then an employee of the Northern Territory University library, established our family home in 1981, and where he stubbornly remains to this day. At that time, Karama was a brand-new suburb filled with young, aspirational families. Our house was modest but embedded within a strong community sharing a common favour: security of tenure owing to the munificence of public housing under the then government's Housing Commission.

From that home I enjoyed the luxury of walking a few hundred metres to Sanderson Primary School, the local primary school. Over seven years I gained not just a basic education, but exposure to extracurricular activities, including a quality musical education, the fruits of which I carry through to today.

A short bike ride away, adjacent to my grandparents' place in Anula, I continued on to the pedagogically vanguard Sanderson High School, where I was taught by committed educators of the highest order. Again,

I was exposed to a litany of broad educational opportunities—science fairs, maths Olympiads, sports carnivals, eisteddfods, Beats, debating and oration, performing arts productions, music camps and so much more. It was, by any measure, a privileged education, the depth of which I had no certainty of acquiring in any other part of Australia.

Two figures loomed especially large throughout my schooling, and it would be remiss of me not to mention them specifically. Jan Moore and Nora Lewis, thank you for your past, present and continued pastoral care.

Today I am a denizen of a different locale—Stuart Park, on one end of the vast urban electorate of Fong Lim. My connection to my electorate is nascent but growing daily, not least because, again, I see in it the opportunity of the old and the possibility of the new.

It begins in East Arm and Wishart, encapsulating much of Darwin's strategic land reserves in the Darwin Business Park, the Marine Industry Park, Wishart Estate, Berrimah West and Hidden Valley Estate. It then covers Berrimah Northcrest, a new promised land for young families aspiring to home ownership and community connection, before traversing Coonawarra and winding through Winnellie, the industrial heartland of Darwin. Across the way lies Charles Darwin National Park, the only such location enclosed within a capital city in Australia. Finally, there is the contrast of the old and the new—the tradition of The Narrows juxtaposed with Eaton's modernity and Woolner's serene suburbia, alongside the beauty of Bayview.

It is an electorate of contrasts, and one I am sincerely grateful to represent. It is illustrative of symbiotic harmony and the diversity of Darwin. It is, furthermore, a constituency of prospect, whose aspirations I hope to champion. Nowhere is this truer than in Stuart Park, the historically proud inner-city gateway to the CBD, replete with potential for rejuvenation and growth.

Rejuvenation and growth are constant themes I encountered whilst on the campaign trail, listening to the concerns and frustrations, but also the aspirations, of the people of Fong Lim. Ours is an electorate not immediately associated with natural beauty, civic activity or dramatic development, but things are happening in Fong Lim and opportunity beckons for all Territorians in that regard. Visit Dinah Park on any given day and you will find connections forming amongst community sport. Tipperary Waters has amazing food and views to rival the best of Darwin's offerings. The nooks and crannies of Winnellie offer entertainment and artisan products, not just manufactured goods. Fong Lim will surprise you.

It is a unique electorate and, I would argue, a potential powerhouse location for the Territory from which our next industrial revolution could be propelled. It contains more active businesses and NGOs than all other electorates combined, with quality residential options interspersed throughout, commercial facilities, attractive ready-to-go land and vastly unrealised growth potential.

Potential without commensurate facilitated opportunity is nevertheless hollow. That is why I am proud to be a member of the Country Liberal Party. I am the beneficiary of the opportunity afforded to me by a strong and stable CLP government that for 27 consecutive years delivered equitable access to high-quality public health, housing, education and infrastructure. It is that platform—in the most ethnically, racially and religiously diverse place in the country per capita no less—which laid the foundations for my successes thereafter, interstate and abroad.

I had the opportunity—indeed, the luxury—to earn qualifications at the University of Sydney in music, economics and law under the auspices of people like Professor Mary Crock, Professor Bill Pritchard and the Reverend Canon Dr Ivan Head. Ultimately, I had the good fortune to work as a research fellow, management consultant, government executive, project manager and policy adviser across the globe.

Failure too, though, has featured prominently in my life, never more so than in respect of my doctoral studies. Interrupted by myasthenia gravis, for a long time I felt my DPhil was a mountain that I was trapped on the side of and would never be able to scale. Lost down a crevasse, and forgotten by my expedition team, were many dark years. Eventually though, I freed myself. Then, for better or worse, I stubbornly refused to return to the nadir until, ultimately, I reached the summit and concluded the descent.

I am sincerely grateful for the help and support of those who helped me survive the long journey—Thyrone Hodgson, Tomi Johnson, Ruth Stackpool-Moore, Georgia Costigan, Rory Hill, Rob Campbell, Professor Gordon L Clark, Gordon Cunningham and Mary Smith, amongst many others. I am grateful, moreover, to those same people for guiding me back to Darwin to try in earnest to make a contribution here using the skills and knowledge that I have acquired on my journey to date.

Demography is indeed destiny. It was with that aphorism in mind that I returned here a year ago to work in partnership with others to try to address the demographic decline of this great Northern Territory. To that point it bears reiterating that our current workforce and population prospects were not always thus; rather, in the 40 years since 1983 we have trended from growing at approximately 30% population growth elapsed over a decade to approximately 20% in the 1990s and 2000s to less than 5% in the 2013 to 2022 period. It is an alarming trend, and one that is unlikely to abate without direct intervention.

Certainly that is my professional opinion, based on a life's work thus far, examining welfare reform and north Australia, future directions for Australian immigration policy and competitiveness in the global market for skilled migrants. To put it another way, the Northern Territory is like a swimming pool where the water level is just getting too low to swim in comfortably and the water quality is starting to go a bit funny. Do we put up a shade cloth to slow the evaporation? Do we tackle the plumbing to slow drainage? Do we try to keep turning up the existing taps or simply pray for rain? More pointedly, why does it even matter?

To quote from Hon Shane Stone AC's maiden address to this House:

The fact is that population is the key to the Territory's ... success, growth and eventual statehood.

That sentiment remains as true today as it did when expressed almost 25 years ago.

Fortunately, I now count myself amongst a team of colleagues who share the view that it is time to find new hoses to fill the pool with. The Finocchiaro government is to be lauded in this regard, being the first in the history of this place to overtly acknowledge the importance of addressing sustainable population growth as the key to achieving sustainable NT economic growth.

We collectively recognise the existence of interstate, overseas and diasporic workers with families who could live, work, and contribute to the NT, given the right inducement. Moreover, we are providing new generations the chance to build here for the long term, as was the case for old Territorians. Already, the Finocchiaro government is signalling to market our commitment to enhance liveability, opportunity and upward mobility, through initiatives to turbocharge housing supply and help small business.

Fortune favours the brave and, to quote a freshman colleague, it is 'time for courage'. It is time to welcome people and enhance opportunities to connect them to local communities and activities, knowing that empirically this is what results in long-term retention and better integration outcomes. It is time to provide renewed hope and optimism, and ensure that newcomers once again get a fair go to become multigenerational Territorians.

Fellow Territorians, I come before you not as an evangelist, but as an empiricist, a social scientist and an applied economic geographer, driven by data not by dogma. I am fiscally conservative, socially liberal and economically rational, as was the foundational self-governing legislature of this Northern Territory.

No doubt, we all come to this Assembly with a unique perspective and biases. Nevertheless, I hope a shared aspiration to reduce crime, rebuild the economy and restore the Territory lifestyle permeates amongst us all at some level. We will, of course, differ in our specific progress prescriptions. I trust, though, that we share fundamental altruism in common.

In this regard, it remains incumbent on all of us in this House to protect, promote and advance the aspirations of self-governance, necessarily including a commitment to fiscal responsibility, to ensure opportunity for generations ahead. A collective commitment to raise investor confidence, stimulate population growth, re-imagine revenue models, ensure energy security, target industry support, reduce government wastage, promote market competition and deliver efficient services—these tasks will not be easy in the aftermath of decades of negligence on economic policy.

Fortunately, this government, of which I am a proud member, is making headway already, by addressing our economic reality and eschewing fiscal fantasies, as it must. Why? Because no less than the fate of our self-governing Territory rests upon the rebuilding of our economy.

Undeniably, we live in uncertain times in which the Northern Territory's geopolitical significance is heightened. Geography matters; the Northern Territory matters. We must succeed in restoring economic integrity for the benefit of not only Territorians but all Australians. I believe we can, and I trust we will, under the direction of this new government.

As the concluding maiden speaker on this first day of the 15th Assembly, permit me to say to my fellow members, the class of 2024, that it is an honour to be amongst you. Individually you are all remarkable. Collectively you reflect the depth and diversity of the NT and demonstrate passion and a commitment to public service that I am inspired to follow. Your first speeches give me hope, and I share your determination to work towards making the Territory the best that it can be. Moreover, I am inspired by your common commitment to listen. I believe this will be a parliament that listens to its people, led by a government that listens for the collective good.

I was privileged to be the beneficiary of opportunity gifted to me by this polity. It is why I am driven to ensure we revitalise opportunity for future generations of Territorians. I am yet further honoured to represent a constituency named after Alec Fong Lim AM, the embodiment of Australia's most successful multicultural community. I proudly bear my father's name alongside my eponymous electorate, knowing how much I owe to both.

Thank you to the people of Fong Lim for entrusting me with the opportunity to be of service. I commit sincerely to cooperation, compromise, contest and competition for the greater good, alongside my fellow parliamentarians, for the benefit of Fong Lim constituents. I hope to be worthy of the faith that you have placed in me. Our time here is fleeting, and our opportunity ephemeral. Let us therefore be compelled not by a desire to change the world, but rather to improve the socioeconomic conditions of existence for Territorians with whom we share our Territory journey.

Mr YOUNG (Daly): Madam Speaker, I congratulate everyone on their maiden speech. Welcome to Parliament House; it is an honour and a privilege to serve the people of the Northern Territory, but most importantly the constituents whom you serve.

I congratulate the CLP government on its election win and welcome our new Independent and Greens members. Welcome and congratulations to the first-ever Greens member. I look forward to working with you both and our colleague Yingiya Guyula. Welcome and thank you for your maiden speeches.

I firstly acknowledge the Larrakia people as the rightful custodians of this land and extend an acknowledgement to all traditional custodians across the Northern Territory and Australia.

I also acknowledge the other four Aboriginal members who sit on the floor today: from the Territory Labor team, the Member for Arnhem, Selena Uibo; the Member for Gwoja, Chansey Paech; and the Member for Arafura, Manuel Brown; and the Independent Member for Mulka, Yingiya Guyula.

As a proud Yaegl man from the small coastal town of Yamba in Northern Rivers, New South Wales, my connections lie elsewhere. But since moving to the Territory, I have felt a strong affinity to this beautiful place. Like many other Territorians, I made the choice to live and work here. It is my honour to stand in the 15th Assembly as the re-elected Member for Daly.

I extend my thanks to the Assembly and the Legislative Assembly staff for entrusting me with the Office of the Speaker in the 14th Assembly. It was an honour to serve the community and parliament in this capacity. I am sure that the Member for Araluen will carry out this role with respect and fairness. Madam Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment.

I am equally honoured to stand here as the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for Territory Labor, under the leadership of my good friend Selena Uibo and as a shadow minister for a number of key portfolios. Every day I intend to work my hardest to represent all Territorians in this Assembly by holding the CLP government to account on its commitments.

I thank the Northern Territory Electoral Commission and its teams for their hard work in carrying out mobile polling across the Daly electorate during the last election. Like other bush seats, it is a vast electorate, but making sure that every constituent has had the chance to make their voice heard is a fundamental right in our democracy.

I was heartened with the increased turnout across the Daly electorate, but, unfortunately, less than 45% of enrolled voters in the Territory's bush seats cast a vote. It is a fundamental matter of equity that people in the bush are given the same access and opportunity to have their voices heard as urban voters, be they in the Daly, Barkly, Gwoja, Mulka, Namatjira or Arnhem electorate. The people of the bush will turn up when given a reasonable amount of time and education. I look forward to working with this government and the Northern Territory Electoral Commission to improve the turnout at forthcoming elections.