

2017 Election Manifesto

- LEONA ROBERTS -

Standing for the Stanley Constituency



In introducing myself, let me begin by saying that I am married to David and we have two children – Nick (21) and Deanna (8). I was born in Chile in 1972, but have lived in the Islands since I was three years old. On my mother's side, my family arrived with Governor Moody in 1842, and I am proud that my children are seventh generation Falkland Islanders.

My career has been varied – from junior reporter at Penguin News, to the Government Printing Office after the birth of my son, and then spending 14 years running the museum, the culmination of which was the project to relocate to the Dockyard. I left that post last year to take some time out and re-evaluate my priorities. I currently work part-time at Falklands Radio.

As a very ordinary Islander I have no great wealth, no business interests, industry ties or entrenched connections. Although I have always lived in Stanley, I have deep affection for the Camp and my interests do not end at the town boundaries. If elected I will be absolutely committed to working for the good of our entire community. I will listen to your opinions and work for you and with you to build a country of which we can all be proud.

My Vision for the Falklands:

I have great passion and belief in our Islands and am convinced that we must demonstrate confidence in our future and invest in the infrastructure that is so essential to our growth. We cannot allow our public services to reach the stage where they are barely getting by, often with obsolete equipment, and watch the civil service fall apart under ever-increasing pressure and lack of financing.

We should, however, avoid creating a society focussed purely on wealth – the value of personal wellbeing must also be recognised. Along with creating high quality services which will meet our needs well into the future, we must protect our natural and cultural heritage, value and strengthen our sense of community and identity, and build a country that is self-reliant, forward-looking and inclusive.

This is a critical time for the Falklands and many challenges lie ahead. The future holds little in the way of guarantees but we Islanders will be here regardless and we should continue to aspire to be a happy and peaceful society, with good living standards supported by a well-maintained infrastructure and strong links with the outside world.

I am pleased to offer you my thoughts on some of the many issues that we face.

Population:

- Population growth is essential to allow our country to develop. We must actively build the workforce we need and commit to upgrading local skills through apprenticeships, mentoring and re-training.
- Immigration and work permit systems should be streamlined to allow for flexibility and discretion, while maintaining control over numbers to ensure that our limited services are not overwhelmed.
- We should continue to aspire to increase the population in Camp. We need to look at better financing for homes and improvements, and recognise that this community relies upon good transport and communications.
- Newcomers must be properly introduced to the Islands and connected with ordinary families if we hope for them to understand our society and become fully integrated in the long term.

Social Well-being & Education

- There are many health issues with the potential to cause us serious problems in the future and we must begin tackling these now. I would like to see the steps below considered, in the knowledge that though they may cost us today, this cost will be outweighed by the long-term savings of a healthier community:
 - leisure and sports facilities expanded and the latter ideally offered without charge
 - tax breaks for households with productive vegetable gardens, polytunnels, allotments etc.
 - community gardens/greenhouses where knowledge, experience and produce can be shared
 - continuing to build awareness, acceptance and treatment of mental health issues, including at schools
 - reintroduction of the pound-a-day scheme as a 'travel' fund for holidays locally and overseas, for international sporting participation, medical reasons etc. The health and social benefits of travel cannot be over-stated and I believe each Assembly should address this at the start of their term.
- We should continue to strive for excellent educational standards, allowing every young Islander the chance to fulfil their potential – be it academic or practical – and look at extending free education into nursery years, offering high quality care and equal opportunity to the children of families from all backgrounds.
- I believe it's time we looked at a purpose-built education campus in an area that would allow for further expansion in the future. A huge investment but a long-term solution and an investment in our future.
- Lifelong learning must be encouraged and become rooted as the norm in our society.
- More employers (including FIG) should consider flexible working arrangements to encourage a healthy work-life balance, creating strong workplaces but also allowing them to get the best out of their employees.

The Natural Environment:

- Our natural environment is at the heart of who we are and we must ensure that the country we pass on to our children is intact and healthy. Respect for and protection of our natural resources and our surroundings must not be an optional extra, but should be considered in all our decision-making.
- A formal Legacy Fund, separate from central government, will help offset environmental impacts from industry.
- We cannot avoid the issue of waste management. Much of the groundwork has been done and now we must be innovative in our solutions, even if the best we can hope for it that schemes are cost-neutral.
- Control of invasive species, better management of the Common and beginning a long-term process for limiting import of single-use plastics are among other issues to be addressed.

Finance & Investment:

- We are in an enviably strong financial position and there is great merit in the plan for a Sovereign Wealth Fund. However, failing to maintain and improve basic infrastructure is false economy and I have been frustrated by the lack of investment in this respect. The age of temporary solutions needs to end.
- Government seems to have become risk-averse. Of course options must be fully considered, but decisions do need to be made. Things will sometimes go wrong, but “blame culture” should make way for “just culture” whereby we do not hide from our mistakes, but learn from them and move on. When decision-making we must not undervalue or overlook local knowledge and experience.
- Uncertainty over air-links poses a serious threat to our future. We should look at alternative options, including the potential for developing Stanley Airport. This would be a massive investment but would potentially create a service of our own – it merits exploration and we may need to use our imaginations. In the meantime, we must apply pressure to resolve the issues at Mount Pleasant before irreparable damage is done.
- I would like to see work on developing Multi-Stakeholder Initiatives and think-tanks, drawing from the tremendous amount of knowledge and experience already within our community, but absolutely key to the future is vision, confidence and decisive leadership from the Legislative Assembly and civil service.

Business and Industry:

- Our economy is heavily reliant upon natural resources, so responsible management is essential. However, these resources remain susceptible to factors beyond our control and we must look to expand into new areas. The Development Corporation should be encouraging innovation and supporting start-ups, particularly those which can be operated from Camp. Overly bureaucratic processes which stifle development must be overhauled.
- Largescale capital investment such as we have seen from some of the private sector is to be commended and should be further enabled, as should moves to upgrade services to meet internationally accepted standards.
- We may not yet be able to justify a full-scale port development, but FIPASS at least must be replaced with a facility that meets our needs.
- Along with reliable physical links to the rest of the world, we must have effective telecommunications. Poor internet restricts commerce, industry and society in general. The regulator must be empowered to bring about the improvements we need. Opening up Island-wide intranet would be a good start.
- Brexit will have impact, but until the UK’s negotiations are complete we cannot know to what degree. We must prepare for worst case scenarios, lobbying internationally and using the experience within our private sector.

The Civil Service:

- Year upon year of cuts and savings have left many government departments in very poor condition, with staff overstretched, stressed or simply worn out. We cannot ask staff to repeatedly take on additional responsibilities to cover for lost posts - this only perpetuates the problem. The word ‘broken’ crops up all too frequently.
- Too many sections have lost long-serving staff and are now caught up in demoralising cycles of recruitment and review, and feel little to no sense of ownership over change – this cannot continue.
- We must improve recruitment and induction and make sure that the experience of existing staff is not overlooked in favour of re-writing systems. Acceptance of local knowledge would have saved costly mistakes.

International Diplomacy:

- Argentina will continue to attempt to stifle our growth and relationships with other nations. We can never be complacent and must remain steadfast in our right to exist as a nation and to exercise the right to self-determination as enshrined in the UN Charter. The referendum made our wishes clear and this should be acknowledged by the international community.
- I welcome the *persona non-grata* list and the ability to refuse entry to those who break the laws of our country. However, I would urge that we do not react to flag-waving antics. For 74 days that flag brought fear and death to our Islands; it has no power now and never will again. We should not give those individuals the satisfaction of knowing that we feel either anger or fear at their pathetic attempts to intimidate us – that is playing into their hands. The moral high-ground can be difficult to maintain, but it where we have the right to stand; it helps make our case internationally and is one of our most powerful weapons against Argentina.
- We should continue our programme of international diplomacy - sharing our story with the rest of the world and correcting Argentina's ridiculous claims. We allow their lies go unchallenged at our peril.
- I would like to see this programme expanded to include more non-elected representatives of all ages and backgrounds. Not only does this educate the outside world, but it provides vital experience and moments of great pride and inspiration for Islanders.
- All that said – we must not allow ourselves to be defined by Argentina or by their act of violence in 1982 – there is so much more to us than that and we must never forget it, just as we must never forget the sacrifices that were made to restore our freedom. We honour those who made that sacrifice by standing strong and shaping a future that is positive, brave and true to who we are.

Even if you do not agree with my views, I trust that I may at least have given you something to think about. If elected, I pledge to listen to advice and carefully consider information that comes before me. I can claim no particular expertise, but am passionate about the Falklands and ultimately will do my absolute best to serve you with integrity, working with confidence and vision towards a bright future.

You are very welcome to contact me to discuss these or any other issues.

Leona Roberts.

Telephone: 22172 - E-mail: leonabob72@gmail.com