

Transcripts: The Independents

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Ep1: Zali Steggall | Independent for Warringah

Zali Steggall: I think this is why Warringah has inspired other electorates. We've all had enough of the smear and fear of the business as usual politics. Everyone needs to remember. The more we pull back the curtain, get people involved, people will question it, and people will change it.

Gretchen Miller: Zali Stegall there. And hello, welcome to The Independents, a podcast from Climate200. I'm Gretchen Miller. And in this series, we're meeting a collection of smart, experienced, and savvy people who are working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the independent candidates who will be standing against various currently government-held seats. Key drivers for these independents are climate action and its intrinsic economic opportunities. Plus, a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

Today, a slight variation to our theme. Our guest is currently a sitting member, and an inspiration and role model for political renewal: Zali Stegall. She's the former Olympic champion skier turned barrister, who, in 2019, overturned a former prime minister, Tony Abbott, who had held the Sydney Northern beaches seat of Warringah for 25 years. When she won, Zali sent cheers across the nation. And I admit to being a bit of a fangirl.

It's now three years since that moment, and I began by asking her to describe the lovely site where we sat to talk: Manly Dam, on the unceded land of the Guringai people. It used to be a freshwater catchment area for the manly area but hasn't been for many years. It's now a beautiful sanctuary with lots of swans and birds and great running tracks and mountain bike riding and just great family recreation.

Gretchen: Do you come here often, to coin a phrase?!

Zali: This is a regular spot for me. So my active meditation is trail running and I very much enjoy coming out and running in the bush along the trails, hearing the noise of the cicadas and just getting away from things.

And we are living in a very fast-paced world. We're very busy. And also we have big social problems. So, it is important to come back out and recharge your batteries, which was something that I find I can do out here.

It's also a really good reminder of what you're fighting for. You know, when we talk about ensuring we have balanced policies around climate, around transition around what kind of a society do we want to be in the future? What kind of world do we want to leave our kids? I come out to enjoy areas like this, to remind myself of exactly how important it is that we leave areas like this untouched or at the very least protected our kids and future generations.

Gretchen: I wonder when climate became an issue for you personally, when you first started to think, hang on a minute, I'm worried about this.

Zali: Look, I've been aware of global warming for some time coming from a background of Alpine skiing. Obviously, you look at the seasons and the changes over the course of years. I used to train on glaciers in Europe and so the gradual melting of glaciers was always a pretty big topic of concern and changing weather patterns.

So I was aware of it, but, you know, I think as for many people you have kind of trust and faith in government that they've got the science, they've got all the warning signs and they're going to act on the science and they are going to take the measures that are necessary to keep our society safe and prospering.

And it was, I think, gradually that I realised that, in fact, it was the complete opposite. What was happening, that the question around climate and around following the science was being distorted for political gain, especially by the previous member for Warringah. He saw it as sport, as in that it was a power play, a game, to win the argument. And to me, I guess, as I got older and my kids, you know, I'm thinking of the future and what kind of legacy we're leaving them, I was more and more confounded by how much of government decisions are not done because it's right, but because there's something to be gained for those in power or their self-serving decisions. And to me, that's intrinsically wrong. So that was my motivator.

I was never an activist. I was never: "chain myself to a tree." I have never attended, before entering politics, had never attended a march. And then as a barrister, your job is to represent your clients, not for your views or your personal opinions to take precedence. So again, I felt it was very important that the "me" should fade into the background. The 2019 election was when I really felt like it wasn't good enough to be a bystander anymore. So that's when I felt it was time to step up and put the skills that I have my experience very, varied experience, to good use to actually advocate for what's right. And what's better.

Gretchen: The fact is, is that you guys, as independents, have not climbed up the political pole, you've got an array of lived experience. How valuable have you found that to be?

Zali: I actually take issue with the idea that you can have career politicians, because I think they are lacking in life experience, in business, whatever other fields may be.

Gretchen: Human connection as well, surely engagement with variety of ways of living.

Zali: If you think of the democratic model and where democracy arose from, it was more a matter of people who have developed a certain level of achievement in their community, they reach a certain point whereby how they give back to their community is by representing them. And to be in a position to do that means you have to develop the skills, the experience, the capability, to represent a wide variety of views, and empathise and understand problems and challenges and be focused on finding solutions. I mean, at the end of the day, we are here to try and find solutions and put forward plans that will take us through the next decade and to 2050. Right?

Gretchen: So, when you say the 2019 election, did you go okay: "Wow. Better get going." Or did you start thinking about it a couple of years before?

Zali: No, no, I had always thought that a possible career path would be to enter politics one day because I felt passionately about what was right and doing the right thing. Because I felt like I had the skills to do that. And I wasn't intimidated by the prospect of politics, or the arena of politics, having come from sport and law and the bar. But the question was the right opportunity and when was the right time. And, for me the growing sense of disquiet was the 2016 US election where Hillary Clinton was beaten by Trump, you know, an extremely qualified woman versus an extremely unqualified and inappropriate man.

And regardless of political persuasion, I really felt like that was such an example of merit and qualification not being given the credit: it was an outcome being manipulated. Then I looked at the 2017 same-sex plebiscite, and again, time and time again, the previous member for Warringah was just showing himself to be interested in the power of personality, politics. He was interested in power for himself, not for what was right.

Gretchen: I wonder what kind of shift you've seen in the electorate when you decided to stand and consequent to being elected?

Zali: well, I think you have to appreciate the journey that people's awareness of the issues has been on, right. You know, concern about climate change has been there for 20 years, but every one comes at it, I think, at a different pace and differently. And it, it suddenly when certain maybe events occur or realities sink in that people become more and more accepting of the need to transition and the need to transition faster.

Gretchen: was there a galvanising moment for the community?

Zali: I don't think I can speak for the whole community. I think the community grew more and more dissatisfied. I think there is a push from the status quo in the major parties to keep people out of politics. You know, they want people to think politics is a nasty, dirty business, that it's a nasty environment that you don't really want to come and be involved with, you know, we're the least worst option that you should back, come every three years. They don't want you to look at it and they don't want you to question it. So, people are busy, and so I think it does happen that people disengaged with the process.

2019, we were able to succeed because a lot of people had done the groundwork before me, right? for the last sort of six years people in Warringah had been growing more and more dissatisfied with Tony, with his position on climate, on integrity on women. And they had been building a tribe, right, getting people connected with one another that also felt disenfranchised. So I think for Warringah, it was a combination of moments where the disquiet around Tony's views on climate, on women on more progressive policy and opportunities in business was growing louder. But then the problem is always opportunity, right? Every three years, people will only be able to vote for whoever is on that voting card. They can't make up a choice. So, you have to have an option that represents the values that talks to the electorate. And I think that was maybe what was missing. It was growing. We saw a rise of the vote for independent and minor parties in 2016. And then by 2019, there had been enough work in the community to mobilize that sentiment.

Gretchen: How are you and your community working together now as a team for representation?

Zali: Yeah. Look obviously succeeding in independent campaign at the election was getting on the start line. You know, a lot of people viewed that as the finish line that you'd won. But for me, that was day one, you know, that was the start line. Because then you have to prove to your electorate that this is a worthy experiment that, that you are going to represent them.

And I always felt that look, I had three years to prove myself to prove to Warringah, that I was worthy of their trust. And so for me, I very much viewed it as: I am only one vote of the 105,000 votes of Warringah. And so I wanted to make sure I consulted regularly. So pre-COVID of course, we had a lot of forums where the community is invited to come and ask questions and tell me their views. We did a lot of online forums, once we couldn't do an in-person. We post, prior to every Parliamentary sitting, we post the daily show schedule so that people can give me feedback about the legislation that's due to be debated.

Gretchen: What happens with that? Cause that sounds really interesting.

Zali: Well, I mean, this is where ironically, you know, people talk about the negatives of social media, but there are many positives. Of course, the positive of social media is it enables quite a direct conversation to occur very quickly. So we only get notified of the government's agenda for parliament on the Friday afternoon before the sitting Monday. So, it's not much notice and that's essentially the legislation the government intends to bring on for debate. And because the government has a majority, they control what comes on for debate.

And so often it will be legislation that people have a strong view about. So by putting that up on social media and get comments back - I either get emails to the office or I get comments on social media, I can very much assess the mood in relation to the legislation, but generally, I've already done the work as well in terms of writing to groups that might be impacted. I have a dedicated team of staff and volunteers. Who are really committed to giving people a response very promptly.

We have regular discussions as a team about the queries that are raised by constituents. And obviously, I am across all the views being expressed. You know, they're consistent with my policy, but I obviously can't answer 40,000 emails. So my team is part of it, but it's important for people to know my team are all locals. We are all here, Northern beaches residents, or North Shore Sydney residents who feel strongly about the issues. No one on my team is here

because they hope to be promoted up to the prime minister's office, for example, right? It's not like a party machine. Everyone is here because they genuinely believe in the policies, they believe in the issues and they want to make a difference on those issues. So, I think that's what comes across that this is not just about me. I'm the spokesperson for the team that this is about much more than just me.

Gretchen: And so you're on the crossbench, so how you vote matters, not just for your community, but also nationally, how do you balance those responsibilities?

Zali: I take very seriously the responsibility of every vote. It's an incredible privilege and responsibility to be in that chamber passing legislation that will impact the lives of millions of people. So on my website, I publish the kind of questions and considerations I put behind every bill. And that is, is it good law? Has there been good consultation? How will it impact Warringah and Australia as a whole? What submissions has there been? What consultation has the government done? Have they been forthright with the information they hold to justify the legislation?

So there's always a lot of questions you need to ask before you just go and vote. And what I've been most shocked about is how little engagement many party MPs have with legislation. They simply follow what they're told to do. And this is both sides. Labor will decide in their caucus room. They will vote on legislation at times, but mostly they go as a block. And then the Coalition will tell their backbench MPs at their party room meeting: "right, this is what's happening," and off they go.

And so often I'm in the chamber and there are MPs they're chatting about the weather, they're chatting about the dinner party. They have no idea what they're voting on. There's even been instances of backbench MPs, Coalition, MPs who have spoken on legislation because they'd been handed a speech written by the prime minister's office with all the talking points that they have to say, that was actually the wrong legislation - that was legislation we voted on the week before. So it just shows a lot of MPs are not engaging with the process. They're trusting their party machine, but I don't think that is taken seriously enough. The responsibility you do have to your constituents.

Gretchen: this isn't democracy, is it? I mean, it doesn't feel like democracy to me.

Zali: I think the party system has corrupted democracy. Because essentially a party MP is basically a proxy vote to the legislation that's decided upon by a very small number of people that are in the prime minister's office or a very, you know, under Rudd it used to be called the kitchen cabinet.

And I think Morrison has the same thing. He has a kitchen cabinet that decides. I've had backbench coalition MPs ask me what's the government's position on this issue when I've tried to raise their interest in being concerned about bad legislation and they just, they don't, they just don't know.

Gretchen: They actually don't know? Ok, I want to change direction a little bit here. Those who are running as independents and there's, you know, there's a loose relationship between you, I think,

Zali: Can I say one of the things that people are overlooking is it would be easier for us to be a party. So the irony is, and I've researched this and I've gotten legal advice: there are benefits to being a party that we are not taking advantage of by electing to be community-backed independence, rather than part of that party. So what no one is saying is it's not like there is a greater accountability step in becoming a party. In fact, the party puts a cloak around the disclosure requirements. And so when government and MPs are trying to, allude to connection or that we appear to be aligned, the irony is, by staying community backed independents we are holding ourselves to a greater level of scrutiny and accountability than any MP in a party.

Gretchen: What has courage meant to you in the political context? Which you've raised from the past and was clearly an important part of your impressive career as an athlete, and as you moved to train as a lawyer and a barrister and then to stand as an independent?

Zali: against a pretty wily, wily and experienced politician. I know. I mean, Tony was certainly a daunting prospect.

It's an interesting one. I think, look, right from when I was a kid, I've always had a very ... I'm always up for the challenge. So whether that's courage, bravery, or maybe naivety I don't know, I've always been up for it. Because I always feel what's the worst that can happen of a decision to have a go at something. The worst that can happen is you fail, so what? what's the big deal? I do think when you get to the end of your life, you will judge the successes of your life by the things you've tried, not by the things you haven't been brave enough to have a go at.

You know, when I was nine, I had a coach told me that: look, the other athletes were all a little bit more talented than me and like, I was prepared to work hard, but I'd have to accept that I maybe I wouldn't be as successful as they would, in my skiing career. And that was like a red rag to a bull, as you can imagine.

And so I walked away from that going: "I'll show you." You know, when I said I wanted to go the Olympics for Australia, you know, go to the bar and be a barrister, cause again, the, you know, the legal world is a fairly patriarchal environment, you know, the bar is not an easy place to crack and succeed.

All of those sort of decisions I've made for challenges. None of them are easy, but it's because they're not easy that they're so much fun to work towards.

Gretchen: and that determination and those skills that you developed as an athlete and as a barrister, have you had to sort of change your approach in politics or is it just a matter of being who you are and refusing to accept some fairly entrenched practices?

Zali: I think I've been pretty true to who I am. So I haven't been afraid to call the prime minister out and call the government out or call the opposition out when their standard is really falling short of expectations.

Wanting to be world champion, going to the bar you know, and coming to being a member here in independent for Warringah, as an electorate that had been conservative for so long, had been loyal to Tony Abbott for so long. All those things didn't daunt me, just as the challenge around climate policy doesn't daunt me. Because I do think once we accept what the goal

needs to be, we can work our way there. We can work our way to good legislation and to good outcomes.

Gretchen: So talk to me about being courageous in that sense. I mean, I'm thinking about despair and people who are resigned and kind of given up, there's a lot of people who are very put off by the political process, they've observed who care deeply about the Australian landscape, the flora and fauna. And I know that Warringah is very rich in all of those things. How have you motivated and encouraged that community? How have you been part of the catalyst of courage in this community?

Zali: Well, I think people respond well to a plan and respond well to a goal. And I think for people if you're giving into despair, it's ultimately the easiest thing you can do. It's a cop-out because, at the end of the day, it's saying "I've run out of ideas of how to actually try and be engaged with the problem and fix it."

And to me, issues around protecting our environment, our quality of life, climate, these are things that you can just never quit. These are the very basics. And so not every approach is going to work, but it's also recognizing that anything worth achieving will take time and it takes hard work, that's just the way it is. So for me, it's been very important, I think, for the community to come up with solutions and approaches that are national, but also local. What are the things you can do? The small things, the small changes you can do that will help your state of mind, your positivity, your engagement.

The more people feel empowered to be involved. The more positive they feel about possibilities of outcomes and how can they move the dial?

Gretchen: So that's a virtuous circle you're talking about.

Zali: I think so. Yeah. I think at the end of the day, it's one step at a time that you will get change to be achieved. And look, I guess the best analogy I can also give is my pastime is trail running, right? I do a hundred kilometre events. It is hard work, right. I don't just think: "all right, I'll get out of bed today and do a hundred kilometres," but it is the product of training. It's a product of commitment, it's planning. And when you're in it, you get through each section at a time and you have to adapt and you have to change your approach. But if you believe in your capacity to get there, you keep working towards that outcome. And I think that's what we can do. I think that's what people are responding to here, in Warringah. And I think this is why Warringah has inspired other electorates. We've all had enough of the smear and fear of the, you know, business as usual politics. Everyone needs to remember. The more we pull back the curtain, get people involved, people will question it and people will change it.

Gretchen: And having gone behind the curtain yourself, is that what, what you suspected, is it what you've observed? So has that made you even more staunch?

Zali: I still don't quite view myself as a politician. I view myself just as a, you know, a skier and a lawyer and local mum, really. But I look, I would say the best and the worst of my expectations have been met by Canberra.

As in, the best of what I thought was possible by entering politics is there. For example, we just got the Pep11 proposal for a gas licence off the coast from Newcastle to Manly cancelled

because of community pressure, because of pushing it. So to me, that's the best of outcomes where what we're here for is showing results. Or I've been able to help hundreds of people in the community around COVID exemptions, you know, and actually physically helping people. We saved over a hundred female athletes and their families from Kabul, right? So their lives were changed. So that is the best of outcomes of what I thought could happen by getting into politics. The worst is the bad legislation, the bad decisions, the corruption that there is in the government at the moment, the lies that come out of the Prime Minister. To me, that is the worst. But it hasn't surprised me.

Sadly, I didn't, I had low expectations of the moral standards or the moral compass of current politicians and current government. And sadly, my low expectations have been met. It's interesting. There's a lot of sledging that happens in parliament. So whereby members of backbenchers will be sitting in the periphery of someone speaking and will try and call out and distract them by making allegations while they giving a speech or doing something in parliament.

Gretchen: So that rather than actually paying attention to what the legislation...

Zali: Yeah. Yeah. There's definitely... I think that is the arena to me, it's real schoolboy stuff.

But look, I've also, you know, I've been at the start of races where we're playing mind games with each other to put the other person off their game, and I've been at a bar table in court, in front of a judge with counsel for the other side, you know, with a bit of sledging because they again think that will put you off your game.

So. I'm not precious in that sense of: I appreciate the different adversarial environments bring out adversarial behaviour, but I think we need to be very mindful that that never tips over to misogyny and gender bias and disrespect. And I think the current batch of, mostly men in parliament, have lost touch with what respect means, what respectful debate looks like and what is appropriate behaviour from people in the Australian parliament.

You know, we do not have a professional code of conduct in the Australian parliament. And I think that is entirely unacceptable. We should have as parliamentarians a duty that we not bring the parliament of Australia into disrespect. Parliamentarians have no such obligation to the Australian constitution or the Australian government that we should respect and uphold our constitution and not bring it into disrepute. And I think there is a cultural misogyny in parliament that has to be called out, that has been called out in 2021. And I, for one, as long as I'm there, won't let, it come back in.

Gretchen: What will you be bringing from your electorate should you be elected again for another three years? What will you be looking to do in a second term?

Zali: Well, I will very much be looking at continuing on with the work, which I hope people recognize I've been doing for the last three years, which is bringing forward the power of balance to decision-making right.

Where we look at, is this a sound decision how will it in fact impact people? Is it good legislation? Is it ethical?

People talk about the balance of power the independence might challenge the balance of power in government, but I very strongly feel independents will bring the power of balance back into decision-making. And that I think is a really important distinction. So for me, this next 47th parliament we need to legislate our transition to net zero.

We need to put in place mechanisms so that good policy and expert opinion is valued and given the appropriate weight it deserves. So, for me, the climate change bill is an absolute must that we should pass that legislation. It will ensure we have a balanced transition.

We need a federal integrity commission. There's no doubt I have great concerns about the gross misspending of public funds at a time of record debt on short term political gain over good, good investment decisions.

Gretchen: And that gets back to integrity.

Zali: Oh well, it's corruption at the end of the day, spending of public funds, for a purpose other than the public good, is corruption.

And if it's for political party gain that is not public good. Public good is identifying the merit, the need in communities and ensuring all communities have access to the services they need to be healthy vibrant and prosper because at the end of the day, with all communities productive and prosperous, all of Australia does better.

So when what we see is, and some people say, "oh, look, pork barrelling, it's always happened. What's the problem with that?" But the problem is if you go and build a hospital in an area purely to buy political votes, but not where there is a greater need for that hospital, for example, then in another community, where there is actually a need, there then won't be the budget to build the hospital where it actually is needed and it means the health system in that area might be overwhelmed. It means that the community will break down because the health needs aren't being met. So pork-barreling is corruption.

Gretchen: One last question as quite a role model for the latest iteration of meaningful independent action in Australian politics, what would you tell would-be independents campaigning to join you on the crossbench, that you've learned about the business of being an indie, and standing for your community?

Zali: I think: be disciplined. Like, it's a big part of my life is discipline because I don't believe anything is achieved lightly by luck or by chance. It takes work. The forces of the status quo, the political parties will try and put you off your game. They will try and besmirch. They will try and make allegations. I think: be very clear to the electorate about what you're standing for and why you're doing it. I think the independent candidates that are stepping forward at the moment are very impressive, capable people. We are talking about candidates who are wanting to give back to their communities by representing them. This is not a career plan of promotion, and gaining power. They are not career politicians. They are professional women who have shown themselves to be strong, capable, and hardworking in their spheres. And so, they should be the qualities that electorates want in the people that are representing them.

Gretchen: Zali Stegall. Thank you so much for joining us on The Independents, it's been just a pleasure to meet you and chat in this way.

Zali: Thank you!

Gretchen: Zali Stegall, independent member of parliament for Warringah here with us on the independence, a podcast from climate 200. And you can learn more about Zali, and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, zalisteggall.com.au. And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election. And please share the love with your family and friends. Let them know where they can find more one on one deep dive conversations with standing independent candidates across the nation. I'm Gretchen Miller. It's been great to have your company, see you next time.

Ep2: Monique Ryan | Independent for Kooyong

Monique Ryan: I will be someone who will be able to take courageous decisions and to be bold, fierce. I might be a bit fiery at times, but I will be someone who will represent the people of Kooyong with integrity. And I can have hard decisions. I'm thinking about situations at work, where I've had to tell people that the kids are going to die, and then pick them up off the floor, or follow them when they storm out of the room and out of the hospital.

And so I do probably have a strength of character that would equip me well for this role. I have many faults and things as well, but in terms of the qualities that people would want from their local member, hhh I think that those are the things that I can offer.

Gretchen Miller: Dr Monique Ryan there, independent candidate for the seat of Kooyong and we're here in Fairview Park, Hawthorne, with her dog Alfie.

Hello, I'm Gretchen Miller, and welcome to The Independents!

In this series, Climate 200 brings you some of the smart, experienced and savvy people, working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the Independent candidates standing on platforms of climate action, and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity, and accountability.

Monique grew up in her electorate, studied medicine at the University of Melbourne, became a paediatric neurologist and until recently was a Director of Neurology at the Royal Children's Hospital. And she's become very attached to this local park - I asked her why she loves it so much.

Monique: I love the fact that it's on the Yarra and then I come down here sometimes, twice a day with the puppy and it's never the same. The Yarra's never the same. And, and it's very beautiful. It's a calm place. It's a place with big sky. It's a place where I feel, I guess, relaxed. And to some extent at peace. I often run into friends here. We have happy times watching the dogs who absolutely love it.

And you know, I think we've all, especially in Melbourne with the prolonged lockdowns that we've had over the last couple of years, the value of community and just your local places - it's

never been more apparent to us as it is now. I don't think I'd ever really appreciated the natural beauty of these sorts of parks and how important they are, until the last couple of years, and not being able to go more than five k's from home almost all the time. It's meant a lot to us to be able to come to this sort of place.

Gretchen: Monique and I decamp to her living room to escape a windy Melbourne day. I ask her about the lateral leap from running a paediatric neurology department at the Royal Children's Hospital, to standing federally. Why now, why politics, and why you?

Monique: the simplistic answer is that there was an ad in the paper on the 20th of October that said: "are you the next federal member for Kooyong."

And I looked at it and thought, sure that could be me. Pietro Giorgio who was the federal member for Kooyong before our current member, when he retired, he said: "you can only walk past so many things and think someone should do something about that for so long, and then eventually you've got to be the person who does it." He did do it. You know, he crossed the floor to vote against refugees being placed offshore. He was a very courageous local member. And I guess I was in a position and more fortunate than most in that I had a family that would support it where financially I could do it.

I kind of felt that I had to. I wouldn't have done it if I didn't think that I could, that I was kind of up for it, if you like. I think if I get there, I'll do a good job.

Gretchen: And you're a woman of science, of course.

Monique: So I am used to looking at scientific documents, analysing them critically, coming to decisions based on the science. And then on the facts, because that's what you do. When you look at your medical research, sometimes you do things and you expect to see an answer and don't get it. You have to move on. And that being the case, I would just look at the facts that were amassing themselves over time and the increasing evidence of the impact of climate change in every aspect of our lives really. And I couldn't really quite credit that the government didn't say it with the same sense of urgency as I did.

Gretchen: So this electorate, you know, is a very particular one. It's quite well off. What have you gleaned from other people in the electorate about their feelings around the climate issue and making changes?

Monique: It is a well-educated electorate. There are more schools in Kooyong than there are in any other electorate in Australia. And people are worried about the impact, not just on themselves, but on the potential impact on their children as well. It's really interesting, actually. It is a wealthy electorate, Kooyong. It's quite mixed in some ways, 11% of people in Kooyong identify as China's Australian.

Gretchen: How can you bring that Chinese part of your community with you?

Monique: It's a big challenge for us, and we're trying to understand how to do that. It's a part of the electorate, which has been marginalised and victimised by the current government for political reasons, because of the pandering to marginal electorates and other states which would see being tough on the China as being a good thing.

But that makes it very hard for people who are first, second or third generation. It's very difficult for them and so that they don't want to be seen to be complaining, but they also have some dissatisfactions and some concerns about the current government and how they're seen in Australia. I think social cohesiveness is a real problem for us and you don't have to dig very deep to hear about the sorts of things from the Chinese Australians, but also the Indians and Sri Lankan families who've immigrated to Kooyong as well. And I think communication is really important and that's one of the things I've really been enjoying about being the candidate is getting out there and meeting people. Every single time I've done it, someone's telling me something I hadn't thought of or didn't expect to hear. I've lived in this electorate for a long time. I've never seen the local member out. And I'm hearing that people have found him difficult to approach and to, to speak to. And I'm kind of hoping that the ability to have an independent candidate for Kooyong will change that paradigm in that people will know that they will be able to reach me and talk to me about the things that matter to them and then I'll take that very seriously and act on it as best I can.

Gretchen: What values are important to this community?

Monique: I think that the thing that's most important to people at the moment and the thing on which I'll be hanging my hat first and foremost, and it feeds into the climate change thing as well, of course, is integrity. Integrity, and transparency. Because people see the current government as being lacking in both and people have a feeling or a perception or a belief, all of which I think are justified, that the current government is in some respects corrupt in the way that it comports itself.

And that is apparent in the pork-barreling, the various sorts of car parks or sporting clubs. The way that the government has managed the aged care crisis, I think speaks to a lack of transparency and provision of aged care in this country. I think lots of the failures of the governments, which have been there for a long time have been made much more apparent by COVID-19 and the stresses that it has placed on us. And people feel disappointed by it as they want integrity and they want transparency. And that is something that they do see that they can get from Independents.

Gretchen: So with your intimate understanding, of health budgets and research, what do you bring from your previous career to government? What would you bring?

Monique: You know, in my own area, professionally, I've got significant skills. But also I have real-world experience. I'm not a career politician. I've had jobs in the public sector, have dealt with people throughout my professional career. I'm good at dealing with people. I'm good with negotiations I'm good in high-pressure circumstances: as we talked about, I'm a scientist. I'm good at analyzing large quantities of data and making a decision about how best to go forward with them.

Gretchen: It strikes me that you work with patients and kids, right up to your surgeons, your nurses, everybody. You cover people during a critical time of their life. What are you juggling in your day-to-day work?

Monique: Well, on a typical day in a public hospital, I might do a clinic. In which case I might be seeing 13, 14 children, meeting with the parents. The kids will be anything from a day or two old to 18.

I'll also have junior doctors popping in and out asking me for advice and asking me to supervise patients with them.

I'll have pagers and calls coming in . I'll be checking results, checking emails during all that sort of stuff. I used to get 250 emails a day. I might have a research meeting with the research team, might need to read some papers, review some papers, write some letters, scripts.

Gretchen: Budget?

Monique: And all the budget comes at the end of the day, yeah. Then there's the budgetary staff. There's the signing of invoices. There's the writing of business cases. There's the writing of grant applications. doing all the human management when you've got a team of 45 in your department and 10 or 12 in your research team.

Gretchen: and what sort of budgets are you dealing with?

Monique: Well, my department, the neurology department at the Children's Hospital had an annual budget of three and a half million dollars, but I also ran a research team, which has been very difficult in the last couple of years because our clinical trial incomes basically stopped with COVID.

At the start of COVID I had 12 people working for me who were all paid for with money from either from grants, from support groups and family groups, or from pharma, for various things that I did for them.

Gretchen: You mean the pharmaceutical industry, right?

Monique: Yeah. So that's one of the things I did and I, you know, I've always found it really interesting and positive in some ways, dealing with the pharmaceutical industry. Lots of doctors see them as the bad guys, but you know, there's not a drug in the world which has been a good drug in the world that's been developed by a socialist or communist country. In fact, you know, there's lots to be gained from working with pharma to develop new drugs.

And, you know, most of the trials that I've done in the last few years have been pharma-sponsored. So I've had a really good relationship with industry and that has led to new drugs that have been life-saving for Australian children. And so I have a lot to do with pharma.

I mean, if you're a senior doctor and you've been around for a long time, you've been through lots and lots of different circumstances ... not to overstate it, but I've seen it. I've been with people that, you know, many, many people at the beginning of their lives and the end of their lives. So I have a maturity about that in which I think outweighs some of the lived life experiences of people in our current parliament.

Many people have said to me, why would you go into parliament? It's a toxic environment, full of awful people, which might very well be the case. But every time someone like me goes into that environment, I know that you've got someone who's relatively mature. Who's not going to put up with or engage in the sort of behaviour that we've sent for many of our politicians in the

last few years. And I think that having the real-life lived experience of being something other than a career politician means that I can bring something quite valuable to parliament.

Gretchen: What would be your economic platform should you become an independent in the next government? Where do you position yourself, economically?

Monique: I call myself a fiscally conservative “small l” liberal, economically. Realistically as an independent, obviously I'm not going to be the treasurer. There will be things that need to come up and should be discussed in the future. I think that there are issues with the way that we're going to economically: the fact that our wages have been stagnant as they have for a long time, is holding people back. There's issues about how wages are structured in many industries.

And obviously, I think aged care and childcare are particularly pertinent at the moment, given the issues that we're experiencing with COVID and trying to get back to normal while keeping people safe. Housing affordability is a real problem for young people. And that's going to need to be looked at prospectively and in detail in the next few years, how we can make things easier for young people to establish themselves independently.

Gretchen: How do you think that the climate crisis is going to impact the way Australia manages itself economically?

Monique: Well there are great possibilities from aggressive, innovative approaches to renewables and Australia's engagement with them. And I guess that's one of the things I've not really understood about our current government, is how it has failed to see those and how it's failed to engage with those with any sort of forward vision seems crazy to me. If we were to do that and you know, you talk about what Ross Garnaut says, we could be an economic superpower.

We could take the lead in southeast Asia and the Asia Pacific by rolling out and sharing our incredible fortune in terms of our natural resources for renewables and, and minerals. So we could guarantee our children's future from an economic point of view. If we do that appropriately, I think there'll be a very great cost to all of us.

Gretchen: Let's talk about your policies. They include: expert-driven climate response, innovation, the economy, diversity and equality, having an integrity commission and looking for social cohesion.

Can you talk to me about expert-driven climate action?

Monique: Well I think that policy kind of reflects the absence of that right now. I mean, if you look at the Great Barrier Reef, just as a single example, Mr Turnbull gave almost half a billion dollars to a company which was unsuited to the task of ensuring the ongoing health of the Great Barrier Reef.

And just in the last couple of weeks, we've had another big injection of funds or apparent injection of funds to the Great Barrier Reef, but it's kind of bandaied funding. That's not in the right place. There's no five-year plan or ten-year plan. it's little bits of aliquots of money that are given almost like a bone to a dog. But the government's not got any forward planning of

how that's going to work, or who's going to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. And what the outcome measures should be. So really what we need is something along the lines of what Zali Stegall has suggested, of a climate commission that will set five-year targets for a response to changes in our natural environment, that will set five-year targets for emissions, and which will critically analyze them. I mean, all of us want to know that our tax dollars are not being wasted and that they're being used effectively for what we think is important. So it all comes back again to the transparency question as well. Government has a huge amount of money at its disposal, and we have very little insight into how much of it is spent.

In climate change, we don't have a whole lot of time to get this right.

Gretchen: So aged care and mental health, are particular focuses of your policy platforms. Tell me why those two areas are so problematic - why are they a particular focus for you?

Monique: Aged care because of the failure of the aged care system that have become so very apparent in the last couple of years during the COVID-19 pandemic. I've had a small degree of personal experience with that. But the stories that people are telling me about the difficulties they've had in finding appropriate placements for their families over the last couple of years, about the slowness of assessments and the massive delays in getting financial support for caring for older family members. It's not acceptable that we're so poorly set up and so ineffective in the provision of quality aged care.

Mental health: again, I mean, I work in a paediatric hospital. I've had a lot of exposure to mental health services. For a period last year, I was Chief of Medicine at the Royal Children's Hospital, and I was actually overseeing some of our psychiatric services.

And it was just incredibly apparent how stretched they were, how underfunded, this sort of a bit of a hodgepodge of higgledy-piggledy services in some areas that don't always speak to each other as well, or as effectively as they should. But also I had last year, just personally, I had so many friends and family members and people who knew that I worked at the Children's, calling me up and saying, look, my child is struggling. They're suicidal, they're not eating, they're not sleeping. They're not going to school. Who can I talk to? And they're just not able to access services, the nurse not getting the support that they need. It's appalling, that's just adolescent mental health. And that was the bit that I was hearing about particularly, but I noticed the same for adults.

Gretchen: One of the things that other independents that I've interviewed have reflected on is the sense of community disengagement. How, as a leader of your community, could you draw people back in, to feeling energised and engaged with the political process?

Monique: Look, it's a universal thing in Australia that people are disenchanted with the political process, but that clearly particularly applies to the young. Because they don't feel that the parliament represents them and that they don't feel that politicians have their best interests at heart.

We're really excited about getting young people involved in our campaign. We just keep saying to them, it's your future. And we will change the climate of Kooyong. If I get in, when I get in, there will be young people at the table on every discussion that we have within the community on the issues that matter.

We've actually got a really big team of volunteers in Kooyong. we've already got more than 850 people. The other day was telling some people about these beer and pizza nights every second Thursday. And, and they actually said: "well, what about dumpling night? And which night are you going to have Indian food?" I thought, yes, absolutely great. You know, we need to bring the young people in.

Gretchen: You, as a person who are you to the electorate, who do you want to be for them? what's the quality that you are most proud of that you want to bring to Parliament?

Monique: Look, I know I'm a strong person. I think it takes quite a bit of courage. The moment you put his head above the parapet, you know, someone is going to take a shot at it. Having been someone who could previously, you know, walk the dog in my shorts, and t-shirt now I'm not, I'm no longer that person, even though I'm still actually really just someone from, from my street in my suburb.

Gretchen: it's a high-pressure place, but you too have worked in very high-pressure stakes, as you say, life and death on the daily. So, how would you deal with the sledging that we know goes on?

Monique: I'm just not going to engage with that sort of thing. it is remarkable that the sorts of standards of behaviour which are accepted in our parliament or sorts of things that you would not put up with for a second in your own workplace. But also I'm good at negotiating. And I think women are good at leaving our ego at the door. And so if I were to benefit position of having the balance of power in the next federal parliament, presumably with some other people who are in that balance of power, I have no doubt that particularly, it was other women that we would be able to sort it out effectively, probably reasonably quickly, and in a way that would give everyone a voice and leave us all, hopefully pretty comfortable with the result. There wouldn't be an ego-driven discussion.

Gretchen: And that's not something that I think Australians are seeing going on. Negotiation seems to have left the building. It's hard-line sticking to your party line, right?

Monique: Yeah. It is interesting that ahead of this federal election the major parties have said that they won't negotiate on things like climate targets because none of the independents has said that what we would say is this is what we should be aiming for. And this is how would like to think about achieving it. But all of us are going to be open to a discussion about that.

I think that all Australians deserve to be considered equally treated humanely and fairly and included in the conversation. I do think that the major parties control to a significant extent by the external loyalties, whether it be to fossil fuel companies or gambling companies or media or other aspects of big business, I'm just going to answer to the Australian people.

Gretchen: Monique Ryan, it's been such a pleasure to talk with you and spend some time with you this afternoon in your living room. Thank you very much for having us here.

Monique: That's a pleasure, Gretchen. Thank you again.

Gretchen: Thank you.

Dr Monique Ryan there, Independent candidate for You can learn more about Monique and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, MoniqueRyan.com.au. And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election. Don't forget to tell your neighbours, friends and family about this series, there are lots more one-on-one deep dive conversations with standing independents across the nation! I'm Gretchen Miller: from Climate 200: see you next time.

Ep3: Sophie Scamps | Independent for Mackellar

Sophie Scamps: He looked at me, and he looked at the ground and he said: "Well, the problem is you can't mention the words climate change within the party room because the Queensland MPs jump up and down." And that was game over for me. I just said: "Well, how on. Are you able to represent this community? If you can't mention those two words, which are vitally important to all of our futures, of our children's futures?"

So that was: right. Well. Things need to change.

Gretchen Miller: Dr Sophie Scamps, now standing as an independent candidate for the Sydney Northern beaches seat of Mackellar, and she is speaking about the current sitting member for the Liberal Party, Jason Falinski, and Sophie is our guest today on the Independents, the podcast of Climate 200. I'm Gretchen Miller. And in this series, we're meeting up with some smart, experienced, and savvy people working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the independent candidates standing on platforms of climate action and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability. Medical doctor, Sophie Scamps has been working away to reinvigorate community engagement with politics for some time now through organisations, One Blue Dot, Voices for Mackellar and Mackellar Rising. She's bringing her ability to take action for the electorate's health emergencies, to the political and environmental emergencies at hand, and across the nation.

Sophie: So, we're sitting looking out at Collaroy beach. the reason we're here is it's an indicator of how things are changing for us. And the challenges we have ahead of us. Recently, there was a sea wall constructed along Collaroy beach. South Narrabeen and that's been quite confronting for many of us in this electorate.

Gretchen: What was confronting about that? I mean, Collaroy is kind of known globally for vision of houses falling into the sea.

Sophie: Exactly. So it sort of indicates how even our way of life here in Mackellar is at risk from climate change with coastal erosion and sea-level rise and things like that. And so we can see it starting, we've got one sea wall already.

We've had houses falling into the sea, which is quite dramatic. And we don't want that to continue. So, being a doctor, prevention is better than cure, right? So, this is very confronting, but it's the tip of the iceberg and we need to act.

Gretchen: Well we're sitting here in your car because the natural environment right now is incredibly blustery and we're very lucky it's not pouring but around us, a family with kids, and everybody's in wetsuits. And immersion in the natural environment is very much a marker of this electorate.

Sophie: Yes, I would agree. So even in the COVID lockdown, we all consider ourselves very lucky because we were still able to get out into the environment and really connect with the environment at the same time, that was really healing for many people.

Gretchen: indeed. Personally speaking, when did you start to feel concern or anxiety around Australia's environmental issues and the global climate crisis?

Sophie: Look, I would say I've had concerns ... the IPC has been making warnings for decades now. And I think I remember living overseas in Dublin in the early 2000s, so 2001, 2002, and being aware of it then, and thinking: we will find the answers. The governments will act, we'll get there, the change needs to come. And I think it really hit home for me when I had my first child as well. And I was really concerned that my children would not have the same security and safety and opportunity. I had had, and things were changing for future generations. And I felt then that, that sense of protecting your children is a very strong one.

Gretchen: And this is a very family-oriented suburb.

Sophie: Exactly, exactly. There's a very widespread sense of, increasing sort of helplessness and distress about this non-action to address climate change by the leaders in this country.

And that's where this grassroots movement has come from, as I say, grassroots movements don't pop out of nowhere. They tap into a sentiment that is felt broadly across the community. And there is a deep sense of distress and frustration. And I would say anger as well, that this current government has failed to act meaningfully on climate change to secure the safety, security and prosperity of all of us in this country.

Gretchen: So tell me what drove you to start the local organisation, One Blue Dot.

Sophie: Oh yeah. So that was, as I mentioned, this growing sense that our leadership should be leading on this. And it wasn't happening.

And you wait and you wait, and I'd been waiting and hoping and expecting things to change. And then I just realised it wasn't going to happen. And so, it was up to us. It was up to me to make a difference, however I could in my own life. But I also knew that there were plenty of people in the community that I spoke to friends, everyone who had similar feelings, that they were feeling helpless, what can I do as one person?

And then it finally dawned on me one day: that person was me. Because I was committed and passionate about it and ready to do it.

So we started up a local community group, which is all about reducing pollution and waste in our community. We spoke to politicians and leaders at all levels, councils, state, and federal, just to try and let them know that this was really important to the people in this community.

So this was at the end of the black summer bushfires, and there was still smoke in the air and we'd had this horrific summer witnessing ... we'd breathe in the smoke, but people had witnessed the horrors of that and people were very distressed.

So then what really triggered me was the survey that was put out by our current member in February 2020. Which listed a whole lot of issues, and we were to tick which issues were the most important to us. And climate change didn't appear on that, that list of things. And really, and not long after our member had a mobile office where people in the community could come and speak to him and just about everyone that came, was wanting to talk about climate change and horrified that the words climate change did not exist on that list.

And I had a conversation afterwards with the member as well, and asked, I said to him: "look, we're hearing a lot from the climate deniers. We're hearing a lot from Craig Kelly. Who's got a very loud voice in the media. We're hearing from George Christianson and Barnaby Joyce. And we're hearing from climate deniers. We're blaming arsonists. We're blaming the fact that there's no hazard reduction. The only thing that's not being mentioned in the media is climate change. And if you are a true moderate, as you say, you are, and you want to see action on climate change, then we do need to hear your voice in the media. You need to speak up."

So that was: right. Well, we need things need to change. Yeah.

Gretchen: Yeah. Quite an extraordinary moment there. Can you reflect then on how that shift has occurred in your community as well. How have you seen your community take on the climate issue over the time you've lived here and what's changed for them?

Sophie: I think there's two ways people are responding to the whole climate change crisis. One is to get involved and start doing what they can in their own lives. And then the other one is, when you have this sense of powerlessness and helplessness and not being heard, is to switch off and disengage.

And so, we have a bit of both of that going on. But one of the things that we found extraordinary, actually, is that in response to the survey, which didn't have climate change in it, we decided that we would try and find out what was actually important to the Mackellar electorate.

And so we started up the Voices of Mackellar group, which was all about holding these small group conversations, kitchen, table conversations. And you just, listen, you ask questions, and you listen, and the questions are: what's important to you? We don't, we don't say it's politics or anything like that, but what's important to you?

And what solutions would you like to see? And the thing about climate change was right up there as number one.

Gretchen: So, were you surprised by that? How overt that concern was?

Sophie: No, no, I wasn't, because I'd been speaking to a lot of people as well.

And also as a GP, I speak to a whole lot of people and I know that it's a big issue, particularly for young people because they have this uncertain future and it has a big impact on their mental health, the planning and the security and all that type of thing.

So now I wasn't personally surprised at all, but the thing that we were surprised about was how exhilarating people found this whole process of actually being listened to. It was quite incredible, so invigorating, and people really enjoyed and appreciated that opportunity to be listened to.

And people would just thank us for listening. They said: "we thought you were coming to tell us stuff, but you just sat there and you listened." That was the extraordinary thing. And the voices of MacKellar group had conversations with over 500 people and all that information was collated into a report.

And the point of that report is to give that information to anyone who wants to be a candidate in the upcoming election.

Gretchen: You were hoping that someone would materialise to be a candidate in the upcoming election, and you had your folder already to give to them. Then what happened?

Sophie: Well, what happened was... So, I should say with that process, what we were hearing over and over again, was that the solutions people were coming up with were: "well we need someone to genuinely represent *this* community, *our* community, because this is what we believe. And so we need an independent, like Zali [Steggall] next door."

And we would say: "well, there's, there's nothing. There is no group." So, some Voices groups are purely about listening to the community and gathering information, and other Voices are about supporting an independent to get in, but we felt, when we were in that group, we felt that it should be a nonpartisan group. And it was purely about listening and finding out what was important.

And so, but because it was coming up repeatedly, we decided, a very good friend of mine Anyo Geddes and I, decided to start Mackellar Rising, which was different in that we were building a community, a momentum behind independent representation, very much, behind an independent.

So, we were building the tribe with that and to the side of that, we were also building the campaign structure and the platform for a candidate to stand on. We started fundraising. We started looking at the marketing, the advertising, the legal structure. And we started looking at the team that we would get to have as our campaign strategists as well.

And the biggest thing we were looking for was the candidate. I mean, we were speaking to people across the community and, there was two schools of thought, one was: "let's get somebody who has a big profile, and that will be great."

But what we were hearing time, and again was no, actually what people wanted in this electorate, was they wanted somebody from the community who was authentically *from* the community, and that people could trust that they had the community's best interest at heart.

But whilst we were looking, what was happening was people were sort of saying: "well have you considered it? Why wouldn't you do it?" And first I thought everyone was being polite and then it was happening so often I thought, well, maybe they mean it, but it's one of those things you... Well, it's a big step up, and you need to look at your family life, your career. For me, it was a big decision to step down from being a GP, because it's absolutely a role that I love, and I've got very strong relationships and my patients and that type of thing.

Gretchen: As well as being a family doctor, you've worked in a local hospital. And I guess in that way, you've been witnessed to the lived experience of the community on a very personal level. So, the emergency room at Mona Vale and then a GP in Narrabeen. Can you talk about what qualities your career experience brings to your change of direction to politics?

Sophie: Look, listening is a huge part of it. They say that taking a good history is 90% of the diagnosis. So you really have to listen and you really have to draw the story out of people. And if people don't feel that they're listened to, they're not going to come back to you. They're just not. So, it's about this sort of working together. And I would also say that GPs these days, or doctors these days, don't say you have to do this: this is what you have to do. You provide the evidence of different ways of acting and what the evidence is behind for each one of them. And then you work together, you, you, it's a collaborative process, you work together to suit that patient. I very much try and let people know that I'm their advocate.

And, of course, we doctors - it's all evidence-based. The decisions that we make are based on the evidence and it's not based on personal opinion or anything like that. And that's, that's what I would also bring to politics is that the decision-making process would be based on the evidence in a consistent way.

Not when it just suited me or whatever the policy was.

Gretchen: It can also be collaborative too, right?

Sophie: And that's what we do. You collaborate, there's experts out there: that's when we refer to the specialists because we need their input.

They're the experts in that particular field. So, you collaborate and then you come back and you make a plan that's best for the patient or the family. And I guess on top of that, Emergency [department] was a very different kind of vibe, of course, and that's where that pressure... two things about that is, gleaning the information so that you can make a good, decision.

And some of them are pretty major decisions that you're making, life or death decisions, but the other thing is working in a team as well. It's absolutely crucial that you work in this team, and everyone communicates well and works well together. That's absolutely key to working in the emergency department.

Gretchen: And there's another element to your work and that is a courage to make those decisions and to make a life and death decision.

Sophie: When I first started emergency medicine, I used to feel very nervous walking towards work because there are these crises, people's lives and livelihoods are in your hands, and you

do not want to muck it up. And I would say one of the biggest things you need courage for is when you're telling someone that their results aren't great. That's a yeah...big, big thing to do.

Gretchen: One of the platforms that you're standing on is that of integrity. And I'd be really interested to hear from you about moments where you've had to make difficult decisions, where you've drawn on your own integrity to make that decision and to stand by it.

Sophie: It's a good question. I think as a doctor, you are expected to, and we need to, act with integrity every single time we see a patient. Every day that we work it's really ingrained in us from the very earliest days at university that doctors have a huge amount of trust and a huge amount of power. And you need to really take that with a huge amount of respect. And that's why they have this very strong professional code of conduct that's instilled in us. So that's why doctors are not supposed to have relationships with patients, because there's a huge power imbalance. So even just things like if I get Facebook friend requests from patients I can't accept them because there's that line. So when we had the COVID outbreak, initially when people were very worried, there were no vaccines or anything like that. And nobody really knew what was going to happen. And particularly the elderly people were very vulnerable, people living at home. Who knows if they could get enough food, all that type of thing. So in that situation care trumps this sort of keeping at arm's length. And so I gave all my patients, elderly patients, who I knew were living alone or vulnerable, my mobile phone number and said: "just ring me any time," because you just need to know that they're okay.

Gretchen: It is that duty of care. And do you think that politicians should also possess that duty of care?

Sophie: Absolutely. Yes. And when you think about it anytime there's a group of people who have a large amount of power there's usually a regulation agency above it to just maintain that oversight, and just to make sure that those processes are, are being lived up to. And so it actually is mind-boggling that there is not a federal anti-corruption watchdog or federal integrity commission. And they are the most powerful people in the country making decisions that affect all of us, and so I really don't understand how there's not one that already exists.

That's the thing and that's one of the really incredible things that came out of these kitchen table conversations. It was: what attributes or characteristics do you feel that your representative should have, and one of the big ones that came out was, people expect their representative to view the role as one of service - you're representing a community, it's not a career path. It's not about yourself or anything like that. It's: what does the community think is the right way forward? And that's what Zali Stegall and Helen Haines and other independents do, they say "I'm voting. How do you want me to vote on these issues coming up? So it's a far more consultative way of doing democracy.

And I have concerns. I feel like the right decisions for action on climate change haven't been made because our democracy has been corrupted. It's not as strong as it should be. And the reason for that is that people are not being listened to, they're not being bought into the decision-making and people are just shutting off. So, what I would like to do, and this is this idea of consultative type democracy, where you actually talk to the community, communicate with the community, they can come and speak to me.

And I relay back things to them as well. So, people know what's going on. And that's how you have a strong democracy, is when you involve the people in the democracy.

Gretchen: We've talked a lot about the community here that you value, and that you want to stand up for and, and step up for. Which groups have you talked to, in order to try and understand where they're coming from politically and how they feel about politics at the moment?

Sophie: Well, we've been trying to speak to as many groups as we possibly can, in these last two years. So, we've spoken to small business owners, we've spoken to environmental groups, groups like Surfrider Foundation and Living Ocean that have been doing amazing work, for decades.

They've been working very hard for a long while, for many years, on cancelling that license for offshore drilling for oil and gas, which has been around for quite a long time. So, they've been fighting against that for years, and that was a huge issue.

Gretchen: and a successful win in fact, yeah.

Sophie: And a successful win, I think they were all quite surprised how it suddenly came to an end, quite abruptly. And we're hoping that it is truly the end. So what had happened there is they, that people had been fighting and fighting this and all this sort of advocacy had been going on for years. And then Zali Stegall from the neighbouring electorate introduced a bill to kill off that licence once and for all. And what happened at that point was it was voted down by our own Mackellar representative, which was... : if you were genuinely representing the electorate, I really don't think there could have been anyone in the electorate that would have been pro-gas and oil. I'd be very surprised if somebody wanted to see oil rigs off our coastlines.

Gretchen: so Jason Falinski in this case was simply not representing the community's interests.

Sophie: No, no, actually, no. And if there was ever an opportunity for him to cross the floor, that would have been it.

Gretchen: so when your sitting member does something like that, how do you think the community feels about politics? Is there, is there frustration? Is there despair? Those are two different, very different feelings. One might be more inclined to action and the other is a withdrawing and a moving away from politics. And I think, are you dealing with both of those in this electorate.

Sophie: Definitely. I think we're definitely dealing with both and probably I was in the despairing stage, I think for a while, but I was very frustrated, but what I found is once you start to act, that sense of despair turns into more empowerment and a sense of hope as well.

And you realise that other people are feeling the same way, but definitely, there's a strong sense of despair and there's that switch off. And we were speaking with young people just earlier this week and they said, "oh yeah, we've just..." And this was a group of people who were very supportive of looking after the environment and this type of thing, "we don't even know what election you're talking about. There's no way we can be heard. We've just switched off."

If you've got uncertainty and fear about the future, and if you feel you can't be heard, it's that sense of being disconnected.

And I would say this is one of the most important things to me as well. I would say that not only are people not heard, but I think that they're actively silenced as well in many ways. So, when people who live in the inner-city suburbs are called latte sippers, that's a way of undermining and devaluing them: "be quiet." And when Scott Morrison said "climate change will not be sorted out at the dinner tables, the cafes and the wine bars of the inner city suburbs," that was a way of telling you: "Be quiet. Shut up. What you say is worthless. It's nothing, we're not listening. You have no right to say that stuff."

And that's a way of silencing people. So, that to me is anti-democracy basically.

And so it was like: "well, this is your opportunity. This is what a democracy is."

And it's, it's all about you being heard and having the opportunity to be heard. So once you bring people in it's this sense of despair turns into this sense of empowerment and that's really what we want to do.

Gretchen: On that despair, health and mental health are an important platform for you. For obvious reasons. I think given that you've been a GP and an emergency, worker in the hospital.

Sophie: Yes, exactly. exactly. And I've lived and breathed it. So I know personally from patients what their experiences are within the health system as well. What they feel that the needs are. I also did a Master of public health. And so those sorts of basic needs for health are obviously front of mind for me as well. So there's a few different prongs. There's the more sort of proximate health concerns with our access to health services and things like that. And particularly access to mental health services is a big issue here.

Gretchen: Well, we've certainly noticed that during the COVID years, haven't where it's so hard to find a psychologist or a psychologist.

Sophie: Exactly. And it's hard for all people, but it's particularly hard for young people. It's just very, very difficult.

So what's happening now is a lot of that specialist care is coming back to the GPs and things like that, just because there's not access and people will have to wait months and months for, for services, which is not good enough. So, there's that proximate type of care, or issues I should say. And then there's a more... the AMA and the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners and other medical groups have called climate change, a health emergency as well, because it's our climate and the changes that we'll see, and that we are seeing, will definitely impact our health. And this is just even the most basic needs for health, like water security, food security, those types of things, security from extreme weather events.

Gretchen: So that is why your platforms are all interconnected

Sophie: pretty much, pretty much. Climate and strengthening restrengthening our democracy.

Gretchen: One of the platforms on which you're standing is economic security. And it's clear that that's actually connected to climate security as well. Can you talk to your, to your economic concerns?

Sophie: So, one of the things that we know is that small business, and business, are absolutely the backbone of this community.

organisations like the Business Council of Australia, they are very much urging us, very strongly to get a much stronger 20, 30 per cent target.

And the reason they're urging that is because they know that unless we start to diversify into these new high tech clean energy technologies, we're going to miss out and we're going to be left behind and we'll miss out. They're predicting that if we did put the foot on the accelerator and get going, now that there would be tens of thousands of jobs created across the country, the majority of them in regional areas, but not just any old jobs, either, sort of high income, high salary jobs, because they're high-end high technology.

And so if we actually do want to maintain the high standard of living that Australians currently enjoy, then we really need to be on the front foot with this and acting quickly because it's the Business Council of Australia saying: "if we don't act now, we are going to be, we're going to miss out and be left behind and it'll be very difficult to catch up."

Gretchen: There's a lot of talk and threat of the idea of a minority and a hung parliament as being somehow problematic and bringing on a kind of paralysis. What are you thinking about that? Because you've chosen to be an independent, you've chosen to go "ok, I'm not going to be part of the two-party system. I want to disrupt it." Why is that disruption a good thing?

Sophie: Well, when you think about it at the moment, we've already got a minority government, we've got a coalition of the Liberal Party and the National Party. So the National Party, I think it's 4 per cent of the total vote. But they hold a lot of power and a lot of the agenda has been driven by the National Party and Barnaby Joyce. And that's a minority government. And what the independents would bring, they would bring back debate and dialogue to the more sensible centre again.

And the channels of communication would have to be open so that we would get a lot more debate on the issues at the moment. Currently what's happening is that I think never in the history of the Australian Parliament have so many issues been gagged. At the moment, there's this fear of even debating issues.

What's really powerful and really constructive about the independents is it's their electorate that controls what they say. So, if there are issues that are uncomfortable, that need to be highlighted, then the independent has the freedom to actually highlight those. And that's what we're seeing happening at the moment. You're not silenced by your party or told or dictated to by your party

Gretchen: On that: you hope to represent your electorate, but you would also have a very important role in national politics. How would you go about balancing the needs of your electorate and that of the nation?

Sophie: Well, that's a really good question. You need to have some trust that the people in your electorate, are good people. And I know that this electorate is full of wonderful people who are fair-minded and have the interests, not just of ourselves here on the coast but of future generations I know the decisions that we make affect the entire country.

The first duty is to represent this electorate in a genuine way, but of course, I have a sense of duty to the whole of Australia. We're all Australians and we're all in this together.

Gretchen: Are you excited about the forthcoming election?

Sophie: Oh, very much so. I think it's incredibly exciting because it's a huge time of change. I don't think many people can believe like this, this wave of independents that's come up and it really is very exciting. I think it's a watershed moment in Australian politics. We're reinvigorating our democracy by people, ordinary people stepping up and having a go. And look, Cathy McGowan, who was the independent for Indi, she was elected in 2013. She's been a huge inspiration because she's like: "There's only us here. There's no cavalry coming over the hill. If not you, then who? You need to step up and you need to speak up and you need to flex that courage muscle."

So, I think is very exciting. Yeah.

Gretchen: Well look, thank you so much Dr Sophie Scamps for joining us on the Independents. Thank you very much.

Sophie: No, thank you.

Gretchen: Dr Sophie Scamps, independent candidate for Mackellar here with us on The Independents, a podcast from Climate 200. And you can learn more about Sophie, and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, SophieScamps.com.au. and Scamps is spelt SCAMPS.

And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election.

Please share us with your family and friends. Let them know they can find more one-on-one deep dive conversations with standing independent candidates across the nation.

I'm Gretchen Miller. It's been so good to have you with us. See you next time.

Ep4: Zoe Daniel | Independent for Goldstein

Zoe Daniel: A lot of my reporting life has been tied to natural disasters. I have covered bushfires floods, cyclones typhoons hurricanes on several continents. I've been to the Arctic. I've seen the direct impact of climate change. And perhaps it's as recent as 2019 when I went to Northern Alaska and saw for myself the melting permafrost and the change in fish species, for example, that the local indigenous community have relied on for generations that that's happening. Because of the warming ocean, the lack of sea ice, all those sorts of things.

And, you know, I think that whole conversation about polar bears feels quite esoteric to a lot of people, but it doesn't feel esoteric to me. Because I've seen it.

Gretchen Miller: That's Zoe Daniel, candidate for the Melbourne electorate of Goldstein, and this is The Independents, a podcast of Climate 200. I'm Gretchen Miller, and in this series, we're meeting up with some smart, and savvy people, working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the Independent candidates standing on platforms of climate action, and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

You may well know Zoe from her work for the ABC. She's had a stellar career, bringing the world to Australian audiences. Her stories come from the frontline of conflict, war poverty and economic collapse. But she's also told personal stories: of refugees and presidents, despots and rebels. The latest of her books is Greetings from Trumpland. Since leaving the ABC she's advised business and community leaders on strategic thinking, risk and emergency management.

It's a phenomenally windy day when we meet at Greenpoint, Brighton, on Bunnerong country, so I jump into Zoe's car to say hello.

Zoe: So this is the Bay. So right in front of us is the city. And this is sort of the most iconic viewpoint, close to town. And you can see the beach boxes on Dendy beach on the right and they're historic beach boxes, obviously, and very expensive real estate. But unfortunately, there's a lot of beach erosion going on on Dendy Beach. So there's a substantial sandbagging to try to protect the boxes from the beach literally washing away.

And so it does cause great concern. And one thing that it's exposed is the sort of lack of any cohesive strategy around dealing with these issues and the fact that you've got all sorts of local and state government organisations particularly, that are quite fragmented, trying to work together to deal with these things.

Gretchen: When did you first connect with the Australian natural environment?

Were you young when you first kind of went, this, this place matters to me? Or did you get more of a sense of the uniqueness of Australia when you were being a foreign correspondent?

Zoe: Well, I think it's both. I grew up in Tasmania and I was a horse riding kid, so I spend a lot of time out here in the Tassie bush, on my own. And it was a different era: seventies and eighties

kids were much less supervised by their parents and adults. So it was a really formative experience for me to have ponies and be dropped off at the paddock at seven or eight in the morning and picked up at five or 6:00 pm and be left to my own devices and, you know, made some lifelong friendships through that, but also learnt a lot about myself and became quite resilient and self-reliant and learned a lot of problem-solving skills. And no mobile phones. And you know, if you fell off the pony and the pony bolted back to the stables, you had to walk home or double dink on someone else's horse. If the fence was broken, you had to fix it and all those sorts of things. So there was a lot of life skills learnt through that, but also just a love of the outdoors.

And that became quite innate, I think because horse riding was really pervaded my life from probably when I was five or six until I went off to university.

Gretchen: Actually, it's really interesting because when you're on a horse, you're super alert to what's around you because you're alert to what might startle the horse too, right?

Zoe: Yeah. You're aware of your surroundings and the various influences on the animal that you're riding. But also, it can be quite a mindful experience to just immerse yourself in the countryside, if you like. And I taught kids for a lot of years, too. So I used to take trail rides, out of Launceston for people who know it, it was up in the back of Riverside.

And then yes, obviously having spent sort of the best part of 15 years overseas in different roles in different countries there is a degree of revaluing those sorts of experiences.

And for me, the outdoors, the long summer days, the long evenings in, in daylight saving that and that ability to live life outside is something that I really missed. And, you know, the ocean and being outdoors and really valuing, the Australian environment.

Gretchen: When did you first come to realise the threat that Australia as a nation, and particular places around the country were under in the global climate context?

Zoe: I don't know whether there was a light bulb moment for me beyond noticing the increasing frequency of bushfires, particularly.

And this is something that has affected me directly in various ways. And then I've covered lots of bushfires as a journalist. We almost lost our house down the great ocean road on Christmas day, 2015 when Wye River and Separation Creek partly burned down. And so that has had a direct effect, but I think in many ways ... a lot of my reporting life has been tied to natural disasters. I have covered bushfires floods, cyclones, typhoons, hurricanes on several continents. I've been to the Arctic. I've seen the direct impact of climate change but the other really pivotal experience, I think was when I covered a superstorm in the Philippines in 2013, which in effect flattened a city of roughly 200,000 people.

I was in the thick of the aftermath of that and I've seen the grief and I've seen the impact and I know how long it takes to rebuild. And it really does pull you up short and make you take these things seriously. And then when you compare it to sort of gradual beach erosion, for example, that's happening right in front of us here in, in Brighton, you kind of realise that it's the frog in the pot argument that if you put the frog in the pot and turn it onto a slow boil, the frog, won't jump out. If you turn it up high, the frog will jump out because it'll feel the heat. But I feel like

we're the former, we're just letting ourselves boil. And there comes a point where you actually have to just accept the science and start taking action before it's too late.

Gretchen: How has your journalism also given you insight into the sociopolitical sphere you'll be working in if you make it to Canberra?

Zoe: Obviously I've been in and around politics for a long time as an observer. You know, I've been in the oval office, I've covered politics across Southeast Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Australia. And I think that it does bring that capacity to, find the right experts to do the right analysis, ask the right questions.

And the other thing that I think it brings is that you know, as a journalist and particularly as a foreign correspondent, I've had to synthesise really complicated issues under pressure. A lot. Everything from foreign policy to economics, to Wall Street, to business, to being a rural journalist covering things that are happening in agriculture, in Australia, all sorts of things.

So there's a lot of learning that's happened around how to do that. You know how to get to the nub of the issue, how to understand what's important, what's missing. And then I think that that can then be applied to the sort of problem-solving process that we're talking about because a lot of policy development is problem-solving.

And I also think that, although it's sort of arguable that I might've thought, well, why on earth would I put myself in there because it's a toxic environment - in many ways, I go into it with eyes wide open.

Gretchen: Okay so we've seen how brutal parliament can be. It's been a hot topic this year, right? Particularly for women and those who care about how women are treated as a cohort. Have you personally experienced this as a journalist in a working relationship with Australian politicians?

Zoe: Yeah, it's interesting isn't it, as a, as a woman, especially as a woman of my kind of age now, almost 50, that the events of the last few years, the #metoo movement and everything that's happened in Australia, sort of make you reflect on the experiences that you had when you're younger and kind of what you accepted or just dealt with or, or brushed off.

So there's that. And then I think because of the kind of work that I've done in the different environments that I've operated in as well. You know, as I said, I go into this experience eyes wide open, and I know that there'll be some unpleasant dealings that, and that it is a combative environment.

I'm not a particularly combative person. But I believe I have backbone. And I also believe that I have the ability to if not rise above or walk away from confrontation when it's not productive. But within that, I think that I have a capacity for collaboration, listening, and conversation that is productive.

And I think that's born in part from a journalism career where I've spent a lot of time talking to people who have very different views than me. And keep that front of mind with everything that I do that you can't assume that people think the same way that you do. And in fact, most

of the time they don't. And you always learn a lot when you go into a conversation with that front of mind.

I mean, I covered the Trump administration. I spent four years talking to Donald Trump's supporters, trying to understand them. That's one of the things that I've enjoyed most about my journalism career is actually learning from and talking to people who have different opinions and views to me.

So I think that really does lend itself as well to a crossbencher.

Gretchen: And it lends itself genuinely representing a community too, right? In listening to your community, what are you hearing are the main issues that concern them?

Zoe: Yeah. This is one of the most fun parts of being a candidate from my perspective is to just get out and talk to people.

There are some not so fun parts in terms of sort of logistics and organisation of a campaign. And that's all very new, but going out and talking to people in the communities, comes quite easily to me and just getting that varied perspective on things. But it is interesting that pretty much everyone might talk to has integrity and accountability yet at the top of their list of priorities. People feel in general, I think, in Goldstein, that they've sort of lost control of their government, their democracy that they're not being listened to.

And that they don't have a voice in the parliament or the party room. There's real frustration around things like rorting and pork-barreling, using taxpayers money. There's a sense that people find that really offensive.

And then these issues of sort of accountability and integrity then layover all of the other policy pillars that I'm focused on. So, transparent economic management, climate policy, really economically-focused climate policy. Implementing measures for safety and equality for women and girls. All of those things come back to integrity, sincerity and accountability from leaders. So yeah, if there's one overarching issue, it's, it's that accountability, integrity issue.

And I do think that in part that's what's driving this 'voices of' movement: people suddenly seeing that there's momentum behind something different that may help them actually regain some control and give them a voice that they don't have.

Gretchen: And that's interesting because this is a Liberal electorate and has been for a long time. It's interesting that your electorate, which would have benefited from being a Liberal electorate, would feel still that there's issues of integrity and accountability.

Zoe: Well, I think there's a question for many people about whether they have benefited from being a safe, Liberal electorate. I think there's a sense from a lot of people that we in Goldstein have been taken for granted. That we're automatically in the 'yes column' for the LNP.

And therefore, it's sort of lip service to the issues of the electorate rather than genuine engagement. And then a bit of throwing money at things like car parks and stuff like that, which is not in line with the priorities of the electorate. Evidence shows that the priorities of the

electorate are exactly as, as I've stated them, climate integrity, equality, good economic management, to some degree COVID recovery now, obviously, aged care is a big one.

There's just a sense among people that, you know, it's sort of like screaming at the moon, but we don't actually get heard on those issues. So, okay. What do you actually get from being a blue-ribbon Liberal seat? This is a really smart, prosperous electorate. One of the wealthiest electorates in Australia, one of the highest levels of tertiary education in Australia, some really brilliant small business-people, big business people, people who work in all sorts of facets of government and bureaucracy and media and the art. Who are just voiceless. And so, there is a sense of 'enough.'

Gretchen: Speaking of some of those things you're pointing to, where would you place yourself economically? What does the electorate want from you if you get to government?

Zoe: I think prosperity and continuing prosperity would be among the top issues of the people in the electorate.

There is a sense, especially in the Bayside part of the electorate, which is the wealthier part of the electorate of not wanting to risk that prosperity. But I also think that there's a realisation among those people, that the biggest risk to that prosperity now is doing nothing.

And my argument would be that the status quo is higher risk than putting in an independent like me who can actually move things forward. We have no option now economically other than to quickly progress the climate agenda. And it's apparent that here we are sitting here at the start of 2022, that if we stick with the status quo and nothing changes until the start of 2025, we're going to find it very difficult to hit the kind of targets that we need.

And that goes to what is the future of our community. And I don't mean environmentally, but that's self-evident as we sit here in front of an eroding beach, but economically what happens to all of our small businesses, what happens to our kids when they exit high school? What jobs do they do?

The numbers are rolling. I mean, Deloitte's done modelling to suggest that if we continue with what we're doing now, we'd be looking at the loss of something like 900,000 jobs by 2070, GDP could fall by more than two and a half percent. So that's what we're faced with. Versus creating a quarter of a million jobs, for example, and all of the economic benefits that go with renewable energy and particularly electrification for small business and households who will be, if we really get on this, saving thousands of dollars a year, potentially, by 2030 in their electricity bills. And Australia then becomes the country in the world that other countries are chasing and trying to compete with. You've got so many high profile business people from Mike Cannon-Brookes, Twiggy Forrest, and others saying this is a huge opportunity for us: grasp it.

Surely, we're better off being the leader on something like renewable energy with all of our options, with solar and wind and open space than being the laggard, and having to then chase countries that don't have the natural assets that we do it. It's a no-brainer really, but unfortunately, it's a no brainer that we've been stalled on because the issue has been weaponized for so long and that it has to stop.

To me it's just: be smart, stop making dumb decisions or not making decisions. I've lived in the US where, for example, the climate is, highly variable in winter it's absolutely freezing, you know, sub-zero temperatures, things like heating homes are much more complicated kind of environment. We have the advantage of a sort of relatively mild or moderate Mediterranean climate where we're not dealing with having to heat houses through winter in sub-zero temperatures.

Okay. We have hot summers, but the solar capacity that we have can deal with our energy needs for heating and cooling in excess. And then we can divert excess electricity to transforming our iron ore into steel in this country, exporting it, becoming, the hub for all the things that we're famous for in a different way.

I actually think it's hugely exciting. If we could just flip that switch to optimism from pessimism. Start legitimately looking forward, rather than back. There is so much capacity that we can do something with, but we have to be thinking beyond three-yearly election terms.

We have to be thinking a hundred years out. What, what do we want our country to look like?

Gretchen: It's a big country. We often drive long distances. How can we ready this country to be electric vehicle-friendly?

Zoe: Interestingly take-up electric vehicles in the last 12 months is at a record high in Australia, which is really good considering them it's not incentivised particularly well. And I think it shows that people are ready to switch.

There are good incentives to switch over, to EVs if our governments support that process. And I think it's a simple matter of getting some good brains on this.

If you look at the US for example, it's quite a good case study in that there are particular states that have really embraced electric vehicles.

So it's a case of overlaying the charging stations onto a map of Australia and saying, okay, where do we need them? What range do we need those vehicles to have? And how are we going to execute that?

But the other thing is that these technologies are jumping ahead in leaps and bounds, you know, you've already got manufacturers or companies, investors in, in Silicon valley working on self-charging vehicles.

So, if we just sort of open the zip on this, it enables all sorts of innovation. And you'll start to see that innovation feeding on itself. I mean, the LNP talks about a business-led model, where government takes its hands out of it. I don't disagree with that, except at the start you've got to give it a push and once it's up and running, you'll get a positive feedback loop, where it will actually feed on itself and then the government can step back.

But also the way that we run our homes will become more efficient. It doesn't have to happen overnight, but if everyone just got to the point where when they change over their car, their

water heater, their stove, their heating system, they switched away from gas to electricity and put on rooftop solar that would take us a long way towards where we need to get to.

And it's just a mindset issue that the government needs to help create.

Gretchen: I'd like to talk now about a few of your policies and just skip between a few of them. Cause we can't cover everything of course, in this timeframe, but on climate, you've called for the creation of an independent climate change body, what would that look like?

Zoe: Yeah, I think it's to do with helping guide policy and keep everyone accountable to that policy.

Gretchen: Do we have a model for that?

Zoe: We have a model for that which was then dismantled under Tony Abbott. So I think it is an independent climate change commission. How does that look? I mean, I think the nuts and bolts of that can be worked out, but in my mind, the fundamentals of it keeping us on track with what the targets are and helping shape policy or keep policy accountable so that we hit them.

And also really helping guide government on the sorts of innovation that we've talked about and how to take advantage of it. And then I think the third piece is helping develop a public-private partnership on some of these things. You know, government doesn't have to do all the heavy lifting on this. Private enterprise will do a lot of it, but there have to be ways of creating those synergies and smoothing the path for that.

So I don't think it's that complicated. You know, we had an independent climate commission, it was dismantled, it can be rebuilt and, and tweaked. But you know, I think it's all there.

Gretchen: I wondered what you meant by smart financing and partnership, supporting innovation, training and revitalization of Australian based research and development? That's how you've put it.

Zoe: The federal government's given the fossil fuel industry, I think it's \$10 billion over the last year or so. And it's a simple case. Shifting that money across to renewable.

Gretchen: So in other words, the government is not out of the fossil fuel industries lives the way it proclaims it wants to be?

Zoe: Obviously the government has its hands all over the fossil fuel industry. And the fossil fuel industry is very powerful as a lobbying entity makes big political donations has the ear of the government and gets a lot of money. Both major parties are beholden to the fossil fuel industry. We need to, as Australians, recognize that that's dictating our climate policy. When you start thinking: "Why is our climate policy the way it is?" And then you match that up to the relationship between the two major parties in the fossil fuel industry and the amount of money that's flowing in both directions. Then you realise why it is how it is.

So when we're now in a position where we have to shift money from the fossil fuel industry across to renewables, it's not good use of taxpayer's money to be putting money into fossil

fuels, coal mines, for example. And coal-fired power stations largely will become stranded assets. So we need to actually move that money to places where it's going to be more productive and it's actually going to take us forward.

And in the end, as I said earlier, if we electrify our economy and are producing electricity in excess of our sort of basic domestic needs, then that energy gets channelled to larger scale manufacturing and production of all, all sorts of things. And then we become a global hub for, for large and small scale manufacturing and exports.

Gretchen: In terms of equality, you highlight the shortfall in government, kindness, government regard for First Nations community in this country and that custodial relationship to our environment. Why is that systemic disregard a problem, and how can various Australian communities embed more understanding and recognition of a relationship, which is both ancient and contemporary?

Zoe: Well, in many ways, I think it's the same as lots of things in Australia right now, and also the world that everything becomes combative and there's not enough just simple respect and listening to each other. And I think in the end, developing and repairing our relationship with First Nations people is about having those conversations and sometimes they're difficult conversations.

And I think that natured political responses to those conversations are really unhelpful. The discussion about an indigenous voice to Parliament. For example, is it a classic case where it was kind of twisted into the threat of a third house of parliament that would have undue influence on decision-making in our country?

And that's not what it is at all. It's to do with having sincere honest, indigenous advice, underpinned by history, needs and views in the first nations community to inform policy, among policy makers direct to parliament, not through the bureaucracy. That would be a huge step forward for us, I think because it just opens the way for much more direct conversations that are not sanitised by bureaucrats and then perhaps less prone to becoming over complicated.

Gretchen: And to broaden that out, you particularly mentioned listening to and engaging directly with people of colour, not just indigenous, but the many different communities that make up this, this one Australian community. Why does that need stating, do you think?

Zoe: I wish it didn't need stating, but I feel like in many of the conversations I've had over the last couple of months have kind of exposed this, that people of colour, people of different cultural backgrounds people with special needs, women, first nations people, need to be front of mind in every policy conversation that you have. Because they're affected differently by the policy. And there can be unintended consequences of the policy, religious groups as well, potentially, you know, so it's a case of looking at the policy that's being considered.

And then speaking to people who are different to you to say, "how's this going to affect you? What, what are the pitfalls in this?" And to just also recognize gaps. One of the deeper conversations that I've had about this is around women of colour and their experience of sexual harassment and their lack of power in workplaces, which is very different to that, of Caucasian women like me, who may be less powerful than men in the workplace, but vastly more powerful than women of colour. So it's just that kind of consideration around the conversations that we're having about policy to say, well, it might affect me in this way, it might affect you in that

way. How's it going to affect this person and this person and this person? So consulting with our community here in Goldstein consulting with people of different backgrounds, who've had particular experiences consulting with experts and then synthesising that information into something that will sort of broadly work for everyone.

Gretchen: On integrity as a policy. As a journalist, do you know the risks involved for whistleblowers? How important are whistleblowers to creating government with integrity? And how does thinking about those kinds of details? Put meat on the bones for an integrity commission?

Zoe: Yeah, we should absolutely have whistleblower protection. And I mean, to me, it actually goes to the core of what kind of country we want to be. If we don't protect whistleblowers, then I don't think we're being true to ourselves. If we're not putting ourselves in a position where people can come forward and tell the truth about something that's happening, that's wrong, then we're... We've got a problem right from the beginning.

I think there are other pieces to that as well. Transparency in political donations, especially large donations from, from companies and corporates. Truth in political advertising is another example. And then there's the broader need for a commission, not only with teeth, but a commission that's well-resourced and that can actively pursue investigations and is resourced to do that.

So all of those pieces come under the sort of broad heading of integrity. But they're not all to do with the commission itself. Some of it would be legislative around some of those other issues that I've talked about, but protection of whistleblowers is really central to all of that.

Gretchen: One last question for you then, as we finish up. Given that you reside in a blue ribbon Liberal seat, why did you choose not to join that party and try and change from within?

Zoe: because I'm not party political, I'm a swing voter, always have been. And I think having been an ABC journalist for almost 30 years, I'd really had trained myself to not be aligned and to try to be as much as possible, really objective and just sort of rigorous in my analysis of particular positions of politicians, not only in Australia, but also overseas and to, to kind of have that open mind of, okay, how would that affect me?

How would that affect other people? What are the holes in it without having any sort of ideological bent in either direction, if you like?

So I never could have run for either of the major parties. I couldn't have worked for either of the major parties, I just couldn't align myself.

But that said, I really did and had been feeling a sort of need to do something more, to be more than a journalist. To, to step in, to participate, to try to change something from the inside. So, I'd been kind of grappling with that having left the ABC, like where am I best able to have an impact?

And then this popped up. And it was like, initially, I don't know if I want to put myself in that situation because I know how that will be. But it's also a good fit for someone who's a lifelong swinging voter who has rigorously analysed policy and asked a lot of questions and

synthesised a lot of complicated information to sit on the crossbench and do that for a job. So the fit is quite neat.

Gretchen: The fit is quite neat. We might leave it there.

Thank you so much. Zoe Daniel, it's been fascinating.

Zoe: My pleasure. Thanks for having me.

Zoe Daniel, Independent candidate for the seat of Goldstein in the upcoming federal election. Find out more about Zoe's campaign and how you can help, at Zoedaniel.com.au, and if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election. Don't forget to tell your neighbours, friends and family about this series, there are lots more one-on-one deep dive conversations with standing independents across the nation! I'm Gretchen Miller, thanks for your company today.

Ep5: Allegra Spender | Independent for Wentworth

Allegra Spender: I think the community's perspective on climate has changed demonstrably since the last election. I think business's perspective on climate has changed incredibly since the last election, but unfortunately, the federal government really hasn't.

Gretchen Miller: Hello, and welcome to The Independents, a podcast of Climate 200. I'm Gretchen Miller and today, we're in Bronte Park with Allegra Spender, candidate for the electorate of Wentworth. And in this series, we're meeting up with some smart, experienced and savvy people, working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the candidates standing on platforms of climate action, and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

Allegra is a businesswoman and an advocate for renewable energy. She grew up and has spent most of her life in this seat, though she studied primarily in the UK - she has an Economics degree from Cambridge University, a Master of Science from the University of London, and she has completed business studies at Harvard and Dartmouth College.

I asked her about her childhood here and what it was like growing up on the streets of Sydney's Eastern suburbs.

Allegra: Look, I have to say I've been incredibly lucky to grow up in Wentworth and spend almost my entire life here. I remember Centennial park. We used to cycle around as kids. I was never very good, but it was something that was, we did as a family and played soccer there. You can't quite believe you're in the middle of town and you've got such a beautiful environment, and so wild.

Gretchen: In terms of environmental issues and the global climate crisis, when did it seep into your consciousness that these things really matter?

Allegra: I have always been someone who has treasured the natural world. One of the things that my husband and I have loved to do the most is actually go on extended walks. So sort of four or five up to 10 day walks in the natural world that gives me so much joy.

I think I've watched like so many people, with real concern about what is happening into our climate and saying, well, what can I do? What is my role in making a difference here?

Gretchen: And so when did it stop being personal and become political?

Allegra: I'm a practical person and I like to take action, not just words. And so my action started with Sydney Renewable Power Company. One of my friends was working in the space and I said, "look, what can I do?" And as that opportunity arose, I joined the board and was the chair. And that was something that was really important to me. We put 500 kilowatts of solar on the roof of the International Convention Centre. It was the biggest CBD installation of solar around the country. And it would not have happened if it hadn't been a group of people who said: "let's make this happen." And now it makes an enormous difference to the Convention Centre, but it also shows that you can both do these things, but also create economic benefit as well, because we had investors behind us and they made a significant economic return by investing in this array.

Gretchen: What do you think then does Australia need to do to move out of the climate doldrums that we've been in, to move away from fossil fuels and the reluctance to embrace positive change? What would you do if you had a parliamentary voice?

Allegra: Look for me, I think it starts with a deep commitment of action in the next decade. I think the scientists are telling us that, we can't put this off. We can't say net zero by 2050 is enough because it absolutely isn't enough. And so they're saying that we need to, the world needs to get to at least 50% by 2030. And as Australia, as a rich country with very high pollutions per capita, I think that's, that's where we need to start.

Gretchen: Okay. So how would you go about exerting that pressure?

Allegra: I think Zali Stegall has put forward a really strong climate bill that would legislate targets, would ensure that we have an objective measurement of our targets and our progress against them and would also take the politics out of the targets, by this being a five-year cycle, as opposed to a three-year cycle. And I think that a lot of people would like to see the politics taken out of climate. Let's go back to the science. Let's go back to, working with business about making this transition, not just covering the cost, but actually saying this is a unique economic opportunity for Australia and let's get behind that.

Gretchen: So you come from a very well-known family, as we know, your mother was Carla Zampatti, who was a fashion designer and you've been managing director of that global company for several years. That was a major role. You've done many other things as well, which we'll get to shortly.

But what does your work there bring you in terms of understanding say, big business, people, management, budget management, international trade

Allegra: Look, I always think running that business taught me so many different things. And working with my mum who was a really impressive and unique person, taught me a lot. What I think it taught me first is that people are the most important part of any business, and how getting the best out of people and understanding and listening to people is really important. And that's what I always do when I, as a people manager, my first point is that firstly, I want to understand and listen to what is important to them and then make sure I also, as a leader, communicate what I see. Your job is to lead, but you start leadership by listening and by empathy and understanding. Secondly, in any business, you need to know your numbers and you need to deliver on what you say you're going to do and I think that's absolutely vital. I managed that business during the global financial crisis which was a really, again, financially, it was a very, very tricky time. And what we did was go back to "what do our customers want," and how do we make sure that we deliver what our customers want and how do we support our staff through, when they are fearful and uncertain about what's going on. And I think that piece of really focusing on your customers, focusing on your numbers and caring and listening to your people is a great place to start.

Gretchen: You've also worked very closely with communities who are perhaps outside the broad lived experience of this quite well-to-do electorate in the Eastern suburbs, through the Australian Business and Community Network. And that's important because as an independent, you're hoping you'll have an impact on national issues that affect communities that are diverse socially and economically. What did that teach you?

Allegra: Look, I have loved my job as the CEO of the Australian Business and Community Network, and it was very hard to give it up to run for Wentworth. So Australian Business and Community Network is a network of around 200 low socioeconomic schools and 40 major businesses around Australia: people like JP Morgan and Optus, American Express, Lend-Lease - all those big corporates. And what we did was we worked with thousands of students from those low socioeconomic high schools and matched them with mentors from our businesses and to help those mentors help the young people understand: what were the opportunities in the world of work, what jobs were available to them? How did they know that they could belong in these environments?

Where some of these kids had never been into the CBD before, even though they lived in west or Southwest Sydney. And so for them was actually it's demystifying the world of work and saying you can belong here and what you bring as a young person, with all your diverse backgrounds, is really valued in the world of work.

I worked with some incredible principals from schools who had 96% of the kids from non-English speaking backgrounds, who had to manage again through COVID who called me, in the very start of the pandemic, to say more than 50% of our kids don't have the data and devices to be able to learn. And we then mobilised thousands of devices and data plans from our companies, but we still know that many of those kids missed out. But it really taught me again, like to listen. You need to listen to business about what they want from employees so that schools can actually help young people be successful in the world of work. And you need to listen to schools about, the lived experience of their young people and how to help those young people in those schools do their best and make that school to work transition most effectively.

Gretchen: Did you sit down much with the kids themselves?

Allegra: Yeah, I did. I think anyone who's worked with young people, you realise there's a lot going on. They see a lot and they're not afraid to share what they think if you give them the right environment. And they are very thoughtful, they are very passionate about making a positive difference in their community, and they want to see a good world. And at the same time, they have fear about what is going to be open to them in the world of work, if it's changing so fast and they're trying to make good long-term decisions.

But they don't know what jobs they might be doing in the future. So there's, I think, both trepidation, but they have so much to bring. They were such inspiring young people.

Gretchen: And as you mentioned, you've also been chair of the Sydney Renewable Power Company, which is an environmental impact investment company right? From that insider perspective, what did you learn about the nature of the renewables industry?

Allegra: Look, I think the renewable industry has come a long way since I was involved in Sydney, renewable power company back in 2013, so it was a very different world.

And I think the really positive piece is that renewable is now the cheapest source of energy in Australia. It wasn't at the time and we're in a really different moment. That said, we're still seeing the government subsidise gas-fired power stations.

Gretchen: What does that industry need from the government to fulfil its potential?

Allegra: We need firstly, a government who's really serious about decarbonisation, who's not just paying lip service, and that seriousness needs to be about having a target that is legislated. That is, ambitious but achievable. And that industry, both the renewable industry, but also the big polluters or the big businesses who rely on energy from different sources who go, "okay, I can now make long-term decisions with certainty because now I know that the government is really behind this and we're going to make, we're going to have to make this transition." Because I think the government is trying to play both sides at the moment.

And there is work to be done to integrate the Australian and energy transmission, grid so that we can take best advantage of our distributed power across the country, renewables, and batteries. But again, you need the federal government to have the will to really drive that. It requires negotiations across the different states and that's where the feds really need to pay a leadership role to make all of this happen.

Gretchen: Let's look at integrity, which has been such a key issue in Federal and State parliaments in the past decade or more. I think now, more so than in the 1980s, say, a genuinely adhered to code of conduct is a meaningful part of a business' offering to clients and stakeholders. Why do you think this hasn't happened in the political sphere, considering the overlap between business and politics as drivers of Australian economies?

Allegra: Look, I think you're absolutely right that the business community has really moved so far in terms of its code of conduct and I think, you look at just the Jenkins Review of Parliament. Parliament has been, is like the 1970s or 1980s in terms of its conduct. Now I think why that is? There are, I'm sure, manifest reasons. One of which I'm sure plays into this is the fact that parliament doesn't represent the diversity of the community.

If you look at the parliamentarians themselves, there are not, for example, the women represented in parliament as that represent the community. There are not the minorities. The ethnic minorities that Australia so richly has, but they are not represented in, in our parliament.

That I think then talks to why is that culture developed so that these, these groups do not feel welcome or are not encouraged to, to participate. And at the same time then, what are the cultures that you have to have in place so that those people and those, groups feel welcome and can make a full contribution?

Gretchen: It's not just about diversity and gender though, is it? It's also about corruption.

Allegra: look. Absolutely. We, I think, as Australian people, expect that the government acts in our interests and we expect politicians to really act for the people that they are there to represent.

I don't ever want to lose that expectation, because that is what we, as Australian people, should expect from our government. But I think certainly the last three years have been a terrible reflection, I think, on those standards.

You look at the car park rorts, the sports rorts, you look at the blind trusts, you look at the behaviours of people in government and say: this is not the expectation of the community. And the people expect the government really to make a change here. Transparency is a great place to start. Let's publish everybody's diaries. So that we know who the different ministers and members of parliament are meeting and let's make that really, really clear.

The states, in many cases, have much more evolved systems of protecting Australian people against corruption, but the Feds have lagged in this, they've lagged in, for instance, not having an integrity commission. So that's just, I think an example of some of the standards that you would expect.

Gretchen: One of your policy platforms is a future-focused economy. What does that look like?

Allegra: I think what it looks like is looking forward to say, where is Australia going to be in 20 or 30 years time? Where are our economic opportunities and ways of preserving Australia's prosperity and how to make sure that all of our actions are driving towards this world rather than trying to hold us back.

Certainly, de-carbonization is part of this. The Business Council of Australia suggest that we have literally hundreds of thousands of jobs available to Australians if we decarbonise in an ordered way that allows business to make the right long-term investment decisions. And this is a huge export opportunity that will actually exceed the current fossil fuel export. But it's not just about decarbonization. It's about having that perspective of where again, where is the economy going and how to make sure that we are supporting that most effectively.

Turnbull drove a strong innovation agenda. And I think that that's really important to continue to drive innovation, that agenda is going to continue to be talking to business and say, "how do we make sure that the best ideas and the brightest people are in Australia" and that we are really supporting those to lead us in the future, whether that be AI and healthcare, or food

manufacturing. We need to make sure that we are on the front foot in terms of different sectors of the economy.

Gretchen: Your electorate is business-oriented. Talk to what it's asking of its future MPs in terms of economic policy.

Allegra: Look, I think the business community at the moment I've spoken to are really concerned about labour shortages. And I think actually the community's concerned about waste in government, where you see that we're spending \$4 million per person keeping people in offshore detention, where you see that we're spending hundreds of millions of dollars on car parks that are badly targeted for marginal seats. And when you see that we're spending billions of dollars on fossil fuel subsidies when we're trying to decarbonise. And so there's a real concern around waste. We're heading to a trillion dollars worth of debt, at the same time we're heading to almost full employment. And so there's a question from business saying: "when are we actually going to address some of these mismatches in terms of government waste and spending versus a debt that we're building up."

Gretchen: This electorate has had independents in the past. And I wonder about that relationship between this electorate, the Liberal party, the LNP, and the independent push here. What's going on do you think?

Allegra: look, I think I think the community feels that Canberra is out of touch with what is important to Wentworth.

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And I think the other piece on Wentworth: it's a highly educated electorate. It's a very independent thinking electorate. It's not afraid to stand up for what it believes in. And you see that with the election of Kerry Phelp. I think it wasn't afraid to say: "Hey, don't take us for granted because we're sick of it."

And both parties are taking it for granted that the people are going to behave as they always do. And really, it only depends on a couple of marginal seats where power lies and frankly not, that's not the case anymore, people expect to be listened to and they expect to be treated with respect.

Gretchen: Allegra, I wanted to ask you: this is a really profound time in global history. I think. What does it feel like for you personally to be standing at this time in this large continent, in the Southern hemisphere to be standing for national Parliament?

Allegra: For me, I'm a glass half full kind of a person. Look, in the time that I was born and my kids were born, and I think, I'm very grateful to be born in this time. We are a more inclusive society. We are a more educated society. We are a healthier society than we've ever been. And that is a wonderful place to be. But at the same time I am, so deeply frustrated to see how we are managing the climate crisis, because we have at our fingertips, so many tools that can make such a difference right now.

And I believe in human ingenuity: that we will be able to make the differences that we need to, but we need to do that together. And so for me, it's very intimidating making a decision to enter

public life like this, but at the same time, I just felt that I couldn't stand on the sidelines anymore. That this absolutely has to be done, that we need to be listening to the scientists, to the experts and following what is in our interests, both environmentally and economically. And so, it's the only thing that has to be done.

Gretchen: Allegra Spender, thank you so much for your time and all the very best in the upcoming election.

Allegra: Thank you very much, Gretchen. Lovely to meet you.

Gretchen: Allegra Spender there, independent candidate for Wentworth. And you can learn more about Allegra and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, AllegraSpender.com.au. And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election. Don't forget to tell your neighbours, friends and family about this series, there are lots more one-on-one deep dive conversations with standing independents across the nation! I'm Gretchen Miller, see you next time.

Ep6: Kylea Tink | Independent for North Sydney

Kylea Tink: It's easy for people to forget that McGrath Foundation was not always as big as what it is. You know, it was a tiny organisation when Jane passed away and we desperately needed money. That's what we needed to be able to get McGrath breast care nurses out and about.

We were approached by a large financial institution, and they wanted to do a deal with us that would have involved a large sum of money being handed to our foundation. We were talking, about another five McGrath breast care nurses being put into the community.

And when you've only got three out there, that's a 150% growth in one transaction.

But the things that they wanted in return for that money were things that really challenged our independence, challenged the credibility we would've been able to hold behind our brand.

And I knew, in my role, I literally took phone calls from families every day in distress saying we need help, get us, help, get us help. So finding myself in this room with this company, offering all this money and, it was a very thin wedge, the stuff they were asking for, And in that moment, for as much as my head said, "oh gosh, we could do so much good with that money," in my soul, I knew it was wrong. So we said, no. And that probably cost us another two years to make that money in other ways from other sources, but I've never regretted that decision.

Gretchen Miller: Kylea Tink, there, candidate for the electorate of North Sydney, and this is The Independents, a podcast of Climate 200. I'm Gretchen Miller, and in this series, we're meeting up with some smart, experienced and savvy people, working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the Independent candidates

standing on platforms of climate action, and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

Kylea Tink grew up in rural NSW, the daughter of a travel agent and a mechanic. Her career has encompassed big corporates, small business, not for profits, charities and the health sector and charities. She's a CEO and board member, a mother of teenagers, and was a classic Liberal voter - describing herself as economically conservative and socially progressive. We meet in North Sydney on a classic summer day, with cicadas buzzing in the background.

Kylea: My name is Kylea Tink. I'm a long-term NorthSydney resident. I've lived here for 15 years with my kids. My businesses have been based here and I am running as the independent candidate for the next federal election for the federal seat of North Sydney.

So today we're at an amazing spot. One of the spots I love in our electorate: the Coal Loader. And the reason that I particularly like this space in our electorate is that I think it speaks so well to who we are as a community. You know this is a spot that used to be heavy industrial. With its name, you can guess the coal was loaded into the ships to them be, taken back out through the Heads.

But what we have now is this beautiful space, which is dedicated to education around sustainability and giving our community the opportunity to have things like their own veggie pods, and to educate and introduce people to a whole new way of being. To me, this space is the perfect example of how we should never settle for just leaving something the way it is, and that things can evolve and can move and can actually mature into something so, so beautiful and useful.

We're meeting today on Cammeraygal land. And when you look at this part of the city, this would have been a thriving First Nations community. You know this is where you fish, this is where you find shellfish. So I think what's really lovely about the land that we find ourselves on is that it is it's very healthy around the coastal regions, and I think the piece that is on offer for us here is to learn from our First Nations people and to really embrace and live true to the idea that we don't own anything that we stand or sit on. We are merely custodians for it.

I grew up out in Western New South Wales and it's true to say that actually, as a young kid, life was pretty simple for me. Neither of my grandmothers, who played a massive part of my life, had electricity on their properties. I guess you would have called them subsistence farmers, like, most of what we ate came from what was produced on the properties.

So I feel like I was very fortunate to have that as part of my experience growing up and in a way it makes me feel very connected to land and the importance of actually respecting it and recognizing what it's capable of producing. So I think spaces like this are important, not only for our community but also for our families' fabrics and for really helping our kids understand that it isn't just all about bricks and mortar and cement.

Gretchen: Personally speaking, when did you start to feel concern, or anxiety, around Australia's environmental issues and the global climate crisis?

Kylea: So, I've lived in communities that have experienced extreme drought. I've seen the effects of, bush fires ripping through communities and floods flowing through communities. So I

think for a really long time, I've been aware of what was going on with the environment. And I've tried very much of my own accord to do the things that I could do as an individual to try and reduce the purchasing of products in multiple layers of plastic. Take your shopping bags, use a reusable coffee mug, you know, not a single-use one. And it was September, I think September 2020, it must've been, when our, there was talk of a new gas power plant being put in up around Kurri Kurri in the Hunter Valley. And I've got to say, I was really impressed that the New South Wales Government came out and said: "no, we don't need that. That's not in keeping with our community's plan. We are pushing ahead with ambitious targets for sustainable and renewable energy."

And I think I almost, then, I just couldn't believe when our Prime Minister then came out and said, "well, if you won't build it, we will." And in that moment, what I saw was a system where there was bullying at play. So the federal level was actually bullying the state level. I always also saw a system where it was a bad business decision. This asset will be left stranded, there is no doubt. We won't be able to depreciate it over the years that it will exist. But rather than our Federal Government look at that as an opportunity in terms of putting the focus on other new facilities, there seems to be this approach that keeps defaulting to an old fossil fuel mentality.

So that was for me at the point that I thought I need to stand up.

Gretchen: So what made you decide to stand as an independent because you are, you've told me before that you've been a Liberal voter, why did you decide not to join the party and argue from the inside?

Kylea: When you look back over who I am and the work I've done in my entire life, the thing that mobilises me is community. I really am very passionate about working with groups of people who have a common ambition and they want to see that achieved. And so for me, when the movement that was North Sydney's Independent reached out to me and I heard what they were trying to do it ticked a whole heap of boxes for me.

On the flip side, even though I have voted Liberal for a large portion of my life, I've never wanted to join the party. And I confess that I think my liberal background comes from how I was raised and what I always thought was the connection between the Liberal Party and small business and economic stability.

Now, both my mum and dad are in small businesses. I've run my own businesses. So to me, I always believed that the Liberal party and good business went hand in hand. When you see the national leader of that party, stand up and call out a really bad business decision. It's pretty evident that what I thought that party stood for, it was no longer the case.

So, I think it just, for me, it made sense. The independent route really was the only route for me to get involved in politics and being an independent brings a freedom that I don't believe any party member ever experiences. And I have the capacity to listen to people, truly listen to them.

Listen to large groups of people, weigh up what their concerns are, bringing that large group of people to a consensus. And then I have that potential to go to Canberra and make that case. And that is where I feel comfortable. I don't think I could have been a politician who had those conversations, and then got down there and found that because of who I was a member of

when I got into the most important house in the land, which is that federal chamber, I have to vote against those wishes. I just find that duplicitous.

Gretchen: So what does Kylie Tink bring from her experience in the world as a businesswoman and a CEO and an advocate, to parliament and to your community? What are the skillsets that you have that make you suitable for this role?

Kylea: So, I'm not somebody who's ever been happy to sit on the sidelines and let an unjust action or, something that's not fair proceed unchallenged, you know? You know, When I look at my background, I'm definitely a born campaigner.

Similarly, I think I've always been somebody who is able to look at it through multiple lenses.

I worked in the commercial sector for 20 years of my life. So consulting is hard slog, but I was able to quickly come to grips with the challenges that we're facing a business, look at the bigger picture, to find a strategy for the way out of that challenge, and then help all the pieces move towards that outcome that we were working towards.

And so for me, I think it's more the fact that I have that capacity to look at the problem, identify what the levers are that you can move to start to shift to a positive position and then mobilize them, get people involved.

Gretchen: Can you give me an example?

Kylea: So in 2005, Jane McGrath launched the McGrath foundation and she did it with the intention of building more support for families facing breast cancer around Australia.

I came into that sphere around 2006, providing pro bono PR support. And then in 2008, when Jane passed away, I went in and helped organize her funeral. And long story short, I ended up staying.

When I took the foundation on, it had three nurses in the community and it had an idea that McGrath breast care nurses could make a difference to families right across Australia. I was there for a period of six years. And in the time that I was there, we went from those three McGrath breast care nurses to up over a hundred supporting over 25,000 families across the nation.

We had McGrath breast care nurses implanted in services like the Royal Flying Doctors service. And the Sydney Pink Test had been born, things that people had said were impossible.

Gretchen: Tell me about the Sydney Pink Test and why it was impossible.

Kylea: So the whole idea was, the bigger potential in this event for the McGrath Foundation was to connect with those people who were watching the cricket from home. We bundled up, we went into Channel 9, spent this meeting, pitching them the idea of a pink test. And that would draw attention of course, to breast cancer. So everything from bandanas on people in the crowd to commentators in pink suits. The funniest story is, we left that meeting, it was quite a good meeting. And the head of sports actually rang Glenn, not realizing that I was in the

car with Glenn and said, you know, "look wanting to pay the courtesy Glenn, thank you for coming in for this meeting today. That Kylea Tink, she's a really lovely, optimistic country girl, isn't she a really optimistic girl, but I just wanted you to know it's not going to happen. Pink and cricket will never work." And I think hearing those words come out of the mouth of that particular executive to me, it was just the throwdown, it was the challenge.

I think it's just had its 14th year in Sydney, the Pink Test is now one of the most iconic sporting events, not just in Australia, but globally.

And it started in a place where somebody had said it was impossible to get it done. And I think, for me, if you want the single most important insight into me as a human being, I don't believe in the impossible.

I believe that with the right people, the right resources, the right commitments, extraordinary things can be achieved. And I think at this particular time in our community and our nation, it's extraordinary things that we need, and this is the opportunity for people to step up and engage in the political process.

Gretchen: Alright, so you've done this remarkable work in the not-for-profit sector. Talk to me about your business acumen. And the nature of representing an electorate that is a commercial hub?

Kylea: My entire life, I've seen my parents work in small businesses and both of them are still working in those businesses today. I don't think they'll ever retire. My first job I think was at 14 and nine months behind a news agency counter and then working for a catering company.

So I've always been very aware of the importance of having an environment where businesses can thrive, and for businesses to be able to thrive, they need access to good people. They need the right support structures around in their society to enable shoppers to shop and then they need to be supported in tough times.

The irony is not lost on me that at the moment our Federal Government is held by a party which has always prefaced itself by being good for business. And yet our businesses are struggling.

We're not sending clear messages to the international market about where we stand and who we are. You know, the message the international market is getting about us is that we're still into digging.

That's basically what Australia does best: we dig and we export. But the reality is Australia is a place of innovation and a place of creation.

The CBD of North Sydney is one that I would like to see really be a hub for innovation, a hub for sustainable and renewable energy, a hub for intellectual property development. And I think until we get serious about putting investment in places like that, we're going to continue to lag.

The story that the Australian public has been told is that accepting climate change is real is disastrous for the economy. That the minute we start to operate as if the climate crisis needs to be taken seriously, then everything's going to go to hell in a handbasket.

Gretchen: So we have a Prime Minister who bought a lump of coal into parliament. Why is that government wrong?

Kylea: The government is wrong because they don't give people the opportunity to hear the full story. They just want that 10, 15 words sticking in people's heads.

So I think internally it undermines confidence for us as a nation. But honestly, there is no economic model where Australia loses by moving faster, to become a renewable and sustainable energy superpower. We have more natural resources than any other continent in the world. The price of renewable and sustainable energy is coming down and it's cheap, cheap, cheap. And in fact, if you removed all the subsidies from the fossil fuel industry, it would be cheaper on every measure.

And let's be clear. Nobody, nobody is suggesting that we turn off the fossil fuel sector tomorrow. We need something that tells us what targets we're aiming for, and how are we going to get there, and how are we going to get there faster? So, there's a number of things going on. Firstly, there are other forms of mining that happen in Australia. And in fact, one of our growing areas will be the mining of critical minerals, which are essential for the creation of batteries that this new, renewable and sustainable world is going to need.

Secondly, the majority of the trades that are currently employed in those mining sites, be they electricians, be they engineers, be they plumbers, those trades are still needed in other parts of the economy. So those people will be able to move. And for those people who can't and need to be either retrained or supported, that's when the federal government could step in with a program to do exactly that.

And it would still cost our economy less than what we are currently spending as subsidies when it comes to the fossil fuel sector. So I think one of the things that's really important that Australians look at really closely: Australia's not making the money out of the fossil fuel sector. Somebody else is. The majority of the stuff that's being taken out of our ground and shipped offshore and sold, the majority of that money is staying out of our country. So I think it's time that Australians really looked up and thought about taking back control of who we are and what we stand for.

I mean, we could help third world nations completely step over this whole fossil fuel reliance period. And I think that's where the excitement is. And I wish that's where our Federal Government was leading us.

Gretchen: So tell me this though. You used to vote Liberal. how do you feel about your role, your responsibility as a person who's helped keep this government in power?

Kylea: It's interesting. I think it's actually fundamentally why I'm standing, you know, cause I was hearing my friends and family actually completely dismiss our government, kind of saying they're a bunch of idiots, but that doesn't matter. We've just got to get on and do what we're doing. And the singular thought that struck me is, "but hang on, I've helped create this system."

This system is created by everyone, just like me, who has been voting for the last 30 years of their life. Now that's kind of uncomfortable to get your head around if you're somebody who

currently feels dissatisfied, because we all bear responsibility for it. But the really exciting thing in that is, that if we created it, we can remake it.

And that's what this movement is about. It's about remaking this political system that is no longer serving our community.

Gretchen: There's a point being made by the parties that the rise of the Independents is a movement and that's problematic. You've talked about it as a movement. Why do you think that it's a) it's not problematic and b) it doesn't run the risk of being a pseudo-party?

Kylea: I do think what is interesting about what we're seeing here is that what is happening with the rise of Independents does classify as a movement. This is a community movement, but I think what's important in terms of identifying it as such as it's something that's coming from the grassroots up, not the top-down, this is community standing up saying: there has to be a better way. And from that perspective, I think it is very consistent with a lot of grassroots positive movements that we've seen over hundreds of years. Whether it was the suffragettes, arguing for women to have the right to vote, whether it was the movement around First Nations Land Rights, whether it's most recent stuff we've seen about gender equality and safety for women at work: these things come from the community and rise out of it to be something bigger than themselves.

Does that threaten the current political system? Absolutely. Do we want it to threaten the current political system? Absolutely.

And for me, the basic premise with a strong, independent crossbench is the singular thing that would do would be to bring debate and discussion back into the chamber where the community can hear it.

Gretchen: Do you think your community shares that frustration, and how does your community feel about the democratic process of politics at the moment. Are you having trouble getting traction, actually, because of the disengagement?

Kylea: It's a really good question. And that actually, my answer would be twofold. You have a percentage of people who are really awake to what is going on and really want to be advocating for change, they see where we're being taken and they are frustrated that that's not in a positive direction. I do think though, across the electorate, we also have a percentage of people that are just completely disengaged.

They've given up hope.

So I do think in, in my particular race, I don't have a bad guy that I'm running against. The current Federal Member is a very likable gentleman. I've met him on a number of occasions. He's very easy to have a chat with. And so as a person, I have no issue with our local Federal Member currently, but what I will not accept is that he will sit and have a conversation with me in one way, that leads me to believe that he will represent me appropriately in Canberra. And then when I look at his voting record in Canberra, it's identical to Barnaby Joyce's. Just in the last 12 months the North Sydney vote, and this is what I think people in North Sydney don't know, the last 12 months, the North Sydney Federal electoral vote was used to block any progress around Zali Steggall's Climate Bill.

It was used to block the referral of Christian Porter to the Privileges Committee when he suddenly had a blind trust set up behind him. And it was used to block debate on a technicality around the establishment of an Integrity Commission.

Now, those three things, climate, transparency and business accountability, and integrity, that's three things that are fundamental to the community I live within. And yet our Federal vote was used to stop all those things.

That's the message I need to get out there to the people of North Sydney is this is your vote. This person is voting on your behalf. Are you happy with how your vote is currently being used? If you are, all power to you. I have no qualms, but if you are not aware of how your vote is being used and you're just voting the same way you've been voting for the last 20 years, because you haven't stopped to think about it, that needs to change.

Gretchen: Let's step back a little now and think about the time in which we're sitting. We talk about hope, but sometimes hope can be really hard to find, particularly for younger voters, who've spent their whole lives observing this political stagnation that you're describing, how would you address the anxiety and the despair and the sense that we can't do anything as individuals when it comes to climate and, let's face it, climate-related pandemics?

Kylea: I heard a phrase on the weekend, the concept of a youthquake, you know, if you actually wake up to the point of standing up and making their vote count, it's a game-changer in this next election. The reality is the environmental conditions we're actually living through right now were laid down by emissions that were secreted 20 years ago. So to your point, we've had bush fires. We've had floods. The oceans, for the seventh year in a row, are hotter than they've ever been.

So these extreme weather events are not going anywhere anytime soon, because there is still 20 years worth of emissions baked into our environment. We have to stop today. It's what we do in the next three years of government that will make the difference to the world in terms of what our kids are living with by 2050, and what our grandchildren are living with.

And I just feel like somebody said to me very early on: "aren't you just another angry woman?" and my response to them at the time was we might be angry, but the power in that is, for me, angry mobilizes action. And it's the standing up and taking responsibility for myself, taking responsibility for the decisions I've made in the past. Putting myself forward to say: I can also be part of the solution. So let's fix this because it is fixable.

Kylea: So, yeah, I, I turned 50 recently, and it was a moment in time for me where it's kind of like, okay, well you spend the first 25 years of your life learning, and discovering. You spend the next 25 years of your life, at least I did, probably working, to ensure you're meeting other people's needs: whether it's your bosses, your partners, your kids. And suddenly at 50, it's like, well, actually, what's the next 25 years of my life going to look like? and I'm incredibly excited and so grateful for the 50 I've had beforehand because it just lightens me up in terms of the capacity that is still there to make, a really massive difference in the next 25 years.

Gretchen: Kylie Tink it's been such a pleasure to meet you. Good luck. And thanks very much.

Kylea: Thanks for having me Gretchen. I really enjoyed the conversation. Thank you.

Kylea Tink there, independent candidate for North Sydney, here with me, Gretchen Miller on the Independents, a podcast from climate 200. And you can learn more about Kylea and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, kyleatink.com.au.

And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election.

Do share us with your neighbours, family and friends... Let them know they can find more one-on-one deep dive conversations with standing independent candidates across the nation right here. I'm Gretchen Miller. It's been great to have you with us. See you next time.

Ep7: Nicolette Boele | Independent for Bradfield

Nicolette Boele: Yeah, I look, I am running on climate. And I could have stayed in capital markets and done climate harder and faster than getting outcomes through government. But the reason I'm standing is because the Australian Parliament is such an important element of the ecosystem in Australia and it's just not working - in 2022? That's why. We've got two major parties that can't give us action after all of these years. The parties have just got a roadblock on any policies and they're just not delivering what the constituents want. The electorate here, they've said they want action on climate change. They want to federal ICAC. And if you think about the self-interest that the parties are stuck in, they can't deliver that. And I'm not anti parties. The parties have got an absolute role to play as part of our future democracy, but at the moment, they're just not getting it done.

Gretchen Miller: That's Nicolette Boele. Independent candidate for the seat of Bradfield, and this is The Independents, a podcast of Climate 200. I'm Gretchen Miller, and in this series, we're meeting up with some smart, experienced and savvy people, working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the Independent candidates standing on platforms of climate action, and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

You might have already met Nicolette Boele through her media presence, as she is a go-to spokesperson, on ethical finance. For the past 10 years, Nicolette was an executive at the Responsible Investment Association, Australasia. She's been an investment executive, policy leader, an environmental advocate. She's advised on human rights risk, including doing supply chain audits over the big four banks, and translating the Universal Declaration for Human Rights into a guide for Australian business. And she established the world's first low carbon investment registry. So let's get to know Nicolette further, at Darnley oval, in Gordon, on Sydney's North Shore, Cammaragal country.

Nicolette: It is a children's playfield. It is a football pitch, I've flown kites here with my family over the years, and it's surrounded by absolutely gorgeous bushland, which is the boundary between St Ives and Gordon. And at the end of the road, Gordon East is the primary school that I attended.

So it's a place of a lot of memories and, significance to my family and to me.

Gretchen: does the community use it a lot, this space? It's lovely and quiet of course, on a weekday.

Nicolette: Yeah, absolutely. I'm pointing at a flying fox. This is an absolute must for particularly the youngsters having parties. and it's a little tiny bike track that kids play this, put their scooters on. So yes, it is quite busy, particularly when the drop-off happens at Gordon East, moms and dads and their kids come down and have their thermos of tea and coffee. And it's very buzzy. We're here in the afternoon, so it's a little quieter, but it also is used by teenagers on the weekends.

Gretchen: Can you describe your community, its diversity, because you've mentioned racism is important to you as a candidate. What makes you want to call that out in your campaign?

Nicolette: So nearly 50% of the people living in Bradfield were not born here in Australia. And so we have, as you pointed out, a very diverse community and it's changing quite quickly as well.

We have around about 30% that have come particularly from, who call themselves Chinese Australians, not all of them are citizens yet: permanent residents and on other visas. They've come at various different times: after Tiananmen, or the hand back of Hong Kong or even just more recently from the People's Republic of China, for providing a better life for their kids here. Particularly the schools, the space, the clean environment. So that community is an increasingly large part of the diversity that makes up this electorate. But I also give a very big call out to, we have a lot of British, New Zealanders, South Africans Indians, and some Pakistanis as well.

So yeah, it's quite an interesting mix of people and you find pockets in different suburbs around the place.

Gretchen: One of your key platforms is tackling climate change. Can you talk to how your community views climate change and its impacts.

Nicolette: I've been working in finance for over 10 years, and I know the great opportunities, as do many people in the electorate, about taking action on climate for the economy and for jobs.

I didn't realize though, just how many people in the electorate, particularly the seniors, who really want climate action for their kids and their grandkids in the future. And they want to be able to hand over the planet in as good, if not better condition to their grandkids. So that's one of the real things that drives people in this electorate, to support strong and effective and urgent action on climate change.

The second group is there's a number of people in this electorate that work in finance. The ABS shows that 4 per cent of Australians work in finance - in this electorate it's 11 per cent. And so there is an acute awareness of the business opportunities to get involved in clean energy and part of the climate system. One of the very first groups that I've met with, in the community the Bradfield Issues group, has been around clean energy and taking climate action. So there's a lot of interest and support from that particular group. Interestingly, mostly men in their sort of forties to sixties that are involved in that.

And the third group is the first time voters. and I have a 19-year-old. The first time voters! They're looking at things like education and the cost of that. They're concerned about the affordability of housing in Sydney, but absolutely the thing that floats to the top is that they cannot believe that we're still talking about climate action in 2022, and we haven't got things like targets for 2030. They just want us to get on with it so that that's probably the three groups.

I possibly could stay in finance and, and help with climate change, but this is bigger than climate change. This is about the integrity of our democracy. And it's about the health and vibrancy of that. So that's why I'm doing it. I really didn't wake up and say, I want to be a politician. But when I look at where I am in my career, I look at the skills that I've gained, the knowledge that I have. I'm just doing what I can for our community.

Gretchen: Let's talk about integrity. What have you taken on board from your electorate regards that issue? What's the big picture here? What does this electorate want to see and what are they saying?

Nicolette: Yeah, the thing that's really cutting through for me is that they just don't want us to go the way of the United States.

And that to me summarises it right there. They just want the people in Australian parliament to lead and they want the values of how business is done there to reflect what people value and care about in the community. And that's not the case.

Gretchen: What have people actually said to you?

Nicolette: They've gone from, if they're not disengaged, they're angry. And one person even said it's just dangerous now. And that's a real shame because the democracy is not perfect, but it's the best system we've got and I'm going to fight really, really hard to try and restore integrity to it. Cause I think it's a very precious thing and it's worth fighting for.

So what I'm trying to do with the integrity around donations acceptance policy is to do two things. I want to try and create a lower threshold for, and the AEC has set a \$14,500 threshold. I've also set a challenge, if you like that I'm only accepting donations from companies whose shareholders purpose is not just profit. It also has to be about having a public good. And that means maybe it's doing something on affordable housing. It can't just be for corporate self-interest.

Gretchen: Let's get to your career path, which is so interesting. And it's largely been in finance. It's actually been said that your qualifications look just like Scott Morrison's! Tell us why, and why are you different?

Nicolette: So the only similarities between the Prime Minister and me in terms of our work experience is that yes, I did cut my teeth in the tourism industry many, many years ago. I'm sure the PM won't remember, but we did cross paths very briefly when I was on a scholarship and working at the Tourism Council of Australia.

That's it. So he's gone off into marketing. I've gone off into political economy and social research and other areas. And that's where my career took me into the nexus between tourism

and clean energy. And what something like ecotourism can bring to the mainstream tourism industry.

And that's the kind of solutions I've been modelling right throughout my career. So when I'm looking at making things better in the sectors I've worked in, I look to the edges and I looked to the people that are pushing the boundaries.

And so in the, in the case of tourism, I was very interested in this concept of ecotourism people, spending money to go to places and sleep in tents with mosquitoes and plant trees and have authentic experiences: a premium, even - what's behind that? And it's about this immersion in experience for them. And there was something in this: at the same time, we are restoring landscapes. We're putting money into local economies and that's principles that I really like in business. So when I say look to eco-tourism to renovate mainstream tourism, what can we take from that to just lift the bar on the mainstream? That's when you see those little signs in the hotel rooms, "hang up your towels if you don't want them washed today" and, you know, saving energy and phosphates and so forth. Many international hotels now have the concept of slow food or food that comes from around the area where people are visiting. That gives people a better story to tell from a business perspective, it helps connect with the person who is seeking to contribute into the local economy through initiatives like that.

Good leaders can step outside their area to see how things are done differently and bring those lessons back into their sectors. And that is precisely what I've done in my career. And I've watched people do it. And it's what I want to do when I'm elected in the 47th parliament and bring that new and fresh perspective to the way things can get done.

Gretchen: So Australia's natural environment, its resources have been at the heart of much of what you've done since the mid-nineties, when you worked with the sustainable energy development authority of New South Wales, you've worked with ACF you've worked with RIAA, which is the Responsible Investment Association Australia. You've worked with the Investor Group on Climate Change, with graziers at the Climate Institute think tanks, you've worked with the Clean Energy Finance Corporation. It's quite a list. How can your experience bring nuance to the national conversation in these arenas? The intersection between finance and the natural environment and custodianship even?

Nicolette: You're right. When you read that list out, I'm feeling a little tired and I need a break! but you're right. And I have learned a lot in those areas from advocacy, accountability and also about policymaking. And I've also had some deep experience in the subject matter of climate policy and clean energy markets and responsible investments.

So, yes, that credentials me quite well in a parliament, like the one we're about to go into, where we've got to do some really strong work in these areas. There's definitely some very qualified and impressive parliamentarians. There are also a lot of parliamentarians that have been in politics their whole life. Having some diversity: gender as well of course - I think is a real plus. And it'll mix things up. It's only going to make debate, discussion and policy outcomes much better.

Gretchen: So how does that real-world experience inform your economic position as a would-be member for Bradfield?

Nicolette: I'm not going to shy away from the fact, but I absolutely love business and I love markets. I do know that markets need good government regulation though.

And when I say good, I don't mean lots of it. I mean, meaningful government regulation and price on carbon is one of those. We could be doing so much more if we had a price on carbon and I'm just going to give you an example of the types of things that, having worked with superannuation, that I've heard. I've heard that there are things like education, communications, health care. These are the sorts of things that underpin a really inclusive and competitive and productive economy. And I say economy, I mean community as well, and society, but we need to do those at the lowest cost possible price. So everybody can benefit, like small business, big business communities and everything.

If we don't have those at the lowest possible price, it's expensive and we become internationally non-competitive and that's why I absolutely would bring to this role, my experience in finance and economic management. And my knowledge about the different levers that can be pulled in terms of policy, and even in tax policy. That could be useful when we sit back and look at how we rebuild our economy to be ready for a 21st-century marketplace.

Gretchen: A key role that you had was that the Responsible Investment Association of Australasia known as RIAA, okay. You were executive manager and it wasn't small beer, what you were messing around with there. The company was a kind of a peak body for companies with assets worth, what? 39 trillion annually? Yeah. So not, not pocket change. Tell me a little bit about that group and what that kind of money indicates about the investment sector.

Nicolette: Well there's no lack of money floating around our economy. The problem is it's very difficult to find good places to put it. And so you're absolutely right. \$39 trillion. The investment sector is trying to come to grips with how it defines itself in the 21st century: where we have net-zero emissions by 2050, what does that mean? We have 7.8 billion people on the planet. There's a whole lot of pressures on our natural systems, which capitalism depends on, and on human capital as well. So we're all trying to come to terms with that.

What they all have in common is they want to start putting finance to work for more than just profit. So that's for social and environmental outcomes as well. And not just because they care about the environment or about people it's because they know when their money is aligned with doing good their social license to operate is secured. Their access to capital is secured as well. It's often cheaper because it's less risky. And these types of businesses that take into account people and planet as well as profit, just make better investments. They've performed better over the short and the long term. So it's, completely business, business, business: to do good for people and planet.

Gretchen: Why is the finance sector, which hasn't had a great reputation changing? Is it changing? And has it always been like that? What's going on?

Nicolette: There's no slow down on the appetite to make profit, just to be clear. What's different is it's fairly hard to meet someone in the finance sector who doesn't believe in climate science and the need to leave the planet in a better place for our children and our grandchildren.

Look, Europeans have already regulated the finance sector on sustainability and climate. The US is on the way. The UK has done it. New Zealand. And China's got commitments for mid-century and reducing emissions as well. In fact, 75% of all of our trading partners in terms of coal oil and gas have already got emission reduction targets for 2030 and 2035. The fact that we don't have this really does put us at risk. And I think that's why we have such a vibrant and engaged membership at the Responsible Investment Association, because people are looking for signals ways that they can be ahead of the curve, or at least keep up to date with what they're hearing is happening in overseas marketplaces.

And I probably have to say too, the advent of the covid crisis has been another big one, and at a very personal level for professionals in the industry: they're doing Zooms from home with the children on their laps and the dogs and what have you, and in their pyjamas. We are just all people in society doing what we can and yes, it's okay to care. That's come through very much.

The other part is, covid has really shown a light on where the cracks are in our society and our economy. I'm seeing a big call out for things like affordable housing, aged care facilities, and the role of finance in the provision of that, Particularly, given it's split across feds and state and even local.

Gretchen: So caring is being custodial, right? Being a custodian. And you said in your campaign launch: "I am a custodian, not sovereign." Can you explain what you meant there?

Nicolette: That's a reference to Edmund Burke, one of the fathers of conservatism, if you like. It's also very similar language that I've heard from First Peoples in my human rights work and activities at the Responsible Investment Association, that we are just here looking after the planet in a series of time events, and we are going to hand this planet, onto our children and our grandchildren. It's not here for us to rape and pillage. It's here for us to nurture and care for. And I think that's, that's very much what I mean with that comment.

Gretchen: So you've also worked for the ACF, the Australian Conservation Foundation. Can you tell us about that job back in the day when climate was barely mentioned in the public conversation, and equally you wouldn't have expected to find a financier employed in an environmental advocacy organisation.

Nicolette: I wasn't yet a financier writ large then, I was a sustainable cities and industries coordinator for their campaign.

So what that job was about was: how do we revolutionise cities to be energy efficient, to generate its own power, to make cool and safe places, under increasing heat and water and food security and so forth? It was a very, very interesting project.

And that's where I think I really did cement the future of my career on that path about getting into business and bringing sustainability into business and eventually investment and finance. So at the ACF I'm particularly proud of one initiative, which was the Australian Business Round Table on Climate Change. So the objective was to convince the policymakers that a price on carbon, through an emissions trading scheme would be a very sensible thing to do the Business Council of Australia at the time, 20 years ago - 2002 -were not having a bar of it. And what we did was we put together an unlikely alliance.

We had the likes of BP and Westpac at the time and IAG and origin and a few others and ACF to say: "Really? maybe there are some businesses where if carbon was priced, we would actually get investments into some areas that we can make money out of. Like solar power and energy efficiency. That was a really big turning point because from this ...

Gretchen: so BP and so on, leaned on the Business Council of Australia and said: "come on now"?

Nicolette: They went public. It was published in the AFR and in the ABC as well, that there were members of the Business Council's community that thought that a price on carbon could in fact be a good thing for the economy. It just meant that we picked up the sophistication of the discussion around what good business looks like.

And from that point forward the business councils members, their CEOs, they've formed their own views, but here in 2022, you will find the Business Council of Australia, very broadly supporting a price on carbon as the most effective and efficient way to drive investment into carbon and climate solutions.

I think this is still the way to go. It means the companies are paying the tax. We're not asking the taxpayers to fund companies to find solutions. That's that's definitely not the way we should do it.

But when you see the prime minister taking a lump of coal into the chamber, Swinging around and telling people not to be scared of it and laughing. That's not a kind of behaviour that draws people...

It's not a leadership thing that brings people behind him to that common future of a clean energy economy. That's a divisive ploy on his part to wedge fear in the electorate. I just don't think it's okay. And not after 25 years of inaction.

Gretchen: So I want to ask you why politics and why now when the capital markets are clearly so much further ahead of government, as you've described. why be an independent -what does independence mean to you?

Nicolette: Yeah, I look, I am running on climate and I could have stayed in capital markets and done climate harder and faster than getting outcomes through government.

But the reason I'm standing is because the Australian Parliament is such an important element of the ecosystem in Australia and it's just not working - in 2022? That's why. The parties have just got a roadblock on any policies and they're just not delivering what the constituents want. And I'm not anti-parties. The parties have got an absolute role to play as part of our future democracy, but at the moment, they're just not getting it done.

Gretchen: So as we draw to a close, the problem with climate change and the climate crisis really is that each individual event is more of what we already know. So more intense fires, more of them more frequently, more intense cyclones, more of them more frequently. How can we get governments to start to act towards long-term positive consequences that you know, you and I might not even witness.

Nicolette: Living in a city, you might forget that, but the regions acutely feel the impacts particularly of bushfires and people on the land are feeling that right through drought cycles.

And what have you, we're in a la Niña year at the moment, so there's plenty of rain, hopefully not too many floods for some of us, but yes. The short-term/ long-term question is something that we also deal with in finance. It's not. A very natural part of human thinking. I think that's another reason why I'm very attracted to bringing my skills to government because having a plan, which is what government needs to do, we need a plan for our vision of what we want our nation to be, and the values that underpin that.

Then we need to work out the role of government in that plan. And we need to help the capital markets do their bit because it's an amazing tool to wield, but it has its limitations. So we need the safeguards that a government can bring to protect consumers and to regulate. And then we need to support communities to turn up as well and be part of that as not just consumers, but as people who live in a community and take their kids to school and what have you. So I think a plan. I think regulations around how that can work, and the institutions that can help support the communities to deliver. These are the sorts of things that government can and should be doing.

I can tell you right now, no one's doing a thing. If we're waiting for 28 years, we want to know what are we doing this afternoon?

We want to know what we're doing. Business cycles don't work in those long periods. We want to know what's happening for 2030. We want to know what's happening in 2025. And that's the sort of leadership that we need from our government to help businesses and communities get on and play their part.

Gretchen: Nicolette Boele, I just want to thank you so much for joining us on the Independents. Really appreciate your time this afternoon.

Nicolette: Oh, thank you so much. It's been an absolute pleasure

Gretchen: Nicolette Boele there, independent candidate for Bradfield, here with us on the Independents! a podcast from climate 200. And you can learn more about Nicolette, and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, nicoletteboele.com.au - and you spell Boele BOELE. And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election. Please share us with your neighbours, family and friends. Let them know where they can find more one on one deep dive conversations with standing independent candidates across the nation. I'm Gretchen Miller. Thanks for being with us - catch you next time.

Ep8: Despi O'Connor | Independent for Flinders

Despi O'Connor: I do a lot of running Gretchen, a lot of running. Two years ago I would be running between 70 and 90 kilometres a week.

Gretchen Miller: And that is serious endurance, right?

Despi: there's a lot of mental toughness that comes with doing those events. You, you know, you go through ups and downs in a, between six and 12 hour period, that are extraordinary. You know, one moment you're elated and the next minute you've got the black dog beside you and you're not going to make it. And then you're out of that again. And, in those times, I've often been alone in those, on those runs because you know, over a hundred kilometres, you're all spread out. And there are times where you just have to ground yourself with something that's right there with you. I have never given up ever.

I'm not stopping. I'm going to keep going. I'm going to finish this thing.

Gretchen: That's Despi O'Connor, who regularly trains for marathons in the reserve behind her home in Mount Martha, on the Mornington Peninsula. Despi is running as an independent candidate for the Federal seat of Flinders, here on Bunurong/Boon Wurrong Country.

Hello there, and welcome to the Independents, a podcast of Climate 200, with me, Gretchen Miller. And in this series, we're meeting a collection of smart, experienced, and savvy people who are working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the independent candidates who will be standing in various currently government-held seats. Key drivers for these independents are climate action and its intrinsic economic opportunities. Plus, a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

Despi is a strong community advocate and leader, a primary school teacher, and until recently, Mayor of the Mornington Peninsula, but she's stepped aside after one year to campaign for Flinders.

Despi: This is the Hopetoun Norfolk Flora and Fauna Reserve. It's a reserve that my home backs onto and something that I've been really passionate about for a few years.

I guess the backstory is that when we moved here, not long after we moved in the local nature group, that's employed by the Shire, actually found and identified the Mount Martha Bundy, which is a tree they thought we'd lost. But it turns out they're here. And you'll see, as we walk through the reserve that they're all numbered in yellow paint to try and identify them and let other people know. But when they found them, they thought we only had 12 and four of those were in my property. I know.

Gretchen: So this is a really special place to you.

Despi: It's a really special place for me. But over the years we actually improved the biodiversity in our own garden by bringing all the plants that were outside our garden, into our garden.

So the local nursery here do a seeding program where they take seeds from local bush areas. And they sell that stock back to people who live in those areas. So this is the Briars Ward and Hopetoun Reserve, they do a lot of seed collection here and yeah, that's the only stuff that we planted into our garden. I guess it grew on us really, literally,

Gretchen: And is this your puppy?

Despi: It is. It is my puppy.

Gretchen: You've got a retriever here holding their toy.

Despi: Yeah.

That's the spot that he sits and greets everybody as they come past. So COVID has been a real... I guess it's amplified this area to people who live around here. A lot of people didn't necessarily walk through this area. So when I've been out in my garden, I've also been educating them about the importance of it because we only have 10% of our remnant bushland left on the peninsula and this small slice of heaven is part of it.

Gretchen: When did you first find your connection with the natural world as something integral to itself?

Despi: That probably goes right back to when I was a kid and spend a lot of time on my grandparents' farm. You know, I can still smell those smells if I, you know, just sit for a moment and think about them. My grandparents were dairy farmers. They were very connected to that space. They looked after it. Nana and grandpa were very big on making sure that, the farm was self-sufficient in its own right. Lots of their food came from that space as well. So I think, I think that was it. And just being out with Nan I spent a lot of time in the veggie patch with Nan a lot of time with grandpa feeding cows and tending to cows. And he was very, he was very caring. I just, I just love the feel of the earth in my hands. And I, yeah, it's a really deep connection for me.

Gretchen: So when did you start to feel anxious about climate change, the climate crisis, as it's becoming.

Despi: I know that the recent bushfires were huge, but the one that stood out to me was I think it was Ash Wednesday. I was 12. I was getting a dress fitted for my cousin's wedding.

And as we left the dressmaker in Brighton somewhere, I think it was, or somewhere down that way we walked outside and ash was falling from the sky. And I was terrified because I knew that those fires were up near Nan and Grandpa's. And for me that, you know, the size of them was terrifying. I knew the area, I knew how big they were and we'd had a very hot summer at that point.

But as the years have gone on. we're seeing more and more of that. We're seeing the big storm events and we had a recent one here that, you know, just shut down most of our hinterland for over a week. And there were still many people off the grid, you know, two weeks later. And it's catastrophic.

Gretchen: So you're already an elected representative for your community. You've been a local councillor and also Mayor of Mornington for a year. Can you tell me about that journey? How long had you been living here? What were you doing before that?

Despi: So I moved here in November of 2006. We'd come from Warrigal, which is down in Gippsland, which is down closer to where my Nana and Grandpa's farm was. And at that stage I was a mum and working for the Shire down there. And prior to that, I did a lot of work for the YMCA. I worked at a couple of different aquatic education centres as an aquatic educator and manager of those sorts of programs. So lifesaving was a big thing for me, which meant that when we moved to the beach, I finally got to become a Nipper and became a trainer actually within weeks of actually dropping in to say: "Hey, I can help. What can I do?" So I became the chief instructor at the local lifesaving club. I guess I was an educator my whole life, because I was highly involved with basketball.

I was coaching, I was umpiring, my husband and I had set up a startup business with basketball, teaching young children, but also coaches on how to coach well, and yeah, get the best out of kids.

Gretchen: did you become a primary teacher or was that before?

Despi: No, that's, that's more recent. So that was in, 2010 I started teaching, full time just at the local school.

Gretchen: So you became a councillor and then two weeks later you were, it was suggested that, well, two weeks later the Mayoral position came. And you went for it and you got it. And then you were Mayor for a full year. What was that like? So what did you learn about the community while you were mayor?

Despi: How lucky was I to be in that position? I learned so much about this community down here, about the diversity of it. Its strengths, the opportunities that we have. None of it really surprised me. Because I've been so engaged in my community, but it was so good to... sort of vindicating really about, you know, what we need to do.

I guess especially with COVID it really highlighted some significant issues around economic development in our region. Our region really relies on our tourism. We have something like 7 million people come to the Peninsula every year.

That's the population of Victoria and during COVID, that didn't happen. A lot of our small businesses here suffered through the lockdowns, suffered through... even (re)opening, now, you know, we have a key worker shortage. We have a housing crisis where key workers can't come here from outside because there's no way for them to live. They can't afford the rent here. Those things are really big issues. We've got an issue of transport on the Peninsula where people on one side of the Peninsula and needing jobs more so than the other, but can't get across to where the jobs are in the bigger townships.

For me as mayor, those were massive issues. And I would speak to people all the time about, solving those. But some of them are really around major infrastructure as a starting point. You know, let's talk about upstream: if we can't get the transport right people can't get places. If we can't get the housing right in this area, people can't live here to be those key workers. And you

can't just have professionals living in a space, you need all layers of our society to be in one place so that we can have, the diversity of people that can run the show really. And at the moment, that's, that's not really happening here.

Gretchen: So how would you advocate for those sorts of changes?

Despi: I really need to see a change in how housing is done on the Peninsula. we don't have any crisis accommodation here. We don't have a good social housing network here. Those things need to change on the Peninsula. And people will say, but that's a state government issue, but the infrastructure to do that needs to come from a higher level. The federal government need to get involved in making sure that people are housed, but it has to happen in a really clever way. The people on the Peninsula don't want to break past the urban growth boundary down here. We want to look after our green spaces, our green wedge and protect it. Our green wedge is our food bowl. So there also needs to be some work done around our circular economy down here.

We have food right at our feet and we export most of it, nearly all of it elsewhere off the Peninsula. And then bring in food from elsewhere back to here. And, that's got to be something that across Australia, people are talking about, and I'm sure that in other food bowl regions, they are talking about those sorts of things.

Gretchen: Are you saying therefore that there actually needs to be more engagement between federal members of similar communities and similar economies and start working out and learning from one another about how to make these things work?

Despi: Yeah, absolutely. Collaboration is, I think it's something that's really missing. It's something that I noticed at a local government level has actually really improved over the last few years. And myself and fellow councillors did a lot of collaboration with areas that were like us so that we could learn from each other.

Gretchen: So, then what did make you choose to go independent and not align yourself with a party given that you would have perhaps more pulling power if you were a part of a major party in government?

Despi: Good question. I was an independent as a councillor as well. I've never been a member of a party. Mostly because I can't align with all of the things that a party stands for. None of them really hit me where I, I need it. And I, being independent meant that I don't have to answer to a party. Being independent means I answered to my community and I think that that's something that people want, they want a leader who's representing them. I did that as Mayor. I, you know, I took those issues back to council and made sure that people were looked after and we really changed some things in that area because we could do that, because it wasn't about being aligned to a party or a particular way of seeing the world. We were bringing all of our ideas to the table and finding the best way forward. And I think as Independents on the crossbench, that's our role, how do we find the best way forward?

Gretchen: What was your experience when you were mayor of engagement with other government levels? Were you particularly engaged with your state member or federal member?

Despi: I was, so Greg Hunt is my federal member down here currently.

And so I would meet with Greg regularly be on the phone to his office regularly. Also the Nepean member and the Mornington member and the Hastings member or at a state level. I was highly engaged with the minister for local government because I was chosen by him to be on his Mayoral advisory panel. And I think that was part of it as well, choosing to go in this direction is I could see it from an outside view. And when you have that larger perspective, you know, I, I felt like I could do more. And how could I do more?

I need to step up again and, and throw my hat in the ring for a federal seat to make a change. And I, I worked quite collaboratively. across the different levels of government, because in the end I actually increased funding to the Shire. So I tripled the incoming funding for the year. We went from \$9 million funding, which is nothing, when you look across at Geelong - and we still don't have as much as they're getting across, across the water, across the bay - to 27 million. And that's a big deal here because it hasn't been up that high.

So it still needs to be higher for this area to do well economically to be supported, but it's a start and I changed some of those conversations and I'm proud of that.

Gretchen: How did you do that?

Well, others have told me that it's to do with the way I built relationships across the federal and state levels. I don't see it that way. I'm just trying to be me and I talk to people and I try and work out, how can we, rather than why not?

Gretchen: So let's talk now about the platforms you're standing on that support the needs of your community.

Despi: Yeah. So integrity is the first one. And for me, I feel like nothing else is going to change until integrity changes.

Honesty and transparency at the federal level is important. And I'd be backing Helen Haines with her Integrity Commission Bill. Until we get that, right, I'm not sure other things are really gonna move. The next one is climate action and we're going to need integrity to get climate action moving.

Gretchen: How does integrity matter when it comes to making change to climate policy?

Despi: Yeah, so integrity matters in that case because of the funding that's coming through from the fossil fuel industries. And I think, you know, a lot of people don't understand that those lobbyists are in Parliament House, in Parliament House.

They're not on the sidelines or phoning in. They can go and knock on a minister's door. And lobby from the inside.

Gretchen: And this is, obviously, to lobby Labor and Liberal.

Despi: Yep. Both parties. So they're lobbying everybody. How can we have integrity for climate action? If we've got that people don't know about that. People don't even realize that those

lobbyists exist inside Parliament House, lobbying our ministers to make changes for their industries. That's not right. And it's the same across gambling and tobacco.

That's just not okay. Between fossil fuels, tobacco and gambling, we're harming our people. Our people. How do we justify that? I can't justify that.

Gretchen: What are your climate policies? What will you stand behind? What are the platforms you'll stand behind?

Despi: I'll definitely be supporting Zali Steggalls Climate Bill. We know that we need to get to zero emissions and wouldn't it be lovely to do that by 2030, but we have not moved quick enough to do that by 2030. I could hope for 2035 and hope that we got there. There's science to say that that's possible, but that's only possible if we start now, we can't wait any longer.

Gretchen: So what about the economy in terms of climate futures?

Despi: There are so many people across the world already moving into the renewables. 70% of our two-way trade is doing it already. We even have renewable businesses who have gone offshore to do this work because other countries are supporting them. We could be so far ahead of this game and people in Australia could be doing this work, and yet we're sending them the ones who are wanting to do it offshore to someone else.

So let's do it. Let's do it here. Let's build that economy through our young people to keep our money here.

Gretchen: A speedy pivot is really required by markets. What does that mean for your local economy? You've said that it's very tourism-based. What else goes on here that needs support in order to pivot.

Despi: So in Dromana, there's work being done at the moment to build a solar farm down there, which will tap into the grid. We have quite a few diesel generators on the peninsula and it's groups like the Dromana solar farm that wants to remove the diesel generators and have the solar power there for the Peninsula. It's doable. There's a battery group over in Tyabb who are putting batteries on-site to store energy and they're going to try to bring in renewables into that space in the future, but they need the batteries to actually store the energy. So that's Tyabb. And then we've got Mornington as well. And Mount Eliza where there's a chance that a community renewable group can get off the ground. We've got ourselves covered down here where we're future-proofing ourselves and power proofing ourselves. It's doable. And we've also got, within council, because our council has a climate emergency plan, we've already started to try to build resilience within our community, by helping our community move away from gas and when their gas appliances need replacing to move to electrical appliances that can feed off those renewables. We're on our way here, as a grassroots, our community are telling us they want this. Why can't we just move that little bit faster? If the community is saying let's do it. What stopping us. I'm not sure? Fossil fuel money? I'm not sure. That's what it feels like to me.

Gretchen: So, equality is also a passion for you, equality for the Indigenous people of the Kulin nation here, for LGBTQI +, for women. Which community groups are you working with to guide your platform here?

Despi: So Flinders and the Mornington Peninsula, Flinders electorate is the Bunurong Boon Warring people. And they've been custodians of this land for many, many thousands of years. They were land and sea people. So yeah, they are doing some work across this region at the moment to heal country, but there are many other Indigenous groups that have moved into this area.

We're actually one of the largest growing areas for indigenous people to come to. And so there are other indigenous groups across the Peninsula who are needing our support as well.

Yeah. It is a passion because I, as I think it comes back to being a teacher, you know, every child in your classroom is different. They have different needs, so you can't paint them all with the same brush and think that they're all going to get to the same place. And so for me, it's about looking at each individual and, and saying: "what is it that you need?"

So things like NDIS need to return to the table and we need to hear from people at the coalface about what's needed to make changes to that. And I've been talking to people in the industry and who also use NDIS.

With our pride community. I've been over the last 18 months, working really closely with a local group called Rainbow Connections. These people, these young people need our support. And, you know, growing up at, at a time where I didn't understand any of that it wasn't something that was impacting on my life, but as I've grown and I've met more people, I can see the inequalities that people have had to deal with. And I just don't think that's fair.

And so I guess, you know, for me you know, when I'm at the Community Support center, every Friday afternoon, packing food parcels and talking to people who come in to collect those or talking to the people who are helping put them together, you know, I can see it.

And until we go back upstream and help in some way. And, going back to my teaching again, Gretchen it's taught me so much, it really has children who experienced trauma are more likely to feel inequities as an adult. Can we support the trauma? Yes, we can, if we identify it. And if we actually say it's real, and we listen. Not everybody is going to have a lived experience of trauma, but if we can just open our hearts and our, and our minds for a moment and hear what someone else experiences, maybe we can understand a bit better.

Gretchen: And how would you go about actually making that come to bear?

Despi: My community's voice flows through me to the federal parliament. I take them with me when I go, not if when!

It's about inclusion. It's, strengths-based, it's a different kind of language. Isn't it?

Gretchen: And that and that implies diversity as well.

Despi: Absolutely.

Gretchen: So you need to build diversity in.

Despi: Yeah, absolutely. it's all of that. It's bringing everybody to the table that needs to be there. We need all the voices. We can't do it without them.

Gretchen: It's a complicated job. There'll be people who will disagree with you, who will sledge, you how do you propose to arm yourself and strengthen yourself against personal attack.

Despi: I am tough enough. And I've stood up to quite a bit over this last year and really pushed through to make sure that I can be the best that I can be for the people who need me to be the best I can be.

I'm here to do the right thing, the good stuff, and I'll keep doing the good stuff, no matter how much you push back. And you know, those, those runs do that to me as well. They push back at you and I keep going. I have never given up, ever.

I am strong, and getting through those events and getting through my last year as mayor in a COVID year with a storm, right at the end of it, that disrupted our whole community. You know, I could have let those things get to me or upset me, but I just kept stepping up. I've got to do more. That's the kind of person I am. White line fever.

Gretchen: Thank you so much, Despi O'Connor for your time today, it's been an absolute pleasure to meet you.

Despi: Thanks Gretchen. I've enjoyed the chat. Thank you.

Gretchen: Despi O'Connor, Independent candidate for Flinders, there, and you can learn more about Despi, and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, teamdespi.com.au.

And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election.

Don't forget to share us with your neighbours, friends and family, there are plenty more one on-one deep dive conversations with standing independents across the nation! I'm Gretchen Miller: great to have you with us: see you next time.

Ep9: Kate Chaney | Independent for Curtin

Kate Chaney: Well, it's a terrible realisation when you have it. I think because it's very easy to say: "the system's broken, isn't it all terrible." But then you realise that we actually are the system. And I had this horrible feeling, which was: "God, if I'm not going to do something about this, who do I think will?" and I remember talking to heads of government departments here in Western Australia and hearing the message from them, which was: "Well, my hands are tied. I can't do this. It's just the system." And thinking if heads of government departments feel like their hands are tied, how do we ever make any change. And really taking that back on and saying: "We are the system, and these are choices that we are making - to accept this level of short-termism, to accept the power as power without purpose, and the politicking, to accept that that's just how politics is done."

They are conscious decisions that we are all making. And so we actually have to step up and do something differently, if we want to say something different.

Gretchen Miller: Kate Chaney there, independent candidate for Curtin. And this is The Independents, a podcast of Climate 200. I'm Gretchen Miller, and in this series, we're meeting some smart, experienced and savvy people, working from the ground up to create a seismic shift in Australian politics as we know it. They're the Independent candidates standing on platforms of climate action, and its intrinsic economic opportunities, alongside a demand for renewed political integrity and accountability.

Kate Chaney and generations of her family were born across the electorate, which is Noongar country. She's a lawyer, and management consultant. She's worked in Indigenous affairs, for Wesfarmers in several roles, and for Anglicare. She cares deeply about action on climate change and for the social good, as we'll hear across this conversation, which we held online while state borders were still closed due to covid. I began by asking her to describe her favourite place to visit.

Kate: I live in West Leederville, which is the eastern part of the electorate. So it's actually the furthest part from the coast. And right next to the end of my street is a lake called Lake Monger, also known as Galup in the Noongar language. And I walk around that lake fairly frequently.

Recently there've been huge flocks of pelicans that land in the early mornings on the lake. And they're really quite spectacular to see. So that's a place that is significant to me. And reasonably recently, probably last year, I think it was, I started to learn more about the Noongar history of that place. And some of the stories that go back to early white settlement, and that being a significant place for Aboriginal people, and this as the location of some skirmishes between the original white settlers of which my family were some, and the Noongar people who lived there.

Gretchen: So tell me about your electorate. Can you describe it? Its focus, it's diversity.

Kate: So Curtin's an above-average income demographic. About half the people who are employed in the electorate are professionals and managers. It includes hospitals and universities, and a disproportionate number of lawyers and teachers as well. The boundaries have been redrawn last year so now includes a larger proportion of Trigg and Scarborough and Karrinyup and Gwelup which tend to be younger areas.

Gretchen: Can you describe the Curtin Independent movement, and how your run evolved?

I was approached on the 5th of January by the Curtin Independent group. That was a group of people who live in Curtin, who got together around the kitchen table and said: "We need to do something differently." They were very frustrated and felt like there was enough energy to actually form a group and put a call out for a candidate who was willing to run as an independent.

When I was approached through a couple of different people, and had that conversation, to be honest, I sort of felt like vomiting because I thought, I think I might actually have to do this and step up into this. There's so many reasons not to go into politics, but I think that it's really matters and it feels like the time is now, and given the diversity of my background I felt like I probably did have something to offer. So I had a series of conversations with the Curtin Independent group over a couple of weeks.

Gretchen: And a little vommy!

Kate: (laughs) A little vommy, that's right. I kept waking up in the morning feeling sick thinking: is it a bad sign that I feel sick about it. And really just that was driven by the personal cost of going into politics and thinking, how will I be attacked and what am I opening myself up to, et cetera, et cetera.

And then made the decision.

One of the really lovely things about this actually has been the relationships I've already made through Curtin Independent, because when you start a relationship with people based on what's really important to you, the things that you really think matter you have this high level of trust. So there's been this great energy behind that movement. And I feel very lucky to be in the right place at the right time and able to contribute to that.

Once I'd announced, I actually didn't feel like vomiting anymore, which was a good sign because there was just this wave of relief and hope from people across my community, and through the Curtin Independent group, too, that made me think: this is important and it does actually need to be done. But that grassroots community group has formed the backbone of my campaign team. And within, I think in the first two weeks, we'd recruited 350 volunteers who have an incredible array of skills and experience.

Gretchen: I wonder what signals you're getting there from the electorate as your campaign progresses.

Kate: So Curtin has been a Liberal seat pretty much forever with one exception when it was held by an independent who was previous member of the Liberal party in that seat. I've felt a strong sense from people that, they feel taken for granted, there's a sense that it doesn't really matter how you vote in Curtin, because it will always be a Liberal seat.

And one of the things that's amazed me in the last three weeks since launching this campaign is the number of people who've said: "thank goodness there's now a genuine alternative." So I think it's more socially progressive than the voting record of the representative indicates. It was the highest proportion in the state in favour of marriage equality, with the plebiscite at 72% or

something. And as the parties moved to more extreme positions on some things, it's left this vacuum of people who are economically sensible, but socially progressive, who really want to say some, strong action on climate change. And that's been one of the big themes I've had coming through in the last few weeks, is how important that is to a broad range of people, certainly younger voters in Curtin, but also older voters too, who are concerned for their children and grandchildren.

Gretchen: I want to ask you one more question about your background, I guess, how were you raised and what makes you care particularly about the environment, about integrity, about gender equality.

Kate: well, that's a very big question, Gretchen. I was raised in a large family. I'm one of four. And my dad's one of seven and my mum's one of four and all of them live in Perth. So I have about 130 relatives from my grandparents down. And they pretty much all live here with the exception of one or two. So really strong family background here and deep, deep roots here over many, many generations. Within my family, there's a strong history of service to community through politics law, business education. And that really came through in my upbringing, the importance of service to community and the responsibilities that come with the good fortune that we have. I think that sense that you do have to be thinking about things beyond your own world, and feel a responsibility to contribute to that.

Gretchen: As a lawyer, a businesswoman, a strategist, you frequently had a social justice focus. Can you tell me about working for Wesfarmers, where you've been manager of Aboriginal affairs, manager, you've worked in emerging ventures. Your father also worked there. That was a bit of a tricky decision for you to join Wesfarmers. Can you tell me why?

Kate: It was a bit tricky. And when I first moved back to Perth, after eight years in Sydney, I remember having a conversation with dad and saying: "well, I've got to work out what I'm going to do it now that we're back in Perth." And he said: "well, Wesfarmers is a great company." And I said: "Dad, I will never work at Wesfarmers. Surely Perth is big enough so I don't have to work at the place that you worked. I want to make my own way." And like most things that you say you'll never do, circumstances changed and I worked at Perth airport for a bit, and then I found myself, after my second child, thinking, "what have I found most rewarding in my career so far?"

And I had done some work up in Cape York with Noel Pearson when at the Boston Consulting Group and I really had found that very rewarding, just grappling with the very difficult challenges of how to give Aboriginal people opportunities and learn from Aboriginal people in, in terms of what we're not doing right as a society as well.

And I thought that's the area I want to work in. And I then found myself having a conversation with Richard Goyder who was CEO at the time at Wesfarmers, who said: "we need to be doing better on Aboriginal employment." And I thought, well, I've got a keen CEO, a blank sheet of paper and the biggest employer in the country. I think I'll have to swallow my pride and take the job at Wesfarmers. And it's just such a great opportunity.

Gretchen: Can you describe that work and what you learned there, the skillset you developed as manager of Aboriginal affairs and what came out of that.

Kate: Yeah, well, it was, it was a really exciting role actually. so there were pockets of Aboriginal engagement or employment throughout the group, but nothing across the board.

And so I worked with the nine different divisions that were across retail, industrial, and safety products, chemical energies, and fertilisers and coal mining, which was like really a microcosm of the Australian economy and worked with the different divisions on understanding what their role was in relation to closing the gap between life expectations for Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Australia.

And we used the framework of a reconciliation action plan. So I developed and then implemented a couple of those while I was at Wesfarmers. And really managed to catalyse the movement on that issue for Wesfarmers, from it not really being a thing, to then being part of how they described their social impact. So it's very, it's very rewarding. And for example, Coles, which is part of the Wesfarmers group at the time, at the beginning we had no idea how many Aboriginal people were employed. And I think, it was about 600 when we worked out how to actually find that out. And within a handful of years, Coles had developed an Aboriginal employment program, and it was employing 5,000 Aboriginal people under that program.

Gretchen: Can you speak to the sustainability experience at Wesfarmers and how your thoughts about climate are playing out now in your platform as a would-be independent.

Kate: So I was general manager of Emerging Ventures and set up a new department at Wesfarmers, which was looking at investment opportunities in high growth industries that we weren't currently exposed to, with a view to what will the next division look like in 10 or 20 years?

So I really had the luxury of that long-term thinking and spent some time looking at what's going to change in the world in the next 10 or 20 years, where are the opportunities? And the theme kept coming through again and again that decarbonisation was going to be one of the big shifts that we saw, and this was going back 10 years now. And really that piqued my interest in climate issues. I think before then, I'd been interested in social issues, but the climate issue, I felt like: "well, surely technology will fix it - that's just too big and hard."

And then when I started looking at it from a Wesfarmers perspective, it became really obvious that this was something big that was going to be shifting in the next 10 years. And as a group, Wesfarmers probably needed to be more proactive in how it was looking at the impacts on its existing businesses, as well as the opportunities in new areas. So I then shifted into the sustainability role and developed 10 sustainability principles to try and bring together diverse views from across the business on understanding how will the world change and what are the implications for, for our business.

And I think it's very easy to get completely disheartened about climate change at a ...

Gretchen: Have you been disheartened? Have you had moments where you've just gone: this is too big?

Kate: Yeah, I think absolutely I have, but I just don't think we have the luxury of throwing our hands in the air and leaving it to someone else to fix. And also what I've found is you feel so much more hopeful and positive about our ability to address this big issue when you're actually doing something about it. And that's a message I've heard from the electorate in the last three weeks too. I heard an 18-year-old say: "I'm so excited that, that I can actually now vote for my future. I can vote in a way that indicates what's important to me, about the future and addressing climate change."

Gretchen: How can government be brought up to speed with what concerns business and the community? I mean, it's easy to kind of romanticise this in the business world and I do it myself, I just think: "oh, thank goodness business is stepping up. But it is about reputational risk, that can have an impact on share price as much as anything else. And, reputational risk can really have an impact on government as well, right?"

Kate: I mean, really the big problem that I think we see with the two-party system is that we're not getting that long-term planning and going back one or two generations in politics, I do think that that was different. I've an uncle who was in federal politics in the eighties - Fred Chaney. And he's talked about being in opposition for much of the eighties. And in opposition, the Liberal party really had time to think deeply about what the country needed. And as a result, didn't block some of the big reforms that came through the Hawke Keating era, and you don't get any political credit for not blocking things.

But that's what it takes to see change is actually putting the interest, the public interest ahead of the political interest. And I just don't think we see much of that today. We saw a bit of it during COVID, which was encouraging. And I think that drove a spike in trust in government during that crisis period.

And the only reason I'm standing as an independent is that I think this is what it will take. I can't see reform happening through the two-party system. It's power without purpose. It's very much just focused on winning and holding onto power.

And I think the independents across the country who are filling the vacuum left by those major parties are saying: "We deserve better than this. And we've got to draw a line in the sand and say: "No. We've got to be planning for the long term." And I certainly am far more interested in policy, than politics. And that's really the leadership that we need to see a return to in politics, making the decisions, even when they're a bit hard because that's what the country needs.

Gretchen: I've got two questions coming out of that. Firstly, I wanted to ask, do you talk much to your uncle about your push, and get his advice?

Kate: I do. I have a great relationship with my Uncle Fred and he's definitely one of my heroes, and I go over and see him every now and then. And over the last few years we have impassioned conversations about what's wrong with the world and what needs to be done. And certainly, he did advise me not to do this because of the personal cost of going into politics, especially for women. When it became clear that I thought that it was worth that cost he has been very supportive and has been a great voice of wisdom for me. And also I think a really good ethical north star. His service to the community over his 80 years has been pretty incredible. And really, I think is the type of politician we miss in politics. So I very much value his opinion and his wisdom.

Gretchen: And secondly, you've stood to run and you've been nominated by Curtin Independent to run. So you've been nominated by a community group, but have you been encouraged by the rise of independent women around the country, determined to make a difference here.

Kate: I think, having seen the wave of independents across the country, for the first time, I thought: "well, maybe you can actually have an impact as an independent, with integrity, without having to dive into what I see as being the huge compromises of being in either

political party. And that there was actually some fresh hope that we can draw a line in the sand and say: "we don't want politics to be like this any more."

Gretchen: How can then government be brought up to speed with what concerns business? Like how, practically speaking, would you be able to do that?

Kate: We have this future building system, which is a combination of politicians, government departments, business, non-profits, the community and importantly, the media. And I think everyone really agrees that there's a problem with our future building system, but each of those institutions think it's the fault of someone else. So really, there needs to be some shifts in how we are thinking about things in all of those different areas. So trying to move back to a longer-term perspective will be an important part of that from a political viewpoint. And I reckon the rise of the independents is the opportunity to do that because you potentially have a small group of people in the parliament who are more interested in the long term than they are in being politicians. And so their decisions and their voting are really driven by their sensible centre perspectives on the change that's needed, rather than how to stay in power.

Gretchen: So trust and integrity comes in here. And I admit, I hadn't heard of the Edelman Trust Barometer, which you raised with me the other day when we were chatting, can you say how that might inform you as a candidate? What can be improved about the intersection of the spaces that the Edelman Trust Barometer measures?

Kate: Yes, I find the Edelman Trust Barometer a fascinating global measure of trust in institutions. One of the things we've seen is that people actually trust business, a whole lot more than any other institution. And they also think that business is the most competent.

Now our government and media institutions are both seen as unethical and incompetent. We need to shift that, we can't maintain this declining trust in institutions because it does fundamentally underpin so much of how the country works. So rebuilding that has got to be about bringing integrity back to federal politics. And the pointier end of that is things like the federal ICAC and politicians need to be held to the highest standard. I think the integrity thing goes beyond that sort of black and white legislative reform on the federal ICAC, to also look at the culture of Canberra: and that's both the way women are treated, the personal attacks and points scoring and returning to it being a competition of ideas. And one of the benefits of independence is you're not bound by ideology and you can take the good ideas no matter where they come from.

Gretchen: Yeah. So have you ever been challenged in terms of integrity? Cause acting with integrity often comes with a... can come with a cost to somebody.

Kate: Yeah, I suppose when launching my campaign there were some people who had had political experience, who I spoke to who said: "Well, you can't let it come out that you joined the Labor Party." Cause I briefly joined the Labor Party last year. "You have to wait. Make sure you're defined by something else, and then when that comes out, you ride it out."

And I thought, there's no way I can do that. That's part of my journey. I grew up in the Liberal Party tradition, was so frustrated last year that I joined the Labor Party, went to one function and thought: "it's not really for me." But the thought of not being transparent about that did not sit well with me.

And so I sort of went against the advice and came out with that to start with. And I'm sure that the Liberal Party will say that that defines me, but I think that people value, transparency and honesty, and also understand that that searching is part of the journey and trying to work out what we can actually do differently. Because however I do this I have to be able to sleep at night and be comfortable with the decisions that I've made.

Gretchen: Most recently you've been director of Innovation and Strategy at Anglicare, as you've mentioned. And you've also been on the board of Next25. You're particularly interested in that longer-term vision as Next25 implies: 25 years. As we know, politics tends to focus on the electoral cycle. Can you talk to how that work has informed your platform strategy and your thinking?

Kate: About nine years ago, I joined the board of a new not-for-profit called then the Australian Futures Project, which became Next25.

And it was looking at our future building system and what's wrong. And what needs to change. I'm really looking at: how do we make sure that we're having the right conversations, or having conversations where we want the country to go, how are we going, getting there and what are the changes that need to be made to improve our future building system?

So that's a fascinating type of, really, macro thinking across the country, which goes beyond any one of the institutions that includes like politics, media, business. I love that type of thinking and really made it obvious to me that we're not having those conversations about who we want to be and how we get there.

Gretchen: And you've expressed a kind of exhaustion with the system, which is a very divisive one, which we mentioned a little earlier, the left-right division, but also I was reflecting on that observation of yours, of, of how fatiguing that division is. There are other divisions in this country that have been fostered, cultural divisions, weaponized contempt, even I think, across, for example, the city/ rural/mining divide. You've worked in both city and rurally, if not in mining, I don't think, but maybe as well. I wonder what the key is to healing that rift?

Kate: I think it comes down to a question of leadership really, and I know it's made harder by social media and the very short media cycle, but I now I think so many of the complex issues that we're facing don't fit on that left/right divide. And so they've ended up being sort of falsely split into a dichotomous position across that divide, which make no sense at all.

So action on climate doesn't fit the left-right divide. And yet it's become a Shibboleth where it's expected that if you believe in free markets, then you also are sceptical about the impact of climate change. And the only way to get around that is by focusing on what we have in common rather than what divides us.

Gretchen: So despite the initial nerves, you've said you are tough enough for politics.

Kate: I think I'm pretty tough. I'm good at separating the personal from the political. I have a strong sense of who I am and what's important to me. I don't think that anyone can break that down for me. I've got to a point in my life where don't have to prove myself, it's time to just get on and get stuff done. I think that I can do that in this role and not be held hostage to personal criticisms because I know why I'm here and that what I'm doing matters.

It is so exciting. I have to say it is really exciting. It does feel like on the cusp of something where we have an opportunity now to stem the decline, set a new standard and expect more. And it's really exciting to see that wave of hope and optimism about shifting our direction and setting a stronger path forward.

I feel very, very fortunate to be in the right place at the right time to be seeing that wave. And all across the country. I think there's, there's real hope that at this election we can hear our voices counting and, and really change the trajectory that we're following as a country.

Gretchen: Hopefully lifting others up with us, right?

Kate: Yes, indeed.

Gretchen: Thank you so much for your time, Kate Chaney, it's been just such a pleasure to have you on the show and I look forward to your continued success. Thanks again.

Kate: Thanks so much Gretchen.

Gretchen: Kate Chaney, here with us on the Independents. A podcast from climate 200. You can learn more about Kate, and how to get involved in the campaign at her website, katechaney.com.au. And if you want to see real action on climate, integrity and gender equality, head over to climate200.com.au and chip in to support this fresh wave of independents in the upcoming election. Please share us with your neighbours, family and friends. Let them know where they can find more one on one deep dive conversations with standing independent candidates across the nation. I'm Gretchen Miller. Thanks for being with us - catch you next time.