

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON DR SALLY TALBOT (South West) [3.56 pm]: It is a good job that I have a whole four years to pay off my debt to my colleague Hon Peter Foster for having now not just thrown me in the deep end, but probably having climbed onto the high diving board and thrown me in the deep end! I was particularly anxious to be ready to take the call the instant we moved back to the Address-in-Reply debate, and I did not want to be trapped in the chair when that happened, so thank you, Hon Peter Foster. You see, it is not as bad as you thought it would be!

In my remarks the other day, which I had to cut short, I had expressed my appreciation and anticipation of a good four years of working with my fellow members in the south west, including not just my two colleagues from the Australian Labor Party, but my colleagues from other parties.

There is one other new member whom I want to acknowledge, and I say this in the context of the Address-in-Reply debate, because the important thing that the Governor has done for us is lay out the agenda for the next four years. I know that a lot of teamwork will go on in this place, both in this chamber and through our work on committees, which will see that come to fruition. I want to make special mention of one other person. That is Hon Dr Brad Pettitt, who is an old colleague of mine from Murdoch University days. We have a long association going back probably more years than we want to count. I know that Hon Dr Brad Pettitt has a very fine academic pedigree. I have never been shy to say that I think there is a very important role to be played by people who take a genuine interest in theory as well as in practice. To combine the two in somewhat of a unique art. I think that what challenges people like me and Hon Dr Brad Pettitt when we come into this place is to show how indeed we can combine theory and practice to very positive ends. I look forward very much to seeing his contribution to this forty-first Parliament and wish him very well in his endeavours in this place. I am looking forward to his inaugural speech, which I believe is scheduled for next Tuesday.

In looking at the beginning of the forty-first Parliament, it would be remiss of me not to comment specifically on the part that was played over the last 20 years by Hon Mick Murray, the former member for Collie–Preston, to get us to where we are today. Members will know that I have worked very closely with Mick for more than 20 years because, of course, he won the seat of Collie in 2001 by 34 votes. Our new members in the other place may like to take notice of this, because I think our most marginal seat is held by 600 votes. Hon Mick Murray won the seat of Collie in 2001 by 34 votes. That was indeed such a nailbiter that the honourable member missed his first caucus meeting because we did not think he would be a member of Parliament! Did he ever let us forget that? No, indeed he did not. I think he even referred in his valedictory speech to the fact that he missed out on the plum jobs because he was not there. When you win a seat by 34 votes, what do you have to lose? Hon Mick Murray from day one held us all to account—all of us. At that stage, I was a party office official in the Australian Labor Party and I felt the heat that came from Mick's oratory in both this place and the electorate over those first four years. He went on to have a stellar finish to his parliamentary career when he became the Minister for Sport and Recreation.

Let us go back to 2001 and think specifically about the Collie area that has now become the seat of Collie–Preston. Members who take an interest in these things would know that the Shire of Collie is about only 20 per cent of the seat of Collie–Preston. Over the years, there have been a lot of boundary changes there. I know that members on both sides of the chamber—I should say members of both major parties in the chamber; I know we have many of our members on the other side, so I have to be careful about how I refer to the other side of the chamber—will know that under a slightly different set of circumstances, the year 2001 might have seen the end of the town of Collie. In those days, particularly in the 1990s, Collie was the centre of what was rapidly becoming an old industry. I am not being fanciful here. We can see plenty of examples in other parts of Australia where communities have effectively been abandoned. Services have walked away, investment has walked away and governments and other sectors of the community who had their hands on the levers of power, I say based on the clear evidence of the last 20 years, could and should step up to the plate when communities have to make that massive adjustment to their local economies. In other parts of Australia, that has not happened and towns have quite simply died.

If members are interested in pursuing this and want to know what to look for, just look at some of the rust belt states in the USA where we see those really horrific images of whole towns simply abandoned and streets where the only thing we can see is “for sale” and foreclosure signs. That is the fate that may well have befallen the town

of Collie before Hon Mick Murray finally won after two previous attempts at the seat. Third time lucky and they got Hon Mick Murray as their local member. Mick was truly a Collie local and from day one he never let us forget that the Collie community consists of real people who have expectations that are just as important as the expectations of people who live in other parts of the state. Those expectations are not complex or unusual, but they are the expectations that people can get a decent job close to home, that they can access to good schools for their children and that they can avail themselves of medical treatment without travelling hundreds of kilometres, and that services are available for adults and children that do not involve people having to take a day off work to access services in the capital, and that children can grow up, leave school and hope to remain living in the area. Of course, it is the beginning of the end of a community when there are no opportunities in that community for young people once they leave compulsory education.

Mick set about that with a vengeance. I can tell members that, having worked with him for close to 30 years before he retired on the election day this year, I learnt a lot about Mick in the final weeks of the fortieth Parliament when I hosted a number of events for people to come and pay tribute and respect and to say goodbye to Mick at the end of his parliamentary career. I heard a lot of stories, some that would be entirely inappropriate to share in this chamber, and I got a great insight into how Hon “Tuck” Waldron put together very coherent questions about the diversification of the Collie economy between 2001 and 2005. Apparently he and Mick were in offices that were next door to each other and they used to keep each other entertained on those long winter nights when they were stuck in Parliament. I gather “Tuck” Waldron became something of an authority on what needed to be done in Collie. I have to say that that particular event was also attended by Hon Eric Ripper, who looked at me and said, “I always had my suspicions.” But that is Mick. Mick would use any vehicle possible, any available path, to get his point across. He did not let go until the day he retired. As somebody who has their office located within shouting distance of Mick’s home, I can tell members that he has not stopped now either. I think that the whole community of the south west owes a great debt to Hon Mick Murray and that it will continue to honour that debt for a number of years to come.

Another person I want to pay tribute to is Peter Watson, who retired from the seat of Albany. I am talking about seats in the south west because that is obviously where I have spent the last 16 years as an upper house member. I knew Peter as the postman from Denmark, where I live. When Peter stepped up in 2001 to run for the seat of Albany, nobody expected him to have a long parliamentary career, yet that is exactly what he went on to have. I want to say one particular thing about Peter, and it might not be the way that he would define his successes or high points of his 20 years in Parliament. There is one particular thing that stands out for me and I would like to think that I have been able to carry on a bit of this work—but I will come to that in a moment. It is a good example for new members in both the other place and the Legislative Council to know how Peter Watson acted when a constituent walked into his electorate office in Albany and spoke to him about his experience of child sexual abuse at the St Andrew’s Hostel in Katanning. His account of the abuse moved Peter to such an extent that Peter came straight to Perth to talk to people who were in a position to act on the information that Peter was now privy to. A constituent rang Peter’s office and made an appointment to talk about something that was important to them. We never know who will walk in our door. As a result of that initial contact and the conversation in that electorate office, we set up the Blaxell inquiry, which had all the powers of a royal commission, to inquire into the goings on at St Andrews Hostel. As a result, the state was put in a very strong position to begin the response to the recommendations of the national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse. That work started in 2017 after the royal commission reported. Since then, it has largely been carried by the Minister for Child Protection; Community Services, Hon Simone McGurk. She has a very onerous task in front of her.

I remark particularly on the genesis of that issue—that it arose from a constituent appointment in an electorate office—because it shows how important it is to listen to people who come and talk to us. Remember, they all have their stories to tell. Remember what we can do with the power that we have in this place. It is often observed by people that parliamentarians have far less power than the public imputes to them. Remember that story about what happened in Peter Watson’s office. Think of it in terms of the way we can empower a person by enabling them to tell us their story. What transpired from that visit was not just the Blaxell inquiry, but one of Blaxell’s recommendations was that we should begin to teach protective behaviours in every Western Australian school. That is now the case. Protective behaviours is now on the curriculum. It is taught in different ways. Schools still have discretion about the way they roll out part of the curriculum but it is now compulsory that children are taught about some of the key measures, not that we would talk to a child in these terms but there are things that a child can do to make sure they are safe. There is a better way of putting that: there are things that children can do to make sure that the adults around them are able to protect them.

The Joint Standing Committee on the Commissioner for Children and Young People, which I chaired in the last Parliament, took the Blaxell inquiry and wrote two reports—one in the previous Parliament, the thirty-ninth Parliament, when I was simply a member of that committee under the chairmanship of Lisa Baker, the member for Maylands, in the other place, and then we continued that inquiry when I took over the chair in the fortieth Parliament. We should remember that when we have afternoons talking to constituents. Some people will come into our offices and feel

better for having talked to us. For others, it will be the start of something that grows in a very significant program that is rolled out by the state and makes a very important difference to the lives of every child in Western Australia.

Having paid tribute to two of my colleagues who have now retired, I want to acknowledge the people on whose shoulders the implementation of the measures outlined in the Governor's address will now lie. Of course, members will not be surprised to hear that I will start with Jodie Hanns, who has taken over from Mick Murray. We have talked about the big shoes on a number of different occasions. I presented the new member for Collie–Preston with Alston's cartoon, which he drew on the day Mick announced his retirement. The entire picture is filled with two shoes and then there is a very tiny drawing of Jodie Hanns standing in the corner. The shoes are labelled "Mick Murray" and the cartoon is captioned "Big shoes to fill". She now has that on her office wall. She is more than up to the task. She is one of the most impressive candidates that I have ever worked with. She is a truly fine human being. She has a terrific background that has prepared her for the work that now lies ahead of her. I hope that she will have at least 20 years in front of her. She will probably be slightly horrified to hear me say this, but I reckon she has a good 30 or 40 years in her. She will make an enormous contribution that I am certain will be felt across the length and breadth of this state during her career. She was the deputy principal at Collie Senior High School. That in itself eminently qualifies her for the position. She has also been running vocational education and training programs for about 16 years, which means that she can talk with real knowledge, insight and understanding about the core part of the program that the Governor outlined when he opened this Parliament, which is the creation of local jobs. It is about bringing together a whole lot of different ideas that we in the labour movement have been talking about for decades. It is about creating local jobs. We cannot create local jobs without creating genuine local training opportunities. That is part of what I am talking about with the diversification of the economies in some of the small towns in the south west. It is not good enough simply to go to the mining sector and say that it has to provide more traineeships and apprenticeships. It has to talk about the range of jobs and training opportunities that real people demand for their young people.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.

Sitting suspended from 4.16 to 4.30 pm