



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Grant Woodhams MLA
(Member for Greenough)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 30 March 2005

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Motion

MR G.A. WOODHAMS (Greenough) [5.20 pm]: It is a great honour to address this Assembly. Peter Watson and I have run a few long races in our lives. Today is probably the longest race I have run. There have been a few false starts, but it is great to be able to get to say what I want to say.

I represent the electorate of Greenough. It is a very famous electorate in Western Australia. Its history goes back to the middle of the 19th century. I begin by talking about the electorate and why it is called Greenough. It is named after George Bellas Greenough, who was a president of the Royal Geographical Society of WA. Originally, George Bellas Greenough's name was just George Bellas. He lost his parents in his early years and was raised by his paternal grandfather, whose last name was Greenough. George Bellas Greenough thus became his name.

It is unfortunate that the Attorney General is not in the Legislative Assembly because I would like to thank him for inspiring me by providing some history to this gathering. History is very important when considering politics in Western Australia.

The first reference I can find to the seat of Greenough names George Shenton Junior. It is recorded in the parliamentary debates in 1870. George Shenton Junior was the son of George Shenton, who was a prominent businessperson in Champion Bay at the time. Champion Bay is otherwise known as Geraldton. George Shenton Junior was a champion in this house for two things in which he believed very strongly in his part of the world. The first was railways and the second was making improvements to the harbour. I add to George Shenton Junior's request to the house that today's members consider making improvements to the railways around Greenough and to its harbour. The situation has changed, given the times we live in, but those improvements to the railways and harbour continue to be needed.

Another cause about which George Shenton Junior felt strongly was providing free land to Aboriginal communities. There are some echoes in this house to this very day of some of those causes. I humbly suggest to members of this house on all sides of politics that we need to do a lot more work with our fellow members of the Western Australian Aboriginal community.

I will stay on the track of history by speaking of William Traylen, who was the first elected member for Greenough. William Traylen was elected in the Legislative Assembly election of 1890. I refer to the Attorney General's comments this morning when he talked about the one vote, one value bill that is before the house. Probably not many members are familiar with the name William Traylen. I certainly was not. William Traylen was elected unopposed for his first four-year term in government. At the next election William Traylen did have an opponent. While I am talking about one vote, one value and electorates of considerable size or lesser size, I refer to the electorate of Greenough in 1894, which had just 112 voters. William Traylen won the election by one vote. He received 56 votes, his opponent received 55 votes and there was one informal vote. My election to the seat of Greenough was won by a slightly larger margin. Nevertheless, it was probably just as nerve-racking as William Traylen's one-vote victory.

In his maiden speech to Parliament William Traylen stated that we all come here inspired with one common feeling of patriotism. I believe that is the case. I am certainly inspired by it. Although I might have some differences with members of the government or even sometimes with members of my own party, I am inspired by patriotism. It is a wonderful thing. I allude to yesterday's swearing in and the address by the Governor. Other members and I had the privilege of meeting the Governor at Government House. The tradition of Parliament is incredibly important. It enables us to perform our jobs in a privileged manner. Although some of the circumstances and some of the pomp and ceremony may seem unnecessary to some people, I believe that tradition is one of the great underpinnings of this Assembly and of the Westminster system, which is a fantastic basis for the government we have. The Westminster system has given all members the opportunity to represent their constituents.

I will mention one final member from the seat of Greenough. It would be remiss of me to not mention him. David Brand, as he was in 1945, and later Sir David Brand, was a former Premier of Western Australia. David Brand won the seat of Greenough in a by-election in 1945. The by-election was caused by the death of Flight Lieutenant Newton, who was the then sitting member for Greenough. He lost his life in World War II. At that time David Brand was the very first member of the Liberal Party to be elected to any Parliament in Australia. On 10 March the first poll was declared for the seat of Greenough, and 60 years later, a National Party representative was able to claim a seat from the Liberal Party. That was a great and historic moment. I feel very humble and proud to have been elected by the people of Greenough, who obviously have a very strong conservative leaning and a Liberal leaning. It is fantastic that they placed their faith in me and, hopefully, it will be a fantastic outcome for this house.

David Brand, in his first speech to this Parliament at the conclusion of a long day of debating estimates, asked the relevant minister to consider the north when framing his estimates. I ask the same of this house; that it consider the north. I suggest, albeit humbly, that there is a preoccupation with the south in the community of Western Australia. I know that other members of this house would agree with me. I am here to represent the north. What has brought me here? Why am I here?

I had the great privilege of working with the Premier at Murdoch University. I will clarify that: the Premier was my tutor at times during my university career.

Dr G.I. Gallop: You were the guild president, weren't you?

Mr G.A. WOODHAMS: No, I was not the guild president. I was the warden of convocation, which, for those who may be unaccustomed with this style of speech, has nothing to do with naval matters or even with navel gazing. In fact it is the title given to the person who heads the alumni body at Murdoch University. That person is probably now called the president of the alumni, but at that point I was called the warden of convocation. I thank you, Mr Premier, for your early inspiration at Murdoch University.

Dr G.I. Gallop: I don't know what happened!

Mr G.A. WOODHAMS: Some of us go off the rails and others are trying to build them. We will leave that alone for another day! I thank the Premier for that inspiration.

I am also inspired by the member for Geraldton, who, before I declared an interest in politics, was often able to provide me with information about matters in the house.

I have mentioned the north. One thing that is terribly important for this house to contemplate is the drift to our major regional centres and the very Rome-like state of Western Australia; that is, all roads lead to Perth and nothing decent or good can happen in any other part of Western Australia. I ask all members to give consideration to the fact that the powerhouse of Western Australia is regional Western Australia, the benefits of which are often visited upon the metropolitan area. I ask all members to always consider that without regional Western Australia, Perth is but a hollow shell.

Greenough has trees leaning away from Perth. I will talk a little about the electorate of Greenough, which I knew very well even before standing for election. These days it extends from Three Springs in the south to Kalbarri in the north. I have found one thing in particular with the electorate of Greenough, particularly when doorknocking. Given my light frame, I was unable to wear out even one pair of shoes, although I contend that I knocked on about half the doors in the electorate of Greenough! As conservative as that electorate has been and as blue ribbon as it once was, there is great poverty and great deprivation in that electorate, and opportunities are missed by many members of our community. Housing conditions in several of the communities that make up the electorate of Greenough are in desperate need of attention and repair. I suggest that there are people living below the poverty line in the electorate of Greenough. This situation should not be allowed to continue. I ask members on both sides of the house to consider housing in Western Australia as a priority. We heard the member for Central Kimberley-Pilbara talk about housing in his seat and I am sure that areas of Greenough have conditions that are similar to those he described. It is not a party political position; it is a reality that we need to deal with.

Yesterday I had the privilege of meeting with two gentlemen from the Department of Indigenous Affairs. Roughly eight per cent of the population of the electorate of Greenough is indigenous. I suggest that our indigenous communities are no different from the communities in which we live. They represent a range of interests, pursuits and abilities. However, as the Parliament of Western Australia, we need to provide more opportunities for many of these people in these communities to gain equality, because I do not believe that they have equality at this point. I recently visited the community known as Barrow Well. I think one member of this house might recognise the name Barrow Well. It is an Aboriginal community inland from Kalbarri. It is a unique community in that it is run by only one family, the Mallard family, who have a long history in Greenough, a long history in the north, and a long history with white society throughout the Greenough electorate. They are seeking equality. They are seeking the opportunities to run businesses in the same way that we can run our businesses. At this point they are denied those opportunities. The member for Geraldton and I will work in tandem to try to create opportunities for disadvantaged communities in the electorates of both Geraldton and Greenough, because these are not political issues; these are issues of social and educational equity.

I am reminded in a historical sense of a previous Governor of Western Australia, Governor Fitzgerald, who travelled through the Greenough region in the late 1840s. He travelled north on the recommendation of the explorer A.C. Gregory, who had found what he believed to be some reasonably strong ore bodies of copper. Governor Fitzgerald travelled north to visit these ore bodies for himself and to see whether he could be convinced that there were business opportunities.

Business opportunities go back a long way in Western Australia. Government involvement in business opportunities also goes back a long way. The interesting thing about Governor Fitzgerald's visit to the area, which became known as the Geraldine mine, is that on his return

journey to Champion Bay to get on a boat to come back to the Swan River Colony, to Perth, he was attacked, assailed and confronted by a group of local residents, who speared him through the leg. I am sure that the Governor was not impressed. He responded to the spearing with a volley from the guns he and his men were carrying, and fought off the local residents. He returned to Perth still with very strong views about the ore-bearing opportunities; the lode of copper that was to be found at Geraldine. That venture went ahead. The Geraldine mine was established and Champion Bay became a settlement. It was called Champion Bay until it became known as Geraldton. For a great part of the early days of Western Australia's colonial history the area was known simply as the Greenough. The first public railway line in Western Australia ran from Geraldton to Northampton, mainly through the electorate of Greenough. I wonder whether the government would like to replace that railway line. I wonder what the costings of it would be.

The issue of health was raised by a previous speaker. I will touch on one area of health in particular; that is, mental health, and the difficulties faced by people caring for mentally ill family members. These people have been thrust upon their families due to lack of government funding or consideration, whatever it may be. Some may say that this is fair enough. However, the difficulty is that the majority of carers are ageing, and there is no support for them. Their own mental health and welfare is at stake here. Once again, this should not be a political issue; it should be an issue of social equity and compassion, and a recognition that the government has a responsibility towards not only those with mental health problems but also those who are shouldering the burden of caring for them. In the main, these are family members who provide care with virtually no support.

I will touch also on the fishing industry. My electorate and that of the member for Moore share a common boundary. The western rock lobster fishing industry along what is popularly known as the Batavia Coast - there have been commercial suggestions that it become the Coral Coast - is the most important and most commercially successful single-species fishery in Australia. The majority of people in that fishery catch fish, on a good day. The majority of those people are family operators, and they need to remain family operators. They do not need to be swallowed up by big business. There is a danger that that fishery will become politicised to the extent that big business will take over and small operators will be pushed out. I am here to defend the family operators in that fishery, and not to support the big business operators, who might think they are entitled to all of that fishery.

The population of Greenough continues to grow, particularly in the urban fringe of Geraldton. One of the challenges I have is with people who come to our community and do not know whether they are in Geraldton or Greenough. Educating them is a very important goal for me. I am very passionate about education, as the Premier would know. Before being elected to this house my previous occupation was in the educational field, as an education consultant. It is incredibly important that, once again, the resources that seem to be readily available to the metropolitan area be made available to regional areas like Geraldton, where the two major high schools of the Greenough region are located. The other two schools of great importance are in Kalbarri and Dongara, and both are suffering severe neglect. Thirteen of the 19 buildings at the Dongara school are transportables, and the situation is similar at Kalbarri. Both communities have pleaded with the government for some recognition to enable staff to deliver successful product in those schools. It is a battle when schools are dealing with not only second-hand but often fifth-hand transportable buildings.

In closing this maiden speech, I congratulate all the new members of this house on their success in the election. I congratulate the government on its re-election. There are some people I would like to thank. I thank the member for Avon and Hon Murray Criddle for talking me into this.

Mr N.R. Marlborough: So they are the ones responsible!

Mr G.A. WOODHAMS: Correct. I thank my mother and father, who are lifelong members of what was the Country Party and is now the National Party. I thank my wife, Gabrielle, and my daughter, Phoebe, for their support through the campaign. I thank the house for hearing me out.
[Applause.]
