

[Thursday, 13 April 1989.]

MR GRAHAM (Pilbara) [11.07 am]: Mr Speaker, I add my congratulations to those given by other speakers on your re-election to the Chair. I suppose I should also commend you on your eyesight, and being able to see down to the back back-benches. It is possible that my friend from Northern Rivers and I are the only two people in the House who actually enjoy a division because it gives us the ability to get down into the House to see what is really happening.

I rise today with great pride to give my maiden speech as the inaugural member for the newly created seat of Pilbara. That seat was created after the recent redistribution of the old seats of Kimberley and Pilbara. I put on record my appreciation of the member for the former electorate of Kimberley and the present member for Ashburton, for the way in which they have serviced their electorates and their assistance to me both during the campaign and since. I know that assistance will continue and I appreciate it. Those two members have put an enormous amount of work into their electorates, but they were hampered in their ability to service the north west because of the sheer physical size of the electorates. Two members of Parliament were servicing approximately half of Western Australia. The redistribution has made the situation much more sensible, and I am left with an electorate roughly the size of Victoria to service.

I would also like to put on the record my thanks and appreciation to all the people who assisted me in my campaign. There are too many of them in too many towns to mention, but to all of them, including my family - and particularly my mother who made the effort in the last week of the campaign to hop on a bus to come to Port Hedland and give me a hand - I give my heartfelt thanks. Every member of this House knows that the people who involve themselves behind the scenes in election campaigns put in an enormous amount of work for their respective political parties and candidates. In the case of the Pilbara a lot of work and effort was rewarded with a clear victory in the seat. Although I have collectively mentioned the assistance given to me by people, I must make particular mention of two senior members of the trade union movement without whose help and encouragement I would not be here today.

I refer to Jack Marks, the secretary of the Amalgamated Metal Workers Union, and to Joe Keenan, the secretary of the Australian Workers Union. I thank them for their friendship and sponsorship, as I also thank the Deputy Premier, David Parker, for his support and encouragement over the years. I must also record my appreciation and congratulations to the Premier on winning the election. It was a particularly difficult election for us to win and I think everyone on this side of the House joins with me in congratulating the Premier, who showed himself to be a fine leader of a great political party in this State.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Mr GRAHAM: It is pleasing for my family to see the name of Graham appear in this House again. My uncle, the late Herb Graham, sat in this House from 14 August 1943 until 30 May 1973, a period of almost 30 years. When I look at that record and consider some of the sitting hours lately, I sometimes doubt his wisdom. His widow, Beryl, has joined us today and the Speaker has been kind enough to allow her into the Speaker's Gallery. During his time in Government, Herb Graham served as a Minister in the Hawke Labor Government in the 1950s, and as Deputy Premier in the Tonkin Government in the 1970s. Herb held many portfolios in this State, and his contribution to Western Australia and his party was of the highest order. It is a daunting task for me to attempt to carry on the family tradition but I would like to think one day my contribution to the State and my party will be matched against his.

As an aside, I have only recently been informed that Herb's father, my grandfather, the late William Graham of Narrogin, was also endorsed by the Labor Party and stood as a candidate in the 1912 elections for a seat in the upper House. That gives me the honour of being the third generation of Graham to be endorsed by the Labor Party.

The Pilbara is a large and important electorate based mainly on the town of Port Hedland. I have lived in Port Hedland longer than anywhere else on this man's earth; my three children were born there. It is a town that has been the victim of political decisions in the past. Unfortunately, some of the political gurus of previous times thought the Pilbara their sole province; we have had nearly every social experiment known to the Western world carried out in the Pilbara. The Pilbara in its developing years suffered from a lack of planning and Port Hedland is a classic example of this. Logic and commonsense should have dictated that as the only existing town in the Pilbara at that time Port Hedland should have been developed and expanded as the major regional centre. This did not happen as it should have and the people of Port Hedland believe that Karratha was promoted at the expense of Port Hedland for purely political reasons. The net result over the years has been the insane rivalry between the two towns which are in an extremely isolated region being 200 kilometres apart, but 1 000 kilometres north of Perth. We have this insane rivalry and it is not a healthy situation.

I believe, because of the excellent political and personal relationship that exists between myself and the member for Ashburton, and the ability of the Government to make decisions based on the needs and merits of each community within the guidelines of Government policy for the north, this counterproductive rivalry will

diminish to healthy competition - except by those people who have a vested interest in maintaining and perpetuating that division.

The Pilbara is an important electorate, and by that I mean primarily the wealth generated from it. I refer to the iron ore industry, and the salt, gold and pastoral industries situated in the electorate. My electorate contains all or part of three of the four mainland producers of iron ore. The only producer which is not present in the area is the infamous Robe River Mining Company - the doyen of the new right in Australia - and, even though I would love to continue my long running battle with that warped philosophy, after three years of dealing with those people daily, I do not and will not miss them. That type of corporate behaviour is something I hope I will never see in my electorate - or see applied in this State again.

Government members: Hear, hear!

Mr GRAHAM: I would like to turn my attention to the iron ore industry because I enter this House having been involved in that industry since 1975. I believe I possess the credentials to comment on that industry. I have worked in the industry both as a white collar worker and blue collar worker. I served my apprenticeship as an electrical fitter in the industry; I have served as a rank and file union member, as a union convener and as a full time union official. I have twice represented the union movement on international tripartite trade missions - first, in 1985 to Brazil and, second, in 1987 to Europe.

The iron ore industry has had a stormy history, averaging 79,000 working days lost every year since 1978 through industrial disputes. In the early 1980s the industry was confronted with a world market which was over supplied and the subsequent downward pressure on the selling price tied with the increasing costs in the Pilbara meant that the industry was in a crisis situation. We had to match the low cost international competition from India and Brazil. Something had to be done to promote the industry. The Federal and State Labor Governments with the support of the unions and producers in 1984, after lengthy negotiations, formed the Western Australian Iron Ore Industry Consultative Council which comprised representatives of the companies, the Government and the unions - including representatives of the shop floor level of the unions. That body has contributed to what I believe to be one of the greatest turnarounds in modern industrial relations history.

Members should consider the following statistics: In 1983 the iron ore industry lost 105 000 working days through industrial disputes; in 1987 that figure had decreased to 22 600. To put that another way, the working hours actually lost by each employee through industrial disputes in 1983 was 129, and in 1987 that figure dropped to 27. The 1988 figures are not out yet but I expect even with the recent major dispute in the industry that the figures will be at most 50 per cent of the 1983 level.

Turning to productivity we should consider the tonnes mined in the industry in 1983. In that year approximately 130.430 million tonnes of dirt was moved around the Pilbara. In 1987 the figure was 200.490 million tonnes - a 53 per cent increase in productivity. If we consider what that means by way of tonnes over the end of the wharf in 1983 we sold 66.4 million tonnes of iron ore; in 1987 we produced 96.09 million tonnes - another significant increase. It is a credit to the participants in the industry that such a turnaround has been possible.

I would like to place on public record my appreciation to the union movement for the manner in which it has conducted itself in recent years. I also congratulate the two Labor Governments for taking, and the iron ore companies for supporting, an initiative which was at the time controversial. It is one which has gone on to become a model for other areas in Australia. To my mind, there is no clearer example of the difference in philosophies between the party I belong to and those people opposite - with their policies of endless confrontation with the union movement - than that such an improvement could take place. The improvement in industrial relations and productivity in one of the major industries in Western Australia would not have been possible other than under a Labor Government.

But, more importantly, the cold hard statistics that I gave, which incidentally come from the council itself from the figures supplied by the iron ore companies, prove the fact that the industry and the jobs of the people employed in that major industry are now secure for the foreseeable future. As I said earlier, I believe it has been a remarkable success story in modern day industrial relations and I consider myself privileged to have been a part of it. I hope I continue to be a part of the working of the council and the industry in my new role as a member of Parliament.

There is much more to the Pilbara than just iron ore mining. It is fair to say that mining is the major employer in the area and that position will remain for a long time to come, but that is notwithstanding the promising development in the tourism field in Tom Price and the Hamersley National Park, which is one of the truly great tourist destinations in the north west. There is a need to attract further industry into the region and not only for reasons of diversification, or only at election time, as there is an urgent economic need to add value to our primary products. I have wondered over the years whether the iron ore secondary processing industry has been pursued hard enough, as the rhetoric over the years has usually come around election time. Sitting down and having a conversation about this the other night we came to the view that if all the jumbo steel mills that we were promised in the 1970s had been delivered, we would have one each. Some interesting processes are being developed in the processing of iron and steel and I will watch them with interest. I assure members that if there is any possibility of a steel mill being built in the north, I have the ideal location for it at Port Hedland in mind.

Mining has brought rapid development to the north west, but with that development has come many associated developments and major problems. Like most Western Australians I am aware of the legacy of Wittenoom, a legacy that will be with us for many years to come. It is nothing short of a tragedy and my sympathies go out to the victims and families suffering from mesothelioma and asbestosis. I have consistently taken the line in Wittenoom, whether it is politically popular or not, that I have serious concerns over the health risk from asbestos. Those concerns are heightened when I consider one of the problems remaining from the mining days. I am speaking of the tailings stockpiled in the Wittenoom and Western Gorges. I have seen it and I am told that there are five million tonnes of asbestos tailings sitting in the gorges. Those tailings contain the fibrous material and it is spread around the Pilbara when the river floods. The question of who is responsible to clean up the tailings is a vexed one. Personally, I have no doubt that the responsibility rests with the mining company and I intend to pursue that line. In this enlightened day and age a mining company should not be allowed to leave an area in the way that Wittenoom was left.

I get all the good ones in my electorate. The Rudall River National Park is also in my electorate and as most people are aware there is a major conservation blue looming there; it promises to be the conservation event of the year judging by the way that people are teaming up for it. I do not wish to address the conservation issue today, nor do I wish to address the problematic question of whether we should mine uranium. However, I wish to address the question of the Mardoo Aborigines who live in this area. Their claim to that land predates the park, mining, exploration and even this House. They are one of the groups of Aborigines in the north who are trying to live as close as possible to their traditional life style and trying to rebuild their culture. They have avoided the bottle that is slowly destroying other Aboriginal cultures around Australia. I believe that they should be applauded for their efforts. This group has been opposed to mining on their land even though they have no secure tenure to the land. In fact, their ownership of the land is under dispute from another Aboriginal group. A report currently is being compiled by the Department of Conservation and Land Management in conjunction with the desert people and I am sure that the report will support the Mardoo people's claim. I would find it distasteful if Australians again uprooted these people when their aim, after 200 years of white settlement, is to rebuild themselves with dignity. I believe strongly that these people are entitled to a fair go from us and should be given the opportunity to re-establish themselves free from the pressures of outside influences. I know that I did not and will not make friends by that statement. However, I believe, whether I make friends or not, it had to be said. I believe strongly in it and I will continue to say so.

In the past I do not believe that people in Perth realised the difficulties that people faced as residents of the Pilbara. There is a lot said about the weather in the Pilbara and in the summer time there are days when the temperature is 40 degrees plus. I have heard the Pilbara described as having the best climate in the world for six months of the year, and the worst climate for the other six months. I suppose that a statistician could work out on average that the weather was quite reasonable over a year. Personally I do not believe that it is a problem; I do not think the Pilbara has a weather problem, apart from the cyclones. I believe that places like Melbourne have a weather problem because people have to carry singlets, jumpers and umbrellas all at the same time.

We have high costs in the north west. We have a transient population and in the past we have had trouble contacting Government agencies. These are some of the difficulties confronting people in the north. In the past the Government services delivered in the north did not work because they were delivered in the wrong place and to the wrong people. But I believe that has changed as the Labor Government has served the north well since it was elected in 1983. It is a totally different place in which to live now, and I will give some examples of this. The Pilbara road study was undertaken by the Labor Government. I will give an example of how road planning worked prior to this study. In 1946 the people of Marble Bar had their railway line closed and they were promised an all weather bitumen road. The Pilbara road study provided the first stage of the roadway in 1988; that was 42 years later. The Labor Government introduced the Pilbara road study and it did something unprecedented; it went out and spoke to the people in the community and the local authorities to find out where people really wanted the roads to go. This was a novel and successful approach to the problem.

The delivery of welfare and community services was a much needed part of life in the Pilbara. In my view it is quite simple; there is no point in the rhetoric that we often hear of working for the dole or that young people are lazy when the young people who live in the town depend upon a sole industry with a finite number of jobs. What is needed is progress and community based programs. Those programs are now in existence in the Pilbara and are receiving ongoing funding. The difference, Mr Speaker, is that we now have, on our side of the House, local members from these electorates in the north west who actually live in the area. When I first went to the Pilbara in 1975, my local member of Parliament, who was from the other side of politics, lived in Perth and continued living in Perth until he was defeated in 1983; I believe there is a message in that.

Some of the programs that this Government have initiated in the north have been extremely successful and I would like to example some of them. Community houses have sprung up in the area including the Treloar Community House in South Hedland, the Nintirri Centre in Tom Price and the Koorinal Family Centre in Paraburdoo. These organisations are funded by programs introduced by a Labor Government. The long ignored

women of the north are now able to meet and to take up community issues that are of interest to them. That did not happen prior to 1983. There has been a major social turnaround in the Pilbara.

I could go on and explain that the Telecom 008 number gives those people access to Government departments so that they can find out what is going on. I could talk also about arrests at public meetings in the 1970s and armed convoys going through the State, but I will not because there has been a major social turnaround in the Pilbara. I congratulate this Government for its foresight and direction.

I will not attempt to give a policy speech from the north all over again. That was done very well by the Premier. However, I applaud the Government for its initiative and will mention a couple of initiatives because they are particularly important. A women's conference is to be held in the north this year. I am sure it will be a success. It would have been unthinkable in previous years for such events to take place in the Pilbara. I also mention the recognition by this Government of the higher costs involved in building in the north through the introduction of the Stamp Duty Amendment Bill (No 2) which allowed for an allowance in the amount of stamp duty paid on houses up to \$125 000 in the north as opposed to \$80 000 in the city. That recognition has not been given previously to the north.

That has come about because of the situation that this Government finds itself in. The Premier lived and worked in the north, as did the Deputy Premier, albeit for a short time only. The Minister for Agriculture has been a long term resident of the north as has the member for Ashburton. I am also a long term resident of the north. A number of other members, including the member for Peel, have also lived and worked in the north for lengthy periods. That has given the Government an ability to be able to make decisions for people in the north with an input from people from the north. It is new. It has not all been welfare and spending by the Government in the Pilbara over the last six years.

I wish to mention some of the major new developments that have come about in the period since a Labor Government came to office in this State. McCamey's Monster is a major new development and probably the best development in the area. Not only did it open up a whole new market for our iron ore in the Eastern bloc countries, but it also gave us access to the counter trade which is something that we have not been involved in before. It has now become one-third of the world trade. That development was held up for nearly 20 year because Lang Hancock did not get on with the previous Premier of this State or for some other reason that I am not sure about. However, it took a Labor Government to get it up and running.

Channar is another major development near Paraburdoo. It has also opened up a new major market for the export of our iron ore. We now export to China. That project was possible only because the State and Federal Labor Governments involved themselves in the negotiations with the Chinese Government. Particular congratulations should go the Deputy Premier for his active involvement in that development.

Goldsworthy Mining Ltd was going out of business before intervention and support by this Government extended the life of its operations by 20 years. That has meant that approximately 850 jobs have been saved in the WA iron ore industry.

The Port Hedland harbour and channel have been deepened to take some of the biggest ships in the world. The harbour will now also house the Australian Navy's forward operating base. I could go on, but considering that six years of Labor Government has produced this kind of first class result, it comes as no surprise to me that Labor holds all of the northern seats.

I am proud to be part of this excellent Government and I am looking forward to playing my part over the next four years and longer because I know that the Pilbara will continue to grow and prosper under this Government. It is the only Government that has the policy mix right and the people with a real and lasting commitment to the north.

[Applause.]