



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Nigel Hallett MLC
(Member for South West)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 25 May 2005

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Motion

HON NIGEL HALLETT (South West) [4.01 pm]: Thank you, Mr President. It gives me great pleasure to stand in this chamber to deliver my maiden speech. Mr President, I take this opportunity to extend my congratulations to you on your election as President of this house. It gives me great honour and pride, first, to have been selected by the Liberal Party and, secondly, and importantly, to have been supported by the electors of the South West Region, which has a total area of 44 518 square kilometres. I recognise and pay tribute to my family: my wife, Susan, and my two sons, Ian and Michael. My mother, Grace, is also here today in the gallery. My late father, Tom, was a person of great ideals, honesty and integrity. My parents were married for more than 50 years, and I had an upbringing of which I am proud. Their moral guidance, support and friendship helped to shape me as an individual. Both my parents were born in the United Kingdom. Both served in World War II, with dad serving in the Middle East, Borneo and New Guinea. It was here that my father forged a lifelong friendship with Keith MacKinnon, father of Barry, a former state minister and opposition leader of our Parliamentary Liberal Party. My parents were typical of their time. Both were committed to a stable home and to providing opportunities for a better life. Both lived through the Great Depression of 1929, the consequences of which I did not fully appreciate in my youth.

Through my parents, the person who I learnt to admire for his achievements was the former Premier Sir David Brand. Sir David was born in Dongara and came from an early farming family in Mullewa. When World War II broke out, he enlisted in the Army. Shortly after, the Liberal Party was founded in 1944. Sir David won the seat of Greenough in 1945. In fact, he was the first parliamentary member of the new Liberal Party in Australia. Under his premiership, there was unprecedented industrial development in the state, including the development of the Kwinana industrial strip, the construction of the standard gauge railway from Kalgoorlie to Kwinana, mining in the Pilbara and progress on the Ord River scheme.

My father was allocated a small farm in Bridgetown through the war service land settlement scheme, and this was where my brother and I were raised. My education at both primary and high school level commenced in Bridgetown, and I later went to Hampton Senior High School in Perth. I was fortunate to

have an opportunity to have a career in farming. My brother David and I worked together in partnership for 15 years. In the middle to late 1980s, interest rates were in excess of 20 per cent. For many small businesses there were opportunities to expand. However, the financial uncertainty was a limiting factor for many. I believed that there was an opportunity to expand the family business, and chose Corrigin. Ironically, the farm in Corrigin was once owned by the late member for Canning, Jack Hallett. There was some financial pressure at the time, but this venture proved to be successful for our family. Farming has a wonderful way of teaching a person many life skills through everyday challenges. The 1980s were a fantastic time to be part of the state's rural development. Having a young family, my wife and I experienced the difficulty of such things as not having a doctor on call and having to travel long distances for medical assistance. As country people, there was also the impact of dealing with isolation and single personalities in a small school, and then the division of the family, with the children moving to the metropolitan area for secondary schooling. Having been fortunate to experience both city and country lifestyles, I recognise that no matter where people live, they have a right to expect equal access to quality education, health and police services, and they have a right to well-maintained roads. We need to change this government's city-centric approach and to ensure the provision of fundamental services in rural and remote areas. The region faces many issues and many ongoing problems, which typically result from a lack of understanding and action.

AGRICULTURE

The agricultural industry has been neglected for many years by successive governments. Apart from the severe population decline in the bush, we are now witnessing a government that cannot develop initiatives and make decisions. An example of this can be found with the exceptional circumstances legislation, which has affected many of our north-eastern wheat growers and associated businesses. The time taken to evaluate the seasonal needs of these small businesses is appalling. Anybody who knows the industry can tell by September whether the season has failed. Why is Western Australia still negotiating with its federal counterpart in May of the following year? The state government can and should take a far more proactive role in this area. It is a reasonably easy solution.

Another area that I must comment on is our dairy industry. Western Australia has lost approximately 30 per cent of its dairy farmers through record low prices, and processors are also finding the going tough. I cannot find a winner in this outcome. The appropriate marketing bodies must help in identifying niche and expanding markets for the benefit of Western Australian businesses. For example, China has a serious shortage in its supply of milk. The average individual consumption of dairy products in China is 25 kilograms per annum. In comparison, the world average is 100 kilograms, and consumption in Australia is a whopping 381 kilograms per person per annum, which is among the highest levels of consumption in the world. China is importing every available dairy cow suitable for its domestic needs from Australia. Last year, it imported 60 000 head of cattle from Australia. Fortunately, this is to the benefit of cattle producers in the short term. However, to benefit industry in the long term, producers must be provided with the opportunity to export dairy products, without jeopardising the lineage of their herds. Agriculture needs leadership and stability.

THE REGION

A successful initiative of the previous Liberal government was the infill sewerage program, which was designed to move societies away from outdated and environmentally damaging waste disposal methods. The program had tangible benefits for the community, but has been sadly neglected by the Gallop government. That has been to the detriment of smaller towns. That has happened despite the Gallop government claiming to being interested in the environment.

We have also seen Labor's lack of resolve in projects such as the Peel deviation. Constant delays illustrate Labor's lackadaisical and irresponsible approach to infrastructure development. The need for this deviation is urgent. On a normal day, at least 30 000 vehicles pass through Dawesville, creating severe bottlenecks and unnecessary driver angst. It is only a matter of time before a serious accident occurs on this dangerous, choked-up road system. Expressions of interest to construct the deviation need to be called. The minister should make this project a priority by calling on Main Roads Western Australia to initiate the tender process, instead of dilly-dallying and waiting another 12 months, which is too often the case.

There has also been a remarkably similar lack of desire to do anything about Geographe Bay. This bay is very important to Western Australia's health and economy. There are a number of areas of concern: pollution, erosion, an increase in pressure from the growing recreational and professional needs of the community; and various outdated methods of fishing. All types of trawling and net fishing should be banned, with the exception of crab drop nets. Aquaculture should be allocated much more research and development support, which will ultimately lead to more sustainable fish stocks. We should also consider the creation of more artificial reefs to improve the marine environment and the quality of the fishing experience in Geographe Bay. South Australia, New South Wales and the Northern Territory had massive turnarounds in King George whiting and other fish species, particularly barramundi, when they took effective and responsible action in dealing with similar problems. This has generated huge increases in tourism alone. I seek bipartisan support in preserving the quality of Geographe Bay for all uses well into the future.

Mr President, you may not be aware that the south west region extends from just north of Mandurah to just east of Albany. It contains three cities: Mandurah, Bunbury and Albany. The region has a population that is heading towards 250 000. The region is among the fastest, if not the fastest, growing of all in Australia. The south west has a broad economic base covering agriculture, forestry, mineral extraction, processing and manufacturing, fishing, tourism and retailing. I will give some examples of income derived in the 2002-03 financial year: mineral extraction, mining and processing, \$2.2 billion; retail, \$1.9 billion; tourism, \$588 million; agriculture, \$493 million; mineral sands, \$305 million; coal, \$273 million; and trade through the Bunbury port of some 12 million tonnes. When we consider that these figures do not cover the entirety of the economic story of the south west region, we can see the importance not only for this region but also for the future and prosperity of all of Western Australia.

This state needs the commitment of a government that understands and wants to see these areas develop and prosper. Why is it difficult to get basic infrastructure such as roads, a reliable power grid and a water supply that would prevent towns such as Manjimup, Bridgetown and Boyup Brook from being on drastic water restrictions? Why is this government continuing with another grossly inefficient and time-consuming feasibility study? The issues and the expertise to rectify these problems have been available for some time, yet the state government has never recognised this or seized the opportunity available. In a time of record revenue collection and a booming state economy, real infrastructure growth is a necessity that will carry Western Australia through the next decade. There are no excuses for delays or shortfalls given the predicted economic growth and population increase.

TAXES - EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Let us look at stamp duty on vehicles and housing. How many members are aware that Western Australians are choosing to purchase vehicles outside this state because the Gallop government-imposed stamp duty is so excessive? Stamp duty on housing - one of the highest rates in Australia - creates windfall Treasury surpluses that are not being used for the benefit and development of Western Australia. When we look into recent history and to the British government at the time when Maggie Thatcher took over from

James Callaghan's Labor government, we can see that she reduced the top tax rate by 20 per cent and actually collected more tax. Although her actions seemed counter-intuitive, they highlight the fact that when government lets people get on with working and making a decent living and stays out of everyday life, more revenue is generated.

Payroll tax is an abhorrent tax imposed in a manner that strangles the incentive for businesses to grow their work force. Compounding this structural problem is the fact that the revenue gained has not been re-invested in industry and training of skilled labour. There has been much talk in recent months about the lack of skilled workers in Australia. Once again I call for bipartisan support in this Parliament to abolish this tax, which will consequently encourage businesses and industry to divert their revenue from unfair taxation to skilling and expanding their work force.

While I am talking about apprenticeships, it is time to revisit these schemes. Apprenticeships need overhauling. They need to be tailored to fit individuals and based on competency, not time served. Students have a great understanding of modern technology; this, combined with greater flexibility and access to information, has created a generational shift that to date has not been accounted for in the education system. Apprenticeships are just as valuable as a university degree. This is the message that Dr Brendan Nelson, the federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, has been sending. We now have the difficult task of convincing a generation of secondary students and their parents that apprenticeships are valued and needed by society. This preconceived notion of inadequacy is quite amazing, considering that a majority of Western Australia's wealth is derived from the mining, oil and agricultural activities, which immediately come to mind, that are heavily dependent on tradespeople.

INFRASTRUCTURE AND YOUTH

I will also briefly touch on tourism. Approximately 600 000 tourists a year visit Western Australia. This figure is a small increase on the previous year, but below the national growth average. Why is this, one might ask? Towns such as Mandurah, Busselton, Margaret River and Dunsborough experience population blow-outs during holiday destination time without being provided with adequate resources to cope with demand. What provisions are being made through infrastructure development to handle these ever-increasing numbers? I suggest very little. The road between Yallingup and Augusta has claimed many lives over the years, yet it still remains substandard. The ever-increasing heavy vehicle traffic on South Western Highway between Donnybrook and Manjimup is creating a potential traffic disaster, as we have all tragically witnessed in recent weeks. We must recognise that trucks are an essential part of our economy. Drivers' professionalism and dedication stands testament to the rig operators who support many Western Australian families and businesses. Governments at all levels need to work cohesively to provide safer and more strategic road systems to counter ever-increasing traffic problems and cater for all road users. Many tourist owners and operators are experiencing difficulty with large increases in tax rates on caravan parks and public liability insurance premiums on recreational activities. Government at all levels should be promoting such businesses and not use these enterprising people as mules for Treasury.

Western Australia's greatest resource is young people. Youth today face greater challenges and opportunities than ever before. To assist them we must continually develop programs to ensure the growth of Western Australia. We must encourage them to set goals, to embrace the principles of family and family life, to take part in communities and be part of community life so that the inextricable decline in social capital is reversed and a contribution for future generations is made.

CONCLUSION

In closing, there are a number of people I must acknowledge for their support, time and experience in my political journey, which began in 1996. My wife, Susan, endured the rigours of lay party political life. As a

former senior vice president of the Liberal Party, she has supported my endeavours. To my sons, thank you both for your understanding. My thanks extend from the MacKinnon family to my divisional president in Charlie Martella; Hon Geoff Prosser, the member for Forrest; Michelle Riley, who ran my campaign; divisional stalwarts Hon Muriel Patterson, Judy Johnson, Garth Hammond and Craig Carbone; my new colleague in Troy Buswell, the member for Vasse; the current member for Leschenault, Dan Sullivan; Bob and Leonie Maslin; Fay Duda; and Gary Beckett.

The last person, but certainly not the least, is former State President of the Liberal Party and now senator for Western Australia, David Johnston. I have been to many parts of the state with David, and he has always been ready to give encouragement and advice. Our friendship has grown in respect over time, and it is one on which I place great value.

In closing, I congratulate all new members in this the thirty-seventh Parliament of Western Australia. The reason we are all here is to achieve a better outcome for Western Australia and all its people. It is a role that I embark on with great pride. It is truly a humbling experience to represent the South West Region in the Western Australian Parliament.

[Applause.]
