



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Peter Watson MLA

(Member for Albany)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Tuesday 22 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

MR WATSON (Albany) [2.53 pm]: Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your appointment as Speaker. I also congratulate Dr Geoff Gallop for his strong leadership in our election win, and Carol Martin our first indigenous member of Parliament. Carol, you are a truly remarkable woman; congratulations. I also extend my best wishes to Hon Kevin Prince, the previous member for Albany. As we all know, Kevin has not had the best of health, and I sincerely wish him well for the future.

Members: Hear, hear!

WITH THANKS

Mr WATSON: I feel very humble standing here today, having been selected by the people of Albany to represent their hopes and dreams for the future. It is 27 years since the Labor Party held the seat of Albany. A lot of people during the bad times continued to campaign, man the booths and do the hard yards and kept the faith. I thank them. To my campaign team of Guy Ross, who held us together on the day, Matt Benson, Julie Hooper, Pam Stoney and Robert Hargreaves, and our dedicated group who hand delivered pamphlets, worked the booths and did all the one-percenters as Micky Malthouse would say, I say that without you I would not be here today. There is one person without whose tremendous vision and work ethic I would not be here today. He is the person who planted the seed for me to seek preselection, who encouraged me through the down times and kept the campaign on track. He has been the face of Labor in Albany and the region for the past 12 years. His passion for politics and the Labor Party and his knowledge of Parliament as well as his reputation in the electorate will be sadly missed. Hon Bob Thomas, I salute you and wish you well.

Members: Hear, hear!

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

Mr WATSON: If I may, I would like to speak on a personal note. I was born in Melbourne to Bruce and Peggy Watson. My grandfather on my father's side was a coalminer in Ballarat and my mother's father played for the Manchester United football team - a perfect balance. My sister, Lyn, and I were brought up with strong family values and were always encouraged - not pushed - in every endeavour. My father always had three pieces of advice for me: listen to what other people say; treat others as I want to be treated; and that I would get back only what I put in. My mother was a volunteer at Royal Perth Hospital for 35 years, tirelessly giving her time to help others. It is sad that

my parents cannot be here today. I clearly remember growing up in Melbourne in a family that barracked for the Carlton Football Club. It was considered treason that I became a Collingwood Football Club supporter after a local woodsman gave me a Collingwood jumper. It was especially treasonous that I wore it proudly to Carlton games, which proved a daunting experience. I thought it snowed at the games because I would discover when I got home that I had white stuff on my jumper. It was only when I was older that my dad told me it was spit from the Carlton fans.

Fortunately, my father retired from the Royal Australian Air Force when I was 12, and we moved to Perth. I attended Perth Modern School and it was there that I learnt two things: first, if someone did not kick the footy barefoot, he was considered a sissy. It was a painful experience for a soft-footed Victorian. The second thing I learnt was that I could run. I started running purely by chance. I was given the choice at school of taking up hockey or athletics. I chose hockey but, after putting eight stitches in my best mate's eyebrow on the first day, the school, in its wisdom, sent me to try athletics. I was lucky with athletics, and captained the state team and represented Australia. After watching Peter Snell win his event at the Commonwealth Games in Perth, I set myself three goals: win an Australian title; break the Australian 1500 metre record; and go to the Olympics. I achieved this in one afternoon in Sydney in 1968. I had fulfilled my dream, but I remember that, being a Western Australian, the wait to be picked for the team was agony. It has something to do with Western Australians always getting the worst lanes or the hardest heats at the national championships. I learnt much through athletics - self belief, the ups and downs of life and the work ethic that is needed to succeed at any level.

During my first week in this House, I studied the body language of my colleagues: how they prepared themselves and how they reacted. Everyone was different. I compare it with my experience of the Olympic village, where the many athletes prepared differently for the challenges ahead. Some were quiet, some rowdy and others quite bizarre. The last mentioned, the sprinters, trained for only five minutes a day, so they had to let off steam somehow.

I was also involved in the Claremont Football Club as a club runner and preseason running coach. I remember the member for Wagin as one of the hardest workers on the track. Being a runner for Mal Brown was a dangerous occupation - unless I watered down what he wanted me to say to the players and umpires!

CAREER

I worked for Australia Post for over 35 years. I started as a telegram boy and worked my way up to management. I thoroughly enjoyed working for Australia Post and built up a large network of friends. It was a great organisation in which to work. I left after 15 years and, with my wife, ran a newsagency/gift shop in Denmark. I have experienced first-hand the many challenges of owning a small business. After five years of working seven days a week, we decided for family reasons that I needed to return to Australia Post. Running my own business was a tremendous learning curve, but we found that we tended to neglect our children.

One of the bonuses of my involvement in sport was the opportunity to host a local sports show on ABC Radio for 13 years. Through that show, I met many Albany and state sporting identities, and was able to give local sporting groups airplay to promote their sports.

FAMILY

In the gallery today are the four most important people in my life. My wife, Liz, has always been there for me, during both the good and bad times. She is my best friend and a wonderful mother. My children, Kristy, Justin and Sarah, are also here today. There is no prouder father than I, and I love them dearly. I hope the fact that I am standing here today shows them that they can achieve whatever they want in this world if they want it enough.

THE ELECTORATE OF ALBANY

My electorate of Albany is the world's best kept secret. It has a great mixture of natural attractions, a sense of history and a strong and vibrant community. Albany was not only the first settlement in Western Australia but also the birthplace of the Anzac Day dawn service. The people who were privileged enough to attend a dawn service on Mt Clarence and who watched the sun rise over the waters of King George Sound were aware that the coast of Albany was the last sight of Australia for all those diggers who did not return. It was truly an emotional experience.

For a long time Albany had a whaling industry, but it was closed in 1978. At the time, some people thought that it would be a fatal blow to our town. The former whaling station, which has now been renamed Whaleworld, is one of the top tourist sites in the world. Not only does it retain the history of the whaling industry, but also it provides revenue and jobs for the residents of our city. I congratulate also Jaycees Community Foundation Inc for its efforts. Mt Romance is also a tourist attraction. The company manufactures perfume and body-care products made from sandalwood that are exported all over the world. It won the 1996 new exporter of the year award and the 1999 design of the year award. Tourists can take tours through the facility to see how the process works and it also has a theatre and restaurant. In November, HMAS *Perth* will be sunk as a dive wreck. The combination of that wreck and the whale-watching industry will open new horizons for our tourism industry. A wind farm is also under construction in Albany that will be an added boost to tourism.

NYOONGAH COMMUNITY

Albany has a strong Nyoongah community. The Nyoongah people are spread from Jurien Bay to Esperance and down to Albany. Albany provides an environment for Nyoongah people to realise their potential - and many have. Many Aboriginals are in management positions, including that of executive officer. Prominent artists work with the Vancouver Art Centre, which is linked to the school networks so that the unique Aboriginal culture can be shared by all. Nyoongah people are employed in every service delivery area in Albany. The Southern Aboriginal Corporation works in partnership with government agencies. The Bringing Them Home campaign is doing marvellous work for the Nyoongah people who have been affected by the stolen generation. Talking to Carol Peterson, Albany's first Nyoongah local government councillor, was a highlight for me. She said she was elected to the council not as a Nyoongah but as a person in her own right, and I thoroughly agree with her. This says a lot about Carol and the people of Albany who elected her as their representative.

ISSUES

As a safe conservative seat, the electorate of Albany has suffered over the years. The substandard police station and courthouse are evidence of that. Some services, including those provided by Westrail, Western Power and Main Roads WA have been slashed and even closed, as was the case with the rail service. When these services are affected, it hurts the town's infrastructure. Albany desperately needs a regular bus service to its outer suburbs, not only because of its ageing population, but also to encourage people to make better use of public transport. Albany has a very busy port which will be even busier when the export of plantation woodchips begins. A new wharf is being built especially to cater for this exciting new business. Albany is also putting forward a bid to have the Australian Antarctic bases serviced through its airport; that will be a major coup if it is successful.

EDUCATION

One of the main aims of the Labor Party is to keep the youth in country towns. The University of Western Australia now has a campus in Albany. I thank the Labor Government for assisting us with a \$500 000 loan to enable the university to expand to the old post office. I also thank the Labor Government for continuing its policy of developing Albany as a university town with places of

learning spread throughout the town. One must live in a country town to realise the hardship that faces country children who must go to Perth to attend a university. They are uprooted from their families to go to Perth. They live in flats or units and must fend for themselves. It is a big ask for them to work in a part-time job and to study. The parents are also hit hard financially because they must pay rent for their children. Kids in the city stay at home, and it is business as usual for their families. The drop-out rate for country students who leave home to study is about twice that of their metropolitan counterparts because of their need to relocate. I am sure that the provision for first year university courses by the University of Western Australia in Albany will help reduce the drop-out rate for our young people.

DOORKNOCKING THE ELECTORATE

When I was doorknocking during the election campaign I spoke to many interesting people, especially two ladies in their 90s. Their knowledge of Albany's history was amazing, but unfortunately when people such as these pass on all that history goes with them. There were also a lot of people in the 50 to 60 age group sitting at home who have been made redundant but who still have a lot to offer our community. With the assistance of the library and UWA, I am helping to link these two groups together to retain some of the first-hand history of Albany. These people need to be involved, even if it is on a voluntary basis. They are our country's wasted assets. The number of people who had double locks on doors and dogs inside houses and who were frightened to open their doors was also an eye-opener. The Labor Party's promise of 250 additional police officers will bring comfort to these people.

HEALTH

As a result of the previous Government's policies, Labor inherited a hospital system that was suffering from a crisis in management. The Albany Regional Hospital was one of the worst affected. The situation was so bad that the hospital carried forward a huge deficit from the previous year. Massive cutbacks are necessary to pay off the debt and to stop a further blow-out this year. I thank the Minister for Health for addressing the pressing needs of Albany's hospital. This is an important issue because Albany has an ageing and growing population, which is placing an ever-increasing pressure on our health and hospital system. On behalf of the people of Albany, I also thank the minister for the \$50 000 provided to keep the Albany Hospice open until it shifts into its new premises at the end of year. The Albany Hospice, first set up by the late Paul Terry, is a very important part of Albany, and the volunteers who have kept it going are very special people.

The main feedback from doorknocking was that the previous Government did not listen to what the people were saying. Under the Gallop Labor Government, a regional cabinet meeting has already been held in Albany and the feedback from our constituents was that the Government listened. Labor listened to the people in the streets and the business people as they put forward their cases on how things differed between the city and the country areas. The people of Albany are speaking and this Government is listening.

YOUTH

I am concerned, not only as a parent but also as a person who is involved in coaching young people in sport, about how the youth of today are portrayed. As a child I had a carefree lifestyle. My only worries were whether I had a proper cricket bat and a football, and what time tea was. The children of today worry about AIDS, drug abuse, the environment, the lack of job security, nuclear waste and what their future may be.

Of all the things I have achieved through sport, my greatest thrill has been coaching junior sports people and seeing them develop, not only as sports men and women but also as fine young people

in the community. These kids are just like us; they need their tyres pumped up every now and then and to have goals set for them to achieve.

ENVIRONMENT

On behalf the people of Albany, I thank the Gallop Labor Government for stopping the logging of old-growth forests. The formation of the Walpole wilderness area will enable my children and, hopefully, my grandchildren to enjoy these magnificent trees in what will be the jewel in the south coast tourist crown.

I thank the member for Innaloo for the trust he has put in me with his yellow and red cards. As he is a self-confessed loose cannon, I can ask him for only one small favour; that is, to give me prior warning when aims the cannonball past me. I would hate to be the first casualty of friendly fire.

I have been given a huge responsibility by the people of Albany. I have a true passion for the people and the electorate of Albany. I will not let them down.
