



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr John Bowler MLA

(Member for Eyre)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Wednesday 23 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

MR BOWLER (Eyre) [12.43 pm]: Before I commence my speech, I recommend that the many members who, sadly, were not in the House when my colleague on my right, the member for Southern River, gave his impassioned address three weeks ago get a copy of *Hansard*. The member has thrown down the challenge to all members, and I hope they read his address in *Hansard*. I have come up with a possible solution to the member's challenge, and others may think of an even better solution. If they do, we will have more people like Paul Andrews walking the streets of Western Australia.

DEDICATION

My address is dedicated to my late father, Jim Bowler. Dad, it has been a long time since I left home that night, and so much has happened since then. Now that I reflect, almost all of it has been for the better. Possibly the only disappointment has been the fact that you died so young and have not been around to meet Mary Anne and our five boys. Yes! Five wonderful boys. They are in the gallery. I remember the look in your eye, dad. I know that warmth, pride and love that was there for me would have been there for them also. The first was James Mansell John Bowler, born on Easter Thursday 1980. He was wrinkled, slimy, hair everywhere, and some would say ugly. But I thought he was so damn perfect, that I said to Mary Anne - who was lying there in no condition to object at the time - that we had to call him Jim after you, dad. She agreed. Over the next 10 years, Daniel, Luke, Sam and Joseph were born. Each was just as ugly, and just as perfect, and now each just as handsome; hence the phone calls from the girls.

PERSONAL HISTORY

The whole world has changed, dad. As I said, the girls now call the boys. I know you were always so accepting and knowledgeable about technology, but you would not believe the changes that have taken place. Sadly, as far as lifestyle goes, some are for the worse. The first big personal change came the year after you left - the day after my twenty-first birthday when I started as a cadet journalist at the *Kalgoorlie Miner*. It was as a journalist that I covered the issues that were important to the people of the goldfields. That led me here to the State Parliament, because after reporting on those issues for 30 years, the next step is to find solutions; or even better yet to stop

the issues and the problems from developing in the first place. I believe that the best place to do that is here in the State Parliament.

DECENTRALISATION

Yesterday was budget day, and I remember you always listened to the ABC broadcast of the federal budget, paying special attention to what was being done about decentralisation. I remember how it had its own place in the budget - up there with defence, education and health. In the last decade, Governments have not even paid lip service to that any more. The gap between the city and the country has never been greater, and while economists and bureaucrats will argue otherwise, proof is in the pudding - people are not going from the cities to the country; they are going in the opposite direction.

MARY ANNE

It is funny how fate can lead one in a particular direction. It was early 1974 and Gordon Dann, a journalist mate from *The West Australian*, and I were on our way to the Palace Hotel for a Friday night hit out. Gordon wanted to get some food first - a lining on the tummy, so to speak - so we went to the Vienna coffee lounge. It was there that Gordon met an old school friend of his. She sat down with us. With her was a first-year-out schoolteacher called Mary Anne Pires. I fell in love. She was so serene, so beautiful - she still is; and two years later we married. Ian Taylor was our best man. Mum loved Mary Anne, even if she did occasionally mix up the name - Mary Lou, Annabelle, Ann Marie, you name it - anything but Mary Anne. But I am glad Mary Anne got to know mum before she died the following year.

IAN TAYLOR

A couple of years later Shack Evans died suddenly while in office as the state member for Kalgoorlie, and Ian Taylor got the Labor Party endorsement and won the seat in a landslide. He went on to become a successful local member, Deputy Premier, and, at one stage, leader of our great party. We are still the best of friends and he came back to Kalgoorlie-Boulder for the last week of my campaign and also to help the former member for Kalgoorlie, Megan Anwyl.

DOUG KREPP

The eighties saw me become involved in community life for the first time, first as a director of the goldfields football league, where I quickly came to admire the sense of public duty and service displayed by the league's president, Doug Krepp. He taught me a lot, both as league president and later as city councillor, where I observed how he acted and kept an open mind on the issues. At one stage, he was president of the local branch of the Liberal Party. That did not stop Doug from helping me, and I wish to pay tribute to his guidance. Doug also made the comment to me one day that we work to live, we do not live to work. He was referring to the massive changes in workplace reform in the goldfields, once the most unionised industry in the State, but now, I hazard a guess, the least unionised.

DEREGULATION

Dad, you would not believe the changes that have taken place in the mining industry. I have no doubt that some unions may have gone too far in the 1980s, but the cycle has swung back too far the other way. The union award system has gone, and in its place are individual work contracts for which the worker, supposedly, has a choice. An example of that is a miner whom I coach in basketball. He is a goldfields guy, who is married with two kids. He was working an eight-hour day underground, an hour's drive from Kalgoorlie and an hour's drive back home - a 10-hour day. He was offered an individual work contract for a 12-hour day. That meant 14 hours a day. He responded to the offer by saying that he had a family and he wanted to get home, that 10 hours was

enough for him and that he could not be forced to sign. He was told that he was right, but he would now be transferred to the Pilbara - so much for choice.

FLY IN, FLY OUT

Extended rosters of 12-hour shifts have led to fly in, fly out arrangements. I call it the cancer of the bush. The pity of it is that it was a Labor Government that allowed it in the first place. It has become far more widespread in previous years under the Liberal Government. There is a place for fly in, fly out arrangements at remote mine sites but not close to towns like those in my electorate such as Kalgoorlie-Boulder, Kambalda, Norseman, Coolgardie, Southern Cross, Leonora, Leinster and Laverton. If the mining operations are close to those towns the work force should be based in those towns. If that trend is to be turned around, changes will be needed to the federal fringe benefits tax and companies need to be given other incentives - some possibly by the State Government - to base their work forces in country towns. As the member for Eyre, I will be a friend of the mining industry; heaven knows that the industry needs every friend it can get. I will be a strong supporter of mining, but mining has to be a strong supporter of the towns from which it gains its wealth.

I recall the day I met a German tourist at the top end of Hannan Street and he asked me whether all the mines were still open. I said, "Yes." He said, "Where's all the wealth gone?" I felt ashamed. He was right; where was all the wealth?

CHANGING ATTITUDES

I want to tell the House about a recent trip with my party leader, Dr Geoff Gallop, to the super pit on the golden mile. We were driving in four-wheel drive vehicles and I asked the foreman about the hours that the workers worked. The site is on the doorstep of Kalgoorlie-Boulder. The foreman pointed to one individual and told me that he worked a 12-hour day. I asked about the roster. I was told that he worked one week on day shift and one week on night shift, and he had the following week off. He loves the week off because he can then go to Perth and spend his money. I asked what he did with his child at school and his wife at home while he was in Perth spending his money. He told me that not many married people worked there any more. I thought, no wonder. I asked what the workers got paid an hour. He did not answer that question directly. He told me that workers can earn \$65 000 a year. Although that is a fabulous salary for an unskilled worker, people no longer go to Kalgoorlie-Boulder to live but only to save money and leave. I asked him how long he had lived there. He told me it was only four months. I felt like my friend the member for Innaloo who, as a lawyer, can say, "I rest my case." I do not need to say any more; he said it all for me.

QUALITY OF LIFE

To turn around that attitude we need to make Kalgoorlie-Boulder - and in fact the entire goldfields - a better place in which to live. I want to make it a place where families want to live; not just because of employment prospects but also because of the quality of life. The people there are special; they are doers, they are friendly and they welcome strangers. It is true that some of the facilities and services do not match other regional centres and it is about time the region got back some of the wealth that the German tourist noticed was missing. In that regard I will work to ensure that our Government implements the range of promises it made to the goldfields during the election campaign. One such pledge - number one on the list - is the development of a grass golf course that was initiated by the previous Government. Other pledges I am looking forward to seeing fulfilled in the next four years include measures to increase the number of police officers on duty. More police officers are needed and that need is illustrated by the fact that the former member for Eyre, Julian Grill, had his house broken into last night. I had the unfortunate duty of calling Lesley Grill on a mobile phone and informing her that her house had been ransacked.

ELECTION PROMISES

I am looking forward to the development of a new recreation centre in Kambalda; a public swimming pool in Leonora; and a safe house in Laverton. Women in Warburton and other parts of the central reserve have to fly over Laverton and all the way to Kalgoorlie to get to the closest safe house. That situation is wrong and I hope the new safe house in Laverton will overcome the problem. There will hopefully be a new community centre in Norseman and improved youth facilities in Kalgoorlie-Boulder. A lot of the developments are aimed at improving the appearance and quality of life in the goldfields. In that regard, I intend to take an interest in fostering other projects. I was a founding member of the Gribble Creek committee, which is a major environmental rehabilitation project that is turning what was once an eyesore into beautiful parkland in the centre of the city. That work must continue, and so must the excellent work of Doug Krepp in creating a nature reserve at the top end of the creek at a place called Karlkurla Park. Karlkurla is the Aboriginal word for silky pear and that name led to the name of Kalgoorlie.

Another group I helped form was SOS - Save Our School - which has already ensured that all years of the Western Australian School of Mines remain in Kalgoorlie-Boulder and that the world-renowned institution continues to expand.

MAN-MADE BEACH

Although it sounds a bit far-fetched, I would also like to see a man-made beach, complete with waves rolling onto white sand. There could also be some palm trees. People have been saying to me for years that Kalgoorlie-Boulder is the best place in which they have ever lived; it has great character and the people are friendly but the one thing it lacks is a beach. I cannot take Kalgoorlie-Boulder to the beach so I will have to bring the beach to Kalgoorlie. One of the commitments of the Labor campaign was to spend \$50 000 for a feasibility study. It is not rocket science; I understand there are about 40 such beaches around the world and I do not see why there cannot be one in Kalgoorlie-Boulder.

EDUCATION

The next step will be to improve the standard of education in the region. It is a major reason that families leave the goldfields. Families leave when children are about to enter primary school, high school or year 11. Members who have been following the inaugural speeches may have noticed the members for Geraldton and Kalgoorlie. The three of us attended Eastern Goldfields Senior High School. It may indicate that all is well, but first appearances can be deceiving - especially in the member for Kalgoorlie's case. I have covered education in the goldfields as a reporter for 30 years and I have built up a mental picture of highly paid and highly resourced teachers. Government after Government, Labor and Liberal, stated that special funding would be given for this and that and that they were great for throwing money into the region. However, I could not reconcile all the money being spent with the terrible results of TEE students. They were almost always in the bottom 10 to 15 per cent of the State. A teacher at Eastern Goldfields Senior High School informed me that, on a per capita basis, that school was the cheapest high school in the State to run. The reason is the high number of first-year graduate teachers; the wages bill is more than \$1 million less than for similar sized schools in Perth. I feel like asking for a stop to the generous extra payments that are being given and for the region to be given the same as is given to schools in Perth. Parents in my electorate are in the top income tax bracket in Australia. As far as education goes, they do not get their fair share of funding. With the Federal Government's new funding formula they will receive even less.

NATIVE TITLE

Another challenge facing the Government is resolving native title. Native title was often blamed by the previous Government for all the problems facing the mining industry, especially the big drop

in greenfield exploration. Native title has not helped but it is not the main cause. The main cause is the bearish share market and a worldwide downturn in exploration, especially for gold. If native title were the sole reason, why was exploration so vibrant and brisk until 1998-99 when native title was introduced as far back as 1992? I recognise that some of the impasses must be overcome. After eight years of Liberal confrontation and conflict, this Government will do far better with its approach of conciliation and consultation. As the member for Eyre, I will continue to pester and hound the ministers responsible to ensure that the process does not bog down. I will make recommendations to the ministers about a group called First Goal, which brings together three claimant groups from the north eastern goldfields: the Wongatha, the Koara - pronounced Gwarda - and the Wotha. First Goal is a well thought out concept and I expect it to become a blueprint for similar claimant groups throughout Australia. I hope a number of ministers will meet representatives of First Goal during the State Cabinet's forthcoming visit to Kalgoorlie.

Another issue is the cost of water. As a child growing up in Kalgoorlie-Boulder I was continually told about the world-famous goldfields water scheme - C.Y. O'Connor's pipeline. The pipeline is almost 100 years old and has paid for itself several times over, yet commercial users in the goldfields pay \$1.94 a kilolitre compared with 70c a kilolitre in Perth. It is the same water that falls from the sky onto our State, but the cost of it is 70c in one place and \$1.94 in another. That is ridiculous and it is a rip off.

ORGAN DONORS

I mentioned earlier the challenge from the member for Southern River, on my right. As members heard, he is one of the lucky recipients of an organ transplant. He said that many more lives could be saved if there were more donors. My suggestion is that at birth, parents should be asked whether they want to register their child to be a donor. The incentive to do so would be that if everything else was equal on, say, medical grounds, the person listed as being a donor would receive an organ before another person of similar age. Once these children turn 18 they can make up their own minds about whether their names remain on the list. I am sure many will choose to do so. Some may say that is coercion. I do not care, as long as it saves more lives. As I said, others may suggest better schemes. As has the member for Southern River, I urge members to go for it.

THANK YOU

Finally, I pay tribute to and thank the many people who helped get me here today. They are epitomised by Bill Finn, a retired prospector, who sat all day under a tree outside the town hall in Bullfinch so that I could get 11 votes. By the way, that is nine more votes than Mick Murray's parents received; and I thought Bill was doing badly. He was very proud of those 11 votes. It is tiger country down in Bullfinch and I out polled the Liberal Party candidate, so it was fabulous. Do members know what? The week after the election Western Power cut down Bill's tree. I am sure that in four years time Bill and his lovely wife Elsie will be back outside the hall, but perhaps next time under an umbrella. They are in the public gallery and I am sure Bill cannot wait for me to finish so that he can return to his beloved Bullfinch.

JULIAN GRILL

My predecessor, Julian Grill, deserves special mention. During 24 years in Parliament he was described by a former national secretary as the best constituent member of Parliament in Australia he had come across. He was described by farmers as the best Minister for Agriculture they had the privilege to work with. He was roundly regarded as the best Minister for Transport of his generation. He is the man behind Bunbury 2000 and the redevelopment of East Perth. Sadly he blotted his copybook three days before the end of his term with an article that had simply got out of hand from him. However, one mistake in 24 years does not a bad MP make. His wife Lesley also deserves special mention for not only supporting Julian for all those years but also making the

Labor Party in Kalgoorlie-Boulder at the time the strongest in the State and for always being there with a smile and a wonderful little giggle. She did the same throughout my campaign.

To the rest of my committee, Lorna Sharp, Paul Browning, Graham Reside, Marg Mason, Eddie Rochester and Charmaine Cragan; my booth captains, Bill Dixon in Southern Cross, Ben Clark and Trudy Smith in Norseman, Kim Chance in Marvel Loch, Rosemary Pettit in Coolgardie, Neil Higgins in Kambalda East, Bob Beeson in Boulder, Bert Davis in Laverton, Garry Kemp in Leinster, Stephan Grill in Leonora and Vic Bermingham and Mick Valentine in Kambalda West and their many, many friends and supporters, especially Neil Gill, a lifelong friend who helped me on election day and the previous days, I say thank you. I am truly humbled.

“I LOVE THE GOLDFIELDS”

Well, Dad, it is time to go. I just want to say that I campaigned on the slogan “I love the goldfields” and that despite its faults, foibles and deficiencies - some of which I have outlined here today - it is the best place in the world. You taught me to love the goldfields and I will never forget that. You taught me to put more into my world than I take out to make this a better place. If you or mum were here today I know you would be proud of me. I also know that you would love Mary Anne and the boys as much as I do.

[Applause.]
