



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr John Hyde MLA
(Member for Perth)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Wednesday 2 May 2001

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday 9 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR HYDE (Perth) [5.18 pm]: I live in Perth 6000. Perhaps it does not have the same ring as Beverley Hills 90210, but it is home. I am able to walk from my dwelling to my electorate office, walk from there to various meetings in the central business district, and walk here to Parliament House. I can stop for a chinwag, or be stopped by constituents at most times of the day and night. I also tend to shop, eat, drink and be merry within my electorate, which stretches from the Swan River at East Perth, around to the freeway at Kings Park, out to Harborne Street in Wembley, and through Mt Hawthorn and North Perth to Mt Lawley at Central Avenue.

The residents of Perth are enriched by my electorate's diverse community, which hosts the headquarters of most of the State's multicultural communities. It has a mosque, a Buddhist temple, a Catholic and an Anglican cathedral, a Jewish temple, some of our State's most rabid atheists, many of our arts creators and companies, an active gay, lesbian and transgender community, our flagship galleries and museums, environmental and protest organisations, the wealthy, the dispossessed, the homeless, the Governor and his digs, entertainment precincts, and reminders of our heritage. Shanks's pony may have got me up here physically today, but a tremendous Australian education system, starting at kindergarten, must take most of the credit for my ability to string a sentence together, understand when I am splitting an infinitive and count well enough to appreciate that there are more of us on this side of the House than there are on the other side, which is why we are the Government. I owe the fact that I made it to university at all to Gough Whitlam. The advent of that most magnificent Federal Government meant not only that university tuition was free, but also that students were actually paid an allowance. With my princely stipend from the state of \$13 a week, part-time work as a barman and proud member of the liquor and allied trades union, and supportive parents who were still each working 70 hours a week in our family deli, I got "meself edjumeccated".

POLITICAL HEROES

I have many political heroes. I fervently believe that the pursuit of politics is a noble profession. After nearly 40 000 years of evolution of participatory democracy on this continent alone, it is a magnificent though flawed process of advancing goodness in the human race. Within state politics in this country, the achievements of the Don Dunstan State Government in South Australia are inspiring. To nurture economic development along with magnificent improvements in human

rights, gay and lesbian law reform, a blossoming of the arts, heritage preservation, an enrichment of the central business district, not to mention a milestone in the sartorial splendour standards of parliamentarians, is a record to which a progressive Government such as this can aspire.

New members are advised of conventions regarding first speeches - to steer away from the controversial, avoid confrontation, and check out some speeches of those who have gone before to get the demeanour right. I duly garnered the first speech of Don Dunstan, made on 28 July 1953, courtesy of our excellent parliamentary library staff. In his first paragraph, the "Hon Don" sallied forth against his Tory opponents, damning them with faint praise, that -

Normally a member of a Party supporting a laissez faire economy is wholly concerned in making claptrap remarks and pious utterances.

Such language will not be heard from me - on this occasion! I had better luck with the first speech of the first Labor member for Perth, Mr - later Sir - Walter Dwyer, on 7 November 1911. He rose -

with a considerable amount of diffidence to address this Assembly for the first time. However, I hope to have the indulgence of hon. members, not perhaps with regard to the matter of what I say, but rather the manner, which I hope may be pardoned in a new member addressing an august Assembly presiding over the destiny of Western Australia. As the result of the recent elections we have heard the country pronounce its decision in no uncertain voice. We have had the labour side returned with a huge majority, and the anti-labour side returned with shattered forces.

Obviously that sort of language worked wonders in getting an Irish boy from Tipperary a knighthood after joining the Labor Party and serving a term as member for Perth. How times have changed! Under this new Government, not only will the present member for Perth fail to get a knighthood in his dotage, but also the position of Agent General in London is out of the question. However, the first member for Perth went on to serve his community in the arts. He was trustee of the Perth public library for 33 years and president of the Art Gallery of Western Australia for 18 years. I hope the member for Thornlie notes that these are wholly noble occupations for a former member for Perth.

SECURITY OF PAYMENT

In his first speech he praised the incoming Government for its quick investigation into the causes for the increased cost of living for working people, its plan to introduce a minimum fixed wage, and its intention to give shop assistants a five-day week to give them a full weekend. The first member for Perth also gently admonished his Government for not mentioning in the Governor's speech the establishment of a university in Western Australia. He called for it to be started forthwith and for tuition to be free. He called on his Government to make a pension compulsory in the private and public sector. I take heart that he also took ownership of a new Bill to amend the Local Courts Act 1904 to stop serial debtors from exploiting small business owners through late and non-existent payments. I note that today, 90 years later, the Minister for Works and Services has asked the current member for Perth to chair the security of payments task force; hopefully, new legislation will be brought into this House in November to speed up payments for subcontractors in the building industry.

My own political outlook has been fashioned through my experiences in Western Australia as a journalist, teacher, small business owner, wheat truck driver, actor and producer. Like many young Western Australians, I rolled my swag and headed overseas, living and working as a journalist and actor in Edinburgh, Seattle and New Orleans. Margaret Thatcher and I share a birth date and a few personality deficiencies. However, living in Scotland under her reign inculcated in me the travesty of economic rationalism. To live in the United States under Ronald Reagan cemented my foothold

on the left side of politics and my belief that there is an important role for government in a just and fair society.

HOMAGE TO HUEY

Stuffing envelopes for Jesse Jackson's Rainbow Alliance in Seattle was part of my political education. Immersing myself in the ruthless, awesome politics of the deep south, as practised in New Orleans, tempered my idealism with the professionalism needed in the real world. Living in the French quarter as a mild-mannered leading spear-carrier in *Aida* for New Orleans Opera by night, I came to pay homage to my greatest political hero, the Depression era Governor and senator for Louisiana, Huey P. Long. Regardless of the way some reactionaries remember Huey Long, by the time of his assassination in 1935, he had taken one of the poorest States in the United States to the heights of free education, with free schoolbooks for children. He also brought regional prosperity by building one of the greatest road and bridge networks in the western world, improved rural health by building a university medical school to train doctors, redistributed wealth away from the exploitative oil cartels and fought for a fairer, more equal, society. Under Huey, the loss-making state prison planted crops and trained inmates in industry. The prison eventually ran at a profit. He also reprieved thousands of African-Americans who were overcrowding the prisons for trite offences. In four short years as Governor, Huey Long made a big difference. He fervently believed in government intervention and regularly intervened in the state football team, coaching from the sidelines and addressing players before the games. Huey justified his political stance, blunt methods and the need for government intervention in society and the economy because 1 per cent of the population in the United States controlled 90 per cent of the country's wealth. Huey realised that trickle-down economics was a sham and worked on his important "share the wealth" projects until his assassination in the Baton Rouge parliamentary corridors. I will work to ensure that the wealth of Western Australia is not only greatly increased during the first term of the Gallop Labor Government, but also shared.

In 1928, Huey was elected Governor by the largest plurality ever given to a candidate. He quickly proposed a 5c-a-barrel tax on the Standard Oil Company, which squealed as some oil companies are wont to do, to help fund his progressive platform. As Huey would later tell the United States Senate when he became a senator in 1932, he had put taxes where taxes ought to be put. I am sure that this will not be the last time that I call upon Huey in justification, in elucidation and in celebration of Labor policies. As with Huey Long, Don Dunstan and Gough Whitlam, I am proud to be part of a Government that will deliver on human rights such as one vote, one value and the end of sexuality discrimination in this State.

YOUTHFUL OPTIMISM

Of course, my upbringing, my life experiences and my employment have also deigned that I end up on this side of the House. Having trained in journalism and education, I took up a teaching post in Geraldton as my first real job. I thank the union movement for achieving basic rights for workers. I was flabbergasted to find out that I actually would be paid for holidays and if I were crook. I joined the Australian Labor Party as a young teacher teaching at John Willcock Senior High School, named after the train-driving Labor Premier of this State, John Collings Willcock. I was impressed with my local Labor members, Jeff Carr, the then member for Geraldton, and Graeme Campbell, the federal member, who later helped source private sector funding for a horticultural course I ran for Aboriginal students in Geraldton. At that time, a new State Labor Government came to power. I remember that it was the headmasters and public service chiefs who took a 10 per cent salary cut to fix the budget problems the Labor Government inherited. As I skateboarded to school after an early morning surf - long-haired and surf-shirted - life was pretty good under a new Labor Government. We had blocked any prospect of uranium mining and the construction of a nuclear reactor at Ledge Point, and the tragedy of Aboriginal oppression as symbolised by Noonkanbah

would be addressed. I hope that young Western Australians again feel that optimism and have high expectations of our new, progressive Labor Government.

My love for the stage and the arts grew in Geraldton. I trod the boards at Theatre 8 in Wonthella in amateur theatrics before I took to the stage professionally. We surfed in the morning, went to work, hurried to footy training with Brigades in the early evening and then went off to theatre rehearsals. After three and a half years, I left teaching and went into journalism as the arts and sports editor on *The Geraldton Guardian* and sports stringer for the *Sunday Times*. Conflict of interest was not as clear-cut in those days, and I would sometimes play for Brigades at Mullewa or Northampton and then anonymously write the match report. Hyde was never mentioned as one of the best players, so I was saved from testing the conflict.

CAREER IN JOURNALISM, ARTS

I later joined *The West Australian*, working there on and off for six years. I was either sacked or resigned on three occasions. My longest absence - 18 months - was spent working in the United States and on *The Scotsman* in Edinburgh, where many other fine Western Australian journalists shone. One of my weekly jobs was as the final edition subeditor. I was all alone between 1.00 am and 3.00 am, ready to pull the front page in case Maggie Thatcher met her demise and a sensitive, caring headline was needed to alert the fiercely anti-Tory Scots of impending celebrations.

After another stint on stage in the United States and working as a freelance writer, I came back to Perth and worked part time on our wonderful Post newspapers under Bret Christian. I started to winter in the Kimberley in 1991 with my ice-shaving business. I joined up with the likes of my great mate Stephen "Baamba" Albert - Uncle Tadpole in *Bran Nue Dae* - to create Theatre Kimberley, Western Australia's first professional regional theatre company. The outgoing Keating Government funded us to create the Tourism and Theatre Aboriginal Awareness Program, which helped to find jobs in tourism and the arts for hundreds of Kimberley residents.

In the United States, arts and tourism meld to prove a big job and wealth creator in regional areas. I dream of that occurring here. I urge ministers to ensure that their agencies employ Western Australian actors and technicians for any advertising and promotions.

Western Australia is the most urbanised State in the world - only 27 per cent of our population live outside the metropolitan area. While I may be the member for the central business district seat of Perth, where the financial operations and administration that enable our mining and agricultural industries to prosper occur, I am passionate about decentralisation and look forward to a regeneration of the regions under Labor.

PERTH ACHIEVEMENTS

I am delighted that already our new Labor Government has achieved so much in my electorate. The Education Minister has already initiated the \$17 million rebuilding of Mt Lawley Senior High School, as outlined this morning by my colleague the member for Yokine. The Government has also committed to the long-term tenure of City Farm in East Perth and has funded a major recycling project in the inner city. This Government's commitment to social justice and sharing the wealth has seen \$120 million worth of part ownership of the Tamala Park waste facility in Wanneroo appropriately redistributed from the non-resident corporate elite of the CBD to the original resident owners - that is, the residents of the Towns of Vincent, Cambridge and Victoria Park. I thank the Minister for Housing for his re-examination of affordable housing projects throughout my electorate. Simple, compassionate consultation has achieved breakthroughs where six months ago my residents faced brick walls. We will end up with more and better affordable housing. I thank the Premier for recently opening the North Perth Community Bank, of which I am chairman. I

acknowledge the excellent work done by the member for Ballajura, who is chairman of the Bayswater Community Bank.

Progressive, intelligent prostitution legislation will be enacted by our Government, properly treating prostitution as a health issue.

Danillo Rodriguez, a gay man, lives around the corner from my home. Danillo lost his partner of 20 years to a tragic accident two years ago. Victorian superannuation laws would recognise him as the rightful beneficiary of his partner's superannuation, but Western Australia's discriminatory laws do not. That is why we need sexuality discrimination legislation, and I applaud our Attorney General for introducing this human rights Bill. Over the next four years I aim to report many more improvements for the people of my electorate. I am champing at the bit to see our young Government do even more.

Having come from local government and having watched my friend, close comrade and predecessor as mayor, Jack Marks, die in office, I know too well the truth of one of his oft-repeated sayings: "The dogs may bark, but the caravan moves on." I aim to work hard to ensure that the Government honours its stated priorities. Rather than see edifices such as belltowers and convention centres built in my electorate, I want to ensure that the workers who pull the middies in the hospitality rooms, cleaners, car park attendants, ticket sellers, performers and carpet layers are all paid a just and decent wage. I want to ensure that the workers who create great wealth for our State in the CBD have real, affordable housing close by, and that they can access a clean and efficient transport system servicing the CBD, where they produce the profits for investors. It is all very well to see workers forced to accept minimum call-out payments and stringent conditions to help maximise profits - or, as it is called, viability - in the tourism and hospitality industry in the CBD; however, at the same time, they are penalised by having to pay higher parking fees, to travel longer distances and to suffer a lower quality of life because they can no longer afford to live near their place of work in the inner city.

As a proud member of Actors' Equity within the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance, I want to ensure that the edifices this Government has inherited are filled with Western Australian workers and artistes. Buildings and structures mean nothing unless they are peopled with the soul of local culture sourced via the arts.

PROGRESSIVE VINCENT

I am delighted to have arrived at this place after spending six years with the most progressive local council in Western Australia. I am proud that during my terms as a councillor and as mayor of the Town of Vincent we refused to contract out our outside work force and, instead, nurtured a council-owned work force that fairly and competitively beats the private sector for works jobs, earning profits to fund other council activities. I am proud that part of my electorate is a nuclear-free zone; that the degradation of animals in circuses is banned; that we banned the use of old-growth timber while promoting recycled wood many years ago; that we cared enough to ban trade with the oppressive regime in Myanmar; that we ran balanced and debt-free budgets and attained community support for rate rises because residents could see the improvements in infrastructure, parks, roads and playgrounds; that we also banned new billboards because of the visual pollution they cause; and that, above all, we listened and responded to our residents. I thank the member for Warren-Blackwood, who as Minister for Local Government created the Town of Vincent and treated Jack Marks and me so well.

I also thank the member for Greenough, with whom I served as Western Australia's representative in the Australian Local Government Association and in leadership roles in the Western Australian Municipal Association. We have enjoyed a very close relationship while attacking conservative State and Federal Governments to progress the aspirations of Western Australians. The member

for Greenough also endured countless interstate flights, conferences and meetings at which I would harangue him and all within earshot about the tremendous advances occurring in the Grand Duchy of Vincent.

While our revered Premier can claim direct family lineage in my electorate back to the first English Gallop pioneers, I can merely note that a 13-year-old John Hyde arrived via steerage at the Swan River colony on 19 October 1829 aboard the *Atwick* from London. The next local tracing of any namesake is towards the end of the nineteenth century. Reference is made to the John Hyde Estate, a big swag of land on Lincoln Street in Highgate - which is within my electorate and around the corner from my current heavily mortgaged abode - leading towards Third Swamp, which soon became Hyde Park. Unfortunately, I can claim no familial links, inheritance or land rights, from this John Hyde.

FOOTBALL, HOCKEY FAMILY

My own father, also a John Hyde, is a Victorian who, after playing in three grand finals for two premierships with Geelong in the early 1950s, came to WA as Claremont's captain-coach. He fortunately met my mother, Morna Pearce, WA and Australian women's hockey captain, and one of the Pearce sisters from Moulyinning who all played for this State and Australia. Mum and her sisters used to train and play hockey at Birdwood Square, Perth, also within my electorate.

While my birth certificate states that I was born in country Hamilton, Victoria, mum and dad having moved there for the start of the 1957 footy season and dad's playing-coach duties, I am adamant that I was conceived in Western Australia. I have argued this issue with my mum and while I acknowledge that she was there at the time and is probably the more reliable witness, given my large size at birth, I am sure it was a long pregnancy and it was entirely possible that mother was with child while hitting a hockey ball around Birdwood Square.

Robertson Park in Northbridge, also in my electorate, once housed the WA women's playing field where my aunts - Dip, May, Tib and Jean - and mum played hockey along with other WA women before and after the Second World War. I am delighted that the Aboriginal reconciliation process I sponsored while mayor as part of the soon-to-begin upgrade at Robertson Park will see Aboriginal heritage commemorated there, the Women's Field reborn, the phases of Chinese and Jewish settlement in the park acknowledged and Australia's first AIDS memorial public art built.

I thank mum and dad for their support. While they and my siblings have remained in Victoria, I had the good sense to stay in WA with our extended family. I have wonderful childhood memories of hot summer nights sleeping on the back lawn in Mt Lawley at Uncle Arch's and Aunt May's, weekends swimming at North Beach while staying with Uncle Poss and Aunt Lucy and school holidays back at grandma's and the uncles' farms at Moulyinning in the wheatbelt.

I pay tribute to my political forebears in the North Perth ward of the City of Perth and Town of Vincent. Jack Marks, the member for Midland and the member for Armadale proved inspirational to someone engrossed in grassroots politics. I had some wonderful times with Jack as a councillor and as deputy mayor to him at the Town of Vincent, and I thank the members for Midland and Armadale for their guidance and friendship.

I owe much to the immediate former member for Perth, Diana Warnock, my campaign director. Diana remains a consummate politician, incredibly progressive, with humanitarian ideals mixed with a knowing acceptance of the realities of the political system. Diana is much loved within the electorate of Perth. She taught me much about hard work, yet at the same time we had enormous fun. I take it as a huge compliment that some call me "Son of Fluff" as I try hard to emulate Diana's commitment to people, events, openings, protests and celebrations within the electorate of Perth.

It was said that Diana would turn up for the opening of an envelope in our electorate. You have taught me well, Diana. In April, I even attended the opening of a milk carton.

To June Belton, my campaign manager, confidante and electorate officer extraordinaire, I say a big thank you. Her nurturing, needling, bluster and bluff helped push me over the line. I know that the member for Geraldton and others here and in the other places in Canberra are also proud graduates of June's school of political preparatory.

I am indebted to Pauline O'Connor, my electorate officer, that I managed to put today's speech in my diary, read it, understand it and turn up on time to deliver it. Having worked with her as my deputy president at the Local Government Association of Western Australia, as a neighbouring councillor, as part of my campaign team and, most importantly, as a co-Geelong and East Perth supporter, I am delighted to have her serving the electorate of Perth.

DIVERSE PARLIAMENT

I thank my other campaign committee colleagues - yay, team. Richard Farrell whacked the finances into shape and stopped me from doing silly things. The acting mayor of Vincent, David Drewett, encouraged us all, intuitively was able to see political consequences of actions and stopped me from doing really silly things. Councillor Marilyn Piper at Vincent worked tirelessly and stopped me from doing some unbelievably stupid, silly things. To the 233 volunteers who worked on the ALP for Perth campaign, I say a massive thank you.

I also thank the federal member for Perth, Stephen Smith, for his brutal honesty and encouragement, my chief executive officer, John Giorgi, and all the staff at the Town of Vincent for their support and professionalism during my time there as mayor and councillor, and my researcher, Jennifer Piper, for her wonderful skills and for being a bon vivant. I owe thanks to the Minister for Housing and Works, the member for Mining and Pastoral and friend, Hon Tom Stephens, for inspiring me and teaching me. It was an honour to have served on Tom's staff. Above all, I thank my partner, Andrew David, for joining me on this roller-coaster ride of politics.

I am now part of the most diverse and truly representative Parliament we have ever had in WA. As the first openly gay man in this place, I join an Aboriginal woman, a young student, labourers, unionists, mothers, fathers, a secondhand-furniture salesman, sparkies, farmers, single parents, grandparents and the odd lawyer or two, to truly reflect our community of 2001 and become a modern House of real representatives.

[Applause.]
