



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Tim Clifford, MLC **(Member for East Metropolitan Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 5 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON TIM CLIFFORD (East Metropolitan) [8.02 pm]: Kaya. Hello. I pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the land we are meeting on today, the Whadjuk people, and for the contribution that they make to the life of the city and this region.

Mr Acting President, I thank you for giving me the opportunity to address the Legislative Council at the end of what is the fortieth Parliament of Western Australia.

I am sorry if I miss out anyone in these thankyou's. There are a lot of people to thank, but I will thank you in time.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge the very valued friendships that I have made across all sides of the chamber. Your support and kindness has been appreciated. I am doing the thankyou's first because I get a bit emotional about these things. I know many of these friendships will continue beyond this place and I hope to catch up with you in time.

I would like to thank the party because without it, I would not be here. To my colleagues, Hon Alison Xamon, Hon Diane Evers and Hon Robin Chapple, I thank you for all your support throughout the years. This place is tough and you need colleagues to pull you up when you are not doing the right thing and you need colleagues to give you a bit of guidance when you need a helping hand.

To all the stakeholders who over the past four years supported us throughout the many campaigns, your support and determination really helped us to put the things that matter on the agenda.

To the President, the Parliament and the committee and chamber staff, I thank you. From the moment I walked in, you were kind, welcoming and always willing to help. I will never forget that.

To my staff: yes, I was the MP, but I could not have done all the things I did without the support of my current and former staff or, how I like to put it, my workmates. We fought the good fight. You all should be very proud of your work. You did everything you could to help me get re-elected. I am really thankful for what you did in helping me be the person I am today and for all the things you did to protect the most vulnerable in our community. Emma, Talitha, Connor, Grace and Alison should all be proud of the work they did in my office because they are an amazing group of people. I wish them the best in their futures.

All of my East Metro candidates did an amazing job: Jessica Openshaw, Manny Singh, Rachel Wright, Clint Uink, Brendan Sturke, Lee-Anne Miles, Tomasz Kielce, Melanye Wawrik, Matt Lacey, Mark Cooper, Emma Pringle, Charles Pratt, Lucy Nicol, Caroline Perks, Callan Gray

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and Beth McMullan. I cannot tell you what your contribution meant to the Greens WA and the progressive movement as a whole. We will be back and I will be with you all continuing to fight for a better world.

To my East Metro campaign team and organisers, Mark Cooper, Zia Hakimi, Kit Sainsbury, Matt Roberts, Sophie Greer, Georgia Blackburn and Dylan Eagles, your tireless volunteer work was really the strategic glue that pulled our campaign together. I thank you all. I thank the other staff that I might not have picked up in this section.

I also want to thank the many hundreds of people who took part in our East Metro campaign. You were willing to do many things including standing at polling booths, knocking on doors and making phone calls. You stood for everything that our movement represents. I thank you all from the bottom of my heart.

To my close mates, Aaron, Ash, Luke, Chris and Chantal, thank you. To my basketball team—I know they are listening tonight—thanks for your perseverance with a teammate who is a member of Parliament. Thanks for switching nights! That is a bit of an inside joke. I know we have to work late on Tuesday nights.

Looking back, I kept politics at arm's length prior to joining the Greens in early 2011. After finishing a six-year period as a FIFO worker, I enrolled at Edith Cowan University as a mature age student. I had no interest in becoming an MP or a leader, but my motivation for getting involved was simple—fairness. I had a sense of urgency about the decision because it was concerning to witness the long march towards the Americanisation of many institutions in our country through the actions of, first, John Howard, and then Tony Abbott. Howard's lockstep support of the US plunging us into the Iraq war, his harsh treatment of refugees and his endless pursuit of crushing workers through his unfair WorkChoices legislation really impacted me as a construction worker. It was unfair for companies to use workplace agreements as a weapon against workers. The power imbalance between myself, the labourer, versus engineers and company lawyers was a real shock to me. The deck was always stacked in their favour and at that time it was a light-bulb moment that encouraged me to look more closely into what agendas were at play between the political parties vying to govern our country.

During that time, I also followed with dismay the accession of Tony Abbott. Tony Abbott's approach was a win-at-all-costs mentality without any regard for the people he claimed to represent. He used dog-whistle politics to pit community members against each other through fear. I was also frustrated as Abbott worked to dismantle our social safety net, making it harder for people to go to university. He also undermined our health system. The question going through my mind was: What is the Liberal Party's endgame? What do these people want? I still ponder that as the federal Liberal government defies economists' and scientists' advice and works to underwrite a dying fossil fuel industry.

Looking back at what motivated me to join the Greens, I find myself coming full circle because the fire I had in 2011 is still with me. Now, more than ever, I believe that we must fight to keep building a positive movement to prevent the privatisation of our public institutions, to prevent inequality and to ensure politics is accessible to all people and not just the privileged few.

Since election day, I have had a bit of time, and I have been reflecting on quite a few things in the past few weeks. There is a lot from the previous four years to reflect on, but I thought I would highlight just a few of the issues I have fought to raise during my time in Parliament. Coming into this Parliament was not easy for me—processes, the echo of the chamber, the ridiculous amount of pressure I put on myself through expectations and the drive not to let anyone down. I remember thinking, “How will I ever work my role out? How will I work out what we call the ‘Legislative Council’?” But things become easier. Bit by bit, things clicked, which helped me prioritise exactly what to pursue and what parliamentary levers I could pull to raise relevant issues.

I thought about my approach to politics and how we conduct ourselves, through my observations in this place and from outside the chamber, and I came to the conclusion that there is a lot to say about kindness. I remember someone telling me years ago that I was too soft for politics, but my reply at the time was, “Please do not mistake my kindness for lack of determination”, and that is what I believe I have been about. My determination has been motivated only by the issues. I did not come to this place to score cheap political points—because I am on this side of the chamber and you are on that side. I came here to work with you all to get outcomes. Yes, we might have disagreed, but I never believed that any issue should be all or nothing.

I know the concept of kindness does not sit well in the current global political climate with many operators who believe the ends justify the means, but we need kindness now more than ever. We are living in a world in which adversarial politics and machine politicians executing agendas of self-interest have sadly become the norm. We all know what happened following the recent United States elections: the storming of the Capitol and the emergence of insidious things like the anti-science movement and white supremacy. It is critical that we do not forget who we are and where we have come from. We need to show some kindness and rise above the toxicity and outside noise and just work together. That is why I took that approach to everything I did.

Looking back at what I wanted to put on the agenda over the four years, I really hit my stride in 2018, after all those other things clicked, because at the beginning of 2018 I sought to raise the issue of the rights of the many renters within our state. The 2018 renters campaign was close to my heart, as I saw firsthand what happened throughout the mining boom of the 2000s. I said many times during that campaign that we had to reform our Residential Tenancies Act to reflect the reality of the day and to avoid the negative outcomes of the boom-bust cycle that we have experienced in the past in Western Australia. Previous booms did mean prosperity for investors, but without proper policy frameworks in place, it came at the expense of others. Renters have faced unreasonable increases as people take advantage of rental shortages. Fast-forwarding now to the post-COVID housing and rental markets, we see very similar issues being driven not by the mining boom, but by a state that has pretty much had to work under the COVID regulations of the previous year and a half.

Just to put things into perspective, we ran a series of surveys online, and I received one email from a constituent that I thought I would read out tonight. I think it is important because it summarises the situation. I spoke to this family and they highlighted their struggle. These were people who worked. They had full-time jobs, they studied, they did the right thing, but through these circumstances they faced hardship and an unfair rental system. I think we need to listen to these stories and ensure we apply them to whatever legislation might be put forward in this Parliament. This is what the constituent’s email said. It was written just before the rental moratorium was about to expire. I quote —

As a member of the voting electorate and a member of the Perth rental market I am writing to express my concern regarding the upcoming removal of rent restrictions. Similar to loosening of covid restrictions there needs to be a controlled and planned exit strategy that allows owners to raise rent at a reasonable and controlled rate.

As it stands the rental market is cut throat and the moment that the restrictions are removed there will be a dramatic and unsustainable increase, this will have a profound impact on peoples well-being, financial status, marriages, and mental health. Homelessness will rise along with suicide rates, substance abuse, and domestic violence.

I am personally experiencing this, over the past year we have experienced a lot of financial and mental hardship. A family of 5, our youngest daughter with special needs was diagnosed with Leukemia early March 2020, her treatment required full time hospital care, this resulted in my wife becoming her carer and losing her job (\$40,000 loss in

income). To help we had to get a special visa for my mum to fly in from Ireland, flights and quarantine cost \$12,500. 3 weeks ago my wife's mum was diagnosed with terminal brain cancer, my wife will need to return to Ireland to help look after her for a duration between my wife's nursing semesters, estimated \$7,000 in flights and return quarantine, plus extended loss of income.

On top of this my wife is in her second year of nursing, which she managed to keep on track while supporting our daughter during chemotherapy. Nursing involves up to 8 weeks of unpaid placement, no dole, no food expenses, no childcare covered, no fuel—nothing—basically free apprentice labour—this does not happen in any other industry.

This week we have had a notice that on the 05/04/2021 our rent will increase by \$100 (approx. 22%). This has potential to send us homeless. I am currently applying for second jobs to try and make ends meet. Our finances have been decimated with approx. \$60–\$70k in reduced income. Now any spare cash that we have for our kids will now go to a greedy money hungry landlord.

I am one of thousands of stories across Western Australia that will be facing financial decimation once the ban is removed completely. This restriction needs to be removed in a controlled manner.

My vote this election time will go to whoever places controls on the out-of-control dictatorship that is the real estate rental market. I have nothing against rent increases, in line with inflation, interest rates and wage increases.

That is only one of many heartbreaking emails that I received in response to one of the multiple surveys I circulated in the community. The surveys really helped to make renters rights an election issue and highlighted the fact that, yes, we do have a housing crisis that still needs to be dealt with.

The other thing that was close to my heart during this period was tabling the Climate Change and Greenhouse Gas Emissions Reduction Bill 2020. When it comes to the climate crisis, I believe there was a shift within the public's attitudes and psyche during this term. The years 2018 and 2019 saw what I call an "awakening" when it comes to the climate issue. This awakening saw millions across the globe take to the streets calling for meaningful action on climate change. I was proud to also march alongside many, including the School Strike 4 Climate and many non-government organisations. Throughout that time, in 2018 and 2019, my office was busy planning on formulating a climate bill. In my view, the introduction of this climate bill was to meet the climate challenge and hopefully encourage reform to ensure Western Australia was doing its bit to mitigate its emissions and encourage the uptake of renewable energy. I was so proud to see that become a reality when I read in the bill in March 2020. Yes, I am proud to have brought in the climate change bill, but we are still living in a state that does not have any legislative targets that actually reduce emissions. We need to continue to hold the new Minister for Climate Action to account to ensure appropriate outcomes for the community.

The other issue that I really looked at throughout my time was inequality, which goes to where I came from. The ongoing fight to address inequality has never ended with me. I did what I could to continue to call out the actions of both state and federal governments to ensure that they did something to address the growing inequality gap in our country. We did what we could for everyone who walked through my office door and even conducted a food hamper drive last year not long after the first lockdowns. Many people were desperate, and I personally delivered most of the hampers we put together. The conversations I had with the people who requested food hampers will stay with me forever. We need to recognise that things are getting worse, not better, for many people in our community and it is going to take the work of policymakers to address those issues on all sides of Parliament. I urge the government to look at this issue and work with the federal government of the day to ensure that these people are protected.

Throughout my time it has been very tough to put many issues on the agenda over the four years, as many people in this chamber know. It is a difficult task being a member of Parliament, even more so when the pandemic hit. COVID-19 consumed everything and exposed existing underlying flaws within countries across the world and, sadly, WA was not spared from this. Yes, the government has a mandate and majority in both houses, but it is what it does with the opportunity that counts. I note the Whitlam government's achievements. Should we judge his government on its short tenure in office, or the policies of free education and equal pay for women? History has proven the latter. It is up to you, who continue in this place, to show courage, work across the aisles, ignore the vested interests and work together to protect future generations. The burden of responsibility lies with you and you should not be surprised at unrest growing in the community if you fail to protect the community from things such as the catastrophic impacts of climate change or the housing crisis.

With reflection, no doubt, I start looking toward the future. Immediately after the election result was declared, I went back to my safe space, which is before Parliament and the person I was then. Before the fortieth Parliament, I was defined by my upbringing. I was a kid from social housing, a former labourer and construction worker—the guy who many said was too nice for politics. That may be, but this was never about me; it was always about bringing the community together and working together. I was and still am just a person who carries the belief that when we work together, we can solve issues that sometimes appear too hard to overcome. I know that many people within the Greens movement are disappointed with the result, but you must know that your work contributed to so much furthering the causes that we fought for, and that is why we must look forward to continuing to build our movement. We must also continue to rebuild, because so many within the community depend on us to continue to put these issues that matter on the agenda.

I have been very moved by many of the messages of support since the election, messages from unexpected places and from across the political divide. Many people are asking me, “Are you going to make a comeback in four years?” I had to put it down, because it is hard to respond, but I would like to say to my friends and foes alike that there are too many doors left un-knocked, too many meaningful conversations not had and too many issues negatively impacting our community and environment not to continue the fight. So watch this space, because I am going to do what I can to rebuild from the setbacks of this election and win back this seat.

[Applause.]