



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Aaron Stonehouse, MLC
(Member for South Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 24 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 23 May on the following motion moved by Hon Dr Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, 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 AARON STONEHOUSE (South Metropolitan) [3.40 pm]: Madam President, honourable members and Western Australians, it is tradition for new members to use their first speech as an opportunity to introduce themselves and tell their story of how they came into politics. My story is short. I have no prior political experience and have never been groomed for public office. I have never worked as a union lawyer or a party staffer. I come from a rather modest background, having been raised by a single mum, working in retail, and living in Rockingham for most of my life. I have never had any grand political aspirations. In fact, at just 26 years of age, I may well be one of the least qualified members in this chamber. So, when I stand here today, I do not do so in a haughty spirit. I do not say in heart, “My power and the might of my hand has gotten me this!” No. I stand here humbled—humbled by being tasked with the most noble of duties: that of effecting good government of the people, by the people and for the people. I do so, alone, with no fellow party members in this house to lean on.

That said, it is not the man that matters, but his ideas, and what I lack in age I make up for in conviction. What I lack in experience I make up for in principles. So although one part of me trembles at the responsibility of my role as the representative of liberty in this house, another part of me is comforted by the fact I stand here today not alone but on the shoulders of giants.

In my battle for the values of liberty, I am not young at all; I am as old as the ancient thinkers. In my quest for limited government, individual liberty and lower taxes, I have the arguments of John Locke, who said, “The end of law is not to abolish or restrain, but to preserve and enlarge freedom.” When I stand in this chamber and argue for free markets, you will hear not only my voice, but also the voice of Adam Smith, who taught us that, “It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest.” When I speak in defence of freedom of speech, I will draw upon the work of John Stuart Mill and his argument that, “If any opinion is compelled to silence, that opinion may, for aught we can certainly know, be true. To deny this is to assume our own infallibility.”

The values I represent, and those of my party—the Liberal Democrats—are the classical Liberal ideals of the Age of Reason. We now often refer to these as being “libertarian”. That word may be more suitable, as the word “Liberal” has gradually lost its meaning over time. Indeed, modern liberalism is a far cry from its roots in the enlightenment. Libertarianism is often summarised as being fiscally conservative and socially liberal. But it is a much deeper

idea than that. Libertarianism is a philosophy that deals with the relationship between the individual and the state. Libertarianism, as we know it today, was the foundation of the American Revolution and the basis of our western civilisation. Libertarianism is the philosophy of freedom.

Freedom is best understood as the absence of coercion. F.A. Hayek, that great economic thinker of the twentieth century and a Nobel Laureate, described freedom as “the possibility of a person’s acting according to his own decisions and plans, in contrast to the position of one who was irrevocably subject to the will of another, who by arbitrary decision could coerce him to act or not to act in specific ways”. Therefore, to be free is to not be subject to the arbitrary will of another—to be free to live our life and do with our own person and property as we will.

Freedom allows each of us to define our own meaning of life and what is important to us. Each of us should be free to think, speak and write, to marry, associate and worship, and to eat, drink and smoke as we choose. When we are free, we can construct our lives as we see fit. It is freedom that allows us to lead a full human life. We need not approve of our neighbours’ behaviour, but merely practise tolerance and respect the moral autonomy of each person, seeing each person as the owner of his or her own life. It was John Stuart Mill who proposed that, “The only purpose for which power can be rightfully ever exercised over any member of a civilised community against his will, is to prevent harm to others.” To simply disapprove of someone else’s behaviour is not justification to interfere in their life or use the coercive power of government to force them to live by our standards.

A free economy allows us to produce and to exchange with others. Prices carry information throughout the economy about what people want and what can be done more efficiently. For an economy to function, prices must be free to tell the truth and be free from government distortions. A free economy gives people incentives to invent, to innovate, and to produce more goods and services for all of society. That in turn means more economic growth and a higher standard of living. In fact, in the entire history of mankind, nothing has done more to lift humanity out of poverty than free markets. To those who cling to romantic notions of a socialist utopia, I respond with the immortal words of Ludwig von Mises, “Socialism is an alternative to capitalism as potassium cyanide is an alternative to water.”

Let me be clear—I am not an anarchist. I concede that the state has a legitimate role in protecting our natural rights to life, liberty and property. It was the Enlightenment scholar, John Locke, who expressed the radical view that government is morally obliged to serve the people by protecting their life, liberty and property. John Locke denounced tyranny and insisted that a government that violates an individual’s rights must be opposed.

As a libertarian, I am sceptical of power—the greater the size of government, the greater its capacity for tyranny. As the old adage goes, power tends to corrupt and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Those who value liberty must also seek to limit the size and scope of government so that government would serve the people, rather than the people serve government. Thomas Paine warned us of this when he said, “Government, even in its best state, is but a necessary evil; in its worst state an intolerable one.”

In the fight for freedom, there is much work to be done. I will commit my time in public service to advancing the cause of liberty, not just for myself but for all Western Australians. When the onus of proof is reversed through so called “proceeds of crime” laws that undermine the principle of the presumption of innocence, you will find me making the case for liberty. When the legislative branch undermines the independence of the judiciary through the imposition of mandatory minimum sentences, I will be making the case for responsible government and the separation of powers. When the rights of property owners are violated by the very institutions created to protect them, through zoning laws, regulations and green tape,

you will find me fighting for the most basic of human rights—private property. When both major parties push on with the disastrous war on drugs, using the police as a blunt-force instrument in an attempt to arrest our way out of the problem, and when the black market continues to thrive, enriching organised crime, while some of the state's the most vulnerable, suffering from substance addiction, are treated like criminals, rather than patients, I will be making the case for policies that focus on harm reduction. Western Australia could learn a lot from places such as Portugal, which have adopted a decriminalisation approach with profoundly positive outcomes.

When our most basic rights and freedoms are being chipped away at on a daily basis through nanny-state regulations and big-government paternalism, with smoking indoors banned, irrespective of what the owner of the property thinks; with bicycle helmets mandatory, despite the rest of the world agreeing that they are really not worth the effort; and with e-cigarettes, a potentially life-saving alternative pathway to quitting smoking, practically banned, I will be there, making the case for personal choice and personal responsibility. When governments distort markets, creating perverse incentives through price-fixing, restrictions on competition and other market manipulation, I will be there, making the case for free markets. When government spends money it does not have, passing the debt to our children to pay off, I will be making the case for fiscal responsibility and good stewardship.

Western Australian businesses are doing it tough, straining under the burden of excessive regulation and high taxation. Many are struggling to cover the payroll month to month. Although the major parties love to talk about economic growth and job creation, they seem to offer only vacuous rhetoric. They shy away from showing real political courage or the testicular fortitude required to implement real reform that will provide an environment for businesses in the state to grow and flourish. During my time in Parliament, I promise to continue to make the case for genuine economic reform. I will fight to slash red tape; I will fight to lower the tax burden on Western Australian businesses. I look forward to working with my colleagues in this house to help make WA the most prosperous and business friendly state in the country.

Before I finish speaking, I will take a moment to acknowledge some of those people who have helped me along the way. I thank the WA branch of the Liberal Democrats, its members and its candidates, in particular, Jared Neaves and Angadjeet Sanghera, and former branch president Connor Whittle and new branch president Stuart Hatch. I thank Senator David Leyonhjelm, Duncan Spender and Eli Bernstein for their continued support. I thank my friends and family, in particular, my grandfather Sydney Stonehouse, who passed away several years ago. Sydney, or "pop" as we knew him, was a role model for me and my brothers. He was a stoic, principled, upright man. Although perhaps I did not know him as well as I might have liked, I have always tried to live my life by the examples that he set, to live a life of honesty and integrity.

Before you all today, I make the following commitment: that I will never compromise on my principles and that I will uphold the values of limited government, individual liberty and lower taxes. I will close now with what is perhaps my favourite quote from Thomas Jefferson —

In matters of style, swim with the current; in matters of principle, stand like a rock.

Thank you.

[Applause.]