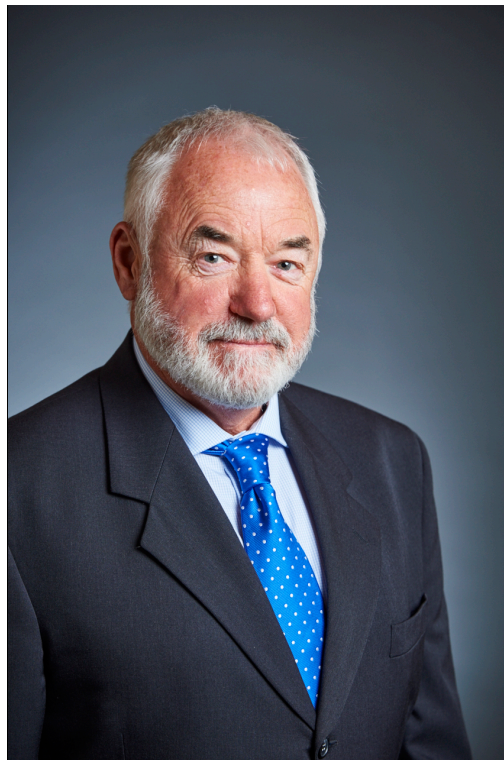




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Robin Scott, MLC
(Member for Mining and Pastoral Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 12 May 2021

Legislative Council

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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 ROBIN SCOTT (Mining and Pastoral) [3.11 pm]: I would like to use my valedictory speech to report what I have observed over the last four years in my electorate and also in this chamber. First, I would like to congratulate the government for winning a second term on the back of a very well run campaign. My own campaign, as most will know, was unsuccessful, which has left me sad, disappointed and a little frightened—sad because I was slowly getting the main issues addressed in regional Western Australia. I am not a career politician and I came into this place completely in touch with the views of the common members of the public. Sadly, some members in here seem to have lost touch. I did what I have always done in my career, which is, very simply, to work hard and do what my constituents asked me to do. I was building towards kicking some major goals for regional WA, but now I am sad that I must leave that progress on the table. I am disappointed because of how different things could, and perhaps should, have been. Although the election campaign was well run by the government, I know that the result would have been different had COVID not come along, even though I think Labor would have won because it left the opposition as simply non-existent. The Liberals, sadly, did not give the voters an alternative.

The conservative views are alive and well in this state and this country, but we have no-one to champion the cause and at every opportunity we are being out-yelled and outmanoeuvred by the Twitterati and the biased, degenerate media landscape. On the back of that, I am frightened because I cannot see any green shoots of hope at the minute. I have repeated many times in this chamber that the only reason that I became a politician was to improve the future of WA for my grandkids and for everyone's grandkids. Now that I have seen how this government operates, I am even more frightened than I was coming into Parliament. Let me say to the public—it may come as no surprise—that the welfare of the people of this state comes second to the protection of the political careers of the furniture in here. Only the public has the mechanism to change the situation, if only they cared enough to do so.

Over the last few years, the government has given chickenfeed to regional WA—a few handfuls of grain here and there to try to keep it happy—and now that it has a double majority, the government can kick regional WA while it is down. The discussion of electoral reform is still hanging about, and informed sources have told me that electoral reform is all but a certainty. Let me say to the regional members of this government: You must stop this from happening. You know that regional Western Australia gets a raw deal in this place. You are inside the government and you need to prevent any dilution to reduce regional representation because you know that it is purely politically driven, and regional WA needs you to be better than that.

Reprinted from Hansard

While I am talking about my electorate, I want to turn to some of the issues in regional WA that continue to go unaddressed. We are still struggling with alcohol abuse. People are now ordering their alcohol through the post. I have said before that we could ban all alcohol orders from being delivered unless it was addressed to a licensed outlet or hotel. All it needs is someone in the government to sign it off. That could be done this afternoon at no real cost to the government, and it would save a lot of misery in regional towns. Antisocial behaviour is still going on and many people are leaving regional towns for the safety of the city. Many are young families frightened for their children who have been threatened at school. These are the people we are trying to encourage to move to regional towns. Until we solve this problem, we will continue to see a decline in the number of people who want to live in regional towns. I have repeatedly asked for facilities that could house children who walk the streets at night because they have no safe place to go, but so far I have had no luck.

The sealing of major access roads is slow. Many of these roads would benefit regional towns greatly. The sealing of Tanami Road would cut distances for deliveries from the eastern states by 1 000 kilometres, making goods cheaper for Kimberley residents.

These are important issues, but they are not the main issue. The main issue underlying so much else is the financial abuse and mismanagement by certain leaders of Aboriginal corporations who today are lining their pockets at the expense of their own people. I have been working on collecting the proof about this mismanagement. The fact that several different Aboriginal groups have made the same allegations was enough for me to sit up and pay attention.

I want to put on record that the government needs to investigate these corporations more and stop blindly trusting their report sheets. It was recently reported in *The Sydney Morning Herald* that the largest Aboriginal corporation in the Kimberley, the Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation, has not had a valid board of directors since 2017. Even worse, it has not been able to account for more than \$28 million. Mr Paul Whyte from the Department of Communities defrauded the taxpayers of \$25 million and it made headlines for weeks, yet this scandal happens with the Marra Worra Worra Aboriginal Corporation and it barely gets reported in any Western Australian newspaper. The Kimberley Land Council sacked its CEO, Mr Brian Wilkinson, after he pushed for greater transparency of the council's multimillion-dollar charitable trust.

As a member of that region, I can tell members firsthand that the Kimberley Land Council is a crooked organisation that needs a few auditors and investigators to rip right through that place. If we continue to turn the other cheek and allow this behaviour to go on, nothing will change for Aboriginal people. In 2021, for a white person to make a big deal about corruption in any Aboriginal corporation is seen as racist. It is not about race; it is about honesty and transparency. The Aboriginal people suffer most from these financial disasters, and this weak state government and even weaker media outlets do nothing about it.

In the goldfields, one of the main offenders is Mr Kado Muir from Leonora. Mr Muir is chairman of the National Native Title Council. He is a very wealthy man who has his fingers in many government-funded pies. I have been told by many people in the area that he is up to all sorts of tricks. One of his favourite tricks is to create a songline where mining is proposed. This then requires the mining companies to deal directly with him. If members of this government and the previous government cannot see what is going on with this system, they are fools, and they do not deserve to be in this chamber. All they have to do is go and speak to the traditional owners on their next trip to the regions. I do not mean the ones lined up to meet them when they step off the plane; instead, members should just pop in to any community unannounced and get a real feel for the hopelessness, misery and poverty, and at the same time witness the vandalism and destruction that goes on due to a lack of jobs and community neglect. The government listens too much to the Kado Muirs and buys the BS when they say they speak on behalf of their communities.

Just recently, it was reported with joy in *The Kimberley Echo* that 60 foreign workers had arrived in Kununurra to fill places in the severely understaffed hospitality and agricultural sectors. Thousands are unemployed yet here we are celebrating giving jobs to foreigners! The government's new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs said to me in this chamber that Aboriginal people do not want whitefellas picking jobs for them. I do not want anybody picking a job for me, but the reality is that I must work because that is what society expects. If you give me and all my mates a fortnightly pay packet, guess what? None of us will work; we will go and sit under a tree and have a drink. Mark my words: this problem will get worse until the government changes its policy. Aboriginal empowerment is not working. The last two decades have shown that it does not work. Stop this idealistic dreaming and get to work. Just because your skin is white does not mean you cannot help Aboriginal people with your own hands. Noted Aboriginal leader and politician Nyunggai Warren Mundine commented recently in *The Australian Financial Review*. He said —

So long as training programs aren't linked to job-retention, and while ever bureaucrats make excuses for why the unemployed shouldn't have to work, people will continue to languish on welfare in a nation desperate for workers.

He was dead right.

Tied into the first issue, the second issue that goes unaddressed is the number of young Aboriginal children who are committing suicide in regional communities because of alcohol, drugs and constant, repeated physical and sexual assault. This crime continues today and is very rarely reported in the media. As one Kalgoorlie journo told me, "We don't like to report suicides", yet we have scandals in federal and state politics in which female employees have alleged sexual misconduct and those have made national headlines for weeks. It seems that some scandals can be reported but not others. These children are growing up in an environment in which they see no future. They are given no hope of escaping their short, miserable lives and opt for an easy, quick release from their living hell. I only wish that members of metropolitan seats could see what I have seen in the last four years—maybe then they might be spurred into doing something about this national disgrace. The government housing contract that my business held for many years was conditional. It contained a provision that I would not disclose what I saw and heard in Aboriginal communities and homes. In the end, I handed back that contract as my conscience started to get the better of me. All these problems could be eliminated in time if we took a different approach and allowed development of our resources.

Take Fitzroy Crossing, for example. People in Fitzroy Crossing are screaming out for jobs. Again, nothing is done about expanding the pastoral or agricultural industries. Hundreds of young Aboriginals are destined to a life on welfare, just like their parents. The main requirement to create many new jobs is water. Billions of litres of water flow into the Indian Ocean every year during the wet season, yet not one litre of that water is saved to generate any new jobs or any wealth for the regions. Capturing a little of that floodwater would provide so much more to all the people living in that area of WA. Since 21 December 2020, enough water has flowed into the Indian Ocean to fill Sydney Harbour more than 28 times, yet not one litre is saved to help the people who are existing on welfare in that area. Not one agricultural job has been created and absolutely nothing has been done to enhance the cattle industry. Do yourself a favour, members, and have a read of the discussion paper released by the government in November last year, called *Managing water in the Fitzroy River catchment*. It is the biggest load of amateur left-wing rubbish that you could ever read. It was the result of not one government department but four government departments all collaborating—that tripe was the best they could come up with! It looks like the work experience kid put it together in a couple of hours. The annual waste of water, combined with the government's red and green tape, is absolutely crippling the West Kimberley. Economic and social chaos will only continue until we get smart and start using our resources wisely.

The Kimberley meatworks, which is a state-of-the-art facility that employs around 90 people, was closed last Christmas and will not open until March next year because of the lack of cattle. Better fodder production and feedlots in the Fitzroy catchment would assist the viability of this facility. All it needs is better water management.

I have received emails and letters from people who support the Fitzroy River and want to protect it. Many of these have come from suburban Melbourne or the Northern Beaches area of Sydney. Those people would not even be able to point out Fitzroy Crossing on a map! We need a proper plan to sustainably use the natural resources in the Kimberley. I understand that while the traditional owners must have a say in the region's future, they should not have the only say or the final say. It was stated in this chamber that we should not allow a few billionaires to make more money by using the Fitzroy River to expand existing industries or introduce new industries. Without these billionaires, we would not have the thousands of jobs in the mining industry or many hundreds of jobs in the pastoral industry. We need to remember that when these billionaires pass on to the next world, their infrastructure and enterprises will carry on into the future. One great example of that was Mr Lang Hancock.

Regional Western Australia is, and always has been, the financial powerhouse of WA, and for the rest of Australia for that matter. While the miners dig out exhaustible resources, we could be securing our future with a resource that replaces itself every year. We could easily become the food bowl for the rest of the world. As the world population mushrooms and countries struggle to feed their people, we could be the saviour of many starving nations, and at the same time give our traditional owners the opportunity to join the workforce and become members of a regularly organised society. We already have the people who could make it happen; all we need is the right people in the government who want it to happen. To grow our state is no different from starting a business and growing and being successful at that business, as I have been in my business. Unfortunately, I doubt there are many members in this chamber who have run their own show. Most will have been, and always will be, employees, always agreeing and doing what the boss tells them to do. If they do not, they will be cut loose at the next election.

I would really like to know when we will stop using Aboriginal people as political footballs and as excuses for not doing something, turning the other cheek when it is evident that something is severely wrong, and conveniently blaming the federal government when it suits.

The last four years have been the quickest years of my life and also the most exciting as far as work goes. I have been a boss for the last 30-plus years but when I started in this chamber in May 2017, I was back being a first-year apprentice. I saw myself doing an apprenticeship in state politics, which turned out to be very different from what I originally expected. I feel that I had a good relationship with some members—there were a few exceptions. This was not a job for me; it was my way of trying to put something back into regional Western Australia in return for the most wonderful life I have had over the last 51 years.

I look forward to seeing more of my grandchildren when I am finished with politics. I have not seen enough of them over the last four years. I am not sure what my next mission will be, but be assured that I will be doing only what I want to do. I might even go fruit picking or drive a bus or a truck, or even go back to working in the mining industry. Perhaps I will do more fishing down south for a while or even take up golf, which I was never any good at, although I always did enjoy my days out on the golf course. I would always start out with six golf balls of my own. At the end of the day, I would have at least 20 balls that I found in the rough. None of them were my golf balls; they had all disappeared into the ether forever.

I need to thank certain people who got me through the last four years. Without them, I would have floundered. I need to start with Hon Michael Mischin, who helped me so much with the Select Committee into Mining on Pinjin Station, which I chaired. I made a few errors and some people wanted me boiled in oil for my indiscretion. However, thanks to Hon Michael Mischin

and Madam President, I lived to fight another day. I also played a part in the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review, of which Hon Michael Mischin was the chair. On my first day on the uniform legislation committee, I thought everyone was speaking a foreign language. They gave me a foolscap notebook to take notes. I could not even pronounce some of the words, let alone spell them, but I decided to use that committee to improve my grammar, my punctuation and my vocabulary. Thank you, Michael, for all your help in improving my English comprehension. He is now a friend, whether he wants to be or not.

I would like to thank my office staff in Kalgoorlie. Ms Kerrie Stones, my electorate officer, kept me up to speed with what was going on in Kalgoorlie–Boulder whenever I was in Perth or elsewhere in the electorate. Kerrie came with much experience as she had worked in the office of Wendy Duncan. I was the one who benefited from her experience. I will worry about all the people who come to my office in Boulder every day for help from Kerrie. It could be for help with Centrelink, health agencies or just with filling in simple government forms or even to get home to Warburton or Tjuntjuntjara. I hope the new guy will take up that role. Ms Chloe Parkes, my research officer, came to my office with no experience in research or politics but her youthful spirit and get-up-and-go attitude guaranteed that she soon became a key player in my team. Both these ladies went above and beyond their duties and never complained when I asked them to work late or to pop into the office when I needed help at the weekend. Thanks, girls. I will not forget the support you gave me and all the times you picked me up and dropped me off at the airport.

Mr David Modolo, my electorate officer, travelled everywhere in the electorate with me—from Norseman to Kalumburu and everywhere in between. On some of our flights, we spent three or four hours in the air, with the worst inflight service you could imagine. We could only eat and drink what we brought along, but not once did he complain. Being newly married, he never kicked up when I asked him to bring a suitcase because we were going to the bush for a while. During the flights, we spent much of our time discussing the reasons for the trip. When we landed, I was always full bottle on the issues and where we stood on the issues. David was a great electorate officer for me. He had had a similar role in federal politics, and I was the one who gained from all his experience. He will always be a good friend.

My family know that I was never put on this earth to be a good father or a papa or a brother or even a husband. My role was as a worker and provider. Every job I took on consumed my life. My father told me at the age of 15, “No matter what the job is, someone is paying your wages and you make sure you work hard and deserve those wages.” My sisters—Gillian, my twin, and Sandra, my wee sister—have always told me to slow down and spend more time with the family. This of course fell on deaf ears. I know they are very proud of me but they do not say too much in case I get a big head. I love them very much.

All the politically correct head shrinks will be shocked at this statement because nowadays a father must stay home sometimes and has to cook dinner and do the washing. I would have loved to have done those things; however, it is all too late for me, but I know my family loves me for what I am and I do not care what anyone else thinks. Julia, my fiancée, came into my life nearly 11 years ago, when I spent much of my time on mine sites. We coped well during my time away on mine sites because when I was home, we made up for lost time and always looked forward to holidays and weekends away.

The last four years have not been easy because this job is 24/7; that is, if you want to perform well in your electorate. I normally go home to Scotland every year but I have not been home since starting this job, and holidays here in Australia have been few and far between. To the new members who believe that family comes first, well, you can chuck that theory out the window. To do this job properly will consume every waking minute of your life. Of course you can choose to do only what is necessary, like some pollies in here, and still have the freedom of a normal life. It will be your choice.

I now have the opportunity to make up for lost time and, believe me, I will be working hard to make up for lost time for Julia and my family. I should not say “lost time” because nothing has been lost. Every day I went to work, it was to try to accomplish, either in mining or politics. What I hope to lose is the extra five kilograms of blubber that I gained during the last four years, due to good food and lack of exercise!

Last week someone asked me what I would have done if I were ever a minister in state Parliament. My reply was easy. It would be like winning \$50 million on the Lotto—I would make so many people happy.

To Nigel Pratt and all his chamber staff and the people who make this place work, thank you. To Hansard, thank you for the fantastic job you do, sometimes under very difficult conditions.

I want to thank the catering staff for all the delicious meals my visitors and I enjoyed, and of course the gardeners, who make it a pleasure to walk into the building. Thank you to the security people, who kept us safe from many events, which mostly went unnoticed by the polities. I thank Rob Hunter and his staff, who do so much that is not recognised.

To everyone I have forgotten to thank, I apologise.

Well, that is the end, folks. I feel that I can cancel this contract knowing I asked no favours and made no deals to try to secure my job, so I can leave here with my head held high. I would like to leave you with these parting words: may the best you’ve ever seen be the worst you’ll ever see; may the mouse in your pantry never leave with a tear in his eye; may your chimney always smoke till you’re old enough to die; and may you always be just as happy as I wish you now could be. Thank you.

[Applause.]