



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Kim Elizabeth Giddens, MLA

(Member for Bateman)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 6 May 2021

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 29 April on the following motion moved by Ms L. Dalton —

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's speech be agreed to —

To His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, AC, Governor of the State of Western Australia.

May it please Your Excellency —

We, the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

The SPEAKER: Member for Bateman.

[Applause.]

MS K.E. GIDDENS (Bateman) [2.51 pm]: Thank you, Madam Speaker.

It is with deep pride that I rise today to speak in this chamber for the first time as the member for Bateman. I acknowledge the traditional owners on whose land we meet, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Soon after I was elected, I met with Noongar elder Auntie Kerry-Ann Winmar. It was important to me to acknowledge and to learn more about the Aboriginal heritage of my electorate. Kerry-Ann shared with me stories about how her ancestors moved across the area we know as the electorate of Bateman. My electorate office in the heart of Applecross Village sits in the area known by the Whadjuk people as Margamangup. Nearby is Goolugatup, or Heathcote, and Kooyagoordup, or Waylen Bay. The swampy reeds along the Alfred Cove–Applecross foreshore was where women hunted in the mud for frogs, turtles and birds and sophisticated traps were used by men to catch fish.

I thank Kerry-Ann for sharing these stories with me and for giving me permission to talk about them here today. They are not only interesting facts of reference; behind each place and language, each story, is a connection of more than 60 000 years of rich culture and custodianship of this land and our environment. That Aboriginal people extend to all Australians an invitation to share in this history and culture is a rich gift that strengthens us all.

I congratulate Madam Speaker on her achievement in being this Parliament's first-ever woman Speaker. I, too, stand here today as not only the first-ever Labor member for Bateman, but also the first woman representative of this seat—both achievements of which I am especially proud.

[Applause.]

Ms K.E. GIDDENS: It is fitting that we acknowledge these milestones and achievements. It is much easier to walk the path well trodden. Firsts send a signal of hope and encouragement to girls and women everywhere, like my nieces Scarlett and Avalon, who are here in the public gallery today. You can do it.

[Interruption from the gallery.]

The SPEAKER: If I could interrupt for a moment. We do appreciate the support of the people in the gallery, but generally they do not participate, so if I can just ask people to hear the speech in silence.

Ms K.E. GIDDENS: Thank you to my colleagues who have delivered their inaugural speeches over this past week. Although you have made it very hard for me to follow, it has been an honour to share your stories and I look forward to working with you.

Bounded by the Derbarl Yerrigan, Kwinana Freeway, North Lake Road and South Street, the electorate of Bateman takes in full or in part the suburbs of Applecross, Alfred Cove, Ardross, Bateman, Booragoon, Brentwood, Kardinya, Mt Pleasant, Myaree, Murdoch and Winthrop. It is a diverse electorate with large Chinese, Malaysian and Indian communities. Statistically, people in Bateman are twice as likely than the state average to hold a bachelor's degree and work as a professional or manager, and they enjoy a quality of life defined by established suburbs and the beauty of the river. Of course, we cannot define a community by its demographics. Like anywhere else, the lifeblood of Bateman is its people. It is an active place where people take pride in their neighbourhoods and care for their neighbours, where traditional notions of community are held dear and where the environment, particularly the green open space, the mature trees and the river are loved and fiercely guarded.

I acknowledge Dean Nalder, the former member for Bateman, for his service to our community over eight years, and wish him and his family all the best.

My arrival in this place feels, on the one hand, like a natural extension of my life's interest and passion for social justice and advocacy and, on the other, entirely unexpected. When people ask me what my background is, I am never entirely sure how to answer. I have lived and worked across Australia, as well as in England, France and Cambodia. I have held jobs in retail, administration, mining, security, government, hospitality, youth work, children's rights and education.

Born in Nhulunbuy on the tip of east Arnhem Land, my first eight years were spent wrestling crocodiles and playing in cyclones—and that is not too much of an exaggeration. It was the kind of idyllic and wild childhood one hears about as a relic from times past. Free from helicopter parents, I remember long days riding our bikes to friends' houses or camping, fishing and swimming in waterholes—and not necessarily croc-free ones either.

When I was eight, my family moved from the Northern Territory to the rural midlands of Tasmania, which was a shock in both climate and culture. Shortly after, my mother decided to study to become a teacher, a role she still holds today. As a single mum with four kids, it was tough going at times. That I am so tall may well be the result of a pantry heavily skewed towards Weet-Bix and pasta! Jokes aside, it was through perseverance and sheer determination that she forged a path that would provide the kind of opportunities for herself and her children that would not have otherwise been possible. My mum is also in the public gallery today and I acknowledge her and thank her for all she has done.

In my final years of school, two pivotal events occurred. The first, on 28 April 1996, was the Port Arthur massacre in which 35 people were horrifically murdered. In that moment our collective sense of safety and innocence was completely shattered. But from the horror and shared grief came the political and community leadership to overhaul Australia's gun laws, resulting in the states and territories signing up to national reform. Just a year later, violence struck again with the murder of my classmate and her three sisters in a murder-suicide at the hands of their father. Unlike the shared will that followed the Port Arthur massacre, which has seen gun-related deaths in Australia fall by two-thirds since, violence against women and children remains stubbornly high. I would like to read their names so they are recorded forever in memorial in this place: Rebecca "Bec" Rose Shoebridge, Anna Josephine Shoebridge, Sara Francise Shoebridge and Georgina Rose Shoebridge.

At university, I studied international relations and politics, but it was the international relations part, not the politics, that held my interest. I had a vision to work in international development and, to that end, when I finished my degree, I took myself to Cambodia to intern for two children's rights organisations. The first was a local NGO that rescued children from sex trafficking. For the second, I was tasked with the job of conducting research to commence drafting the alternate report to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, to which Cambodia is a signatory. In a country recovering from genocide, it was challenging but deeply rewarding work. When I returned from Cambodia, I picked up a short-term contract with a temp agency so I could save money to return overseas. The role was with a state government minister, and it was from this experience that my passion for politics emerged.

For experienced members in this place, you need no introduction to the diversity of issues and need in our community that presents through the office of a local member. But to a young 20-something focused on the bigger world around me, I was naively amazed that this process called politics could have such a big impact on people's everyday lives, right here in Australia. In almost all areas, government can directly improve, or impede, people's lives. I was hooked from that moment. But still my path to this place was by no means obvious. Following the sudden death of my brother David and my niece Stella, I struggled for some years to make sense of a world whose axis had so fundamentally and permanently shifted. I sought meaning in adventure, and to this end I travelled to Western Australia. The rest, as they say, is history, although of course it was not as simple or easy as that.

No-one arrives in this place alone, and I would like to acknowledge the people who have supported me to be here today. My first thanks goes to my husband, Mick, whose steady counsel and unwavering faith in me always leads me to a wiser place than I could ever arrive at alone. Thank you for the love and leadership you provide to me and our family. To my beautiful boys, Joel, Liam, Fergus, Finnan and Hugo, being your mother and stepmother is at times one of the hardest things I have ever done. It is in your love that I find the motivation to always try harder so that I might be the very best I can be for you. I cannot think of anything that brings me more joy than being your mum.

To my mum, Anne-Marie, sister Alex, and aunty Jean, or "Aunty Dream" as she is lovingly known to us, you belong to a long line of matriarchal women whose legacy of strength, courage and resilience you proudly share and pass on.

I am now going to do something that I have been advised not to do in an inaugural speech, and that is deviate from my script. I would like to share a story of my great-grandmother that maybe tells a bit about the line of women in my family. My great-grandmother lived in a three-bedroom, upstairs-downstairs house in the United Kingdom and had 14 children. As the story goes, she was preparing dinner one night for the family after another baby—I do not know; let us say baby eight—and the local priest arrived and knocked on the door to ask her why she had not been to mass lately. The dinner, which was apparently spotted dick, was thrown across the kitchen and hit the door near where the priest was standing. I think he never visited again! I am not sure whether she ever attended mass again. I like to think sometimes of her spirit and temperament and that I maybe have a bit of her in me as well.

To my family who could not be here today, my stepdad, Phil, brother Sam, my brother-in-law Samm, and my handsome nephews Archie and Atticus, thank you. To my in-laws, Sue and Richard Moore, and the Reedy Creek mob, who were meant to be here today but were stopped at the border not by COVID restrictions, but by a broken-down car, thank you.

To my campaign team, campaign director, Hon Kate Doust, MLC, campaign manager, Peter Feasey, and committee members Shenae Hunter, Hamish Beer, Hugo Seymour, Dean Ellis and Sonia Arrakal, and to every volunteer who spent time on pre-poll and polling day, thank you, with special mention to Hannah and Jeanette Anderson, Rhonda Kerr and Kaylie Burnett.

I cannot thank you enough. I thank Glenn and Fiona Sterle for their moral and practical support. I am extremely grateful for your belief in me. Thank you to Ben Harris from the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association of WA for your time, quiet patience and advice. I thank Paula Rogers for your motivation and friendship. You have a joy for living that you are so happy to share with those around you. I welcome Shaun Hawkes, who will be joining my team after the arrival of his first child, who is due very soon. I wish him and his partner all the very best in this exciting time.

Finally, special mention must go to two people. The first is to Karen Wheatland, who volunteered on my campaign as field coordinator. She gave willingly of her time, energy and passion, while holding down three jobs, renovating her house, and caring for an unwell parent. The only thing bigger than her smile is her generosity, of which I am a thankful recipient. I am excited to work with you and continue this journey over the next four years.

The second is to Hon Peter Tinley, AM, MLA, member for Willagee, who has served not only in this place but also in the service of our nation, with distinction and honour. Peter is a builder of teams and his commitment to helping others has been to my great benefit. I thank him not only for his guidance and encouragement but also for shining a light on the pathway to the opportunity for me to be in this place.

If experience is the name we give to our mistakes, then I come to this place with plenty of experience. The difference between where I stand now as a representative in the forty-first Parliament of Western Australia, and an alternate path, is not the result of some intrinsic moral character or particular talent or special intelligence, although, perhaps like all of us here, I like to think I do in fact possess these things. Rather, it is the result of support, both human and structural, that at different stages of my life have provided me with the tools to fulfil my ambition.

The concept of equality and fairness are great Australian traditions woven even into the most sacred of Australian narratives, that of the Anzacs. Broadly, these values are promoted as shared across partisan lines. In reality, these notions are deeply contested. The concept of “lifters and leaners”, favoured under the neoliberal tradition, is an example of this contest. Under this approach, equality of opportunity is touted as the aspirational precondition for human advancement. This belies the fact that we all begin life from different starting points, and face different hurdles once here. What is the value of equality if it is not the outcome that we measure? Dr Bill Garner from the University of Melbourne says this better than me when he argued that “equality of opportunity is the version of equality you claim to believe in when you do not believe in equality at all”. Nowhere is this more evident than in Australia’s education system.

Research shows that in this country, the single biggest factor that determines how a student will do at school is the socio-economic status of their parents. The higher the socio-economic status of a school, be it public or private, the higher the average achievement of the student. If education is the lever by which we raise people, then we must do better than accept that our children’s educational outcomes will be determined by the economic status of their parents and that of their community. I am proud of Labor’s commitment to tackle and address the structural inequalities that prevent people from accessing opportunity equally. A clear example of this is Labor’s affirmative action policy, which, for the first time in this Parliament’s history, has achieved nearly 50 per cent representation of women.

I would like to talk a little about my experience working as a teacher. I decided to become a teacher while living in Wyndham in the East Kimberley, where my husband was serving as a police officer. It was in this role that I developed a passion and interest in trauma. After observing the students in my first prac, I noticed something that was confusing and disturbing to me—a pattern of behaviour with some students that ranged from what could only be described as near complete shutdown, to sudden and seemingly unprovoked outbursts of violence and other disruptive behaviour.

I searched my field of reference for the cause. Were they bored? Were they disengaged? Was the lesson not at their level of understanding? Was English as a second language a factor? Although some or all of that may have been true to varying degrees, I had a feeling these explanations did not fully cut it.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms K.E. GIDDENS: Determined to connect with my students, I researched until I came across the growing body of evidence on the impacts of trauma on child development. Through this area of study, we now understand that trauma is not in the mind at all, but rather physically in the body. Changes associated with complex trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder can be detected by MRI brain scans. Children and adults who have experienced repeated or prolonged childhood trauma show reduced brain volume, disrupted hormone levels, and both immune system and neurobiological changes. No wonder common appeals in the classroom to try harder or be good do not work for these kids. Science has confirmed a graded dose response relationship between adverse childhood experiences, or ACEs, and negative health and wellbeing outcomes. The higher the ACE score, the higher the rates of behavioural problems, disengagement from education, unemployment, smoking and drug abuse, alcoholism, family violence and early death. What people may find more surprising is that higher ACE scores are also linked to conditions we might not traditionally associate with trauma, such as asthma, diabetes, autoimmune disease, heart attack and stroke. I am passionate about the findings from this field of research because I believe they have powerful implications for the way we understand and respond to some of society's most "wicked" problems, including our failure to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and in areas like family and domestic violence, mental health, housing and homelessness, education, health, policing and justice.

We heard an excellent example yesterday from the Minister for Community Services of a trauma-informed approach, with the success of the Housing First model in addressing chronic homelessness and disadvantage in Western Australia. I look forward to working with colleagues to build on this approach and further support the incorporation of trauma-informed understanding in policy and legislative settings.

Of course, this election was significant for reasons other than the number of women elected to this place, as noteworthy as that is. With Labor gaining 53 out of the 59 seats in the house of Assembly, Western Australians have overwhelmingly placed their trust in the McGowan Labor government. It is not lost on me that people in Bateman and, indeed, Western Australia voted Labor for the first time in their lives at this election. On the campaign trail in Bateman, people told me they wanted competence over ideology, and they judged the McGowan Labor government to be competent by giving it the most significant win of any government in Australia's history. This trust was forged by the Premier's leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic, which put first the safety of Western Australians, including our most vulnerable.

COVID-19 has created significant challenges for our state and, indeed, the world, but as the saying goes, "Never waste a good crisis." When the COVID-19 pandemic reached Western Australia, the McGowan Labor government did not hesitate to protect Western Australians. In doing so, it kept our economy strong. I have heard protests from the members only figuratively opposite me, who have said, "Yeah, but that's only because of our iron ore." Yes, Western Australia has been blessed with rich natural resources, but the strength of our economy is due first and foremost to the management of this government during the pandemic.

The human side of economic systems is that no-one wants to spend money when the people they love are sick or dying. This reflects a deeper truth—that the economy should always be in the service of the people, and not the other way around! So how do we put our economy, with iron ore undeniably at its heart, to the service of Western Australians? The first thing to do is to enable as many Western Australians as possible to participate in and benefit from the economic

abundance of this state. The Premier has unapologetically insisted that Western Australian mining jobs go to Western Australians first. This is important. I came to Western Australia to drive trucks in the mines in this thing I had heard about over east, called the mining boom. At a time when the industry was crying out for drivers, I was shocked at how difficult it was to get a job. In fact, I had to leave the state and go to the Northern Territory before I could return to WA and get a job in the mines here. As a fun fact, Madam Acting Speaker, I may be the only member of Parliament who has ever driven trucks in the mines! I asked the wonderful Parliamentary Library staff to fact-check this, and they have records of two former members who had worked in the mines, but not as truck drivers as far as we know. But I digress.

The second, and more exciting, opportunity that our mining industry affords is the ability to leverage the economic, industrial and intellectual capacity of this \$115 billion per year behemoth to support the emergence of new industries in Western Australia. That is to say that Western Australians should be not only driving the trucks, but also designing and building them. Further, we should be designing, building and managing the sophisticated technological systems that support modern mining operations, and looking for opportunities to apply that technology across sectors. We are, in fact, already doing this, with Western Australia leading the world in, for example, remote and autonomous vehicle operations. However, with the development of the Simandou mine in Africa and given other market forecasts, the canary in the iron ore mine is that we may have only seven to 10 years to build a truly diversified economy.

In addition to our resources, Western Australia is blessed with another natural gift—our proximity to Asia. Western Australia is a trading state within a trading nation. Asia is the fastest growing economic region in the world, and it is right on our doorstep. Although it is important that Western Australia looks to Asia, we must remember that Asia does not necessarily look to us. We must actively promote Western Australia in Asian markets with a committed and resourced plan to build the long-term relationships that underpin successful trade. We cannot have a diversified economy without diversified markets, so this is especially important in new and emerging markets such as Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines and Thailand.

I came to WA for adventure, but I stayed for the opportunity. Those of us in this place now have a moral duty to do what we can to create a genuinely diversified economy that will sustain the next and future generations of Western Australians.

On the theme of moral obligations, the need to tackle climate change is increasingly urgent. This is not controversial. Western Australians overwhelmingly accept the science of human-induced climate change and they expect leadership and action on this matter. We must be honest about the fact there will be some pain in the transition to a carbon-neutral society.

My brother-in-law is a diesel mechanic in a coalmine. He wants to know that his job is secure and his children will have jobs in the area they have grown up in. This is a fair and reasonable expectation. We must always remember the human element of change. We owe it to people like my brother-in-law to not walk into Parliament with a lump of coal and promise that change is not coming. Instead, we must work closely and honestly with affected industries, communities, families and workers to ensure that they have a viable and sustainable future. This is exactly the approach the McGowan Labor government has taken in Collie.

I am proud to be a part of this state government, which is committed to creating new jobs and industries while tackling climate change through the green jobs plan. I call on the federal government to put aside its ideological and intellectually bankrupt failure to act strongly on climate change and instead do what the vast majority of Australians want it to do, which is to provide the leadership so critically required on this issue.

As I stand here today, new to this place, I do so knowing that my time here is borrowed. I say this not as a reflection on my seat or my ability to do my job here, but to prompt me to ask myself: what is the contribution I hope to make to this place in the time that I have?

I have outlined today a wide area of passions and interests, but if I can summarise it to just two points, it would be this: the first is that I will always remember that our role in this place is to improve the outcomes of the people we represent. It is in your service that we are in this place, and I will do all I can to act in the interests and aspirations of our state and its people. The second is to have courage to tackle with determination the challenges and issues that are most important to our lives and our future. To borrow the following words, “Courage is not an emotion. It is a decision to act.”

I sincerely thank the people of Bateman for their faith in me. I will work to the best of my ability to be the kind of local member you expect—hardworking, accessible and a strong advocate for our community.

[Applause.]
