



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Mark McGowan, MLA

(Member for Rockingham)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 11 March 1997

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR McGOWAN (Rockingham) [9.07 pm]: It is appropriate in commencing this address to thank those whose assistance played a major part in my election to Parliament. The person deserving of most praise is my lovely new wife, Sarah, who is in the Public Gallery tonight. Not only did Sarah help me through good times and bad, but also she endured the election campaign with good spirit, knowing that our wedding was to be held the following weekend. No-one should have to endure an election and a wedding within one week. Sarah and I will never forget the month of December 1996.

Sarah's parents, Gwen and Neil Miller, are also here tonight. They provided me with immense support and were willing to accept the burden of worry whenever I needed to transfer it. My mother and father, Dennis and Mary McGowan, provided me with the upbringing and the values which are unmistakably Labor, and played a major role in giving me the opportunities which allow me to be here tonight.

I pay tribute to Kim Beazley, who is not only one of the greatest men I have ever met, but who also provided me with immeasurable assistance to be here tonight. A large number of my parliamentary colleagues have been of immense assistance to me, and I especially thank Hon John Cowdell, Mr Julian Grill, Mr Norm Marlborough and Hon John Halden, as well as my friends in the union movement, Mr Joe Bullock and Mr Kevin Reynolds, for their support, encouragement and assistance over the years.

I also congratulate our leader, Dr Geoff Gallop, for fighting an excellent and outstanding election campaign.

During a very tough campaign Mr Michael Woodhouse, Mr John O'Callaghan, Mrs Barbara Baxter and other friends in the Public Gallery, including Carmel Low, John Baxter, Jack Nicholson and Anne Wood, as well as the Safety Bay–Rockingham branch of the Australian Labor Party, provided me with outstanding voluntary support.

It would be remiss of me if I did not congratulate the Weekend Courier and Sound Telegraph newspapers in Rockingham for providing a fair and impartial coverage of the election campaign and an outstanding service to the people of Rockingham.

I thank the Rockingham City Council and the staff for the excellent support and assistance they gave me when I was a Rockingham City Councillor and Deputy Mayor.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the first member for Rockingham, Mr Mike Barnett, who overcame a great deal in his life to achieve so much in this Parliament and have a distinguished parliamentary career. I wish him well in his future career and endeavours.

Finally, I thank the people of Rockingham who have vested their confidence in me. I intend to work for them to the best of my ability.

Experience is a great teacher. Having spent the greater part of my youth in relatively small country towns as the son of parents of modest income, I grew to understand the inequality between people and communities. It was a fact of life in the area in which I lived that if one's parents were wealthy, one was afforded opportunities and if they were not, one missed out. It became apparent to me then, as it still is, that it was through the actions of government or representative organisations—for example, the union movement—that ordinary people were afforded opportunities. This overarching principle was true in the 1970s and it is also true in the 1990s. This principle applies in country towns and it is especially the case in expanding urban areas, such as Rockingham, which are on the edge of large cities. It is and always will be a fact of Australian politics that the Australian Labor Party best represents these people and communities. It has been the central theme of the Australian Labor Party over the 106 years of its existence that the guiding goal of society should be the improvement of the lives of all regardless of who they are or from where they come.

In state politics in recent years it has been the accepted view of the public that it is the Labor Party which performs better than its opponents in the areas of health, social services, public transport and education. This is due to its exceptional performance, at both state and federal levels, by world standards in these areas over the last 10 or more years. For Labor to properly achieve its goals of equality of opportunity, guaranteeing the future of the State and a decent life and job for all, it must reassert itself in what will increasingly become the two great domestic issues of the age—industry policy and the environment. If members were to walk into a classroom and ask the students what they thought was the major issue of this age, it is more than likely they would say, "The environment". Their preoccupation with this issue will increase in the future. It must be Labor's goal to ensure that clean air,

clean water, the prevention of soil erosion and the protection of endangered species continue to be part of its focus. Members on this side of politics have the willpower and conviction to legislate, speak out and act on these matters. If they continue to do so, they will guarantee not only their future, but also the future of their children.

Another issue on which the Labor Party can act is industry policy. At present there is unacceptable unemployment and certainly an unacceptable sense of job insecurity in the community. To a large extent the Western Australian economy relies on its mineral and commodity production and not on manufactured goods. The best jobs, the highest paying jobs, are in the mining industry. However, there are not enough of these jobs to go around because they rely heavily on world markets, which can fall sharply and quickly.

Western Australia must have more manufacturing and downstream processing industries as well as the service industries which cater to them. It is at the heart of Labor philosophy that there is a role for government to ensure that these industries are encouraged to establish, not through the discredited technique of excessive protection, but by finding something smarter which is targeted at and sympathetic to industry without pandering to sectional interests. It is no coincidence that the countries which have the highest standard of living are the same countries which spend the most per capita on research and development. Labor's intention is to encourage research and development, build infrastructure and introduce mechanisms to ensure that the great pool of national superannuation savings is invested in Australia.

Environmental and industry policy are two areas of Labor's natural strengths in which it needs to assert its superiority over those opposing it. In comparative terms I am a young member of Parliament. The fact that my wife and I were married in December and purchased our first home last Monday makes us representative of the thousands of people in Perth's southern suburban rim who feel alienated by this Government.

The City of Rockingham is an area in which literally thousands of people are choosing to make their home each year. It is one of the relatively rare areas in urban Australia in which ordinary Australian families can afford to buy a decent home at a fair price in close proximity to a major city and the ocean. In comparison with virtually all other mainland capitals, home prices in Perth are very competitive. This makes an important difference to the quality of life of Western Australians. Rockingham is an area which consistently records massive growth. Between 1986 and 1996 the population increased from 32 845 to 63 815 residents. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics this places Rockingham third in Australia in terms of percentage growth rate, which is close behind two local government areas—Queensland's Sunshine Coast and far in excess of any other local government area in Western Australia. According to Department of Planning figures, the projected population for Rockingham is 105 500 people by the year 2006. According to the City of Rockingham figures, in the 1995–96 financial year the value of building applications totalled \$104m and has been consistently at this level over the past five years. By the year 2021 it is projected that the population in the south western corridor will exceed 400 000. This population increase has been shown to be very marked among residents over the age of 75 years and those in the 15 to 30 age group. Rockingham is very much an area where young couples and retirees choose to settle. The projected growth rate in the over 75 age group in Rockingham is 197 per cent between 1991 and 2001. In the 15 to 24 age group the projected growth rate is 126 per cent over the same period. By contrast, the rest of the population of the Perth metropolitan area is projected to grow at 27 per cent and 10 per cent respectively for these two age groups over the same period.

In addition to the massive population growth there has been a corresponding increase in the wealth produced and the output of the industrial area known as the Kwinana strip. This area is contained partly within the Rockingham electorate and also within the neighbouring electorates of Peel and Cockburn. The strip accounts for \$8b worth of WA industry outputs, including immediate and flow-on effects, and employs 12 500 people directly. Another 12 500 jobs depend directly on Kwinana industry. The major employers in this area include Alcoa, with 1 033 employees; Wesfarmers CSBP Limited, 600; BP Refinery (Kwinana) Pty Ltd, 490; and United Construction Pty Ltd, 1 250. These industries are the major centre of downstream processing in Western Australia. It is only through maximising the productive capacities of these downstream processing industries and industries in other areas by providing them with the opportunities to grow and prosper will Western Australia become a truly great economic State.

Additionally, Rockingham is home to one of the four most important military bases in Australia—HMAS Stirling. For employment and attitudes Stirling is extremely important to Rockingham and has had a positive effect on our community. HMAS Stirling plays an important role in our nation's overall security, but I will expand on that later.

Despite the massive population growth in the southern suburbs, particularly in Rockingham; the area's immense contribution to the State's wealth, particularly in downstream processing, and despite Rockingham's contribution to the defence of the State and the nation, there is an appalling lack of state-funded public infrastructure in Rockingham. Furthermore, there appears to be a lack of any sort of commitment by the State Government to rectify this problem, which manifests itself in a large number of ways in the areas of health services, schools, police numbers and facilities, and state government offices.

During this speech I will confine myself to the issue of transport infrastructure. Firstly, a rail line to service the burgeoning suburbs south of Fremantle should be an absolute priority. It is a Labor priority. It is not this Government's

priority, and that needs to change. At present the State Government's plans in this area are for a rail service to Rockingham to be completed some time in the next century between the years 2010 and 2020. Until that time, Rockingham will be the only remaining strategic regional centre which is not serviced by a rail line. All the others—Armadale, Fremantle, Midland and Joondalup—are properly serviced by rail. The Government's planned rail service will join the southern corridor via Kenwick to the city of Perth. It will eventually join Mandurah to this service. Both the route selected and the time frame involved are unacceptable to the vast bulk of people in Perth's southern suburbs. The time frame chosen is obviously an attempt to place the burden of construction on some future Government. The route chosen is one which will not meet the needs of the overwhelming majority of the people it is meant to service.

A line via Fremantle would be not only a cheaper proposition but also a much more highly desirable route to the people of Cockburn, Fremantle, Jandakot, Kwinana, Rockingham and Mandurah who contribute much to the nation's economy and security but receive little in return. A rail line via Fremantle would offer much needed employment, and educational and social opportunities to the people of the southwest corridor. Every other comparable Australian city has a comprehensive rail service. The southern suburbs of Perth are in the most conspicuous need of such a service.

Road transport is another area where the people of the southern suburbs are not receiving a fair deal. Through Main Roads the State Government has plans to extend the Kwinana Freeway 11 kilometres southwards with completion expected in the year 2005. This extension will involve four sets of traffic lights in addition to the six sets already in existence. The main access point to this freeway extension will be south of the major population centre of Rockingham. This is unacceptable to Rockingham residents. In effect the proposed freeway extension will be of little benefit to the majority of the people it is supposed to serve. The people living in the established areas of Rockingham will use the existing access points to the Kwinana Freeway.

I am convinced that the \$44m allocated to the freeway extension would be better spent on removing the traffic lights from the existing freeway and upgrading current entry points. This approach would have the added advantage of enabling the work to be carried out sooner rather than later. This would also serve as a demonstration by the Government that it is committed to the people of Perth's southern suburbs and that they are not forgotten. Both of these transport issues need addressing urgently to cater for the growth of the southern suburbs.

From 1989 until last year I served as a member of the permanent naval forces. Indeed I resigned only to contest last year's election, and I am now a member of the Navy Reserve. I am extremely proud to have HMAS Stirling, Garden Island, and vast numbers of serving and ex-serving military personnel and their families within my electorate. I am also proud to call Kim Beazley my friend. It is commonly accepted within defence circles that Kim Beazley was the best Australian Defence Minister since John Curtin. Labor's defence record is solid gold. It was Labor that successfully led this nation through the darkest days of both World Wars. However, it was during Kim Beazley's tenure as Defence Minister that the Australian Defence Forces were transformed. It was Kim Beazley who determined that the construction of Australia's new service combatants, the ANZAC frigates and our new submarine fleet, the Collins class, would be undertaken in Australia. Australian made by Australian workers is the essence of Labor's policy. Furthermore it was Labor and Kim Beazley who made the biggest commitment to the defence of Western Australia since the Second World War when the strategic decision was made 10 years ago to base half the Navy's fleet in Western Australia. This means that now more than half a billion dollars worth of construction on Garden Island has been completed. Ships and submarines representing more than half the Navy's striking force will be based at HMAS Stirling. The concept of two-ocean basing means that the Australian Navy will now be properly dispersed around the nation so that it is available in times of need to defend us.

Some 2 500 defence employees and their families reside in my area, and as a result hundreds of millions of dollars in contracts, purchasing and expenditure now accrue to the Western Australian economy. Whenever one drives past Transfield in Coogee one is likely to see a frigate, destroyer escort or patrol boat being refitted. There has been precious little recognition of these facts by this State Government. There is no appreciation of our strategic location in South East Asia, little understanding of our Navy's role as host operating with other navies in our region, and very little support for the provision of infrastructure to both Garden Island and Rockingham. Major navy bases require infrastructure, especially in the transport area. This is important not only for supply, but also to maintain the morale of our service personnel and their families. Indeed, under this Government the most notable actions in defence have been attempts to allow commercial mining interests to enter Garden Island without consultation with the Navy. Secondly, no attempts have been made to help the Australian Defence Forces to obtain security of title over training areas in Western Australia.

I would like to close my first speech by reiterating these central points: It is time that attention was focused on Perth's expanding southern suburbs. It is clear that the people of Perth's southern suburbs want a better deal. It is no less clear that they deserve a better deal.

[Applause.]