



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Terry Waldron MLA
(Member for Wagin)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Wednesday 23 May 2001

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

MR WALDRON (Wagin) [1.33 pm]: In rising to present my maiden speech, I feel extremely honoured, humble and proud to represent the Wagin electorate and indeed all Western Australians. It is a large responsibility and I look forward with positive enthusiasm to meeting that responsibility and doing the best I possibly can for the people in my electorate and Western Australia. I sincerely acknowledge my predecessor, Hon Bob Wiese, for the outstanding contribution he made to this State and particularly to the people of the Wagin electorate over the past 14 years. A former Minister for Police, Bob was a tireless worker who operated with great honesty and integrity and always had the people of his electorate and Western Australia in mind. Through my election campaign and my experiences over the years, I know how highly regarded Bob was and still is throughout our region and across Western Australia. I also recognise Chris Wiese, Bob's wife, for her outstanding contribution and her total and loyal support of Bob over the past 14 years. They were very much a team. Bob has left me extremely large shoes to fill, which I will endeavour to do to the best of my ability, always knowing that I will be satisfied and proud if, at the end of my period as a parliamentarian, I am as highly regarded and respected as Bob Wiese is today. I sincerely thank the people of the Wagin electorate for putting their confidence in me. I say to them today that I will work extremely hard and endeavour to give them the best representation possible. I also thank the National Party and my election campaign committee for their great work and support over the past year, especially my campaign committee chairman, Doug Fowler; my treasurer, Mary Graham; and all other committee members. I thank also the National Party state director, Jamie Kronborg, for his efforts and guidance; all my National Party colleagues; plus the many other people who assisted me. I mention also the people in the National Party branches in my region for their great work and support over a sustained period. I also thank very much the management and staff of the West Australian Football Commission and the Western Australian Country Football League for their great understanding and encouragement over the past 12 months, in particular Jeff Ovens, John Lussick, Ken Baxter, Grant Dorrington and Ian Taylor, who has already been mentioned here today. I especially thank Ian for his guidance while I sought election.

THE ELECTORATE AND ITS PEOPLE

The electorate of Wagin comprises 11 shires, plus the town council of Narrogin. It stretches from Wandering in the north to Tarin Rock in the east, Broomehill in the south and Darkan in the west. My electorate houses two major regional centres: Narrogin and Katanning. It also houses a number of smaller towns and many more smaller community centres. The region is very much reliant on agriculture and associated industry and business, although there is a definite move in the region towards greater farm diversity and the introduction of new industries when economically possible. However, both these areas will need further state and federal government support, which should be provided via research and, in some instances, venture capital. Although farming is still the economic backbone of our region, the number of farms and farming families has decreased. The majority of the population is now involved in a variety of occupations and is much more multicultural. At this point I acknowledge the contribution of the Nyoongah people and the large role they have played in my region. I have had a good relationship with the Nyoongah people over the years through my schooling, business and sporting activities, and I have developed many friendships with them. I look forward to continuing to work with them in my new role. I also congratulate all those people who have, either recently or over the years, come to my region from other countries. I recognise the great contribution they have made to the region. Although we have historically been an economically strong and sound region, we have been through one of worst farming seasons in memory and, combined with other seasonal circumstances such as drought, frost and low commodity prices, the region has experienced a severe economic downturn. A reasonable to good farming season in 2001 and improved commodity prices are critical to the future of the region, the people in the region and the State. Most of my region has experienced some good opening rains this year, but the eastern areas have not had that as yet. Those farmers will be looking for that over the next few days.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

At this point I provide the House with a brief personal background. I was raised on the family farm at Jingalup, a small place in the Wagin electorate about 20 kilometres south west of Kojonup. I am a very proud Jingalup-Kojonup country person. I attended a small two-room school at Jingalup - the mighty purple and golds - before attending Hale School, where I was a boarder for seven years. After completing my leaving, I returned to the family farm for just over a year before returning to Perth, where I worked in the insurance industry and furthered my football and cricket career. This six-year period included a year working and playing sport in Adelaide. I returned to Kojonup in 1975 and for the next 15 years worked in rural real estate, selling farms, businesses and houses across the region. We ran our own real estate business out of Kojonup and I later managed Elders Real Estate southern area operation out of Katanning. We also ran the farm until it was sold in the mid 1980s. In 1990, I followed a passion of mine by working in regional sports development - in particular, in cricket and football development. That led to my appointment as general manager of the Western Australian Country Football League in 1992. I held that position until the state election.

I am married with four daughters and now reside in Narrogin, which is central to my Wagin electorate and the site of my electorate office.

REASONS FOR SEEKING ELECTION

During the preselection process and the election campaign, many people asked me, "Tuck," - my nickname - "why do you want to get involved in state politics?" That is an excellent question and one I feel I should answer here today. I have three main reasons for getting involved: first, I have always represented Western Australia and, in particular, country Western Australia with great passion - whether it be in business, sport or in my previous role of developing and managing country

football - and I want to continue that representation in this Parliament. Second, over the past few years I have worked very closely with the Government, government agencies and many politicians. Having watched government agencies and politicians at work, I felt confident that I could do the job and represent the people. Third, being a country person who has also spent a great deal of time in the city, I have witnessed first-hand and have been very much aware of the many inequities that exist between the city and the country. I wanted to get involved in state politics to redress those inequities. Those inequities exist in many areas, such as health services, the education arena, banking and communication services, fuel pricing, cultural and sporting opportunities, transport services and so on. With the support of my electorate and the National Party, I will strongly represent the interests of country people in ensuring that those inequities are kept to a minimum.

RURAL COMMUNITIES, THE PEOPLE AND SERVICES

I feel very strongly that in everything we do we must remember that we are dealing with people, real people. Those of us on all sides of politics sometimes forget or do not take fully into account the effect of the decisions we make. Our decisions can change dramatically how people live their lives and in some cases where they live their lives. This brings me to an issue and a reality that concerns people in country Western Australia; it also concerns me. I refer to being able to maintain strong rural communities in Western Australia. These communities should be able to provide excellent facilities, services, opportunities and security for our families. Many of our smaller country towns are struggling to survive, and even the larger towns and bigger regional centres face many challenges. The breakdown of rural communities directly affects people and, in particular, families.

This poses our greatest challenge and it is pivotal to Western Australia's future. We must maintain strong rural communities. We must support our farmers to ensure they remain viable, as in a high percentage of rural Western Australia, farmers still provide the economic backbone of our communities. We must also support the mining industry, because it is vital to those communities in which it operates. However, I have some concerns about the effect of 12-hour shifts on families, sporting life and our communities generally. Of course, the fly in, fly out arrangement does nothing to enhance local communities. We must find innovative ways to sustain jobs in industries and services we now have in our country communities. We must also find innovative ways to create new jobs, because ongoing and new employment opportunities are the key to maintaining and growing our communities. We can achieve this by attracting and supporting new industries. The pilot oil mallee plant being established in Narrogin is a good example of such innovation. We must also ensure that we maximise the number of government contracts awarded locally, thus providing a boost to local economies. We must maintain and increase the number of government agencies in our country communities. Those agencies provide local services to the people and boost the local economy. It is a two-way arrangement. We must also continue to expand the tourism industry in rural Western Australia. Many country communities are working very hard individually to achieve that goal, and I could cite some fine examples in my region. However, those communities will need further assistance and guidance to work together to coordinate tourism development properly throughout country Western Australia. While many good initiatives have been implemented in tourism, we must have a coordinated approach to realise its potential. The proposed new leisure rail project is an ideal example of an initiative that, with support, will bring great benefit to southern rural Western Australia both from an economic and an employment perspective.

We must encourage and support our existing small businesses. We must assist and work with small business operators so that they can expand their operations and, thus, ensure their role as employers providing greater security for our people.

Of course, to encourage people to remain in our communities, we must provide facilities and services. I refer in particular to health and education services. The provision of those services in my electorate has improved greatly over the past few years, thanks very much to the efforts of the

coalition Government. We must attract, look after and retain the people required to work in these service areas; that is, the doctors, nurses, health professionals and teachers. Providing attractive and fair conditions of employment and modern accommodation are key areas that must be addressed. It is important to provide equitable educational opportunities at the primary and secondary levels and also at the tertiary level with TAFE facilities, universities, technical colleges and so on. Banking services are also essential. With major banks pulling out of many country centres, I strongly support the establishment of community banks in country towns, which, with local community involvement, can ensure a local service. The Bendigo Bank and other financial institutions that deliver personalised, local banking services will always be supported.

Telecommunications services are vital to our country towns. Better Internet access, a wider mobile telephone network and maintenance of the telecentre network are essential. Mobile phone coverage is very unreliable outside the major towns. In fact, if members were to ask country people what "CDMA" stands for, they would respond, "Call didn't matter anyway." I am hopeful that the agreement secured by the former Deputy Premier Hon Hendy Cowan between Telstra, the Commonwealth Government and the State Government will overcome this problem, at least in the south west land division, and that the recently announced federal funding package will also assist in this area.

Adequate and accessible police services must be retained and improved in country Western Australia. Given the increase in drug-related crime, law and order is an important issue in rural areas, and particularly in major regional towns. We must also have access to police in our smaller communities. Those communities need, want and will support one-man police stations. Transport services and well-maintained roads are also important factors in supporting strong rural communities.

SPORT, RECREATION AND SOCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

While everything I have mentioned is vital, it is also important that people in country communities have access to sporting, recreational, cultural and other social opportunities. People will not remain living in a town if they cannot enjoy themselves socially. Although that is true of people of all ages, it is particularly so of young people in country Western Australia. Mention has been made already today of young people leaving our country centres. That movement concerns me. We must provide facilities, services and social activities to ensure that our young people stay and work in the country and, at the same time, enjoy their lives. We must also ensure that our families have security and opportunities and that our elderly people can retire in these country towns, close to their families and knowing that they have local access to social and health services.

We must support and maintain sporting, cultural and recreational facilities in our country towns. In this, the year of the volunteer, I especially acknowledge the efforts of volunteers. I recognise the fantastic and important role they play across our State. I support the role they play in many areas including sport, recreation, culture, social groups and the various activities that are essential for people to enjoy a normal social and active life, especially in country Western Australia.

All those activities play a crucial role in the physical and mental health of country people. It is extremely important to be involved in physical and social activities that take us away from the everyday business and financial pressures that we face. Physical and social activities give us a chance to take time out to relax, socialise, enjoy ourselves and recharge our batteries. It is important to do that because of some of the huge stresses that have been placed on people over the past couple of years.

I will refer to the values that I see in team sport and team activities. Team sports and group activities are important. I am positive that being in a team environment enables young people to

become better community members by helping them to gain self-esteem and accept discipline and responsibility. Whatever team activities we play, we learn that we rely on others and that others rely on us. Team sports teach us responsibility that helps us throughout our lives.

It is also essential that we retain the successful progress rural WA program that was introduced by the former Minister for Primary Industry, Monty House, and, in particular, the WA rural leadership program that has greatly helped outstanding young country Western Australians prepare to take on leadership roles within their own country communities. That is important for the future of those communities, and it is of great importance to the youngsters who will take those benefits with them through their lives.

Earlier, I mentioned that the decisions this Parliament makes affect real people. Any decisions we make that affect country communities must be made carefully and we must always keep the people of those communities strongly in our minds. I am extremely confident that most rural communities can and will survive. I have great faith in the resilience of country people. I have seen them get back off the ground to fight again. However, they will need to make a committed effort, which I know they will do, and receive support from local, state and federal Governments.

SPECIFIC ISSUES

I will refer to some specific areas that I intend to pursue on behalf of my electorate and the people of Western Australia. My constituents repeatedly raised some issues during the election campaign over the past 12 months or so, including the mounting mental health problems encountered throughout country Western Australia. Those problems occur largely because of seasonal conditions, isolation, drugs, alcohol, financial pressures and a real sense or a perception of being forgotten about. Many other factors also contribute to the problem. I am concerned that we need more mental health professionals in country areas to assist these people. We also need help for those health professionals because they are under enormous pressures and have heavy workloads; they too are suffering and need our assistance.

We must ensure also that the fight against salinity continues and that we assist in better land care and water management. More money from federal and State Governments is required in this area for ongoing research and to assist farmers and land care groups in their on-ground activities. The farmers and land care groups have led the fight against salinity. Assistance for research and on-ground activities must also be given to Agriculture Western Australia and the Department of Conservation and Land Management.

Road safety is a big issue that has been raised with me on a number of occasions. I have been involved with country football and the belt-up campaign that we promoted in the country. That campaign made me aware of the issues of road safety. Too many people, often young people, are injured or killed on our roads each week. We need more research into the causes of, and methods of reducing, this continuing carnage. I am particularly concerned at the number of deaths and injuries on our country roads in Western Australia. Although I do not feel that a blanket reduction in the speed limit is the answer, we must look into different road classifications. It may be appropriate to have different speed limits on different road standards; for example, a lower speed limit on gravel roads. Perhaps this is only one area of road safety, and we must continue to examine the overall approach. It is imperative that we build on existing driver education and training, to ensure that new young drivers are well prepared when they first drive on our roads and that they can drive safely.

It has become apparent to me since talking with people on election day, and also through my own observations, that the handing out of how-to-vote cards at polling places should probably cease. It is a huge waste of material, money and people's time. The voting public tell me that they are fed up with being harassed by all and sundry at the polling places. It appears to me that most voters

either take everybody's how-to-vote card or none at all. We should stop this wastage by putting how-to-vote cards for all the candidates in each electorate in a prominent position. Boards should be displayed inside and outside the polling place and in each polling booth. It is time we treated the voters as the intelligent people they are.

In the interests of a fair go, I ask all members to consider carefully any new legislation dealing with one vote, one value and changes to the electoral boundaries. We must ensure that whatever changes are made, the country people, who are already greatly disadvantaged in many ways, at least have a fair and equitable say in the governance of our State; that is all they ask.

FAMILY ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Before I close, I sincerely thank my family. I thank my father and late mother very much for their guidance and love, and for giving me every opportunity in life. I am honoured and thank them greatly. I thank my two sisters, Delphine and Rosemary, and their husbands, Peter and Brenton, for their love, assistance and encouragement. I thank also my wonderful wife, Noelene, for her love. She is a great lady who has given so much to our family. I thank also my four fantastic daughters. The member for Eyre said that he has five sons. I have four daughters - maybe they will get together one day! I thank Jemma, Kelly, Bonnie and Jessica for their love and understanding and for putting up with dad. They make my life fun and they are the most important people in my life.

CONCLUSION

I conclude by congratulating the Speaker and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your appointment. I look forward to working hard and representing the people of the Wagin electorate and the people of Western Australia to the very best of my ability. I also look forward to working with all members of this House for the future growth and success of our great State. I look forward to working for the people whom I am proud and honoured to serve.
