

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 25 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 PETER FOSTER (Mining and Pastoral) [3.10 pm]: Thank you, President. Let me first offer my congratulations on your election as President of this place. I thank you for your warm welcome, support and encouragement and I very much look forward to working with and learning from you as I settle into this place. Could I also congratulate the Chair of Committees, Hon Martin Aldridge, on his election; I look forward to working with him in my capacity as a deputy chair.

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we stand today, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation. I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, and acknowledge First Nation people's continuing connection to land, sea and community. I stand before you all extremely humbled and somewhat nervous, for it is indeed a great honour and a privilege to have been elected as a member to this place, as part of the re-elected McGowan Labor government, to represent the Mining and Pastoral Region, a place I have called home for the past 13 years. Western Australia is a great state and I am immensely proud and very lucky to call it my home. It is home to ancient culture, dramatic landscapes, burgeoning industries and many great communities. And, as the world is still in the grips of the global pandemic, it is also one of the safest places to be, thanks to the leadership of the McGowan government.

I was born six days before Christmas in the very late 1970s in a town called Kurri Kurri in New South Wales. Kurri Kurri is situated in the Hunter Valley, in the coalfields, and was founded to support the nearby collieries. The first miners to the region lived in makeshift accommodation near the collieries and were often away from their families for extended periods. The miners' unions, through local delegates, flagged a need for a town to reunite the families. Their campaign was successful and, soon after, the town was surveyed and formally gazetted in October 1902. The name of the town, Kurri Kurri, comes from the local Wanaruah people, the traditional owners of the area, and means "the very first" or "the beginning". Kurri Kurri was a planned town and some believe it to be one of the first planned towns in New South Wales. I note this fact because where I live now, Tom Price, in the Pilbara, is also a planned town, established by Hamersley Iron in agreement with the state government in the late 1960s to house miners, and their families, who were working nearby at the Mount Tom Price mine site.

Some of my great-great-grandparents were early settlers in the town of Kurri Kurri. Like many of their generation, they boarded ships and embarked on a journey of a lifetime from the United Kingdom to find better-paying jobs and pursue the promise of a healthier and prosperous new future in another part of the Commonwealth. Not all my ancestors were migrants from the United Kingdom. I also have migrant connections to Germany and France through my great-grandparents. One of my ancestors, Richard Foster, was born in Manchester in 1789 and, as a convict, was transported on the ship *Coromandel* in 1819 to Australia.

I was born in Kurri Kurri Hospital, another legacy of the miners' unions. Delegates from nearby collieries had got together to discuss the urgent need for a hospital in town due to accidents that regularly occurred at nearby pits and the difficulty of moving those patients for treatment. It was decided that a building fund levy be imposed and, a few years later, with a government grant, Kurri Kurri Hospital was built. It opened in 1910 and still stands to this very day. The hospital has a special place in the hearts of Kurri Kurri locals, myself included, and it was because of this hospital that I got my first experience in activism. In the early 1990s, the Greiner government was trying to close our hospital and I joined with hundreds of protesters in July 1991 to march down Lang Street. Brandishing placards and chanting, we made our way to Rotary Park for the rally, where inspiring speeches were shared. I was only 11 years of age at the time. Due to the town's efforts, our hospital was saved. Hospitals are important to regional communities, and I want to acknowledge the work of the McGowan government in supporting our regional hospitals, especially during the global pandemic, right across the Mining and Pastoral Region. Construction of the nearby Newman Hospital continues. Planning is underway for a new hospital in Tom Price and a new health service in Meekatharra. The government is also investing in country paramedics, rolling out the COVID vaccine, and supporting jobs, health delivery and opportunity in our regions.

I am the eldest of six, with three brothers and two sisters. I feel very lucky to have grown up in such a big and busy household, juggling responsibilities and schooling. Being the eldest, I was expected to step up and I had my fair share of chores around the home. Dad worked five and a half days a week as a tyre fitter and later as an assistant manager to support us all. Mum stayed at home with us children, organising the household and volunteering at

school at times in the canteen. Money was tight but we never went without, and I enjoyed our family holidays to Port Macquarie and Sunshine with my grandma and grandad. We were happy and healthy, and we had each other. I am proud to be the son of a working-class family. Both my parents come from large families as well, and so I was incredibly lucky, as a child, to visit great-grandparents, grandparents, uncles and aunties, and many cousins. There was always a christening or a party being held, and us cousins would spend hours chasing and teasing one another. There was always a backyard cricket match, which I, not the very sporty type, would always try to avoid.

Family is very important to me. It is through family that we learn our values, how to treat others and how to view ourselves and those around us, and discover our purpose in life. I acknowledge my mum and my dad, who are here today. I also acknowledge Grandma Foster and Nana and Pop Marion, all who could unfortunately not be here due to ill health, but all of whom I love very much and from whom I learnt my values and get my strength. My parents tell me that, as a child, I was not shy; I was noisy, loud and always competed with others to be the centre of attention at parties, including at my mother's twenty-first birthday party, where I attempted to steal the show. Growing up with my mother taught me that we should treat each other with respect and that everyone should be treated both equally and fairly. This was reinforced during the marriage equality debate. As someone who has happily been in a same-sex relationship for 18 years, the debate and subsequent plebiscite was of great importance to me. Listening to political commentators and leaders talk down my relationship as simply a lifestyle choice and saying that marriage equality contrasted deeply with their personal religious views, or worse comments, took its emotional toll on me at times. So, as children do, I would call my mother to vent. My mother would remind me that it does not matter who you love, she loves all her children equally and their choice of partners equally, and that everyone should always treat everyone equally, including in marriage and in law.

Equality and fairness are, and will be, a priority for me in this place. Growing up with my father taught me that we should always stop and help others and that we should always look out for each other, because one day we may very well need someone to stop and help us when in need. Often, when we were kids, dad would stop and help a fellow driver who had broken down on the side of the road, sometimes to change a tyre, sometimes to look under the hood or sometimes to give friendly advice. I have strong memories of dad always being busy volunteering for sporting groups or helping family and neighbours in need, in addition to working long hours at the tyre shop. Once as a teenager, when I was driving home from a night out on the town with friends, my car broke down. I was in the middle of nowhere, in the middle of the night, with no mobile phone reception; I was stuck. Fortunately, after a short period of time, a vehicle stopped and the driver offered me a lift home. Someone had stopped to help me. This episode reinforced to me my dad's words, and it is fair to say that my father's examples have also shaped me into the person that I have become. We have an obligation to each other, especially family. We are all in this together and we should never leave anyone behind. I believe this is why the core values of the Labor Party have always resonated with me: the light on the hill. As Chifley said of Labor in 1949 —

... a movement bringing something better to the people, better standards of living, greater happiness to the mass of the people. We have a great objective—the light on the hill—which we aim to reach by working for the betterment of mankind not only here but anywhere we may give a helping hand. If it were not for that, the Labor movement would not be worth fighting for.

This is why I would later join the union and the Labor Party. My strong Labor values of working together, helping others and leaving no-one behind were passed on to me by family and also my hometown. As a child I attended Kurri Kurri Public School—dare I add, another legacy of the miners' unions—and later Kurri Kurri High School where I was awarded dux. My schooling years were fascinating yet challenging. I was a bright child; however, I was bullied. My voice sounded different. I liked to study and I preferred to have my head in a book rather than kicking a ball around in the playground. This made me a target amongst my peers. Most of my schooling days were spent looking over my shoulder, forever vigilant. Due to this, I developed anxiety, which I have learnt to live with daily ever since. At school, I would spend lunch times hiding in the library and I would change the route I walked home from school each day to avoid the bullies. I share this with members not to elicit sympathy, but to highlight that programs that support safer schools and inclusive education are so important to children who are different. I know that I will speak out in this place to support our children to be safe, especially those who question their identity. I acknowledge our brave colleagues in both this place and in the other place who have spoken up about their personal mental health journeys. Everyone's journey is different and we should always check in with each other, ask if they are okay and lend a listening ear. I join with my colleagues in acknowledging the investments made by the McGowan government into mental health initiatives across our regions, including the recent announcement of an additional \$14.5 million in funding agreements and contract extensions to over 150 eligible community and mental health services.

At the end of high school, I came out to my friends, then to my mum and my dad and then to my extended family. I was one of the lucky ones, with lots of love and support to guide me forward on every adventure. Following high school, I attended the University of Newcastle, where I obtained a Bachelor of Arts degree majoring in classics and politics. I really enjoyed my time at university. It encouraged me to develop independent thoughts, expand

my horizons and encourage debate, and it challenged me to look at the world differently. Whilst studying, I worked a range of retail jobs on a casual basis, including in the areas of fast food, shoes and menswear. I was not in a retail union at the time, but looking back perhaps I should have been. Inconsistent hours, varying conditions and underpayments were commonplace. Management would always remind us: “You’re lucky to have a job, so don’t complain and don’t ask questions.” Studying full-time and working part-time I relied on the income of these part-time jobs to get by, especially the penalty rates, and whilst I was grateful to be employed and be paid, I knew nothing about my rights at work or even what award I was paid under. This contributed to an already heightened level of stress whilst studying. I want to acknowledge the work of our Australian union movement in highlighting the importance of and fighting to protect penalty rates. This makes a huge difference to the take-home pay of the lowest paid workers in Australia, who are largely made up of women and younger workers.

Following university, my first full-time job was working in a call centre for Qantas. Thankfully, the pay was much better. After this I joined the public service, which is where I have continued to work for almost twenty years before my election to this place. I am and will always be proud to be a public servant. My first role was with Centrelink taking calls in a call centre before I pursued an opportunity to work in Maroubra. Working for Centrelink was intense work most days but also extremely rewarding. My role was to interview new claimants and assess their claims. I was dealing with people who were often at their lowest moment in life and struggling to make ends meet for a variety of reasons, including job loss, addiction or fleeing family violence. I took pride in my work and often worked back late. I believe that this is where my passion for serving the community grew as I could see myself trying to make a difference. I ended up working for Centrelink for five years and held a variety of roles. This was when I joined my first union: the Community and Public Sector Union. I want to acknowledge its work in standing up to the staffing cuts of successive coalition governments. Following my time at Centrelink, I worked for the Child Support Agency as a financial investigator and then for Medicare as a branch manager.

After working in Sydney for a few years, I met my partner, Sam, and followed him to Wollongong. After moving in together, we purchased our first home. We were paying off the mortgage and credit cards and with endless cost-of-living pressures, money was tight. Like my ancestors before me, and with the encouragement from family, we packed up our possessions and travelled west to find a better life. When we first arrived in the west, my first memory was of the Pilbara heat, which I would later learn to love. I remember stepping off the plane at Paraburdoo and thinking that I had inadvertently stepped into a blast furnace; it was very warm 45 degrees! As we drove into Tom Price, I was taken aback by the beauty of the place. It is truly an oasis in the desert. North west mining towns are transient and many people are reluctant to get involved in the community. Many come with five-year plans to maybe start a family, pick up a few skills, make some money and then leave again. At first we were no different, but as the months passed and after many conversations with locals, my love for the Tom Price community grew and so did my desire to make the town much better. Working in customer service for the Department of Transport, I had daily conversations with clients about local issues—concerns about the availability of childcare, the unsealed road to Karratha, the ageing hospital and outdated sporting and community facilities that were no longer fit for purpose. Growing increasingly frustrated with the shire, I decided to challenge myself by running for council in 2009. On the first occasion I was unsuccessful.

Undeterred and knowing that I could make the community better, I became more involved. I joined the Tom Price Youth Support Association, Tom Price Tidy Towns and the Nameless Jarndunmunha Festival committee. I volunteered much of my spare time each week. Volunteers are so important in our regional towns and the Mining and Pastoral Region is no different. Volunteers run our sporting and community groups and countless fundraisers, giving many hours of personal time. Through volunteering, I learnt much about myself and made many new friends, which helped me to combat my anxiety. National Volunteer Week was celebrated recently. It is important for all of us to recognise and thank volunteers for the vital role they play in our communities, such as those volunteers in the State Emergency Service and St John Ambulance who put in long hours, working under often exceedingly difficult circumstances to save lives. I want to make special mention of the Tom Price State Emergency Service, Tom Price St John Ambulance and the Tom Price Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade, which do an amazing job across inland Pilbara from gorge rescues to land searches to responding to car crashes and fighting the many bushfires caused by lightning strikes during the wet season.

In early 2011, I joined with Councillor Cecilia Fernandez to run a petition to bring attention to sealing the remainder of the road between Tom Price and Karratha. This was a priority for us locals, many of whom travel to Karratha regularly to access medical services, play sporting games or go shopping. At the time, it was not a priority of the local and state governments and we strongly believed it needed to be. In just two short days, we had gathered almost 1 000 signatures, which we gave to former member for Pilbara Tom Stephens to lodge on our behalf in state Parliament. I was determined to champion change in our town.

In late 2011, I ran for council for the second time and this time I was successful, securing more than 50 per cent of the primary vote amongst three candidates. I had the privilege of serving as an elected member with the Shire of Ashburton for nine and a half years, being re-elected twice, in 2015 and 2019. As a councillor with the Shire of

Ashburton, I chaired various committees, including the audit and risk committee, and I represented the region on the Pilbara Regional Council, the Western Australian Local Government Association state council and numerous regional and intrastate forums. I am incredibly grateful for the experience of serving within local government. It gave me a platform to expand my public speaking, negotiating and debating skills, and I met and engaged with many stakeholders. I enjoyed presiding over the many Australian citizenship ceremonies and welcoming new residents to town. We must have strong local governments to ensure the success and longevity of our regional towns. Local governments do so much more than rates, rubbish and roads; they work to fill the gaps by providing essential services including health, early years and education, environmental, and welfare to name a few. I want to acknowledge the work done by the previous Minister for Local Government, David Templeman, in strengthening the sector and the measures he took to reform the Local Government Act 1995. I look forward to working with the new Minister for Local Government, John Carey, to share my experiences to help strengthen the sector further.

Recently in an interview I was asked what was my biggest achievement on council. I said that it was staying true to my commitment of being the community's strong voice; always listening and responding to concerns; encouraging council to invest in community facilities, including the new Tom Price childcare centre, which will bring relief for families; and championing major projects to the state government, such as the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway and the Tom Price Hospital redevelopment. I would like to thank and acknowledge the McGowan government and Rita Saffioti, the Minister for Transport, for their work on the further sealing of the Manuwarra Red Dog Highway. This project means so much to both the Shire of Ashburton and the City of Karratha, supporting local jobs, helping grow tourism and businesses and improving accessibility to inland Pilbara towns.

I also served on two independent school boards as chair and can attest that we have some great schools in inland Pilbara, with committed principals and teaching and support staff, as well as an engaged school community supported by local government and the resources industry.

I was sad to resign from local government earlier this year, but I know that I will continue to listen and be a strong voice for the Ashburton community in this place.

Earlier this year I also resigned from my job as a child protection case support officer with the Department of Communities, a role I held for three years. Working with families and supporting case managers was extremely rewarding and I want to acknowledge my former colleagues across the Pilbara district, who often work in challenging circumstances to keep children safe. To strengthen families and protect children, we need a robust child protection system that supports both families and carers, including our valued grandparents, as well as the staff who administer the system. I look forward to working with the Department of Communities and Minister Simone McGurk to also share my experiences to help strengthen the sector.

The Mining and Pastoral Region is vast, stretching over 2 201 000 square kilometres. It extends from the goldfields and Kalgoorlie in the south to the Murchison, the Gascoyne and Carnarvon in the west, and to the north to the Pilbara, Broome and Derby, and Kununurra in the Kimberley, and more than 150 000 people call it home. There are 27 local government areas within the electorate, including the Shire of East Pilbara, which is the largest local government area in Australia. I look forward to engaging with every local government and understanding their aspirations and concerns.

The Mining and Pastoral Region is home to robust resource industries, which drive the economy of our state, including oil, gas, iron ore and gold. With over 19 000 local people employed in the mining industry, it is our region's largest employer. Jobs are important to our region with many others employed in construction, tourism and accommodation services, manufacturing, transport and farming. Jobs have been a focus of the McGowan government. As part of WA Labor's re-election campaign, the Premier made WA jobs a key priority. This resonated strongly in my region, with a commitment to work with resource companies to reduce the reliance on interstate fly-in fly-out workers, build infrastructure using local workers and local content, freeze TAFE fees to upskill WA workers, and invest in manufacturing.

The Mining and Pastoral Region is home to much beauty and tradition including Kalbarri National Park, Karijini National Park, Murujuga National Park and the Dampier Peninsula to name a few.

The Mining and Pastoral Region has its fair share of challenges: attracting workers for agriculture, construction and tourism, land availability to address housing and business demands, and tackling antisocial behaviour and family violence in our communities.

Our First Nations people have been living in the Mining and Pastoral Region for many thousands of years and we must respect their continuing connection to country and the cultural significance of country and take the time to listen to their stories, their wisdom and their aspirations. First Nations should always be consulted on what happens on country and this I wholeheartedly support.

I want to acknowledge and thank the voters of the Mining and Pastoral Region for the opportunity to serve in this place and be their representative, including those who told me at the polling place that they were voting Labor for

the first time. Thank you to the leadership of the McGowan government of the fortieth Parliament for keeping our state safe during the pandemic, with a strong focus on WA jobs. Thank you to the WA Labor Party, in particular its state secretary, Tim Picton, and assistant state secretary, Ellie Whiteaker, for running our strong campaign. Thank you to the Carnarvon, Karratha, Newman, South Hedland, and Broome Labor branches that supported my nomination and volunteered in our campaigns. Thank you also to Rainbow Labor for your encouragement and support over the years. As one of only a few LGBTIQI parliamentarians, I know that this brings additional responsibilities and I hope to do you proud.

Thank you to the Australian metal workers' union, which welcomed me some years ago with a shared vision of creating good paying jobs and opportunity for all. Manufacturing jobs are vitally important for our state's future and supporting Australian made. Thank you to state secretary, Steve McCartney, and organisers Alex Cassie and Renee Portland for your wise words and counsel.

I thank members of this place for their support, encouragement and guidance, including Hon Stephen Dawson and Hon Kyle McGinn, who I will have the privilege of working with in representing the Mining and Pastoral Region, along with Hon Rosie Sahanna. Thank you to our lower house candidates—Divina D'Anna, the member for Kimberley; Kevin Michel, the member for Pilbara; Cherie Sibosado, our candidate in North West Central; and Ali Kent, the member for Kalgoorlie—for your strong and outstanding campaigns. I had the privilege of working closely with both Cherie Sibosado and the member for Pilbara during their campaigns and I thank them both for the opportunity to be involved, including making phone calls and doorknocking to listen to and understand some of the major challenges faced in our region.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the people in the towns of Tom Price, Paraburdoo, Pannawonica and Onslow, who also supported me on council and in our campaigns. I would like to thank my dear friends Torin Peel, Michelle Lewis, Kirra and Chris Hannon, Deb and Nudge Walker, Audra and Jason Smith, Mel Farmer, Amanda Yeomans, and Jarred and Kin Nicholson for everything that they did to support the campaigns, as well as the personal encouragements that they gave me every single day. Thank you to my mum and my dad for their love, wise words and encouragement, for being positive role models, and for travelling from Sydney to Perth—their first ever plane flight—to support me here this week. I love you both.

Lastly, and certainly not least, to our son, Roman, and my partner, Sam, for putting up with my endless conversations about politics, for supporting me when I was away on the road campaigning or down here in Perth, helping me on polling places, helping me letterbox streets, and helping me put up corflutes, but, most importantly, for being there for me when I needed you. Sam, thank you for always believing in me.

The McGowan government has a strong mandate, following the convincing state election result, to govern Western Australia, and I am enormously proud to be a part of it, to represent the Mining and Pastoral Region, and to be a voice for the inland Pilbara, which I proudly call home. I am looking forward to the work ahead over the next four years, working towards fairness and equality, and advocating to make our regional communities even stronger, whether it be building tourism or industry, supporting job creation, or improving community amenity. I will always stay true to my Labor values. Thank you.

[Applause.]

HON ROSIE SAHANNA (Mining and Pastoral) [3.42 pm]: First of all, good afternoon, President, and congratulations to you on your appointment as President of the Legislative Council.

I would like to thank you all for gathering here today. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation, who are the traditional owners of this land on which we gather today. I would also like to take this opportunity to acknowledge all First Nation elders past, present and emerging.

I come to this place today as elected by the people of Western Australia. I am honoured to serve our great state, and would like to thank the Western Australian people for entrusting their confidence in both the WA Labor Party and myself as the member representing the Mining and Pastoral electorate.

I would like to start by introducing myself to you all. My name is Rosetta Sahanna, but I prefer to be called Rosie. I am an Aboriginal woman, born and bred in Broome, with family ties and connection across Western Australia from the Kimberley through to the Murchison and Gascoyne regions. I am a proud Ngarinyin and Bardi Jawi woman connected to the Kitja and Gooniyandi tribes in the Kimberley and the Yamatji in the south. It is a great honour knowing that the Mining and Pastoral electorate also covers the regions that my family comes from. This electorate is the largest and most diverse electorate in Australia. To represent the Mining and Pastoral electorate of WA is more than just a title to me. I have a strong personal connection to this electorate, and I understand my responsibility to this electorate.

I will now give you a snapshot of my upbringing to give you a sense of myself in my personal capacity. Firstly, I will acknowledge the anniversary of National Sorry Day today, 26 May, and acknowledge the special community event being held in Broome at the Kimberley Stolen Generation National Sorry Day event. National Sorry Day

remembers and acknowledges the mistreatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed from their families and communities, which we now know as “The Stolen Generation”. Today is the anniversary of the presenting of the *Bringing Them Home* report delivered by Sir Ronald Wilson, which was to be the game changer for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and for Australia.

The predominant aim of the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families was to absorb or assimilate children with mixed ancestry into the non-Indigenous community, which has challenged our very own wellbeing, identity, and essence of our uniqueness within the WA community and the world as traditional owners.

I would like to quote Sir William Deane, the then Governor-General of Australia, in his submission to the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from Their Families —

The present plight, in terms of health, employment, education, living conditions and self-esteem, of so many Aborigines must be acknowledged as largely flowing from what happened in the past. The dispossession, the destruction of hunting fields and the devastation of lives were all related. The new diseases, the alcohol and the new pressures of living were all introduced. True acknowledgment cannot stop short of recognition of the extent to which present disadvantage flows from past injustice and oppression.

This goes to the very heart of many of the issues that are faced today and highlights the need for truth telling, a treaty and a voice to Parliament.

My father was a child of the stolen generation. He was taken from his family up on the Gibb River at a pastoral station called Moonlight Valley Station, on the Salmon River in the north-east Kimberley. His mother was Aboriginal and his father an Indian from Karachi. After the tragic death of his father, he was taken away and sent to Beagle Bay Mission when he was nine years old. For those of you who do not know Beagle Bay Mission, it is actually north of Broome on the Dampier Peninsula. It is widely known as the home of the stolen generation because many of the Kimberley people who were taken away were sent there. It was there that he met and married his wife—my mother—Otilia Paddy. My maternal grandmother, also a child of the stolen generation, was taken from Carnarvon in 1900 and sent on a ship to Beagle Bay Mission. Her mother was Aboriginal and her father Chinese. Like my father, she too met and married her husband, my grandfather, at Beagle Bay. She never went back to her country; however, her family members travelled to Beagle Bay to meet and spend some time with her as she was the missing link to her family members.

My father and my grandmother never complained about their circumstances. They made the best of what they had and never looked back. My father a welder. He was a staunch Labor supporter and union man. He was a very proud man, and he raised his children the same way he was raised—strict and disciplined, taught us family values and principles, and the importance of having a job, and wanted nothing to do with handouts. I share this story with you all to highlight the fact that myself, like most of us Western Australians, come from very humble beginnings, facing circumstances imposed on us from the policy of the day, and yet somehow we thrive, and we never stop pushing on.

I have been involved in the delivery of services in the Kimberley Region for over 30 years. During this time, I have worked at all levels across government and non-government agencies and Aboriginal organisations from administration to chief executive officer. It is hard to discuss a 30-year time frame in a short amount of time, but I will share with you some of my many milestones.

My first employment was in 1977 as a 17-year-old public servant employed by the then Department of Harbour and Lights at Broome port, where I worked for five years as a clerk. At 17 years old, it was daunting working my first job in an office full of only men. Luckily for me, the other staff were all local men whom I was familiar with, so I got on really good. It was there that I met my husband, a Torres Strait Islander pearl diver, Lenny Pitt, and together we have four children and four granddaughters.

I then went on to work for the Department for Community Welfare. It is really funny; one day at lunch here at the dining room, I met a lady by the name of Kay Hallahan. She was a minister at that time. That is going back 30 years. It was really great to see her again and to talk to her.

I started as a family support officer and worked my way up to become acting team leader. It was there that I got my first insight into the many issues facing at-risk families, in particular Aboriginal families, on a daily basis. I worked in that department for 15 years. During that time, the department changed its name several times, but to Aboriginal people, it was always known as the “department of native welfare”, responsible for taking kids away. That was in the 1980s and 1990s and Aboriginal people still thought that the department took kids away.

Seeing the disadvantage facing families and the support that they needed sparked my interest in Aboriginal affairs. I knew I wanted to be more involved in helping my people. In 1999, I resigned from the department. It happened to be the same year as the election for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission Kullarri Regional Council, which I decided to run for. I got elected to the council and was successful in my nomination to be the chairperson. At 39 years of age, I found myself in a familiar setting—the same situation I was in when I was 17. I was the only woman in the room again. I was the only female chairperson in the state of WA alongside 12 men, who included

eight other male chairpersons and four male commissioners. I was not a scared 17-year-old anymore. Being the only female in the room did not scare me this time and I completed my term as chair. In 2008, I became coordinator of the Kimberley Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation—the same year Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised to First Nations people. It was a significant moment in time for our nation, but 13 years later I am still wondering where to from here regarding the apology.

These are just to name a few of the points of my working life. In addition, I have worked tirelessly in health, native title, education, justice, youth and employment programs. I tell you this in the hope that you find comfort knowing that my whole career has been built while working on the ground with people. Whether it be with health or employment challenges, or whether it be with women and family issues, or whether it be dealing with land and youth, or whether it be with the justice system or education, I take the lessons that I have learnt from the ground up and will never forget that at the end of day we politicians are here for our people. We must work together with our people to tackle the issues that we face every day.

I stand for transparency and accountability within our greater communities. But I must advise that I stand in particular for my Aboriginal community who have been calling out for some time the ostracism and lack of proper and true accountability to their communities. They are people who have no voice, have been bullied and are oppressed by the very entities that are supposed to represent them on the ground. Therefore, I look forward to working with Hon John Quigley, the Attorney General and Minister for Electoral Affairs; Hon Alannah MacTiernan, Minister for Regional Development; and Hon Stephen Dawson, Minister for Mental Health; Aboriginal Affairs; and, of course, many other members of Parliament, including our Premier, to be leaders and to straighten the spear for a precise hit to get it right in our state. There needs to be focused energy on community organisations when the silenced voices call.

I nominated for the seat of Kimberley in the Legislative Assembly but was unsuccessful. I was then asked whether I would be interested in being placed fourth on the upper house electoral ticket for the Australian Labor Party for the Mining and Pastoral Region. I accepted knowing that there would be no way that I would get elected this term! It was a long shot and I was actually looking forward to the next election. However, as I watched the election updates and results throughout the day with anticipation, I was very surprised—perhaps more shocked than anything. The reality finally sunk in—I had been elected. Later, I was told that I was the first Aboriginal person to have ever been elected to the upper house of the WA Parliament. What a great honour bestowed on me by the election result. Today, I take my place as the first Aboriginal person to be elected to this house as a proud Kimberley Aboriginal woman.

It is fitting that I was sworn in and that I am giving my first speech during the celebration of National Reconciliation Week and National Sorry Day. I would like to think that my place here is proof of the possibilities for my people. Having said that, I will use this platform to promote and raise the profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's voices in the Parliament and on all issues that affect my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and the community in general. I would also like to say to all you young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women out there wanting to make a difference: the best seat in the house is in the back. It is there that you get to look, listen and learn, and never be in a hurry to get to the top. That was the best advice given to me by my dad. I have given the same advice to my children. That advice has led me to where I am today. It took me a while, but here I am creating history. I guess it was meant to be.

We live in this beautiful state we call home. We are pretty lucky. It is the best and safest place to be right now. There is no place like home. Then again, WA has always been unique and we Western Australians have always done things differently. I look forward to playing my role in this great place as there are many issues that we, the Western Australian people, are yet to overcome. I know I do not need to name them—our people know what is ahead of us, and I am sure that they are sick of us politicians telling them things that they already know. Even though the Premier and this government have done a wonderful job keeping us safe during the coronavirus pandemic, let us not forget the many other important issues that need to be adhered to, that also affect the lives of people living in WA, so that we can live in all sectors of the WA state equitably. I cannot express the motivation and the anticipation that I have felt and that has been built up in taking my seat in this house. I will support the WA Labor Party to work together with our constituents to pave a better and brighter future for the next generation.

My life has been blessed with some wonderful people over the years and I take this opportunity to thank the following people for their support and encouragement: Joe Grande, Dr Mark and Tania Bin Bakar, Greg Tait, Julie Cobb, Irene Stainton, Robyn Stacey, Susan Bowles, Gemma Lawford, Joan Lane, Lexie Trancollino and my cultural confidants Mr Kevin George—who is here today—and Mr Donald Campbell. I would also like to acknowledge the support of the Maritime Union of Australia. I made the decision only recently to go into politics, but it was members of the MUA who saw the passion in me and went out of their way to advocate for my preselection. I thank in particular Sunario Bin Sahari; Hon Kyle McGinn; assistant state secretary, Jeff Cassar; and state secretary, Will Tracey.

To my family—my Sahanna-Pitt family; my children, Koikie, Tilly, BJ and Kaupa; and my grandchildren, Lenay, Maraya, Imahn and Zoe; my nephews, whom I raised, Tanu, Clinton, Arnold and Warren; and my brothers, Ray and John Hamilton—thank you all for your unconditional love, support and encouragement and for putting up with this old girl. You certainly keep me on my toes. You are the reason I do what I do and why I wake up every morning with a smile on my face. You are the air that I breathe and the wind beneath my wings. I love you all to the moon and back.

I finally say to all members of the WA Parliament: please respect me—my advice, recommendations and suggestions—and utilise me for the many years of experience I have in making WA a greater place, in particular in Aboriginal affairs. It is a great honour to be part of this group that is made up of people from very diverse backgrounds and from all over WA. I am confident that this will help us work collectively to represent all Western Australian people's views and to make sure that they are brought to the table when we discuss issues that affect Western Australia.

Having said that, please do not take me for the token black woman in this room. As the first Aboriginal person elected to this house, I want to set an achievable and superior standard for the next Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander generation who will take their seat in this house after me. I have a lot to offer my constituents, as a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region and of the WA Parliament.

May we be guided by our collective honesty, passion and commitment to making WA a transparent and accountable state. I am looking forward to working with this successful team.

Thank you, President.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Thank you, honourable member. I also take this opportunity on behalf of us all to acknowledge the milestone of your election and your first speech as the first Indigenous member in this chamber. You are very welcome.

Hon SUE ELLERY: This is a bit unusual, I ask that you leave the chair until the ringing of the bells because by the time I get the advisers in here and settled, there will be time to ask only one question.

The PRESIDENT: Before I do that, I recognise in the President's gallery a former member for Mining and Pastoral Region, Hon Tom Stephens. It is good to have you back.

Debate interrupted, pursuant to standing orders.

[Continued on page 757.]

Sitting suspended from 4.00 to 4.30 pm