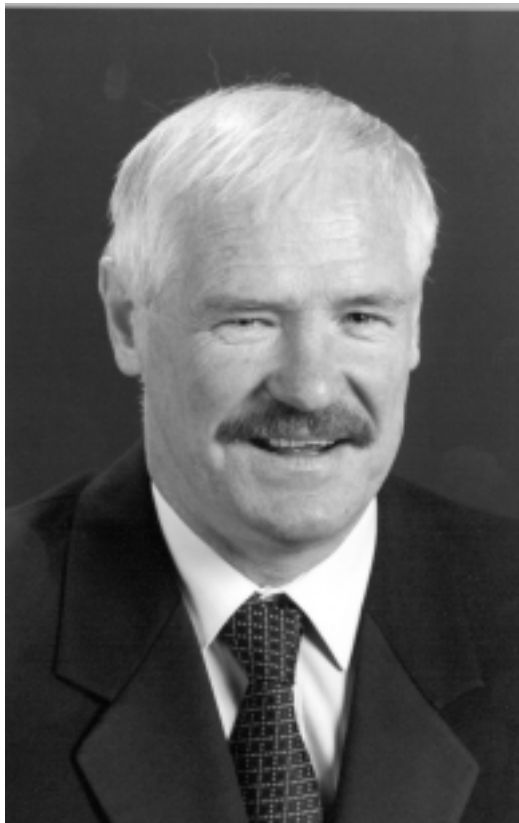




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Mick Murray MLA
(Member for Collie)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Wednesday 23 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

INTRODUCTION AND THANKS

MR MURRAY (Collie) [12.24 pm]: Mr Speaker, I take this opportunity to congratulate you on your election. It is with pride that I stand here today as a Labor Party representative to speak on behalf of the people of the Collie electorate.

However, before I continue, I must thank the many people and organisations who worked very hard to make this possible. First, I thank the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union for its support over many years. It first put to me the idea of becoming a representative of the Collie electorate. Some of the people from this organisation who always assisted me and to whom I am truly grateful for their help include Keith Peckham, Jim Davidson, John Sharpe-Collett and Jock Ferguson, along with many of their colleagues. I wish to thank them for their guidance and encouragement.

The Collie Coal Miners Industrial Union of Workers is another organisation that has assisted not only me, but also many other people in achieving their goals. The union is one of the most community-minded groups around, and each year donates substantial financial assistance to many local charities and welfare groups. While thanking the union for its support, I congratulate its secretary, Gary Wood, along with its president, John Borlini, for their support of the Collie community as a whole.

I thank Hon John Cowdell for his support to our local branch, for which we are grateful. The help he gave me was certainly welcomed. Also, the time and efforts of the many booth workers and behind-the-scene workers were much appreciated.

I give special thanks to my colleagues at the Griffin Coal Mining Company Pty Ltd and my workmates at Wesfarmers Coal Ltd for their help. I will always be indebted to them for the many times that the trades covered for my absence or arranged shift swaps to allow me to attend another of those endless meetings. Maybe - just maybe - now that I have been elected, references to Alf Bussell will cease. Yes, it is the third time I have stood for the seat of Collie, and many people have wondered why.

WORKERS' RIGHTS

Over the past eight years I have seen the erosion of workers' rights under the third wave legislation and the decimation of the work force in the coal mines and in public utilities such as Western Power. I have witnessed most public services being shifted out of country towns and relocated in

regional centres, such as Bunbury or Albany, with no thought at all for the devastation and hardship it causes to the many people who are unable to drive or who do not have the financial resources to travel 60 to 100 kilometres to access government utilities. All this and hardly a word of protest from anyone in the conservative Government.

Before each election took place, it seemed to me grossly unfair that promises of grand proportions were touted for the coastal strip, yet inland towns like Boddington, Boyup Brook, Balingup, Donnybrook and Collie received very little, again without any protest from the conservatives in government. In fact, at one stage they called it a social dividend. This situation, along with the Labor Party including the basic needs of society - namely, health care, education and policing - as a major part of its election platform, certainly inspired me to work harder than ever in my attempts to become the member for Collie and to add a strong and loud voice for the forgotten.

HEALTH, EDUCATION AND POLICE

The health system must be treated with respect and be maintained at a level that is world class. The people who work in these systems should be treated with dignity and respect in recognition of the tasks they perform, and the hospitals must be upgraded to reflect today's standards. It is no longer accepted that the "she'll be right" attitude is good enough for the health system or our hospitals. All people in the health system can be assured of my total support in their quest for better systems that will satisfy their needs.

The education system must also be high on the priority list, with an all-out effort to encourage the youth of today to study and work at attaining high achievement levels. However, it must be remembered that not everyone can be at the top, and consideration must be given to those who may wish to study in the hands-on industries that are very important in our society.

We must be forever aware of our changing world, listen to our teenagers and students, and realise the pressures they feel when asked to perform at the levels required today. It has been said many times that they are our future, and rightly so, and support must be provided accordingly.

Then there is the policing of our great State, which by world standards allows us to live in comfort and safety. However, we can do better and take away the fear felt by the elderly and the young by being strong in demanding higher levels of accountability from all areas and not accepting a lower standard just because someone else has. I do not think it is right that in some areas police are being replaced by security guards to control crime. This will cause problems in the future due to ownership and accountability, and I strongly support the recommendations for more police on the beat.

LABOR'S COMMITMENTS

I welcome Geoff Gallop's commitment to take government out of the city and to ensure decisions are made that reflect the needs of all Western Australians. However, I remind all members that, although country people support the concept of one vote, one value, they must have avenues in which to participate in decisions that affect their quality of life. I will endeavour to assist the Government to achieve that aim by ensuring the voice of the Collie electorate is heard strongly in Parliament.

As a long-time country resident of Collie and shire councillor for more than 12 years, I believe I have the background and experience to be able to speak on behalf of country people from all walks of life. Although I acknowledge that country people cannot have all the services provided to city folk, a few of the basics would be more than welcome. The basic services that people in the city take for granted but are not readily available to country people include doctors, banks, public transport, Homeswest and Centrelink services. Country people are generous to a fault and in general

do not grizzle much. However, as the recent state election indicated, country people are now standing to make their voices heard. The Labor Party's success in gaining so many "unwinnable" seats in the regions - including mine - demonstrates that country people have had enough. The introduction of the goods and services tax had a huge impact on people in the regions when many were forced to shut the doors of their small businesses and trading firms because of the multiplying effect of this unfair tax, which even the most conservative country people are cursing. The failure to listen to country people by many of our politicians, including some of my colleagues, has created a huge gulf between the Western Australian people.

The latest statistics on the section of WA that receives the most income indicates that people in the bush do it hard. Some areas have an average annual income of around \$23 000. When they take from that money for food, petrol, school fees and the like, apart from the cost of buying a house, there is not much left. Farmers have waited ages for flood and drought relief. The federal minister has told some that their applications have not been sighted and, therefore, not processed. What are they supposed to live on? What effect does that have on small and large businesses in the area? They shut their doors and move away to a much more pleasant environment where services are available and where they may be able to get a job that would pay reasonable money to afford them a less heartbreaking life. In my electorate which has gold, bauxite, coal and mineral sand mines together with broadacre farming, viticulture, aquaculture, horticulture, timber and a blossoming tourist industry, the variations between small and large businesses are huge. All these industries need avenues through which they can express their opinions, can be listened to and can be supported; I intend to do just that.

COLLIE - THE FUTURE

The electorate of Collie has the potential to become a major tourist attraction. A railway line connected to Dwellingup could service Boddington, which has plans for a free-range zoo. Moving further south, Collie has a new national park and motor sports complex. The national park needs to be expanded and there is still much work to be done at the motor sports complex. However, people are working hard to make sure it will happen. Across from Collie, in Donnybrook, the residents have worked hard to shed the tag of the ugliest town in WA. It is now a town which people love to visit because of its diversity and its displays of produce in the new attractive main street. Down the road in Boyup Brook is Harvey Dickson's Country Music Centre, WA's home of country and western music. Further south is Balingup, a town famous for its plum port. It is never short of ideas to promote itself to attract people to the region and away from the coast. I know this speech sounds like an episode of *Getaway*, but one starts to get the idea of the potential of the electorate as a tourist attraction. It is my intention to further expand on the ideas of many people in the electorate and encourage further development of the tourist industry until the Collie electorate becomes the place to be.

My home town of Collie is currently struggling. It is the only town in the south west which recorded a decrease in population of more than 1 500 in the last census period. Although some politicians would like to see Collie disappear forever, that will not happen. I say to members who do not know where it is or have not travelled far enough to have visited the area, it is 200 kilometres south of Perth, with a lovely drive over the ranges into a town that has changed dramatically in the past six to seven years. With that remark, I welcome the Shire President of Collie, who is in the public gallery today. Her presence indicates the commitment she has given to the area. There have been changes not only in the mining and energy industry, but also in the town's physical appearance, with major works being carried out to transform it to fit its new image under the banner of the "Collie River Valley". The Shire of Collie should be congratulated for its efforts to make the town and its surrounds a pleasure to live in or to visit.

MY HISTORY

Mr Speaker, like other members before me, I shall give a brief and much edited outline of my personal history. Growing up in the small town of Duranillin, my education centred mainly on rabbit traps and a good dog. However, thanks to my parents' insistence, I attended the local school, which had one teacher and 14 students. The teacher taught all levels from grade 1 to grade 7 and also helped a few students with high school correspondence lessons. Most of the students were children of migrants who lived next to the railway line in tents or in railway houses. I remember being proud of being able to swear in languages that included Italian, Polish, Nyoongah and Dutch; not something mum and dad were proud of. That was multiculturalism at its best. Sure, we had our scraps but they were never about where we came from or what colour our skin was. If only the rest of the world would follow that small school's example; they are fond memories.

When I was 11, we moved to Collie and my education continued in the state school system until I achieved the junior certificate. I then entered the work force as an apprentice mechanic and came under the guidance of a likeable character called Wally Geldert, to whom I am indebted. It was because of his constant insistence that I completed my apprenticeship. I then went off in the exciting 1970s to the north - Dampier, Karratha and Port Hedland - doing construction work with plenty of money and a variety of jobs. These jobs helped fund my wedding along with an extended trip to Europe. When my children were born my priorities changed. There was no more moving from one job to the next or being carefree and travelling the world. My wife and I wanted to make a home for our family and we decided to settle in Collie. I then started work in the coalmines in 1977.

THE COAL INDUSTRY - TODAY

As a person who has worked in the coal industry for 24 years, I have seen changes that still have not been fully acknowledged by many people. During the time I worked underground for 10 years, I witnessed changes from shovel or scoop to bobcat loaders through to mechanical miners. When the underground mines closed, it was the turn of the open-cut mines to modernise. Trucks that carried 110 tonnes were replaced with trucks that carried 300 tonnes, and loaders were replaced with electric shovels that loaded 100 tonnes in one bucketful. Gone are the so-called good old days when there were two shifts, seven-hour working days, early knock-offs, sickies galore and, if we were short of a dollar on a back week, we could hit the boss for a sub to carry us over to the next payday. That may sound like a good thing; however, we should not forget the number of underground miners who lost their lives or suffered horrendous injuries. Thankfully, times have changed. Modern and professional attitudes adopted by the coal companies and their workers have seen the production of coal increase from 4 060 tonnes per man in 1990 to 9 109 tonnes per man in 2000 - a remarkable achievement - and injuries reduced to a figure below the industry's standard. The mining industry has indicated its willingness to change its methods to survive, yet has not been given the credit it is due.

Unfortunately, for a variety of reasons, coal is currently out of favour as the preferred supplier of power. However, it must be remembered that coal has stood the test of time, both financially and supply-wise, while other sources of power generation have been tried and failed. For many years Collie supplied the majority of WA's electricity without major failures or blackouts caused by industrial action or a lack of fuel.

COLLIE COAL - THE FUTURE

Many members have forgotten the shambles of the 1960s when Sir Charles Court's Government decided that using oil to produce electricity was the way to go. Against loud protests from the then Labor member for Collie, Tom Jones, the Court Government went ahead and converted the State's power stations to oil-fired. That caused much grief to the Collie community: 600 miners were

retrenched, leaving 350 homes empty and the closure of 26 shops and one hotel. Back then a block of land could be swapped for a pushbike. Later, came an oil crisis, up went the price of oil and the power stations, being too expensive in their production of electricity, converted back to coal at a huge cost to the WA Government and the community.

I hope we will not see history repeat itself with the use of gas as the preferred fuel at the expense of coal, as I foresee the same problems of supply and price recurring, especially as the federal Government is conscious of its need to maintain the world parity price of gas. The lessons of deregulation, which go hand in hand with fuel supply contracts, should be learnt.

One need look only at what has happened in New South Wales, Queensland and New Zealand., where electricity either failed altogether, or business and householders were given limited power on a rotational basis while they converted to the tried and trusted systems of before. Just last week America was thrown into chaos when power generation and distribution systems failed across the country. In California, the electricity shortage forced an 80 per cent increase in the cost of household power. It is believed that the Californian Government may be building a case to confiscate privately-owned power plants due to profiteering by these private companies, which closed power plants to limit generation and thus raise prices.

Western Australia must be extremely careful in its selection of future power suppliers. I repeat that coal-fired power generation has been a reliable supplier for this State over many years. Over the long term it has proved to be the cheapest source of electricity in Western Australia. The issue of greenhouse emissions is a much-touted excuse. Again, there is strong evidence that when gas is compared with coal from the source at the wellhead to the final burning stage at the turbine, there is hardly any difference in greenhouse emissions. This is due to Collie coal's low sulfur content and lack of methane gas, which makes it a unique energy supply.

Over the years, the Collie community has been promised numerous power stations by various political leaders. However, in all honesty, the only coal-fired power station built in recent years was built by a Liberal Government, and even that was too small to produce the required economies of scale. The community has been loyal in its vote for the Labor Party with a strong belief in a Government with a social conscience. Only time will tell, but my constituents can rest assured that I will leave no stone unturned in my efforts to secure the future of Collie and surrounding regions.

CONCLUSION

In finishing, I take time to thank my family and friends who have been extremely supportive and understanding over the years. I thank my mother and father, who manned the booth at Mayanup, where we received two votes. I think they are still looking for those two people! Thank you; those two votes were very important. I thank Bruce Roberts, who is not exactly family, but over the years, as Collie ALP branch secretary, has been someone I could rely on to talk to and on whom I could also vent my frustrations at times. I thank Bruce for his strong support and advice. I thank all branch members for their endorsement of my nomination and for their help over the elections. Finally, I thank my family. It was a long road, but we got there.

[Applause.]
