



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Dr Graham Jacobs MLA
(Member for Roe)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 30 March 2005

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Motion

DR G.G. JACOBS (Roe) [12.38 pm]: Mr Speaker, I thank you for the opportunity to address the house today in my new role as the member for Roe. The electorate of Roe is named after John Septimus Roe - 1797 to 1878 - who was an explorer, a pioneer and the first Surveyor General of this great state. Indeed, he was one of the founding members of the Legislative Council and the executive of the Swan River Colony. He is featured with Captain James Stirling at the first Council in a picture that is located at the entrance to this Parliament House.

The electorate of Roe is a large area in the south east of Western Australia. It comprises an area of 90 000 square kilometres and has a population of 20 000, with a voting population of 12 000. Esperance is the main centre situated in the most south eastern corner of the electorate, with a small agricultural centre of Salmon Gums in the north east, Kulin 450 kilometres to the north west, and Bremer Bay in the far south west coastal corner. The area has over 30 schools, 10 hospitals and nursing posts, and many other government service centres. The area is more than one-third the size of Victoria.

From the minute I stepped into this place, Mr Speaker, I could feel the deep privilege of being one of only 57 people to represent this state in the greatest system of democratic government in the world. I take this opportunity to thank the parliamentary staff for helping me to orientate myself without any preconception or prejudice in order to create an environment in which I can effectively represent my constituents.

My background emanates from a pioneering spirit. As a seven-year-old boy, I was brought to the west by my gutsy, determined father and my loving, supporting mother who were looking for farming land. From 1955 onwards the Esperance region was released as conditional-purchase blocks to small groups of settlers. The Esperance sand plain had been considered non-arable until then, when the Agriculture Department's trials revealed that an addition of trace elements to the land made it a productive mixed farming region. As a kick-start to this process, the WA state government released one million acres west and one million acres east to the Chase syndicate that developed the land together with many Victorian landholders, like my mum and dad. I pay tribute to both of them - my dad is in the public gallery today - for such a pioneering background. It is largely their resolve that sees me here today. Having settled 43 miles, as it was termed in those days, west of Esperance on the Lort River by a waterhole in a caravan near a gravel track with virgin bush all about, a farm was carved.

My sister, Jenny, who is two years my junior, was my sole playmate. Both of us were taught by correspondence because the track was so rough that we could not attend the local schools. I thank her for those great memories. We eventually attended formal schooling with an excellent grounding in the three Rs. We had parents who placed a high priority on our achieving our best at school. I was fortunate later in life to be accepted into medical school, and graduated as a doctor in 1976. Twenty-five years of rural medical practice now sees me in this privileged place. In that time I have not been idle as my wife, Kathryn, and I have had five children. I will ignore members' undoubted temptation to suggest that this was the result of poor or no television reception in the bush. Despite this, it is appropriate to acknowledge Kathryn and her contribution - and that is extra to her powers of procreation! She has been most supportive in my life,

and notably later in my campaign for Parliament. We both, most respectfully of course, do not approve of the dilution of traditional family values that can emanate from the government side of this house. More importantly, most of my electors do not approve of this dilution either. I also thank Jesse, Daniel, Aubrey, Lucy, who is here today, and Julian for their understanding in this process. This protection of family values is a cause worth pursuing for many children like them in this great state of Western Australia.

Mr Speaker, I now touch on a most pervading and overwhelming difficulty facing the 30 small centres that I represent in the electorate of Roe. How do we maintain services that small communities deserve, that they have earned and that they desire while faced with what I call diminishing community economies of scale? For instance, how do we maintain a hospital in Gnowangerup where there is little growth and a decline in the younger population as farms amalgamate in a place that is a significant distance from help if a person is critically ill? I am ever conscious of the result of downsizing a hospital in losing a doctor, then losing the pharmacist, and then losing the butcher as people go to the next town to see the doctor and to shop. This will sound the death knell of many country towns. In travelling the area, and being a country boy, it is clear to me that everything cannot be justified in dollar and cent terms. Many people in the Gnowangerups, Lake Graces and Jerramungups have, like my dad, done the hard pioneering yards. One cannot begin to calculate what they have done to add value to Western Australia; one cannot begin to calculate what they have attracted to the state's gross product; and, finally, one cannot begin to calculate what they have paid in taxes and charges, especially under governments like the government opposite. If that were not enough, as a rural doctor, I recognise the human cost of a poorly serviced health system.

However, aside from this, what is the *raison d'être*, the reason for being, if you like, Mr Speaker, for a state government?

I humbly suggest that it is to administer essential services - often, again, this cannot be justified in profit and loss terms - to all people in Western Australia, and not just those in Peppermint Grove and in Mandurah. It seems there is plenty of money for underground railway tunnels and revamped East Perth power stations to heritage centres, but no money for the ordinary people. Much of the pain of ordinary people - I refer to hardworking, long-suffering, honest people - could be relieved by attention to the basics; for instance, the area of power. Half my electorate this summer has been on fire. I do not mean turned on or enthusiastic; I mean literally burning. Why is this? Is it the unenergetic or incompetent power service staff? No; in fact, they are competent and hardworking and have been stretched to the absolute limit. I suggest that the maintenance funding has been scalped with no money available to maintain transmission infrastructure crews and maintain infrastructure itself to prevent my electorate burning as a result of pole-top fires and clashing wires with frequent power outages with enormous cost and inconvenience, and, even in some cases, the loss of life.

Much of the pain of ordinary people could be relieved by attention to another basic service - the provision of water. It may surprise members that I have a town in my electorate that ran out of water. The Water Corporation is carting water to Ravensthorpe from centres 200 kilometres away. Allowing for the dry season, which the area is noted for, forward planning is needed to drought proof the region. It was interesting to note that my parliamentary colleague and predecessor mentioned this matter in his maiden speech 16 years ago; not much has changed. What is happening now is a knee-jerk reaction at the end of summer. A large pipe is being laid from a desalination holding tank on a hill south west of the town to a dry town dam. Honestly, we are not asking for much, just the basics - health, power, water, education and a fair go for small business. I suggest that the rest will look after itself.

Just a small follow-up on that, Mr Speaker, is the topic of encouragement of a small group of dedicated farmer/businessmen in Jerramungup centrally placed in my electorate. They have a well-researched project for a value-added industry of stockfeed pellets, which we as parliamentarians need to recognise and support in a town faced with all the problems of a small population, and those I have spoken of previously of down spiralling facilities and services. These centres often need a circuit-breaker, and this can be it!

I put to the members that they have not seen anything yet. I have just touched on the deficiencies of country core services. If that is not bad enough, now that side of the house wants to take the vote from country people. They call it electoral reform - reform that will see country people, who are ordinary, hardworking, honest people, lose five to eight representatives depending on what mix the government comes up with, as we heard earlier today. If one had any doubts from my brief outline of the deficiencies in rural Western Australia about the metrocentricity of this government, they are now totally dispelled. My electorate will not be a five-hour drive from east to west but an eight-hour drive. What sort of representation for the people of Western Australia is that?

I have outlined how many schools, hospitals and government centres I already have in the electorate. How many more?

The member for Yokine can walk around his electorate before lunch. It will take me a week of lunches, and that will be if I drive. I suggest that this is a blatant betrayal of my electors and I consider it a privilege to be here to fight it. One can try to justify issues with figures, such as dollars and cents, but that does not make it right.

On a different tack is the subject of my responsibility as drug abuse spokesperson. In my work over the past quarter of a century I have seen the devastation illicit drugs cause to individuals and families. I have seen the tragedy of portraying cannabis as harmless and the futility of harm minimisation programs. At the Esperance District Hospital where I have worked over my time, we gave out 1 000 needles and syringes just last month through the Fitpack program. It is a harm

minimisation program that is a disaster, fostering a younger and younger clientele into intravenous drug use abuse. We know that illicit drugs are dangerous. They are dangerous because they create enormous health and social problems and make existing problems worse. We should by every means prevent our children starting on the use of these drugs. We should be hard on suppliers, loving but firm on users, and not send them the wrong messages, as I believe decriminalisation programs do.

As a member and a Christian, I will support the good work done by Teen Challenge in Esperance in bringing people out of the bondage of addiction. I commend to every member of the house a book by Jade Lewis, nee McSherry, "Golden Haze", as we all know of a young person who has fallen victim.

In closing, I want to thank my community for having faith in me, and my patients for voting for me. I give an undertaking now to work for them outside my surgery in order to deliver better outcomes in health and other services. I will take my doctor's skills of thorough history, specialist opinion, objective examination and assessment to deliver a diagnosis and treatment for my electorate.

I thank my committee, particularly David Dwyer and Alan Matthews, Norma Smith my campaign office manager, Irene Obales my information technology manager and my understanding surgery staff for delivering a Liberal member to the seat of Roe after 22 years since the days of Geoff Grewar. The 48.5 per cent primary vote with a 27.5 per cent swing to the Liberals was a tribute to their dedication. As I said in my memorandum to the Liberal Party members recently, for my sins and perhaps for theirs I am their whip. I look forward to the functions of this appointment in order to form a keen, hardworking and respected opposition, and thus a deserved team to govern come the next election. Good opposition in the meantime is important in this great Westminster system that we have blessedly inherited. I also look forward with excitement to working with my opposite number, the member for Mandurah, and both sides of the house to deliver good and right government to the people of Western Australia. I thank members for their forbearance.

[Applause.]
