



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Dr Steve Thomas MLA
(Member for Capel)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 30 March 2005

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Motion

DR S.C. THOMAS (Capel) [12.58 pm]: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the honour you have given me of being able to address the Assembly today. I thank the Premier for honouring me by sitting through my speech. I know that he must have to sit through quite a few. I would also like to thank and congratulate the member for Kingsley for her speech on the Address-in-Reply yesterday. I will not try to make a habit of correcting members when they make a speech, but perhaps I might make a small correction to the speech the member gave yesterday when she spoke of coats. If somebody is given an old coat, apparently it will be tossed away on a scrap heap. If somebody is given a new coat, it will be looked after. However, I must tell the member that from my experience in our area if somebody is given a new coat, it will also be thrown on a scrap heap. If we want people to respect a coat, we must give them a job and let them buy their own coat. In that case, perhaps the coat will have the respect it deserves.

Although he is not in the chamber, may I also commend the member for Collie, who has done an admirable job over the past four years of looking after many of the electors who now form the seat of Capel, because the seat of Capel is a new seat. The respect that electors in my area hold for the member for Collie stands him in good stead.

I was intrigued to hear His Excellency the Governor yesterday speak of the legislative program for the next term of Parliament. I find very interesting the overriding statement from His Excellency that the government is committed to the provision of quality and affordable services for all Western Australians. I think that is very admirable. However, he added the rider "wherever they live". I find myself wondering why wherever they live would make any difference and why there is a rider on such an overwhelming statement. Could it be that His Excellency the Governor thinks that where people live makes a difference to the quality of services that they receive? If that is the case, perhaps this Parliament should take a lead from the words of the Governor. Perhaps the danger is that the Governor is right and where one lives does make a difference. The danger of one vote, one value legislation, therefore, should be obvious to this house.

It was a long and difficult campaign in the seat of Capel, particularly because the seat of Capel is a brand-new seat. Although changes were made to various other boundaries across the state, there were very few places in which a brand-new seat was created. It made the job of selling the seat of Capel very difficult. I want the house to be aware that there was great resentment across the south west to the development of the seat of Capel. Some people in the Busselton end of the seat of Capel who went to the polling booths had their name scratched off the list and tore up their voting cards rather than be a part of the democratic process because they had always voted in the seat of Vasse. It is intriguing to note that the one vote, one value legislation might give them back their wish.

I find it interesting and difficult to make inroads as the member in the seat of Capel. I do not much regard that as disrespect to me but more disrespect to the seat of Capel. It is very difficult to be the member of an electorate on the edge of a large number of rural areas. When various members of the Liberal Party came to the seat of Capel during the election period, they stopped at the important services in the south west, such as the Bunbury Regional Hospital. The member for Bunbury talked with the Leader of the Liberal Party about the hospital and at the end of the talk I said that the Bunbury Regional Hospital was in the seat of Capel, as were Edith Cowan University, Bunbury TAFE and many other services throughout the south west. I have had difficulty in making the media and other people aware that the seat

of Capel is an important and integral part in the provision of those services in the south west. I seek the support of both sides of the house to increase that awareness as the next four years will be extremely difficult, whether or not one vote, one value legislation is introduced. If it is not introduced, future members for Capel will continue to have the same difficulties and it is important for both sides of the house and all members of Parliament to recognise this.

Mr Speaker, let me give you an example of this issue because it is an issue that is very close to my heart. I was the chairman of the South West Health Forum for a great period of time. During that time the forum presented the south west health plan, which was accepted by the then Minister for Health, Mr John Day, who is still a member of this house.

It was then supported by the next Minister for Health, Mr Bob Kucera, who is also still a member of this house. It is the only plan - the Reid report notwithstanding - for any health district that has not been virtually thrown on the scrap heap in the past 10 years. I commend that plan, which expires in 2006, to the government and the Minister for Health. I suggest that it is time for the government to review the delivery of health services across the south west and to ensure that the planning process for the delivery of those services continues. Otherwise, and without adequate planning, the mess that mental health service delivery is in and the difficulties faced by disabled people in my electorate will spread across the south west. The time for that planning is coming very soon. I hope the minister will take that issue on board and move as quickly as possible.

Another area of the south west in which I have had a great deal of experience is agriculture. I would like to think that the opposition will work with the government, as much as against the government, to look after the areas of agriculture that are particularly dominant in the seat of Capel. Although the greatest areas of agriculture and agricultural production in the state are wheat and wool, large numbers of other producers exist and, to some degree, are the poor country cousins of agriculture in this state. I hope to bring to the attention of the minister at the appropriate time that those areas also deserve support and require as much help as possible.

I want to thank some people who helped me during my campaign, particularly the campaign team. I thank Lucille Piesse, Mary Silcock, Lou Tuia, Peter Hearman, Penny Hearman, Glennie Caratti, Terri Shine, Don Wetherall, Jack Kitchen, Merve Johnston and Keith Rose. In particular I thank three people who were integral in my campaign but who, more importantly, were all candidates for election at some stage. It has been brought home to me in no uncertain terms that many good potential members of Parliament on both sides of the house never get here due to politics, factionalism and many other reasons that keep them underfoot. I therefore dedicate my win in the seat of Capel and my being the inaugural member for Capel - and perhaps the ultimate member for Capel - to three men: John Silcock, Brian Piesse and Ken Caratti, all of whom stood for election or preselection at some stage and who would have made excellent members of Parliament. It could be said that there but for the grace of God go I and many other members who sit in this house. The three men I spoke of would have made excellent members of Parliament and I am saddened that their ambitions were never recognised and the contributions they could have made never made.

Going through an election campaign was a great learning curve. I learnt many things. I suggest in my own humble way that during my campaign I probably doorknocked as many houses as any other member on either side of the house, wearing out a couple of pairs of shoes. I learnt one particularly important thing; that is, every life story is important. That is something that we can easily forget. We can forget about the person who is unimportant and we can forget about an elector who is just another number, but I discovered that every life story is important. In the temporary and ghostly life of politics that I may be looking at in the next four years, the message I would like to deliver and leave is that every life and every piece of work is important. In the next four years I will be a representative of that message and I will look after every person who comes along.

Mr Speaker, thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to at least four years of robust debate and I hope that I will live up to the expectations of the people who put me here.

[Applause.]
