



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Peter Collier MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Council

Wednesday, 25 May 2005

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Motion

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan) [5.32 pm]: Firstly, may I congratulate you, Mr President, on your election to the position of President of this house. I also congratulate Hon George Cash on his re-election to the position of Chairman of Committees. I would also like to thank most sincerely the Clerk of the house and all of the parliamentary staff for the assistance and guidance that they have provided to me as a new member. I am confident that all new members of this house will agree that the induction sessions that were conducted by the parliamentary staff were of considerable assistance and value.

I was honoured to be elected to represent the citizens of the North Metropolitan Region in this chamber in the 2005 Western Australian election. Having been born a political being, having been an active participant in the Liberal Party since I was 16 years of age and having taught political theory at the secondary level of education for more than 20 years, the notion of participating in the political process, as opposed to commentating upon it, always appeared inevitable to me.

Before I make comment on several issues, I deem it appropriate to provide some background on my personal life. I was born and bred in Kalgoorlie - I was born in 1959. In retrospect, I can say that I had a charmed childhood. My parents owned a small grocery and liquor store and while we were certainly not what would be termed affluent, I never went without. Life was basically comfortable and uncomplicated. As you do as a child, I relied upon my parents for everything - materially as well as for guidance in life skills and for loving support. I was always given an abundance of all three. Neither my two sisters nor I were ever found wanting. In essence, life consisted of school - North Kalgoorlie Primary School and Eastern Goldfields Senior High School - an abundance of valued friends, tennis, my golden palomino and working in our corner store.

Almost without warning, those days of innocence came to an end. I left Kalgoorlie at the age of 17 to continue my education. While my parents and eldest sister also moved to Perth, the younger of my sisters remains in Kalgoorlie with her family to this day. The town holds a special place for me, and I am delighted that it is currently receiving excellent representation at both levels of government through Matt Birney and

Barry Haase. After Kalgoorlie, I spent four years at the University of Western Australia, where I gained a Bachelor of Arts degree with a double major in political science and history, and a Diploma of Education.

Following university, I entered the teaching profession, where I remained until my election to this chamber. Initially I taught in the government sector, at John Curtin Senior High School and Lesmurdie Senior High School, before moving to the private sector - Presbyterian Ladies' College for three years and for the past 15 years at Scotch College. Over this period I held a number of senior positions, including head of politics and history at both Presbyterian Ladies' College and Scotch College during my tenure at those institutions, as well as head of Ross House, which is primarily a pastoral position, at Scotch College for the past 10 years. These positions of responsibility provided me with considerable insight into the challenges and expectations of the contemporary secondary student and the role of the classroom teacher and school administrator.

I always found teaching to be a vehemently positive and rewarding experience, and I thoroughly enjoyed my time at each of the four schools at which I taught - leaving each of the first three through opportunity, certainly not through disillusionment. I always gained particular satisfaction teaching politics, in which a number of my former students achieved at the highest level in the tertiary entrance examination. I found debating contemporary issues with highly idealistic adolescents on a daily basis extremely invigorating. In a profession in which it is so easy to wish one's life away as one counts down the periods to the end of each day, the weeks to the end of each term and the terms to the end of each year, I can state without reservation that I still held the same passion for my role as an educator on my last day of teaching as I did on day one at John Curtin Senior High School in 1981.

Combined with teaching, tennis coaching has been a significant element of my life. To this end, having a strong and valued bond with the world's greatest ever woman tennis player, Margaret Court, has provided me with endless opportunities, including coaching numerous state and national champions and spending time on the international women's tennis tour. That in itself was a tremendous period of my life. I thrived on the daily challenges provided by the tennis circuit - the endless desire to be the best one can be and the constant accountability through performance and results, which is not unlike politics. Having said this, the single most significant element to emerge from my association with tennis has been my relationship with Margaret Court - my mentor in life. I recently travelled to Sri Lanka with Margaret to conduct a series of tennis clinics for victims of the tsunami and the underprivileged. It was a deeply moving and spiritual experience that has been life changing for me. I acknowledge Margaret Court for all that she represents, and I thank her for all that she is to me.

In the past I have also held positions on a number of state and federal advisory committees, including the National Expert Advisory Committee on School Drug Education, the Western Australian Youth Advisory Committee, the Western Australian Youth Suicide and Self-harm Prevention Committee and the Western Australian School Drug Education Project. Also, I am currently the patron of the Shenton Park Dogs' Refuge Home (WA). Finally, I have been senior vice-chairman of the Western Australian section of Australians for a Constitutional Monarchy for a number of years. I have benefited considerably from my involvement with these committees and associations, and I am grateful for the opportunities that they have presented to me.

My decision to pursue a position in this chamber has been long felt. As mentioned earlier, I was born a political being, and I have had a long-held desire to be a representative of the people in this place on behalf of the Liberal Party. I will always be conscious of the fundamental role of this Parliament and the role that I will be expected to play within it. Based upon the Westminster model, the essential role of our Parliament is to represent the people and to debate on behalf of the people. Without question, ultimate authority rests with the people. This Parliament exists under the sovereignty of the people. I commit myself to

representing the people through the promotion of the philosophy of the Liberal Party. I am extremely conscious of the fact that there are billions of people on this earth who want to vote but cannot, and that there are hundreds of millions who can vote but do not. However, in Australia - in Western Australia specifically - with compulsory voting, a vast majority of our citizens utilise their democratic right to a ballot.

I will be their representative, and I will represent their interests. I will not use this place as a vehicle for personal retribution or vendettas.

Unfortunately, in more recent years Parliaments across Australia have been increasingly, and at times tragically, used as such forums through the abuse of an age old procedure known as parliamentary privilege. The principle of parliamentary privilege essentially commenced with the enactment of the British Bill of Rights in 1689, which states in part -

That the freedom of speech and debates or proceedings in Parliament ought not to be impeached or questioned in any court or place out of Parliament;

This was designed to protect the Parliament from the King. In 1891 these privileges were set out in two acts of the Western Australian Parliament: the Parliamentary Privileges Act and the Parliamentary Papers Act. In contemporary society there is little merit in protecting the Parliament from the monarch, as our commonwealth and state Constitutions provide meticulous checks and balances, resulting in an extremely effective parliamentary system. There is certainly justification in maintaining that aspect of privilege that deals with contempt of the Parliament to ensure that there is no interference in the proper functioning of the Parliament. However, the most controversial aspect of parliamentary privilege is that relating to parliamentary freedom of speech - a vehicle designed to protect the speeches, debates and proceedings of the Parliament from defamation action or from being used as evidence in any court. Similarly, there is also qualified privilege - a vehicle that provides some legal protection to the media. Again, there is considerable merit in the principal concept of this aspect of parliamentary privilege. However, I have deep reservations about the abuse of this aspect of parliamentary procedure. As I have mentioned previously, I resolve not to use this place as a vehicle for personal retribution. I come to this place as a representative of the people of North Metropolitan Region, and I fully commit myself to their purpose alone.

To turn to another area, I guess that one can take the boy out of Kalgoorlie but one cannot take Kalgoorlie out of the boy. I am proud of my country heritage and extremely grateful for the opportunities that a Kalgoorlie upbringing provided for me. Although I have been a permanent resident of Perth for almost 30 years, I remain mindful of the extraordinary challenges that are faced by rural Western Australians each and every day. Tens of thousands of people from the bush are required to regularly travel exceptional distances to reach the most basic services. In addition, the health, education and communication facilities, just to name a few, that are available to residents of the bush are frequently substandard. It is in this vein that I express my disappointment at the recent changes to the Electoral Act. Because of its sheer geographic size, Western Australia is unique. Those people who make a conscious choice to live outside the metropolitan region deserve special recognition and consideration. In order to counter the government's initial attempts to amend the Electoral Act, former Liberal Party President Kim Keogh established the Defence of Democracy Committee in 2002. The role of that committee, of which I was chairman, was to raise funds to fight that move by the government. The committee was extremely productive. We received overwhelming support from members of the Liberal Party and beyond, and raised hundreds of thousands of dollars to successfully defend in the Western Australian Supreme Court, and ultimately in the High Court of Australia, the franchise of rural Western Australians. As I have mentioned previously, I am disappointed at the recent changes to the Electoral Act, and I will always remain a determined advocate for rural Western Australians.

As a teacher with over 20 years' experience I am fully conscious of the considerable challenges and expectations facing the teaching profession in contemporary society. Significant shifts in the fabric of the modern family, globalisation and its associated challenges, and the ongoing changes to the curriculum, have placed considerable pressure on today's teachers. As modern adolescents often regard privileges as rights, and their parents demand rather than consult, teachers are increasingly expected to perform a far broader role than they could ever have expected. The role of pastoral carer, and its associated demands, has evolved to be a commonplace requirement for today's teachers. In addition, with the advent of outcomes-based education and the pending implementation of the associated courses of study at the post-compulsory level, the professional pressures that are placed upon teachers are considerable. I am not convinced that the Western Australian education system is adequately prepared for these changes, nor that these changes have sufficient essential support from the teaching profession, the broad parent body or even the students themselves. An air of frustration and cynicism definitely permeates the teaching community, and equally there is a significant amount of confusion amongst parents and students. A degree of disquiet that is sufficient to warrant concern already exists with regard to outcomes-based education where it has been implemented in the K-10 years. These problems will be compounded with the extension of OBE through the courses of study to years 11 and 12 in the immediate future. I am not convinced that the Curriculum Council has given sufficient consideration to the enormity of the changes associated with the implementation of the courses of study in our education system and the associated demands they will place on the teaching fraternity and school communities at large. To this end the Curriculum Council must ensure that comprehensive professional development is provided and funded in all sectors of the Western Australian education system. Given that these are state-driven changes, this is a commitment that the state government needs to provide to all sectors. Long implementation periods are an essential prerequisite for a smooth and effective transition to the courses of study for all involved. This is currently not the case. There is confusion amongst the teaching profession, particularly with regard to the framing of assessments and the time lines to be adhered to. This confusion is inevitably being transferred to students and parents. The recent announcement by the Curriculum Council that it intends to delay the implementation of 10 courses of study is testament to the problems that exist in this area. The notion of full implementation of all courses on the same date, after comprehensive implementation periods, appears to have real merit. In an ageing and conservative profession, unless consideration and accommodation is provided to the very real concerns of the teaching profession over the next few years, I fear that a significant number of teachers will seek alternative employment. Teaching is without doubt one of the most rewarding occupations imaginable. I would like to see this profession given the respect and consideration it so richly deserves, particularly over the next few challenging years.

I would now like to comment on recent legislative changes to Western Australia's drug laws and the impact of these changes on our youth. I am strongly opposed to more liberal laws on illicit drug use, particularly cannabis. To my knowledge no evidence has been presented that suggests that cannabis use is beneficial to a person's health. On the contrary, there is overwhelming evidence that prolonged cannabis use can be deleterious to a person's health, particularly to the male and female reproductive systems, the immune system, the heart and the lungs. There is also evidence that cannabis use is addictive, impairs learning and frequently leads to the use of higher-order illicit drugs. In fact, the Western Australian President of the Australian Medical Association, Dr Paul Skerritt, is quoted in *The West Australian* as recently as 2 March 2005 as saying -

The drug is provoking manic depression, schizophrenia, depression and panic attacks among the users, some of whom had tried it for the first time, . . .

The article includes a quote from Professor Castle from Melbourne University, who says that the use of drugs such as cannabis during the formative years of life, such as the years at school, could affect the way a

teenager or young child thought, thereby impairing cognitive ability and having a long-term impact on job prospects. The negative impacts of cannabis use on a person's health are without question. Also without question is the fact that a significant proportion of our adolescents, to be accurate about one-quarter of 17-year-olds, indulge regularly or semi-regularly in cannabis use. There is no indication that this level of use will decline. In fact, there is every reason to expect that this figure will continue to increase. Dependency levels will inevitably rise correspondingly, as will the proportion of users who progress to higher-order illicit drug usage. This is a cause for further concern. I am firmly of the belief that more liberal laws with regard to cannabis use over recent years will inevitably lead to an increased prevalence of cannabis use among Western Australian youth. The message that is being portrayed in the community at large, and in particular to our youth, through these recent changes to cannabis use is that cannabis use is acceptable. That message is transparent and unambiguous. Whereas a generation ago the use of cannabis was deemed a hanging offence, recent legislative changes have altered the goalposts. As a result, cannabis is no longer held with the same disdain. Our youth regard these changes almost as a badge of honour. They believe the use of cannabis is acceptable. Parents, teachers, counsellors and the like are faced with the unenviable task of explaining the negative attributes of cannabis against what our youth see as a legitimisation of the product through legislation. More liberal laws on cannabis use are regressive and have the potential to inflict significant damage on our youth and the community as a whole.

I take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank a number of people for their valued support over many years. To begin, I thank my wonderful parents, Les and Beryl Collier, who I am delighted to say are here today, for being the consummate parents. I also acknowledge and thank my sisters, Diane Edwards and Kerry Holman, and their families, for so brilliantly completing the family circle. In addition, I pay tribute to my political mentor and friend, Sir Charles Court. I thank him for his wise counsel over many years. I also acknowledge my many friends and supporters in the Liberal Party and beyond for their valued support and encouragement, particularly Sally and Angus Plummer, Robyn Nolan, Michael and Robyn Mischin, Kate Watts, Lorraine Beckett, Richard Wilson, Julie Johnston, Jeremy Sher, Phil Paterson, Deb Brady, Jono Daventry, Barbara and Greg Brophy, Danielle and Nick Blain, Daphne Bogue, Clive and Carolyn Hartz, the Kilderry family, the Court families and the Scotch College community. There are numerous others - Liberal Party friends, both parliamentary and non-parliamentary, lifelong friends from so many walks of life and professional colleagues from teaching and tennis coaching to whom I am eternally grateful. I recognise and thank them.

I also pay tribute to the Curtin Division and the Nedlands Branch of the Liberal Party. Both Curtin Division, which is currently superbly represented by my valued friend, Hon Julie Bishop, and the Nedlands Branch are thriving examples of the Liberal Party in practice. They both have large numbers of enthusiastic members. They meet regularly in order to service the needs and desires of their membership base and they both hold regular social functions to further develop camaraderie. In essence, they are the epitome of what a political organisation should be: avenues for debate, relevance and participation. Having held senior office bearer positions in the Curtin Division and the Nedlands Branch over many years, I can attest to their success. I thank the membership of both for their overwhelming support and friendship. Ultimately, the lay organisation of a political party is its foundation - it is its heart and soul and, in this context, the Liberal Party is in extremely safe hands.

To conclude, I always affirmed to my students that they should treat life as a series of opportunities and not a series of events. It is a philosophy upon which I have tried to direct my own destiny. I regard my election to this place as a real opportunity. It is an opportunity to represent the people of the North Metropolitan Region. It is an opportunity to represent the Liberal Party, its philosophy, members and supporters in this chamber. It is an opportunity to explore options, to consider legislation that is reflective of our community's expectations and to debate alternatives. I come to this place conscious of the

expectations of not only my supporters and the supporters of the Liberal Party, but also the entire community. I come to this place as someone with considerable life skills and, I feel, as someone with a broad awareness of and sympathy for the needs and expectations of our contemporary society. I am conscious of the extraordinary privilege associated with being elected by the people of the North Metropolitan Region to represent them in this place. I commit myself to their cause. Thank you.

[Applause.]
