



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Andrew Waddell MLA
(Member for Forrestfield)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 13 November 2008

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Motion

MR A.J. WADDELL (Forrestfield) [9.36 am]: Mr Speaker, my name is Andrew Waddell and I stand here before you today as the new member for Forrestfield. Firstly, let me congratulate you on your election as Speaker. I also extend my congratulations to all other new members of the house. The things that bind us together are far greater than those that separate us.

It is an inspiring privilege to serve the people of my electorate in this place. The seat of Forrestfield is a new seat and is made up of High Wycombe and Maida Vale to the north, Forrestfield and Wattle Grove in the centre, and parts of Kenwick and Maddington to the south. It is a wide and diverse seat with suburbs that are distinct in nature. On behalf of my constituents, I look forward to many a great debate in this chamber. I will strive to live up to the trust that has been placed in me by the people of my electorate and I will work hard to make a solid contribution to the state.

I grew up in Stevens Road in High Wycombe. It was a road that was bounded by unimproved bushland at the time. I went to High Wycombe Primary School and Forrestfield Senior High School. All of my earliest memories are of living, walking about and playing in those streets. I remember the friendly street parties that my parents would attend and I remember how everyone knew everyone else in the street. We all pitched in when a job had to be done somewhere. These are idealistic childhood memories but there was a real sense of community at the time and our neighbours were not strangers. Perth in the early 1970s was a different place from what it is today, and that is particularly so in Forrestfield. We felt isolated from not only the world, but also the city. They were the days before satellite TV and mobile phones. The nightly TV news was sometimes a day behind world events, public transport was scarce, and as a child even doing the weekly shopping trip to Midland was an adventure. The sense of wanting to overcome that isolation has been a continuing source of drive for me ever since.

As a teenager, I remember being part of the bulletin board scene. In particular, I was a member of the Fidonet system, which was run by computer enthusiasts in the mid-1980s. It was a simple system that allowed one computer to link with another, passing messages over local telephone calls from node to node, spanning the globe. It meant that over the course of a single day an email could circle the globe. The world suddenly felt an awfully lot smaller. In the early 1990s I was introduced to a new system called the internet. It was not the internet that members know today; rather, it was the internet that existed before Tim Berners-Lee gifted us the web and before streaming video,

podcasts and spam. It was a text-based system. The first time I gophered into the MIT library to browse its collection, I truly felt that the future had arrived and that the world was at my fingertips. Once again, the world felt a lot smaller. Since then technology has continued to shrink distances. Now it is easier to watch Barack Obama's historic victory speech live from Chicago than it is to find out what is happening in the local shopping centre in Forrestfield. Perhaps that is the problem. Perhaps that is why people sometimes feel as though they are citizens of the world more so than members of their own community. I will come back to that issue.

After completing a commerce degree at Curtin University of Technology in the early 1990s, I was tossed into the real world to start my professional life. My professional life can be categorised in two sections: IR, industrial relations; and IT, information technology. I was fortunate to be taken into a graduate program at DOPLAR—that is, the Department of Productivity and Labour Relations. There I was exposed to a wide range of experiences. Some of my most memorable experiences occurred when I staffed the Wageline phones. I had to advise people about their award conditions and rights, whether they were being underpaid and what they should do if they had been unfairly dismissed. From there I was recruited as an industrial officer in the Transport Workers Union by my good friend Mark Cuomo. Whilst there I represented many workers in front of industrial tribunals. There is no training like industrial relations training to get to know the intimate daily lives of working people—their hopes, dreams and fears. I am proud to share the knowledge of ordinary working Australians with many of my Labor colleagues in this place. I shall draw upon it daily in my life as a member of Parliament.

In 1996 I took a leap and began my own IT company. IT has always been a passion and a joy. Starting my own company gave me a chance to indulge in my hobbies—namely, building and repairing computer systems, programming and generally making technology work for people. Running my own successful business taught me an entirely different set of lessons: innovation, enterprise, self-sufficiency and self-reliance. Running one's own business is about making something, taking pride in it and seeing how it contributes to the community. It is about being a business which people want to use and to which they are happy to refer others. Running my own business gave me a sense of self-efficiency and self-reliance. With that came a feeling of freedom and of knowing that I could fall back on my own skills in the future and that I could fulfil the needs of my family.

How does my background in trade unions and small business come together to form a philosophy? In the seat of Forrestfield—many members would experience this in their own electorates—there is a problem with graffiti tagging. Some places are more prone to graffiti than others, such as the Woodlupine Family and Community Centre, which seems to get attacked nearly every week, and the telephone exchanges in Midland and Forrestfield. The latter has been covered in ever-changing graffiti for the past decade or so. As I doorknocked and heard stories about graffiti tagging—where it was and how long it can take for a wall to be cleaned—I realised that most people do not know how to solve the problem. They do not like the fact that there is graffiti, but many feel a sense of helplessness and of not being able to do anything about this scourge. That is where my two backgrounds fuse together. We, as citizens, need to take personal responsibility for the collective health and wellbeing of our communities. Many people look to government as the parent. They expect that parent to step in and fix their problems, and they complain to the parent when something is not fair, yet they see the parent as somehow beyond control or influence. I hope to change that during my time in this house. For example, I intend to set up a website to help people track and log graffiti occurrences in Forrestfield. Members of that community will be able to take digital photographs of graffiti and post them on the website. The site will provide advice as to what steps should be taken to solve the problem. Members of the community will be able to take ownership of the problem—or they can leave it as an open-ticket problem for somebody else to solve. The website will track the location of graffiti attacks through an application, such as Google Earth, to

determine patterns. The web will also enable tracking of the clean-up of graffiti to inform people living in the local area of the progress that is being made. This is an example of what I call “open-source activism”. The term “open-source” comes from software developers and refers to a community of users who develop software in an open process and who agree to freely share their work for the greater good. Many people would be familiar with software from companies such as Microsoft and Apple. Such companies own the software that they write; theirs is a closed system. If there is a problem or a bug in the system, it is up to them to fix it. With open-source, nobody owns the software; rather, a community of users contribute to its development for free. Computer software developed through open-source is usually free. It adapts more quickly to changes and generally operates more securely and robustly. I would like to apply that concept to our communities. I would like to use technology to bring our communities together in a virtual way so that people can chat about local issues and things that matter to them. We need to create an environment in which everyone can plug in to participate in a conversation, even if they do so at three in the morning. They could leave their comments for somebody else to read at, say, 10 in the morning, and there could be a public conversation over the course of a couple of days. By virtualising the dialogue we can ensure that it happens. We need to create a place in which neighbours can note and discuss an issue and actually take responsibility for it—“I will fix that one.” At the very least, they should ask whether someone has taken care of the mess down the street. They should not simply assume that somebody else is looking after it. They should not simply wait for the government to step in or for mum and dad to fix it. We can work collaboratively to solve simple problems, such as cleaning a wall. We must take responsibility for our communities. Perhaps some people want the government to provide a Microsoft or Apple out-of-the-box solution. I think it is better in the long run if we as a community start writing our own community software. We must take responsibility for our own lives. As the saying goes, “Feed a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach him to fish and he eats for a lifetime.” Of course, that is assuming that he properly manages his fish stocks!

The funny thing about talking to one’s neighbours is this: it is a great way to quickly achieve a consensus on what is right and what should be done. That is the basis of community standards. Community standards lead to community behaviours. I defy anyone in this place to tell me that that is not what the public is crying out for. Over the past few days I have heard members from both sides of the house speak about this very issue. How do we develop community standards if we do not talk to our neighbours? How do we express standards if we do not know what they are? When did we as a community agree to abrogate our right to determine standards? Surely that was the day we agreed to live behind locked and barred doors, isolated from our neighbours and frightened by the sound of a simple knock at the door. We stopped feeling safe in our homes when we stopped determining standards. We have become isolated, and that isolation is a blight and a threat to the continued functioning and wellbeing of our society. It is remarkable how few people know their neighbours. It is remarkable how few people feel they could lean on neighbours in a time of crisis. It is remarkable that in a time of unprecedented communication we do not communicate. The consequence of all this is that government and central services are expected to pick up the slack. Whereas neighbours would once pitch in, people now expect a central agency to do the work, and that comes at not only a financial cost, but also, and more importantly, a social cost. How do we as a Parliament get people to talk to their neighbours? It is not an issue on which we can legislate. However, we need to take action to turn this situation around. In the vein of some of the great community education programs such as Life. Be In It or Slip Slop Slap, we should create a “Know Thy Neighbour” program—a simple program to encourage people to get to know the people around them; a program to build trust among people who are much the same and basically have the same needs and wants. I would like to see streets where parents feel safe leaving their children to play in the knowledge that their nearest neighbour would step in at the first sign of trouble. So, my message

is that we need to trust ourselves and we need to trust the global community to show what is best for itself. For us in this house it means we need to listen and we need to enable.

Some great things are already happening. I recently discovered the sustainability program at Dawson Park Primary School in my electorate. There, students have been charged with preserving and restoring native bushland. They use water tanks and are installing their own solar cells. The school is teaching the students that a sustainable lifestyle does not mean a reduction in the quality of lifestyle. This program is driven by some very enthusiastic teachers and committed members of the local community. They use government grants and services where available, but the program is driven from a completely local level.

Another case I experienced was last Sunday when I was at the Forrestfield Soccer Club, which was hosting a Malaysian junior team on exchange. This was an event in which the local club invited an under-15 team from Kuala Lumpur to play a series of tournaments against the Forrestfield club as well as some of the other local Perth teams. The idea was to foster a long-term relationship between the clubs and to help link up local businesses with opportunities from the Malaysian businesses, and vice versa. The event was a huge success, and a great deal of goodwill was generated for both communities, and they are both better for it today. Again, this was driven by committed local people looking after their own community. As I visit local community groups and hold forums in and around my electorate, my offers of help are often not about doing but about enabling. I will help with the connecting; I will help them seek resources; I will help bring the community together; and I will help write the letters and use my influence in any way. What I want to do is to help community groups that are willing to look after themselves and their communities.

I would like to introduce into this house a Hopi word, “koyaanisqatsi”. Translated, this means life out of balance or a way of life that calls for another way of life. Our society is out of balance. We live lifestyles that clearly call for a different way of living. Global warming alone attests to that. We, as parliamentarians, have to start thinking differently. We have to start thinking about change. We have to start thinking about communities in a different way. We need to partner with our communities. We need to trust them to set their own standards. We need to abandon the old top-down government as a parent model that tells everyone what is best for them. We need to stop staring into the Mirror of Erised. Take, for instance, the federal government’s intention to establish the so-called clean feed of internet traffic initiative. The government intends to introduce mandatory filtering of all illegal material and a second optional filter to block content deemed inappropriate for children. On the surface, the idea of a clean feed appears to be a good idea, but we must ask ourselves: what are we really trying to achieve? We want a safe internet for our children, but are we trying to substitute community standards and parental supervision with government regulation? Are we freely giving up our freedom of speech for a symbolic effort that will ultimately achieve nothing but damage the internet itself? Coming from Western Australia, as I said earlier, I have always been keenly aware of our isolation. However, in recent years that isolation has begun to break down due to our ability to interact with many other people across the world and participate in global events through the internet. To facilitate this, we need a high-speed, high-availability internet. We need it for our education, for our entertainment and for our commerce. It is not an optional item. The federal government is planning to filter the internet, and this means that our content access on the internet will be decided by a committee of bureaucrats out of Canberra. They will determine what is fit for our eyes and, in doing so, will introduce technical barriers to the proper functioning of the internet.

Internet providers and the government’s own lab tests have found that presently available filters are not capable of adequately distinguishing between legal and illegal content, and can degrade internet speeds by up to 86 per cent. Their filtering plan will ultimately slow down our access and cause considerable grief for many internet applications. For many businesses that rely on the internet and for many schools that rely on the internet this will be a disaster. Is it worth it? Will this achieve the

federal government's objectives? Will it make the internet safe? Quite simply, the answer is no. The internet filter is designed to work on web protocols. You might remember, Mr Speaker, how, earlier, I spoke about the internet before the web. There is a lot more to the internet than the web—the “www” bit we see every day. This plan completely fails to understand the fact that the majority of internet traffic today, particularly the “nasties”, are transmitted through other protocols such as peer-to-peer. We can think of a protocol as a way of communication, just as we can send a message by a lot of means such as letter, fax, email, telephone call, TV commercial or Salmat distribution. There are lots of ways or protocols for sending information across the internet. At this point, I think I need to confess that I am a bit of a geek!

Mr R.H. Cook: Hear, hear!

Mr A.J. WADDELL: I love the technical details. I bring to this place a unique set of skills, and I hope to use them for the good of WA. Sometimes a little knowledge can actually be a useful thing. Even if the government is able to successfully filter current protocol available today, new protocols will simply arise that bypass these filters almost instantly. During the Olympics there was great outcry about censorship of the internet in China. They call it “the great firewall of China”, yet there are many ways to circumvent the Chinese censorship. The internet was designed for resilience. It was designed to route around damage; it sees censorship as damage. Why does Australia need to damage its connection to the world? The net effect, if members will excuse the pun, will be to damage a precious resource for us. This is what can happen when technology is not properly understood. This is what can happen when a government insists on a top-down approach. Australian families do not need censorship to keep their children safe; they need knowledge and support. The government certainly has an educative role. There is a world of information that parents could use in setting the standards for their own households. However, the clean feed will make the internet slower and less efficient, hand our freedom of speech to a government committee and, ultimately, do nothing to prevent the transmission of dangerous material. Worse still, it will give our community the illusion that it does not need to worry about a serious issue.

As members here will appreciate, it is a long road into this place and there are many people who help along the path. It would be remiss of me to not acknowledge at this time those who played a pivotal role. Firstly, and most importantly, thanks go to my family—to my wife, Jenny, whom I married here in the grounds of Parliament only nine years ago. She has always known of my passion for public life and has stood by me all the way. She has even sometimes prodded me into the right direction when I have stalled. I love you and thank you for your support. Amelia, my daughter, who has allowed me to experience the world through innocent eyes once more, has been understanding of the demands placed on her daddy. On election eve, she told me that if I was not successful, the most important thing was that I keep trying. I would also like to acknowledge my parents, Grada and John. My father is no longer with us, but I am sure he would be proud that I am here today—maybe a little disappointed in the side I am sitting on! My parents gave me my start in life and gave me the very principles and values that have led me to this place and to the success I have enjoyed in my life. I thank also my brothers, Alistair and Stuart, for keeping it real and reminding me what a family bond really means. I also owe a debt of gratitude to Jim McGiveron and the Transport Workers Union; Joe Bullock and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association; and Dave Kelly and the missos. These unions took a chance on me and offered me their support in the last election. I say thank you. Let me say that I am proud to be associated with the trade union movement. It is a movement that has made a positive contribution to our society, lifestyle, prosperity and safety in the workplace that we all enjoy today. I thank also my good friend Geoff Baker for his friendship, his advice and his late-night help with planning, strategy and motivation. Lastly, I thank my campaign team who made it possible for me to get here: Natalie Machin, Senator Glen Sterle, John Davies, Peter Brisbane, Andrew Vitolins, George Sekula, Brendan McShanag and

the innumerable other people who supported me in many ways. I wish I had the time to thank them all.

To conclude, I would like to once again give my thanks to the people of the electorate of Forrestfield for their support and for taking a chance on me. I look forward to representing them in this place over the coming years and I hope I repay their trust.

Amendment to Motion

Mr A.J. WADDELL: Mr Speaker, at this time I would like to move an amendment. I move —

That the following words be added to the motion —

but regret to inform His Excellency that the Barnett government has failed the people of Western Australia by abandoning plans to extend the rail line to Butler, by failing to order new railcars and by removing from Western Australia's Infrastructure Australia application all reference to public transport

[Applause.]
