



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Laurie Graham, MLC **(Member for Agricultural Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

Reprinted from Hansard

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 11 May 2021

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 5 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON LAURIE GRAHAM (Agricultural) [3.23 pm]: It is my pleasure to stand here today to make a short contribution on my exit from this house. Being here has been a fantastic opportunity for me. I would like to particularly acknowledge the Deputy President and Madam President herself. They have been very fair and the way they have dealt with us all has been fantastic. I think it is a very hard task to undertake. I initially tried that chair and I found that the ejection seat was the best thing for me. I must acknowledge that Hon Adele Farina, who took over from me, did a much better job than I was ever likely to do. So I found my rightful place back on the back bench.

I will start with the staff here. They have been fantastic. I would hate to pick out individual members of staff, but as was commented on earlier, they all welcome you. It is great to see the way they interact with us. Anthony, down at the members' bar, has my mark with the coffee. These days I do not even have to suggest what I want; he is making it before I arrive. There is a bit of humour in that, I think. I am terrible at names and he thinks I have forgotten it every time, so I have to look at his badge to make sure I have Anthony right.

I need to thank a number of people but, before doing that, I want to touch on a couple of matters. I will tend to be fairly brief as I go through my contribution. I believe I was really fortunate to be a member of the house during the passing of the landmark voluntary assisted dying legislation, which had strong community support. Obviously, as a Catholic, it gave me some heartburn to look at the issue, but as I talked to all the constituents, it was very clear that a vast majority supported the legislation. I think people are elected to the house to represent people. We are also elected to bring our own views, but I believe we should, wherever possible, support the views of our electorates. I was very pleased to be party to voting for that legislation. The interesting thing is, in recent times, as that legislation is about to get underway, some people who were not supportive of VAD whom I talked to at the time are now wondering whether there should be more liberal conditions. They have obviously looked at the recent situation with COVID, including what has happened in nursing homes. Lots of people do not want to go to a nursing home. I am certainly one of them and I would like to think that I could sign a bit of paper in advance to say "I'm outta here!" But that is obviously up to a Parliament in the future.

My four years went in a flash, but when COVID arrived, that seemed to bring it to an end much quicker. Everything stopped for the better part of six months. I am in the over-70s group. The first time the COVID legislation came to the house, I got the phone call from my friend here

to tell me that it was the best idea for me to be paired for the day. I found it difficult to accept at the time. However, on reflection and looking at what has happened elsewhere, it was certainly the right decision for those of us in the more elderly group not to be here. We did not need to be here; everyone was going to vote for the legislation. It was a crisis that the state was trying to stop happening, as we could see it happening in other countries. Acting on health advice, the Premier made some tough calls on COVID in the early days. I remember people lobbying all sorts of ways, particularly business interests, asking whether I would advocate for them. Like most people, I was very “wait and see”. It became apparent that this was the right call. I should acknowledge the Premier in the President’s gallery; thanks very much for coming down, Mark. It was well done by the Premier and his team. Most people I talk to believe that there will be ongoing issues until vaccination is complete. Although I have not received the jab myself, it is only because the doctor who I thought was going to do it is not now having a clinic. At the first opportunity, I will ask to be vaccinated.

I would like to talk about committees for a while. It is a shame that Hon Michael Mischin is not here because, along with Hon Pierre Yang and Hon Robin Scott, we were on the driest committee that one could be involved with: the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review. I think the committee probably needs to be made up of four solicitors, but I think they would have a hard time coming to any agreement. It was great. The members made what was a dull committee very enjoyable. Regarding the Select Committee into Local Government, although I voted against that legislation—I was one of a number of people—I was told I would be the deputy chair of the committee! I am pretty passionate about local government and I was very pleased to be given that opportunity. I was extremely disappointed that, again, COVID intervened with reporting on that legislation. We did not end up holding country hearings or doing the task in a way that it should have been undertaken, but no doubt that will happen in the future. Despite cutting it short, I believe there are a number of good recommendations around the current legislation and whether it is appropriate for all local governments. I like to think we will come up with a tiered system for local government at some time in the future. I am not suggesting we have an A, B and C-type arrangement, but with very small local governments that have large tracts of gravel roads and not much else relying on grants funding, there is not much point them doing rates returns, filling in squares and carrying on; it would be much better if they went back to the old system that was in place many years ago.

My hope for reform in local government is that local governments themselves will jump up and determine the best way to address the matter in the interests of their ratepayers. I am sure that some of them will have problems, but every time we get close to the fence, they run away. It has proved unsuccessful to date, but I am still optimistic they will do it in the future.

I would briefly like to talk about council amalgamations because I have been involved in them, particularly at the Shire of Greenough when it amalgamated for the first time as Geraldton–Greenough. That amalgamation was successful. Unfortunately, at that time, the rural ratepayers wanted to be part of the city. I believe the recent amalgamation with Mullewa has made that council doubtful as far as the community of interest is concerned and perhaps at some stage, when we have reform, we will have more logical local governments, like coastal local governments, where there is community of interest on coastal strips and also with rural and city people, who all have different views about how life should be. They are all worried about cross-subsidising the rates.

I also take the opportunity to highlight the Geraldton election commitments. In the run-up to the 2017 election, commitments were made for \$45 million for the Geraldton Health Campus upgrade, which was subsequently increased to \$90 million when it was found that it was a much bigger job and the emergency department needed more beds. I am very grateful to the government for committing to that and for the support that upgrade has received generally from within this house.

The step up, step down facility is another project that was not on the radar when I was elected and it is great to see that that facility is now up and running. That is another issue that was identified quickly and was addressed.

Commitments to community and sporting facilities were well received in Geraldton. People in Geraldton are sports mad. When I was younger, there were a couple of thousand people playing basketball. Today we have the same number playing basketball, but I have no doubt that as facilities improve, we will see even greater numbers participating.

In 2021, the government's commitments included \$2 million to basketball. I am pleased to see that the association has planning approval in place through the City of Greater Geraldton for four new basketball courts, which will keep the costs down a bit more than if it had received that approval later. The current courts have been unable to cope and, obviously, with climate change and other things, parents are not prepared, like we were when my children were younger, to put them on the outdoor courts and allow them to fall over and scratch their knees. I would say some children are a bit precious these days! However, it is a different standard and they are paying fairly big money to participate, and it is great to see that commitment by the government.

Early in 2000, when I was on the Shire of Greenough, we identified the need for boat ramps, north and south. I was pleased to see that this year, after our continued lobbying in this area, the government committed \$3 million for coastal protection and the boat launching facility at Drummond Cove. I believe the community will very much appreciate that. Hopefully, the city can secure the additional funding it is now seeking through other sources and build a bigger and better facility and locate it so that it has minimal impact on residents in the area.

Cycleways was another item that was unexpectedly approved this year. I know there is great drive for that. In 2017 a report identified the need, but I did not think the government would fund it so quickly but it has committed \$4.3 million.

I would like to touch on a couple of items. My colleague Hon Darren West covered the other three electorates in the Agricultural Region, so I will touch only on Geraldton and some of Labor's very good commitments at the 2017 election. I will not go through them all, as the list is extensive. One was providing food at Foodbank. There was the commitment to the Mid West Sports Federation for the expansion of the current cycling network—that was a big allocation. Ngala community services was funded to run the youth program. I know my colleague Hon Darren West was a driving force and put money into that, in addition to our commitments from the election campaign, to see that delivered in the best possible way. The Geraldton Police and Community Youth Centre was funded for young people to upgrade their midget vehicles that have been lying dormant for many years. That was a great contribution.

I will move on to the 2021 commitments and will run through the list for the record. Commitments were made to the Geraldton Yacht Club to replace one of its rescue boats; to Marine Rescue Geraldton to provide some outdoor facilities for its generator that was rusting away in the wind; and to the Geraldton Bowling Club. It was great, in particular, to commit to this. It was a \$30 000 project that looked to harvest water and put it back into its sump. The beauty of that investment is that the club spent probably \$50 000 or \$60 000 doing all the preliminary work and it asked for funding to reseal the area. The Geraldton Community Toy Library was allocated a \$40 000 grant to expand its services, and the Wandina Playgroup outdoor facility was allocated \$50 000.

Centacare Men's Health and Wellbeing was allocated funding for transportation services. The government funded a bus there. I was there recently. It was interesting to turn up to that facility and find that Centacare, to its credit, funded a coordinator for the first 12 months, and that commitment will enable it to take him on for another 12 months. Centacare will obviously continue to seek money for a coordinator, but it is great to get infrastructure to allow it to pick up the clients who are most disadvantaged in the community and bring them to those sorts of

facilities. Bundiyarra Aboriginal Community Aboriginal Corporation is another group that benefited from Lara's election commitments. The Quarry Street youth facility refurbishment was way overdue, so that \$200 000 commitment was great.

There are a number of other commitments that I will not touch on, but I mention the Geraldton Hockey Association. It was great that we could make a contribution of \$220 000 to the hockey association. I was at Busselton the other day watching the hockey. The existing turf is very tired and upkeep is obviously very difficult for sporting bodies. Perhaps it could be said that they mismanaged this or that they were a bit unlucky in that the cockatoos turned up and ate their field! It is great to see new fields and new facilities provided to them.

It has been my pleasure being a member of the house, especially with the cordial manner that all members in this chamber have treated me. I came here with some reservations, expecting it to be cliquey, with members on this side or that side and no one would talk to you, but it has been great to see that people are very cordial.

I need to acknowledge some members in person. I acknowledge the esteemed Leader of the House, Hon Sue Ellery, for putting up with us and continuing to carry on. We certainly test her! I do not know how she does her job. To the Leader of the Opposition in the fortieth Parliament, Hon Peter Collier, you always went out of your way to acknowledge me and have a chat in the corridor—as did all members on the other side—and that was very much appreciated. I need to comment on my friend here, Hon Pierre Yang. He was the Whip and I was the deputy for that short period of time. I would describe Pierre as the *extraordinaire* control freak. He knows exactly what is going on and what everyone should be doing. I was doing a job and I received a message that said, "You're down to 12; do something"! It was great, Pierre. It was my pleasure to do that task for the balance of the term.

To the Premier, Mark McGowan, your leadership of the party during my term has been outstanding, and no-one disputes the way you have handled the COVID crisis. I do not know how you sleep at night and carry on and get up in the morning. I know that you enjoyed the roadworks this morning as you arrived, and I should comment on that, I suppose. Like all people in regional WA, I now have to add 15 minutes to every trip because there will be roadworks somewhere in the state. It will be wonderful and great when we see the majority of the big road projects completed. Certainly, Geraldton is 20 minutes closer to Perth as a result of the freeway extension, and after other extensions it will be 30 minutes closer to Perth.

I will conclude my remarks by acknowledging those who I have worked closest to during the election campaigns, both in 2017 and 2021. First, I would like to thank the members and supporters of the Roe, Central Wheatbelt, Moore and Geraldton campaigns whose hard work was the contributing factor in the Labor Party winning the second upper house position in 2017 and, this year, seeing us win three upper house positions. Although I expected us to have an increased vote in the seat of Geraldton, I did not expect it to be by that percentage, nor did I expect to see that the other electorates would improve by so much. Congratulations to Lara Dalton, who was elected, and also Shelley Payne and Sandra Carr, who worked very hard during the election campaign. I am sure the result was a reflection of the level of work they put into it.

I have to move on to my friend Hon Darren West. He has given me a hard time, and members would have heard him give me a hard time again the other day! It is my opinion that the success of Labor in winning the seat of Geraldton would not have been possible without the establishment of the Labor office back in Geraldton after it had ceased. Kim Chance was there for many years and then we had a gap and then Darren went back. In 2017, Darren put his all into the Geraldton campaign as well as the other three campaigns. He had the unfortunate position of running four campaigns during the 2017 election and to get a swing in not only the Geraldton seat, but also the Moore seat was fantastic. His willingness to share his offices and staff during the past four years made my job much easier. It helped us to better cover the four electorates.

Lesley, I know that you are here today, and thanks very much for those beds in the middle of the night when we turned up at all sorts of hours as we were driving past and Darren invited us in for a bed. I think that sometimes your son was sent out for the night to find another bed elsewhere because we had taken them all!

I would like to move on to the staff. I employed Mark Cairn as a temporary electorate officer at the Geraldton office while I was waiting on an office in Northam. Mark had worked in the Geraldton office for some period doing relief work and taught me where we were going in life.

During my term, Jodi Ingram and Geoff Cannon worked as my permanent electorate staff. I was indeed fortunate to recruit you, Geoff, from the ABC news as my research officer in Geraldton. I thank Darren for hosting that position for the four years. You quickly learnt the ropes and became a very valuable member of our team. With my decision to not seek nomination, I was concerned about what the future held, but with your appointment to Lara's staff, that is now secure.

To Jodi, who is here today as well, I was very pleased when I received your application and I was able to appoint you to the electorate officer position in the Northam office. With your deep involvement in the community to facilitate the establishment of the first Labor office in Northam for many years, your work ethic is second to none, and Darren's decision to recruit you to continue to work in that office has been a great outcome.

I would also like to extend my thanks to Barni Norton, who provided relief in the Northam office from time to time, and Adam Dusty, who has worked for me in the Geraldton electorate office since the election, when I transferred back to Geraldton.

Donna is here today, and although Donna Plumber and Judy Riggs both worked for Darren West, they provided support and backup not only to myself in Geraldton and Perth, but also to Geoff and Jodi. I have to say that there were a number of occasions, Donna, when I said that I was going to do something and you said, "No, you're not!" I did appreciate that very strict advice! Donna, you are the most experienced and capable political staffer I have ever had the pleasure to work with. Your help in Perth, at country shows and with running election campaigns was fantastic. Thanks, Donna.

Judy Riggs assisted me greatly in my role, especially in the Geraldton area, where she looked after all my commitments. Judy's compassion for helping constituents, especially those most disadvantaged, is amazing. I have never struck an electorate officer who can have someone at the counter going ape and sits there and patiently talks to them. Judy talks them down, finds out what the problem is and endeavours to solve it. She is an amazing lady, and, Lara, you are very lucky to have her on your staff.

I have left Lara till last in the staff acknowledgements, but I have to thank Lara. In 2017, Lara achieved a remarkable swing, but she fell short by a small margin. I was very lucky that that big swing, together with the increased vote in Moore, saw me elected and, as I said, get Labor two positions in the Agricultural Region for the first time. Lara gave it her all again in the campaign, and the massive swing this year was largely due to her own efforts. I am sure Lara will continue to be a great advocate for the people of Geraldton and the broader midwest community and be able to hold the seat for an extended period of time.

Last and by no means least, I would like to acknowledge and thank my family for embracing my decision to seek endorsement in 2017 and acknowledge the impact that it has had on them. I was in retirement mode and things all changed. After I ran for the seat of Geraldton in 1996—an election that Labor had little chance of winning—I made a commitment in 1997 that I would not stand as a political candidate again. However, I negotiated approval with my wife, "the boss", to be on the ag ticket in 2017. In doing so, I gave her the assurance that although I may assist Lara

in winning the seat of Geraldton by being on the ticket, the chances of me being elected were very remote. History says otherwise. I know that Darren and other members such as Ian Blayney saw it coming, but I certainly did not.

While I am speaking about my family, I would like to give a special thanks to my daughter Stacey, who I have stayed with for the last four years and have disrupted her family life. I am sure that she will not miss my impact on the family as I came and went at all hours of the day and night, and she accommodated my ever-changing arrangements and always produced a meal on the table whenever I arrived unexpectedly.

I am sure my wife, Heather, will wish that I was back here again after I am under her feet for an extended period of time! I think the new dog, Rain, will appreciate having me home, however, and maybe the veggie garden will flourish again.

Members, I have no definite plans for future work or community involvement. But I will continue to remain involved in organisations like Joblink Midwest as long as they want me and several parties have expressed an interest in me taking some active part to assist them in their projects. Mr Acting President, it has been a fantastic four years. Thank you, one and all.

[Applause.]
