



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Darren West, MLC**  
**(Member for Agricultural Region)**

**Legislative Council**

**Address-in-Reply**

**Thursday, 23 May 2013**

*Reprinted from Hansard*



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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

**HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural)** [3.09 pm]: Thank you, Mr President and honourable members. I am indeed privileged to be here. Only 95 members of Parliament represent the social, geographic and economic diversity of views and characters in a state that is nine times bigger than Texas. I acknowledge the former members of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly and their good work, and I also acknowledge the traditional owners, the Noongar people, and pay my respects to elders past and present. I congratulate you, Mr President, upon your appointment, and other members upon their election, and I look forward to working in the institution that is the Western Australian Parliament. I give sincere thanks to all staff in the Council, the refreshment areas, even the outdoor staff, and those who have answered my several dumb questions on what has been a steep learning curve. I look forward to working up a strong relationship with you all as well.

I was born in Edenhope, a small country town in western Victoria, not far from where Bob Hawke was born, and moved to the midwest, near Geraldton, as a toddler when my parents started out farming at East Chapman with \$20 000 and a ute. I attended primary school in Geraldton until attending boarding school in Perth. I obtained a music scholarship and went there as an 11-year-old, which was very difficult as I was rather a small boy. I had a smart mouth and I sang in the choir. I learned some very sound survival instincts at Guildford Grammar School. Later, after we sold the property in Geraldton, we moved back to Victoria to a farm not far from where my father grew up. During this time my father was diagnosed with degenerative heart disease and subsequently received the ultimate gift of life—a heart transplant. Ten years later we came back to Western Australia for good, purchasing Loughmore at Jennacubbine in the WA wheatbelt with my father, Howard, and mother, Lyn. I decided to go farming and give up a career and university. I probably would have ended up in the mining industry and might have been sitting on the other side with you guys!

**Hon Michael Mischin:** It's not too late!

**Hon DARREN WEST:** It is far too late!

Not so long after this Lesley and I married, and the children arrived soon after; our first child, Madeleine, arrived on this very day 18 years ago. This beautiful young woman is studying law at the University of Western Australia, speaks fluent French and plays piano like an angel. As you can tell, I am more than happy to have my inaugural speech rate as the second most important event in our family today. Happy birthday, princess. Dylan breezes through school at Aquinas College—Mr Sawle asked me to mention Aquinas today!—and consistently knocks out batsmen's stumps. He spends much of his time studying the physics of reverse swing—best figures: four for one. He can fill our house with Hendrix riffs; it is great. He is my new best mate. Tragically, our third child was taken from us as a result of complications at birth. To us, the first star seen in the night sky is always known as "Cooper's star". At around this time I also lost my father, who had the strongest influence on me; he taught me to never give up and that there is always a way. He was my best mate. He was tough in every sense of the word, having

survived leukaemia and his heart transplant. We were blessed to have an extra 13 years with this great man. It was a difficult time for all of the family when he passed and I learnt firsthand the difficulties of the farming business and keeping a family together, both of which he did very successfully.

I had the honour of being appointed chair of the Wheatbelt Development Commission for six years, and I am very proud to have been appointed by both Labor and Liberal–National governments. This was a most fruitful time for me as I learnt about what makes the wheatbelt work. This allowed me to spend time with its amazing people and it exposed me to an amazing group of like-minded people who made up the Wheatbelt Development Commission board. They had a broad range of skills and ideas and were able to lift the profile and the public perception of the commission during this time. I was also the chair when royalties for regions started. It was great for country areas and we had to adapt to meet the new funding requirements. I was also exposed to the machinery of government and the associated bureaucracy, who I did not find to be all paper shufflers but, rather, a steadying influence on a young chair who wanted to fix the wheatbelt now! I was fortunate to be able to forge some strong working relationships and friendships during this time and I picked up a lot of good information on the way.

I have had strong involvement in education. I chaired the school board at Sacred Heart Catholic School. The Building the Education Revolution grant, despite all its —

**Hon Liz Behjat:** Faults.

**Hon DARREN WEST:** No; there was a lot of talk about the BER grant, but for us it was great. We rebuilt our little school and ensured its future. Enrolments have risen, resources are better and staff want to teach there. It has been fantastic for the school. After that I went on to be CEO of the School Resources Committee, which allocates over \$700 million to WA Catholic schools and I learnt a lot. A quality education can never be taken away, and it is my view that we are not doing enough in Australia's wealthiest state to address the inequity in education. Western Australia should embrace the opportunities the Gonski review provides and the associated federal funding model that will come with it.

I have always been drawn to the values of the Australian Labor Party, and as a legislator I will fight for those values in this Parliament. Equality, fairness and equal opportunity for all, regardless of postcode, race or social standing are important to me. We need to support our working people and ensure that they can hold aspiration and hope. Australia is powered by its workers. Similarly, WA appears to be the only state in the commonwealth not to care about the gross inequities in funding for those with disabilities by stonewalling the National Disability Insurance Scheme. It is way time that we gave the less fortunate a hand up to maximise the enormous potential of all Western Australians.

I would hope that in my time in this Parliament it has the courage and the energy to deal with issues such as voluntary euthanasia, an issue that I feel most strongly about. It is now the year 2013; there is a better way.

The Agricultural Region is rather large and has around 90 000 voters. The region extends from Kalbarri to Bremer Bay, and as the lone Labor member I look forward to the enormous challenge that lies ahead. I thank the voters for their confidence in me and the WA Labor state executive for endorsing me into this position. Special thanks to the four lower house candidates in the Agricultural Region, Kathryn in Geraldton, Peter in Moore, John in Central Wheatbelt and Josh in Wagin, for working as hard as they did against the odds. We were outspent 10 to one in these seats in real conservative country. These people are true believers indeed, and I thank them for their unwavering support of Australia's oldest political party and what it stands for. We had a great time during the campaign and it was a great team. Thanks to all supporters

and members for your help. Sadly, I also experienced firsthand appalling behaviour during the election campaign, with the recording of voice messages and their subsequent circulation to the media. I understand that the gloves come off during an election campaign, but the fight should be fair. I was extraordinarily disappointed and no apology has ever been forwarded.

It is well documented that the agricultural sector faces significant challenges, the like of which we have not seen since the 1930s. It is tough on the business but even tougher on its people. I applaud the federal government for acknowledging this and offering some meaningful help. Why is our state government not doing the same? The token effort those opposite have put forward is a kick in the guts to a strongly supportive community.

I would not have this opportunity without the unwavering support of my amazing wife and business partner, Lesley, who has been the cornerstone of my journey so far; also my mum and business partner, Lyn, and my sisters, Helen and Jennifer, along with their husbands, Greg and Rob, and my in-laws, Barry and Terri Chattaway, who have supported me all the way. I have enjoyed information and advice from a great many people. Thanks so much to Kim Chance, Geoff Gallop, Eric Ripper, Alannah MacTiernan, Mark McGowan and the many other MPs who have mentored me, taken innumerable phone calls and offered good advice. Thanks also to John Halden, Ruth Webber, Bill Johnston, Sally Talbot, Simon Mead and Lenda Oshalem at the party office who have taught me much about the behind-the-scenes business of party politics. I would especially like to thank Tanya and Kristian, David and Roslyn, Daine and Lisa, and Paul Tomlinson, along with several other family members and friends for the hours of discussion and their street wisdom.

I am a very fortunate Western Australian. It is my view that everyone should be afforded the opportunities I have. Our farm business is growing very well; we no longer have the \$20 000, but we still have the ute! I have had a look around the world and spent a year in the US on a scholarship; there is truly nowhere else like here. I look forward to working extremely hard with my Labor colleagues. We are the light on the hill and the voice of those without one. There is enough for everyone in Western Australia and I find it impossible to condone the allocation of hideous wealth to some and poverty to others. This needs to change. We are the ones who have the job and we need to do it as a collective. We must never give up when the going gets tough. I am proudly driven not by what I can be, but how I can help others. I look forward to the next four years. We have an obligation to future generations to leave the place better than we found it.

[Applause.]

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