



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Andrea Mitchell MLA
(Member for Kingsley)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 6 November 2008

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MS A.R. MITCHELL (Kingsley) [3.49 pm]: I move —

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's speech be agreed to —

May it please Your Excellency —

We, the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the speech that you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the position of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly. That position and your deliberations will be instrumental in ensuring fair and constructive debate in the house. I also congratulate my parliamentary colleagues and the honourable Premier in the outcome of the election, which resulted in a change of government. I am most honoured to be a member of this Liberal-National government.

KINGSLEY

I am pleased that I have been elected to represent the electorate of Kingsley in the northern suburbs. I wish to thank the people of Kingsley for their support, and I will continue to listen to them and work with them to ensure that the electorate is well served. Kingsley is a compact electorate comprising the suburbs of Greenwood, Kingsley and Woodvale and falls within the City of Joondalup. It is primarily a residential electorate with many people in small business and middle management. They are all striving to provide opportunities for their families. They are people who support the principles of hard work. They are not seeking handouts but are seeking acknowledgement of their efforts through good government. Many people have been in the electorate since the suburbs were developed. As a result, the electorate of Kingsley now consists of a broad demographic of ages and has the additional requirements of such a community. The people are very active in their communities and they care greatly about the issues that exist. These issues revolve predominantly around law and order, education, transport and health. It pleases me that people within my electorate are actively involved in local issues as I believe that this makes for a more effective community. If people do not get involved or believe that there is not anything they can do to effect change, our communities will suffer. Community engagement is critical to the success of our society, and this has been demonstrated on many occasions—unfortunately, usually when there has been a crisis. **The strength and success of our communities and our state lies within our people.**

BACKGROUND

I believe that my personal and professional backgrounds have prepared me for this important role as a member of Parliament. I was born in Brisbane, Queensland, and my family comprised my parents and two sisters. We had a very normal life. When I was in year 5, my experiences broadened in a most positive way when my father was transferred by his work to a small town in north Queensland called Bowen. The five years that my family had in this town were amazing and formed a significant part of my life, and they have been instrumental in how my life developed. My father was transferred again, this time to Perth. We arrived in 1970, once again planning to stay only five years, but we are still here because we fell in love with Perth and its lifestyle.

My family has always been active in the community, from sporting groups through to church and community organisations. Volunteering was very much a part of our upbringing and I recognise and support the valuable and necessary role of volunteers in our community at all levels. I was originally booked in to attend Brisbane Girls Grammar School for my high school education but as we were living in north Queensland, my parents determined that I would attend the local high school rather than board in Brisbane and we would stay together as a family. This was a significant decision in our lives with respect to our education. Likewise, when we arrived in Perth, there was no hesitation to enrol in the local high school, with my family again placing its confidence in the public education system. My education and my teaching roles have been in public education. **I support the need to ensure that there is a strong and viable education system in both the public and private domains.** I completed a Bachelor of Physical Education at the University of Western Australia and was an inaugural graduate of this degree. I then completed my Diploma of Education and commenced my teaching career. I enjoyed my time teaching, which covered 15 years at four government high schools. Developing and educating young people is a very rewarding and, of course, at times very challenging experience. It is vital that our education system supports our young people as they prepare for the future. Education is a lifelong process and should be a positive experience.

I then moved into the Department of Sport and Recreation, where I held a number of positions, but I must say that my most recent role was also the most rewarding. I managed the regional service for the department, using sport and recreation to achieve broader based community outcomes while at the same time improving the lifestyle of people living in the regions. I would like to take this opportunity to promote the value of sport and recreation in our community; it forms the social fabric of any community. It has the potential to prevent many problems in health, crime and antisocial behaviour. It assists in education, tourism, community development and social cohesion. It develops people. My experience has demonstrated to me that we have an amazing state and that there are incredible people throughout regional Western Australia who are committed to reinventing their towns and their industries and to growing the opportunities in the country. **This has led me to firmly believe that we must develop our state outside of Perth.** I can most happily recall my working times at Quobba station, Indigenous camps at the Argyle diamond mine, Meekatharra and Kalumburu, as well as at the more well-known places of Albany, Esperance, Broome, Kununurra, Kalgoorlie, the mid-west, the Gascoyne, the Pilbara and the south west. **I will always support the people in regional Western Australia who make this state what it is.**

For many years I had the privilege of holding the position of President of Tennis West, overseeing the development of the game of tennis in Western Australia. There is not a town in regional Western Australia without a tennis court; it is part of the social fabric of these communities. In addition, I was a director of Tennis Australia, which sets the direction of tennis in Australia and conducts the highly successful Australian Open. I remain a director of the Hopman Cup; in fact, I am the only director of this International Tennis Federation event who lives in Perth. Through tennis I developed extensive networks at state, national and international level as I attended meetings in many parts of the world. These contacts are now friends—another outcome of the value of sport.

Some may say that I have made a significant change in the direction of my life by entering politics. It has not been my lifelong ambition to be a politician, but politics and government have always been a keen interest of mine. I am the first member of my extended family who has moved into the political arena. I enjoyed watching from the outside and am now pleased to be actively involved in a Liberal-National government, contributing to the people of Western Australia from the inside. The sport and recreation industry is full of politics and I am well versed in getting the best from people in situations that require a cool head and a calm, considered approach. The sport and recreation industry is a people industry, and politics is about representing people and preparing the future for our people. Setting the direction for the future of Western Australia is a critical component that I am excited about as there are few professions that can really impact in this area. It is a great responsibility that we have and one that should be foremost in our minds. I would describe myself as a person who enjoys looking to the future and shaping what needs to be done now to prepare for that. I do not believe in just letting things happen.

COMMUNITY CHANGES

Our community is facing the impact of several large, sophisticated and complex issues. We cannot think that we are immune from the impacts of a changing climate and, more recently, the global financial meltdown. These issues will have major impacts but I believe will also provide us with significant opportunities. For our state and its people we must deal with these issues by adopting a cooperative government approach led by those of us entrusted by the community to work and find solutions at the international, national, state and local levels. This Parliament has a significant responsibility in this; therefore, I support an approach based on the quadruple bottom line, especially at the level at which I can influence it in this house. In this, I believe in balance—it is not just about the economic bottom line.

I find that in many ways regional Western Australia is a very good barometer for social change as initially changes are more evident in the country and can take longer to be identified in the city. One of the significant changes in our society is the change in our communities. Believe me, our communities are changing faster than they ever have and many aspects of our lives are not keeping up. These changes are based on, amongst other things, work practices—I refer to fly in, fly out; drive in, drive out; shift work; and casual work—family structures and disengagement between people.

I refer initially to the changes in work practices and the impact of those changes on our society. We must find ways to deal with the impact of fly in, fly out; drive in, drive out; and shift and casual work. We must consider how we can develop ways to adapt in order to achieve strong and effective communities in this ever-changing world.

Our family structures are changing. Our families are smaller, often broken and even totally disengaged with each other. We are now, more than ever, operating as one-parent-type families as a result of many issues, including changing work practices. We —are experiencing a significant loss of people who make a voluntary contribution to the community, such as helping out in the school canteen or being a volunteer in a community organisation taking on additional responsibilities.

It is most disturbing when we read, and can recognise, that gangs are becoming the families of young people. Is our community so unsure of itself that it is neither confident nor prepared to set boundaries, but instead appears to accept all forms of antisocial behaviour—in particular, the rationalisation and normalisation of behaviours previously deemed unacceptable by the wider community?

We are creating our future now and there are many challenges and issues for our community that do not always give me a great deal of confidence for the future. Basically, these issues are related to the **concept of connectedness** in both the family and the community. Our society works when people are connected—preferably in a positive way. Will the decisions that we make connect people

or isolate people? Why is it that we are now more concerned about spending more money on traffic-calming devices at schools rather than spending money to continue employing a crosswalk attendant at a primary school—an attendant whom the community, parents, teachers and children trust? By the way, it costs an awful lot more to install a traffic-calming device than to pay a crosswalk attendant!

Is it good that people hide in their houses behind roller shutters rather than take an active—or even a passive—interest in their neighbourhood? Is it good that people will not call the police when they are concerned about antisocial activity in their neighbourhood because they perceive that they will be put at risk?

Young people are our future. We must provide an environment in which young people can develop and take on positive and leadership roles in the community.

We must not forget our senior people. These people made our country what it is. They worked hard. They went without. They saved before they bought. They still make a valuable contribution to our society through their volunteering; their child minding, and now the raising of children; and by their caring for loved ones and family. That value is enormous and our state is the beneficiary of these people.

We members must also take on responsibilities. In this Parliament we have a great responsibility and I challenge each one of us to accept this responsibility and to act accordingly.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In conclusion, I must take this opportunity to acknowledge and thank the people who have been instrumental in my life and this next step in my career. Firstly, I thank my parents, Ron and Margaret Mitchell, who are, unfortunately, in Sydney this week with my sister Janet and her family. They have provided a close family environment with strong Christian values and support. I thank my Perth sister Glynis, her husband, Mark, and their children, Mitchell, Matthew and Bronte, for their love and support and for bringing me back to what really matters in life—on many occasions!

I thank the Liberal Party of Western Australia for its endorsement. This process began—as one might expect—on a tennis court in Perth with a group of young Sri Lankan players, and continued thanks to Hon Peter Collier and Pastor Margaret Court. Peter, in particular, continued to play a key role in my campaign and election and I thank him for his guidance and his support.

It has been a remarkable and very fast journey. I sincerely thank the many people who have been a part of this experience. There was not one person with whom I discussed the next step who did not encourage me to proceed. I acknowledge the people of the Cowan division and, in particular, the Greenwood and Woodvale branches of the Liberal Party, whose support I have greatly appreciated. I also recognise the work of Hon Cheryl Edwardes, the former member for Kingsley, in this process.

To my friends, who may have expected that when I retired from tennis I would lead a “normal” life—and who can now only say, “Here she goes again” or “What is she doing this time?”—I say that I appreciate not only that they accept me and my actions, but also that they remain my loyal friends.

FINALLY

I am excited about the opportunities that I now have.

I am humbled by the responsibilities that I now have.

I am committed to the future of Western Australia and to the electorate of Kingsley.

[Applause.]
