



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Joe Francis MLA
(Member for Jandakot)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 25 November 2008

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR J.M. FRANCIS (Jandakot) [3.12 pm]: Firstly, I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election as Speaker of this house. I look forward to working with you and other members in the interests of all Western Australians. Secondly, I thank the people of Jandakot for the trust they have placed in me, and for the privilege of representing them in this place. It is an immense honour to join this chamber as their advocate.

Jandakot is a new seat recreated by the recent redistribution. The Aboriginal word “Jandakot” means “place of the whistling eagle”. Therefore, it is appropriate that the seat includes Australia’s largest general aviation airport. Jandakot is a seat that reflects the cosmopolitan nature of Perth itself. Situated south of Perth and covering some 67 square kilometres, it is part semi-rural and has many first home buyers and young families, and many small and large businesses. It is bounded by Roe Highway and South Street in the north, by Kwinana Freeway to Banjup in the south, and by the three lakes of South, North and Bibra in the west.

I remain an unreconstructed fan of John Howard. One of his overarching themes was aspiration, meaning the essential goodness of each citizen’s desire to improve their position by effort, risk and endeavour. In equal measure, I oppose the instinct of the left to lump people into vast, faceless collectives, to treat them as a powerless class of victims being acted on by forces beyond their control, and to reduce the romantic and heroic adventure of life into a capricious casino of chance.

If there is any group of 24 000 Australians who could rightly be called aspirational, it is the people of Jandakot. Very few of us were born into great wealth, but we are hard-working people who are determined to pass on a better standard of living to our children. I live in the seat of Jandakot. I know the people, and I share their values and hopes. I am determined to work hard to not only represent their concerns and interests in this place, but also to make Jandakot an even better place to live. There is no electorate on this vast continent that I would rather live in or represent.

Australia is the developed world’s model economy. Yes, we are experiencing tough economic times, but we are far better off than comparable countries and Western Australia is the reason why. Although we make up just 10 per cent of the national population, we contribute 36 per cent of Australia’s exports. If Australia were a business, 10 per cent of its employees would contribute 36 per cent of the profit. Western Australia has the lowest unemployment rate in the country—a full one per cent below the national average—and this, Mr Speaker, is just the beginning. Western

Australia's greatest days are ahead of us. There was a time when Asia frightened Australia. Today, Asia is both our partner and our friend. The three billion people between Mumbai and Beijing are not going anywhere: they want our natural resources and it is our duty to sell to them. There will surely be ups and downs in demand and commodity prices; however, the twenty-first century will be the century of not only the Asia-Pacific region, but also the state of Western Australia. I believe it is entirely possible that by 2050 Perth will have overtaken Sydney as Australia's financial centre and premier city. It is not that the city of Sydney will go into a decline; it is simply that we will overtake it.

If the longest journey begins with the first step, the first step begins with the spark of belief. When I look across the Indian Ocean to the tiny specks of land called Dubai and Qatar, and the other Gulf States, I am thrilled that those countries have been so successful. I ask the house: what can Western Australia achieve? It is up to us. The moment is now and the potential is enormous. Political leadership is not everything but it is an essential ingredient in the prosperity of a people. Add to that the octane of human aspiration; abundant natural resources; a rich legacy of democracy, community and the common law; and we have a combustible cocktail of opportunity.

President Reagan of the United States was one of my favourite political leaders of the twentieth century. I liked his policies and, perhaps even more importantly, his ability to renew an optimistic sense of belief in the American people. After the difficulties following the Vietnam War, and with the threat of mutually assured destruction hanging bleakly in the air, President Reagan revived the can-do spirit of the American people. Mr Speaker, I want the people of Western Australia to embrace again their can-do spirit. We have always had it but every generation needs renewal and I hope to play a role in the regeneration of that can-do spirit.

We have everything here: the greatest natural resources in the world; world-class human capital; and the underpinning political, judicial and social systems inherited from the British. All around the world it is former British colonies that are renowned for their harmony. We are only at the beginning of the great unfolding story that is Western Australia. Our best days are still ahead of us and the only limitations are those that we place on ourselves.

Prior to my election I was proud to serve as an officer in the Royal Australian Navy and equally proud to serve as a submariner. The submarine service cannot be fully understood by those who have not experienced its associated camaraderie and mateship. That is why I want to pay particular tribute to those submariners who instilled in me an ethic of leadership and professionalism—those men who have led by example and for whose friendship I am grateful. First among them, and perhaps the greatest, is Mr Max Shean, Australia's most decorated submariner, who quietly achieved so much during World War II and changed the course of history. Also included are my former Commanding Officers and Executive Officers in HMAS *Farncomb*, Commander Mark Hammond, Lieutenant Commander Shane Doolan, along with Lieutenant Commanders Michael Mitchell, Michael Jacobsen, Lieutenant Dean Barr and Lieutenant Trent Yates. It was these men who taught me so much and with whom I had the pleasure of sharing extended periods underwater.

The Navy has a saying, "You can take the sailor out of the lower decks, but you can't take the lower decks out of the sailor." I pay special tribute to Leading Seaman Andrew Hume, Leading Seaman Jason Edhouse, Able Seaman Stuart Walz, and Able Seamen Wayne Morgan and Amy Harris. As a former sailor, I understand the challenges and rewards of their jobs, and I salute them.

I am reminded of Theodore Roosevelt's statement that "a good navy is not a provocation for war but rather the swiftest guarantee of peace". Under the watch of such sterling men and women, our country's defence is in good hands. In their honour, I undertake to be a passionate fighter for the rights of veterans and ex-servicemen. Both my father and my grandfather were career sailors in the Royal Australian Navy, so my decision to serve my country by following their footsteps came easily.

Navy values of honour, honesty and loyalty were infused in me early. I believe that, like military service, politics is an honourable vocation. To serve in this house is a privilege; it is one that I will not take lightly in the discharge of my duties. It is worth noting community surveys of the trust placed in certain positions. Journalists, lawyers, politicians and used-car salesmen usually end up at the bottom of the list; doctors, teachers and military officers generally end up at the top. My goal, with the help of other members, is not to drop from the top of the list, but to raise the esteem of public office.

My gratitude goes to the Liberal Party of Australia. One of the first things I did when I turned 18 was to join the Liberal Party. Generally speaking, the older one gets, the more interested one becomes in politics. It was not a particularly cool thing to do, and I cannot explain why, but ever since I was young I can remember being interested in the television news and the newspapers. I can remember asking my parents to explain what was happening. The Liberal Party and its forerunners have governed Australia for around two-thirds of the time since Federation. It is a party with a proud history that has helped make Australia great. I am proud to belong to a party that includes the likes of Sir David Brand, Sir Charles Court and Richard Court among its leaders. They were men of vision who preferred decisions to committees, who did not fear failure and were animated by a burning desire to fulfil some great destiny for the west of Terra Australis. My political and philosophical views were formed with the support of Hon John Howard, Hon Tony Abbott and the late Bob Santamaria. I will always be indebted to them for their influence and help. In addition I thank those friends who were always willing to offer their encouragement, advice and support: Mr Stephen Gallilee and Mr John Ruddick. I could not want for better friends or confidants. I also thank former National Party Senator Bill O'Chee, current New South Wales National Party Senator John Williams and my good friends Mr Christopher Pearson and Hon Ross Cameron for their support. Mr Phil Edmand, Mr Rick Palmer and Mr Frank Parker were always available when I needed counsel. My campaign chairman, Mr Donald Gibbs, went above and beyond the call of duty, and Mr Cameron Schuster, as the man who signed my cheques, was a godsend.

I have always felt passionately about the humane treatment of animals. I am proud to have been a life member of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals for almost 15 years. We have a long way to go in alleviating the suffering of animals. Animals are not as intelligent as people, but they are intelligent and they feel pain. As long as I am in public life, I want the RSPCA and similar organisations to know that they have a friend in this house.

I am a Liberal because I believe the role of government is to give people a hand up and not a handout. I believe in limited government regulation, with unlimited business opportunities. For benefiting both business and consumers, the spirit of capitalism and free enterprise beats red tape and central planning every time.

I believe people who work long hours trying to stay afloat while costs rise and earnings fall should not have to come home and clean graffiti off their fences, repair vandalism and be kept awake by hoons during the night, as well as feeling unsafe or insecure in their own houses.

I believe effective representatives are elected to solve problems and not dwell on them.

I believe conservatives should also be conservationists, and protecting our environment needs more than just lip service.

I believe government spending should be determined by what a community needs and not by how it votes.

I believe that a dollar in the hand of a citizen is usually more wisely spent, saved or invested than a dollar in the hand of government. It follows naturally for me that we should aim to leave more money in the pockets of citizens and put less in the treasuries of governments.

I believe it is better to honestly disappoint people by doing what is right rather than temporarily appease them by doing what we know is wrong.

I believe the primary function of government is to promote conditions in which the individual enjoys freedom.

The great Australian Rupert Murdoch recently said that, while there is a genuine scientific debate about global warming, the planet deserves the benefit of the doubt. That leads me to an area on which I disagree most strongly with Australian Labor Party members, because I have a passionate belief in uranium mining in Western Australia. During the recent election campaign I noted with regret the deafening silence from advocates of uranium mining on the other side of politics. The reality is that mining uranium and reducing carbon emissions go hand in hand. Any response to carbon emissions that does not include a substantial role for nuclear energy is simply not credible. Solar, wind and geothermal power have a role, but they need the sheer grunt of fission. Nuclear power plants produce barely any carbon emissions. Coal-fired power plants are the biggest contributor to the world's carbon output. Its opponents in Australia have worked hard to invest the words "uranium" and "nuclear" with fear and loathing, but many nations, including France and Japan, generate over half of their electricity from nuclear sources. It is morally and logically incoherent for us to say that we are happy to mine and export uranium for other countries to use as low carbon energy sources but we are morally opposed to the development of nuclear energy in our own country. If the Greens and the left wing of the Labor Party really had the best interests of the environment at heart, and not the instinctive blocking of progress, they would surely agree.

I want to make special note of my experience of Aboriginal people in our state. I recall driving through New Mexico in the United States of America a few years ago—Navaho country. I pulled into a gas station and noticed that the guy filling the vehicles was a Navaho Indian. The girl behind the counter was a Navaho, as were the waitresses, chefs and the people who ran the hotel. In fact, in that town almost every small business was owned and staffed by Navaho Indians. It occurred to me that I would not see that in Australia. I pondered this situation to ascertain the reason. The answer is simple: what those people have that Aboriginals do not have is a sense of purpose. That is the reason that I applaud the intentions of Andrew Forrest, because governments are not the only answer to improving Aboriginal living standards. People like Andrew Forrest are and real jobs are.

I pay tribute to the mining companies of this state, who are by far the largest employer of Indigenous Australians of any sector of the economy. Mining companies are doing far more for practical reconciliation than all the social workers, academics, liaison officers, government agencies and sorry days combined.

There are of course reasons that I am a Liberal. One reason is that I believe in a fair go and giving anybody who wants to try a real chance at success. It is the reason that I am committed to fighting for the quality of life and basic services. The first priority of any government should be prosperity with a purpose. As Sir Robert Menzies said —

... we were determined to be a progressive party, willing to make experiments, ... but believing in the individual, his rights and his enterprise ...

I am a strong proponent of federalism. I believe that sovereignty should be constitutionally divided between a central governing authority and the states. Our founding fathers were deliberate in creating checks and balances. They felt strongly that the state's interests should be respected and safeguarded; they were wary of an intervening national executive. Government at a central and distant point can never be government of the people. The great Austrian-Jewish philosopher Karl Popper talked about the limited ability of any central agency or plan to understand, govern and control something as diverse, unpredictable, fast moving and innovative as a democratic society. That is why I reject the premise that state legislatures should cede more and more functions to the

commonwealth. However, I accept that Australians are over-governed and that local, state and federal powers should approach their task with a listening ear, a light touch and a desire to increase the realm of the private, civil and voluntary society and reduce our call on the state's monopoly over coercion and compulsion through the law and regulation.

I was not born in this state, but I chose to call Western Australia home. In the past decade over 300 000 people have made the decision to cross the Nullarbor or oceans to start a new life in Western Australia. Eight years ago I was one of those people. This collaboration of different nationalities, ethnicity and interstate parochialism contributes to the special diversity that is Western Australia. I fell in love with this state the day I moved here.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the love and support of my wife Vicki, who is in the public gallery, and our beloved fur kids: our German shepherds Sasha and Rex. Vicki has not just stood behind me during this campaign; she has walked next to me each day and I am forever in her debt.

Without the support, help and love of my family, I would not be here. I could never adequately express the thanks that my father Charles deserves for the gifts he has given me. Dad came to Perth for the last week of the campaign and he turned 76 on the day of the election. He is a true Australian hero and a proud Vietnam veteran. There is nothing my mother would not do to help me. From the sacrifices my parents made to provide me with a Jesuit education, through to the day-to-day tasks they still happily perform, I am eternally grateful. My sister Janelle, who is ill and I wish her the best, is the best sister a bloke could ever want.

I have also been blessed with the support of Margie and Brian and would like to thank them for everything they have done to assist me.

Every member knows the value of local supporters, such as my friends in my own suburb of Atwell, including Steve Portelli and Sharon Leitch. The warm welcome we have received from the Leeming Bowling Club has been outstanding.

In conclusion, I would like to remind the house of the 10 commandments of William Boetcker. These are the principles I will keep in mind every time we are called upon to act in this place —

You cannot bring about prosperity by discouraging thrift
 You cannot strengthen the weak by weakening the strong
 You cannot help little men by tearing down big men
 You cannot lift the wage earner by pulling down the wage payer
 You cannot help the poor by destroying the rich
 You cannot establish sound security on borrowed money
 You cannot further the brotherhood of man by inciting class hatred
 You cannot keep out of trouble by spending more than you earn
 You cannot build character and courage by destroying men's initiative and independence
 And you cannot help men permanently by doing for them what they can and should do for themselves.

[Applause.]
