



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Dr Katrina Stratton, MLA
(Member for Nedlands)

Legislative Assembly
Address-in-Reply
Tuesday, 4 May 2021

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 29 April on the following motion moved by Ms L. Dalton —

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

To His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, AC, Governor of the State of Western Australia.

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 you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

DR K. STRATTON (Nedlands) [7.35 pm]: I thank the Leader of the House for that, because the member for Victoria Park actually left me in tears. You have let me start in good humour instead, so thank you!

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I would like to begin by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land upon which we stand today, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, their continuing culture and the contributions they make to the life of this place, this community and this state. I also pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging, and make particular acknowledgement of the Aboriginal people in the chamber.

INTRODUCTION

It is indeed an honour to stand in this house as the very first Labor member for Nedlands. It is an equal source of pride to stand here as only the second woman to hold this seat since its inception in 1930. There are, indeed, very many legacies associated with the seat of Nedlands. Importantly, however, looking forward there is an opportunity to work alongside the community of Nedlands and to show them what it means to have an active, engaged and inclusive Labor local member.

It is this nature of legacy and, in particular, the shoulders of the women on which I and many others here stand, that I wish to reflect upon today.

THE NATURE OF LEGACY: WOMEN IN PUBLIC LIFE

EDITH COWAN

We come together to form this, the forty-first Parliament, in the centenary of Edith Cowan's election to the Western Australian Parliament—the first woman elected to any Parliament in Australia. Long before her election, Edith played a very important role in public life, advancing and progressing many issues for women and children that still stand today in the Western Australian community. She showed us what was possible, and we have witnessed women taking on increasingly diverse and non-traditional roles within public and civic life, including the recent appointment of Madam Speaker, Hon Michelle Roberts, as the first female Speaker of this house. I add my congratulations to the well-deserved chorus.

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AN ODE TO MY SOCIAL WORK COLLEAGUES

I stand here also on the shoulders of my social work colleagues, students and the communities that we serve. It is a female-dominated profession committed to social justice, human dignity and integrity. We provide care and advocacy for people, populations and problems that are very often rendered invisible or hidden—people and places that show us the very worst, but also the very best, of the human condition.

Social work and community service are, to me, hope in action. Hope is a human endeavour. We find it in our aspirations, our struggles, our connections and our spirit. To even embark on a career in social work is a quest in hope—hope that the world can be better, can be kinder and can be more just, that people can and do grow and recover, that lives improve, and that the structures that inform those lives can be built on foundations of fairness and justice.

However, if hope is to be a spark for change, it must be active and it must be fuelled by both imagination and evidence of what works. There are two women I would like to introduce members to this evening whose contributions to social wellbeing in Western Australia represent imagination and evidence.

FLORENCE HUMMERSTON

For the last decade I have worked at Wanslea Family Services, a Western Australian not-for-profit organisation providing care and services to children and families across this state. Wanslea was founded during the Second World War by Florence Hummerston, a woman of amazing imagination and innovation. During the Second World War, Florence became the founding president of the Women's Australian National Service, which performed many traditional activities, such as preserving fruit, sewing uniforms and social activities, to support the war effort.

Florence soon recognised that the women whose husbands were at war were effectively sole parents. Many, too, were also taking on roles in the workplace traditionally held by men. Recognising this, Florence led the development of a compassionate, caring and responsive organisation focused on the welfare of children. She opened a hostel in North Perth where children of servicemen could stay while their mothers recuperated from illness or for respite. Although the original intention had been to cease the service at the end of the war, the baby boom and what we now know as post-traumatic stress disorder for returning service men and women saw the ongoing need for and then the birth of Wanslea Family Services. Florence would later become the first female councillor for the City of Perth, a position she would hold for some 18 years, from 1951 to 1969. Madam Speaker and colleagues, I acknowledge Florence for showing us the importance of a responsive and innovative community services sector, which is always turning to emerging community need, much as we are bearing witness to now as the impact of COVID-19 on our wellbeing becomes better known. I also take this opportunity to thank my Wanslea colleagues, in particular, CEO Tricia Murray, AM, for their support not just throughout my campaign but also over the last decade of service.

PROFESSOR DONNA CHUNG

The other acknowledgement I wish to make to my social work colleagues today is to Donna Chung, John Curtin distinguished professor. Professor Chung's work in understanding family and domestic violence and effective service and policy responses is internationally renowned. Many of the innovative service responses we see in response to domestic violence are informed by Donna's research. I hold a deep professional and personal respect for Professor Chung, who has worked passionately and tirelessly for decades for the rights of women and children who are experiencing and are impacted by domestic violence. Donna, while I thank you personally for being a role model, a mentor and a friend, I want to bring your legacy of evidence-informed policy, evidence-informed service design and delivery and legislative reform to the work that we undertake in this house, too.

I also thank my Curtin colleagues for their support and, in particular, their understanding, as my campaign happened to coincide with the start of semester 1 teaching.

I also acknowledge those who have brought social work values and ways of knowing, being and doing to Parliament, both here and in Canberra, before me. The very first was Grace Vaughan, then Kay Hallahan, Stanley Halden, Francis Donovan, Jann McFarlane and, of course, Hon Don Punch.

THE NATURE OF LEGACY: WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE SPHERE

These formal and public roles and legacies of women are important and need celebrating. It remains true, however, that many of the roles women play and the contributions we make to the community are still largely embedded in the private sphere, often hidden, often invisible and often undervalued. Yet, in my 25 years of community services work, I have seen women step up to provide very complex care to highly vulnerable individuals, people for whom neither the state, the market nor the community are coming to provide.

GRANDPARENTS RAISING THEIR GRANDCHILDREN FULL TIME: THEIR CONTRIBUTION AND SACRIFICES, AND A CALL TO ACTION

There is a very particular and very important group of women and men that I acknowledge today who step up to provide love and care to children who are often unsafe and often vulnerable. My dear colleagues of Grandparents Rearing Grandchildren WA Inc, you know that you are one of the other reasons I have the honour of standing here today. Grandparents who are raising their grandchildren on a full-time basis is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care for children in need of care and protection in Australia. This group of grandparents step up to take responsibility for and provide full-time care to their grandchildren when it is no longer safe for them to live at home. Often formed in a period of crisis, these families come together in response to parental substance use, mental health, domestic violence and incarceration, and very often the intersection of all these issues. The majority of these arrangements are considered informal; that is, it is a family arrangement. This means that there is no legal recognition of the grandparents' responsibility and rights when it comes to the care of and decision-making for their grandchildren. Their ability to access both universal and specialist services are negatively impacted by this. Yet, their care keeps their grandchildren out of the formal foster care system and that system's short and long-term challenges, costs and negative outcomes. There are financial and social savings to the state and community for grandparents' sacrifices, too. We know that children in the care of their grandparents experience greater stability and longevity in their placements. Their outcomes are better than for children in the care system, as they are known and, most importantly, they are well loved.

Having been on the board of Tuart Place for many years—a unique participant-led organisation that provides support to care leavers, including child migrants and forgotten Australians, I know that the impact of a care experience is lifelong. The care leavers of Tuart Place have taught me that this impact is about not only ongoing pain and trauma, but also resilience and recovery, particularly when their care experience is seen, heard and acknowledged. It is important that we get children's care journey right—that it be safe, secure, loving, supported and resourced. We should do this for the improved social and economic outcomes and savings that brings to us but, mostly, we need to get it right for human reasons.

Through research that Wanslea conducted with Edith Cowan University and Curtin University over the last four years, grandparents told us that they derive immense joy and great satisfaction in caring for their grandchildren—keeping them safe, secure and well loved. Yet, they also told us that they do so at great sacrifice to all aspects of their wellbeing, being worse off than their peers across dimensions of social health, mental and physical health, financial health and employment and housing security. This cost is exacerbated by navigating complex service and policy systems that can contribute to their invisibility.

As a community and a state, we have an opportunity to step up, as grandparent carers do, to create a fairer future for all grandchildren: to create an evidence of care system, a way of demonstrating grandparents have both the rights and responsibilities to make decisions for their grandchildren; to have grandparent advisers in key government organisations, to reduce their invisibility in service systems and facilitate access to required services; to have specialist legal advice to support not just the obvious custody and care arrangements, but also often complex financial, retirement and estate planning, too; to create a parliamentary friends of grandparent carers to provide a focus and voice in this house; and advocacy to our federal colleagues to improve the accessibility of Centrelink in particular.

To the grandparent carers whom I have come to know as my colleagues and friends, my promise to you is to continue to give voice to all you do for your grandchildren, your families and us as a community.

THE NATURE OF LEGACY: THE CENTRALITY OF THE CARE ECONOMY AND COMMUNITY SERVICES SECTOR

Grandparents and other carers are part of a broader network of community services and what is often called the care economy. COVID-19 has shown us many things, including the social, economic, health and human importance of these sectors. Female-dominated sectors were at the front line of the services that remained throughout the hardest times of the pandemic—childcare workers, retail workers, nurses and health workers, those who work in aged care, and the broad network of community services, including the diverse array of large and small non-profit organisations across Western Australia. Community services rallied, showing our capacity to be agile and innovative and always responsive to emerging community needs. COVID-19 has seen the need for increased and varied responses, particularly to family and domestic violence, homelessness, child safety and mental health. The increased demand for services is ongoing, and many are at or beyond capacity. There are long waitlists to manage and the impact of those on both the people we serve and those who serve is meaningful. Yet, in how we respond to the pandemic recovery, the role and centrality of the community services sector is often lost in analysis, recognition and job recovery plans.

We need to continue to grow our investment in the care economy and community services during the COVID-19 recovery and beyond. Actioning existing strategies and plans to address homelessness, family and domestic violence and poverty are essential. These are made urgent by a global pandemic. Addressing such issues will have important economic and social outcomes, but, again, our reasons for valuing and investing in the community services sector should be driven primarily by human and humane reasons. I am really proud to stand here as an advocate for my sector and its place in our economic, social and human life, including our recovery from COVID-19.

THE NATURE OF LEGACY: AN ODE TO MY MATRIARCHS

There is still much to be achieved in terms of gender equity. Our shoulders, too, must remain strong and robust for others ahead of us to stand on and see a different future. I think, too, of my women, including my granny, Phyllis Edington, who was the first social worker in the family. Although she might not have had the piece of paper as such, her compassion, inclusivity and sensitivity to others' needs were a model for me into my calling to community service. She remains one of the kindest people I have ever had the pleasure to know. Kindness—to each other, to the planet and to ourselves—is perhaps the greatest gift we can offer.

My grandmother, Marjorie Katherine Stratton, taught me what grace and courage in the face of loss looks like. To love fiercely despite loss is perhaps one of the most courageous lessons that I have been taught. My brother, Ben, sister, Leonie, and I were lucky to be the recipients of that love, and I witness my mother-in-law, Joan Toole, delivering the same lesson—loving her grandchildren with a ferocity that is brave and beautiful in the face of our shared loss.

I stand between my mother, Jenny Stratton, and my daughter, Catherine Lily Stratton, linking the generations. Like my grandmother, mum has shown what it means to be kind and compassionate, and to take the needs and feelings of others into account when deciding who and what you are in the world. Catherine extends that. She is known as a person who can get along with anyone—much like her dad did—make them feel at ease, make them laugh and make them see the best of themselves.

Her brother, Oliver Dermot Stratton, has this same compassion and kindness, but his is bounded with a strong thread of social justice. Again, much like his dad did, he will stand up to be counted when he sees a wrong. He is already, at 17, an engaged and values-driven citizen. He, too, is politically active, and when we discussed my running for the seat of Nedlands—in this, his ATAR year—he was cool, calm and accepting.

NEDLANDS CAMPAIGN 2021: THANK YOU

And so began the campaign for Nedlands: a short and sharp six weeks, which began with a one-week lockdown. In that time, we engaged over 120 volunteers. Many of them were first-time campaign volunteers and were not yet members of the party. They carried out a broad range of tasks for not only the campaign, but also my family. So, yes, there were many pamphlets delivered, phone calls made, community engagement activities and events held and a lot of how-to-vote cards distributed. But there were also meals cooked, cakes delivered, listening ears offered and children cared for. As a campaign team, we were always clear that we would run a positive and local community-based campaign. It would be a campaign informed by Labor values of justice and inclusivity, and one with integrity at its core. The feedback we constantly got from the pre-poll and on the election day itself was that our volunteers were committed, engaged and positive. While I thank you for all the practical tasks you carried out, it is for working in alignment with those values that I want to say a particular thank you.

TO MY CAMPAIGN TEAM

Sandra Nelson, my campaign director, was the first Labor member for the seat of Katherine in the Northern Territory, which she won by 28 votes. Sandra lived the knowledge that there is no unwinnable seat; there is just a seat that has not been won before. That became our campaign mantra. Sandra, your passion, your straight-talking, your strategic thinking and your integrity were and are a force to be reckoned with.

Bev Jowle was the first to ask if we could stop talking about unwinnable seats and instead talk about challenging seats. This is another example of what those of us from the community services bring to the table—always strength-based and always optimistic. Bev, while working full time, was also the one who managed those 120 volunteers across the many weeks and hours of campaigning and pre-polling. I thank you, Bev.

Michael Berry, who created the all-important campaign soundtrack, would also start every meeting with a list of innovative wins and hopes. Yes, he is a social worker too. He brought these qualities together post-election to form what has become our campaign ode. Michael, your optimism was, as it always is, a gift, a joy and a salve for the soul.

Angela Barns—AB—your boundless enthusiasm and humour and searing analysis were so necessary. You brought, too, the familiarity of our social work ways of knowing, being and doing to the work. I thank you not just for your campaigning, but also for your decades of friendship and collegiality.

Cathy O’Toole, my mentor through EMILY’S List Australia, was always available, always wise, always kind, always optimistic. Cathy won the federal seat of Herbert for Labor in 2016, the first time that Labor had held the seat for 23 years. She won it by 37 votes. People might see something of a theme in the kind of mentors I was seeking. Cathy always brought me back to a commitment of enacting Labor values and what they had to offer the electorate.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr K. STRATTON: Finally, to my colleagues in Perth Labor Women—a place for learning about the party, procedure, policy and advocacy. This branch is always pushing for equality for women in the party and policy, and for a gendered lens across all our decision-making. Under the leadership of Helen Tuck, the branch also provides opportunities for women to try out their political voice and aspirations.

However, my most important thanks belong to my family and particularly to my son, Oliver, and daughter, Catherine. Being your mother is my greatest adventure ever. I am always told about, and I live with, your kindness and your compassion, but also the commitment that you both show to people being included and heard. I am so proud of the family the three of us have created, and I thank you for coming with me on this great adventure.

THE NATURE OF LEGACY IN THE SEAT OF NEDLANDS: LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING FORWARD

I now turn to Nedlands, the place I have called home for 40 of my 48 years. It is a beautiful place to live, on the banks of the Derbarl Yerrigan and with Kings Park on our doorstep. My parents moved there in the 1970s so the three of us children could have access to the exceptional public education opportunities on offer. That was my same reason for returning 11 years ago with what was then a young family.

One of my friends observed that election night was a little bit like watching the Brownlow count, but it was for political nerds instead. I am going to assume that I have a receptive audience here for some political nerd kind of details, and so I want to share with you some numbers.

In 1929, the seat of Nedlands was created. In 1930, the seat elected its first of many Liberal members. The electorate is now home to eight suburbs and just over 30 000 voters, and covers 31 square kilometres.

Two is the number of Premiers the seat has been home to. Five is the number of Nedlands members who have held ministerial or shadow ministerial positions. Two is the number of women who have held this seat, and I am proud to be the second.

The year 2017 was the state election year in which Penny Taylor, the WA Labor candidate, who with a swing vote of 10.9 per cent reduced the two-party preferred margin in favour of the Liberals to the lowest it had been since 1933. I thank you, Penny, for that leading legacy.

Twelve years was how long my predecessor had held the seat. Hon Bill Marmion was my local member for the whole time since I returned to live in Nedlands. Bill, I want to thank you for your many years of service to the people of Nedlands, and to the state of Western Australia through your ministerial and shadow ministerial roles. I thank you particularly for your kindness to me on the campaign trail, for running a positive campaign and for your very public good wishes post-election.

Eight point six per cent was the margin in the seat, before a boundary redistribution after the 2017 state election. When we welcomed parts of West Perth, that margin became eight per cent.

Depending on which poll you read and/or believed, 80 to 92 per cent was the approval rating of our Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, as we headed into election day. This was meaningful in the electorate of Nedlands, where 32 per cent of our population is aged over 65. They told us many times on pre-poll how they had felt particularly scared and vulnerable during COVID-19. Premier, I was asked many times to pass on to you a message of thanks for seeing our older people, for seeing their vulnerability, for protecting them and for keeping them—and all of us—safe.

Sixty-eight years—the longest someone told us they had been a Liberal voter and were now voting Labor for the first time. We had quite a few of those! So many people told us they were a first-time Labor voter. The year 2025 is the year that they will become second-time Labor voters!

One hundred and sixty-seven was the number of votes by which we won the primary vote, or 0.7 of one per cent for those who prefer comparative statistics. The swing to Labor in the primary vote was 9.1 per cent, and 10.8 per cent was the two-party-preferred swing. We won nine out of 12 of the booths. The seat took five days to count and declare. Fifty-five is how many days that actually felt like!

Four—the number of resignation letters I have had to write. Again, to my colleagues at Wanslea Family Services, Curtin University, the University of Western Australia and the board of Tuart Place, thank you for your generosity in supporting my campaign and for hoping that I would not be back!

Five point six per cent is the margin by which the Labor Party now holds the seat of Nedlands. And one is the number of Labor members this seat has had—for now!

THE SEAT OF NEDLANDS: THE STORY BEHIND THE NUMBERS

Behind these numbers, though, is a story—a story of gratitude and a story of community. Nedlands gave me a great childhood and an excellent education. It gives me a safe place to raise my children, with lots of opportunities on their doorstep. The community of Nedlands stood by us when the worst thing that ever happened to us, happened to us. Nedlands gives me a beautiful natural environment to both enjoy and to protect. I am so grateful for this community.

I am also grateful to the people of Nedlands, Dalkeith, Subiaco, Shenton Park, Daglish, Jolimont and West Perth for the honour you have granted me in representing you, to work with you, to work alongside you in service; and in representing all of Nedlands, all members of our community, whether you voted Labor for the first time or have done so all your life. I bring with me to that service the lessons from all the legacies that I have spoken of today: to live and to serve with courage, with grace and with kindness in ways that are inclusive and are always about progressing social justice for our most vulnerable—to serve in gratitude and collaboration but always to serve with hope. My esteemed colleagues, I consider all of us to be brokers of hope, and that together, and in this very particular Parliament, we can contribute to a society that is more just and more inclusive. Thank you.

[Applause.]