



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Don Punch, MLA

(Member for Bunbury)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 May 2017

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 16 May on the following motion moved by Ms J.J. Shaw —

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

To Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, 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.

MR D.T. PUNCH (Bunbury) [12.49 pm]: Madam Acting Speaker, my congratulations to you and also to the member for Albany on his appointment as Speaker of the fortieth Parliament. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of this land, the Whadjuk people, and pay my respects to elders past and present, and also to the elders of the south west from whom I have learnt so much over the 30 years that I have lived in the region.

In reading through previous inaugural speeches, including those of many members here today, I have been inspired by the deeply personal stories of those who find themselves in this place. My story will be similar. I come to this moment in my life because of the people in Bunbury who voted for me; because of family, friends and colleagues who supported me; because of the deep love I hold for the south west and Bunbury; and because of the absolute commitment of the WA Labor Party to winning back the seat. “Proudly Bunbury”—that was the theme of my campaign to become a member of this house. The people of Bunbury are proud—proud of the place they live in, proud of the contribution they make to our community and proud of their achievements. Having the opportunity to represent the good folk who live in the communities of Bunbury and Dalyellup is one of the proudest moments of my life. The community overwhelmingly gave me its trust in every ballot box across the electorate. I will return that trust to the best of my ability, but in doing so I acknowledge the work of my equally passionate predecessor, Hon John Castrilli.

Bunbury has gone through enormous change. In the mid-1980s it was an industrial port town. Railway marshalling yards made up most of the city centre and the view from the city oil storage tanks was extra special, conveniently located next to the water treatment plants! The change started with Labor's Bunbury 2000 program to transform Bunbury by removing the industrial heartland that was the CBD and replacing it with new mixed-use precincts and public open spaces. It was a golden era, with investment in a university campus, a new regional entertainment facility, new industrial land developments, new hotels and office complexes, and a new contemporary passenger train service. The then members for Mitchell and Bunbury, Hon David Smith and Phil Smith, and then Deputy Premier, Mal Bryce, were an essential part of the transformation and I acknowledge their contribution, together with those of Dr Ernie Manea and many of the civic leaders of the time who shared the vision. Today, Bunbury's future is being driven by people passionate about the area they live in.

It is a multicultural city that is embracing diversity and generosity. It has a pride festival, a multicultural day and a Diwali festival, all of which flow into activities throughout the year that celebrate both difference and inclusion. It is a city with people who were creative enough to get out in the middle of the night on a long weekend and install signage inviting traffic heading south to Margaret River to travel via the new scenic route of Bunbury's extensive cappuccino strip.

The people of Bunbury have gumption—a good old-fashioned Yorkshire term that means to get up and go for it. These are the people who create the climate for growth in new and imaginative ways, and we need to celebrate them. “Gumption”—such a great word. Bunbury is more than a second city; it is a potential alternative to Perth for investment and population growth, as Perth increasingly copes with diseconomies of scale. Find yourself stuck in a freeway traffic jam and Bunbury starts to look pretty good as a desirable place to live. It is a city that has great potential to grow international tourism and to be at the forefront of emerging technologies and new industries. Bunbury was the first regional community to achieve gigabyte bandwidth in the CBD and then start using it to drive new industry development. But for all that potential, Bunbury is a city that is suffering as a consequence of the slowdown in Western Australia, and many people and small businesses are doing it tough.

Bunbury needed a plan for jobs. The government's plan for Bunbury has simple objectives. Firstly, to build jobs through renewed focus on Bunbury's competitive advantages in manufacturing capability, the port, tourism, agriculture, mineral processing and the new, emerging digital and creative industries. Secondly, to restore our education and training capability with a focus on supporting teachers in the classroom, and skilling for the future—building skills that will allow our kids to adapt to a changing world and enabling people to transition to new opportunities, as old-world jobs disappear. As we know, old-world jobs are disappearing at a much faster rate than our ability to create the jobs of the future and, as a consequence, investment in education has never been so important. Thirdly, to expand our health services to meet the growing needs of our population by dealing with chronic shortages of beds at Bunbury Hospital, and opening up new opportunities for specialist service delivery. Fourthly, to invest in our transport connectivity, for people, freight, and data, so that transport does not remain a constraint on growth. Fifthly, and importantly, to improve the quality of life through sport, culture and the arts, and recreation, so that our community has a vibrancy that makes people want to be there. This is a plan that will see Bunbury's port taking a greater role in the state freight task to promote new investment in transport logistics and port-related manufacturing industries. Bunbury port has enormous potential for the import and export of manufactured product as well as bulk exports.

When it comes to social infrastructure, Bunbury has been put to the back of the queue for new investment in many areas, including social housing, mental health services, drug addiction services, recreational and sporting facilities, hospital beds and schools. In my doorknocking I found many people living in Department of Housing homes, waiting for basic home maintenance to address damp, mould and leaks. In Dalyellup I found many young families but a lack of basic family support networks to build communities, which means that young parents are isolated in their own homes. People who are worried about friends or relatives with severe mental health problems are still waiting for the step up, step down facility that was promised in 2013 and then forgotten about. When it comes to transport, the *Australind* passenger rail service operates more often as a bus link than as a train link; it is in urgent need of renewal as a contemporary passenger rail service.

Bunbury and Dalyellup are also next to some of the nation's most important biodiversity hotspots. The proposed Preston River to Ocean Regional Park has the potential to be a fantastic nature experience, but weed infestation and a lack of resources for management are threatening the very basis of the park. It, too, has been put to the back of the queue.

My vision for Bunbury is simple—a place where you can have a career, build a home, and have access to good quality education and health care in a place that you love; a city that has a strong commitment to the arts and culture as a basis for generating a shared understanding, and a place where people can get together and enjoy everything from music and art in the streets through to weekend sport. Central to this vision is a city that embraces its Noongar heritage and Noongar people, and celebrates the fact that today we share a rich culture.

The Bunbury plan will take up where Bunbury 2000 left off, and will be implemented with the community. It will position Bunbury as an alternative Western Australian destination for people and industry, and it will send a clear signal for investment. But most importantly, it is a plan for the future that puts people first.

NON-GOVERNMENT SECTOR

But life is not happy for everyone in Bunbury. Bunbury is increasingly confronted with problems such as homelessness. How can civilised cities accept this as part of the background city noise? How can we continue to step around the person sitting on the pavement and not believe that we should have appropriate and effective options for people to break the cycle? If prosperity and jobs are goals of government, then equally we must build in inclusiveness and fairness and be responsive to happiness. This means addressing domestic violence, poverty, the protection of children, community safety, drug addiction and mental health. It also means a fair go for people living with disability, but we need to do this in partnership with a strong non-government sector and the community. Over the past eight years the non-government sector has been subjected to competitive tendering and short-term contracts. Competitive tendering reflects a dismal lack of understanding about how to build local volunteerism and local capability. More frequently we are seeing eastern states' organisations with slick tender presentations and no local knowledge win tenders for services and close down local providers. I have no doubt this drove a significant part of the mood for change in the electorate of Bunbury. I will be looking for a new deal for our non-government and voluntary sector based on buy-local principles that serve to build our local capability and volunteerism. We need partnerships, not purchasing tenders; mutual obligation, not contract management; and long-term funding certainty, not 12-month agreements continually rolled over at the last minute. If we build the strength of our voluntary non-government organisations through effective partnerships and a commitment to social enterprise, we will reduce the long-run cost to government across a range of portfolios from health to housing to police, and have a happier and healthier community.

Madam Acting Speaker, before I leave this topic I want to draw the attention of the house to the needs of the aged. During my campaign I discovered that many people are caring for high-need elderly parents, just as Helen and I do in our home. Bunbury's aged population is going to increase significantly, and as people live longer and require more services, this will place more demand on carers and service providers. Although aged care is a commonwealth responsibility, I will promote the needs of both carers and the aged to achieve healthy and active ageing and appropriate care during people's final years.

Prior to entering this place, I had a long career in the public service, from Wyndham to Albany and Bunbury to Kalgoorlie. I started out in 1981 when I headed to Moora with the keys to a Holden Kingswood in one hand and a copy of the Child Welfare Act in the other. I finished my career as head of the South West Development Commission in July 2017. The Kingswood was long gone, but in its place a rich tapestry of experience and an insight developed over many years about social and economic policy and practice across regional Western Australia.

PUBLIC SECTOR

I have a special interest in the public sector's future, especially for those people who work in difficult and often isolated circumstances. Increasingly, those people have spoken to me about the devaluing of their skills and abilities as departments become increasingly preoccupied with budget shortfalls, risk avoidance and centralised decision-making. I support this government's approach to public sector reform. It is bold and it will drive change. A combination of the previous government's approach to budget management and efficiency dividends, without any strategy to guide them, together with multiple departments that duplicate effort, has driven the need for this government to act. Reducing the number of departments will reduce cost, streamline decision-making and provide a clearer line of sight to outcomes for the community. Together with the services priority review, the reform has the potential to empower staff and create a better basis for local decision-making. It is a welcome change.

ENERGY

Prior to the election I was proud to campaign to keep Western Power in public ownership. This asset has been developed over three generations and we should hand it on to the next generation better than we found it—fit for purpose and capable of responding to changing energy technology. I do not intend to repeat here the argument for retaining Western Power in public ownership, suffice to say that the community of Bunbury and Dalyellup, along with the rest of the state, did not need much convincing. Very few of the people I spoke with had any faith that privatisation was in Western Australia's interest. This does not mean our energy sector should not change. However, changes need to take place in the context of a rational and well thought out energy policy that is firmly linked to manufacturing and industry development, as well as the new industries that will shape our future economy.

Manufacturing and baseload electricity supply are interlinked. We cannot have one without the other—both are vital to our state's future. A strong manufacturing sector needs access to reliable baseload supply. We do need to transition our energy mix. However, we need to use sound engineering principles in a manner that builds system reliability while reducing emissions.

I want to acknowledge the men and women from the Australian Services Union and the Electrical Trades Union who campaigned to save Western Power. They took their argument to the community in a respectful manner and the community listened. They have a lot of knowledge and experience to contribute to the energy debate and in the transition to new technologies all they are seeking is a fair deal for their members in managing the transition.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

There are many people who have brought me to this point in time. I firstly want to acknowledge the campaign leadership group of John Whitelaw, Sonya Dye and Tom Palmer, together with Tom French. They are an incredibly creative, energetic and passionate group of people who lifted me when I was down and smacked me down when I was too excited. Yes, Madam Acting Speaker, I do occasionally get excited!

[Member's time extended.]

Mr D.T. PUNCH: Lenda Oshalem, who initially directed my campaign, always had faith that we would succeed and from whom I have learned so much about modern campaigning and Patrick Gorman, clinically insightful and great to have on your own team—I am very grateful to you both. My political mentor Hon Mal Bryce's wisdom over many years has helped to shape my thinking about questions of our collective future and in the last year

he has provided considerable insight into the role of a parish politician, not to mention regular inspections of my shoes during doorknocking. My thanks go to Gordon Hill, Tony Buti, and David and Tresslyn Smith, who have extended their friendship and support to me on very many occasions, and to the wonderful volunteers from south west branches of the Labor Party, especially the Bunbury branch, as well as many community volunteers. I also thank Hon Alannah MacTiernan, an incredible campaigner; Tim Hammond; Hon Rita Saffioti; Hon Sue Ellery and Hon Steve Dawson. I would also like to thank the members of the Australian Services Union, the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, the Electrical Trades Union, United Voice and the WA Prison Officers' Union, who provided immense support right through the campaign. These members work right across our community and wanted to dedicate their time and effort to help build a better future.

David Kerr, a special friend whose immense contribution to Bunbury and the south west deserves acknowledgement in this house, and Jan Tierney, whose good humour put new life into doorknocking. David and Jan will be lifelong friends.

I also thank the Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, whom I first met when he was a new, slightly nervous Minister for the South West and I was a slightly anxious CEO. I was confident he had not read *Yes Minister*, so I thought there was a chance I might have the upper hand. That thought lasted all of a nanosecond. He was a fantastic minister and I am immensely honoured to be part of his team today.

I came to Western Australia in 1971 as a 14-year-old boy looking for a new future. I had left a family that had gone its separate ways and I had not attended school for a number of years. I had no idea what the future held but I was sensible enough to take an opportunity when it was offered. I joined my brother Tony and his wife, Ann, who provided stability, support and a home and I learned just how special growing up in a country community can be. I am not sure they quite knew what they were taking on but they gave me a fresh start and I am forever grateful for that. I went back to school, firstly in Manjimup, and then Collie, which will appeal to the member for Collie–Preston. It was a shock to wear a school uniform again. But I owe a great debt to the teachers of those schools for their support and dedication in making up for the lost years of my education. Their example has stayed with me throughout my life and provided a foundation for the person I have become and it drives my belief in the public school system. For those of you in this house who have a teaching background, you have my admiration.

I was lucky enough to enter university in 1974 following the Whitlam government's university reforms that made university education accessible. I and many others remember Gough Whitlam for that great and memorable change in Australia's values that opened university access to everyday people. My education has enabled me to have a career that has taken me all over Western Australia and overseas. I have met and worked with many people from all walks of life and learned so much. It has taught me that relationships are the most important thing we have and that everybody has their own story to tell. Perhaps most importantly it has taught me about acceptance of our shared humanity and the importance of diversity.

Western Australia is a land that has reached out to me as a migrant from England, and I am very grateful for it. I owe a great debt to my brother Vic. He has always been there in the background with advice, guidance, good humour and a sense of fun. I am blessed to have him as a brother.

Most importantly, in this house before my fellow parliamentarians I thank my wife, Helen, and our three sons, Alan, Daniel and David. Together they set an example that I can only aspire to, in not only what they do but also the people they are.

In closing, I remember the remarks of Hon David Templeman introducing the class of 2017 to Parliament when he warned us to be careful about our Address-in-Reply. In a voice full of doom that can only be conveyed by the member for Mandurah, he told us it will be the first reference used when the time comes for condolence motions! In anticipation of what is hopefully a far-off event, I intend to have a very good time in this house, have fun and be the best I possibly can be in representing the proud people of Bunbury.

[Applause.]
