



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Mark Lewis, MLC
(Member for Mining and Pastoral Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 23 May 2013

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [2.22 pm]: Obviously, it is with some trepidation that I rise here today, but it is also with some excitement in acknowledgement of the challenges ahead. Members, please forgive me; I might be a little bit more local and parochial than some in this speech. I would like to touch on a number of points today, and I beg your indulgence if I refer to these notes just a little bit, or maybe a lot.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly, and as is customary, I would like to thank those who have supported me through the long journey to this place. It goes without saying that my family has had to put up with me being away for long periods over many years. I recognise them in the gallery: my wife, Michelle, my daughter, Bridget, and my sister, Glenda; my son is, unfortunately, unable to be here today. My wife deserves special thanks as she is not only a wife and a partner, but also my very own adviser, and a worthy one, as she has been in politics for over 16 years, I was informed today. She has been around both the state and federal systems, and currently works for the good Senator Eggleston, who I also note is here today. Thank you.

My son, Matthew, must also receive a mention. Being in his late teens through most of those years that I have been away, he would always provide very succinct answers when asked for his advice. It consisted of “Er”, always issued in that same inaudible tone. He is now, thankfully, fully comprehensible. My nearly 18-year-old daughter, Bridget, must also be thanked for her constant advice to me on dress sense. However, much to her chagrin, I have been more than a bit of a challenge in that area.

The rest of my family is represented by Glenda here today. I also must attribute some blame to them for being destined to be in politics and Parliament. Unfortunately, our mother has been unwell, so she is unable to travel. I say to her that she is the bedrock of our family and our moral compass, and I sincerely thank her for that. I am not too sure what our dear old dad would say, but he would always give me the advice of “Sit down, be quiet and listen”—very similar to the advice that Mr President gave us—and he would always say that it is better to be thought a fool than to say something and be confirmed a fool. So I will take his advice; however, be sure that I am listening and, hopefully, learning.

Mr President, as you reminded us during our induction, we are all a product of the political framework and the hard work of those grassroots members who represent our parties, and these people must also be recognised. In my case, these are the branches throughout the Mining and Pastoral Region, and particularly my home branch and its stalwarts Bruce and Caroline May at Carnarvon. From the Durack and O’Connor divisions, I acknowledge Gordon Thomson and Steve Martin as the ever-involved presidents. To all those members who travelled to preselection from places like Esperance, Carnarvon, Port Hedland, Broome, Derby and Kununurra and journeyed to Perth to preselect candidates, the Liberal Party, and the candidates especially, I owe you a debt of gratitude. Also, thank you to Ben Morton and his team at Menzies House. As we have heard a number of times, Ben Morton is an extremely talented

young man, and if he should ever decide one day to join politics on this side, the country will be better for it. I thank you all for your support throughout the years.

To the lower house team in the Mining and Pastoral Region, a big thank you to Graham Jacobs from Eyre, Tami Maitre in North West Central, George Levissianos from the Pilbara and Jenny Bloom from the Kimberley. Finally, I would like to make special mention of my friend Melissa Price, who, as a new girl on the block, contested the seat of Kalgoorlie, which she won on primary votes, but was unsuccessful after preferences to Wendy Duncan, MLA, and I congratulate Wendy in this regard. But mark my words: keep an eye out for Melissa in the future. She is an outstanding candidate. Thank you all for running such a dedicated, disciplined and on-message campaign because, as we all know in this chamber, a good lower house candidate is one of the keys to our election to this place.

To my upper house colleagues Hon Ken Baston and Hon Norman Moore, I thank you both for your guidance and your wisdom over many years.

It is arguable—I am not sure he would want this on the record—that Hon Ken Baston is probably more culpable than most for my being in this place as he lured me into politics through promises of lots of merriment and fun. I thought I was just helping out, making up the numbers sort of thing at various branch and division functions et cetera, but eventually the bug bit and the rest is history, as they say. So, a tongue-in-cheek guarded and reserved thank you to you, Ken.

To Hon Norman Moore, I am not going to try to repeat or match the superlatives more eloquently put by others on your contribution here, other than to say that having been through two campaigns with you, I have learnt this from you: stay calm and relax. But I guess it is easier for him to say that after 36 years here and, I think, about eight campaigns than it is for me as a new boy on the block. I thank you also for offering me the opportunity to take your counsel whenever I need it—except, I suspect, when you are on the sundeck of a cruise ship in the Aegean Sea, but at least you offered. I wish you and Lee well and expect a call from time to time.

Others worthy of an honourable mention are Hon Ian Laurance, AM, who is also partly guilty for me being here before you today. Ian is a former member of the Legislative Assembly, and I was fortunate enough to have worked for him when he was the chairman of a government committee. I admire Ian and his ability to get things done. I purposefully watched, listened and learned from every move he made, and if only five per cent of that has stuck, then I am a lucky man. He also left us a legacy, and it is something that I will always remember when things get tough. He would always say that humour is still allowed. I think that is important going forward. As I said, Ian is a true gentleman and a professional, and I thank him for taking an interest in my career over a long time.

Last but not least are the constituents of the Mining and Pastoral Region. I acknowledge the trust and responsibility afforded me and I pledge to work with them and for them to the best of my ability and endeavours. I can assure them that I will be keeping as close to the grassroots as I can, and I ask that they keep me informed of the local issues that affect them at all times. I thank them for all their assistance to me in my journey to this place.

PERSONAL BACKGROUND

I would now like to give a short biography of myself. Again, I understand this is customary, to provide others with an insight into my values and my thinking and how these have been formed. For those who remember the Australian country music icon Slim Dusty, I am one of his Cunnamulla fellas, having been born in that small western Queensland town in 1957.

As Hon Norman Moore said in his opening remarks in this chamber on Tuesday night, most people think that Liberal Party members are all born with a silver spoon in their mouth. Like

him, I must confess that I was brought up in a most austere and workmanlike way. Whilst I was born in Cunnamulla, I was subsequently raised in central Queensland on a farming and cattle property. My father drew by ballot an undeveloped block and we basically went in there with an axe and some fencing gear donated to us by relatives. Mum, dad and we four kids lived in a shed for many years. My bedroom was a dorm-like arrangement at the back of the shed, with the rest of my siblings, brothers, on a dirt floor. I can still remember the day we poured the concrete underneath our beds. I also remember skiting at school about how flash we were now that we had a proper floor!

I attended boarding school in Rockhampton, not because of any blue-blood destiny, but because there was no secondary facility in our small rural community, so I basically had to. After completing grade 12, I returned home for a stint on the family properties from where I subsequently went as a mature-age student to what is now known as Gatton Campus at Queensland University to study in the field of animal production and health. Whilst maintaining an interest in farming and later in sheep and cattle properties in the south west of Queensland, I started work for the veterinary services branch of the Department of Primary Industries and served in the Channel Country of far western Queensland, even living in Birdsville where I think the population then was about 34.

I ended my work at QDPI as the department's district manager in Mackay for the Mackay–Proserpine region in 1996. In that same year, some 17 years ago now, my family and I moved to Carnarvon with the Western Australian Department of Agriculture and Food fulfilling positions including program and regional manager, director and more recently as another manager of policy and industry development in the rangelands. Fortunately, the rangelands region I have operated in over the years covers most of the Mining and Pastoral Region, except for the bit around Yilgarn and Esperance. Obviously, this has allowed me to acquire and develop a keen understanding of the issues in the Mining and Pastoral Region. During my professional career, I undertook additional studies and completed a master's degree in applied science in agriculture and rural development, as well as completing a couple of post-graduate qualifications in management.

In my recent role I have been deeply involved in looking at ways to secure food for our future through the investigation and development of new agriculture markets in areas not just in the Ord but also outside the Ord, and more broadly within the Mining and Pastoral Region. I will return to this issue later; however, suffice to say that it is this backdrop and the reasons that my heart and soul are connected to rural and regional Australia. I trust my background and my life experience will provide me with a platform for my new role in this place.

PERSONAL MOTIVATION

I would now like to turn to my third point, which is to outline my views on why I am here and, importantly, why I am in the Legislative Council and not in the Legislative Assembly. I do not know why but I excelled at social studies with near-perfect scores during primary school—the only thing I actually excelled at. For those who cannot remember or who did not partake in social studies, it was a compulsory part of the curriculum back then and provided to primary-grade students a basic insight into the way our society works and is governed—you know, the whole Westminster thing. Sometimes I think this is now sorely missing from the curriculum. That aside, I guess I have been a student of government for some time and have always been aware of the role of government. Unusually for an ex-Queenslander—members might be aware that Queensland does not have an upper house—or perhaps because I grew up in the Joh era, I understand the roles of the various houses and the importance to democracy of separation. It is one of the reasons I gravitated to this house, the house of review. I clearly see my role here as ensuring that any legislation that passes before us is not restrictive and/or does not negatively impact on the constituents of the Mining and Pastoral Region. Conversely, if there is a need for

positive or proactive legislation that assists and advances the cause of my constituents, and the businesses and enterprises within it, I will act to assist such legislation to pass. In my view it is quite simple.

FUTURE STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Fourthly and finally, I must also take this opportunity to admit to be wanting to be part of setting a vision for the future of our region, and more generally of WA. I am often accused by my friends and colleagues, some of whom are in the public gallery today, of being expansive—an arm-waver and a chaser of dreams. I admit I am, but I have learnt to see this as a skill for being able to spot the trends, to connect the fuzzy dots and to see the forest for the trees. I want to bring this skill to this place and to this government to help create a vision for the future for my region and, more importantly, for how we can lay a pathway to achieve such a vision.

If we reflect on our role in this place—only six upper house members and five lower house members represent electorates in the Mining and Pastoral Region—we can see that we have an incredibly important role to ensure that the economic powerhouse of not only this state but also this nation maximises its contribution to our current needs and that it continues to be the driver into the future. I was thinking about calling these 11 members *Ocean's Eleven* but “Oceans to Outback Eleven” is what I will call them. We “Oceans to Outback Eleven” members have a special duty and responsibility to ensure that the government does everything possible to provide a platform to foster and encourage enterprise and industry in this region. Obviously, this principally should be targeted at the oil and gas, mining, fishing, agriculture and tourism industries as a first pass, but there are other new and emerging opportunities that we must foster as well, and I want to be deeply involved in being a part of achieving this.

I believe we need to work towards the Premier's broad vision of engaging with those to the north and to the west, and to continue to work on targeted programs to ensure we achieve this vision. I submit, as I said before, that I am keen to get on with the job and that I will be pleased to be burdened with this responsibility.

When I look back on my four years as a member of this place, I will be satisfied only if I can see that there has been genuine advancement in our region, and I will be particularly keen to see that there has been concerted progress in the areas of —

- converting the significant amounts of water we are blessed with in the Mining and Pastoral Region towards our future food security;
- significantly streamlining approvals processes for projects within a risk management framework, particularly in those industries I mentioned before;
- establishing a flexible tenure system within the Mining and Pastoral Region's vast pastoral estate that is contemporary and fosters future growth in a range of industries and opportunities that will underpin our future;
- targeting infrastructure that sustains and grows long-term productivity;
- increasing trade and investment into our region;
- creating new and diversified industries
- value-adding to and within our supply chains; and
- equality in general in our government services to and within the Mining and Pastoral Region.

I list these areas because I believe I have some background in these areas and can contribute to these key areas of economic development. I know it is dangerous to list these sorts of aspirations within a maiden speech, as it is on the record and people will have a wont to use such self-

disclosure to haunt oneself in the future. However, I believe in setting out a plan, if only for myself, and working to this plan as far as possible along the delivery spectrum. It was, however, a little disconcerting to hear, as the venerable Hon Norman Moore said in his valedictory speech, that some things take 36 years to achieve and that some of the key activities that he was pursuing never got across the line. However, we shall persist.

FEDERALISM

It would be remiss of me if I did not mention one more passion that I have and that I must declare. I, too, am a states' rights advocate. I will not go over ground covered by Hon Liz Behjat in her excellent Address-in-Reply response to the Governor's speech, by Hon Norman Moore in his valedictory speech, or by Hon Peter Katsambanis in his very eloquent speech yesterday, all of which in part touched on federalism. But suffice to say that I believe it is now imperative that we call for a Federation convention to try to restore the original intent of competitive federalism. I think I am right in saying that there have been only two Federation conventions. The first was obviously the one that was held to establish the original charter of the Federation. In my opinion, it is way past time that another convention was held, before we get to a point of no return. I believe there is enough concern around the country about our Federation that there will be support for such a convention; and, if we make a genuine attempt at it, I think we can claw back some of the creep of centralism that has taken place over the years. I will leave it there. But be assured that I, too, am watching that insidious creep of centralism that is destroying what was originally intended to be achieved by the Federation.

In closing, I look forward to working with all members over the next four years, particularly in committees, and I congratulate all the new members on joining me in this chamber.

[Applause.]
