



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Mark Folkard, MLA

(Member for Burns Beach)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 17 May 2017

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 M.J. FOLKARD (Burns Beach) [3.40 pm]: I take this opportunity to thank and acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet and sit, the Noongar Whadjuk people, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and future. Before I start my reply and introduction to this place, I congratulate the member for Albany on his election to Speaker of this place. He was an Australian Olympian in his youth, and he is now the Speaker of this Parliament—again, congratulations! I take this opportunity to acknowledge Mr Albert Jacob, the former member for Ocean Reef. I wish him and his family all the best for the future. I thank Her Excellency the Governor, Kerry Sanderson, AC, for her address to the fortieth Parliament, and I offer this in reply.

I am a humble man who understands what a great honour and privilege it is to stand here today, so it is appropriate that I tell members something about my journey to this place. My father was a major in the Army and my mother—may she rest in peace—was a nurse. By virtue of my father's military service, as a young child my family travelled throughout Australia as he was posted to various cities along the east coast. As part of these postings we were transferred to Lae in Papua New Guinea. At the time I had two younger brothers. One would go on to be a highly successful merchant banker in London; the other would become the chief physical training instructor at the Special Air Service. While in New Guinea all our family contracted malaria, which was normal at the time as the illness was rife in the area. My mother developed a further complication that led to her developing paranoid schizophrenia later in life. My mother's illness would have a great impact on my life. It was a cause of my parent's separation, and as her illness developed I had to take on a greater role in raising my two younger brothers. That was a challenge because at the time I was only 11 years old.

It was an interesting period for me. My schooling was spasmodic. Months would go by when I looked after mother and would not attend school. My attendance was so rare that my absence was never really noticed, although I was enrolled in some of the best schools in Perth—Aquinas College, Rossmoyne Senior High School and Christ Church Grammar School. The end result was that I could not read and write when I left school. My literacy was of such a standard that I could not read even a newspaper. I am not sure to this day whether my father pulled a few strings or the military felt sorry for me, but I ended up doing a short hitch in the Army. While serving, I was able to teach myself how to read and I developed an

insatiable appetite for the written word. On leaving the Army I spent a couple of years at night school, learning how to write to an acceptable standard to pass the police entrance exam. That was challenging.

I commenced my policing career in June 1990. I graduated on 24 December 1990 and was posted to Subiaco Police Station. I remember working Christmas Day, and while attending my very first police job I became the subject of a ministerial complaint. I laugh at it now, but perhaps it was a sign of my future career. The next 27 years was spent on the police front line, always in the mud, the blood and the beer.

I was always in the thick of it. My service took me all over the state. I served in Northam and Eucla, and returned to Perth and served in the original vehicle crime unit. During the election campaign, the Labor opposition, now the government, spoke of empowering police to be able to force vehicles involved in high-speed pursuits off the road. I remember doing that 20 years ago. We were chasing a stolen motorcar along Morley Drive at around 180 kilometres an hour at 3.00 am. I watched the vehicle sail through the Tonkin Highway intersection at over 200 kilometres an hour. I remember looking to my partner, who was later killed in a police plane crash, and asking, "Why are we doing this?" He responded, "If we don't keep going, there's no-one else out here to stop them. If we don't stop them, they're going to kill someone." On that night they got away, but a couple of nights later we were not on the road and an innocent victim was killed.

After finishing my time at the vehicle crime unit I went on to serve with the armed robbery squad. I spent the next couple of years working in the northern suburbs, before I was seconded to the Australian Federal Police. I served in East Timor during the troubles, and I was there for the presidential elections and independence. There is nothing like running a multiple homicide investigation with no resources other than a notebook and a pencil in your top pocket to teach you how to keep things in perspective.

On my return to Western Australia I was posted to Kalbarri Police Station as officer in charge. While there, I received numerous commendations and was a finalist in the Police Officer of the Year award. I was promoted to sergeant and transferred to Wagin Police Station, before returning to Perth. I served at a couple of places in Perth, including as senior trainer at the Police Academy and at internal affairs, before finishing my last couple of years as a sergeant at Morley Police Station.

Members may ask what would motivate a police officer with a successful career to make the decision to stand for Parliament. It is simple: a couple of years ago I was called to a job. A little old lady was trapped inside her home. After not being able to get inside, I forced entry into the address. Once inside, I saw a nonna pointing to a room. I followed her direction and found her partner lying on the floor. Realising that the man was critically ill, I dragged him from his room and immediately started resuscitation. I was joined a short time later by our fantastic ambulance officers, who took over from me. Seeing a loved one being resuscitated is a very frightening thing, and as a result of seeing nonna so scared I took her aside and away from the event. I spoke to nonna for about 20 minutes. Through her broken language I found out that her husband had complained of minor chest pains the night before, but that the last time they went to hospital they waited over eight hours before eventually being sent home. It was because of that wait that they made the decision to wait until morning to seek help. Papa did not make it till morning. I was so angry and enraged that I had to walk away. Police officers cannot ring ministers of the Crown because it is considered a breach of regulations, but I wanted to. As the matter was a health department issue, the police command would not have been interested. It was not the first time I had encountered adverse situations created by poor government. The decisions we make in this house have real consequences that affect real people, and sometimes it is life and death. We must never forget that. If I had continued

to sit on the fence, I would have ended up with a sore behind. As a result, I vowed I would do whatever I could never to be in that position again, and here I am.

I want to talk about the domestic violence that I have seen and intervened in so often over the years and that is fresh in my mind, including some very recent homicides that I could not talk about to the Legislative Assembly without becoming emotional. This issue is raw with me. I feel compelled to evidence and criticise our courts for their impotence, the Western Australia Police for its attitude towards domestic violence, and the incompetence of the Department for Child Protection and Family Support for its betrayal of the women and children of our community. However, I feel that today is not the time for this conversation, as I would never want to stand behind parliamentary privilege to hide my criticisms. I feel this would be cowardice and not show due respect to the brave victims of domestic violence. But I will not shy away from this issue and I will continue to work hard to rid our state of this horrible scourge.

I wish to raise the matter of post-traumatic stress in our first responders. Over many years of service I have seen many close friends crippled by this affliction. During the election campaign, a friend and colleague of mine felt the need to take her own life. I will not particularise the circumstance but I can assure members I do not know a police colleague who has seen the service that I have seen and not been afflicted by this hideous condition. As recently as five years ago, the Commissioner of Police refused to acknowledge that his workforce was troubled by PTSD. I note that St John Ambulance and our fire services have had a similar uncaring attitude to their employees. I have the condition and would not wish it upon anybody. I find it difficult to go to the funerals of colleagues who have suffered from PTSD because there have been just too many. I am the lucky one, because I am comfortable talking about it, but there are many other first responders who are not. It is for them that I raise this issue in this house. We are indebted to these individuals, because they do our biddings, but at a great cost to themselves and their families. We as a community have an expectation that our first responders will go into harm's way for our safety. They do that without hesitation and without question, time and again. But there is a price that our first responders pay. It does not matter whether they are a firefighter, a copper, a paramedic or a State Emergency Services volunteer—all of them in time will succumb.

So, what do we do? It is my belief that we need to develop an institution of mental health excellence to help treat our injured workers. Just as importantly, we need to undertake research into the illness so that our heroes can gain some normality in life and excellence in treatment. We also need to compensate the injury, because PTSD is an injury. The World Health Organization recognises that having PTSD is the equivalent of having a physical injury that leaves a person paraplegic. I have witnessed this and I agree with the analogy. We need to keep in mind that this illness is in some ways like an illness of addiction, in that we never completely recover from it, but we learn to manage and develop strategies within ourselves to deal with the dark days. The worst thing about this illness is the hidden cost—the price the loved ones, the families, and those who care most about their family members, pay. How can we quantify a price or put a value on the broken families, the divorces, and those who have taken their lives? Lastly, we need to accept these individuals as a part of our workplace. We need to accept them for who they are, not what they have become. They are heroes. We must not walk away from them.

I have another passion that I must air in this place, and that is our state's road toll. Over the last three decades, I have witnessed the growing tragedy occurring on our roads within our great state. I have attended too many fatal crash scenes; I have gone to too many homes to do the death knock; and I have told too many mums and dads that their sons and daughters will not be coming home. There are perhaps others in this Assembly who have had the misfortune to do this, and to them I give my nod in respect, for they know what a dark day is.

To illustrate my argument, I will go back only for the last 10 years. In 2006, 201 persons were killed on our roads. In 2007, it was 235; in 2008, it was 205; in 2009, it was 191; in 2010, it was 192; in 2011, it was 179; in 2012, it was 183; in 2013, it was 161; in 2014, it was 182; in 2015, it was 161; and, last year, it was 195. That is a total of 1 885 people killed on our roads in the last 10 years. Put in stark terms, our road toll is greater than the sum of all Australian deaths in the Korean, Vietnam and Afghanistan wars combined. Western Australia's road toll is greater than that of Kenya, a Third World country. I cannot begin to understand and quantify the human cost and the pain and suffering the families have gone through, but I have seen the tears in their eyes, and worse.

I have read many studies to try to understand what the financial cost to our community is. Some of these studies estimate the cost of a single road death at between \$2 million and \$15 million. In my view, the most credible studies tend to put the cost at around \$8 million per death. Based on this, the cost to Western Australia for last year's road toll was over \$1.5 billion. This figure is tripled to \$4.5 billion if we include those who are totally and permanently incapacitated. In this fiscally challenging time, it is unconscionable that the profile of our road carnage is not higher in our community safety agendas and priorities.

I know from personal experience that there are four main causes of our road toll. They are the poor condition of our roads; the poor training of our young drivers and road users; poor legislation; and poor police doctrine and enforcement, whereby an electronic infringement carries more value than direct officer interactions. When it comes to our country roads, 80 per cent of fatalities could be stopped if the road verges were cleared of vegetation three grader blades from the carriageway. To put it simply, if a car runs off the road, hits a tree or rolls over, a person dies. Clearing the road verges reduces the deaths. It is not hard.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr M.J. FOLKARD: Most of our country roads are the responsibility of local government. We as a state government have a responsibility, might I suggest, to develop creative, imaginative and secure revenue streams to local government that are quarantined. Some of these creative ideas could possibly be a levy on vehicle registrations or drivers' licences; or, more controversially, we could consider allowing fixed speed cameras, Multanova cameras and point-to-point speed measuring devices and quarantine the revenue from them for road maintenance or for re-engineering the roads so that they are safer. Some would say that is revenue raising. I would say yes, absolutely it is. However, if it saves one life, it is a small price to pay. Some in Parliament would say we should use the road trauma trust fund. There are numerous mentions in *Hansard* about the lack of use of these funds. At what point did our road toll have to get to before those funds would be used? I look to the previous government and say nothing.

When it comes to our young drivers, there is not a professional first responder who does not believe that having parents teach kids to drive is a flawed process. Effectively, we are allowing poor drivers to teach our young drivers their poor habits. A significant proportion of our road toll is made up of individuals who are under the age of 25, and the majority of them have been taught by their parents. Our current system relies on a learner driver sitting a test, doing 25 hours of supervised driving, sitting a second test and passing it, and doing another 25 hours of supervised driving. That basically means we are giving kids 50 hours of driving supervised by unqualified driving instructors who cannot necessarily drive well themselves. Again, if poor drivers reinforce poor driving habits to young, impressionable youth, we are setting our kids up to join the road toll. I believe that if our children received 40 hours of proper driver instruction by qualified driving instructors we would see a significant reduction in the youth road toll. Some members in this house will decry the cost. My question to them is simple: what is a minor increase in the cost of proper driver education verses the death of

a child? If that is too personal, look at the \$1.5 billion that last year's deaths on Western Australian roads cost our community. The cost of the carnage on our roads alone during last year's Labour Day long weekend was \$80 million. When is this going to stop?

In conclusion, I would like to thank the following people. I thank my fantastic wife; our daughter, Jillian, and our son, Adrian; my great and unwavering stepmum, Leslie Folkard, and my father, Michael Folkard; my father-in-law, Graham Cook, and my brothers, Stewart and Brett. Without their tireless support, I would not be here today.

I would like to thank the electors of Burns Beach. I have one aim in this Parliament; that is, to be the best local member for my constituents and to represent them, no matter what their background, to the best of my ability and for the benefit of the community.

I would like to thank the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union and its members, organisers and staff for their support during the election campaign. I thank the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union for its contribution. I thank the Australian Labor Party for having faith in me. I also thank Robert Knox, my campaign manager; Rebecca Doyle and Jake Whitley, my field organisers; and Rory Cummings and Sue and Kim Young who formed my campaign team. I would further like to thank Senator Louise Pratt; Anne Aly, MP; and Ken Travers and Martin Pritchard, MLC, for their support and advice. I thank my volunteers, who are too numerous to list. I would like to thank Steve McCartney, state secretary of the AMWU, for his belief in me and for his friendship, and Jon Ford and Sally Talbot, MLC. Jon and Sally were a steadying hand throughout the recent election campaign and they have become my mentors and dear friends. I cannot thank them enough. Finally, to my dear mates Matt, Snowy, Dave, Glenn, Louie, Cheryl, Michelle, Tennille and Pete, take care and may your God go with you.

[Applause.]
