



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Wendy Duncan, MLA
(Member for Kalgoorlie)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 18 April 2013

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 11 April 2013

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MS W.M. DUNCAN (Kalgoorlie — Deputy Speaker) [10.43 am]: May I first congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to your position and thank the house for the honour of being your Deputy Speaker. I thank the Governor for his speech on the opening of the thirty-ninth Parliament and congratulate the Premier and his team for their election to another term of Liberal–National government. I also congratulate all those new members who succeeded in winning a seat in this house and for the contribution they have already made through their inaugural speeches. It is very interesting to hear of everyone’s diverse background and the skills and experience they bring to our Parliament. I think I would be pretty safe in assuming that most, if not all, members present are not familiar with my first inaugural speech, so I will provide you with a bit of background on what brings me to this place.

It is an absolute honour to be elected the member for Kalgoorlie as that town is the place of my birth. Kalgoorlie has produced many members of Parliament over the life of our democracy and I hope I acquit myself as well as those who have gone before me. My family are now into their fourth generation in the pastoral industry in the Goldfields. There is a great story of my grandfather, who was originally from Cornwall, setting down my grandmother, the daughter of a pharmacist in central London, on Menangina Station in 1926, when she asked where the house was. She was told there was not one. The incredible struggle they had carving out a new life for themselves as they faced the Great Depression, untimely death and dispossession, only to fight back so our family could continue on, is one that fills me with awe and great pride.

My father and mother continued in the industry, and my siblings and I had the amazing upbringing that many view as typically Australian, but few experience. My early education was by correspondence and School of the Air. But the education I appreciated even more was what I received from the wonderful traditional Aboriginal people who lived there. Many times we went out with the ladies, and from them I learned some of the Wongi language, how to track, how to dig up and eat honey ants and bardi grubs, and how to tell whether a goanna egg had a developing lizard or a yolk inside just by the markings on the shell.

With no high school nearby, I went to boarding school in Perth at age 11 and finished with an offer to study medicine at the University of Western Australia. However, a gap year as a Rotary exchange student in South Africa, where I saw human rights denied and a police state in action, made me decide to pull out of medicine and study politics and make a promise to myself that I would actively defend our wonderful democracy.

My political life was not associated with any particular political party until I returned to regional WA, first to Kalgoorlie and the pastoral industry and then on to Esperance to expand into farming. As we struggled to rear our four beautiful kids, the neglect of regional services and the debilitating and demoralising effect of economic rationalist policies dreamt up in distant capital cities made me realise that we needed to take action before our regional towns and industries were left to wither and die. A defining moment was when a representative of the government of the day told an angry hall full of people in Esperance that if they did not like the price of power, they should move to Perth.

If anyone was going to stand up for regional WA, it had to be the Nationals. However, at the time the Nationals were far from capable of taking on the task with the prospect of one vote, one value legislation causing commentators to predict that the party would be reduced to one member. History now shows that, contrary to popular belief, one vote, one value did not disenfranchise regional voters, it galvanised them. The leader of this resurgence was Brendon Grylls. I would like to pay tribute to his leadership and, in particular, his determination to stare down the naysayers and show by example that it is worthwhile taking risks to achieve a higher goal. Congratulations, Brendon, on your election to the seat of Pilbara—a defining moment for the Nationals and a demonstration that the Nationals is now a party capable of representing the vast array of interests that have one common thread: being part of regional WA. And congratulations to those who took on the task of filling in behind him and knuckling down to retain the seats in our traditional heartland. It was truly a team effort involving a great deal of hard work, a fair bit of self-sacrifice and some miracle working with pretty scarce resources.

Part of the strategy was to try for the seat of Kalgoorlie, a seat the Nationals have never won before. When John Bowler and Brendon Grylls suggested I take it on, it did not take long for my husband, Ian, and I to decide that we were up for the challenge. The idea of returning to our roots was too tempting, although, I must say, I will sorely miss the wonderful people and places I have served in the Mining and Pastoral Region over the past four and a half years.

The Kalgoorlie electorate is 632 816 square kilometres and stretches from the stunning historic city of Kalgoorlie–Boulder north, to my old stamping ground of Menzies and Kookynie, to Leonora, Leinster, Laverton and the incredible Ngaanyatjarra lands. Kalgoorlie–Boulder is a mature, cosmopolitan and diverse city of more than 30 000 people that is capable of doubling its size by 2050. Mining is the dominant industry in the electorate, with mining production worth more than \$8.8 billion in 2010–11. The region is also well known for its pastoral industry, tourism, Aboriginal art and culture and the beautiful and unique Great Western Woodlands and, of course, the Lake Ballard statues. In fact, it was the amazing buildings that caught the eye of Brendon Grylls when I first took him to Kalgoorlie in around 2006. He remarked that we could see there was a boom there a century ago and asked why people were living in containers in the present boom towns of Karratha and Port Hedland. This is where the seed for the royalties for regions was sown.

Since Paddy Hannan found gold in 1893, the mineral resources in the Goldfields–Esperance region have extended to include nickel, cobalt, zinc, copper, silver and, more recently, iron ore. For these mines to reach their full potential and for exploration and development to continue, we need to be mindful of the increasing costs the resource sector is facing. According to the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, the pressures are coming from many sources: project approval processes, duplication, time delays and complexity; imposed business costs, including the uncertainty of the changing taxation imposts of the minerals resource rent tax and the carbon pricing regime; productivity challenges, increasing labour costs and shortages; and increasing energy demand and costs. Over the past week we have seen a significant fall in the price of gold, which will bring many operations perilously close to their break-even point. Cost pressures have seen the cash cost of producing gold rise from under \$400 an ounce in 2002 to nearly \$1 000 an ounce in the last quarter of last year. These pressures must be taken into account in any review of the royalty regime, as it is important to maintain investor confidence in these uncertain times.

Over the past four years the seat of Kalgoorlie has seen great benefit from royalties for regions, and much of the thanks for this must go to the former member for Kalgoorlie, John Bowler. John was elected in 2001 and found himself in 2008 as an Independent in a minority government. Very early in the piece he threw his hat in the ring with Brendon Grylls and negotiations took place for the formation of government and commitment to the policy of royalties for regions. As a condition of his support, John saw the \$58 million upgrade to

Kalgoorlie Hospital as one of the first projects to get off the ground under the Liberal–National government. Since that time nearly \$100 million of royalties for regions funding has been committed to the region, with notable projects being the Ray Finlayson Sporting Complex, the Kalgoorlie Indigenous Visitors’ Hostel, \$20 million towards new student accommodation at the WA School of Mines and \$5 million for the detailed planning for the proposed transport hub in Kalgoorlie and strategic links to ports to the north and south. Funds have found their way into all corners of goldfields life, refurbishing, reinvigorating and renewing not only infrastructure and public amenities but also hope, a way of life and pride. Projects ranging from the caravan park in Menzies to the sporting complex in Leonora, the office complex in Warburton, through to playgroup and childcare centres, tourism strategies, disability support services and event promotion have all played their part in redressing the neglect of decades, but there is much more to do.

The most important thing we must now remember as we go into the next phase of royalties for regions is that the policies are based on the mantra of local priorities and local decision making. This is what has given the people of regional WA hope, a sense of excitement and the courage to come out and say what is needed and where they would like their community to go. We must be very careful as a government not to tread roughshod over this new strategic capability we have encouraged and nurtured in these long-neglected communities. I draw members’ attention to work done through the remoteFOCUS initiative, facilitated by Desert Knowledge Australia. The project was under the leadership of Fred Chaney, a man for whom I have a great deal of respect and who has spent decades considering the state of our nation and the neglect of our remote and regional areas. In his report “Fixing the hole in Australia’s Heartland: How Government needs to work in remote Australia” he notes that Australia is the most urbanised continent in the world, with more than 85 per cent of our population living within 50 kilometres of the coast. The report looks at how remote Australia is governed and perceives government, and had a particular focus on the Pilbara. I quote from the report —

Royalties for Regions is a unilateral (that is, State) policy which addresses the traditional failure to provide financial resources to regions sufficient to meet their legitimate needs and aspirations. The next step is to ensure all governments and the different Pilbara communities are on the same page—declaring Loyalty to Regions—and this cannot be done unilaterally. A particular necessity is the incorporation of Aboriginal interests into this process through their established representative structures.

What concerns me is the talk of changing the focus of royalties for regions to more general infrastructure such as roads and rail—taking decision making back to central control. The hopes and visions of those we have enticed out to give their point of view and set their priorities will be dashed; their trust betrayed. Is this loyalty to regions? Fred Chaney, in his personal reflection in the report, noted that when he went around regional Western Australia in 2007 seeking views on a human rights bill —

What we found was more of a demand for economic and social rights than civil and political rights. People felt short changed and attitudes to government (not political parties but government generally) were uniformly in terms of “them” not understanding “us”.

He went on to say —

I have also been a sometime participant and long time observer of honest attempts by governments to do better. The uniformity of failure to match results with good intentions makes it clear to me that failure is not a matter of partisan politics, of lack of good intentions, of just getting policy settings wrong, or of having the wrong people. There is

a system failure here; the present instruments of government are not fit for use in remote Australia.

He asked —

... can Australia properly be a nation while there is this hole in our heartland? We think not.

There is much more to do. It is imperative that those who live and work in the regions they love have a strong say in how the funding is prioritised. That is why when the Nationals committed \$150 million to the Goldfields–Esperance strategic development plan, we did not specify how the funding should be spent. It is not for distant politicians to decide what is more important for the goldfields—is it more doctors or a drag strip? The Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission, Goldfields Voluntary Regional Organisation of Councils and Regional Development Australia have worked very closely with their communities and community organisations to identify priority projects for the expenditure of the \$150 million that will enable the region to work towards the vision and strategies to meet not only their critical needs, but also their aspirations. Some of the key priorities found in the work done so far are for a community hub based on the new golf course in Kalgoorlie–Boulder; town centre revitalisations in Menzies and Laverton; seniors’ accommodation and multipurpose office accommodation for service providers in Leonora; sealing of the Outback Highway to improve access to Ngaanyatjarra lands; and upgrades to key infrastructure, such as Laverton Hospital and the Goldfields Art Centre.

I turn to some of the priorities I see as part of my work as the new member for Kalgoorlie; things that will make a difference in the lives of the people of the goldfields and the Ngaanyatjarra lands. Of high priority is the severe general practitioner shortage in the goldfields. There is no doctor in Laverton or Kambalda and the City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder, given the size of its population, should have 40 general practitioners. However, by 30 January this year, the number had dropped to 23. One of the major problems is that local general practitioners are so overstretched that they do not have the capacity to supervise international medical graduates or new young doctors. Finding and recruiting doctors who have these capabilities is virtually impossible, yet there seems to be an unwillingness to accept that the system is broken. We need to look at new ways to meet the needs of people in regional areas. The royalties for region southern inland health initiative committed more than half a billion dollars in the southern half of the state. Major progress is being made in recruiting doctors and installing telehealth equipment and employing nurse practitioners. However, we are still not breaking the back of the general practitioner shortage. When Brendon Grylls suggested a nurse practitioner for Laverton, it was ruled out by the Australian Medical Association, which has also greeted new developments in telehealth with great reservation. It worries me that the Australian Medical Association is protecting the jobs its members do not want to fill. It is time to rethink the provision of general practitioner services in the regions. The medical workforce is changing. Doctors, an increasing number of whom are female, require more family-friendly working hours. The small family medical practice is confronted with the need for expensive and hi-tech equipment, burdensome reporting arrangements and high insurance premiums. Many just want to be doctors, not small business owners. International medical graduates face a very difficult and often lonely road as they try to gain accreditation, and the burden on their supervising general practitioner is immense. We need to use nurse practitioners and telehealth. We also need facilities at which GPs can provide their services in a fully supported way whereby they receive a salary or remuneration for consultations without the burden of running a small business. Our upgraded regional hospitals must be used to train and supervise interns.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms W.M. DUNCAN: Another area in which we can make a real difference with a bit of attention is in the provision of mobile health services into Indigenous and remote communities. We have already seen the success of the Western Desert kidney health project and the Royal Flying Doctor Service on-the-road program, which have been supported by substantial royalties for regions funding and have delivered primary health care and important health education and assessment through culturally appropriate mobile means. The Telethon Speech and Hearing Centre for Children's Earbus mobile children's ear clinics is another program that is making a difference. Studies show that 40 per cent of our Indigenous children acquire middle ear disease immediately after birth and that before the age of two one in three has a perforated eardrum. Research also shows that these children with hearing loss subsequently find education difficult, have a tendency to drop out or become socially disruptive and an increased likelihood of finding themselves captured by the justice system. The Earbus program is making a huge difference to these children and I would like to see it extended statewide.

Many of the inaugural speeches in the chamber this week have touched on the issue of alcohol consumption and its misuse having a detrimental effect on our community. The goldfields have particularly been under the spotlight on this issue recently with a section 64 notice being issued to licensees and the subsequent application of liquor restrictions in the town. Alcohol consumption per capita in Kalgoorlie–Boulder is consistently around twice the state average at 21.21 litres, with rates of night-time assaults and acute alcohol-related hospitalisations substantially higher than the state average. The same can be said for drug possession, with a dramatic increase in the availability of cannabis in Indigenous communities and high amphetamine use across the community. The Office of Crime Prevention shows that alcohol was a factor in 61.3 per cent of assaults in Kalgoorlie–Boulder and the Office of Racing and Gaming notes that 80 per cent of disorderly conduct offences are alcohol related. I acknowledge the severity of these statistics but I maintain that we must focus on the people who are unable to drink responsibly rather than apply ad hoc restrictions that impact on the majority who are able to drink safely and sociably. If we want to make our regional cities places where people want to live, work and spend their leisure time, we must be careful not to impose onerous and inequitable restrictions that make people feel like second-class citizens. I would, however, support a statewide approach to this issue. Considerable work needs to be done to deal with excessive alcohol consumption in regional areas. Much more focus must be given to education, prevention, rehabilitation and policing.

I have a particular concern about the prevalence of FASD—foetal alcohol spectrum disorder. We must get the message out that the only safe level of consumption during pregnancy is zero alcohol consumption. Many people think this problem is found only in Aboriginal communities, but that is not true. It is a community-wide problem, although there certainly are tragic concentrations of children afflicted with FASD in places like Fitzroy Valley, and I praise the women of that region for the groundbreaking work they have done in researching this disorder and its prevalence. The national inquiry into foetal alcohol spectrum disorder has made several recommendations, including rolling out a national FASD diagnostic and screening tool, placing warning labels on alcoholic beverages, public awareness campaigns and support and education for pregnant women, especially those with alcohol dependency. We must also push for FASD to be recognised as a disability so that those who are affected have access to support and services.

It seems mandatory that at every election the issue of law and order is top of the list for attention and promises made by candidates and political parties. There is no doubt that we all have a right to live safely and securely in our homes free from threats of assault or loss of possessions. However, sometimes it is too easy to see incarceration as the solution. My colleague and well known Kalgoorlie–Boulder police officer, Hon Dave Grills, who is now the member for Mining and Pastoral Region, has often discussed this issue with me and pointed out that from his experience the vast majority of crimes are alcohol and drug related. That is perhaps where we

should focus more of our resources rather than on providing more beds in jails. The member for North West Central touched on this issue last night, but I would like to add some weight to his arguments. I note that we have on the front bench of this government some people with strong credentials in economics, so I will quote from the cost–benefit analysis prepared by the National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee, “An economic analysis for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offenders: prison vs residential treatment”. Here is a snapshot of some of the statistics captured in that analysis. In 2011, 81 per cent of Indigenous prisoners were convicted of a non-violent offence, and 70 per cent of Indigenous prisoners convicted of a violent offence had been previously convicted. Around 68 per cent of Indigenous prisoners self-reported having used illicit drugs during the preceding 12 months. Based on data from New South Wales, Indigenous prisoners are also significantly more likely to be dependent on alcohol than non-Indigenous prisoners. Indigenous men were significantly more likely to report that they were intoxicated at the time of the offence for which they were incarcerated. Reoffending rates are high and incarceration is associated with poor health outcomes for prisoners, including a relatively higher risk of mortality post-release. The estimated annual average cost per prisoner per day in 2012–13 is \$315. In relation to diversion, in 2009–10, nearly three-quarters of residential treatment and rehabilitation services providing services to Indigenous clients had a waiting list, yet the outcomes from Drug Court participants, whether or not they completed the program successfully, were better than for the comparative group. Participants were less likely to be re-convicted of an offence, including offences against the person, as well as drug offences. The total average cost per client per day, including both operating and capital costs, is between \$204 and \$284. The analysis concludes that the total financial savings associated with diversion to community residential rehabilitation compared with prison are \$111 458 per offender. Community residential treatment is also associated with better outcomes compared with prison, with lower recidivism rates and better health outcomes. In monetary terms, these non-financial benefits have been estimated at an additional \$92 759 per offender.

So I am asking that more government resources be directed to the diversion of offenders and more accessible drug and alcohol rehabilitation services. In particular, I draw attention to the excellent work being done by Goldfields Rehabilitation Services, which has already expanded thanks to a contribution from royalties for regions, but which now needs to expand further to meet the needs of the community. In particular, it needs accommodation for detoxification. This service is changing lives for the better and saving the state healthcare and law and order costs that would occur without rehabilitation.

I would also particularly like to see the continuation and expansion of the excellent youth diversion work that is being carried out with support from royalties for regions, much of it under the excellent leadership of the former Minister for Corrective Services Hon Terry Redman. The youth justice program has been very successful, and the Honourable Wayne Martin, Chief Justice of Western Australia, commented that funding from the royalties for regions program has resulted in a very significant strengthening of juvenile justice programs and facilities in the Kimberley and Pilbara, including through the provision of supervised bail facilities, and similar facilities in Geraldton and Kalgoorlie have dramatically reduced the number of children from regional WA in detention in Perth.

I would not be here today without the incredible and humbling support of so many people and the encouragement and wise counsel of so many residents of the goldfields and, in particular, my dynamic and diverse campaign team. They came from all sides of the political spectrum and decided that Kalgoorlie needed a National in state Parliament. Without the leadership of Gary Brown and John Bowler, I would not have had that team. They did an amazing job, much of it without being asked. They are too numerous to list, but thanks must go to Don Hoddy, Beth Richardson and Terry Fleton for their attention to detail. Graham Thomson, Paul Browning and Graeme Campbell were always there with strategic advice, and Sheryl and Greg Liddicoat,

Anne Skinner, Jeff and Fay Jones, Gloria Moyle and Lisa Malicky were ever ready to put on the green Kermit team T-shirt and make an impromptu appearance if required. Bryce Greatorex looked after the dollars. Thanks also to Jemma Crook, Georgia Blazevic, Steve Kean, Alexis Johnson, Dave Grills and Tony Crook for their work, as well as Nola and Ziggy Wolski.

Family members, of course, are the ones who keep you strong, back you when you are feeling unsure and go the extra mile. In fact, it was the extra thousands of miles that my wonderful husband, Ian, went with his brother Ross—three trips to the Ngaanyatjarra lands distributing material and then collecting not only mine but also everyone else's after the election. To my amazing parents, John and Maxine Tonkin—John is in the gallery this morning—both of whom have Orders of Australia for their service to the goldfields, thank you for your love, support and example. And to my four beautiful kids—Kat, Anna, Elise and James—I am blessed to have your backing. You did not have to do it, but you made the Kermit shirts look stunning and you helped us man every polling booth in Kalgoorlie-Boulder with unpaid gorgeous young people.

I want to conclude by thanking my Mining and Pastoral electorate staff, Margie Thomas-Close, Dorothy Henderson and Frances Archer. Your work is professional, efficient and above and beyond. You are my very dear friends and I am glad you will still be on the team with the successful election of Dave Grills.

It is a great honour to be the member for Kalgoorlie, a real homecoming for me, and I look forward to the next four years working to reward the faith the people of Kalgoorlie have placed in me.

[Applause.]