



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

## **INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Diane Evers, MLC**  
**(Member for South West Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 24 May 2017

*Reprinted from Hansard*



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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 23 May on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

## INTRODUCTION

**HON DIANE EVERS (South West)** [5.01 pm]: Thank you, Madam President, for giving me this opportunity to address the fortieth Parliament of the Legislative Council of Western Australia. I acknowledge that we are standing on Whadjuk Noongar boodja and pay my respects to the elders, past, present and emerging, and note that this land was never ceded. I also acknowledge and support the comments by the Governor of Western Australia, Hon Kerry Sanderson, AC, in her opening address to this Parliament.

It is a great honour and an incredible privilege to take a seat in this esteemed chamber. This is something that I never really expected until late last year when it became apparent to me that there was a very real chance that the Greens WA might earn enough votes to once again claim a seat for the South West Region. It is eight years since we last had Greens representation in the south west and much ground has been lost in this time, figuratively and literally. I am humbled by the road ahead and by the many people who have held this seat before me. My mentors in this role will include previous members Chrissy Sharp, Giz Watson, Paul Llewelyn and, most recently, Lynn MacLaren.

I admire their past contributions and look forward to their guidance in the future. In addition, I will have the experience of my colleagues, Hon Robin Chapple, MLC, member for Mining and Pastoral Region, and Hon Alison Xamon, MLC, member for North Metropolitan Region. With their support and guidance, I am certain that my colleague Hon Tim Clifford, MLC, and member for East Metropolitan Region and I will quickly learn the ropes to become effective members of this Parliament.

Members may notice that I am working hard to manage the formalities of the English language used in this Parliament and I pray that all my esteemed colleagues will afford me leniency when I neglect to speak properly or use colloquialisms that do not quite reflect my point as I would like to. I came to Australia as a 20-year-old from another place and here I found my home. I have been a citizen for over 20 years and I feel most fortunate to be here.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, to the thankyous. I could not be here without the support and trust of my husband, Tony Evers. Back in August, he said to me, “If you are going to this, don’t go in half hearted.” Not only did he give me encouragement, he also gave me the next six months of his time to travel the 45 000 square kilometres of the region, reaching out to the more than

250 000 people, 19 local governments and many individual communities. The South West Region extends along the coast from Mandurah to Augusta and east to Bremer Bay, then inland to cover Jerramungup, Mt Barker, Rocky Gully, Boyup Brook, Collie and Dwellingup, also taking in Margaret River, Manjimup, Denmark and my home town of Albany. Tony has stood by me through the past 29 years of our marriage and I feel I can count on him for love and encouragement through my time in Parliament. My four adult children, Tia, Carl, Rose, Jessica, and her partner, Shane McNeice, will be there for me to offer encouragement and support to ensure that my mental and physical health is kept in good shape. Their love and strength will provide the rock that keeps me balanced and stable when under the enormous pressure that may come with being a member of Parliament. My family makes me whole. They are who I am doing this for. It is their generation that I hope will see a lasting benefit from my time in Parliament—benefits such as social equity and environmental stability.

My thankyou's must now extend to the incredible team of Greens members and supporters who got me to this position. From my local Albany group, to the south west region and WA state group, and even some support interstate, I thank all of you, and cannot express how proud I feel to have your support and to be representing the Greens and the values we share. I would not be here without the work of each and every one of you. My thanks extend to each person who voted Green, especially those who took the chance and voted Green for the first time. I do not intend to let their voices go unheard. In particular, I would like to thank my campaign manager, Donald Clarke. He put his life on hold for three months to work tirelessly on the campaign, and even brought in his daughter, Sarah, to build our Facebook presence. His skills in managing people were greatly appreciated as he held the team together and moved us forward toward our success. His support was unwavering and I am truly humbled by his contribution. I must also thank my eight lower house Greens candidates, David Rastrick, Jodie Moffat, Luke O'Connell, Gordon Tayler, Callum Burwood, Andy Huntley, Aeron Blundell-Camden, Michael Baldock, and my colleague on the upper house ticket, Hsien Harper. I must comment on and offer my great respect for Michael Baldock in particular, as it is through his valuable efforts over the past eight years to keep the Greens membership of the south west informed and active, and over this time maintain a cohesive group who were able and willing to run such a strong campaign. His past work will not be forgotten. I would also like to thank Brenda Conochie, a good friend, who pulled the team together at the last moment to ensure that we had the highest likelihood of success on the day of the election. Throughout the campaign I felt loved, respected and supported, and this made my work easy. The South West Region is populated by caring, thoughtful people and I feel honoured to represent them.

### ACCOUNTING

Well, that is it; that winds up my thankyou's. Now to get on to the nitty gritty: my plans for the next four years. I will start with a bit of background on myself. Some people know their calling early in life and I knew mine. I was born to be an accountant. I loved math from very early in my life and was working the odds of nickel and dime poker by the time I was five years old. At 12 years old I went to the school library to look up exactly what an accountant did to confirm my choice of career. I was convinced; counting money for a job seemed perfect. Some members may be familiar with *Monty Python's* sketch in which an accountant wants to become a lion tamer for some excitement, and then realises it would be better to remain an accountant. For me, as an accountant, this is the best of all their work. There is another accounting joke, although I cannot remember where to give credit. It pictures a person talking to a clairvoyant, and as she gazes into the crystal ball, looks up at the person and says, "I'm sorry, but you were an accountant in all your past lives." This is how it feels.

I illustrate this thought to demonstrate to each member sitting in this room that I am a numbers person, and I hope I have some companionship in this regard, to balance out those people who rely on words to tell a story or paint a picture. They say that some people see the world in colours, smells or sounds. I see it in numbers and I am here to use those numbers to see that the government of Western Australia is run efficiently and effectively to ensure that all people are looked after, that our natural environment is cared for in perpetuity and to see that our economy becomes robust and is resilient to the outside influences of climate change, globalisation and the influences of individuals or corporations that try to undermine the legitimate processes of government.

### FINANCE

My role here as a member of the Greens is to demonstrate that our policies, aims and objectives have a sound economic base. I understand how budgets work. I understand how money can be spent only once. An individual, corporation or state can expend only what it sources through revenue and is supplemented by debt. But debt, which is paid back in the future, should only be drawn for investments that will return a benefit in the future. Using debt because we want pretty things now or because we have mismanaged our recurrent revenue and committed to excessive and unnecessary recurrent spending is as wrong for a state as it is for an individual. Sound financial management entails being able to cover our current costs, then our necessary improvements, and following that we can look at the pretty things, the luxuries, the bell towers and the stadiums. As it stands, our current costs have ballooned. We have sizeable interest payments to make, contracted construction costs in place and distorted wage values, particularly in senior management. The only area that had been trimmed was government services. Over the past few years, most government departments have been losing staff to pay for excesses in spending on other projects. I welcome the recently announced inquiry into past spending, if only to ensure the same mistakes are not repeated.

Speaking from the South West Region, we have lost significant employment in TAFE, the Department of Education, the Department of Agriculture and Food and the Department of Parks and Wildlife, and in our health services, ports, schools and policing. The list goes on. The loss of people in these positions and the resultant loss of their families to the region places additional strain on our communities, which are already stressed by our slowing economy from the end of the mining construction boom and from the increasing agricultural variability brought on by climate change. Our youth and other jobseekers are left to fend for themselves in an economy that is doing everything possible to eliminate low-skilled meaningful employment. People do not just need a job; they need meaningful employment.

But I digress. My intent is to let everyone in this house know that I will focus on the numbers side of all our legislation. I will consider the economic impacts and consequences of our proposed legislation to see who are the winners and who are the losers, and who will bear the cost; which principles are supported and which are rejected; and whether the advantage will be in the short term or the long term. Each issue must have its economic consequences researched and detailed, not just for the immediate term but for the future.

When considering projects beyond our essential services of government, my mantra will be as follows: invest in projects that will reduce our ongoing costs and in projects that will bring in future revenue. One of those projects is the renewable energy industry. Not only can we create affordable renewable energy systems now, but this technology will reduce our future operating costs and result in substantially lower clean-up costs at the end of a lifecycle when compared with fossil fuel energy production.

As an added bonus, Australia, with our rich mineral resources and outstanding educational institutions, should be able to create a manufacturing industry based on renewable technology. Talk about creating meaningful employment! Imagine being the person to develop and manufacture a better battery or more efficient solar collector. Australians have the ingenuity to do this. We simply must stop subsidising polluting industries. We must listen to communities such as Collie that are faced with bearing the brunt of our previous lethargy by a government that failed to prepare for the phasing out of coal.

Other sound financial investments are in our people. Better education and improved health are key to a strong and resilient population. If we want to help people off drugs and out of unemployment, we need to give them the education to understand and manage how to live in our increasingly complex world. We need to provide a healthcare system that prevents minor issues from growing larger and that addresses mental health issues with appropriate support. We need to increase the opportunities for people to find something better in their lives, such as work, sports, music, friendships and community. People who are healthy both mentally and physically, when given the skills of a good education and access to high-quality further training, will be more likely to find or create meaningful employment.

In my previous position as state manager for the community run organisation Green Skills, we ran a series of Green Army programs to give disadvantaged youth an opportunity to learn new skills as part of an environmental team. This program worked well on the south coast in achieving environmental aims while also providing employment and skills to assist young people to find further work. We were very disappointed when the program was cut, as the consequences were dire for our youth and the environment.

Another sound investment for government funding is public transport. Build a road and traffic will fill it. Then we need to build another road. Build a train line, and when the train is full, run the train again. Simple. We need to invest in electric vehicles and in charging stations that run off renewable technologies. The more renewable technology we invest in, the cheaper it becomes. Technology. Think about it—research through our universities, development by our small businesses, and production in a new manufacturing industry. This ticks all the boxes.

This is not the last time members will hear me harp on about sound financial management. To me, sound financial management goes hand in hand with good physical and mental health and a quality education for an individual, as it also goes hand in hand with social justice and environmental conservatism for the state. Through our sound management, we can ensure that there is social equity across the state.

I turn now to the triple bottom line—the idea of accounting for social, environmental and economic aspects. How long is it since we have used that term? It came and went, along with many other progressive ideas. It then disappeared completely when the idea of running government like a business became the fashion. As an accountant, I appreciate the desire to run an operation on a sound financial basis to achieve good value-for-money results. But a government has many more responsibilities to its constituents than just the business model of simply making a profit without regard to consequences.

In addition to managing the finances well, government has an obligation to look after the people and the environment. We have the responsibility to see that no-one is left behind, and that people in our society less fortunate than ourselves are looked after and not disregarded through our own lack of empathy. That includes people who live with a disability, an addiction or an inadequate level of education, and victims of crime and family violence. A fair and just society cares for the disadvantaged.

We also have a responsibility to ensure that our natural resources of air, water, land and biodiversity are not further diminished by our greed and general consumptive behaviour. In order to fulfil our responsibilities as a Parliament, we must value the entirety of environmental, economic and social outcomes.

### **SOUTH WEST**

I will now venture into my electorate, the South West Region, to demonstrate the interconnection of these values. I guess that many members here today have travelled to the south west and have seen the incredible beauty of the southern forests, the magnificent coastline and the productive farmland. Members may have also noticed the diverse economic base of tourism, agriculture, mining and small cottage industries, and, of course, the extensive service industries supporting our communities. During my campaign, what I found most striking, however, was the incredible range of social situations in our communities—farmers, foresters, miners, teachers, nurses, tour guides, vigneron, builders, bankers and bus drivers, and also, of course, volunteers, parents, students and so on. Members may have noticed that in that list not once did I have a need to refer to gender, ethnicity, religion, sexuality or age. This is because we are all people first. We must be inclusive of all. Our role as members of Parliament is to look after people and the planet, and not necessarily profit. To put it simply, in government we work out what revenue we have available and what services and projects we need to address, and then work out how best to achieve this.

So, as a voice for the South West Region, I will be focused on creating opportunities for meaningful employment; supporting a transition to renewable energy industry careers; creating opportunities to replace logging in our native forests; supporting diversity and progressive development in our agricultural and horticultural industries; providing opportunities to engage young people in activities that encourage connection and hope for their future; and inspiring visitors to experience the diversity, prosperity and community of our absolutely incredible region.

I know of nowhere else that demonstrates the interconnectedness of social, environmental and economic issues as does the south west. Most of our social life and economy stems from our natural environment. Our industries of farming, mining and forestry follow directly from our landscape. Our tourism industry is best represented by the natural beauty of our forests, coastlines and biodiversity. People in the south west are influenced daily by their natural environment, if not through their employment then through their leisure time in fishing, camping, surfing or trailbike riding. We cannot focus on the economy without addressing the underlying support of our environment, nor try to fix the economy without addressing the inequity in our society.

I will be focusing on the principles that guide the Greens—that is, the pillars that support our entire structure of policies, and the tenets of our party. These are peace and nonviolence, ecological sustainability, participatory democracy, and social justice. These four concepts will guide my actions in this chamber. I will stand by these principles in each debate and decision we make, and I will use this guide to improve the wellbeing of the regional communities of the south west region.

### **AGRICULTURE**

My first idea in the recent election campaign was to promote and repeat the three word slogan, “Greens Support Farmers”. I did this because we do. Each time I said it, under my breath I would finish the line with, “because nobody else is.” During the past eight years, the Department of Agriculture and Food has become a shell of its former self, existing without the necessary research staff and resources to progress new ideas. Farmers and farming communities are vital to our state. They were here long before mining and will continue to be here long after. We cannot live without food. The Greens support healthy soil, access to clean

water, small business, truth in labelling, the right to deny access for gas exploration, innovation in farming practices and the development of new products and new markets. Family farmers are being squeezed by banks, global corporations, trade agreements, the supermarket duopoly and onerous legislation that makes small operations nearly impossible. As a Parliament we need to support farmers and farming communities. Eighty per cent of our population lives in our metropolitan area, and they need to eat healthy, fresh, local food that improves their health and does not deplete our landscapes.

Good productive farmland has been chewed up and spat out by salinity, acidity, plantations and residential encroachment. There are many issues facing farming communities; we just need to listen. It is not difficult. It is not expensive. Write legislation that supports regional areas and people will choose to live there. We will continue to produce food and earn export income. Our farmers must have rights to refuse access for gas exploration or extraction. They must have the right to be compensated when genetically modified organisms escape from neighbouring properties and contaminate their crops. They must be able to receive a reasonable price for their produce.

### **FORESTRY**

Agriculture is one of my portfolios; another is forestry. Twenty years ago when the old-growth forest debate was gaining traction, environmental groups were vocal to claim that jobs were being lost in forestry due to mechanisation, not through conservation. But the protesters were tarred with the blame for lost jobs and here we are again, trying to stop commercial logging in native forests. This time, financial reports clearly demonstrate that the state is losing millions of dollars propping up native forest logging through our Forest Products Commission. This time, environmental actions such as the WA Forest Alliance's campaign Forests for Life is not simply saying to close the forests; rather, it is saying to manage the forests. The forests can be used to create economic prosperity in the regions; develop industries, such as beekeeping and truffle production; build on ecotourism or agritourism to bring in visitors; increase sawlog plantations on land other than prime agricultural land; and increase value-adding to timber industries by supporting the craft wood markets and small mills that can obtain greater yields from the thinning of trees undertaken to improve the ecological health of the forest. We can think of better ways than the old ways. Research must be carried out to determine good management of our native forests that protects human populations, provides economic opportunities and ensures healthy forests.

### **SMALL BUSINESS**

Through my term I will be addressing small business concerns. Small business is vital to the continued health and growth of the WA economy. As a side point, I was a small business owner in Sydney before coming here, so I do recognise some of the issues small businesses go through. Not only is small business the largest employer, it is where new ideas are generated, and where resilience is found in the face of a changing climate. As a Parliament, we must ensure that regulation brought in to curtail poor practices brought on by the greed of global corporations does not curtail the innovation and enthusiasm of new enterprises. We must look at levelling the playing field so that new enterprises have access to the same supports and subsidies that are offered to larger players. Small business, particularly for the South West Region, is where our economic prosperity lies.

### **SPORT AND RECREATION**

Another portfolio of mine, which does not quite fit with the finance and regional ones previously mentioned, is sport and recreation. Members may have noticed that the Greens do not often raise issues related to sport and rec. Many of us in the party take part in one



sporting activity or another, but I have to say I rarely hear conversations about who won the footy—unless we are talking about our kids. The focus of sport seems more about getting out and getting active, not about winning or placing a bet. I am not an active person; my fitness seems to have stuck with me from 35 years ago when I practised martial arts to the level of black belt. It is likely I would be a bit rusty now. These days, my sporting activity is pretty much limited to watching my son play cricket or my daughter play soccer. My interest in the sport and rec portfolio will be aimed predominantly at supporting community activities to get people of all ages out there and active. There is plenty of research to demonstrate that sports and other recreational activities support people to have healthy and meaningful lives. Another thing is that I grew up with baseball, but I have found my true love in sport with cricket. With my new membership at the Western Australian Cricket Association, I hope to have many opportunities to sit back and enjoy the game and maybe even see some members there.

### **GREENS INFLUENCE**

On 25 March—back to the election—when I realised I had won this seat, my first thoughts were concerned with the difference I would like to make. Working with a Labor government and drawing on my financial conservatism, I believed we would make a dramatic change to the wellbeing of Western Australians. I considered that my drive would be to assist the Labor government to enact good legislation that would carry us forward into a new era. All I aimed for was to make a positive difference. Then, the penny dropped. Through numerous conversations I came across the challenging realisation that by making Labor look good and not seeking any personal or Greens recognition, my efforts would eventually undermine the Greens and thereby reduce our opportunities for continued electoral success and legislative change. I will lay my cards on the table. The Greens and Labor are not the same. Many of our ideas may overlap, but on many fronts the Greens take the issue just a few steps further. I ask members to think of protecting the forests, protesting at Beeliar wetlands, supporting Indigenous recognition and protection of cultural heritage, tireless lobbying for the National Disability Insurance Scheme and marriage equality.

I love it when I see Greens policy become legislation, but I now understand how important it is that we get some credit for this. There will always be a need for a progressive party to lead, or maybe drag, the other parties forward. Without the Greens, the old parties could remain with the old ways, the things they have always done, the people they have always catered to. The two-party adversarial system of democracy that we follow ensures that one side is determined to make the government look bad. No wonder the general population is cynical about politics. Let us leave these practices to the other house. In this house, let us work together to achieve outcomes that benefit Western Australians. Leave the gaming and bickering to the Legislative Assembly. We can be better than that. So there we have it: I intend to make a positive difference and my effort will make Labor look good. If all of us here in the Legislative Council work together, we may even improve the public perception of Parliament and politicians. I am expecting us to work for the good of all Western Australians to protect what natural environment we have left, and to manage our natural and economic resources sustainably so that our future and that of our children and grandchildren is pleasant, safe and equitable.

I ask you, my fellow Legislative Councillors, to please join me in this dream for the future of Western Australia. Each of you needs to consider the consequences of his or her actions. We have all come to this place with a hope of making a positive difference and a chance of being remembered for our contribution. We know that there is little money in the bank, so we must work with what we have to achieve the best outcome. As the mine construction boom petered off, we have had to refocus on our export industries of food, mineral resources and tourism,

in addition to our internal markets and services industries. Think of mine construction as the icing on the cake; it may not be there any longer, but we still have the cake. Let us make the most of it and share it out equitably. During my campaign I met Sister Mary, a nun at St Brigid's convent in Bridgetown. Sister Mary, who volunteers in Perth working with homeless youths, told me how she says to the kids that "We can either argue over who has the biggest piece of the cake or we can sit down and enjoy our tea and cake and work out how we can make things better." That is what I propose we do. Rather than waste our time scoring points over one another, let us get stuck in and make things better and work toward consensus for positive outcomes. Let us invest in the projects that reduce our ongoing costs or that will bring in future revenue.

### **RESPECT**

I will speak about one last thought to finish up. On the opening day of Parliament, in her response to the Governor's address, Hon Sally Talbot, MLC, spoke about women and the challenges they face. I recognise and understand her comments. A demonstration of this inequity can be seen right here in this chamber. On this side of the chamber, made up of the Greens and Labor, there are nine women and nine men, or 50 per cent women. On the other side there are only two women out of 18, or just over 10 per cent women. Throughout my life I, personally, have not felt serious gender-based discrimination and I do not intend to accept it in this house. I take each person on their merits and afford them the respect that I would offer to any individual, and I expect to be offered the same in return.

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you, everyone.

[Applause.]

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