



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Charles Smith, MLC (Member for East Metropolitan)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 25 May 2017

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 24 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.

HON CHARLES SMITH (East Metropolitan) [3.03 pm]: First of all, Madam President, I congratulate you on your election, and I look forward to working with you in this place over the next four years. I would also like to thank all the parliamentary staff members who have been most helpful and accommodating throughout the transition period since the election. I congratulate the Leader of the House on her recent appointment, and I also congratulate all the new ministers, parliamentary secretaries and Whips. They have a very important duty to carry out, and I wish them well in their endeavours. Political allegiances aside, all of us in this place have an obligation to serve the interests of our constituents and speak on their behalf. We have been entrusted by the people of Western Australia to perform one of the most important duties in public life. The Westminster form of government that we inherited from Britain has served Western Australia well since the nineteenth century. As elected members of the fortieth Parliament we have an obligation to respect the enduring traditions and uphold the integrity of this place. I also wish to acknowledge the Whadjuk people, traditional custodians of the land on which we are meeting. I would also like to acknowledge the early pioneers and their descendants, who laid the foundations of modern Western Australia.

Today, like others before me, I speak for the first time in this place with a variety of emotions, but above all I have a great sense of opportunity, and I am incredibly grateful to have been given this opportunity to represent everyday Australians—the forgotten people, whom Sir Robert Menzies defined so well in his famous radio broadcast in 1942. I am one of the many Western Australians who made the choice to move to this great state from elsewhere. I was born in a small market town called Hitchin in North Hertfordshire in the United Kingdom, about 60 kilometres north of London. I take this early opportunity to acknowledge my parents, who instilled in me—of course, the young man does not realise it at the time—a good sense of right and wrong, and later on a sense of wonder and inquiry. They are, and continue to be, the most wonderful parents any child and man could hope for. Unfortunately, although they cannot be here today, they may be watching from the UK, through the modern wonders of the internet, and the parliamentary live streaming service, which is a victory for them as much as it is for me. If so, I say to them that I am so very happy that they can see me here today serving the Western Australian people at the very highest level.

In the UK I became a qualified biologist, and a student of crop protection, studying at the Scottish Agricultural College. However, as I am sure that all members can attest, career paths are seldom linear or follow predetermined plans. In the early 1990s, employment in the UK was very hard to come by—very similar to Western Australia at the present time, and I fortuitously fell into the world of banking and investment. I became fascinated by the global financial and commodity market, with its combination of risk and analysis at the forefront of making informed decisions. It is truly exciting and awe-inspiring to behold hundreds of thousands of dollars changing hands actually in seconds. Although initially riveting and rewarding, I gradually became disillusioned with it all, and decided a change in direction of life was needed—not merely a change in career, but also a change of environment. At this time, my interest in Australia grew, and I began to seriously examine the possibility of emigrating to the other side of the globe. In many respects, I was following a great tradition. Millions of people from the British Isles have moved to this land over the past few centuries, seeking to build a new life in a country with boundless potential.

I arrived in Perth from the UK in January 2005, with my wife and baby son, straight into the rather confronting heat of a southern summer. I came with a sense of renewal and with fresh opportunity about what lay before me. We had never before been to Perth, or even Australia. I have always taken calculated risks, and living with the regret of not knowing what I could have achieved was the driving force in selling up and jumping onto the plane. It turned out to be the most momentous decision in my life, and I am eminently grateful to Western Australia and its people for the opportunities they have afforded my family and me.

Coming from the financial industry, I now had ambitions to change my outlook and serve the community. I joined Western Australia Police in the same year as I arrived, and it is a decision that I do not regret in any way, shape or form. I heartily recommend that everybody live in the shoes of a frontline police officer just for a short time. It will forever change their lives and their outlook on life. I encourage members to go and ride along for at least a week of night shift, if they have the fortitude. In January 2007, I shipped out to Kalgoorlie–Boulder, where I stayed until 2015. The goldfields was an entirely different world from what I was used to, but in time I began to appreciate the region and its colourful collection of characters. I remain convinced that Western Australia's eastern regions are underdeveloped and offer an immense economic potential. I also believe that people in regional Western Australia quite rightly feel undervalued and ignored by the major parties, who often seem obsessed with issues that only people in wealthy inner-city suburbs care about.

While stationed in Kalgoorlie with Western Australia Police, I had the fortune of meeting Hon Dave Grills, a former member of this place. Mr Grills deserves a special mention, as that meeting in Kalgoorlie ultimately led to a warm friendship and my reinvigorated interest in politics, which culminated in my election to this place.

As a police officer, one gets to see life—real life. One witnesses the worst, and sometimes the best, of human nature. Through working in the real world, I have a good understanding of everyday people's concerns and what the important issues are. What my party and I represent to people is commonsense, hard work, understanding and traditional values. I fear that too many people within the political and media classes are detached from ordinary people and tend to look down upon those who do not share their so-called progressive values.

At the state election just over two months ago, the public of WA overwhelmingly expressed their dissatisfaction with the previous Liberal–National government and voted for a change of direction. It was a sweeping victory and a total disendorsement of the former Premier and his cabinet. The size of the swing indicates that people will resoundingly turf out governments

that fail to deliver. Voter loyalty to the major parties is disappearing and people will no longer vote for a party simply because that is how they have always voted.

In my observation, many Western Australians are utterly fed up with all-talk, no-action career politicians, and are tired of hearing the same old promises from the same tired old politicians who never produce any results. I am here to represent those people, to hold this government to account, and to put Western Australians first. Those people have realised that politics is a battle of ideas—a philosophical contest, not merely a public relations competition, pitting a battle between reason and self-indulgent, self-righteous sentiment, which is divorced from objective reality.

Throughout Western Australia I see strong warning signs of disaffection, malaise and cynicism. A growing chunk of the body politic lacks drive and common purpose. Many people feel that their country is at risk of losing the values that made it strong and had it being looked upon with jealous eyes from overseas. Many people feel that their country is slipping away, socially and culturally. They notice the decline in community-mindedness and watch as reminders of our Western Judeo-Christian and British heritage are erased from school curricula and the public sphere. They see the growing entrenchment of asymmetrical multiculturalism, consumerism and hyper-individualism.

Significantly, they see a society in which responsibility and mutuality have been slowly eroded. It has been eroded through unemployment and chronic underemployment in low-paid insecure work. The healthcare system is creaking at the joints, our children's education is at risk, and year after year, our children's educational standards tumble down the global tables. Our economy is failing to provide improvements in real living standards. There is fear on the streets. Levels of crime and substance abuse only seem to worsen, and the traditional family unit is falling apart like never before. The social cohesion we used to enjoy is increasingly being replaced by a sense of alienation. Is it any wonder people are fed up with the same old all-talk and no-action governments that just look after the few rather than the many?

We must rediscover a society based on mutual rights and, most importantly, responsibilities. This is real social justice, in which people get something for something. This is the almost forgotten social contract which sprang from the Enlightenment of eighteenth century Europe and the great British philosophers, Hobbes and Locke, and also a Frenchman named Rousseau. Simply stated, we each have a duty to society in which we accept the responsibility to work and to improve ourselves and our communities. To quote Edmund Burke —

Society is indeed a contract. It is a partnership ... not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born.

It is my view that we have inherited our state and society from previous generations, but do not possess it. Rather, we are temporary custodians, tasked with conserving a precious inheritance which will, in turn, become a future generation's inheritance.

At its core, the party I belong to wants to generate a culture of service and responsibility in which we all pitch in and work harder and look after not only ourselves, but each other. We know that individuals prosper best with a safe, secure and cohesive society. There has been much commentary—most of it widely inaccurate—about what One Nation stands for. Our supporters have been demonised and labelled with many vile epithets. I would like to now dispel some of the myths about our party.

One Nation is comprised of working and middle-class Australians whose basic decency, quiet patriotism, traditional moral compass and vigorous work ethic defines them as the heart and

soul of our society. One Nation serves as a voice for those who feel they have been forgotten or abandoned by the major parties, which now increasingly seem to pander to special interests and vocal minorities. The great Australian historian Geoffrey Blainey once warned —

The more emphasis that is placed on the rights of minorities, and the need for affirmative action to enhance those rights, the more is the concept of democracy—and the rights of the majority—in danger of being weakened.

For our democracy to remain strong, establishment politicians cannot afford to keep ignoring a large chunk of the body politic.

I would now like to turn my attention to the East Metropolitan Region, which I have been given the great honour of representing. I am immensely grateful to the people of the East Metro Region, which encompasses Armadale, Bassendean, Belmont, Darling Range, Forrestfield, Kalamunda, Maylands, Midland, Mirrabooka, Morley, Mt Lawley, Swan Hills, Thornlie and West Swan. There a number of serious challenges confronting the fast-growing communities in the electorate. Wedged between the inner-city and regional areas, communities in the East Metro Region could be described as the ignored middle children of Western Australian society. Despite grand promises from successive governments, residents of Perth's outer eastern suburbs continue to lack access to the infrastructure, services and jobs that inner city residents enjoy. As a resident of Aveley, I can attest to the nightmare that is the daily commute on our clogged eastern roads.

Unfortunately, this situation is only set to worsen, with predictions that the population of Perth and surrounds will swell by around 75 per cent to 3.5 million, largely due to the high immigration policies pursued by the major parties at the federal level. As the 2016 Perth and Peel@3.5 million planning document noted, this rapid, forced population growth will place increased and unsustainable pressure on our natural environment, our economic wellbeing and our highly valued way of life.

I am obviously a migrant myself and I understand that some level of continued immigration is desirable. However, I do not believe the current rate of immigration-fuelled growth is sustainable or beneficial to the pre-existing population. We have seen over the last decade how incumbent residents have borne the costs through greater congestion on roads and public transport, as well as more expensive housing and reduced amenity. Perth's freeways have become car parks, our trains are overcrowded and our schools and hospitals are overloaded. Residents seeking affordable housing have been squeezed out to the urban fringes, far away from employment and services. The huge infrastructure costs associated with this population growth has also forced increased state debt borrowings and unpopular proposed asset sales. Yet the plan from the established parties is to continue the policy of high immigration, without any real measures to cope with the influx. To put it mildly, this is a recipe for disaster. Western Australia urgently needs its own population policy, aimed at protecting the quality and way of life of the existing population. We also need new ways of funding infrastructure in WA to ease crippling congestion, lift productivity, generate economic growth and jobs and keep our assets in domestic hands.

Another major issue facing communities in the East Metro Region is the volume of crime—not only reported, but actually committed—and in particular burglary, assaults, domestic violence and alcohol-related incidents. I have a strong commitment to the rule of law and order. I do believe that there is a strong community perception that our criminal justice system and our corrections system is a failing and dysfunctional one. From simple observation it is obvious that our courts have slanted too far in favour of the accused, and no longer reflect the views of everyday Australians.

Our communities want to see more robust sentencing from magistrates and judges, who are rightly perceived to be consistently out of touch with community expectations. When magistrates fail to meet community expectations they are in danger of losing their legitimacy. I fear we have reached that point. Those who commit crime have no fear of the police, no fear of being caught, and no fear of going to court, because the chances are they will receive very little in the way of any punitive measures against them. The fact of the matter is that the law, in most cases, is adequate, in that it contains provisions for magistrates or judges to impose a custodial sentence. However, in many cases, the sentencing is perceived to be excessively lenient for the crime committed and there is a view amongst many lawyers and judges that society is to blame for the crime rather than the offender, and this has to stop. This approach to crime has created a society without personal responsibility, in which there are no consequences to bad behaviour in school, bad behaviour on the sports field and bad behaviour in public life. It has created a society of excuse-makers and blame-shifters, where criminal and bad behaviour is seen as a less favourable career choice. It has taken away people's responsibilities for their actions. I believe individuals should be held fully responsible for their actions. Committing crime is fundamentally a matter of rational choice.

It will be my role in this Parliament to send a strong message of support to the police on the ground, who do such a difficult job so well with little resource and support from successive governments and, in particular, the judiciary. I will be seeking to increase the number of police on the front line and to secure the health, safety and welfare provisions that our police so desperately need. It really is tough enough. Our police deserve access to adequate resources.

To improve law and order, we need to ask: what are the ideological aims of policing—crime control, the protection of citizens and their property, the upholding of justice, the denunciation of criminality, the maintenance of order? I would suggest that our police currently fail all these tests. The fact is that there are simply not enough police on the streets. It is very, very straightforward. I know of case after case of police not even attending a job, or forensic officers not attending burglaries because of the enormity of the workload and the backlog of jobs. To put it bluntly, the police are in crisis. I fully support the call for an additional 1 000 police officers over the next four years and the associated resources required. If members do not believe crime is out of control, again, I invite them to ride along with the police.

Policing is, by its very nature, difficult and dangerous. Police make mistakes and get it wrong. Police officers have to live for the rest of their lives with decisions that they made in a split second. Rarely do they see good things when policing and, because of that, they become cynical, which makes them seem hard and uncaring. Policing damages good people. When they leave the service, every police officer has issues that they must rationalise before moving forward. Some, sadly, never rationalise them. Many members of the police have been treated absolutely disgracefully, having been left to fend for themselves after being medically retired. Why is it that the police do not have a tailored workers' compensation-style scheme? I want a scheme to be introduced as soon as possible with retrospectivity to give peace of mind to those who are currently living a daily struggle. Every police officer of some years' experience carries with them post-traumatic stress disorder of varying magnitude. The rate of mental illness, especially depression, divorce and anger issues, is simply not acceptable for those people who sacrifice to serve and protect with very little reward.

I would like to recount to the house a short story of a former police officer's life that fell apart after witnessing too much trauma and distress. I will keep her real name secret, so I will refer to her as Nikki. At the age of 20, Nikki joined Western Australia Police, following in her father's footsteps. She served for 15 years doing pretty much what every front-line police officer deals with today. She witnessed death, violence, car accidents and families ripped

apart by alcoholism, drug addiction and domestic violence. Towards the end of her career, Nikki noticed that she was wracked with sadness and mood swings and would relive some of the trauma she witnessed. She eventually admitted to herself that she could no longer do the job and she was medically retired. She was told by doctors that she was experiencing depression and post-traumatic stress disorder. Nikki suffered with excessive suicidal ideation, along with the break-up of her marriage. She became mentally unable to work and relied upon a disability pension to get by. Eight years after being medically retired, she was eventually referred to a PTSD specialist and admitted to hospital, where her finances went from bad to worse and she had to declare herself bankrupt. Needless to say, the effect of Nikki serving in WAPOL has been devastating on her and her children. The whole family is in counselling and they struggle through every day. After experiencing severe mental illness that sprang directly from her work, Nikki, like hundreds of others, was just left out in the cold to fend for herself. Is this how we treat those who serve and protect our communities? Every state in the Federation has a workers' compensation package for their police, except WA. I am sure honourable members will agree that it is now time to change that.

I, along with my colleagues, will offer to assist in the passage of government legislation, but as a One Nation member, I will continue to insist on certain conditions being met—conditions that bring the very best outcomes for WA and my electorate. Our support for the government will not be taken for granted and we will reserve the right to vote against any or all government legislation. This new government has talked about putting Western Australians first in local content provisions and employment. We want to see it now deliver on those promises. I would also like to see the government ensure that Western Australians receive a fair return for the exploitation of our mineral and energy resources. WA has an abundance of natural gas, but we are failing to properly capitalise on this natural advantage. We must make sure that sufficient reserves of gas are set aside to meet the current and future needs of the local economy. We must also make sure that local companies, workers and communities benefit from gas projects and that the state receives sufficient revenue.

In closing, it is usual and right in an inaugural speech to also thank family, friends and supporters. Firstly and most importantly, I thank my wife, Helen, whose love and support knows no depth. I thank my children, Tristan and George, for their enthusiasm; my parents, Mike and Myra; my brother, Andrew, all of whom encouraged me to stand up in the face of abuse, insults and lies from political opponents. You are my driving force. Without support and guidance from the following people I would not be standing here today: I thank Ron McClean and Marye Louise Daniels, Senator Pauline Hanson, Lincoln Stewart, George Copley, Sonia Dixon, Jenny Bennett and Sandra Old. I would also like to acknowledge my One Nation WA parliamentary colleagues, Hon Colin Tincknell and Hon Robin Scott, for their encouragement. Finally, I thank my supporters who came out to volunteer on election day and who were verbally abused and bullied in the name of our democracy. You are true heroes to stand up for your beliefs and values in the face of that hostility. With your continued assistance and support, I hope to achieve the best possible results for the people of the East Metropolitan Region and Western Australia.

Thank you.

[Applause.]