



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Tjorn Sibma, MLC**  
**(Member for North Metropolitan Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 25 May 2017



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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 23 May on the following motion moved by Hon Dr 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 TJORN SIBMA (North Metropolitan)** [11.21 am]: Thank you, Mr Deputy President, and may I offer my congratulations on your appointment to that role, and also, through you, my congratulations to Hon Kate Doust on her historic election as President. I also offer my congratulations to all members elected to this place, especially those who, like me, have been elected for the first time. I am humbled to be elected to this chamber, and I thank the people of the North Metropolitan Region for giving me the opportunity to represent them. I pledge not to let them down.

## FAMILY AND ORIGINS

Nothing in my family origins predetermined my presence in this place. At the end of the Second World War, my grandfathers had occasion to express thanks for their personal survival and to embark on separate journeys that would deposit them half a world away on a wharf not far from here. My grandfather William Hay served as a Royal Navy submariner in every operational theatre of that conflict. It was on shore leave in Perth that he met his future wife, Bernice Berry. It was love that eventually brought William to settle in Perth and raise five children, among them my mother, Susan, who is in the gallery here today. Frederik Sibma, my other grandfather, spent the war in Germany as an indentured labourer. He was spared the worst of what happened at home in the Netherlands. My grandmother, Elizabeth, who is still with us today at the age of 93, survived the Nazi occupation, married Frederik, had three children in quick succession, and then moved to Perth. Only in their later years did my grandparents begin to open up about their wartime experiences. This was not unusual for a generation which collectively kept their own counsel and which had, as children of the Great Depression, developed a level of resilience and gratitude that will always keep me humble. What I will say is that each suffered a terrible loss, no less than the loss of their youthful innocence. But they were brave, and they continued to be brave their entire lives.

Australia in the early 1950s beckoned as a place in which enterprising people could easily get work, put the past behind them and forge new and prosperous lives. My father, Sjoerd, who is also here today, came to Australia as a boy with his parents and his brother and sister. Legend has it that he spent the majority of that long sea voyage tethered to a railing, or some other fixed object, due to his mother's mortal fear that he and his two siblings would be washed overboard. Providence ensured that the family arrived safely. Frederik's renowned impatience determined that their journey terminated at Fremantle rather than Melbourne as originally planned, and I thank him for his foresight.

I come to this place with the intention to honour their memory. As working-class migrants, I hope they will be proud of their eldest grandson for making it here. My father was until February this year an engineer with the Water Corporation for 45 years. He has worked on just about every major initiative and project undertaken by the Water Corporation since the mid-1970s. In his final years at the Water Corporation, he was responsible for commissioning our two water desalination plants. I respect my father's concrete contribution to this state and the depth of his technical knowledge. He was rightly proud of what he did for a living. I still to this day hear an echo of his admonishment, "There's nothing wrong with the water I make, son", whenever I open a bottle of water.

My mother is a woman of many talents. There was not a job she could not do well. For more than 20 years she taught just about every piano student who lived north of Scarborough Beach Road. Coming home from school each day, we were greeted by a wall of sound, as well as a set of precise instructions regarding when and how we were to assemble the dinner that she had prepared earlier in the day. In middle age, mum was finally convinced that she had a good brain and enrolled at university. She is now a clinical psychologist and businesswoman. We are all immensely proud of her achievements and example.

My brother, Kurt, sister, Liesl, and I enjoyed a happy and supportive childhood in Carine. We each attended Carine Primary School and Carine Senior High School, which were then, and remain, excellent schools. My teachers nurtured a love of learning in me from an early age, and I am grateful to them all. At the time my parents bought the land, Carine was still a relatively new subdivision, full of young families aspiring to make their way. The suburb very quickly became established, benefited from good roads, thriving small businesses and a vibrant community and sporting life, and soon exuded a steady, suburban and mainstream character.

Those qualities continue today in the broad constituency of the North Metropolitan Region. I am here to represent the interests of that mainstream constituency—regular people who want to be given a fair go, have access to reliable services and live their lives without bureaucratic interference. I am here for families who worry about paying the mortgage and keeping food on the table. I am here for young people who are worried about how they will get jobs. I am here to represent the interests of our seniors, who want to feel safe in their homes. I am here to help all my constituents preserve the Western Australian way of life that they love.

### **FORGOTTEN PEOPLE**

Seventy-five years ago this week, Sir Robert Menzies spoke about Australia's "forgotten people". They were the honest, hardworking and law-abiding people who were neglected by the powerful political interests of the day. They had no-one in their corner. Menzies changed that. The idea of a "forgotten people" might strike us as anachronistic, but it will be my guide here. I will assess every piece of legislation I see in this place against these simple questions: How will it affect today's forgotten people? How will it benefit families?

The people of the North Metropolitan Region prefer deeds to words. They are practical and decent people who demand that we in this place get on with our jobs so that they may get on with their lives. I therefore come here as a determined pragmatist who will draw on my skills and experience to serve my electorate and this state so that they both might have a bright future.

### **WORK LIFE**

As a young man with an honours degree in philosophy, upon graduation I was confronted with an unsurprisingly low number of local job prospects. Throughout my studies I was confronted with the same question: how are you going to get a job with a degree like that? It did eventually dawn on me that local employers were not particularly intrigued by my dissertation on comparative models of consciousness, or the fact I had wrestled for 12 months with Immanuel Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* and survived—a tome that was single-handedly responsible for reducing the size of our graduating honours class from nine to just three students.

At the end of my studies, I left Perth for Canberra as part of the Department of Defence's graduate intake. If I had not taken that journey, I very much doubt that I would be here today. At the Department of Defence, I undertook a broad range of demanding roles, including the development of the Timor Leste Defence Force; monitoring the Lincoln Agreement on Peace Security and Development on Bougainville Island; managing Australia's defence cooperation relationship with Malaysia; and participating in the Five Powers Defence Arrangements.

I will speak very briefly of my time on Bougainville Island. Bougainville was, prior to its civil strife, home to a population of the most highly educated and skilled population of the small islands that comprise the South Pacific. In very short order, it disintegrated completely and bore witness to every imaginable war crime. Our job over there was to drive a weapons amnesty between the two ex-combatant groups, which still had every reason to despise and mistrust one another. We found that we had inadvertently slowed down the peace process by negotiating exclusively with the old enemies. Only when we started to speak with the churches, women's groups and other civic associations, did we begin to see progress. There I learned a lesson about negotiation and the importance of broad stakeholder consultation that I will not forget. The uniformed officers and civilian officials I worked alongside at Defence are among the most outstanding colleagues I have had. The example set by then Chiefs of the Defence Force, Sir Peter Cosgrove; Sir Angus Houston; and the Secretary of the Department of Defence, and home-grown Western Australian, Mr Ric Smith, have set for me the benchmark for leadership in any organisation.

### **A COHESIVE SOCIETY**

My time in Defence coincided with the September 11 attacks, the Bali bombings, and our campaigns in Iraq and Afghanistan. The threat of terrorism at home and overseas has informed my global outlook and has shaped my view of what constitutes a united and healthy society. The sickening terrorist attack in Manchester just three days ago has, sadly, reinforced my perspective. I am the son of a migrant and my wife is the daughter of migrants, and so I am no opponent of immigration. But I can and will continue to take a deep interest in the success of the national migration program. Everyone in our Western Australian community has a stake in it. To my mind, the successful integration of new arrivals and encouraging their cohesion within the mainstream are the only rightful objectives of immigration policy. Our very welfare depends upon it.

On the evening before the Western Australian Electoral Commission declared that I had been elected as the sixth and final member of the North Metropolitan Region, I learned that I had been appointed as shadow Minister for Community Services; Youth; Seniors and Ageing; Volunteering; Government Accountability; and Veteran Issues—quite a bag. I intend to make a remark about one of those shadow portfolios, veteran issues, not to the exclusion or detriment of any of the others. I would like to work constructively with the minister, whose military service I greatly respect, to ensure that the needs of Western Australia's veterans are at the forefront of our considerations. I am energised to meet the needs of our younger veterans, particularly in the areas of mental health support and employability. In my 40 years, I have worked as a cleaner, market gardener, kitchen hand and tutor. I have worked in the public service, for a mining company, a family owned property development company, and a university.

I also spent time serving a political apprenticeship. Amanda Vanstone gave me my first job in politics, for which I am ever grateful. Amanda was then, and remains, the definition of political authenticity. She knew her own mind and spoke it often, even at personal cost. She gave me some of the most important political tutelage that I have received: be a straight talker. Working for the member for Cottesloe, Hon Colin Barnett, was a study in contrasts. It was a privilege to work for him. His integrity and political credibility were the reasons the

Liberal and National Parties were able to form government in late 2008. He is doubtlessly among the most significant Premiers this state is ever likely to see. The Western Australian Museum will open its doors to the public in 2020. If not for the passion of the previous member for Kalamunda and Minister for Culture and the Arts, Hon John Day, whom I served as chief of staff, the sod-turning ceremony on Monday would not have happened. The Liberal election victory in 2013 secured that project's future. It will be the jewel in the crown in the Perth Cultural Centre precinct, create needed jobs and be a tourism drawcard.

### **CONSERVATISM**

I joined the Liberal Party because I am a conservative. To my mind, conservatism is not an ideology that pursues causes, or seeks the attainment of impractical ideals. My working definition is that conservatives apply commonsense and shared values to preserve a cherished way of life. Conservatism is founded on the collective wisdom of what has been proven to work. It is a guide to ensure that although our circumstances will change, that our values will continue. Conservatism establishes the necessity of personal responsibility and the obligation of individuals to one another, and of individuals to the whole. It demands service beyond self. Foremost, our obligations to love and protect one another are enacted through the family, the most cherished and important social institution we have. If the purpose of my parliamentary service can be reduced to one objective, it is to ensure that future generations of Western Australians and their families inherit a higher standard of living than my generation enjoys.

### **WESTERN AUSTRALIA'S FUTURE**

I am therefore committed to ensuring this state's continued economic development, and especially to the continued delivery of critical infrastructure and jobs in Perth's northern suburbs. My starting premise is that Western Australia's future success is not guaranteed. In spite of our abundant natural resources and skilled workforce, there is always the risk that we will slip into decline. We have no-one to rely upon but ourselves; my hope is that Western Australia's best days are ahead of it, but we will only get there by our own striving.

We are being buffeted by financial, economic, cultural and technological changes. The residential electricity sector is a prime example of where fundamental changes are already taking place. A proliferation of affordable generation and storage technologies has now upended the century-old model of centralised electricity generation, transmission, and distribution. This means that we cannot avoid giving serious consideration to the wisdom of retaining in perpetuity state-owned electricity utilities whose asset values will only decline.

I also want to mention of the disruption of technological change and how this bears on the delivery of education in this state. What was once science fiction is now science fact. A proliferation of technologies encompassing artificial intelligence, virtual and augmented reality, 3D printing, and autonomous and integrated systems are changing our lives already. Industries are being broken, made and remade. All I need do is remind people of Uber to give a sense of how rapidly change has occurred. I do not take a position on whether all this change is inherently for good or for bad; I suspect it is partly both. What matters is how we respond.

My son, who is only seven months old, will enter a workforce marked by heightened global competition for skills and where human-machine interaction is the norm. A failure to prepare him for that future, and indeed all our children for that future, will be a dereliction of duty. We have an excellent education system in this state, much of it due to the hard work of my colleague Hon Peter Collier. The task remains for us to build on this strong foundation and emphasise the need for comprehensive science, technology, engineering and mathematics education in all our schools. Future generations of school students are going to require a combination of fundamental mathematics and science knowledge, and advanced vocational skills, to thrive in the new world. That means that we will need to do more to encourage

students to take hard maths and science subjects in years 11 and 12. To fail in this will be to consign our children to the status of global academic and economic also-rans. We cannot drop the ball on this. If there is but one achievement I wish to make in my time here, it is to ensure that future generations of Western Australian children receive the world's best STEM-oriented education so that they are ready to work in the smart service industries and niche manufacturing sectors that will provide the next tranche of skilled jobs.

The Liberal Party went to the recent election with a \$30 million pledge to replace the old state Quadriplegic Centre in Shenton Park with a new 28-bed facility consistent with modern standards of care for people with spinal injuries, as well as an additional \$13 million to provide for the construction of suitable at-home accommodation for those who wish to maintain their independence. I would like to take this opportunity to urge the government to match that commitment.

### **MEDICAL SCIENCE**

My mother's uncle, Paul Berry, was a permanent resident at the old paraplegic–quadriplegic rehabilitation hospital in Shenton Park until he passed away in 2005. In the late summer of 1956, Paul, then aged 27, was felled by the polio epidemic that had gripped Australia. Paul survived, but did so at great personal cost. He forever lost the use of his arms. The muscles in his torso atrophied to the point where he could not breathe unconsciously. Paul slept every night of the next 49 years in an iron lung; without its help he would have suffocated.

I often think about the promise of his youth, which was cut down by a disease that we now have little occasion to remember. He was a gifted athlete, dancer, and competitive sailor. He drove fast cars and had a promising career in the family building business. All of that was taken from him, but he was gifted a strong mind and a sense of humour. Gradually, Paul rebuilt a life for himself, including teaching himself to type and to paint with his toes, and eventually teaching an art history class at tech. He never drew a pension, instead relying on the proceeds of a land sale in which he invested wisely. He also supplemented his income through selling his paintings. He maintained a connected and active life, attending mass and watching West Perth play whenever he could. He was often seen dashing across Selby Street in his motorised wheelchair on the way to the Wembley bottle shop, which was quite a sight, I can tell you! He was dearly loved by his family and he was probably the most remarkable person I have ever met.

I tell this story in part to honour his memory, but also as a warning about the dangerous propaganda of the modern anti-vax movement. Modern communication has brought with it many positives, but pseudoscientific fallacies travel quickly, too. We need to be on guard against that. Parents who do not vaccinate their children are not only putting the health of their children in jeopardy, but also endangering those whose immune systems are still underdeveloped. Reports of the under-vaccination of children, even in the more affluent suburbs of the North Metropolitan Region, are cause for serious alarm and serious action. I therefore very much support the principle of the commonwealth government's "no jab, no play" policy and its implementation in Western Australia. I pledge to work with colleagues in this place and with health professionals in this state to arrest this decline in vaccination rates.

I would like to briefly acknowledge the quiet and groundbreaking research undertaken by our scientists. Perth is home to some truly world-leading researchers and specialists in the field of medical science. We must never take them for granted. Although it may be unfair to single out just one team for their work, it is my opinion that the more people who know about the University of Western Australia bioengineering team responsible for the "microscope in a needle" invention of a few years ago, the better. That invention uses advanced optics to detect previously undetectable pathogens. The capacity to identify and locate minute cancer cells will save lives and reduce the need for follow-up surgery. The potential benefits for women with breast cancer are very promising.

This kind of wonderful work goes on every day in this state. Although it is the disposition of our adversarial system to focus on the problems and shortcomings in public life, I will also use my position here to bring focus to those truly remarkable innovations from which we all will prosper and benefit.

### GRATITUDE

I have a great deal of thanks to give. I thank the men and women of the Western Australian Liberal Party who endorsed my candidature last year. The Liberal Party preselection meeting for the North Metropolitan Region was a large and competitive affair, which attracted a strong field of candidates. To every single one of those people, including my two senior colleagues in this place, Hon Peter Collier and Hon Michael Mischin, and to those colleagues with whom I shared the ticket—Victoria Jackson, Sandra Brewer and Tim Walton—I give my utmost respect and appreciation. The election result belied the pipeline of young talent we have in the Western Australian Liberal Party. My hope is that this generation is given the opportunity to renew and rebuild, and I am sure that it will.

I thank every single member of the Cowan division for their support and robust advice, especially the magnificently blunt Matthew Blampey; the incomparable Colin and Hon Cheryl Edwardes who, I understand, are watching me from Ireland at the moment; Scott Edwardes; Rosemary Edgar; Scott and James Edgar; Hon Ray Halligan, a respected former member of this place, and my campaign chair who also joins us today, old warhorse John Hammond; Gary MacLean; Tess MacLean; Amanda McIlroy; Lisa Brooks; Ryan Blake; Arthur Taylor; and Fran Blampey. I would not be here without you.

Politics is a competitive and ruthless enterprise. The loss of my friends Eleni Evangel and Paul Miles bears out that fact. They are a loss to this Parliament and to their electorates. I thank them both for their friendship and support when they were in the fight of their political lives. It was a pleasure to campaign alongside you. I have also benefited from the support provided by Dr Peter Lilly, Mr Stedman Ellis and Mr Matthew Fahey, who each encouraged me to make a serious political run.

To my ex-colleagues at the University of Western Australia—Professor John Dell, Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable, David Harrison, Mark Stickells and Tim Shanahan—please know that I appreciated your candour and camaraderie over the past three years and that I carry with me here many of the ideas and opportunities we discussed for the advancement of the state's tertiary education sector.

To Jason Marocchi, Richard Wilson, Blair Stratton, Joey Armenti, Rhys Turner, James Larsson, Mike Buba, Simon Ehrenfeld—this will go on!—Aiden Depiazzi, Michael van Maanen, Eacham Curry, Brent Fleeton, Daniel White, Caroline Preuss, Stephen Barton, Gin Ang, Andrew Whitehead, Liam Staltari and Anthony Spagnolo: thank you for your advice and support, even when I did not always listen! Thank you also to state director Andrew Cox, and the entire Liberal Party headquarters, for running a campaign in the most trying of circumstances. That took exceptional courage and you were professional throughout.

To my parents, Sue and Sjoerd, my brother, Kurt, and sister, Liesl, and your families: thank you for making me who I am. To the Hay, Jones, Mokdad, Monisse and extended Sibma families, thank you.

Finally, to my wife Tanya: thank you for all that you have given me, especially our beautiful baby son. Your love, advice and support are immeasurably valuable to me, but your constant reminders that there is a big world outside politics and your insistence that I continue to fulfil my domestic duties are precisely the guidance I need most. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]