



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Ian Britza MLA
(Member for Morley)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 12 November 2008

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR I.M. BRITZA (Morley) [12.48 pm]: Mr Speaker, I congratulate you on your election to Speaker of the house and look forward to watching you arbitrate with honour and integrity in this chamber. It is an immense honour to join this chamber as the member for Morley. I wish to thank the people of this wonderful electorate for giving me the privilege and opportunity to represent them in this Parliament. I also want to take this opportunity to recognise my colleagues, new and re-elected, in the government and the opposition. I want to acknowledge the former member for my constituency of Morley, formerly called Ballajura, Mr John D'Orazio. I do not lay claim to the stature or respect that was earned by the former member. His work in the electorate and for the Bayswater council, which has already been publicly recognised, has provided me with an excellent foundation on which to build.

I take this opportunity to thank the marvellous group of people who supported me during my election campaign. The campaign for the seat of Morley is now well and truly over. It was an unusual campaign in many respects and, ultimately, a closely run affair. However, the support and enthusiasm of my campaign team and their unwavering loyalty to me were never in question. To them, I owe the deepest debt of gratitude. We all genuinely enjoyed the campaign, while at the same time being acutely aware that no-one knew who we were or how to spell my name and did not even know what I looked like.

Mr Speaker, with your consent I would like to place on the public record my sincerest thanks and appreciation to my elder brother, Ross Britza, who is in the public gallery, and my sister, Joy Evans, whose faithful and loyal support over many years has enabled me to stand here today on behalf of the Britzas Australia-wide with a great deal of genuine pride and humility. To many others too numerous to name, I also express thanks for their enthusiastic support over such a short but remarkable political operation.

I would like to acknowledge several people in particular: firstly, Mr Jonathan Daventry, who somehow saw in me the potential of a man who could serve the Liberal Party with dignity and respectability, and possibly be elected into Parliament. Neither of us fully realised that all of this would happen in eight short months. I joined the party in January, was pre-selected a week after the election was called and now sit alongside my colleagues in government. It is difficult not to offer a little bit of this to divine providence.

I acknowledge the friendship, support and encouragement of Bishop Harry Westcott from Alectown, New South Wales, who has continually spoken into my life and encouraged, upheld and supported me over 25 years. This is a man who is highly respected on five continents and I am honoured to have had this man as a colleague and deeply appreciated friend.

I acknowledge Dr Graham and Katherine Jacobs, who came alongside my wife and me and gently, but persuasively, encouraged us to turn our hearts towards being involved in politics. This led us to finally joining the Liberal Party and now we are part of Western Australian history.

I also acknowledge Dr Kenneth Copeland from Fort Worth, Texas, USA. This is a man who believed in me when it was not popular to do so and he saw in me something that I did not completely see at first: a deep love, admiration and appreciation of my own country and my responsibility to stand up and take my place to serve her where needed. When I fell and failed, he had compassion for me and helped to put me on my feet and spoke over me only words that would help me to achieve my destiny by rising to the call on my life. How important it is to show mercy and compassion when it is in our power to do so. To this man, I owe much and am grateful and honoured to call him a friend and a teacher who has been an important and significant influence in my life.

I acknowledge the influence and encouragement of Mr Barry Court, who is in the public gallery. He is the current president of the Western Australian Liberal Party. This man helped me to restore my faith in leadership. He is a man not concerned about popularity; is fiercely loyal, even to his own hurt; is vitally concerned about truth; and, above all, can be trusted. To this man I dedicate the triumph and my absolute joy of winning the seat of Morley.

I acknowledge the love and support of my wife, Penny. After speaking at countless conferences and conducting numerous seminars all over the world on all aspects of family issues, including counselling and offering advice to many couples and young people, I found myself divorced and beginning to experience the depths of despair—the ostracism by my peers, anguish and hopelessness that so many others who experience this go through. When Penny came into my life I found the love, passion and, finally, the direction I needed. I did not know that a man could be loved by a woman in the way that Penny expresses her love to me. It does not matter what I achieve in public life during the day, there is nothing that beats the joy of going home to someone who is absolutely delirious and excited to see you. To my wife I owe much and although her love and passion for me is still a complete mystery to me, it is something that I have never taken for granted, and I express that to her often. Members may be excused for wondering why in the world I am expressing my heart so publicly and passionately about my wife. Well, it is because the best gift that I can give my electorate is a stable, passionate and loving home. They will know that I will deal with them with the same honour, respect, integrity and love that are expressed in my life. Thank you, Penny, for loving this man when he had nothing; he had lost everything and had even lost his way a little. I am a very grateful and appreciative husband who will never forget what you have done for me. To my elder sons, Timothy and Michael, thank you for encouraging your father every step of the way. You never wavered in your support and I am truly thankful for your love, encouragement and support. I give thanks to my young 15-month-old son, Samuel. It sounds as though I am going through my family, but that is okay. I could never have imagined that I could love a boy the way I love my son: truly, he has been God's personal gift to me.

I would like to focus on a couple of the issues that confront Morley. I have two high schools and several primary schools in my electorate and I am disheartened by the physical condition of several of them. At Morley Senior High School there is a pressing need for the entire science block to be completely refurbished. The science benches have had the laminated tops completely removed, exposing the timber, and all the gas fixtures that are from the early 1970s need to be replaced, just to name a few things. Weld Square Primary School is in desperate need of an appropriate

administration block, which I understand is a standard request from most schools. Some of the classroom conditions are appalling and in dire need of either complete refurbishment or an entire rebuilding program. I am sure that many schools throughout the state are going through the same frustrations experienced by the schools in my electorate; however, this does not diminish the need for a program of rebuilding and refurbishing to be re-established in the Department of Education and Training rather than just the maintenance program. The Morley parents and citizens have done a remarkable job in supporting these schools while they deal with the pressing issues that seem to confront them on a daily basis with no feeling of finality of completion in their hearts. I make a commitment to stand up and be counted on behalf of these teachers, parents and their schools to maintain the quality of education in adequate and satisfactory classrooms and administration facilities that they thoroughly deserve.

The seniors in my electorate are numerous in number and while I have not met all the associations and clubs that represent them, I intend to meet them and raise my voice on their behalf in this Parliament. In many cultures the elderly are held in high respect. It is to our shame that we do not follow the same example. They do have a voice and it is getting rather loud these days. It is simply wrong that their cries are not being heard or, apparently, not being acknowledged.

When I won the seat of Morley, I knew that the people did not know me and the vote was primarily against the previous government. However, I felt like an adopted son. The people voted for me and, just like an adopted baby, they did not know where I came from, what I was like, what I believe, and probably hoped that, at least, I stood for Liberal Party policies, which I do. What are my principles, ethics and personal beliefs? My parents, the Reverend Bill and Beryl Britza, were missionaries for just on 20 years in Malawi, Africa, before becoming Baptist pastors. My father pastored in churches in Kojonup, Woodanilling, Bayswater and, finally, Liverpool, New South Wales. I was the fifth child of six children and was born in Perth before heading to Malawi, where I lived until I was nearly six years old. My parents related to me that my arrival back in Perth was quite traumatic, because it was only back in Australia that I realised I was white. This was exacerbated by the fact that I spoke predominantly Chinyanja, a Zulu tongue, and little English. However, it did not take long for the white genes to kick in. I started clapping on the “on” beat, I could not sing and I certainly had no rhythm. However, I survived this experience intact. I bring this anecdote before the house because I believe it laid the foundation for the genuine care and awareness I have in my heart for the people of Africa. Our state has many representatives from this nation. I have had the privilege of representing the Premier at several African functions, and I am honoured to have done so. I would consider it an honour to be counted with the many people from Africa who now call Western Australia their home and bring their desires and concerns before this house.

I also share with the house my unashamed support and love for the nation of Israel. I have visited this nation, and my heart is tender towards its people. History has shown time and again that whoever supports and honours this nation truly becomes prosperous, flourishes and increases in influence. Therefore, I publicly declare my support for and loyalty to this nation.

Having married a beautiful, strong and passionate native of Texas—I hasten to inform the house that there is a huge difference between a Texan and an American—I have a natural love, admiration and deep respect and honour for the United States of America. I am well aware of this nation’s real and perceived failures, but it stands on its own in the world as a nation whose people stand for what is right and have a deep-seated heart for and belief in democracy, freedom and justice. Whether or not we support the United States of America, it is a sobering thought to consider that no-one thinks to invade us because of our excellent alliance with this nation, whose own armed forces have also given their lives for our nation’s freedom. It is very important to state at this time that my declarations towards these nations and their people, who also reside in my electorate and elsewhere in this state, in no way diminishes the total respect and value I have for all nations and for their

people who call Western Australia their home, and I am equally thrilled and delighted to become part of their lives and represent them as well.

In the light of the fact that I have been a minister of the church for nearly 30 years, I understand how many people would immediately, without much thought, put me into a particular religious box. So I take this opportunity to either confirm that or go the other way. I am not ashamed of the foundational spiritual principles that were given to me by my parents. They not only gave me sound spiritual guidance for my future welfare and personal benefit; they also instilled in me a sense of right. It truly amazes me that people can have perceived genuineness about what is right or wrong and still totally miss what is truth. Very soon, as far as morals and ethics are concerned, two plus two will definitely add up to five, at the rate we are going. The community already laughs and mocks the apparent lack of commonsense among politicians and is particularly annoyed when its decisions via referendums and other forums are not received or taken seriously. We pass some legislation that the vast community does not agree with or understand and then we wonder in amazement at the cynical attitudes that are growing within our own citizens and the media towards us. I as a rule do not listen much to cynics, and any time I hear someone declare himself to be one, I remember the writer of Proverbs declaring that a cynic is someone who is constantly looking for wisdom but never finds it—all he finds at the door of his heart are stockpiles of stupidity. I guess we just need to leave those who express cynicism most with their own piles of stupidity and leave it at that. Some previous speakers have already alluded to the decline in our moral values. Many people often query why morality is such a strong issue with those who hold strong spiritual values. It is quite simple really. Every civilisation that has lost its compass where morals are concerned has simply slipped into history and its people have always played an extremely high price for it. Just because we live in the twenty-first century does not mean that the consequences of the past will not come to us.

Morality is an interesting thing, and I have sometimes meditated on the old fairytale of the king who wore no clothes. Everyone was trying to convince themselves that the king was wearing clothes so they would not be seen as foolish, stupid, out of date, irrelevant or, in our case, not to have passed into the new twenty-first century thought patterns and beliefs, as though morals actually evolve. The fact was that the king was as naked as could be, and it took a little boy to declare it out of simple commonsense. He knew the king was naked, and just said so. There was no meditation, no excuses, no explanations, no committees, no legislation, no legal briefs, no conferences and no marches. He just said it because it was simply true; it was a fact that the king was naked. Just because something is legal does not make it right, and just because a bill is presented and is passed by a majority does not mean that it is right. Just because abortion is legal does not make it right. When a woman who is pro-choice wants a child she calls it a baby, and when she does not want it she calls it a foetus. It may be legal but it is not right.

This brings me to my final point. While obviously holding on to sound biblical, Judaeo-Christian beliefs and principles, I simply ask whether the decision before me is right. Situational ethics is a dangerous path to walk when there are no absolutes to guide oneself in making decisions that affect hundreds and thousands of people. When listening to bills being presented in this chamber, I will be constantly asking myself whether they are right or wrong. I will make decisions based on moral absolutes, because they are not persuaded by how we personally think or feel about a matter. Two plus two will always be four. Even if we do not like it or are angry and frustrated by it, the answer will always be four, and moral judgements are the same. People can say whatever they like, believe whatever they want to believe, and act however they want to act, but moral absolutes simply remain the same.

I conclude with a statement that will be my guiding rule in my term as member for Morley and in this house: it is easy to do justice, but very difficult to do right, therefore let right be done. I thank members of this house for the friendship and goodwill extended to me and I humbly express the

honour I feel to be a part of this chamber and to serve the people of Western Australia, the people of Morley, the Premier, his ministers and the members of this chamber.

[Applause.]
