



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Jaye Radisich MLA
(Member for Swan Hills)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Thursday, 3 May 2001

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Motion

MS RADISICH (Swan Hills) [4.08 pm]: I congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the position in this House. I hope that in your role we will have the opportunity to foster greater efficiency for our work in this place and with your guidance we will eventually embrace a greater use of technology in the Chamber. I would also like to congratulate Premier Gallop and the members of the Cabinet on their new roles. I am privileged to have the opportunity to work with all members. I congratulate all new members on both sides of the House. There are so many of us and I hope that we can make a meaningful contribution to our electorates and to this place.

I extend congratulations to my new colleague in the other place Louise Pratt about whose election I am very pleased. I am sure that, as two young women wandering the corridors of this place, we will find great solace in each other's company. I am pleased to have been so warmly welcomed to Parliament by colleagues in this House and by the staff of Parliament House. I appreciate their unqualified assistance and guidance.

Thankyous

I owe a great deal of thanks to many people who aided my bid to become the member for Swan Hills. The list of people to whom I extend thanks is almost endless - by my count, it is around 262. I extend my sincerest gratitude to everyone who supported me for party preselection and those who spent early mornings walking the streets and gravel roads of Swan Hills to deliver material, especially May Kosovich, Tom Canny, Karen Treanor, Lyn Jager, Steve Howlett and Belinda Clark. I also thank those people who drove me around when my car would not make it up Greenmount hill, those who staffed booths for me on polling day, participated in fundraising activities, prepared refreshments for booth workers and supported me when I needed an ear to listen.

I also extend special thanks to my parliamentary colleagues Hon Michelle Roberts, my neighbour in the electorate of Midland, and Hon Nick Griffiths, the member for the East Metropolitan Region. Their support and encouragement is especially appreciated. I also thank all my other special helpers - they know who they are. My supporters gave me the chance to achieve my dreams and I am a member of the Australian Labor Party because, like other members, I believe in creating a more just and equitable society that will give everyone a chance to achieve their dreams.

Family

I also make special mention of the great support and assistance provided to me by my immediate and extended family. My family members have supported me in my many and varied extracurricular activities over the years. Their support for my participation in the recent general election is no exception. I thank my mum and dad, who are here today, and the rest of my family. I am very lucky to have present in the public gallery today many of my friends, a few of my old student political foes and family members.

It is sad that my father's father, Frank Radisich, is not here with us today. He worked at the Midland abattoir and was a shop steward with the Australian Meat Industry Employees Union. After the closure of the abattoir he worked at the old Midland Workshops. February 10, the date of the recent State election, would have been Frank's birthday. Tragically, his life was lost due to cancer. I hope that wherever he is now, he likes his birthday present.

It is extremely important to me that Zora and Joe Rakich and Ena Radisich were able to share my election to Parliament with me. I cannot imagine the kind of life that they and their parents led. They have told me stories about how their parents could not or would not speak English, that education beyond primary school was simply not a possibility and that not owning a pair of shoes until the age of 12 was perfectly common. I have also heard tales of just how hard it was pruning vines and picking grapes in the hot sun. They were among the many pioneers of the Swan Valley. I have not experienced the hardships that they endured. I owe thanks to their hard work for the better lot in life that my parents, my siblings and I enjoy. As a result of their efforts, we have learned the importance of hard work, the value of a dollar, and how to share with others. They have been valuable lessons. I also understand that I am the first person of Croatian descent to become a member of this House. I doubt that my parents and grandparents would have thought that their daughter and grand-daughter would be a member of Parliament. I hope they think it is as cool as I do.

Opportunities and work

I may be only 25 years old, but I am proud of what I consider to be an extensive work history. I began my first job a week before I turned 14. I decided that I needed money to buy the things that schoolgirls buy and I had to figure out a way to do that. The logical conclusion was to get a job! I went with my mum on a shopping trip to our fruit and vegie shop and mustered the courage to ask the proprietor whether there were any vacancies. He informed me that there were not. However, I received a phone call a few days later and was offered a Saturday morning job. I went to my first day of work feeling nervous but determined - like Tuesday. I had not discussed wages with my new employer. As a 14-year-old in 1990, I calculated that I should be paid at least \$3 an hour. Members can imagine my glee when I was offered \$6! I quickly accepted the offer and stayed working part time for two and a half years while I was in high school. This was one of the first major opportunities afforded me. It gave me a good grounding and work ethic for the future.

After being paid for the first time I caught the bus to the shops and made an important purchase - I spent \$20 on a clock radio to make sure I got to work on time. I still use that same clock radio to wake me up all these years later, so that I get to my new job on time. As members can tell, I am a great believer in long-term investments.

I moved on to work in many other part-time jobs over the years. I worked at Coles Fosseys in the city for five years. I am among literally thousands of others who worked at that store. It was a sad day when Coles Fosseys closed in 1997. Many people worked at that place their whole working lives. The closure caused the unemployment of about 400 people. Luckily, many people were absorbed into other parts of the retail sector, but not everyone. I thank all those people with whom I worked at Coles. It was a definite community and had an important place in Perth's history.

I was fortunate to be offered work as a cosmetics consultant at Priceline and remained in that position until a week after I was elected to Parliament. In that job I was able to do two of the things I like most - to experiment with make-up and, more importantly, help people. During my very short time in this place, I have figured out that working as a cosmetics consultant is similar to being a politician. Members must know what products are available as tools to solve problems, must listen closely to the customer and identify his needs, provide him with a range of options to solve his problem and importantly, pass on skills to give him greater confidence in his own problem-solving abilities for the future. However, I assure members that this job is much more than that. As I hope more experienced members will agree, this job is about being a mediator, an advocate, social worker, government liaison officer and more. However, members of Parliament are not given professional development or training. Perhaps I will raise this matter with the Premier!

In short, I have been lucky to meet a range of employers who were willing to give me a chance. I sincerely thank them for that. If I had not been given the opportunity to work, I would not have been able to afford the things that young people need to accompany full-time studies. I will make a brief but important comment about the participation of young people in the retail sector. I do not deny for one moment that age and sex discrimination are rife in this industry and probably in others. The principle of equal pay for equal work is not always employed in the retail sector. Intimidation of young people still occurs. I have experienced - and other young people have also expressed this to me - that I was too old to work and that younger employees were cheaper. Why is there a pay differential when the same work is undertaken and the same productivity is achieved? There is no excuse. This is a mere discrimination of convenience because young people are generally less organised and less able to speak up for their rights. I hope this is one inequity that can be redressed in this new millennium.

I encourage employers to continue giving people a chance. On the flip side, I encourage people looking for work to never give up. In a way, it is like embracing the spirit of the Anzacs, to continue to strive for excellence even in the face of adversity. This is easier said than done; however, no-one should ever give up hope - opportunity does knock! I am grateful to the people of Swan Hills, my newest employers, for giving me this opportunity. I hope that I prove to be a worthy staff member.

Members now know where I came from, but why am I here? I have not come to Parliament with one cause in mind or one special area that I wish to fix. Perhaps I want to fix everything - at least I have never been accused of being under ambitious! While this may sound vague, I believe that being in Parliament should not be about trying to represent a single interest group or issue. Once that issue was resolved, where would that leave the member? I am here to take a balanced, holistic approach to Government and to represent all my constituents to the best of my ability.

The seat

I will now speak about the special aspects of Swan Hills, which is the second largest metropolitan seat in Western Australia. I also refer members to the list of statistics on the enormous size of electorates, which the member for Roleystone mentioned in his maiden speech. I thank him for noting the differentials as it has saved me the job. The seat of Swan Hills ranges from suburban Beechboro, home of the single McDonald's store in my electorate, to the homes of some of the hardest working people in this State. Swan Hills also incorporates areas of great natural beauty, such as Walyunga and John Forrest National Parks, and far more functional areas such as Mundaring Weir and the amphitheatres at Belvoir and Parkerville. I am keen to see new urban areas, such as Ellenbrook, develop further as communities and I will monitor their rapid expansion with great fervour. I am sure all members of this House have visited the Swan Valley and have appreciated its many wineries and restaurants but also acknowledge its value as a growth centre for

primary produce and tourism. Swan Hills is a very special place in Western Australia and I am privileged to represent the people of the 35 suburbs within the seat.

Hills tourism

I am biased when I talk about the characteristics of the seat of Swan Hills. I guess that it comes as no surprise that the seat can basically be divided into two parts - the Swan and the hills.

I now turn my attention to the Perth hills, which are very special and sensitive and should be treated as such. I am constantly reminded that people move to the hills for the lifestyle, and I accept that commentary as a reality. I see it as my job to protect and enhance that lifestyle. The hills have a lot to offer in respect of commercial, residential and environmental opportunities. We can make much more of what we have in the hills without doing harm to the delicate environment there. I have a vision to make sensitive improvements to the Perth hills, not only to provide a better lifestyle for existing residents but also to welcome interstate, intrastate and international tourists. The hills are close to the city, and they are a great place for corporate retreats, picnics for families and friends, outdoor musical performances and other activities. Although my words may sound like the text of a glossy brochure, I must tell members, it is all true. Hills tourism to date has largely focused on day trippers. That is a really important aspect of what the Perth hills offer, but like many other champions of the hills, I have a few more ideas. It is important to note that I am not of a mind to create so-called tourist towns. I want to see the provision of modest, environmentally appropriate accommodation and foster the establishment of cottage industry and home-grown businesses. I hope that this will provide employment and income earning opportunities which will perfectly complement the hills lifestyle.

I am pleased that we will follow the leadership of The Environmental Tourism Department in Queensland and establish a similar body of our own. Ecotourism and nature-based tourism management should not just be catchwords, they must be meaningful, both to communities and to nature. Furthermore, this brand of commerce should apply to environmentally sensitive areas such as the Perth hills and Swan Valley, but also to other areas in Western Australia such as the south west. I think that is enough of the sales pitch.

Education

A broader issue which draws my attention is the area of education. I firstly make the observation that we must make many improvements in our tertiary education sector. We must liaise with the corporate community to ensure that academic education has a practical application in today's work force. We must not, however, allow university to be a free training ground for companies that may aim to buy courses and produce graduates just for themselves. In addition, we must continue to ascribe value to so-called uneconomic schools of learning, in particular, arts and humanities. The study of such disciplines makes an important contribution to the intellectual development of the community. This is certainly a form of value adding.

I am also committed to the idea of a multi-disciplinary "fresher" year, an area where Murdoch University has arguably led the way. The idea that the first year of university should be a chance to discover the options available, to try a variety of disciplines and to learn about independent study, without the strong contacts and support that exist at the secondary level, is important. I rather like the concept that engineers may take a semester of philosophy and medical students may study some financial accounting. Introducing new students to such a variety of schools will hopefully broaden the minds of future graduates to benefit both themselves and the people around them. I hope that such programs will be introduced at all tertiary institutions in this State. It might just help someone avoid making the same mistakes as I made - some people were never meant to be accountants!

Like others before me, I am particularly concerned about the lack of civics education at the primary and secondary schooling levels in Western Australia. We all know just how sceptical our

constituents are about politicians. Maybe that is our fault. The education that we provide to young people about our democracy, our parliamentary system, separation of powers, the Constitution and other civic matters is highly inadequate. I do, however, commend the efforts of the State Parliamentary Education Office and its programs to rectify this situation. The secondary school curriculum identifies various learning outcomes under the heading “active citizenship”, but there are no specific requirements. There is no guarantee that children leave school with a detailed or even basic understanding of how government is formed, how laws are made or the logic of the court system.

While our system is not perfect, it is important for us to explain the intricacies and uniqueness of our democracy, and also to explain the potential for people to become involved. If we want our children to become active and informed members of society, a far higher level of basic education is required. I want young people to feel inspired, rather than apathetic, when learning about their potential to improve and change our society. It is by providing children with these basic facts at an early age that they will grow up to be informed adults, with the potential to participate in policy debate. Perhaps people are so sceptical of politics because of this grave lack of understanding; or maybe because it is just boring. I certainly hope not, or the next four years will not be much fun.

The gap in services for young people

There is also a distinct gap in the level of services and opportunities afforded to young people who leave school at year 10 and go straight into the work force. It is important that young people in the work force are exposed to new ideas and opportunities. It is the responsibility of employers to pay special attention to the needs of younger employees. It is the role of unions to make sure that members are offered choices and chances. It may also be the domain of police and citizens youth groups, church or other youth groups, to seek out young people who could benefit from the programs and activities that they offer.

Entrepreneurship and small business

I was disappointed to learn recently that in a *Business Review Weekly* survey the Australian Government was rated almost last, compared with other countries, in the support it gave to new enterprises. The same article in BRW suggested that entrepreneurial programs should be developed at primary and secondary education levels and that older entrepreneurs should be encouraged to mentor and be available as role models. I believe that knowledge creation and business creation should go hand in hand. We must encourage all people to educate themselves to the level where they feel comfortable and to use that education when engaging in commercial activities to make progressive and responsible business decisions. There is no doubt that big businesses are important, but small ones provide the largest proportion of all employment, and they also have the ability to provide a better quality of life, greater flexibility and even more family-friendly sources of income. Small businesses are an important part of my electorate, and an area which I will not ignore.

I am constantly amazed and awe-inspired by the many small business operators. Running a small business is not an easy thing to do. The proprietors have to be bookkeeper, consultant, administrator, human resource manager, project planner, marketer, innovator and distributor all rolled in one. If they do not succeed, they do not get paid. It is a scary business. It is my hope that I can influence the Government to encourage, foster and develop small business in this State, especially those which put so much back into the local communities, like many businesses in Swan Hills.

The litigious society

So far I have discussed a range of measures which together have the capacity to help build communities, but I am disturbed by the forces at play that destroy them. I have studied a unit at law school called alternative dispute resolution, and this course was the most valuable of my university

studies. There is an increasing volume of litigation in our society and I believe that much of it is unnecessary. People are becoming used to the idea of simply threatening to sue if something does not go their way. This thought pattern must stop. We must learn to think about resolving conflicts peacefully and proactively, not to mention cheaply. This applies not only to local issues but to national and international issues as well. I encourage members of all communities to avoid aggressive and antagonistic approaches to conflict resolution, and thereby avoid the destruction of communities and neighbourhoods.

Prisons

Following on from the theme of conflict resolution, it is appropriate to turn to prisons. First, I state my personal opposition to the privatisation of prisons. My electorate is home to the new Acacia Prison, due to open this Saturday. There are many illustrations worldwide where the privatisation of prisons has failed. At a more fundamental level, I do not believe it is appropriate for the State to relieve itself of its duty to incarcerated persons. We live in a free society in which it is accepted that the State is the only entity able to withdraw that freedom. Therefore, I do not find it acceptable to pass on the responsibilities of punishment and rehabilitation to private organisations. I do not associate these initiatives with profit making. My electorate is home to not only Acacia Prison but also Woorloo Prison Farm and Bandyup Women's Prison. It is fitting that I comment on the standards in our prisons. Jail should not be like a hotel, but conditions must be humane. I have heard stories of seven inmates being housed in rooms built for two people. These conditions fall short of not only international standards, but also the standards that I expect in this State.

Aged care

Prisons are not the only places in which proper standards are not always met and overcrowding is common. I draw the attention of the House to aged care facilities - or lack thereof - in this State. Aged care is another policy area of particular interest to me. It is common knowledge that Australia has an ageing population, and the aged demographic in Swan Hills is higher than average. I am concerned with ensuring that all people have access to quality aged care facilities. Aged care facilities should be built to support existing communities. Retirement villages, nursing homes and hostels are ideally located in areas with ageing communities so that people can move into local accommodation with the friends and neighbours they have lived with for years. I make these comments with a particular community in mind; it would please me no end to see the construction of quality retirement accommodation in the Swan Valley. Many older people have lived and worked on the land for a long time and they deserve, when they retire, to continue living in their neighbourhood. I intend to do what I can to make that a reality.

When I sat down to write my speech, I did not know where to begin; now I do not know where to stop. I would love to have raised many more issues, such as the quality of the electricity supply in my electorate, the lack of taxis with wheelchair lifts that are prepared to travel into the hills, the constant traffic problems on Brockmill Avenue, the North-Eastern Hills Settlement Pattern Plan, toilets at Upper Swan Primary School, logging at the Wellbucket water catchment area, the Swan Valley Planning Act, police services in Bullsbrook, road safety at Red Hill, water flow through Cooke's brook and the redevelopment of Mundaring Weir. The list goes on. I have a full four years ahead of me. I am here to advocate for and represent the people of Swan Hills and I am also here to serve the people of Western Australia. I am humbled by the position and privilege that I now hold and will be an adamant and perhaps on occasion loud voice in this place. I am here to work hard and I will do my best to keep it real.

[Applause.]
