



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Michael Sutherland MLA
(Member for Mount Lawley)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 25 November 2008

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Motion

MR M.W. SUTHERLAND (Mount Lawley) [7.25 pm]: Mr Speaker, firstly, let me congratulate you on your election as Speaker of this house. It is a great honour to join you in this chamber as the newly elected member for Mount Lawley.

In the first instance, I wish to thank the hundreds of helpers who made it possible for me to stand here today. In particular, I thank my partner, Michelle; her parents, Colin and Marjorie Gilchrist; my sister and brother-in-law, Elizabeth and Roy Haagman; my campaign manager, Malcolm Homes; Hon Donna Faragher, MLC; Tom Wallace; Maureen Meixner; Murray Freiberg; Bill and Judy Green; George Georgiou; Errol Vertannes; Councillors John Tognolini and Sandra Liu; members of the Liberal Party; and, in particular, the Liberal Party campaign team. These are among the many thousands of people who wanted a better state government and ensured a Liberal victory in the seat of Mount Lawley.

I also wish to thank the members of this house for electing me as Deputy Speaker. It is a further honour to serve in this capacity, and it is my intention to preside in a manner that is fair to all members.

The Mount Lawley electorate is an inner-city seat north of the central business district, and is essentially a solid family area that also has a large concentration of retirement villages and nursing homes. The seat was abolished in the redistribution of 1988, and was brought back as one of the new metropolitan seats in the redistribution prior to the election. The last representative for the seat of Mount Lawley was Hon George Cash, who is now a member in the other place.

The suburb of Mt Lawley, after which the seat is called, was named in honour of Sir Arthur Lawley, the Governor of Western Australia from May 1901 to August 1902. Immediately after having been Governor of Western Australia, Arthur Lawley was appointed Lieutenant Governor of the Transvaal, the former South African Republic. This was shortly after the Boer War ended in 1902—a war in which many Australians served with distinction. I note that there are two former members of this house who fought in the Boer War.

I was born in Johannesburg in the Transvaal in 1954, and lived there until I came to Australia in 1987. I grew up in a family that encouraged hard work, reading and education and an interest in sporting clubs, community groups and politics. My father, William Sutherland, who started work as a bricklayer at 14, met my mother, Alice, while he was serving as a warrant officer in the South African Army in Egypt during the Second World War. My mother was from the Lebanese Christian

community, and she spoke a number of languages, including French, Arabic, Italian and Greek. In 1949 my mother moved to South Africa on her own to join my father. This was a very brave move since she spoke very poor English at the time. After my father's death, my mother was able to join my sister and me, and lived in Australia for a number of years.

I had what can be described as a cosmopolitan upbringing, associating and mixing with people of many diverse nationalities, religions and backgrounds. After leaving the local government high school where I was head boy, I did my national service in the South African Army, and then proceeded to complete a Bachelor of Arts at the Witwatersrand University, where I majored in history and international relations. I then commenced teaching in 1977 for a period of some five years. While teaching, I studied as an external student at the University of South Africa and obtained a teacher's diploma and law degree, and was admitted as a solicitor and notary public in South Africa in 1983.

It was primarily my dislike of the apartheid system in South Africa that led me to become involved in politics. I was active in the United Party, the then main parliamentary opposition to the ruling National Party, from the early 1970s. In 1982 I was elected to the Johannesburg City Council as a member of the Progressive Federal Party, which by then had become the main parliamentary opposition party. I served on the Johannesburg City Council until I came to Australia. The Johannesburg City Council was a greater metropolitan council with 47 councillors and some 600 000 residents. It operated like Parliament on political lines and it administered, apart from normal municipal services, public housing, public transport, fire and emergency services, the running of art galleries and museums, the generation of electricity and the supply of water, amongst other things. It also had its own traffic police force of quite a large number. In 1987 the Johannesburg City Council had a budget of over one billion rand. At that time, one rand was nearly equivalent to \$A1.

As a result of incessant political turmoil, unrest and uncertainty in South Africa, I decided to immigrate to Australia and adopt it as my new country. I arrived in 1987 with a suitcase, a tennis racquet and a squash racquet. I landed in Sydney, where I requalified as a solicitor at the University of Sydney, and then decided that Perth was the place that had the most to offer and where I would like to make my home. I settled in Perth in 1988 and have lived here ever since. I first resided in Mt Lawley and soon joined the Mt Lawley Tennis Club, where I remain an active playing member and sponsor. I thank two of my tennis team, Jim Bonzas and Tony Hooper, for coming here tonight. I am a strong supporter of sports clubs and realise their importance to the wellbeing of our society. For the past 19 years I have lived in Noranda, which is a short distance from the northern boundary of my seat, and have practised law in Beaufort Street since 1988.

In 1995 I was elected as a councillor to the newly constituted City of Perth council, which was part of the old, larger City of Perth. I am now the longest serving councillor of the City of Perth. I have been elected Deputy Lord Mayor on three occasions by my fellow councillors, and have served five years in this capacity. As I have publicly stated, I will reconsider my position on the Perth City Council again in the new year. I have served on numerous internal and external committees of the City of Perth and, until recently, was the chairman of the city's Parking Committee, which generates approximately \$45 million in annual revenue. The city partnered with the state government and became a leader in Australia by providing the free and environmentally friendly inner city central area transit bus service for the central business district and adjacent areas. I am proud to have supported this initiative. I have also been a member of the Central Perth Transport Steering Committee, which comprises both government and city representatives. The committee considers various inner city transport and parking issues, as well as the running of the CAT bus service, which has now reached its capacity. There is a pressing need to extend the service and acquire more buses. It is gratifying to note that many visitors to Perth remember Perth for the free CAT bus service and mention the fact when I meet them. I have also served on the city's finance committee since

becoming a councillor. The council's operating budget is now \$145 million plus. I bring to the Parliament long experience of monitoring public finance and expenditure, including infrastructure spending of considerable value. Until recently I was a member of the Metropolitan Region Planning Committee, which deals with major planning issues in the Perth metropolitan area.

Other speakers have mentioned in their maiden speeches the importance of having strong international relations links. It has been my pleasure, since being on the council, to have been part of the city increasing its links to Taipei, Nanjing and Seocho, a city that is part of metropolitan Seoul, and also to Aberdeen and Perth in Scotland. The city has also become a leading member of the World Energy Cities Partnership, which is a very positive thing for the state of Western Australia. Western Australia will continue to be active in creating and maintaining strong international links that will benefit both business and the community in general. I hope to play my part in this important activity while I am a member of Parliament.

The people of Mt Lawley want performance above politics from their local member. It is my intention to deliver results for them and to respect the trust they have placed in me. During the campaign I emphasised to voters how important it was to vote on my record of public service and my demonstrated commitment to the community, as this experience would be a critical factor in the quality of their representation. Because of my extensive association with the area and my legal, commercial and political knowledge, I have the necessary understanding and experience to properly serve my constituents.

As I have said, the seat of Mount Lawley is part of the inner city of Perth. In order for inner city suburbs to flourish, it is important that they are vibrant and vital places in which to live, work and play. We need to encourage town centre sites in the suburbs, with increased work and entertainment opportunities in close proximity to people's homes. In my seat of Mount Lawley there are two ideal sites—the Dianella Plaza and Dog Swamp Shopping Centres.

Perth will evolve over the next few years into an international city, but the question remains whether we are moving fast enough. Our city centre should be alive and our foreshore pulsing with arts and cultural activities. Vitality is a cultural, social and civic leadership issue. We require programs, events and activities that employ local, creative people, complemented by retail, small entertainment venues and regular and reliable public transport. For this to happen, we need to get rid of a generation of clueless and invisible regulators in state and local government departments who stifle initiative and creativity and do not listen to the community. They make it difficult, if not impossible, for people with ideas to take the city and the state forward. The regulators often create a nanny state that suffocates the very people who are needed to take the city and the state forward. I welcome the government's commitment to sink the railway between the city and Northbridge and its commitment to upgrade the Perth Cultural Centre, which is a very uninviting public space at present. When we speak of community vitality, it is a matter not only of retailers, restaurants, small bars and nightclubs, but also of people knowing their neighbours, feeling safe to use public transport and to walk down their streets at night, and wanting to use community clubs and facilities.

It is apparent from recent inaugural addresses by new members of all political persuasions that they are concerned about public safety and support policies that protect the lifestyle that we cherish. I join my fellow members in expressing similar concerns. An increasing number of citizens are scared of their neighbours and are in a constant state of alarm. There is a trend of escalating violent attacks, including those against police, nurses and other officials. There is the destruction of property, graffiti and disrespect for the law and other people. We bemoan the obesity issue, yet we are too scared to let children walk to school. There have been laments by many community leaders, including the Chief Justice of New South Wales, Justice Spigelman about the coarsening of our culture. A mindset is developing that anything goes, anywhere and at any time, with no parameters for behaviour and language. This is because we have become soft on antisocial behaviour. We are

allowing people to escape the consequences of their actions. This problem will not be solved by more obscure laws that focus on trivia and take into consideration every conceivable possibility that adds to bureaucracy and wastes time and resources. The core issue is not the inadequacy of the law but the inadequate enforcement of the law and effective rehabilitation of offenders, while at the same time considering the needs of victims. Seeing justice done and knowing that offenders will face the consequences of their actions greatly assists victims to recover from the detrimental effects of the crimes that have been committed against them. Our youth are increasingly being involved in alcohol and drug-fuelled violent attacks. We need to not only enforce the law, but also encourage our youth to get involved in community activities, thereby preserving and rebuilding the fabric of our society. I am pleased to note that the government has proposed the building of a correctional facility for 18 to 22-year-olds that will help young offenders receive rehabilitation away from career criminals.

Another important factor is education. A proper education eradicates prejudices, develops a sense of individuality and instils respect for others and an understanding of the complexity of the community. Confidence in state schools needs to be restored. Local schools are one of my top priorities. A number of schools in my constituency are in need of major capital works. Sutherland Dianella Primary School has been allowed to run down to a totally unacceptable level and the facilities cannot cope with the number of children currently enrolled at the school. The government, I am pleased to say, will honour its commitment of \$5 million to upgrade facilities to the required standard at that school. The Liberal Party will also keep its election commitments made to other schools in the area. Again, I remind teachers and parents that all schools within my electorate will now receive the proper attention that they all deserve.

As an ex-teacher, I was alarmed to read an article in *The West Australian* on 23 August 2008 that reported that between 15 and 20 per cent of the population will struggle with reading by the time they reach year 8. All children need to receive an education that prepares them for a world that is increasingly competitive. Dare I say bring back the three Rs! We should be urging students to find satisfaction in achievement instead of making them feel comfortable about their failures. I had a more conventional schooling than what is offered at present, and I have been able to succeed because of the solid foundation of that more traditional education, which taught me literacy and numeracy. Too many euphemisms, such as behavioural management, are used today to disguise bad behaviour and poor discipline. The reality is that too often in schools today discipline is sadly lacking. Without discipline, we have chaos and destruction, and the end result is that learning is significantly compromised. Teachers should not be subjected to bad behaviour and an ever-increasing fear of abuse and assault.

Another matter of great concern to inner-city residents was the proposed closure of the Royal Perth Hospital. The government has made the right decision to preserve the hospital.

This announcement, based on practical commonsense, has been welcomed by the local community.

Another matter of concern to all of us in this place is global warming. Whether or not we believe in global warming, we should all give the planet the benefit of the doubt. In any event, we should all in our personal capacities and in our capacities as public representatives encourage sustainability and a focus on conserving water, car use and other pressing environmental issues. This is something that the City of Perth has again taken the lead in by planting 85 000 trees this financial year to offset carbon emissions from cars using the city's car parks. I am proud of my association with the council's environmental efforts over the past number of years. To assist the environment we need to develop an integrated, safe and more frequent public transport system, including the extension of the Central Area Transit bus system, the introduction of river CATs and, where possible, light rail from the suburbs into the central business district. This will help ease traffic congestion in the inner city and assist our community to get around.

Another matter stated by many members in their inaugural speeches is that the Liberal Party supports people who build businesses, create employment and give our youth the skills to meet the demands of a constantly changing global economy. I also support small business and I realise that our future lies with small business. The Beaufort Street precinct in my electorate is becoming a well-renowned restaurant and shopping strip. The small business and artistic sector has made this area thrive and it is vital to maintain the area with good ambience and a diversity of high-quality retail businesses and offices.

While doorknocking during the election campaign, I admired the mixture of modern and historic homes in my electorate. It has always been the Australian dream to own one's own home. Australians are some of the hardest workers in the world and for them not to be able to enter the housing market is unacceptable. This generation is being priced out of the market, and there is no encouragement to work hard and to succeed if at the end of the day people are not able to own their own homes. We should be looking at this problem to see how we can assist and also try wherever possible to release land for redevelopment that is no longer used for its original purpose or is in areas that have become degraded.

When I came to Australia some 21 years ago, I found a nation guided by the idea of a fair go, straight talk and honest hard work. Western Australians do not want, nor do they need, to be carried through life; they do not want cradle-to-grave socialism. People want to make their own decisions and receive the rewards of their actions instead of having their decisions taken away from them by the nanny state. Our electors are not looking for an answer to every problem but rather for fair, honest and sensible representation. People do not want buzzwords, spin and newspeak that clouds reality. Without straight talk and clear answers to their questions, we will fail them. Our citizens want clear and concise information on which to base their decisions. I will take this approach in my work as the member for Mount Lawley because it is what I deem to be right and what my constituents want.

In closing, I once again thank the people who have helped me take my seat in this place. I have left until last the thanks that I must give to Dr David Smith and Mr Ben Allen, who have done so much to establish my electorate office. I also thank the many friends and family who have come here tonight to hear my speech and show their support. I hope my speech has not been too long! It is with a great sense of privilege, passion and purpose that I accept the responsibility of representing the electorate of Mount Lawley.

[Applause.]
