



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Ms Rebecca Sue Stephens, MLA**

**(Member for Albany)**

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 6 May 2021

*Reprinted from Hansard*

# Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 6 May 2021

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 29 April on the following motion moved by Ms L. Dalton —

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's speech be agreed to —

To His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, AC, Governor of the State of Western Australia.

May it please Your Excellency —

We, the Legislative Assembly of the Parliament of the State of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign, and to thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to address to Parliament.

**MS R.S. STEPHENS (Albany)** [12.11 pm]: I congratulate Madam Speaker, Hon Michelle Roberts. It is an honour and a privilege to serve alongside her as the first-ever woman Speaker in the Western Australian Parliament. She is indeed a trailblazer. I relate to the word “trailblazer” because I am the first-ever woman member of Parliament to represent the community of Albany—the first settlement of Western Australia and the home of the Anzac story.

I acknowledge the Menang Noongar people, whose land I call home and I pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. The Menang name for Albany is Kinjarling, which means place of plenty.

There are many firsts in the forty-first Parliament following the unprecedented election results. I am the seventeenth member for Albany, the seventh Labor member for Albany, the first-ever woman member for Albany and the first-ever member born in Albany. I acknowledge Hon Peter Watson, also known as “Watto”.

In 2000, I graduated from Albany Senior High School as Citizen of the Year, the same year Watto started his campaign. He successfully won the seat of Albany in 2001. Our paths joined as we pounded the pavement, doorknocking the Albany community. We did not encounter too many hot days, rather lots of hills, dogs and long driveways. We share the aspiration to proudly and determinedly represent the people and community of Albany. I intend to build on the legacy that he left not only in the community of Albany, but here in this Parliament. I wish Peter, Dianne and Harry many happy adventures in their motorhome.

I was born in Albany to Robin and Celia Waugh. My father was born and raised in Albany. Dad left school at 14 years of age to start an apprenticeship as a painter. He retired last year after running a successful business for 50 years. Mum and her family arrived in Fremantle as ten-pound Poms. Shortly after their arrival, my grandfather travelled to Albany and purchased the Lower King Store.

I have very fond memories of my schooling at Spencer Park Primary School and Albany Senior High School. I was fortunate to have many teacher role models and mentors, such as Maggie Dent, Nicky Byrne and Rod Gillies.

I obtained my first job at the Beachside Cafe and Restaurant at age 14, where I learnt many skills and especially the importance of a strong work ethic, which remains with me today. This is the first of the attributes that define me. I have a very strong work ethic.

Like many young Australians, I took a gap year after high school and used Edinburgh as my base and travelled throughout Europe. Wow, I learnt a lot! Those were the days when internet cafes were just starting to pop up and there was no such thing as Google Maps or apps.

When I returned to Western Australia, I studied tourism, event management and marketing here in Perth. At 23, I returned to Albany and started a boutique award-winning hairdressing salon with my cousin Ryan. That set us on the path to success. During our partnership, we won many awards, including WA regional business of the year with up to 10 employees. I was an active member of the executive committee of the Albany Chamber of Commerce and Industry, the youngest by 35 years and still the youngest-ever serving member. While at the chamber, I was instrumental in establishing the ACCI Great Southern Women's group and in bringing young business owners to the membership. I am a proud member of the chamber, which has 600 diverse businesses in its current membership. I acknowledge the humble Baked Bean Seller, Paul Lionetti. Paul is an inspirational businessman, who has made brave investments to progress Albany, with the opening of the Hilton Garden Inn on the Albany foreshore in the coming months.

Volunteering was instilled in me at a very young age. My father is a football legend and a life member of the Royals Football and Sporting Club. My mother is a life member of the Albany Surf Life Saving Club and Surf Life Saving WA. The value of volunteering has helped shape the person I am today. As a keen sportsperson, I often played multiple sports, with mum and dad coaching, scoring, umpiring and volunteering as committee members. Sport was my life. I went to school to socialise and I played sport. I trained and I played hard. I represented Albany in country carnivals in basketball, football, volleyball, swimming, surf lifesaving and netball over many years.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates what kids from the bush faced and still face today. I loved swimming. When I was 10 years old, my coach, Andy Jay, took me, the only kid from Albany, to the state titles at Challenge Stadium in a 50-metre pool. I remember as a country kid warming up on my own, getting to the 25-metre mark and having a cry. I had trained in only a 25-metre pool. I had a goal to break the 40-second mark in the 50-metre freestyle, and my reward was that I was going to Sizzler. I marshalled my stomach full of nerves; the grandstand was packed. I took the blocks; the gun went. I smashed my goal by two seconds. I was eighth in the state; I was going to Sizzler. At the age of 10, I knew that as a country kid I was going to face challenges, but I was ready for them.

My family joined the Albany Surf Life Saving Club in 1990. The club had only 50 members and was close to folding. Mum became the secretary and committed to revamping the membership, which now is over 400 members. Surf lifesaving taught me the value of community service. The surf club became my second home. I spent summers patrolling the beach, travelling to compete at carnivals and keeping the Albany beaches safe. Middleton Beach is known as one of the safest beaches in WA. However, when I was 17, we lost a community member. I was involved in the rescue and resuscitation. We could not have done anything else; however, that experience and loss stays with me today.

I had many opportunities through surf. I obtained my first professional job at surf house as an education program coordinator. I was chosen to volunteer in Bali, training locals to obtain qualifications to gain employment, and I served on the Albany Surf Life Saving Club as the executive director of education and in other committee positions. Surf lifesaving clubs are unique. They are sporting clubs that provide vital emergency services to WA communities. As the pressures and demand of the emergency response teams expand, the McGowan government has committed \$1.6 million to expand the safety and functionality of the Albany Surf Life Saving Club.

The second of the attributes that define me is that I have lived and breathed the broader community of Albany. The obvious move for me was to become involved in local government,

firstly as the mayoral liaison officer and then as a staff member and later an elected member of the City of Albany. There is nothing like local government to give you a breadth and depth of understanding of the issues facing the broader community. I enjoyed the opportunities to learn about the many varied challenges that people in the community face. People in Albany who know me well would say about me that what you see is what you get.

I learnt a great deal under the leadership of two local government CEOs, firstly, the legendary Graham Foster, followed by the current CEO, Andrew Sharpe. I acknowledge City of Albany Mayor Dennis Wellington for his bullish, passionate advocacy for Albany, and my fellow councillors, current Deputy Mayor Greg Stocks and Councillor Rob Sutton, for their support, guidance and wisdom over the years.

The third attribute that defines me is my thirst for knowledge and understanding. Prior to being elected, I was the regional manager of Worklink WA, a not-for-profit organisation providing career and training services. I absolutely loved this role and its ability to adapt to a changing scope. Let me tell you about Dakota, one of our many success stories. I had a call from an old school friend who had a junior warehouse position vacant. I took Dakota down to the business for a meet and greet. Dakota had been a student with Worklink for 18 months and prior to that had attended high school for only four days—not four days each week, but four days in total. He did a trial at the warehouse the next week and he is currently completing a full-time traineeship. This is a perfect example of how organisations like Worklink can fill the gap for the many young people who slip through the cracks of the traditional education system. It is vital that government continue to partner with not-for-profit organisations like Worklink, because there are many, many young people like Dakota in our communities.

Organisations like Worklink are perfectly placed to provide for local needs. An example is when South Regional TAFE collaborated with Worklink in response to the hospitality skills shortage by delivering a fast-track course for students to gain responsible service of alcohol, barista and COVID food-safety qualifications, along with speed networking with hospitality businesses who were seeking staff. This was highly successful.

Just last weekend I was introduced to one of the successful students from that program, who is now working full-time at the Albany Entertainment Centre with the skills they learnt. On the Monday following the election, a journalist joked that I would have to resign from my job. It was honestly the most rewarding job, helping young, vulnerable youth to obtain training and employment. Resigning became a bit easier when my colleague, friend and CEO of Worklink was elected to the seat of Warren–Blackwood!

The McGowan Labor government created the regional economic development grants program so that strategic government investment can get smaller local projects off the ground and help diversify our regional economies, drive economic growth and create local jobs. Since 2017, nearly \$1.5 million has been invested in Albany through the RED grants to businesses like Himac Attachments, Albany Seafoods, Monty's Leap winery, Westerberg Aluminium Boats, Dune Brewing Company and Beck and Call Coffee. Albany's Himac manufactures machinery attachments for the agricultural and earthmoving sectors. From its roots as a small family business to being a leader in the Australian attachments industry, Himac has experienced incredible growth. The grants have helped Himac kickstart digital infrastructure for its manufacturing facilities. Its workforce will reach around 65 employees by the time the second manufacturing facility is up and running later this year.

I now turn to my thank-yous. To my campaign director Hon Alannah MacTiernan, you, my friend, are a warrior, inspiring and compassionate. Thank you also to your family for their willingness to help in any way. Your support, wisdom and encouragement has changed my life and I will be forever grateful. To Guy Wroth, I would not be here without your dedication to the campaign. Thank you Ben Headlam, Ian Bishop, Claire Hanson, Kenneth John, Di Fry,

Luke Gibson, Darcy Duncan and the Albany Labor branch. Also thank you to Ben Harris and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, Brad Gandy and the Australian Workers' Union, former Premier Alan Carpenter and all volunteers, supporters and donors. To the WA Labor campaign headquarters team, your support and dedication was outstanding.

To my fellow regional members of Parliament, special congratulations to you. Our regional representation is so important. Regional voices need to be heard and acknowledged. Regionally, we face diverse challenges and are presented with many opportunities. This government has demonstrated its commitment to creating regional jobs and diversifying regional economies so that local small businesses can benefit. To the Premier, Mark McGowan, thank you for your solid, unwavering leadership, for your dedication and commitment to the party, and for your advocacy to see more women in Parliament. You rose to rockstar status in 2020 for many reasons. The Albany roller derby team used your famous "Run and Eat a Kebab" comments for fundraising T-shirts. It asked that I thank you.

I acknowledge my family and friends. To my mum, Celia, thank you for your unwavering love and support always. Thank you to my husband, Darcy, who has embraced and supported me to become a member of Parliament. Thank you to my sister, Megan, who is a nurse who serves the Albany community, and to my dad, who during the campaign proudly flogged around the streets of Albany on his gopher as a mobile billboard. Thank you to my children: Fergus, my quiet lamb, a lover of history, sport and music; and Maggie, my rooster, fearlessly determined, independent and soccer-mad. Thank you for being resilient; the journey has just begun.

It is an exciting time for Albany, with planning underway for the bicentenary in 2026, the delivery of a new Mount Lockyer Primary School, the Albany ring-road, the radiation oncology centre and everything else in the WA Labor plan for Albany that will create local jobs.

The stamp I want to leave on this Parliament as a proud member for Albany are the three attributes I have spoken about today, with the first two being my strong work ethic and my constant involvement in the community. I know the Albany community and the Albany community knows me. The third attribute is my thirst for knowledge and understanding. I want to use these attributes to contribute to the decision-making of this government for the benefit of every Western Australian. Thank you.

[Applause.]

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