



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Peter Rundle, MLA

(Member for Roe)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 16 May on the following motion moved by Ms J.J. Shaw —

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

To Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, 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.

MR P.J. RUNDLE (Roe) [5.18 pm]: I feel extremely honoured, humbled and excited to deliver my inaugural speech here today. I am very proud to represent the Roe electorate and the people of Western Australia. Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker, for giving me the opportunity to address the Legislative Assembly for the first time as the elected member for Roe.

Firstly, I would like to extend my thanks to the people of Roe for placing their trust in me by supporting me at the recent state election. It is a great honour to be elected as a member of Parliament. I am aware of the responsibility that goes with it and I will work extremely hard to give the people from the Roe electorate the best possible representation in the years ahead.

I would like to thank the National Party and its members for giving me the opportunity to represent this great party. Thanks must go to my campaign committee, which was well led by my ever-enthusiastic campaign manager, Steve Blyth, along with my wife, Andrea, Colin De Grussa, Leigh Ballard and Tori Castledine. Particular thanks are due to the members of the Parliamentary National Party and the Nationals' campaign committee for their support over the election campaign. Thanks are also due to the National Party branches and members for their great work and support—many of them are watching online tonight. I look forward to honouring their faith in me. A special mention must go to the Agnews and the Hoskings in Esperance. I also owe a great deal of gratitude to the WA Young Nationals for their enthusiasm and assistance during the campaign, and in particular I would like to mention Young Nationals president Lachlan Hunter for his energy and support.

I would like to take the opportunity to tell the house about the electorate of Roe. As members may be aware, the electorate of Roe was formed at the recent boundary redistribution, with the unfortunate abolition of one regional electorate and the abolition of the former electorates of Wagin and Eyre. As a result, Roe now consists of 18 different local governments stretching from the Shire of Williams in the north west to the Shire of Cranbrook in the south west and to the Shire of Esperance in the east. My electorate has three major regional centres—Esperance, Narrogin and Katanning. Roe consists of approximately 106 000 square kilometres which, for interest's sake, is 5 912 times the size of the electorate of Mount Lawley. The region is very much agricultural based, with grain, wool, lamb, mutton and beef the mainstays of the agricultural industry. In recent times there has been some exciting diversification into export hay production along with an increase in aquaculture and

horticulture. In the eastern part of the electorate, the mining industry is very important, particularly iron ore, nickel and mineral sands, and lithium mining has recently increased. Many of these products, both agricultural and mining, are exported through Esperance port. This port is extremely valuable to our region. Last year the port exported over 15 million tonnes, with a trade value of \$8 billion.

The electorate also contains a diversified small business sector that supports the agricultural and mining industries. Tourism is developing rapidly and its importance cannot be underestimated to both inland and coastal destinations. I was recently briefed on an exciting inland tourism trail extending from Northam through Narrogin, Katanning, the Stirling Range and on to Albany. This is an interesting development and will be mainly funded through private sector investment.

Without doubt, the greatest resource of the Roe electorate is its people. I met many of them while doorknocking in the recent election campaign and, having lived in the electorate for most of my life, I know a great many of them. There is myriad diversity in the electorate and none more so than my home town of Katanning, which is also home town to 43 different nationalities. The Katanning Harmony Festival has developed into a renowned event and demonstrates how a community can work and play together. Many of these people are the backbone of our workforce, especially the meatworks at the Western Australian Meat Marketing Co-operative Limited. I recognise the numerous contributions that many people from other countries and cultures have made to our region and, in turn, I am pleased to be the National Party spokesperson for citizenship and multicultural interests. I also recognise and acknowledge the contribution of the Noongar people and the large role they have played in the region. I have many relationships with the Noongar people through schooling and sport and I look forward to working with them in my new role.

When it was announced that the new seat of Roe extended such a great distance to the east and over such a vast area, it was a little unsettling, to say the least. I received some great advice from “Tuck” Waldron, the recently retired member for Wagin and who many members know. He said to treat it as a new challenge. I must say it has been fantastic to meet a new range of people in the towns of Ravensthorpe, Hopetoun and Esperance. My wife, Andrea, and I have come to know many people from these towns through the election campaign. We admired their resilience during the flooding events in February and their attitude during the recovery process. The people of these towns and surrounds are somewhat isolated from the metropolitan area. That is why it is essential that the state government gives support, where possible, when these types of events occur.

One major current issue is the isolation of Hopetoun from the Fitzgerald River National Park through the decimation of the causeway at Culham Inlet. Fitzgerald National Park is the leading tourism destination in the region and many businesses are doing it extremely tough as the town has been cut off, resulting in a substantial decrease in tourist numbers. I note the Minister for Environment’s recent comments that we need to use and access our national parks more. I look forward to the state government supporting the Hopetoun community by reinstating the causeway. I must compliment Main Roads WA and the Department of Transport for their quick action in restoring many parts of South Coast Highway after the recent floods.

Reflecting on the recent election campaign, I must comment on the biggest issue raised consistently in my electorate—the Esperance Tanker Jetty. This jetty is an iconic tourism drawcard for the town and the region, but it has unfortunately deteriorated due to lack of maintenance. The Esperance Tanker Jetty is one of only three remaining timber jetties in Western Australia. After speaking to many people during the campaign, it is clear how important the jetty is to everyone, including the people from the goldfields. I implore the

Ministers for Heritage; Transport; Regional Development; and Tourism to help the community. With their support I believe the jetty can be successfully refurbished, similar to many great jetties in South Australia. The jetty, along with the recently developed foreshore, are great assets for everyone to enjoy.

On a personal level, I would like to inform members of my background before I became the member for Roe. Raised on the family farm between Katanning and Kojonup, I attended Katanning Primary School and Katanning Senior High School prior to becoming a boarder at Wesley College. After completing year 12, I deferred my studies to go on a one-year agricultural exchange to Canada and Switzerland. On my return I spent several years farming before taking the role of managing Wesfarmers' share department at Computershare on St Georges Terrace. I also studied commerce at Curtin University and completed a course through what was then known as the Securities Institute of Australia. This period of seven years was important for me as I came to realise that not everyone in the metropolitan area was as interested in the regions as I thought they might have been.

It was during this time that I married Andrea and our two boys, James and Sam, were born. We moved back to the family farm in 1994 to bring our children up in the country. I will never regret this decision as I have enjoyed farming for the subsequent 23 years. Community and sport, particularly tennis, golf and squash, have been a major part of my life. I became involved with several community projects including six years on the reticulation of the Katanning golf course with the town's wastewater and five years on the building of the \$25 million regional saleyards. I also served on the St Patrick's School board where our boys attended primary school. This led to my appointment as chair of the Great Southern Development Commission in 2009 and, in turn, appointments to the Regional Development Council and the Western Australian Regional Development Trust. This body oversees the governance of the royalties for regions program and provides advice to the Minister for Regional Development. I also note that our now Premier was perhaps one of the few who used to read our annual report and quite often referred to our former chairman, Andrew Murray.

During this time I also graduated from the Australian Institute of Company Directors. The opportunity to be involved in the world of regional development has given me a clear picture of what is required for the advancement and stability of our regional areas, and to the qualities and resilience that many of our country people possess. In many ways that is what has led me into politics. I see it as an opportunity to address some of the inequities that exist between country and city, while also looking at a positive way forward to address issues concerning the whole state. I also thank the CEO of the Great Southern Development Commission, Bruce Manning, for his friendship and knowledge regarding regional development.

Regional Western Australia makes up 22 per cent of the state's population. Our regions are vital drivers of the state's economy, contributing more than one-third of Western Australia's economic activity and 95 per cent of the state's exports. It has therefore been fundamental that the royalties for regions program was introduced to deal with the large infrastructure backlog that had built up over many years. I congratulate the previous state government on the implementation of the royalties for regions program, which has seen a vital rebalancing take place and has given heart to many rural communities that had been suffering an obvious decline. We cannot underestimate the boost to morale and in turn the boost to the small business sector that royalties for regions has given these communities. I was involved with, and very proud of, many diverse projects during my time at the Great Southern Development Commission. Some examples include the Smart Start early childhood program; the Munda Biddi tourist trail; aged independent living units in a variety of towns; the Great Southern Taste Festival; the Albany Hospice; and the "Great Southern Regional Investment Blueprint".

In my electorate I consider smaller towns such as Nyabing, Tambellup, Cranbrook, Wickiepin and Kulin every bit as important as our larger regional centres. These smaller towns provide the support for the surrounding farming community, and the sporting and cultural activities that take place in these communities cannot be underestimated. The weekend football, netball and hockey are what hold many communities together and we must retain and encourage this for future years. Equally important is that our larger regional centres thrive as well. The recent comments on recreation centres concern me when I see up to 200 children playing basketball on a weeknight in the likes of Esperance, Narrogin or Katanning. We need to support this and ensure our children are encouraged to take an active role in their community from an early age. In reference to our larger regional centres, I have been heartened by the recent moves by our federal government to decentralise some government agencies to the regions. Narrogin is a town with a strong background in supporting government agencies and the economic benefit from this is extremely rewarding. This scenario is a vital key to boosting employment opportunities and boosting our local economies and I look forward to the state government considering this extensively.

I am very passionate about education in a regional context. I believe that every child who lives in the regions should have access to a standard of public education equal to that of their metropolitan counterpart, regardless of their parent's income. This may sound idealistic. However, I believe it is achievable with the right blend of high quality teachers, effective leadership and good governance. Teacher quality is the most important issue in relation to student success and it is essential that we do not accept a continual reduction in the entrance level required by our universities. Quality teaching is first and foremost to producing good student outcomes and excellence in education. I recognised the importance of this firsthand when my wife, Andrea, won the Australian Teacher of the Year award in 2011 for her valuable contribution to regional education over many years. Her passion for caring and nurturing disengaged students demonstrated to me the value of effective quality teaching. Strong and effective leadership is a vital element in all schools and none more so than our regional schools.

I would like to see our principals on five-year contracts, which would enable performance reviews and results to be measured in line with the contracts implemented in the public sector. A strong network of high quality K–12 schools spread throughout the state would be the best outcome. This is demonstrated in Merredin and Mt Barker and currently provides regional families with choice at a more local level. Unfortunately, we are currently seeing the drift of many families and children to either larger coastal locations or the city. Another concerning pattern developing is when mothers and young children leave town for their education and dad is left behind on the farm or at his business in town. This is leading to family breakup and less contribution to our regional communities. We need to explore all ideas, as there is nothing more disheartening than to see our younger generation leaving their local community and family for education at the age of 11. With this said, a quality public education is the preferred model.

In 2016–17 the WA education budget was \$4.84 billion dollars. In regional areas the replacement and maintenance of education infrastructure is key to ensuring better education outcomes for regional students. Together with this, technology and e-education programs can significantly improve rural students' education. We need to ensure that information and communications technology infrastructure and bandwidth are the best possible available as disparity in these elements leads to disparity in the results of regional students. I was pleased to hear that fees have been frozen for several years for TAFE students, as this is becoming a very important element in education for regional students. For all of the aforementioned reasons, I am very happy to be the education spokesperson for the National Party and I look forward to engaging in fruitful discussions on regional education.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.J. RUNDLE: Health and aged care have been greatly improved in regional areas by the royalties for regions program. Hospital improvements in Esperance, Narrogin, Katanning and Lake Grace have been welcomed, along with the renovation of many smaller community health centres. If our standard of health care is reliable, people will stay for longer in their home community. A highlight for me has been the regional men's health initiative. We have seen many rural men come forward and deal with various health problems as a result of this program. I congratulate those who are involved and trust that this important program can continue long into the future.

Independent living options for the elderly have enabled our older regional residents to stay in their communities close to family and friends while maintaining their lifestyle and routine. I was heartened when out doorknocking in Woodanilling recently to see four different aged families all meeting at their back fence. They confirmed to me how much they enjoyed the independent living units and how important it was for them to stay in their own community.

Agriculture is such an important element of Western Australia's economy. I believe that we are going into a period when livestock production, especially sheep and cattle, will be prosperous for several years to come. We must ensure that key infrastructure is in place so that the state and its farmers can reap the benefits. My main concern is in relation to the declining numbers in our sheep flock. Currently, there are 13.8 million sheep in the state and it is important that we do not fall below this critical number in order to maintain the breeding flock. A key element to this is the sheep industry business innovation project based in Katanning at the Department of Agriculture and Food. The project is looking at not only maintaining numbers but also improving innovation and productivity. Unfortunately, the grain prices are currently at low levels and we look forward to an improvement during the year—along with, hopefully, good seasonal rains and no frost. With the growing efficiencies in grain farming, there is an increasing reliance on telecommunications, data reliability and new apps for GPS guidance and many other farming techniques.

Telecommunications are now such an important issue in regional communities. Comparatively poor mobile coverage and low utilisation of digital technologies are hampering economic growth and service delivery in the regions. The national broadband network satellite service, where available, is suffering from severe delay, has capacity limitations and low data quotas, and is more expensive than services offered in the metropolitan area. I would like to see this government focus on fixed telecommunications in regional areas, which can generally allow higher data speeds and quotas delivered at reasonable cost. Continuation of the good work of the previous state government in increasing the mobile tower network across regional Western Australia would be beneficial and certainly appreciated.

I welcome the attention and focus that is currently being given to the increase of drug usage and the overwhelming damage and heartache it places on families. Unfortunately, members will be aware that in recent times methylamphetamine has become readily available, with regional areas affected at a higher rate than the metropolitan area. We need to address this issue immediately to ensure that every member of our community feels safe. I look forward to attending the Shalom House Rehabilitation Centre seminar in July, which has been organised by members of the Esperance community to address rehabilitation and future solutions.

In conclusion I would sincerely like to acknowledge my predecessor, Hon Tuck Waldron, for his outstanding contribution to the state and the Wagin electorate over the previous 16 years.

He was well known for his popularity and great sense of humour, but his hard work and dedication in the electorate was well regarded and so well received. I know that the member for Cottesloe, Hon Colin Barnett, often says that Tuck would not handball to him when they played for Claremont. However, I am sure that he was well respected by all members on all sides of Parliament. Tuck and his wife Noelene's support for me over the last two years has been extremely valued and much appreciated. The new stadium, which is well on the way to completion, will be one of the things that Tuck will be remembered for in his previous role as Minister for Sport and Recreation. He is currently taking a well-deserved caravan holiday in South Australia, but still took the time to call and wish me luck and I know that he is watching online tonight. It must be said that we share a major interest in the Esperance tanker jetty as I am currently receiving photos on a regular basis of every jetty that Tuck visits on his adventures around the state of South Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge the contribution of the previous member for Eyre, Dr Graham Jacobs. I am lucky to have worked with two high-quality leaders of the National Party in my prior roles in regional development. The previous member for Pilbara, Hon Brendon Grylls, was a creative, enthusiastic and innovative leader. His determination in developing royalties for regions has seen a massive transformation in regional Western Australia. The member for Warren–Blackwood, Hon Terry Redman, has been an excellent leader and a highly regarded minister of several portfolios. I also thank him for his advice, friendship and support. I am looking forward to working with our talented new leader, the member for Central Wheatbelt, Hon Mia Davies.

It is with great pride that I acknowledge the presence of my family and friends in the public gallery. I would like to express my sincere thanks and gratitude to my family for their unwavering support and encouragement. I thank my loving wife, Andrea, who has been a great inspiration to me and who gives so much to our family and the community, and our wonderful sons James and Sam for their enthusiasm and support. I thank my parents Bronte and June for their guidance and love and for instilling in me both the work ethic and the importance of giving back to the community of which you are a part. I also pay tribute to my extremely supportive extended family who have been involved in many ways, and a particular thank you to my sister-in-law Judy for her contribution to my election campaign. I also extend my thanks to Dot and Graeme Hickey for the continual support that they give to Andrea and me. I must say that Graeme keeps me updated on all GST issues, a subject I am very passionate about.

Thank you, Mr Acting Speaker for the opportunity to address the house today. I am passionate and focused on many regional issues, but, as I say, every person who remains in or moves to the regions is one fewer person blocking up our freeways in Perth. I look forward to working hard for my constituents along with all members of this Parliament for the betterment of this great state of Western Australia. Thank you.

[Applause.]