



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mrs Lisa O'Malley, MLA

(Member for Bicton)

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.

MRS L.M. O'MALLEY (Bicton) [12.29 pm]: Madam Acting Speaker (Ms J.M. Freeman), I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. I also congratulate the member for Albany on his election to the position of Speaker of the Legislative Assembly of the fortieth Parliament of Western Australia. I wish to acknowledge the crucial role of the Speaker in ensuring that we, as parliamentarians, stay focused on the task at hand in the business of government. From my very limited observation, I suspect that the job is not unlike that of a field umpire. I wish the Speaker all the best in enforcing the rules and making sure that we all play the ball and stay focused on our game.

I speak to you today as the recently elected first member for Bicton. It is a historic moment for which I express my eternal gratitude to the people of Palmyra, Bicton, Attadale, Melville, and parts of Alfred Cove, Myaree and Fremantle.

A new member's first speech is a momentous occasion. It is a speech in which the speechmaker aims to condense and share our past, present and future selves, and our hopes and aspirations in our role as local members and parliamentarians into 20-or-so minutes of engaging, eloquent and hopefully memorable words. It may not be the toughest challenge that we will face in our parliamentary careers, but I think it may be up there. To my new parliamentary colleagues, I acknowledge and congratulate each of you on your election to the fortieth Parliament of our great state of Western Australia, and on the occasion of your first speeches.

I would like to acknowledge that we meet here today on Whadjuk Noongar booja—always was; always will be—and pay my respects to elders past, present and emerging. On the occasion of my first speech in this house, I also wish to acknowledge and pay my respects to the traditional custodians of the place of my birth, the Bunurong people of the Kulin nation of south central Victoria.

It is with enormous gratitude that I additionally acknowledge the presence of members of my family who are here today, my parents, George and Margaret Hams, who have travelled from Victoria; my parents-in-law, Dennis and Moya O'Malley; my sisters-in-law, Karen and Anne; and my own beautiful family—my husband, Mark, and our children, Aidan and Matilda. Thank you for all that you are and give to me. I also acknowledge my family that cannot be here today; you are with me nonetheless.

Today I may be speaking for the first time as a member of this house, but those who know me will attest to the fact that, for me, speaking is what air is to breathing. However, the many hours of doorknocking, phone calling and street corner pop-up offices throughout the past year of campaigning has taught me that although there is great power in words, it is with listening that I will truly make a difference for the people of Bicton as their local member. Everyone has a story to tell, and I believe it is one of the gifts of public office to be the recipient of those stories. It is an honour, a privilege and a great responsibility to be entrusted as not only the beneficiary of those stories, but, far more critically, to be the facilitator of change brought about by the telling of that story. It is a great thing to be the mechanism by which the storyteller, the constituent, can achieve a positive outcome from the act of sharing their story, despite how challenging this may be, particularly for the vulnerable and marginalised members in our community.

I have listened to many stories of isolation and challenge in our community, from people living alone with dementia who are afraid to venture into a world that is becoming increasingly confusing to them, to those who have worked exceptionally hard to overcome mental health challenges. These are people whose lives may have been reshaped by their experience but who do not deserve to be defined by them. Despite all the advances that have been made in destigmatising mental ill-health, people still encounter discrimination and disrespect in the workplace and in our society. I have listened to stories of women who are trapped in violent and chaotic homes, fearful of what may happen if they stay, but too fearful to leave. I have listened to many, many stories of underemployment, unemployment and looming redundancy, and the enormous financial pressure that places on families.

I have also listened to good news stories from the people of Bicton, of the success of a small local business, of community and individual achievement and of optimism that this Labor government, despite the appalling economic legacy of the previous government, will turn things around, because this government will put people first.

My story is one of people and place. I was born and raised in a small country town located in the Strzelecki Ranges of South Gippsland, Victoria. Growing up with practical, loving and hardworking parents alongside my four brothers in the open spaces and tight-knit community of Korumburra was a gift beyond measure and continues to shape every aspect of my life to this day. From my mum I learnt the values of community, compassion and generosity of heart and hearth. From my dad I learnt the values of hard work, persistence and self-reliance. My brothers taught me to stand up for myself and others and to kick a football.

Both of my parents finished school before their fifteenth birthdays, my mum to work at the Nestle factory in Pakenham, Victoria, and my dad to work alongside his brothers and their father to establish blue metal quarries at Woodlea and later Ruby, Victoria, which provided stone and concrete to build roads and other projects throughout the local region. My homemaker mum was an enthusiastic participant in our town's community and her many fundraising and community commitments instilled in me the importance of collective action and community solidarity. Ours was a home in which the door was always open and a cup of tea never far away. My two eldest brothers followed our father into the family business. My middle brother, my younger brother and I entered university. This was an experience that was new to our family and opened not only our young minds, but also those of our parents as we challenged their conventional views with new perspectives and a greatly expanded understanding of the world and our place in it. I thank my parents for their support, encouragement and patience.

The social and political matters of the time rarely featured in our dinner table conversations; ours was not a political household. But from 1980 to 1983 an environmental issue of world

significance—the Gordon-below-Franklin Dam project in Tasmania’s south west wilderness—would challenge the political complacency of many small town households, including my own. Thousands protested at the impact the dam would have on this environmentally sensitive place. The Tasmanian state and federal governments of the time were locked in battle and the world watched. It would finally end with the election of a Bob Hawke–led federal government that had committed to stopping the project. The enormity of that moment is still with me today and the connection between that event of 34 years ago and the WA Labor government’s recent success in stopping the destruction of remnant wetlands at the site of Roe 8 is of great personal significance to me. It would be many years until I found my political voice but from that moment it was on its way.

A love of sport and physical activity led me to studies in health, fitness and recreation and then into a career in the fitness industry. Although I have long since moved on, I maintain a commitment to the importance of physical activity for preventive health management and community wellbeing. The preservation of the natural environment is integral to this. Health, environment and education are to me the pillars that hold our economic and social fortunes aloft and to lose sight of this is to fail the people of this great state in the most fundamental of ways.

My heart led me to Western Australia and I moved into my first home in Melville with my Kalgoorlie-born husband in 1993. We moved to Palmyra shortly after and remain there to this day, embedded in our own tight-knit community where local streets become pop-up skate parks and roadside verges a place of gathering and community celebration. In the years that followed, we started our family and our children entered a local public school—Palmyra Primary School—where I quickly became involved in the school’s P&C, fundraising and lobbying government to provide the best possible resources for our teachers to teach and our kids to learn. Then the education funding cuts of 2013 came and I knew I had to do more. I became a state councillor for peak parent body the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations, representing and advocating for public schools throughout the Fremantle area. At the time, I joined several other local parents and citizens association presidents to fund the parent lobby group SOS—Save Our Schools. We partnered with the Putting Our Kids First alliance of unions to protest the savage cuts to education funding under the previous Liberal government and to lobby for the return of these vital funds. I was beginning to find my political voice. Parent associations work exceptionally hard to raise funds for their schools and I take this moment to acknowledge and thank the P&Cs and parents and friends associations in our Western Australian schools for the incredible work they do to provide extra resources and support. I also acknowledge the vital role our teachers, education assistants, administrators, school leaders, cleaners and gardeners play in educating and supporting the wellbeing of our children. They inspire our kids to become the leaders of tomorrow, for they are the ones who will shape the future of this state. I thank the unions that protect these incredibly important workers’ rights and I am proud to be part of a government that will put 300 education assistants back into our classrooms.

Since arriving in Western Australia 24 years ago, I transitioned from employment in both the private and public sectors to small business ownership with my husband. This gave me a good understanding of the challenges faced in these quite different but equally important areas of our economy. I am particularly proud of my three years of managing the Palmyra Western Farmers Market with my good friend Karen Greenwood. It was a time of 5.00 am starts and grassroots, hands-on community building and I loved every minute of it. Thank you, Karen, for sharing that time with me and for all your support throughout the campaign and beyond. I am thankful for the many opportunities this great state has given me and I look forward to giving back throughout my parliamentary career.

The story of the electorate of Bicton has only just begun but the history of the district is not dissimilar to my own. Palmyra, Bicton and the other suburbs that make up this new electorate were once mostly farming land; perhaps that is why I feel so at home there. From the 1850s, fledgling communities began to spring up along the southern banks of the Swan River in an area known as Melville Water. Development was slow and the early settlers were isolated by thick, natural vegetation. The river was the primary means of transport and communication. Much has changed since then but the river, its foreshore, bush sites and open public spaces remain at the heart of our district and community identity, with two-thirds of the electorate of Bicton bordered by the majestic Swan River. We may no longer rely on the river in the same way we once did, but the role it plays for the people of Bicton as a meeting point, recreational space and place to reconnect with our natural environment is more important than ever before as our lives become increasingly crowded with noise, distraction and stress. I know through personal experience that physical and emotional health is integral to our sense of self-worth and the preservation of and access to our natural environment plays a critical role in living meaningful and productive lives. Being in nature is an essential antidote to the ills of our modern life. In particular, mental ill health takes a terrible toll on our community and suicide is a human tragedy that touches too many. We must do more and I believe it is a moral responsibility for every one of us to step up to this task—none more so than those of us who are entrusted with the power to make policy. We must do more to stop the terrible loss of life and I make my solemn commitment to playing my part.

I take this opportunity to pay tribute to the local environmental community groups that dedicate hundreds of volunteer hours every year to protect, preserve and restore the Swan River and its surrounds. They work tirelessly without any expectation of reward or recognition for the vital work they do in the electorate of Bicton. It was with great pleasure that on Thursday, 12 January I stood beside our now Premier Mark McGowan to announce that this government will provide \$300 000 per year for the next four years to assist community volunteer groups to undertake foreshore restoration, waterbird conservation, mosquito monitoring and control, recreational fishing and bacterial monitoring projects along the Canning and Swan Rivers. This funding is even more fortuitous, as it comes at a time of increasing threat of encroaching foreshore development.

To the member for Fremantle, Simone McGurk: your commitment to your constituents and dedication to hard work and never giving up on the good fight has provided both inspiration and motivation to me throughout the past five years. You are an exceptional example of a great local member—the type of local member I aspire to be. Thank you for your support and words of advice, and for pushing me way beyond my comfort zone throughout the past 12 months as my campaign director. You have played an integral part in my journey from P&C president to parliamentarian.

To my campaign manager, Matt Bowden: you ran a remarkable campaign that succeeded in electing a Labor candidate in an area that has not seen red since Hon Barry Hodge held the seat of Melville between 1977 and 1989. I am here today because of your guidance and commitment.

To my Bicton campaign field coordinators, Joe Quick and Kerry Banting: you ran what was arguably the strongest field campaign of this election.

To the members of United Voice and the 121 volunteers who knocked on over 15 000 doors and made more than 20 000 phone calls: I remain in awe of your energy and drive, and humbled by your support.

I also acknowledge and pay tribute to the thousands of people who came together in the fight to save Beeliar wetlands and stop the disaster known as Perth Freight Link. Throughout this past summer of destruction, you held the line and bore witness to the sheer arrogance and

callous disregard of the previous government's decision to push on with this deeply flawed plan in the face of a looming election. The environmental and health impacts of that project threatened some of the most vulnerable members of our community—our children. There are 32 primary schools, nine secondary schools, three tertiary schools and 26 day care centres located along the routes of what was to be Perth Freight Link.

[Member's time extended.]

Mrs L.M. O'MALLEY: These 70 places of education and early childhood care are located within two kilometres of the planned road; one day care centre in Bibra Lake is at ground zero, on the very edge of the road reserve. Diesel engine exhaust is declared by the World Health Organization to be a group 1 carcinogen, meaning there is no safe level of exposure for humans. Diesel particulates are found in diesel exhaust and have the ability to cause disease and death; they disperse well beyond the point of origin. Diesel particulates are microscopic particles found in diesel exhaust and are less than one-fifth the thickness of a human hair. They are small enough to penetrate deep into the lungs, where they can contribute to a range of health problems. The elderly and people with emphysema, asthma and chronic heart and lung disease are especially sensitive to fine particle pollution. The still-developing lungs of children place them at a particularly high risk. More roads that bring trucks into our communities is not the answer to our freight and transport needs, and on 11 March the people of Western Australia delivered that message to the Liberal government. The people of Western Australia held the former government to account for its environmental vandalism and economic irresponsibility with an electoral defeat, the size of which has never before been seen in Western Australia. The people of Western Australia elected a Mark McGowan-led Labor government—a government that will deliver on its promise of effective, sustainable and futureproof transport and infrastructure; a government in which I proudly take my place as the first member for Bicton.

My journey from P&C president to parliamentarian has been driven by a simple belief that people drive policy, and that with collective action and a common purpose great things can be achieved. I view life from the bottom up, not the top down, and believe we can change society one street at a time.

Quite simply, I commit to working with the people of Bicton to get the things done that will make their lives, and those of their children and generations to come, better than they are today. It would seem that I have found my political voice. Thank you.

[Applause.]
