



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Dr Kim Hames MLA
(Member for Dawesville)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 30 March 2005

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Motion

DR K.D. HAMES (Dawesville) [1.07 pm]: Members, I am back in this place today to make what is supposedly a maiden speech. As many members know, I am no longer a maiden and I guess that what is now called the first speech is no longer a first speech either. However, it is still a great privilege for me to be back in this place today to give my opening speech to this house on my re-election to Parliament.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I will not do what a previous member for Balga was known to have done during his first speech in Parliament, which was to provide a long and detailed list of every person in his electorate who had helped him during his election campaign. He produced that list of everyone who assisted him in a report called “The Leader”, which was one of the prime publications of the day. I will not do that, as I am sure that not all the people who helped me in my campaign wish to have their names publicly known! However, I thank many people who helped in my electorate, certainly those who chose me at the preselection committee meeting, which in itself was a rather interesting event. I was very pleased to be the winning person at that preselection meeting. I particularly thank the members of my campaign team who worked long and hard and did a great job in making sure that I would be elected to the seat of Dawesville. I also thank the people in the Dawesville branch of the Liberal Party for working very hard and supporting me in coming from Perth and establishing myself in Mandurah. I made the point on many occasions to people in the electorate that although I have lived in Perth for most of my life, for 40 years I have been going to Mandurah almost on a yearly basis, because my grandparents had a house in Avalon, so every year I had the opportunity of enjoying the pleasures that Mandurah, and in particular Dawesville, has to offer.

I also thank Arthur Marshall, the former member for Dawesville. Arthur did a great job in his 12 years as member for Murray and then member for Dawesville, and he achieved many things, both in our term of government and since, of which he can be immensely proud. Arthur turned 70 during the last term of government. Not too many 70-year-olds would do the hard work that Arthur did. Many members of Parliament who are coming to the end of their time in the Parliament tend to ease off and not do the hard yards. As members would know, Arthur was a sportsman. Everything that he did revolved around sport. His analogy for the completion of his term was that there was a tape at the end, and he did not want to just jog through that tape; he wanted to sprint through. That is exactly what Arthur did. Until his last week in the Parliament, Arthur was still attending many functions and doing all the hard work that a parliamentarian needs to do. Arthur will not be gone from public life. I thought that when he bought the caravan and the new Prado he would be off in the distance on the obligatory retirement tour, as he had promised Helen he would do. However, I think Helen will find it difficult to get him to go away, and the caravan will remain parked in the yard for some time, because Arthur still runs the Peel Thunder 100 Club, which now has well over 200 members, and he is still working very hard to improve facilities at the Peel Health Campus. Every time someone rings the electorate office, I say I am now in Arthur’s office and sitting at Arthur’s desk. I think it will be some time before I will be able to stop saying those words. Arthur was a tremendous local member, and I am very proud of what he achieved. I also thank Helen, who did a great job for the local community in supporting Arthur.

I also thank my family. It is not easy when one is elected to represent an area outside the metropolitan area. I am now living in Mandurah. However, for personal reasons my family will take some short time to join me, so initially there will be a degree of separation. My family have been right behind me in my desire to get back into Parliament and re-establish my parliamentary career. My wife is currently in hospital recovering from major reconstruction surgery on her shoulder, and I wish her well.

I thank the electorate of Dawesville for voting me into Parliament. Although some concern was expressed about the fact that I was from the city, and the local paper showed some pictures of parachutes to indicate the suggested mode of entry for me to get into that seat, I received great support from the local community. I am very proud of the Dawesville community for electing me, and I promise to do everything in my power to continue with the good job that Arthur did and make sure that I represent the people of Dawesville in the best possible way.

LOCAL ISSUES

Peel Deviation

I turn now to some of the local issues in my electorate. These issues became very important to me during the year in which I campaigned, and I place on record my intention to pursue them during the next four years. The first issue is the Peel deviation. The Peel deviation has been promised by both parties. However, it has been brought forward only through the great efforts of Don Randall, the federal member for Canning, who made sure, through Senator Ian Campbell, that a contribution was made at the federal level. In earlier years the state Minister for Planning and Infrastructure had to be dragged kicking and screaming into initiating the construction of the Peel deviation. However, after about three changes to the proposed date for the commencement of construction, it has finally been pinned down to 2007. The Peel deviation is essential for not only my electorate but also the south west. Up to 30 000 vehicles a day drive through the heart of my electorate. It is an absolute disgrace that people need to travel through the heart of Mandurah to get to Perth. I spent the Easter break at my father's farm in Boddington. I arrived back in Mandurah at about 1.00 pm on Monday, and the traffic through the heart of Mandurah was already bumper to bumper. I estimate that it would have taken people who were driving back to Perth after their holiday in the south west at least half an hour to get through Mandurah. Another problem is that trucks are travelling through the centre of Mandurah at all hours of the day and night. When I say that, I should perhaps declare an interest, because my house is very close to Old Coast Road, and at three and four o'clock in the morning I can hear the trucks travelling through that area. I believe that the construction of the Peel deviation should be brought forward even further, and I ask the Premier and the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to look seriously at ways in which that can be done. I understand from experts in Main Roads that Main Roads plans to call for expressions of interest for the construction of the Peel deviation in the middle of this year and intends to award the contract in the middle of next year, with construction to commence at the beginning of 2007. All that needs to be done prior to the calling of expressions of interest from companies is some work on soil quality and on property purchases. I do not see any reason that those two things cannot be done in conjunction. There is no good reason that the government could not seek expressions of interest now from companies to do the construction, which will take at least six to eight months, and during that time finalise all the work that will need to be done by the various government departments before construction can commence, remembering that even once the bids have been put in by the companies there will still be a considerable time before construction can commence. I also call on the Premier and the minister to look seriously at the proposed design of the Peel deviation. The road that will connect the Peel deviation to the heart of Mandurah is in neither the minister's budget nor the planning schedule. However, it is the only road by which the people who will be using the Peel deviation will be able to gain access to Mandurah. The only other road is Gordon Road, which is a back road that was never designed for large volumes of traffic.

Old Coast Road

Another area of concern is the poor quality of Old Coast Road. About 20 000 people live in the electorate of Dawesville. That is not a lot less than in many metropolitan seats. That road carries up to 30 000 vehicles a day, in many cases travelling at a speed of 90 kilometres an hour. That road is being seriously damaged by those vehicles, and particularly the large number of trucks, but it is being extremely poorly maintained. I recently took someone from Main Roads to inspect that road. The repairs to that road are very poor. I am sure the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure would not accept a similar situation in her electorate. She would not accept an old sealed road that was poorly maintained, and on which vehicles were travelling at 90 kilometres an hour, in an area in which 20 000 people live. It is unacceptable for the road to be left in that condition; it needs an asphalt seal on its surface. I understand that would cost approximately \$2 million. I am getting further costings on that and I will request that the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure give serious consideration to that proposal. If the Peel deviation project were to begin in 2007, the road would not be completed until at least 2009 or 2010. That would mean that an estimated 30 000 vehicles would travel on that road every day for the next five years, and that average estimate is increasing every day. It is time that problem was addressed.

Railway

The next issue to which I refer is the railway line. During the election campaign the Labor Party said that if the coalition were elected to government, it would not proceed with the planned project. That is not the case. I put on record that if the opposition were in government, it would have followed that program. It would have ensured that the project was delivered on time and on budget.

Dr S.C. Thomas: We didn't promise it on their budget.

Dr K.D. HAMES: That is true. We had serious doubts about the Labor Party's ability to meet its budget and the proposed timetable. The problem the Labor Party will face is the unions, who have so much control within the rail construction system. The unions will cause more and more delays, and the Labor Party will not be able to complete the project within its current timetable. I hope the Labor Party does meet its timetable. My electorate wants the timetable to be met. All members on this side of the chamber who were elected to represent that region hope that the project will meet the timetable. I warn the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure: do not be late. My electorate will not accept the rail system being delayed. We will watch the minister every step of the way.

Peel Health Campus

I will now talk about the Peel Health Campus. During the election campaign, the proposed coalition government committed \$21.6 million to upgrade the Peel Health Campus. The coalition would have doubled the size of the casualty ward, significantly increased the number of beds, built extra theatres and a paediatric unit, and provided many other requirements that the hospital desperately needs. In accepting the Reid report, the Labor Party has not committed to any increase the number of beds available at the Peel Health Campus. Also, during the election campaign the member for Mandurah stated that the size of the casualty ward would be doubled. That ward was designed to service 15 000 people per year, but it now services 30 000 people per year. I will talk to the Minister for Health about that matter. I hope to receive support from the member for Mandurah so that this does not become a political issue. We do not need it to become a political football. We will provide every support to the minister. We hope to convince him to increase the provision of facilities that are desperately needed at the Peel Health Campus.

Osprey Nest

I will now talk about an osprey nest. To some members, that may not seem like an exciting subject for a maiden speech in Parliament. People who drive over the new bridge at Mandurah can see the osprey nest to which I refer. The nest has existed for more than 40 years. Sadly, during the development of the Mandurah Quay Resort, the tree in which the nest resides was placed in the private property of one of the developed blocks. The tree overhangs the neighbouring property, which is soon to be developed by Mirvac Fini. Both developers support the proposal to take away the nest and move it to a pole closer to the estuary. Film footage shows the female ospreys raising three chicks in that nest. The birds use the whole tree to learn to fly and to feed and it creates a great environment for the rearing of the osprey chicks.

I place on record that many local residents and I are strongly opposed to the proposal to move the osprey nest. I hope to gain the support of the government and certainly of the local council to oppose that plan.

Fairbridge Bank

The final local issue I will raise concerns Fairbridge bank and an area called Roberts Point. Roberts Point lies just to the south of the opening of the estuary in Mandurah. About 100 years ago C.Y. O'Connor produced a plan to build a barrier into the ocean from Roberts Point. A significant problem regarding the estuary system is the continual reforming of the bank, which does two things: firstly, it prevents the easy movement of vessels within the Mandurah estuary system; and, secondly, it blocks the flow of water going out of the estuary system.

The Dawesville Channel - or the Dawesville Cut, as it is referred to - has resulted in a huge improvement in the water quality of the estuary system. However, significant problems still exist. I refer in particular to the acid soils that lie at some of the verges of the estuary system. That soil is not being properly flushed through the estuary. I believe an opportunity exists for the government to undertake a project similar to the project being undertaken in the ocean marina, just north of the channel. I would like the local council and the government, through its development arm, to work together to conduct a stage 2 ocean marina development to provide a significant barrier to the sand flows that currently sweep around Roberts Point. By helping create the barrier, the government and the local council would provide better opportunities for boats - particularly cray vessels - to moor away from the heart of those residential areas. The proposed development also would enable larger visiting vessels to moor in the newly created harbour at the estuary, because of the greater depth of the channel the development would create. That development also would enable ordinary people to fish on the jetty and engage in other recreational activities, which also would be greatly improved.

HEALTH ISSUES

As the shadow Minister for Health, I will raise some issues regarding the opposition's view on health matters relating to the next four years. I am concerned that many experts are trying to promote a healthy lifestyle and preventive medicine programs as key components of a long-term strategy to reduce the burden on the health system. That may be true in the medium term. For example, the prevention of osteoporosis, which is seldom a life-threatening condition, reduces morbidity, thus reducing the use of the medical system. However, in the long term, this strategy has the opposite effect

of that intended. No matter how healthy a lifestyle people lead, we all must die of something. Sadly, even people who have led unblemished lifestyles, as illustrated by the Premier, will seldom succumb to an acute episode such as a cardiovascular event. They are more likely to succumb to a prolonged disease such as cancer. The length of time it takes for cancer to take its toll on patients places a burden on the health system. Also, the prolongation of life increases the chance of non-life threatening body failure conditions affecting the body's organs. The significant increase in hospital admissions of people in the 65 to 85-year-old age group reflects the steadily increasing numbers of hospital admissions for hip replacements, cataract surgery and renal conditions, for example. I am not saying that it is not important to undertake preventive medical programs to improve the longevity and quality of people's lives. Those programs are vital, and it is important to continue them to reduce hospital admissions caused by preventable conditions. However, we must stop suggesting that this will reduce long-term medical costs, because in most cases it will not. My point is that we need to accept that there will be a long-term, sustainable increase in demand for medical services. Preventive medicine is essential to improve the quality of our lives but, in my view, it will not reduce the long-term demand on health services. We need to make sure that we plan properly for that increased demand. We are a wealthy nation. In particular, we are a wealthy state. It is time that we made that commitment to having the highest level of medical service of any country in the world. Our state needs to be recognised throughout the world as a centre of excellence for medical treatment. We should have the highest level of expenditure of any state in Australia on health, not the lowest, as was stated in the Australian Institute of Health statistics for 2003. It is not good enough that this state government is willing to still accept the long waiting lists in our emergency departments and the ramping or bypassing of ambulances. It should not accept the long waiting lists for routine surgery or the long waiting lists to be seen even before a person gets on a waiting list for routine surgery. It should not accept the inadequacy of our rural health services. It certainly should not accept the current state of our mental health services. That does not mean that I believe we should provide or can afford to provide unlimited funds to the health service. History has shown that whatever funding is provided for health needs throughout the world, demand will always find a way to exceed the budget. Unlimited funding itself increases inefficiency, mismanagement and overservicing. The bar has been set at a level of service that most Western Australians find unacceptable. It is time that bar was raised. Despite the famous statement by the Premier to fix the health system, since coming to government in 2001 the Labor Party has done little other than commission a report and make announcements about future spending. It is time to ensure that those reforms are fully activated. I am sure that the Minister for Health has requested a significant increase in funds to try to resolve those issues. This government has money pouring into its coffers from increased taxes, increased royalties and increasing goods and services tax revenues. That increase in funds is easily outstripping the growth in health expenditure.

As the shadow spokesperson on health, members will find that I will not constantly oppose government initiatives. When I see a program that the opposition supports, I will come out and say so. If I disagree, I will also say so. Hopefully, in most cases, constructive comments will follow. It is time that this government made a serious commitment to increase and improve health funding in this state. I believe we need to set our standards higher and aim for a level of excellence in medical care never before seen in Western Australia. If the government accepts that goal and provides the funding to achieve it, the opposition and I, as the shadow minister, will work hard with the government to ensure that we achieve that standard of service for all Western Australians.

[Applause.]
