



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Dave Kelly, MLA
(Member for Bassendean)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 April 2013

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR D.J. KELLY (Bassendean) [4.06 pm]: Mr Acting Speaker (Mr P. Abetz), congratulations on your appointment, and congratulations to all other members elected at the election.

It is an honour to give my first speech as the Labor member for Bassendean. Firstly, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land that make up the electorate of Bassendean and the land on which we meet today. I pay tribute to elders past and present. When I was speaking to one of the Indigenous leaders in Bassendean only a few days ago he shared a little of his story as a member of the stolen generation. He was taken away and put in an institution when he was not much more than a toddler and then forced to work for nothing. I cannot imagine what it would be like and how it would feel to be separated from your family and treated so badly, yet he still spoke of his desire for all Australians—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—to live in this country together in harmony. I find the generosity of spirit shown by him and other Indigenous leaders towards non-Indigenous people to be quite incredible, and I thank them and him for it. I hope that during my time in this place I can at least contribute something towards making good the wrongs of the past and building a better future for Indigenous people here in their own country.

Some consider being elected to Parliament as an achievement in itself; I do not really see it that way. Rather, I feel as though I have applied to do a job for the people of Bassendean, and that, after a very unusual selection process, I have been given the nod. Getting here is not an end in itself; it is what I do with this opportunity that really matters to the electors of Bassendean and to the broader community. I take this job very seriously, I am up for the challenge, and I very much look forward to the next four years. I intend to work hard for the people of the electorate of Bassendean, whether they voted for me or not.

Of course, getting elected is not a solo pursuit, and I would like to acknowledge some very important people. Firstly, my family; I was extremely lucky to be brought up in a loving home. My mother, Marj, in particular is a marvellous woman from whom I learnt a lot of my values. She was always there to help others, and she placed little importance on material things or prestige. In fact, she had a healthy disrespect for those in high office, especially those who were more interested in the office itself rather than actually doing anything useful. Her advice was, “Do something with your life that assists others; don’t just think of yourself”; wise words many years ago and wise words now.

My father, Bernie, who is no longer with us, worked hard to raise a large family, and I thank him for that. Looking back, we did not have a lot, but the fact that he had secure employment—something that many people today do not have—contributed significantly to us having a good family environment. Thanks to my five siblings—Phil, Alison, Brian, Sue and Lorraine; no matter what we do in life, it is good to have brothers and sisters who are always there to remind us that we are still someone’s little brother. To my incredible partner and my two kids, I can say only thank you. Rachael is equally qualified as me, if not more so, to be standing here today. She is as committed to social justice as anyone I know. She was a great union organiser when I met her. She is now a committed environmentalist and, in all that, she finds time to be a great

mother. She is not a mythical supermum; she is just a fantastic person who knows what is right and is prepared to work at it. Thanks to Sophie and Charlie who are great kids, and are here today. They are a great source of fun and advice and I thank them for that.

I must also thank the many people who generously gave their time to be part of the campaign team. I give many thanks to the ALP members in the electorate, but especially to those in the Bassendean branch, who worked very hard. To Kylie, Jai, Mark, Carol, Anne, Valda and Clive, thank you for all your help. To my old friend Teresa and to Irene, thanks for all the work you did with all those letterbox miles. Thanks to everybody at United Voice for all the assistance that you gave me during the campaign. Many of you are here today.

The Bassendean electorate is a great part of Perth. It enjoys kilometres of Swan River foreshore and relatively easy access to Perth and to the hills. The Bassendean township has a small-town feel to it and the electorate has a lot going for it. The people are great. I enjoyed the months of doorknocking that I did before the election. I had the odd door closed in my face, but overwhelmingly people were friendly and engaged. Wandering the streets and knocking on doors gives us an opportunity to see bits of a community that may otherwise ordinarily pass us by. Thanks especially to the people who invited me in and offered me water on those hot days.

Friendly as it is, the electorate of Bassendean exhibits some of the problems that face many parts of Western Australia. A shortage of affordable housing means that many are struggling to pay the rent or the mortgage and many of the children of Bassendean families will find it hard to buy there. They are being forced to buy in suburbs further afield without the services and facilities that Bassendean enjoys. In many parts of the electorate public transport is sadly lacking while traffic congestion gets worse every day. If every member of the cabinet had to use Tonkin Highway each day to get to work, we would have a train promised tomorrow. Residents in suburbs such as Beechboro, Kiara, Eden Hill and Lockridge do not get excited about the government's promised airport train link because if they wanted to use it, it would first require a bus trip to find it. Needless to say Metronet was very popular in my electorate. A train line along Reid and Tonkin Highways would give real rail access to residents in the surrounding suburbs, rather than them having to rely on an inadequate bus service, crowded roads or the crowded Midland line. I do not intend to let this issue rest just because of the election result. The electors of Bassendean want and deserve better public transport and I will continue to work for that.

Another big issue in my electorate is the government's plans to privatise the new Midland hospital, which will replace Swan District Hospital when it closes. Across the political spectrum the majority of people in Bassendean, I believe, are opposed to this decision. The Western Australian government has a long history of managing world-class public hospitals for all Western Australians, yet the Court and Barnett governments have embarked on a hospital privatisation agenda. In the 1990s the management of both the Peel and Joondalup Health Campuses was handed to private companies. In the face of public opposition the usual assurances were given that the private operators had been chosen only after rigorous selection processes and they were well qualified to do the job. At Joondalup, it took the private operator just seven years of a 20-year contract to bail and onsell the contract. The same has just happened at the Peel Health Campus. History has shown that both private operators chosen by the government were woefully inadequate. Now both hospitals will be run by the same private company. The same private company will run the major public hospitals in the northern suburbs and the Peel region without ever going through a public tender process. Against this background, this government is now proceeding to have the new Midland hospital run by a private operator. No publicly released business case and no coherent explanation has been provided for why this is in the best interests of the residents in the eastern suburbs or the nearby rural areas who will rely on the new hospital. This decision is made even more remarkable because the private operator has been allowed to refuse to provide some medical services purely

on the grounds of its religious belief. Not only will these services not be provided but also no patient will be referred to another provider to access them. It will be as though they do not exist. I believe health services in a public facility should be provided on the basis of medical science not on religious belief. I am sure the overwhelming majority of the public agree with this proposition. The government knows its decision is not popular. Prior to the election, it embarked on a taxpayer-funded ad campaign to extoll the virtues of the project. It also stopped referring to the new hospital as the Midland Health Campus and started referring to it as the Midland public hospital—an example of spin over substance. I will continue to campaign on this issue.

I look forward very much to working with the local community groups in the electorate. I would like to mention just a few of them. AshfieldCAN, the community action network, comprises a committed bunch of locals who want to see their suburb develop. The dedicated people at Brockman House work very hard in limited facilities to provide services for people in the Beechboro and surrounding areas. I look forward to working with them specifically in their search for larger premises.

To all the groups that form part of the Good Neighbourhood project, hardworking people who do amazing work to help support some of the most disadvantaged families in our community; and to the schools and childcare centres in the electorate who educate the next generation, I look forward to working with you to see our kids get the best start they can have in life. I especially want to mention the parents and citizens associations that do such important work.

Three local government authorities touch the electorate—the City of Swan, the City of Bayswater and the Town of Bassendean. Local government is important and I hope that over the next four years this government handles this issue wisely. Many sporting clubs work very hard in the electorate; most do so on a volunteer basis, and I look forward to doing what I can to assist them. We have a famous West Australian Football League club in the electorate, Swan Districts Football Club. Like most WAFL clubs, it is finding life difficult. It has a great youth program; it deserves to have a secure financial base. I also look forward to working with the businesses and the community members who hope to revitalise Old Perth Road, which has great potential. To the clubs and groups like the seniors groups, the RSL, the volunteer fire brigade, the churches and many others, I hope to be a resource to them and an advocate when necessary.

Finally, I give special mention to two groups that are very active in the Bassendean electorate. The first is the Bayswater–Noranda Community Bank. When I first moved to Bayswater in the 1990s, the shopping precinct around the Bayswater train station had three banks. Within five years, the last, the Commonwealth, which was my bank, announced that it was closing. Like others, I was angry at what the banks were doing and I also feared that the loss of the last bank would be a fatal blow to the shopping precinct. Rather than just get angry, I and a few others started a campaign to convince the Commonwealth Bank to stay there. My campaign experience with the union was very useful, and within weeks we had an event outside the bank, which involved hundreds of locals. We engaged the local businesses and local councillors. Community feeling was strong; there was anger at the loss of face-to-face banking, but there was also anger that a large corporation would not be there for the community. Ultimately, the CBA did not change its mind and it closed its doors, but we found another solution. We started our own community bank. We now have two branches, one in Bayswater and one in Noranda, with more than 12 000 accounts and 730 shareholders. Our community bank was the first in metropolitan Perth. We return a good dividend to our shareholders and we return thousands of dollars each year back to the community in the form of community grants. The work is done by great banking staff, who are the key to our success, along with our well-regarded bank manager, Sean, and our board led by Barry McKenna as chair and Denise Beer as his deputy. I have been on the board since day one in 2000 and I am proud of what we have achieved. I mention the bank because on an occasion like this it is good to give the hardworking staff and board members

some recognition for the work they do, and also because it is a great example of what a community can do when it decides to fight “city hall”—to use that expression. The sheer size and muscle of the big banks means that logically they should always win, but our community bank story shows what you can do when you have a go. We now have a thriving small business providing better banking services than we ever had, and a share of the profits go back to the local community. How good is that? It was also a pleasure to meet many of our shareholders and account holders as I doorknocked; it seemed like there was one in every street.

The second group that is well represented in the electorate and that I would like to give a special mention to is United Voice, the union for which I had the honour to work for more than 20 years, the past 10 years as WA secretary. More than 500 of our members live in the electorate of Bassendean. It is still an honour and a privilege to be a member of the union. United Voice members come from industries such as aged care, child care, health, education, cleaning, hospitality, manufacturing, security and disabilities. They educate our children; they care for our elderly; they keep our hospitals running; they make a disabled person’s life more fulfilling; they scrape us off the road after a traffic accident; they clean our offices when we have gone home; they stand guard while we sleep; they bake our bread; and they serve our drinks. United Voice members are likely to be there when we are born and when we are laid to rest. To do that, they work day shift, night shift and everything in between; they work on weekends, at Christmas and every public holiday; they work full time, part time and increasingly casual; they work two jobs; and they work hard—harder than most in this chamber would ever imagine—yet they are so often given little reward and little respect for what they do.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr D.J. KELLY: Most are women and most earn less than \$50 000 a year. Most struggle to pay their bills. They are typical of many Western Australians who are finding it difficult to survive in our economy. Many hang in there because they are committed to what they do, but increasingly they are finding that commitment alone does not pay the mortgage or the rent.

Western Australia is blessed with the resources that make it one of the wealthiest corners of the globe, yet the award rate of pay for a carer in aged care is less than \$20 an hour. We pay a qualified childcare professional less in their whole working life than some Western Australian executives take home in a single year. I will just repeat that: we pay a qualified childcare professional less in their whole working life than some Western Australian executives take home in a single year. Clearly this is not right. But in the face of this injustice, these workers are not accepting victims. As members of United Voice they are constantly pushing the boundaries of what our economic leaders say should be their lot—and they make a difference. If United Voice members in WA were doing the same job in many other countries, they would be minimum-wage workers; they would get the legal minimum in countries where that exists and nothing else. In WA, the legal minimum is \$16.52 an hour, or \$32 000 a year. Just imagine for a moment what it is like to live in WA on \$32 000 a year. What would be the standard of care in aged care, in hospitals, in child care or in disability services if our members were on minimum wages? The workers and the clients would suffer. But as a member of United Voice and under union agreements in WA a school cleaner earns \$21 an hour, an education assistant working with special needs kids earns \$26 an hour, an aged-care worker can earn up to \$22 an hour and a disabilities carer can earn up to \$23 an hour. While I am on the subject of wages, I congratulate United Voice nationally for the \$300 million commitment that has been negotiated with the Gillard Labor government to lift the wages of staff in childcare centres by between \$3 and \$5 an hour. None of these wages won by United Voice members under union agreements are sufficient, but imagine the plight of these workers and their clients if they had not taken their own futures into their own hands by joining the union. In doing so, they have at least lifted their wages above the legal minimum. Given the valuable work done in representing these industries

for more than 50 years in WA, it never ceases to surprise and amaze me that instead of applauding the work of the union, many in this house attack it. Few in this community or in this Parliament would dare to argue that a carer working in aged care earning less than \$20 per hour does not deserve more. We all nod and say something should be done to assist workers in industries such as aged care to get a just wage so that they can feed their families and stay in the industry to provide care for the elderly, but when these workers join a union and campaign for a better deal, they are often vilified for their efforts.

Of course it is not just about wages; it is also about respect in the workplace. Workplaces can be very hierarchical and it is often the case that in the classic hierarchy our members can be seen to be less important and, in some cases, even expendable. One of the most stressful things in working life is to not have any control over when, where and how you work, especially when you are trying to juggle work and family life. The push for more flexibility leads to workers in our industries having more stressful and disjointed family lives and less time to do community work such as coach the local football team. If we say we believe in the family and family values, it is important to pay attention to industrial laws and how they impact on family life. Imagine the uproar in this house if, instead of having notice of sitting dates for the rest of the year, the government only ever put out a fortnightly roster that could include sitting over any seven days. Of course the roster could be varied at any time to meet operational requirements and at the Premier's sole discretion, and of course we would only get paid for the hours we worked on the roster, which could go up and down every fortnight. Sounds pretty awful, does it not? But that is the work environment many United Voice members face every day.

When I was doorknocking during the campaign, I knocked on the door of a woman whom I had not met before, but I had a note to tell me that she had previously been a member of the union. When she opened the door, I mentioned the union and she immediately told me how she had lost her job at the Art Gallery of Western Australia in the 1990s when the Court government privatised security. She said she felt that she was part of the team at the Art Gallery and she was hurt when the government made the decision that security was non-core—nice term that—and privatised the work. She reluctantly took a job with a private security firm and then lost it three years later when the contract was won by a new company that only employed guards with previous military experience. So she did a few years as a guard at a shopping centre before retirement, but she said it was not the same. She went from being part of the team working in an important Western Australian institution to being just another guard working wherever the company wanted her. She actually apologised for telling me such a long story, but she said that even though it was such a long time ago, it still affected her today. Of course, she did not have to apologise to me because I had heard many versions of that story told by workers impacted upon by decisions to privatise or outsource jobs. The personal message to each worker is, "You're not wanted." The effects are personal and economic as well. The low pay, the lack of respect for the work that people do, the constant push for more flexibility; these are the reasons why it is so important that unions such as United Voice exist. There are plenty of places around the world where unions do not exist and inevitably the average worker is worse off. So, to the new leadership team at the union—Carolyn, Pat and Kelly: congratulations on your new roles. To Nina, our president, and to the rest of the branch executive, the leadership group, the admin staff, the officials, the members and the delegates: thank you for everything that has happened during the last 20 years. United Voice makes an incredible contribution to the wellbeing of thousands of workers and their families. I know the union is in good hands.

I want to finish with one more story from my electorate. I recently spoke with a small business operator in my electorate. After years of hard slog, he was walking away from his business; closing up, not because he was a bad businessman, but because of an excessive rent increase sought by his landlord. He felt bullied by the way he was treated. After seven years he received a one-line email telling him he could leave or agree to the new terms. What does this story and

the story of our member at the Art Gallery have in common? I suppose it is how we view people and how we view economics. I believe people are always more important than money. I believe that economics should be there to assist communities and not the other way around. These days we can be forgiven for believing that people are subservient to the market, not the reverse. The principal purpose of economic activity is to provide humanity with what it needs to live a fulfilling and dignified life. The economy is not an end in itself. This is not to say that circumstances beyond our control may mean tough decisions must be made, but the pain must be shared. Unfortunately in our economy the burden is often unequally shared and it is often borne by the people who can bear it the least. That is not good enough, again, in one of the wealthiest parts of the globe.

In conclusion, I say this: whether we are born here or whether we came to Australia by some other circumstance, we are extremely lucky to live in a corner of the planet that has such incredible naturally occurring wealth and we should always remind ourselves that we, the current residents of Western Australia, did nothing to put the minerals in the ground. In these circumstances we can individually consume as much as we can for as long as we can and not worry about the person next to us or the people to come, or we can use these resources wisely and conservatively to ensure that, as a community, everyone can live a decent life and that there is a future for generations to follow. I believe that the latter approach is what makes us better people and what makes us a better community. We teach our kids when they are young that sharing is better. This should be our guiding economic principle as well. I know that some people will say it is more about growing the size of the pie rather than sharing what is there. I find that to be grossly inadequate. Firstly, in our community the pie is already pretty big. How much bigger does it need to be before everyone in Western Australia can have a roof over their head? Secondly, the world is full of countries where just increasing the size of the pie has not seen a fair standard of living for all. We need a healthy economy, but a healthy economy is one in which everyone is included. In Western Australia we are a long way from including everyone. That is why I believe in the labour movement. The labour movement and the Labor Party are two of the most efficient tools to ensure our economy looks after everyone, not just the few. That is why I am proud that I worked for United Voice for all those years. That is why I am proud to be in this place as a Labor member. That is why I am proud of our community bank, a successful small business that is dedicated to genuinely serving the community. Finally, as a Parliament we lay claim to being the leaders of this community. I believe true leaders should be judged not by the monuments they build but on how well they treat the least privileged in our community. That will be my focus in this Parliament and I look forward to the task.

[Applause.]
