



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Ms Alison Elizabeth Kent, MLA**  
**(Member for Kalgoorlie)**

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 6 May 2021

*Reprinted from Hansard*

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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 A.E. KENT (Kalgoorlie)** [11.01 am]: I wish to add my congratulations to Hon Michelle Roberts on her appointment as the first woman Speaker in this house in Western Australian history. It is richly deserved and I truly will value the support and learning from her, the Deputy Speaker and the Acting Speakers over the next four years.

I would like to firstly acknowledge the traditional owners on the land on which we meet today, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation. I pay my respects to their elders past, present and especially emerging. Their history and culture over 60 000 years is extraordinary and I learn new things every day.

Today, I begin by expressing my enormous appreciation to the voters in the electorate of Kalgoorlie for their faith in me. It has been 20 years since Labor last held the seat of Kalgoorlie and I am standing here today as the 101<sup>st</sup> woman to be elected to this Parliament.

**Mr D.J. Kelly:** Hear, hear!

**Ms A.E. KENT:** Thank you.

I am humbled and honoured to be given the privilege to represent Kalgoorlie over the next four years.

I would like to recognise and express gratitude to Kyran O'Donnell and his staff for their service over the past four years.

To my gorgeous daughter, Danielle Foster, I am so very proud of you. To my son-in-law, Rhett Foster, and Campbell and Georgie Foster, my beautiful grandchildren, thank you so much for supporting me as I embark on this major life change. You mean the world to me.

To my lifelong friends, thank you for the fun, laughter, support and friendship. I am so grateful to have you in my life—many of whom are here today. Let the crazy journey continue.

I also thank the people from the campaign team who got me here.

The biggest shout-out goes to my campaign director, Hon Kyle McGinn. What a journey we have been on. You provided me with support and encouragement and were always there to listen and provide advice—sometimes even to berate. It was all, every part, humbly appreciated. Thank you so much. The only thing I would like to add is that maybe you could have left the shoe out!

To Bobby-Lee Field, George Foulkes-Taylor, Deana Lawver, Klasey Hirst, Amy Astill, Melissa Drummond and Eddie Rochester—your endless hours of work and support knew no bounds. I could not have achieved this without you all and I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

To the amazing volunteers, all 150 of you—wow, what a fantastic team—who were doorknocking, phone calling and standing on market stores in 40-degree heat, nothing was too big an ask and the win was for you all.

To WA Labor, the support I received was outstanding. I would like to give a big shout-out to Tim Picton, Ellie Whiteaker and all the staff who worked tirelessly to get the massive Labor win.

Last and definitely not least, I would like to thank my staff: Klasey Hirst, my electorate officer, and Katie-Jane Anderson, my research officer. You have hit the ground running, setting up the office and all the logistics that go with that. Thanks to you both. Constituents are being seen and their concerns are being heard and dealt with.

I never thought I would be standing here, and I am still pinching myself. How did I get here surrounded by the Premier and ministers and members of Parliament? They are people I have looked up to for years but I can now call them colleagues.

It goes back to Swansea in Wales, where I was born in the 1960s, and to the best dad in the world, the most influential person in my life. After my mum died when I was eight years old, it was my dad who had to take the reins. That was not easy for a man in the 1970s, but he taught me so much. I learnt about the Labour Party, about unions and about how social justice is essential to any society. Importantly, he taught me how, as a girl and then a woman, I could achieve anything in life.

My dad grew up in a very working-class area of Manchester in the UK. His own dad died when he was seven, at a time when there was no social security to rely on. His mum worked three jobs and they lived in a one-up-one-down room and shared a washhouse used by 15 families. I remember going there as a child. Times were really tough. After lying about his age to get into the Royal Air Force in the Second World War, he met my mum on a training course in Wales. They continued their courtship through letters from India, Israel and Japan, and then married after the war. He worked on the shop floor and was a strong union man and a great Harold Wilson fan. I saw how important his values were, especially when he went out on strike to support the coalminers during the Margaret Thatcher days. We used to sit and talk for hours about how this affected towns around the UK. It was tragic to watch, and many communities, particularly in Wales, still have not recovered. What an education that was. The message was loud and clear: we need to look after each other. It started the course of my life as a Labor supporter.

I left Wales in 1989 and came to Western Australia, where I entered my first job in the public sector through the fire brigade, now the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, while also holding the role as the designated sexual harassment officer. That was a challenging role in the then very male-dominated environment. I reflect on the culture that has been exposed in federal Parliament and the international Me Too movement. I also reflect on how critical it is for us to be vigilant.

The Labor Party for me is about equality and justice. As one of many women now sitting in the WA Parliament, I am confident the party I am proud to represent will continue to hold these values to the core. I will speak more about this in a moment.

So, to the goldfields. I moved to Kalgoorlie–Boulder in 1994 and spent the next 10 years working for the Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission, living through a boom and then a bust, when the gold price went down to \$250 an ounce. It was during this time that I met Hon Ian Taylor, who was the member for Kalgoorlie for 15 years. I worked on Ian’s campaign during that time. He has offered me support and friendship since then and I am incredibly grateful that Ian is here today.

I continued my state government experience with a role as the manager of intergovernmental relations with the Department of Education. I was lucky enough to be part of the education revolution started by the then federal Minister for Education, Julia Gillard. What an inspirational woman and a true leader.

After 30 years working for the state government, I started my own small business in Kalgoorlie–Boulder, a role I loved and that allowed me to work with many community groups and businesses by helping them get grant funding for much-needed projects.

I would like to focus on community life for a moment. I am an all-in type of person and believe that any place is what you make it. That is definitely the case in the goldfields. The way the community embraces people is incredible. I was lucky enough to become the president of the Goldfields Women’s Health Care Centre, a wonderful organisation doing extraordinary things. Its chief executive officer, Gloria Moyle, is an inspiration to me and I am honoured to call her my close friend.

Bringing Rosie Batty to Kalgoorlie–Boulder for International Women’s Day in 2019 was a highlight. She is such an inspirational woman who generously shared her time with so many people. I saw how her compassion had such an influence on them.

Through my own involvement in community groups, I have been able to give back in a small way, and I hope to continue to do so. Communities play an important role in every aspect of our lives. We have communities in our friends, our families, our employment, our neighbourhood and in so many other places. Having a sense of community unites us. Being a part of the community can give us opportunities to connect with people. I am sure that everyone thinks that their place and community is special, but I know that the goldfields are unique. Being part of this community gives us a great sense of belonging. We are part of a group of people who want to help each other either socially or professionally. It gave my career a huge boost back in 1994, and I am positive that I am just one of thousands of stories that are very similar. I encourage anyone who wants a great lifestyle, great income and great opportunities to come to the goldfields—you will not be sorry.

Of course, the Kalgoorlie electorate will be boosted by some fantastic infrastructure projects that I fought hard to get as election commitments. They include the \$5 million upgrade to the Niels Hansen Basketball Stadium, a \$2.1 million youth hub and \$600 000 to build a large-scale nature playground on the site of the Karlkurla Bushland Park. These will make a big difference to the liveability of the goldfields region.

What a rich, powerful history Kalgoorlie–Boulder and the goldfields region have. I am sure that previous members for Kalgoorlie have stood in this house and told of the impact that the goldfields region has had on Australia. As legend has it, in 1893, three down-on-their-luck Irishmen, Paddy Hannan, Tom Flanagan and Danny Shea, stumbled across 100 ounces of nuggets when they stopped to replace a shoe for their horse.

Just a decade later, the twin boom towns of Kalgoorlie and Boulder would be home to the fabled Golden Mile, reputedly the richest square mile on earth, with one of the greatest concentrations of underground mines ever established. Today, Kalgoorlie–Boulder and the goldfields are not only a thriving region for almost 40 000 residents, but also a living heritage area. The new and the old city are in harmony side by side, acknowledging a rich past and looking to fresh horizons. Its natural bounty combined with its striking landscapes, amazing sunsets and remarkable Aboriginal history makes it truly a unique and distinctive place.

This wonderful history continues. Just three months ago, the Super Pit joint owners, Northern Star Resources and Saracen Mineral Holdings, merged, with a value of \$16 billion. The merger created a new top-10 global gold major with a world-class portfolio. For the first time in its 125-year history, Kalgoorlie’s famous Golden Mile has now been consolidated under one owner.

This was achieved through Raleigh Finlayson and Bill Beament, two graduates of Kalgoorlie's own Western Australian School of Mines. The future of the mining industry is secure—well beyond my lifetime I am sure.

One of my strengths lies in being a strong, opinionated woman. I feel passionately about giving women an equal voice in all aspects of life. In 2021, we are dealing with a tsunami of issues surrounding the treatment of women. Women are being underpaid! Women are being under-represented! Women are being bullied and harassed! Women are being beaten and abused! Is it not time to gain the respect we deserve, time for us to be treated as a core part of society, time our ideas and opinions were valued, time we felt safe in our workplace and time we felt safe in the street and in our homes? It is 2021, 100 years since Edith Cowan entered this house as its first woman member. We have our first Madam Speaker. When she came to this house in 1994, she was only the eighteenth woman to be elected to the Legislative Assembly. This year, I am one of 13 women coming in at one time. What an achievement this is for women, for the Labor Party and for Western Australia.

I am a feminist, and it has taken me decades not to feel I have to apologise for that label. Getting equal rights, opportunities, status and respect are all that feminists want. Michelle Obama said, "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is: I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat." I wholeheartedly agree. If we have learnt anything from what has happened in Canberra recently, we must recognise that women are standing up and using their voice. They have had enough. Here in this Parliament, I can only be humbled and grateful that I am in this special place at this special time. Now we have almost 50 per cent women representing the Western Australian people. Imagine that! This demonstrates true democracy. We will participate and our voices will be heard. We will add a different perspective to discussions, and, trust me, the sky will not fall in.

I have learnt so much over the past year. Of significance is the unwavering support I have received from the Labor caucus. I would like to single out two women who have constantly checked in on me and given me tips and advice on how to survive the campaign. They have been there every step of the way: the member for Kingsley and the member for Swan Hills—the two Jess's. Thank you so much. Knowing I can count on you for your support for the next four years means so much to me.

Having worked among the community on so many issues, I have heard a range of different matters that are important to people, and I want to be able to make a difference as a member of Parliament in so many ways. Access to mental health services is one of the big ones, especially among young people. This was highlighted for me when over the last six months a number of young people in the goldfields sadly lost their lives to suicide.

On 11 January 2021, a friend of mine in Kalgoorlie, Sharon Duffy, lost her 19-year-old son, Bryce Duffy, to suicide. It is with Sharon's permission that I recount his story. For over a decade, Sharon Duffy sat powerless, helpless and scared as she watched her son continue to try to take his own life, when the system that was supposed to support him continued to let him down. Since the age of 10, Bryce had had many attempts at taking his own life, but due to his young age and issues with drugs, there were limited options of support available. On three occasions after a suicide attempt, Sharon rushed Bryce to hospital, but they faced the same issues each time. She was told there were no mental health beds at the hospital for youth under the age of 18, which meant that Bryce could be kept in emergency overnight but could not be admitted, and he was sent home the next day. In Sharon's words —

There were many times I could tell he was suicidal or he had self-harmed, where I considered taking him to hospital—but it was too hard to get him there and what was the point? I knew they would just send him home ...

I spent so long, so many years not being able to do anything.

As a mother you are supposed to be able to care for your child and protect them and when you are powerless to do that, it is really upsetting.

It was really hard, lots of sleepless nights and crying and stressing, terrified that my child was going to kill himself and now it is too late.

It's too late for my boy and I don't want it to be too late for anyone else.

Sharon used her voice during this tragic time to call for stories from other parents. Twenty submissions from the Kalgoorlie community outlined that the problems that Sharon's family faced were unfortunately all too common. These submissions detailed the personal experiences that families have endured trying to get their family members, often children and youth, help from services. Multiple gaps were identified. As a parent and grandparent, this broke my heart. No parent should have to go through this. One of the first things I did once elected was to bring Sharon together with key health professionals, and the challenges and hurdles faced by parents were discussed in detail. As you said, Sharon —

Suicide is a permanent solution to a temporary problem. We need to support people in times of need and ensure the system supports them and makes them well again. If we do not do this then more people will suicide, and more families and communities will be left grieving the loss of those they love.

Thank you, Sharon, for your strength, your ability to share and for bringing others along with you. Statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare show that in 2019, suicide accounted for 1.9 per cent of all deaths in Australia. That is shocking. For Aboriginal Australians, it is even higher—a devastating 5.9 per cent of the population.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms A.E. KENT:** As a government and a community we must address this. We must do better and we can do better. I will be working with Sharon to push very hard for the changes we so desperately need. Thankfully, I am now part of a government that understands how important it is to significantly fund mental health initiatives. A \$360 million funding package will address critical gaps in the mental health system. Importantly, this will include more than \$122 million for the expansion of mental health services to young people.

This privileged position I find myself in will never be taken for granted, I promise. I was lucky enough to count on Premier Mark McGowan who visited Kalgoorlie so many times during the campaign. It enabled me to discuss many issues that are important to my electorate. If you haven't walked down Hannan Street with the Premier, you really haven't lived! What an experience. Of course, if Mark was not available, the cardboard cut-out was still a very popular choice for a selfie!

I am so grateful for the support and encouragement of the other ministers who visited often. I would like to make special mention of Hon Alannah MacTiernan who visited Kalgoorlie when I was deciding to go for preselection and grilled me. Anybody who knows her knows what that is like! But thankfully I survived and her advice has been so warmly welcomed.

I look forward to working with the Premier, ministers and members of Parliament to implement the plan for the goldfields. I promise that I will fight hard to bring benefits to the electorate of Kalgoorlie that it so richly deserves. I will represent every section of our wonderfully diverse community as best as I possibly can over the next four years.

During my campaign, a lot was made of how the regional voice will be overshadowed by metropolitan members of Parliament. Well, the Western Australian voters have spoken. This Labor state government now has nine regional members and the voters can count on us fighting hard in our electorates. No-one need be in any doubt that we will be heard loud and strong.

I chose Western Australia as my adopted home. I am so glad that my journey took me to the goldfields where I am now living with the third generation of my family in this incredible community. You have my heart and my family. I am passionate about so many things, but the core value that my dad taught me was how everyone needs to be treated with fairness and compassion. This is what I see Labor represent and it will remain at the forefront of my mind at all times. Dad, I hope you are looking down. This is for you. Thank you.

[Applause.]

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