

FEDERAL PARLIAMENT

Gift - Statement by Speaker

THE SPEAKER (Mr Barnett): I wish to make a statement for the information of members. On 4 May 1988 the President of the Legislative Council and I jointly wrote to the Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate proposing that the Parliament, the Government, and the people of Western Australia present a specially commissioned sculpture as a gift for the formal gardens of the new Parliament House. The Speaker of the House of Representatives and the President of the Senate have now advised that the Parliament of Australia is pleased to accept our gift, and this sculpture, when placed in the formal gardens, will be viewed by those who work in and visit the new Parliament House. We hope it will be a constant reminder to all of the generosity of Western Australia.

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY - FIFTH DAY

Motion

Debate resumed from 24 May.

MR CUNNINGHAM (Balga) [2.25 pm]: It is with pride and humility that I take my place in this Legislative Assembly of Western Australia to represent the people of the electorate of Balga. My pride comes not only from the faith that my party, the Australian Labor Party, has placed in me, but also because I have been trusted by the people of Balga to represent them in the Parliament of this great State of Western Australia. My humility comes from the fact that I have been selected to succeed Brian Burke. I am honoured that he counts me as a friend.

I am succeeding one of the most remarkable men to have served this State as a Premier. He is a man of strength and compassion; a man of wit and wisdom; a remarkable leader who has not lost that personal touch. At 1.45 this afternoon he telephoned me from Budapest - that demonstrates the kind of man he is; always a personal touch.

Brian Burke is a great teacher of loyalty. He never lost sight of the fact that he was in this Parliament to represent the good and ordinary people of Balga. This is something that will always be foremost in my mind. He believed that to be a member of Parliament did not mean removing himself from the electors. Instead, it meant he should be drawn closer to them and to their problems. His slogan was, "Can I help you?" The people came and he helped.

Brian Burke turned a 30 vote winning margin for his seat in the 1973 by-election into a remarkable winning personal vote in subsequent elections which defied all trends and all predictions. The people of Balga voted for Brian Burke because they knew and loved him.

My task as his successor is, therefore, a daunting one, but I am privileged to have known Brian since those early days of that historic by-election and to have been with him during all those years of political struggles and successes. I realise we will continue to have those political struggles and those successes.

For 15 years we have been close friends and it was with much pride that my dear wife, Julie, and I were chosen to be the godparents of their lovely daughter, Sarah. I wish to publicly thank Brian and Sue for their friendship, support and help not only to ourselves, but also to all the people of Balga and to the people of this State whom they served with such strength and dignity. We wish the Burke family every happiness and success in their new home in Ireland. They will be fine ambassadors to both the Republic of Ireland, where so many Australians have ancestral roots, and the Holy See which is one of the most important diplomatic listening posts in the world as well as being the centre of great spiritual significance.

I now turn to my election to this Legislative Assembly. I wish to convey my thanks to you, Mr Speaker, the officers and staff of this House and to all the members who have made me feel so welcome during my transition to Parliament.

I thank all those dedicated members of the Australian Labor Party, those many friends who helped me in my hard-fought by-election campaign. I also thank the trade union movement that did so much for me. Normally, I do not like singling out people, but I must single out

members of the Australian Workers Union and staff, Joe Keenan and Joe Isherwood. I must single out also Mark Bishop and Joe Bullock from the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Association, and John O'Connor from the Transport Workers Union, who gave me great assistance in my campaign.

I thank also my dear wife, Julie, and my adopted family for all their love and support. Without them I would not be here today. As one of the newer members of the House, I also congratulate the member for Ascot and the member for Dale for the victories which enabled them to take their seats in the Chamber.

It was from a deep, personal political conviction that I joined the Australian Labor Party in Toowoomba, Queensland, in 1956. I was convinced then, as I now stand here today, that the Australian Labor Party stands for social justice and cares for the whole of society. I am extremely honoured to be a member of the Dowding-Parker Labor Government. Both Peter Dowding and David Parker provide the leadership qualities which are essential to the future well being of the people of Western Australia.

The electorate of Balga includes the suburbs of Balga, Girrawheen, Koondoola, Mirrabooka, Ballajura and East Hamersley. Mirrabooka, in the south of the electorate, is the most recently developed Homeswest suburb in the electorate. Low cost land has been sold to those who qualify and the homes have been built by private developers rather than by Homeswest. There is a great deal of pride among the residents of Mirrabooka.

I would like to raise four issues in my maiden speech: The family reunion concept of our immigration policy; the State Government's family package; consumer credit; and the role of two schools in the Balga electorate.

The electorate of Balga is ethnically diverse and as a result is a culturally rich electorate. This is a reflection of how Western Australia as part of our great nation has embraced family immigration as an important factor in the future direction of the State. I represent people of many ethnic backgrounds who made a decision to settle in the Balga electorate. These people have brought with them skills and qualifications to service and enhance our community. In doing so, they have contributed immensely to the social and economic growth of our great State of Western Australia.

The Dowding-Parker Labor Government recognises the rights of our established migrants to have their families join them in Australia. Lately I have received numerous complaints from many of my constituents of various ethnic backgrounds. They have expressed grave concern about the Federal Opposition's immigration policy. The question of a re-emphasis away from the family reunion policy has deeply distressed and offended those people who wish to be reunited with their loved ones. The Federal Opposition has demonstrated a distinct lack of compassion for these people who have given so much to this country. One must question the motives of the Opposition and its commitment to the concept of a multicultural Australia.

The proposition by the Federal Opposition that migrants should be more skilled is one already being addressed by the Dowding-Parker Labor Government. It has moved quickly to set up an overseas qualification recognition unit to assist people who have qualified in the country of their origin who wish to continue using their skills to benefit all Australians. Along with many other initiatives that are being pursued by the Dowding-Parker Labor Government, this unit has made, and will continue to make, the process of resettlement a less traumatic experience for those coming to Australia.

Skills development and training of our young people are of great significance to the Dowding-Parker Labor Government. In my electorate the Balga College of TAFE is a prime example of a community-spirited teaching institution. Under the guidance of its principal, Mr John Levy, it has proved its worth within the community. Both young and more mature people are provided with the opportunity to develop their education and their skills.

The family package is another indication of the State Labor Government's strong commitment to the quality of life for Western Australian families. Western Australia is the only State to have a Minister for The Family, a portfolio created by the Burke Labor Government after the 1986 election. The Minister for The Family, Hon Kay Hallahan, recognises the importance of the family and understands the complexities and the pressures facing Western Australian families. The Dowding-Parker Labor Government recognises that all families experience change as individual family members grow and enter new stages

in their lives. This change may involve difficulties and a family may find itself in need of professional support and guidance. This Government accepts a responsibility to ensure that services are available for families in crisis by enhancing the ability of those families to care for and protect their members, prevent family breakdown and ensure the safety of individual members.

Our Government continues to recognise the problems of people who are socially and financially disadvantaged and will continue to assist these people. The family package complements previously established programs. Importantly, the family package takes up the challenge of supporting the quality of family life for as many people as possible across the entire spectrum of our community. The Government has given a major priority to assisting families living on low incomes. Concessional assistance has increased from \$47 million in 1982-83 to \$88 million in 1987-88. The provision of these concessions has meant that families on low incomes are much better off than they were prior to 1983.

The Burke Labor Government was elected on the clear understanding that Western Australians need the opportunity to work together for the common good. This Government has acted decisively to restore justice and equality to the family, qualities which were wilfully eroded by the previous Government of the conservative parties. The Dowding-Parker Labor Government is working on the understanding that it is not too late to reverse the damage done during those conservative years. We have a mandate from the electorate to carry out this task. Essential to this task are our social welfare reform programs. We shall not be diverted from our goal of achieving a decent, secure, dignified and constructive way of life for all Western Australians.

Interest rates for consumer credit have for too long been extraordinarily high. Interest charges for bank credit cards average between 22 and 23 per cent and one large retail store in the city, in particular, has the audacity to charge a similar interest rate of 22 per cent on credit transactions. Consumer credit is too often made available with scant regard to the ability of the consumer to meet repayments. Such an irresponsible practice, coupled with high interest rates, too often results in unserviceable financial problems creating serious social problems.

While consumer problems affect the majority of the population, that effect is particularly severe on those people on low to medium incomes. This general community problem is of particular concern in the electorate of Balga and is evident in much of my electorate office work on behalf of my constituents. I am appalled to note the scale and impact of consumer problems. Equally, I am pleased to note the vigour with which the Dowding-Parker Labor Government is addressing those problems.

The Minister for Consumer Affairs, Hon Graham Edwards, has established under the chairmanship of the member for Victoria Park, Dr Geoff Gallop, a task force to provide counselling for those people confronting financial difficulties.

In the course of my work in the Balga electorate I have been impressed by the dedication and hard work of all school principals, teachers and staff. It may be a dangerous practice to single out particular schools and their teachers, but I will make an exception in the case of two schools in my electorate.

Ted Kelley, principal of Burbridge School and Eve Lucas, principal of the Gladys Newton School in Balga, together with their teaching staff are kind and compassionate people who have demonstrated a highly professional and caring attitude towards physically and intellectually disabled students. As well as an education and ancillary staff, the Burbridge School has been allocated a State registered nurse, two enrolled nurses, two physiotherapists, two occupational therapists and a speech pathologist. Dr Lesley Callingham, medical officer of the Koondoola Child Health Centre, visits the school on a weekly basis. These services have helped to ensure that physically and intellectually disabled students do not have to leave the school to receive therapeutic and medical services. The Department of Health employs and supervises such staff in cooperation with the responsible education authority.

Burbridge was opened in 1979 and under strong leadership and due to the systems devised and implemented by the principal and staff has become one of the best and most efficient schools of its type. Today there are 76 students in the school. Twenty one are profoundly handicapped, 20 are in transition or life skills programs and 35 are in traditional programs

which have been modified and may - and I stress the word "may" - eventually lead to these students being placed full time in primary and high schools. Already, the school has achieved success in this area and in the past six years some 40 students have graduated to become full time students in regular schools.

The Gladys Newton school was opened in 1971 and caters for students ranging from the severely handicapped to mildly handicapped. There are 145 students enrolled in the school aged from four to 18 years. This school offers a wide range of programs for students progressing through the junior, intermediate and senior groups. As well as traditional academic areas of instruction, the school exists on self help and independence programs. As students progress to the senior area of the school, the program emphasis changes to one of a preparation for work, be it in open or sheltered employment, and being able to access recreational facilities in the community. Additionally, the students are encouraged to help junior students within the school as part of a program of civic responsibility to the school community.

An integration program with both Warriapendi Primary School and Balga Senior High School exists to enable students from this school to interact with their non-disabled peers. This is a two way process with Gladys Newton students going over to those schools and some students from the regular schools joining in classes and recess activities at the Gladys Newton School. The dedicated principals and staff of Burbridge and Gladys Newton see themselves as partners with the parents of their students in providing an appropriate and relevant education in order to maximise the life potential of every student.

The aspirations and hopes of my constituents are many and varied. I greatly appreciate this opportunity to join the people of Balga in their work to fulfil these goals. I take up the challenge that has been passed to me with the exit of Brian Burke from the political stage and pledge that I will commit myself to the welfare of the people of this State and to the people of Balga.

I firmly believe that I have been blessed and fortunate to be selected to represent the electorate of Balga.

[Applause.]

MR COWAN (Merredin - Leader of the National Party) [2.48 pm]: I join with the members who have spoken previously in this debate in welcoming new members to this Parliament. I am reminded of comments made to me by the Minister for Conservation and Land Management when the session began last week. I am sure that he was not original in his comment that we spend a great deal of time and effort to get into this place and, having won a seat for the first time, we spend even greater effort to stay in here, sometimes wondering just why that is, because very few of us ever understand why we work so hard to stay here when the job does not involve a great number of rewards.

The Address-in-Reply gives members an opportunity to debate any issue. For some reason or another, very few members of the Parliament examine the Governor's address, which is an outline of what the Government will do, or make any criticism of it. Generally, members tend to launch straight into those areas that are of importance to them. However, I have looked at the Governor's Speech and, if it is an outline of what the Government will do during this legislative session, quite clearly some of its impact has been taken away because of the earlier launch of the Government's challenges and opportunities, or economic strategy document, which was released by the Premier a month or so before the Parliament opened.

One of the interesting features of that economic strategy document was that it was difficult to find any new initiatives. It was really a position statement by the Government giving details of those things which it has set out to do over the past four or five years and which it is in the process of implementing.

Mr Peter Dowding: The industry renewal guarantee was a new initiative which had not been announced prior to that.

Mr COWAN: It might be said that there was an embellishment of what existed.

Mr Peter Dowding: No, it was a major initiative.

Mr COWAN: That is a matter of conjecture. I give the Premier credit for it, though, because I think it is a good idea.