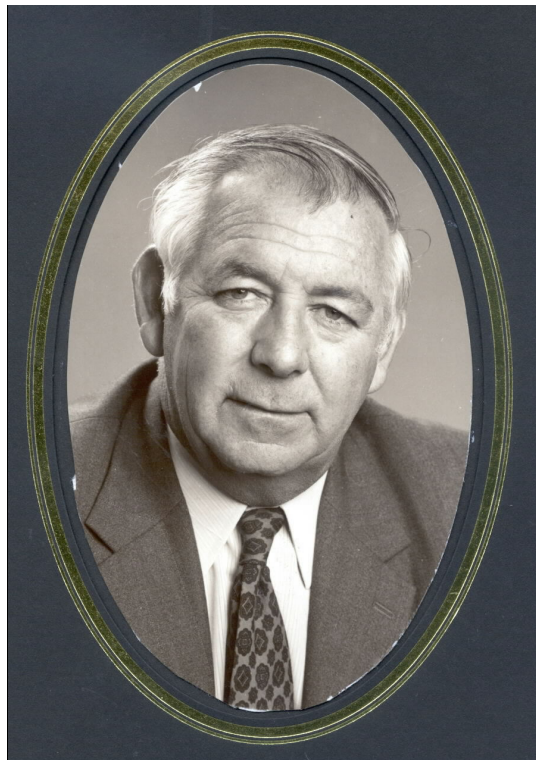




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Harry Walter Gayfer, MLA

(Member for Avon)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply: Fourth Day

Tuesday, 7 August 1962

Reprinted from Hansard

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 7 August 1962

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: FOURTH DAY

Motion

Debate resumed from the 2nd August on the following motion by Mr. Runciman:—

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency the Governor in reply to the Speech he has been pleased to deliver to Parliament:—

May it please your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Assembly 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.

MR. GAYFER (Avon) [10.11 p.m.]: I would first like to congratulate you, Sir, on being elected to the position you occupy. From all accounts you did an extremely good job in the past, and I feel sure you will continue the good work in the future. As members know, I represent the electors of Avon, which is virtually a new seat. It comprises most of the old Avon Valley electorate and some of the Roe electorate.

I feel honoured indeed that the electors of Avon should have returned me at the last election to fill the position vacated by my predecessor, Mr. J. I. Mann. I have known Mr. Mann practically all my life, and I only hope that when my time comes to leave this House, I will be accorded the same respect that was given to Mr. Mann when he left; and I also hope that, as he did, I will earn the respect not merely of the electors of Avon but also of the entire State. I would also like to pay my respect to the work done by the late Mr. Perkins, who served the electorate of Roe with ability similar to that with which Mr. Mann served the electorate of Avon. This seat of Avon comprises the whole of the shires of Brookton, York, Beverley, Quairading, and Corrigin, together with part of the shire of Wickiepin, namely, the town of Yealering.

We have our troubles, like the districts of most other members who have already spoken. Our main trouble seems to be a lack of decentralisation. Decentralisation is something which we have heard bandied about for many years, but we have never seen any practical results come from investigations that have been made into this question. I have heard it said that perhaps the best solution to the problem of decentralisation is to spend the money where it is earned. I would like to see this done in many parts of the agricultural areas. But the most immediate steps that should be made towards decentralisation are in regard to those matters mentioned by previous speakers over the last few nights.

I think our main concern would be water. We have all heard a lot of talk about water; and, as a matter of fact, I seem to have been implicated in this aspect a little myself. Water is the lifeblood of the country. I have also heard of the high cost of water in various parts of the State. I would like to mention one country town which recently had water laid on. The people there were paying £3 10s. a thousand gallons for drinking water. That applied to the members of the teaching staff, police officers and the other employees who lived in the town. The town in question had one well. Fortunately a pipeline has been laid to the town in the past 12 or 18 months. I daresay the same position obtains in other towns. For instance, at Greenhills water is at times being carted from York.

The next point on which I wish to touch is electricity. Things are reaching the point where electricity is as essential as water to the towns and industries. We know that the progress of electricity is governed by its expansion in the city areas. I only hope that the State Electricity Commission will, in its wisdom, soon be able to construct a line from Narrogin through to Merredin, with spurs to provide light for those towns on the east side of the Great Southern line, at a cost which will induce people to move into the wheatbelt towns, and share the amenities enjoyed by the city people in relation to electricity.

It is also noticeable on the 66,000-volt lines which are perhaps envisaged to run throughout the State, that eventually there will have to be some sort of breakdown in the way of a transformer to enable current to be used by the farms on the way through. I do not know whether they have actually invented the arrangement they need, but I know it is an essential part of the service to break down the voltage sufficiently in order to enable it to be run into farms as it goes past.

Education is another very important matter. We all know that schools have improved, and are improving, a great deal; but in old areas like the one I represent not enough attention is being paid to education. This is particularly so in the country, where there is still room for a big improvement. I do not see why, because we live in the country, we should not enjoy the same educational benefits and chances for our children as those enjoyed by the people in the metropolis and some of the bigger towns.

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I admit it would perhaps be impossible to build anything like a Scarborough High School in a place like Corrigin, for example; but I think that something on a smaller scale is certainly very necessary for our children. It is necessary to educate children up to a standard which will enable them to take over and handle a fairly large business in the country. It means that when a pupil is finally educated and wishes to live in the country he must be used to handling anything up to £20,000 worth of machinery at any one time on his own; or be used to looking after the equivalent of up to £20,000 worth of stock. As a matter of fact, there is a great deal of money invested in farming in these days. It is big business; and unless there is a suitable standard of education which will enable the youth of today to enjoy the life they wish, I am afraid our farming interests will suffer.

Perhaps the most important factor which would encourage people to live in the country would be availability of housing. But there are not enough houses available; and that is all there is to it. I could quote a little town I know of; namely, the town of Bullaring. The storekeeper there owns all the houses in the town—some £10,000 worth—and before he can employ any more staff he must have a house ready for them. He cannot get any houses from the State Housing Commission until he obtains the name of the employee; and he cannot get that until he has a house. It would seem therefore that things are at a deadlock; and that is typical of all the shires in my electorate.

The Kulin shire council in Roe wants more men, but it cannot obtain them unless it can provide the houses; likewise it cannot obtain the houses until it is able to get the men to put in applications for houses. This applies to all country areas and towns. The employers are willing to guarantee the rentals and that jobs are available, but the men cannot be asked to live in tents for a period of, say, five months or more before housing accommodation is found for them. In my electorate housing is an important factor.

The hospitals in my district have in the main been improved, but there is still room for further extension and improvement. Some of them were built around 1915 and in the 1920's. They serve quite a big area and have to treat accident and other cases which were not contemplated at the time they were built. It is a fact that the furthest point in the Avon electorate from the city is only 150 miles, but in some cases that distance is too great to transport patients when their lives are in danger. I would ask the Minister for Health to again look at the hospital situation at Corrigin if he could possibly find the time. I understand that this matter is being attended to, but I ask the Minister to look into it and to give the people in that part of my electorate an assurance in the matter.

The provision of adequate transport is another question on which there has been a certain amount of discussion. The railway line between Brookton and Corrigin has been closed, and that move might have been for the best. In its place a bitumen sealed road between Corrigin and Brookton was laid, and for this we thank the Government very much. Another railway line ran parallel and north of the closed Brookton–Corrigin line, and it has since been lifted and the materials sold. Access to the sidings on the closed line is made via feeder roads from this new bitumen road. As each year passes those feeder roads crumble more and more under the big loads as heavy transport carts the wheat from the sidings to the bitumen roads.

I have brought this matter up in certain directions and have been told that the wheat is transported into the bins and out of the bins along the same roads. People making such statements should realise that a bin is usually located in the centre of a district, and the wheat is carted to that bin from all directions; but it goes out along one road. That seems to be the point which has been missed in some of the correspondence I have received.

As we have a bitumen road connecting Corrigin and Brookton, the obvious outlet for the farmers is either Corrigin or Brookton. The little stores which are established along that line are closing down, because there is no reason for them to remain open especially if the storekeepers have to bring the goods themselves from the city. In turn, the telephone exchanges are going, so that the whole idea of decentralisation in that area will fall down. The farmers are told that if they want to get their mail and stores they can now go to Brookton or Corrigin; but the fact is that the nearest point in the centre is Quairading, and that route is at right angles to the railway line, and unsealed.

A further inquiry should be made in that area to ascertain whether an adequate road system has been established to compensate for the lifting of the railway line. That is an important aspect, and I feel I am justified in bringing it forward. For a nine-months' period ending at the close of last month the railway freights on wheat, oats, and barley amounted to £2,875,000. This sum was paid by the wheat farmers and the grain producers of this State to the railways in a nine-months' period. To that figure can be added the freight on 80,000 tons of wool which was consigned to the wool stores. In addition, the freight on superphosphate on the return journey has to be added.

We in this district still use the railway services, but we have to use other means of transport also. We do not use our trucks for bringing produce to and from the city. We have to cart our goods from various railheads, and we have to rely on a good road system. If the farmers and the people of the district have to pay the railways such high freights we ought to get back more in return, for the purpose of sealing the roads. There is not a large mileage of feeder road to be attended to; there might be between 20 to 25 miles to be sealed, to link up with the bitumen road provided.

I refer to another matter which I know to be a "hot potato." It concerns the subsidy on dams built in country centres for the purpose of irrigating playing fields. Some people have brought up the point that in many country towns there is no comprehensive water available, and want to obtain a subsidy for the establishment of such dams. Shire councils in country areas which are willing to go out of their way to build dams to irrigate playing fields—as three

councils in the Avon area are doing or trying to do—should be assisted. They want a subsidy on the same basis as the subsidy is paid on the building of swimming pools in country centres. They want a subsidy on the building of dams so that the people in country areas can enjoy the sporting facilities which are available in the city. The people living in the city are used to such amenities; they do not have to play sport on gravel pits as is done in the country in some cases. If a shire council is willing to move in this direction and build a dam on a self-help basis every assistance should be given to it, including a subsidy.

If a bomb should drop on the City of Perth, as was referred to by Mr. Hall, and the civil defence organisation went into action, the survivors of the catastrophe would be taken to the country. If the water pipeline were destroyed, what would we do with the survivors who were sent to the country? We would not have any water for them. If the dams to which I have referred were constructed—although they were primarily built to water sports fields—then in a national emergency they could be used to serve the people.

In all these matters which I have raised the main feature is that country centres should be provided with the amenities which are enjoyed by the people living in the cities. That is not asking for too much. We would be able to induce more people to work in the country if the proper amenities could be provided. The pay in the bush is pretty good, and the housing accommodation on the farms is not bad. But country centres lack the amenities which are provided in the cities.

If this State is to progress, as I expect it to progress, and if we are to play a big part in the development of this State, as we are entitled to, then we must have more men in the country, we must have better towns, and we must provide better housing accommodation. The best way to attract people to country centres is by providing amenities in those centres—amenities which are talked about but which, in some cases only, are seen. As far as I am concerned they cannot be provided quickly enough.

I thank you, Mr. Speaker, for allowing me to make my contribution. I was a little diffident about doing so after having heard all the eloquence in this Chamber tonight. I was told by members this first speech is the worst part of a man's parliamentary career; but after sitting here and listening to the debates I find that I am thoroughly enjoying them. In conclusion, I specially want to thank those speakers who offered their congratulations to me and to my new colleagues.