



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Martin Whitely MLA
(Member for Roleystone)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly, Thursday 3 May 2001

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MR WHITELY (Roleystone) [9.45 am]: I do not thank the member for Innaloo; he is a very hard act to follow. I will indulge in your protection, Mr Speaker. I do not want to be hit with any wet lettuce leaves or any bits of paper.

First, Mr Speaker, let me congratulate you on your election to your very important position.

I feel extremely privileged to have been elected to represent the people of Roleystone for the next four years. I am particularly excited to be a member of Western Australia's thirty-sixth Parliament which has at last the opportunity to deliver true democracy to the people of Western Australia.

One Vote, One Value

With respect, I believe that the fundamental principle of democracy is that every adult citizen has a right to equal representation - in other words, one vote, one value. We are elected to represent people, not square kilometres, and we should represent the same number of people regardless of how far they are spread. As the member for Roleystone, I believe I speak with some authority on this subject because I represent a large number of people spread over a very large area. A justification often offered for the current electoral boundaries, which discriminate against the majority of Western Australians, is that geographically large electorates are harder to service. To a point I agree; large electorates are harder to service.

I believe the members for Albany, Kalgoorlie, Bunbury, Mitchell, Mandurah and Dawesville have a relatively easier job serving their tiny, relatively homogenous, electorates than I have serving mine. The total land area of those six country electorates is 505 square kilometres, which is less than a third the size of Roleystone. Roleystone is more than 63 times the size of Bunbury, 41 times the size of Mandurah, 32 times the size of Albany, 24 times the size of Kalgoorlie, 12 times the size of Mitchell and nearly nine times bigger than Dawesville. If geographical size were used to determine the number of electors, Roleystone should have far fewer voters than each of those electorates; yet the opposite is true. Roleystone has nearly two voters for every one in those seats. This is a statistical aberration which applies not only to Roleystone. Although Roleystone is the largest metropolitan electorate, Swan Hills, Wanneroo and Southern River are all much larger than the biggest of the six country electorates I mentioned. It is nonsense to argue that country seats

should have fewer voters because they cover greater areas. The reality is that the country seats I mentioned are urban in nature. It defies logic, and is simply an accident of history that they are over-represented in this Parliament.

Of course, in electorates such as Pilbara, Eyre, Ningaloo and Kimberley, distance represents a huge challenge. I accept that those members deserve extra staff. However, I consider it totally undemocratic that an adult citizen in Wanneroo has only a quarter of the democratic rights of an elector in Eyre. We are all Western Australians, and we should all have one vote with one value.

Roleystone - A Diverse Electorate

Whether there is true one vote, one value electoral reform or simply the scheduled redistribution, it is likely that the electoral boundaries of Roleystone will change significantly. It is a very diverse electorate. In many respects Roleystone is a microcosm of Western Australia or, at least, the south west corner of Western Australia. This diversity makes my job both challenging and rewarding. The electoral impact of the forest debate illustrates the diversity of the electorate. Although the Government's commitment to save old-growth forests was well received by the majority of Roleystone voters, five timber mills within the electorate employ a significant number of locals. Suffice to say I have an appreciation of the range of views on the future of our forests. Roleystone is a mix of suburban, semi-rural and rural communities. About one-third of the population lives in the suburbs of Beckenham, Kenwick and Maddington. I doorknocked those suburbs, and learnt that generally residents feel that the south east corridor of the metropolitan area has been ignored. Many believe that the northern suburbs got all the goodies on offer from the 1996 state election, and that Bunbury and Mitchell were singled out for special treatment before the last election.

Policing

When one compares police resources, public transport and road and rail systems in the south east metropolitan area with those in the rest of Perth, it is fair to say that perception is justified. For instance, the Cannington police district, which includes the northern part of my electorate, has one of the highest crime rates but one of the worst ratios of police to population in Western Australia. As bad as they are, I believe the crime statistics for the Cannington police district are probably understated. Many residents have told me that they do not bother to report minor crimes to police because they believe there is little or no chance of the police responding effectively. Although police stations are located at Armadale and Gosnells, they are often either closed or run by skeleton staff who lack the resources to respond to or even take calls from the public.

The village of Roleystone is worthy of special mention; it is serviced from the under-resourced Armadale station. When police are available, the target response time from Armadale to Roleystone is 17 minutes. Often this figure is only of academic interest as Armadale station frequently lacks the personnel to respond. Roleystone village, with a population of over 6 000, has no police presence, whereas Carnarvon has 30 police officers servicing 8 000 people. Apparently Roleystone is sufficiently isolated to prevent effective policing from elsewhere; however, it is not isolated enough to have its own police station. I will be pushing to ensure that the south east corridor gets its fair share of police resources. Furthermore, I would like to see the return to smaller suburban stations where police have an opportunity to build relationships with the community.

The south east metropolitan area has been neglected for too long. Now that government members hold the seats of Thornlie, Southern River, Armadale and Roleystone I expect that we in the south east will enjoy services comparable with those in the rest of Perth. The work done by the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure to speed up the construction of stage 4 of the Roe Highway is a welcome start.

Waste Disposal and Environmental Protection

Further south, my electorate takes in the Shire of Serpentine-Jarrahdale, which includes the semirural communities of Mundijong, Oakford, Serpentine, Jarrahdale and Byford. People are attracted to these communities by the tranquillity, natural beauty and sense of community. Over the past 18 months, initially as a candidate and more recently as the local member, I have spent an enormous amount of time dealing with environmental and land use issues in the Shire of Serpentine -Jarrahdale. The shire suffers from being neither regional nor metropolitan. As Perth grows the Serpentine-Jarrahdale shire is increasingly being used as a rubbish tip. The shire has numerous existing and proposed landfill sites. On the one hand, landfill proponents argue that cities create waste and burying waste in the relatively sparsely populated areas is the most economic method of disposal. On the other hand, local residents argue that dumping is polluting streams and underground water and destroying their local environment. I understand the need to develop better ways to dispose of waste other than simply burying it in the outskirts of the metropolitan area.

The peculiar geography of my electorate has given me a unique perspective on a waste disposal issue that has attracted recent media attention. I refer to the solid waste to energy facility proposed for construction in the City of Gosnells. In the north of my electorate many residents of Maddington are concerned about the environmental impact of building a new technology high-volume rubbish disposal facility in their suburb. In the south of my electorate residents of the semirural hamlet of Cardup where the City of Gosnells' rubbish is currently buried are concerned about the impact of landfill on the ground water which many use as their domestic water supply. In the case of the proposed SWERF the idea of transforming domestic rubbish into electricity is appealing. However, I share the concerns of Maddington residents that the technology is yet unproven. Fortunately members of the Maddington community have taken responsibility for developing a process to inform themselves and other locals of the merits or otherwise of the SWERF. I will be a very interested observer of that process and the EPA assessment of the SWERF.

Mineral Sands Mining

The local issue that has attracted the greatest media attention over the past 12 months is the joint fight to save Whitby Falls Hostel and prevent mineral sandmining in Mundijong. These issues were debated in both Houses of the previous Parliament. I will not critique the previous Government's shameful handling of these issues. However, I will address a misleading statement made in the Legislative Council by the previous Minister for Mines in relation to Labor's position on the Mundijong sand mine. On 16 November 2000, in response to a question without notice, the previous Minister for Mines stated -

In this case the Labor Party candidate is saying that I should abide by the warden's environmental decisions. In other words, the Labor Party is saying that the warden should make the environmental assessment and not the EPA. I am interested to know the Labor Party's position on this matter. Whenever I ask, I receive a conflicting point of view. The Opposition spokesman on environment says the assessment should be done by the EPA, whereas the candidate says it should be done by the warden. The Labor Party is confused on this issue.

In fact, it was the former Minister for Mines who was confused. The Labor Party's consistent and very well-publicised position on the proposed Mundijong mineral sands mine was that Labor supports the full implementation of the recommendations of the mining Warden's Court in the case of Serpentine-Jarrahdale Ratepayers Association versus Iluka Resources Ltd. For the benefit of members, the mining warden recommended no mining in the majority of Iluka Resources' mining lease application area, because the land was more valuable for housing and tourism. The mining warden based his decision on economic and social considerations, not environmental considerations. To put it simply, the mining warden recommended no mining in two-thirds of the application area because the land had more valuable uses. He also said that mining may be approved in the

remaining one-third of the area. He did not make a final recommendation, presumably because he did not have access to the appropriate environmental expertise. The mining warden stated -

It is my opinion that the matters of dust pollution, noise pollution, assessment of groundwater usage, and the consequences thereof, and the potential impacts upon the environment, and upon other uses of groundwater in the area, together with flora and fauna preservation and protection, are all matters, which in this case, are properly the subject of inquiry and direction by the Environmental Protection Authority .

The former Minister for Mines was wrong. There was no inconsistency in Labor's position on this issue. The former minister was both confused and confusing.

A series of Supreme Court and Warden's Court decisions relating to the proposed Mundijong mineral sands mine and another mine west of Serpentine have implications that stretch well beyond the boundaries of Roleystone. For most of our history Western Australia has derived much of its wealth from mining, and miners have virtually had the ability to mine where and when they have wanted to do so. Until recently the role of the Warden's Court was limited to applying the provisions of the Mining Act, most often to resolve disputes between competing mining interests. The Supreme Court has effectively expanded the role of the Warden's Court to consider the merits of economic, social and environmental objections. Another case that is scheduled to be heard by the Supreme Court later this year also has implications for the roles of both the Warden's Court and the Minister for Mines. The confusion created by these cases benefits no-one. The objectors to the two mines have gone through a drawn out and expensive process. Despite several significant legal victories they still have a way to go. On the other side of the argument the mining industry is concerned about the delay and uncertainty created by the Supreme Court expanding the role of the Warden's Court. I believe that a system that speedily and inexpensively deals with economic, social and environmental objections to mining proposals is needed. Inaction will lead to more court cases and confusion. The public will lose, the mining industry will lose; the only ones to benefit will be the lawyers. Obviously the nature of our political system is adversarial. At its best - as it did in the case of the Mundijong mineral sands mine and the Whitby Falls Hostel issue - confrontation performs the function of keeping Government accountable. However, opportunistic confrontation can prevent Parliament dealing effectively with contentious issues. Sometimes populism triumphs over principle.

Attention Deficit Disorder - Misdiagnosis and Overprescription

Drug law reform is one area where a populist opposition can stymie genuine reform. Perth has a growing crime problem where addicts are prostituting themselves, stealing, sometimes with violence, or dealing drugs to finance their self-destruction. History tells us that public education programs, while valuable, can achieve only so much. As parliamentarians we need to have an open mind on this issue. Failure to do so will mean escalating crime and suffering.

The negative health and social effects of illicit drugs are well known and widely accepted. However, no general agreement exists on the long-term social, health and behavioural effects of drugs that are being prescribed to a significant and growing number of Western Australian children. I refer to the prescription of dexamphetamine commonly known as Dexies or by its brand name, Ritalin, and to a lesser extent methylphenidate for the treatment of attention deficit disorder. My interest in ADD and the related condition attention deficit hyperactivity disorder stems from my previous employment as a teacher at a boys' secondary school. The first time I was made aware of the condition was when a clinical psychologist addressed the staff at our school on ADD. The psychologist defined ADD sufferers as the 5 per cent of children who are the most inattentive, impulsive and/or hyperactive, and ADD as occurring most often in boys. He identified drug treatment, combined with behaviour modification techniques, as the most effective method to deal

with ADD. At the time I accepted the experts' advice. I now have grave concerns that ADD misdiagnosis and the resultant overprescription of amphetamines is a threat to the health and happiness of many Western Australian children.

As a former teacher, father of two boys and coach of junior sport, I know inattentive, impulsive, hyperactive behaviour is a part of childhood, particularly for boys. Some children are by their very nature more impulsive, hyperactive and inattentive just as some children are taller, shorter, heavier, lighter and less or more coordinated.

To define the 5 per cent of children who are the most impulsive, hyperactive and inattentive as having a disorder has, I believe, very dangerous consequences, particularly when the option in most cases is to give them amphetamines or "chill pills" as they are referred to by the supposed sufferers and their peers. This argument is often countered by the claim that ADD is a disorder because it prevents the sufferers from functioning effectively. I am suspicious of what defines effective functioning. I believe that it is often simpler for even well-intentioned doctors to diagnose and prescribe behaviour-altering drugs than it is to deal with the underlying cause.

The symptoms of ADD - inattentiveness, impulsiveness and hyperactivity - are also the symptoms of a variety of conditions including abuse, dysfunctional parenting and depression. It concerns me greatly that some children who have behavioural problems are being treated as if they have a chemical imbalance. I have first-hand experience of students on ADD medication sitting compliantly in class. They were not hyperactive or impulsive, but they were far from switched on. Their medication had not made them more attentive but it had made them more compliant and easier to manage.

I also know of teachers who with disturbing certainty categorised particular students as undiagnosed ADD. In my experience, these were teachers who often struggled to control classes and had particular difficulty with high-spirited students. ADD is a condition whose diagnosis is necessarily subjective, as there can be no objective measure of impulsiveness, hyperactivity or inattentiveness. I would suggest a visit to any schoolyard at recess or lunchtime will reveal just how normal impulsive and hyperactive behaviour is.

My suspicion that ADD drugs are over-prescribed first arose because of my experience with one student who as a 15-year-old had his first "drug holiday" in many years when he failed to self-medicate on an extended school camp. This boy for his three previous years at the school had been withdrawn and passive, to the extent of almost complete social isolation. After a few days without medication, he began to participate and socialise with other students. For the first time, his peers and teachers witnessed his personality and sense of humour. After the camp, the boy was immediately put back on medication and for the rest of the time at school he continued to be withdrawn and socially isolated.

I suppose it could be argued that I know of only a few isolated cases of over-diagnosis and over-prescription. It is, however, much harder to dismiss the July 1996 Report of the Technical Working Party on Attention Deficit Disorder prepared by twelve Perth health professionals, including five doctors and four psychologists. Whilst the report stated that stimulant medications are effective in 85 per cent of children carefully diagnosed ADD, it identified that some unnamed Perth paediatricians are carelessly diagnosing and over-prescribing dexamphetamine and methylphenidate. The report also stated -

The parent is frequently the sole source of information and often educational and behavioural information is not sought. When information is sought from the school, the questions asked are frequently inappropriate. Behavioural observations are rarely obtained.

The report highlighted the 43-fold growth in the prescription of dexamphetamine to five to 14-year-olds in Western Australia between 1989 and 1994. It also highlighted rates of prescription per child in WA were about two and a half times the national average. Furthermore, the report identified that prescription patterns varied greatly across the metropolitan area. It concluded that it is the view of the working party that the differential rate of prescriptions may be more reflective of the prescribing patterns of paediatricians servicing the various areas than it is of social or other factors associated with ADHD in those areas.

The report was published for public comment in July 1996 before a final, slightly watered down report was presented in April 1997 to a cabinet subcommittee consisting of the then Ministers for Education, Health, Disability Services and Family and Children's Services. Both reports contained similar recommendations, most of which have not been implemented. A key recommendation of both reports was -

That the Stimulants Committee of the Health Department be authorised to carry out random audits into the use of block authorisations; and that paediatricians and psychiatrists found to be failing to abide to the appropriate criteria have their block authorisation capacity removed.

This has not happened. Currently, those paediatricians and psychiatrists who prescribe the most are assumed to be competent and are given "block authorisations" for the prescription of dexamphetamine and/or methylphenidate. Effectively, this means the heaviest prescribers are the least accountable. In my opinion, this is exactly the opposite of how the system should work.

The reports were not accepted and implemented by the previous Government. In fact, a new round of reports has commenced, with the latest being a September 2000 draft of a report entitled Attentional Problems in Children and Young People. This new report again highlights the problem of "bloc authorisations". It states -

One of the current barriers to data collection and safety guarantees for children is the provision of *en bloc* authorisation. Consequently this option will be replaced by a more comprehensive system.

I hope this report will at last lead to action. ADD diagnosis and treatment is a controversial topic but it cannot be left in the too-hard basket. At the heart of the issue is the health and happiness of too many children.

Reconciliation

I finish by addressing the issue of reconciliation. I believe as a nation that we are a long way from effectively tackling indigenous disadvantage and achieving true reconciliation. The reality is that a significant but thankfully declining minority of Australians are racist and they often reserve their deepest and most irrational malice for Aboriginals. The majority of Australians, however, take people as they find them yet many rarely, if ever, meet indigenous Australians. As a result of this "distant relationship", for many well-meaning Australians addressing Aboriginal disadvantage often comes down to headline issues like land rights or an apology.

Whilst a just resolution of land issues and a prime ministerial apology are important steps towards reconciliation, they will only go a small way to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage. Too many indigenous Australians are excluded from the economy. For many, the cause is simply isolation and the lack of a local economic base. For others, it is the cumulative, intergenerational destruction of self-confidence which effectively denies economic opportunity.

All Australians need to understand our nation's history of institutionalised racism and how it relates to current disadvantage. We need to understand that landmark changes like the 1967 referendum

or a future genuine prime ministerial apology did not, and will not, wipe the slate clean and provide a fresh and equal start. We need to know our history, warts and all, not to create a sense of collective or individual guilt because few living Australians are responsible for the errors of the past, but so we can understand the present and together build a better future.

I believe the public debate about Aboriginal disadvantage and reconciliation has, unfortunately, often been polarised between those who would blame the victim and those who, perhaps understandably, but ultimately just as destructively, are motivated by unquestioning guilt. I think Most Australians are fair-minded and are turned off by both racists and those who they see as self-righteously claiming the moral high ground.

We as parliamentarians have a responsibility for the quality and substance of public debate. I think a significant contribution was made by Noel Pearson in his Light on the Hill speech last August. He challenged those of us in politics, particularly those of us on the progressive side of politics, to develop a new approach to addressing Aboriginal disadvantage. Noel Pearson's basic argument was that, whilst Aboriginal disadvantage may have been caused and perpetuated by non-Aboriginal action, the only effective solutions will be those developed and implemented by indigenous Australians when they enjoy the rewards of success and suffer the consequences of failure. He argued that welfare is destructive of Aboriginal self-reliance. In general terms, Noel Pearson contended that the role of government assistance must be one of a "temporary hand up", not a "permanent hand out". Mr Pearson based his comments on his experience as a Murri and a Cape York community leader. There is, of course, a danger in generalising his remarks to Western Australia, but I believe his contribution can be a catalyst for a new, more mature and open debate about reconciliation.

My experience working with Aboriginal organisations for three years in the early 1990s made me question the then current emphasis on empowering indigenous Australians through resourcing community organisations rather than individuals or families. This approach seemed to be based on the fundamental assumption that entire communities of often hundreds of people, rather than individuals or families, are the basic building blocks of the Aboriginal society. For example, I believe numerous promising business opportunities developed using the Commonwealth Government's Community Development Employment Program model failed because they did not reward individual effort. In my experience, CDEP businesses were successful when they had the chance to grow naturally. Unfortunately, however, instead of beginning by employing a few individuals full time and letting them share the rewards of their efforts, CDEP businesses were typically structured to employ many community members on a part-time, basically "voluntary work for the dole", basis. There was little or no reward for individual effort and workers who were initially enthusiastic quickly and understandably lost motivation. This was an opinion I formed in the early 1990s. I visited a promising CDEP enterprise in my electorate last month and was disappointed to see aspects of history repeating themselves. I doubt that it is appropriate to continue to base aspects of public policy on the questionable assumption that indigenous Australians are motivated by entirely different factors from other Australians.

Thank You

The issues I have discussed relate to either my electorate or my previous employment as a teacher, an accountant and as a university lecturer in financial management working with Aboriginal students employed by community organisations. I would have liked to discuss options for the abolition of payroll tax and Australia's republican future. Before I finish, I thank my campaign team, especially Kate Doust, Dean Summers and Barbara Whitely, for performing miracles on time and below budget. I especially wish to thank Dean and the Maritime Union of Australia for not only supporting my campaign but also leading the fight to save Whitby Falls Hostel. The MUA initially

got involved in this issue because it was sticking up for a comrade who is a resident; however, it quickly became committed to ensuring a fair go for all residents of the hostel. I also thank and congratulate the numerous community groups in my electorate, including the William Street Action Group, Jarrahdale Linkbusters, the Save Whitby Hostel Action Group and the Serpentine-Jarrahdale Ratepayers Association for their tireless work in fighting for their communities. I especially thank Cardup resident Alan Clarkson for his work ensuring a fair go for his local area. I pay tribute to the former member for Roleystone, Fred Tubby, for his generous assistance in the handover process. I hope that if the electorate ever taps me on the shoulder and tells me it is time to go, I act with the same good grace. Finally, I thank my family - Mum and Dad, Jen and Chris, Melinda, Shane and Patrick - for their values, love and support.

Needless to say, I am excited by my latest career change. Obviously, I am proud to be a member of the new Government; however, I believe that, regardless of our political affiliations, we all have a role to play in improving the lot of Western Australians. I am looking forward to working with all members of the new Parliament, particularly on some of the issues I have discussed and for which party affiliation can and should be irrelevant. Thank you.

[Applause.]
