



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Troy Buswell MLA
(Member for Vasse)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 31 March 2005

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 31 March 2005

Inaugural Speech

Mr Troy Buswell MLA

(Member for Vasse)

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

INTRODUCTION

MR T.R. BUSWELL (Vasse) [3.01 pm]: First, I congratulate you, Mr Acting Speaker (Dr S.C. Thomas). It is my first time standing in this chamber and no doubt it is your first time in the Chair. I congratulate you on your recent victory in the new electorate of Capel. It is an immense honour to me to join this chamber as the member for Vasse. I first thank the electors of that fine part of Western Australia for giving me the privilege and the opportunity to represent them in this Parliament. It is a particular honour to have the opportunity to follow in the footsteps of two notable former members for Vasse, the late Sir Stewart Bovell and Mr Barry Blaikie, two men with long and distinguished parliamentary careers who made a valuable contribution to, and earned the enduring respect of, the communities they represented in this chamber. I do not lay claim to the stature or respect that was earned by either of those former members for Vasse, but they provide me with an excellent example of what one should aim for as a local member of Parliament.

During the recent induction program for new members of this house we received a fascinating presentation on the history of this place from the former member for South Perth, Mr Phillip Pandal. Those members who are familiar with Mr Pandal would no doubt be well aware of his proud links with quality Western Australian convict stock; namely, his ancestral link to Joseph Buswell, an Englishman from Oxfordshire who was transported to Australia in the 1850s. I am pleased to report to the house that I enter this chamber as the proud grandson of a grandson of the same Joseph Buswell.

AN EXPRESSION OF THANKS

I also take this opportunity to thank the terrific group of people who supported me during my election campaign. The campaign for the seat of Vasse is over, despite reports in the Press this week. It was an unusual campaign in many respects, and ultimately a close-run affair. However, the support and enthusiasm of my campaign team and their unwavering loyalty to me was never in question. To them I owe the deepest debt of gratitude. With your indulgence, Mr Acting Speaker, I will place on the public record my sincerest thanks to Sara Ronald, Ric Toovey, Kevan Smith, John Reid, John Slee, Trevor Fitzgerald, Sue Wagner, Tony Robinson, Phillipa Reid and Murray and Jan Smith for their enthusiastic support over such a long time.

I also acknowledge the love and support provided to me in recent years by my family, in particular my wife Margaret and my well-disciplined sons, Jacob and Samuel. Members need to understand one thing: nothing is more important to me than my family. I know that they have sacrificed much to help me get here today. We are a family that works together. We share our tribulations and triumphs together. At heart, we are an old-fashioned family. We enjoy nothing more than sharing time together and the opportunity to pray together in thanks over a meal. We are also a family that has enjoyed the support, guidance and friendship of our extended families, especially our parents and their partners. I am pleased that after a somewhat long wait, they are in the chamber with us today.

THE ELECTORATE OF VASSE

I am also immensely proud of the area that I have been given the opportunity to represent in this Parliament. The seat of Vasse has changed dramatically in recent times and largely now follows the coastline of Geographe Bay and includes the major towns of Busselton and Dunsborough and the smaller townships of Yallingup and Eagle Bay. Although the area still includes some fantastic agricultural land, which is farmed by a number of long-term farming families, most people in Vasse enjoy an urban lifestyle in our towns or a rural-residential lifestyle on some of the larger, more natural lots in both Busselton and Dunsborough. The people of this area are a very interesting mix. Long-term residents have in recent years been joined by an increasing number of new residents, who have been attracted by the lifestyle and opportunities offered in our region. As a result, the expectations and aspirations of the local community are often diverse and are constantly evolving.

To many in this house, my electorate represents an idyllic holiday region to which people retreat to relax and enjoy time away from their busy metropolitan lives, and where they can share our fantastic natural amenities and diverse tourism infrastructure. Vasse is far more than this. Vasse represents one of the most dynamic, rapidly developing regional areas in Australia. As many members may be aware, the Shire of Busselton has experienced annual population growth of approximately five per cent for many years. On current trends, there is a reasonable expectation that the population of the area will double from its current level of 24 000 people to approximately 50 000 people in the next 12 years. This growth presents my community with many challenges and, of course, many opportunities. Indeed, the greatest challenge for our community is in being able to take a proactive role in guiding the change process that is occurring in our towns and to make sure that the outcomes that this change process delivers reflect the aspirations and goals of the residents of the area. Failure to achieve this will simply result in the community becoming reactive and being forced to accept whatever outcomes the growth process delivers. For years the government of this state has failed to acknowledge the growth that has been occurring in the Vasse area. As a result, a number of pressing issues require significant state government social investment or other forms of state assistance. The people of Vasse elected me in part to make sure that these issues are brought to the attention of the government and, indeed, to my own party, and to do all I can to fight on their behalf for a better set of local outcomes.

ISSUES CONFRONTING VASSE

It is not my intention in the time that I have today to discuss at length specific issues, although there are three issues that I wish to touch on. Busselton is currently served by one high school, which was constructed in the 1950s for a student population of approximately 700 to 800 students. The government is in the process of planning a new middle school for our area. Although in the opinion of many this is not part of the best long-term solution for the educational needs of our children, it will nonetheless be a welcome investment in the future of our children's education. However, it must be noted that this is only part of the solution to the provision of better education facilities in our area. Despite the efforts of parents, teachers and staff, our existing high school is in sad need of a major upgrade, especially if it is to be transformed into a modern senior campus. The cries of the people of Dunsborough for planning to commence on a middle school also need to be clearly heard by the government. It is interesting to note that Dunsborough is the centre of a large catchment area that will have a school-age population approaching 2 500 by 2016, yet the government has not seen fit to begin planning to provide new schools to complement the existing primary school, preferring instead to force the students of Dunsborough to spend approximately 60 minutes on a bus every day travelling to Busselton and back.

Our growing region is currently served by a hospital, built in 1978, that is in serious need of either a complete replacement or, at the very least, a major overhaul. The previous health minister promised an upgrade to the emergency department during 2001 - an upgrade that we are still waiting for. Today the residents of my electorate and visitors to the region are forced to seek medical attention in a hospital that was built to cater for a regional population of 8 000, while the population heads steadily towards 50 000. We are serviced by a hospital in which the government chooses to close the operating theatres for 10 per cent of the year. I am aware that discussions may be occurring outside of the public arena about the long-term future of the hospital, and I would caution the government and encourage it to engage the local community in these discussions. Despite its physical shortcomings, a tremendous amount of community pride and ownership is associated with the Busselton District Hospital, and any future plans should recognise this.

The last issue I will touch on is growing support for moves in my electorate to ban the practice of using nets to catch fish in Geographe Bay. The bay is a wonderful local feature, and plays an important role in the lifestyle of all the electors of Vasse. However, the time-honoured practice of catching a feed of fish in the bay is becoming increasingly difficult, and it is time for the true value of Geographe Bay as a recreational fishery to be identified, and for the destructive and wasteful practice of netting, be it by recreational or commercial fishermen, to be brought to a close. The previous Minister for Fisheries took a bold yet widely applauded step to ban commercial crabbing in Geographe Bay. I look forward to working with my community and with the current minister to achieve further positive outcomes for Geographe Bay and the people who use it, both locals and visitors.

PHILOSOPHICAL BELIEFS

I mentioned earlier that I come into this place as the grandson of the grandson of a convict. I am also the son of a father who, sadly, passed away when I was young. Members opposite may be interested to know that he was as passionate a

follower of the Australian Labor Party as could ever be found. He was a man who would have cried in 1969, and would have danced with the rest of the “It’s Time” generation in 1972. My father was a person fired by a passion for many things, and his passion for matters political was something that he embedded deep within me as a youngster. It is a passion that I have carried with me for as long as I can remember. Of course, my own personal disposition, my life experiences and my responsibilities to my family have sent me in the direction of a set of personal beliefs that are somewhat divergent from those of my father. Although I come into this chamber firstly to represent the people of Vasse, it is important to understand that I bring with me a set of core values that I will defend and advance whenever possible. These core values, I am proud to say, are reflected in the heritage and the beliefs of the Liberal Party. Although I am extremely disappointed to be sitting on this side of the house, I am proud to sit with my fellow conservatives and to represent the Liberal Party in this Parliament. During the months that I spent doorknocking in the Vasse electorate, a number of issues became very evident to me. People feel distant from their elected representatives. However, of more concern is the fact that they feel disenfranchised by and largely disinterested in the process of government.

People are concerned about the erosion of the social structures and social values that they have relied on as points of reference in an ever-changing world. People are seeking security; not necessarily physical security but, importantly, economic security and opportunity for themselves and their families. I am pleased to state, for the record, that I have an absolute and unyielding belief in the importance of the traditional family unit as the cornerstone of our social structure. I am concerned by the constant attacks on the relevance and role of the family unit from all sorts of people pushing all sorts of social agendas. I am firmly of the opinion that there is a lack of respect for the traditional family unit and the stability and benefits it can provide. I am sure that, on this side of the house, we stand ready to defend and nurture the family unit, not just as the whim of some populist-inspired political jargon, but with a true sense of commitment and belief.

The importance of sustainable economic growth is lost on few. However, the role of market forces and free enterprise in delivering this outcome is often overlooked and at worst ignored. I recall many politicians - many of whom still sit on the government benches - and many social commentators criticising deregulation and the process of freeing our states and the Australian economy and exposing it to a more competitive environment. Although this process has been far from perfect - especially, it should be said, in some agricultural industries - we are currently enjoying one of the most sustained periods of economic prosperity, at a national level, that most of us have known, thanks in no small part to these reforms. Much must still be done to enable Western Australian business to successfully compete in both the regional and broader global marketplaces and much must be done to encourage small and medium businesses to flourish and reach their full potential. Business needs the reliable provision of core services, such as electricity and water. I am pleased to note the minister’s announcement about the rebate for the loss of power supplies. There will be a lot of very wealthy people in my electorate in the near future, I have no doubt! Business needs to be freed from the constraints of an overtaxing and over-regulated environment, and small business in particular needs to be freed of many of the inhibitors it faces in employing people, currently imposed by restrictive state labour laws.

I am a committed small business operator with a strong tourism background. Tourism is an industry that stands to offer this state a great deal, in particular in regional areas such as the Vasse electorate that I represent. Sadly, this government has done little in the area of tourism over the past four years. This was highlighted to me yesterday by comments made in this house by the new Minister for Tourism, when he proudly boasted that, last year, international visitor numbers to this state increased by 2.9 per cent. The facts are that, in the same period, international visitor numbers to Queensland increased by 13.3 per cent, to New South Wales by 10 per cent, and to Victoria by 8.7 per cent. We as a state are, as I am sure we have been for a number of years, losing market share in a very valuable international tourism market, and this issue needs to be addressed.

I have taken some time in recent weeks to review a number of Address-in-Reply speeches, or inaugural speeches, given by a variety of members from both sides of the house. One matter that strikes me continuously is the number of members opposite who espouse, through what I consider to be the rose-coloured glasses of the utopian socialist, a longing for the great new dawn of the egalitarian state. I read it over and over again. However, the days of the great class war are but a distant memory, and in holding to this belief they have failed to acknowledge that, for as long as a God allows people to be born with different skills and different personal dispositions, people will achieve different life outcomes. No matter how much they tinker with social policy or choose to empower their comrades in the trade union movement to embark on anticompetitive centralised power grabs, those differences will continue to exist. The focus should not be, as the Labor Party would have us believe, on equality of outcome; the focus should indeed be on equality of opportunity. This has always been and will remain at the core of the philosophical difference between us on this side of the house and the government. It is one of the fundamental reasons I stand here proudly today on this side of the house.

One of the greatest legacies of our political and social system is the set of rights, freedoms and liberties that we as individual Australians enjoy. However, these freedoms and inherent rights associated with the ownership of private property are slowly yet surely being eroded.

The encroachment on our rights and freedoms is in many instances driven by excessive government regulation, especially that enacted in the name of the environment and the spread of the socially acceptable or the politically correct norm that various groups are trying to continually hoist on a largely unsuspecting public. Yet, Mr Acting Speaker, when challenged by the politically correct you will find that I develop the tendency of a Luddite and grasp onto that which is under threat. Indeed, I continually remind myself and others of the words of the English philosopher John Stuart Mill when he wrote in his essay on liberty -

There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence: and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs, as protection against political despotism.

These words were written in the 1850s, yet they are as important a reminder to us today as they were then.

CONCLUSION

So it is with a passion for these things - the family unit, free market economics, the protection of individual liberty, the defence of private property rights along with a strong desire to help the people of Vasse achieve that to which they aspire - that brings me to this chamber.

In closing, I say once again how honoured and proud I am to have the opportunity to represent the people of Vasse in this Parliament. I look forward to building even stronger links with the many communities of interest that combine to constitute my electorate and I am sure that with their guidance and encouragement I can make a positive contribution serving them as their local member of Parliament and in the service of this Parliament. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]
