



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mrs Robyn Clarke, MLA
(Member for Murray-Wellington)

Legislative Assembly
Address-in-Reply
Tuesday, 16 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 11 May on the following motion moved by Ms J.J. Shaw —

That the following Address-in-Reply to Her Excellency's speech be agreed to —

To Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, 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.

MRS R.M.J. CLARKE (Murray–Wellington) [7.00 pm]: Mr Speaker, Whip and Leader of the House, please accept my sincere congratulations on your appointments.

One of the most important things for me to do in my inaugural speech is to acknowledge the Bindjareb people on the land on which I am the local member. I pay my respects to their elders past and present, and I feel honoured to have my office situated on their boodjar. I also want to acknowledge the Whadjuk people on the land on which we stand today and pay my respects to their elders past and present. Today I want to acknowledge the Bindjareb people of my region as the first peoples and as the traditional owners of the land. I also want to acknowledge that there were different Aboriginal groups within Western Australia prior to European settlement, each with their own distinctive language, customs and lore. Under Aboriginal lore and custom, Aboriginal people have cultural responsibilities and rights in relation to the land of which they are the traditional owners. Aboriginal people have a living spiritual, cultural, familial and social connection with the land. Aboriginal people have made, are making and will continue to make a significant and unique contribution to the heritage, cultural identity, community and economy of the Murray–Wellington electorate and Western Australia. Historically, the Bindjareb people were an important traditional group, as many of the Aboriginal groups would come from inland regions over the scarp and trade with them. The Bindjareb region was a place of celebration and ceremony, where the Bindjareb people played an important role. I am looking forward to continuing to build a positive working relationship with the Bindjareb people as I support them to take a leadership role once more.

Mr Speaker and Premier, I am truly thankful to be part of the fortieth Parliament along with the other 40 WA Labor Party members elected. As the saying goes, life begins at 40, so as I see it, we are at the stage where we are at the peak of attaining our greatest. It also simply means that it is the start of fresh new beginnings for most of us here in Parliament. I stand here today in this fortieth Parliament with hand on heart to let my community know that I will never give up to ensure that our electorate is provided with recognition and support, which it has not been given by past governments.

Being here today would not be possible without the forceful support of our brilliant volunteers, who were the backbone of our grassroots campaign. This was a team effort. First, to David Scaife, my campaign manager, and my supportive husband, Charlie Clarke, who was our campaign field organiser—thank you so much for your work and all of your assistance. There are too many in the union movement whom I want to thank for their tireless and ongoing support, but in particular I wish to thank Steve McCartney of the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union for his guidance over the years in our fight to protect workers' rights. For his gracious assistance and mentoring, I thank the Leader of the House, the member for Mandurah. To my dedicated, hardworking, loyal electorate staff—Lisa Cook, my electorate officer, and Zoe Jones, my research officer—thank you for the tireless contribution you have provided to not only me but also the constituents in our electorate.

I would also like to take a moment to acknowledge some guests who are part of this significant night. They include representatives from the Shire of Murray—chief executive officer Dean Unsworth, shire president Maree Reid and shire councillor Patricia Briggs, who was the former candidate for Murray-Wellington in the 2001 state election. Also here tonight is Pinjarra Senior High School principal Rob Lawson. To my friends of many years and to friends I have made throughout the campaign, thank you. I thank all the AMWU organisers and staff for all their support and encouragement. My thanks go also to the Clarke family—you have accepted me as part of your family and supported me throughout this journey.

My greatest achievement is my children, Steve, Christina and Cassandra, whom I am so proud of. Thank you for making motherhood so easy, because you are all so incredible, talented, funny, independent and fearless. Last but certainly not least is the one man to whom I owe so much—the love of my life, my husband Charlie Clarke.

I have worked a portfolio of careers in my lifetime and the shared thread that runs through them all is the values of effort and devotion, as they are directly proportional to the outcome. I was an owner-operator of a lunch bar at the age of 19, so I know all too well the struggles of small business owners—long hours and balancing precarious finances to make sure that we did more than just simply get through. I worked in the fertile and febrile media landscape of the 1980s, before having children. Following this I learnt how to balance a domestic life with a career at all ranks in the banking and health industries, from sales and customer service up to management. I know how important it is to guarantee that you deliver on your word.

I am so proud to be a part of this Parliament when it contains the largest number of female politicians that it has ever held. In standing here tonight I would like to take a moment to recognise two women in particular who were the forerunners for me and other female politicians in Australia. The first of these women is May Holman, Australia's first female Labor politician. May Holman held the Dwellingup-based seat of Forrest from 1925 until her death in 1939, making her the first woman in the British Commonwealth to serve in a Parliament for more than 10 years. She was actively involved in Labor Women's Central Executive and Young Labor, was a strong believer in equal pay, and played a crucial role in introducing the Timber Industry Regulation Act 1926, which was one of the first acts to bring health and safety regulations to timber industry workers. The other woman is Australia's first and as yet only female Prime Minister, Hon Julia Gillard. Ms Gillard has been a strong role model for me and, I am sure, many other fledgling Labor MPs, not just during her time in Parliament but also in her post-political career. She stood up to misogyny in politics and is a strong advocate for mental health and women's rights. In the face of significant hurdles she achieved a great number of positive reforms for the country both as minister and Prime Minister across workplace and industrial relations, health, disability care and education. This included the introduction of the Fair Work Act, plain packaging legislation, the National Disability Insurance Scheme and the Gonski reforms. I am exceedingly proud

that I stand here today as the first woman to represent the seat of Murray–Wellington. I draw inspiration from these two great Australian women as I begin my journey.

Murray-Wellington, originally known as Murray, was one of the original seats contested at the 1890 election. It has only once been held by Labor—between 1989 and 1993 by Keith Read. The electorate includes three local governments, which throughout my campaign were very vocal that this chamber needed a refresher course on the geography of the region, as governments have seemed to overlook it for quite some time. At the northern end is the Shire of Murray, which encompasses the towns of Blythewood, which in 1842 was one of the original European settlements; Coolup and West Coolup, which have an incredible community spirit; Fairbridge, which is renowned for its historical value; and Dwellingup, which has an amazing discovery centre and is a historical timber town. The surrounding timber towns of Holyoake, Inglehope, Marrinup, Meelon, Myara, Nambelup, Nirimba, North Dandalup, Oakley and Point Grey were razed during the 1960's Dwellingup region fires. The shire includes Pinjarra, which has a rich history and is where my office is based; Ravenswood; North Yunderup; South Yunderup, with its unique canals on the Murray River; Stake Hill, with its exquisite acreage blocks; Teesdale; West Coolup; West Pinjarra and Whittaker.

The Shire of Waroona covers the towns of Hamel; Lake Clifton, which I have a personal connection with as I spent a lot of time there growing up in the 1970s; Nanga Brook; the tight-knit and welcoming community of Preston Beach; Wagerup; and Waroona.

At the southern end of the electorate is the Shire of Harvey. It incorporates the town of Australind, named as a combination of Australia and India, which last year reached the milestone of 175 years since settlement. Australind has seen a strong population increase through the development of residential estates such as Kingston and Treendale. The shire includes Binningup, a strong beachside community; Brunswick, which has just opened its new Pioneer and Community Wall honouring 17 pioneer families; Cookernup, which has one of the strongest senses of community that you will see in any town and great Wednesday catch-up morning teas at the community hall; Harvey, which has the region's most incredible war memorial; Beela; Hoffman; Leschenault; Mornington; Myalup, another wonderful beachside community; Parkfield; Roelands; Uduc; Warawarrup; Wellesley; Wokalup and Yarloop.

The January 2016 bush fires caused devastation to the communities of Yarloop, Waroona, Preston Beach, Harvey, Cookernup, Lake Clifton and Hamel. The fires destroyed 181 homes, along with the historic Yarloop Workshops and town hall, and, sadly, took two lives. The Ferguson Report outlined a number of recommendations following the fires. Implementing those recommendations will be crucial in reducing the possibility of another fire as catastrophic as this occurring again and I have made it clear to the community that I will fight for this to happen. Nearly a year and a half on, the town of Yarloop is still trying to rebuild, with the primary school reopening this year and families re-establishing their lives. It is important that the people of the community receive the help they need in the long and difficult process of resurrecting their town.

One of the things that makes the region so incredible is its unique environment. The Dwellingup forest is part of the state's irreplaceable jarrah forests and holds historical significance to the local Indigenous population and the Dwellingup community at large. The area is home to a unique range of native flora and fauna, including a number of endangered species. Another key asset to the Murray region is its waterways and wetlands that include Lake McLarty, Lake Mealup and the Peel-Harvey estuary, which is the largest in south Western Australia. The region's waterways and wetlands serve a number of purposes to the area, including agriculture, protecting and feeding native wildlife, and being used as a source of recreation.

There are a range of threats to these waterways, including those associated with water acidification, declining water levels, land clearing and litter. It is of upmost importance that support is given to the community groups that are educating the public about the environmental significance of the region and to the groups that are contributing to the conservation of our environmental assets. It is also vital that Indigenous groups are given the opportunity to show others the cultural significance of our environment. The continued conservation of our forests and wetlands will safeguard our native animals from extinction, allow the region to continue to be further developed as a tourism destination, and encourage recreational activities to continue. We must remember that the interests of industry are inseparably tied to protecting the air we breathe and the water we drink.

Fracking is an issue that many people within the wider community are passionate about. Many people living in regional areas, particularly the south west region, are worried about the impacts that fracking will have on their lives and their environment. The lack of safeguards and assurances of safety, consequences of maladministration, intense use of water, seeping of chemicals, waste and impacts on human health are all concerns that people have made clear in regards to fracking. Introducing fracking into the south west threatens a sum in excess of \$1 billion that the region annually adds to the local economy through tourism, as well as the dairy, beef and wine industries that the region is internationally renowned for. The only way to make sure that our environment is protected, that our health is protected and that our industries are protected is to place a statewide ban on unconventional gas operations. Let us "Lock The Gate" on fracking in WA!

Unemployment and the need for job creation are major problems that the region is facing. At 11.5 per cent, the unemployment rate in the region is nearly twice as high as the state's unemployment rate. Many people are left with no choice but to leave the area to find work, and many that manage to stay travel long distances to make a living, with approximately half the working population employed outside the area they live in. Local jobs and local manufacturing of "Made in Australia" products is essential to growth in WA.

We must ensure government contracts have the right ratio of tradies to apprentices. This is vital to ensure jobs and growth in all regions. The lack of this support is causing a loss of manufacturing jobs in Australia and the opportunity to train our youth and upskill our current workforce to a standard we can be proud of. Apprenticeships are declining due to the lack of job opportunities and the rising cost of training. This has a detrimental effect on our skilled workforce, which in the past has been highly regarded and recognised internationally. We need to limit the quantity of raw materials and resources leaving our shores to be used in manufacturing overseas and bought back as produced goods.

One-fifth of the population in Murray-Wellington are under the age of 14, making high quality education fundamental to the growth and future of the community. The electorate covers 22 schools, 14 of which are public. These schools are all facing different challenges, including limited resources, ageing facilities and both increases and decreases in student numbers. Pinjarra Senior High School, the largest school in the electorate, saw an increase of over 200 students when year 7s were amalgamated with high schools, yet currently does not have any of its own facilities to hold assemblies or host performing arts. Providing aid to these schools is paramount to the overall success of the region.

[Member's time extended.]

Mrs R.M.J. CLARKE: As I previously said, one-fifth of the population in Murray-Wellington are under 14, so there is a need for policies that explicitly address the needs and aspirations of young Western Australians that are not simply welfare provisions. Young Western Australians are more remarkable than many of us in this chamber and are the

greatest resource of this state, yet are hindered by inexcusable unemployment rates, housing affordability and now rising costs of education, which we know to be the surest means of social and cultural mobility. We are losing them to the east and overseas, where they can see venture prospects and an opportunity for usefulness. We must foster an entrepreneurial spirit and keep skilled workers in Western Australia.

Access to efficient and effective health and mental health services is rightly a watermark by which we, as community members, value our state. The availability of health and mental health services will always be an important issue, especially in regional areas where the tyranny of distance compounds suffering, where services are stretched beyond their means and where access to services is difficult—especially for specialist services, such as cancer treatment—or is near impossible for those without financial or familial support. Although we have two limited-service hospitals in the electorate, many people have to travel to Mandurah, Bunbury or Perth for health care. Because of this, a lot of people rely on mobile healthcare services provided by at-risk not-for-profit organisations. Continued government support for these organisations will ensure that these important resources can keep running. The higher rate of instances of mental illness in regional areas is well known, and, for many, is not best served by the criminal justice system. However, the increased difficulty of accessing support and the regional stigma associated with mental illness means that people in the country do not seek or are not able to receive the support they need. We must lessen the burdens.

The state prospers—the Labor Party too—when we propose bold policies designed to improve the material wellbeing of economically embattled voters; when we reach out; when we are responsive and compassionate to the plights of those who have been disregarded, forgotten or hurt by the previous government; when we acknowledge that our political compromises have substantive and meaningful effects on the lives of vulnerable people; and when we lead with research-based best-practice policy and virtuous conviction, and are not blinded by ideologues. Whenever we cannot reconcile on an intractable issue, may all of us be reminded that there is no inconsistency between ensuring jobs growth and protecting workers' rights. There is no inconsistency between growing our industries and defending the environment. There is no inconsistency between a criminal justice system and hope and dignity for those affected. There is no inconsistency between fiscal responsibility and safeguarding social protections.

[Applause.]
