



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Bill Leadbetter, MLC**  
**(Member for East Metropolitan Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 16 May 2017

*Reprinted from Hansard*



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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

**HON BILL LEADBETTER (East Metropolitan)** [5.12 pm]: Who has not awakened on a warm spring morning to the siren song of the cicada? For years it gestates, grows and matures deep underground until finally it emerges and for six weeks sings to the skies, and then it is gone. I joined the Labor Party 19 years ago, and I have done what active party members do. I have been active in branches, I have convened policy bodies and I have run as a candidate in state and federal elections. My political self has gestated, grown and matured, and here I am today as a member of the Legislative Council, and I am here to sing, at least metaphorically. I will not trouble my parliamentary colleagues with my often inaccurate tenor–baritone, but I will speak my words with the zeal of a 19-year-old locust. This is my first speech in this chamber. It is also, formally, my last speech in this chamber. It is a hail and a farewell—in Latin, a language with which I familiar, *ave atque vale*. One of my friends, who is present here, called it my “inaugudictory”. Such is my time in this Parliament, it is a mere shadow, a breath that goes out and is gone.

I begin with an acknowledgement. We stand in this house, in the city, on land that was once entrusted to the charge of the Whadjuk Noongar people. I acknowledge the survivors and descendants of that great nation as the traditional owners of this land, and I pay my respects to their elders—those who have passed by, those who are with us, and those who are yet to come.

With all of us, there is a deep substratum of people who have assisted us in becoming who we are, and what we bring to this place. We all stand on the shoulders of others, rather like that famous woodcut by Abraham Bosse that serves as the frontispiece of the original edition of Thomas Hobbes’ *Leviathan*. We are all people comprised of many other people—those who have raised us, taught us, encouraged us, laughed and mourned with us, struggled with us, and triumphed with us.

I have had, by a great many measures, a fortunate life. I grew up in Sydney, the son of Ruby, who was a teacher, and Arch, who was a policeman and then a social worker. Both my parents worked to meet the needs of others—to create possibilities for them and to keep them safe. After he left the police, my father became a social worker and worked amongst some of the most disadvantaged and marginalised members of our community, again working to give hope, possibility and security. Our house was full of books, music and vigorous conversations. My parents believed in the value of education, and sacrificed much

to give me the best education they could, and I was always expected to go to university. In this, I did not disappoint them, although I might have, in my chosen course of study. They hoped that I would do law, but I chose history. If they were disappointed in that, they did not show it for very long.

I was fortunate, too, to have been born at a time when universities were free. That meant not only that I could go, but also that there were a whole lot of people at Macquarie University, my alma mater, who otherwise might not have been there. Universities were beginning a process—unfortunately reversed over the past two decades—of opening themselves up to working people, midlife women and retirees, all of whom went seeking an education rather than job training. I was a beneficiary of this, as was my wife, who was enabled to attend the University of Western Australia and study medicine, as was her sister, and her brothers who were also able to go to university. My wife’s family, the Norman family—the four children of a policeman who was later an ambulance officer—were all given that possibility once denied to their parents and previous generation. How those people have enriched our community.

I share my parents’ faith in education as a means of personal, social and intellectual improvement. That is one of the key reasons I am in the Labor Party. It is a party of education—the party that opened up universities to people beyond elite private schools and selective state schools; the party that consistently seeks equity in education by establishing transparency and driving reform in funding models. It is to be regretted that the Abbott government trashed the original Gonski funding package pretty much at the first chance it had, and that the Turnbull government has only recently announced that it is developing a new version that still serves, while talking about equity and fairness, to cut overall funding for education. In this context, it is always the poorest who suffer most. The Barnett government prided itself on being a reform government in education through the introduction of independent public schools. But education reform consists of a great deal more than rebranding schools and devolving to them the management of funds.

Actual education reform puts the needs of students first, and that includes a commitment to those most in need of individual attention. Actual education reform ensures that teachers are well prepared for their profession, well supported with resources and assistants, and well respected by students, parents and the broader community.

I was fortunate to have had a mother who was an exceptional teacher with an abiding love for literature—for Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Andrew Marvell and Gerard Manley Hopkins. I had wonderful teachers, too, at primary school and secondary school and at tertiary level. They opened my eyes to the wonders of the world and the glory of the humanities. Above all, they taught me to learn and became the models for my life as a teacher. It has been my privilege, as some members may know, to spend a lot of time in ancient Rome. I was led there by Richard Rowling and Margaret Beattie, Ted Nixon and Edwin Judge. With such excellent guides, I met some truly fascinating people who remain my intellectual friends to this day.

When I was contemplating running for office a couple of years ago, I consulted the Roman expert on this: Cicero. In his study of the Roman state, imaginatively called *On the Commonwealth*, or, more romantically in Latin, *De republica*, he makes a familiar observation: no-one likes a politician. So, colleagues, take comfort that even in the years of the Roman republic 2 100 years ago, politics had a bad reputation. Cicero asked the question: why would a sensible person involve themselves in politics? Why would anyone put themselves through that, when integrity, honesty, and motivation are consistently questioned and impugned? Cicero’s answer was simple: someone has to do it, and it is better that it is someone of integrity, honesty and good motives. We cannot help what people say about us; we can only be true to ourselves. As someone who is a deep believer in the value of a tertiary education, whether trade training or education in a profession, I have a hope, and I cling on to this hope—a dream—that young people in Perth’s eastern suburbs might aspire to attend a university in their own backyard.

In the recent state election campaign, and, indeed, the campaign before that, the Liberals in Midland sought to make much of the establishment of Curtin University's medical school on the site of the former Midland railway workshops. "Look," it was stated and trumpeted in the press, "we have brought a university to Midland"—only if a rind is a cheese or a peel is a fruit. That was a shadow and a shell of a university and will continue to be until real investment is made. We need, and continue to need, a real tertiary institution for Midland, centrally located in the eastern suburbs, to which all young people can aspire and which offers hope to all those who wish to retrain, requalify, or simply grow through learning, and not have to commute long distances to do so. But there is not much point in the foundation of such institutions if students are priced out of their aspirations. One reason that my parents could aspire for me to go to university in a full-fee environment was that Menzies Liberals supported universities through a generous commonwealth scholarships scheme. Now no such scheme exists—just more fees and debt.

Here in Western Australia, the previous state government increased TAFE fees by 510 per cent; that is, they more than quintupled what students were expected to pay for their professional training. Unfortunately, given the parlous state of the budget with which we were left, it will be a long time before those fees can be reduced sufficiently to make TAFE education as affordable as it should be for young people. In the same way, the commonwealth's new round of university funding cuts will price out of the market not only the poorest people, but also people who otherwise could have attended—people who are quite important and gain from universities in a special way, such as mature age people, and many are women. I do not accept that universities can afford these cuts because the cost of course delivery has fallen below the income generated. For the most part, those costs have fallen because universities have increasingly casualised their academic workforce, which has led to both a hollowing out of the academic profession in Australia and a migration of many academics to better supported tertiary education systems in the United States, Canada and Great Britain. For many years, universities were punished for being prodigal; now they are punished for being frugal.

My parents did not just give me a belief in the inherent value of education. When I was a teenager, about to start my first job, my mother said something that has always stayed with me: "Always join the union, my son. It was the union that fought for your wages and your conditions, and it is only the union that will watch out for you." This, I remind my parliamentary colleagues, was from a Menzies Liberal: "Always join the union", and so I always have. When I was a university student, I was an active member of my students' union and was heavily involved in reforming what was then the Australian Union of Students. When I edited the student newspaper *Arena* at Macquarie University, I joined what was then the Printing and Kindred Industries Union, the PKIU. When I became a teacher, I joined the Australian Education Union. When I became an academic, I joined the National Tertiary Education Union—a union of which I am still a proud member.

I am grateful for the work of all those unions and all those like them. I am offended by the trash-talking and demonisation of unions by conservatives in our community. I do not accept any proposition that employers create jobs to benefit the people whom they employ; they create jobs in order to derive a profit from their business. That is not criticism; it is observation. The point of a business is to generate a profit, and that is done by maximising income and minimising costs. Unions protect workers from the dangers that are inherent in that and stand up for safety on worksites, and they should be applauded for that rather than castigated by a conservative commentariat as obstacles to economic growth or fined for doing their job. Not so long ago we witnessed in this country a deliberate judicial attack on the union movement through the Heydon royal commission. There were genuine issues to be addressed, and they were addressed. There were real rorters and thieves to be identified and

about 40 of them were identified from the entire union movement across the entire nation. About 40 people were referred to relevant authorities and to this point there has been one conviction, and still the conservatives, the defenders of bank robbers and tax evaders, continue to pillory the union movement for being self-serving and corrupt. In this respect, a few unions have come in for some pretty heavy treatment. No union, for example, has been more criticised than the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. We regularly heard, especially during the debate on the reinstatement of the Australian Building and Construction Commission, that the CFMEU was a bunch of thugs and bullies who needed to be brought into line, yet it is the CFMEU that is there when people die or are seriously injured in the workplace. When people die on building sites—and they do—it is CFMEU members who bear the brunt of those terrible tragedies, as witnesses, as first responders and as campaigners for justice. I do not condemn the CFMEU for being robust in seeking to protect its members, because it is safeguarding not just the livelihoods of those members but their very lives.

In the same way, we are often told what a bunch of uncompromising militants the Maritime Union of Australia is. Well, of course it is. The MUA has to be militant. The Howard government tried to wipe out that union. I well remember that national assault on a trade union. It happened not long after I came to Perth in 1998. I remember just how militant the commonwealth government was in seeking to crush that union. I remember the dogs and the riot police and the constant attempts to provoke violence. However, I also know that the MUA stands for something more than good wages and conditions. It stands up—it stands up for Australian jobs and for Australian workers.

This is a talk that Prime Minister Turnbull talks, most recently in his pea-and-thimble trick with 457 visas. Yet his government persists in the deregulation of the maritime industry, which encourages the growth of flag of convenience shipping and the export of Australian maritime jobs. At a time when security is tightening internationally in the transport sector, the commonwealth is lifting security requirements. At a time when we need a trained and proficient merchant marine, the commonwealth is exporting those jobs to the Philippines. Who is really doing the job of standing up for the country here? Is it the commonwealth, whose members are sworn to do so, or it is the MUA, whose members are, more frequently, simply sworn at? I applaud the MUA, and I understand its militancy. This is not a sector in which moderation will serve, since it has not been offered either by employers or by their political allies.

It is not very long since the appalling employment rorts in the 7-Eleven franchise were laid bare by the media. For this, we have to thank the tireless efforts of members of United Voice and the SDA. We have here a demonstrated case in which, across a franchised operation, employers have systematically exploited their workers and underpaid them—in effect, stealing their labour. United Voice and the SDA are to be commended, not condemned, for standing up for those workers, and for workers like them who are still vulnerable and subject to abuse.

These are not historic cases. I am not delving into the depths of history here. These are examples from contemporary Australia and recent memory. These stories tell me that the dark satanic mills of William Blake's poem, the age of the workhouse, the sweatshop, piecework and day labour, could so easily return without the steady vigilance of the sentinels of the union movement. My mother was right when she said to always join the union. I am proud to be a unionist, just as I am proud to be Labor. As I have said, mum and dad were both Menzies Liberals, but not so partisan that they would not have set that aside for me. They have both been gone for 25 years, but I feel them with me every day, and I feel, too, their swelling pride in this moment.

I came to Western Australia 19 years ago to teach history at Edith Cowan University. My education in Western Australian politics began almost immediately. Harry Phillips was my office neighbour and I learned much from snatched or long conversations with him, either with me standing in his doorway, cup of coffee in hand, or Harry standing in my doorway, cup of coffee in hand. I also came to know a former member of this place, Bob Hetherington, now sadly departed. It was Bob who first brought me to Parliament House for lunch. It was Bob who first brought me into this chamber to walk through it surreptitiously. I did not think 19 years ago when I first entered this chamber that I would return to it in a different capacity.

Not long after I arrived in Western Australia, I joined the Labor Party. I joined to make friends and to settle into my Western Australian life. My inquiries were welcomed by one of the assistant state secretaries of the WA Labor Party at that time, Bill Johnston, who is well known to members of this place and I am honoured to say is now the Minister for Mines and Petroleum; Commerce and Industrial Relations; Electoral Affairs; Asian Engagement. I am glad he has found time to pop in and listen to this debate. Bill sent me to a meeting of the Perth sub-branch to have my membership approved. The president of that sub-branch was Greg Roberts. Greg Roberts has been my firm friend and supporter ever since in matters both personal and political. It was Greg who initiated me into the ways of the Labor Party and encouraged my entry into politics every step of the way. Together, Greg and I have walked on Roman bridges in France, fished unsuccessfully off Ocean Beach in Denmark, pruned fruit trees, driven the hills of Perth, and, I have to say, eaten countless lunches. It was Greg who stood at my side when I married my wife, Margo. It was Greg who managed me with great diligence—and probably some frustration—during the long campaign for the seat of Hasluck. It is Greg who still keeps me going. If this honourable member seems to be sailing serenely along, it is because Greg is somewhere in the background, making it all happen.

Greg is not, of course, a solo act. He is, for his wife, Michelle, the model of the loyal, supportive and ever-present political spouse. It is along with Greg that I came to know Hon Michelle Roberts. I have had two phone calls that have been life altering, in a good way. Both those phone calls were from Michelle. The first was in 2007, inviting me to join her ministerial office as speechwriter and principal policy officer for heritage. In that office I learned ways to transform political ideals and ideas into the daily reality of helping people and how to seek consistently to make their lives better. In this I could hope for no better role model, mentor and friend than Hon Michelle Roberts. I have now worked for, and beside her, for 10 years. Michelle is a person of deep belief, unwavering principle and profound personal loyalty. She is also immensely generous. I remember when I worked in her ministerial office celebrating a certain birthday with a zero in it. She marked the occasion by baking the most delicious lemon meringue tarts. They remain the best I have ever tasted. At my wedding, Michelle arranged the buttonholes for the groom, best man and groomsmen, and, in a delightful surprise, ensured that every table at the reception was decorated with flowers. The second phone call was in November 2015. I was on Rottnest, about to begin a weekend's retreat, and the phone rang. It was Michelle, suggesting that I put my name forward for preselection for Hasluck. And so a great adventure began that is not wholly over. Throughout that time, she has been stalwart in support, sagacious in counsel, and always ready to help. I am honoured to have her as my friend.

I have made other friends too in that time. One is Margaret Quirk, MLA. Margaret is passionate, compassionate, smart, frank—members know how frank!—and consistently underestimated, and also, I now discover, a great pal to share an office with. Others include Hon Kate Doust, for whom I once briefly worked and with whom I am privileged to serve in this chamber, and likewise Hon Sally Talbot, whose Denmark hospitality is, I think, proverbial.

Elsewhere in the party and in the great cloud of witnesses who surround me, I would add, in the federal sphere, Matt Keogh and Tim Hammond, who have been consistent friends and supporters; locally, Steve Wainwright, who ran my 2010 Pearce campaign; Jean Wainwright, who is a constant source of pragmatic wisdom; and Julie Wainwright, who tried to staff every polling booth in Pearce. If members know the federal seat of Pearce, they will know how hard that is. I also mention John Gangell, who is a tireless grassroots campaigner; Emi Barzotto, my boss first and then my friend, who has a very clear vision and a long memory; Elizabeth Roberts, my style consultant; Mark and Geoff, who put their lives on hold for a time to work in my office; and Luke, Frank, Angela, Sally-Ann, Rachel, Jacob, Leesa, Aimee, Damian and Mikaela and so many others. The list is long and it grows longer the more I think about it.

When I came to Perth, WA Labor was not the only family that I found. After a time, I also became a member of the cathedral congregation of St George. I am an Anglican and I take my faith seriously. It has been the deepest part of me for most of my life, and it is one of the reasons that I stand here in this place and speak. Since I was 19 years old, I have been impelled to work, in all the ways that I have been able, for justice in our community. I find the reason for this best expressed by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in his book *Ethics*; a book he was still writing when he was executed by the Nazis in the dying days of World War II. He wrote —

The hungry man needs bread and the homeless man needs a roof; the dispossessed need justice and the lonely need fellowship; the undisciplined need order and the slave needs freedom. To allow the hungry man to remain hungry would be blasphemy against God and one's neighbour, for what is nearest to God is precisely the need of one's neighbour.

I have learned much from the cathedral, firstly from both of the deans I have known, Rev Dr John Shepherd, AM, and the Very Reverend Richard Pengelley, and from the many good friends that I have made there and, I have to say, continue to make. It was Peter Bedford, now a professor in the United States, who introduced me to the cathedral community, and Catherine Arends who suggested that I make it my home. I shall always be grateful to them for that, and for many other things.

The final two people I wish to acknowledge this afternoon are those souls who make my life complete—my wife, Margo, and my daughter, Maia. Margo is a formidable person and it is a constant source of wonder to me that she chose me to be her husband. Not only does she run a demanding obstetric practice that sometimes requires she leave the warmth of bed at home at 2.00 am for a delivery, but she is also loyal, forthright, generous and, above all, kind. Kindness is a virtue that we are all too short of, especially in public life when there is a craving for the instant critique, the kneejerk cheap shot or the zinger of a put-down. That is not her nature. Her nature is the patience and kindness that she has shown in supporting her aberrant husband's political adventures, whether with wise counsel, financial support or the simple and deeply faithful act, which members will appreciate, of staffing a polling booth all day!

My daughter, Maia, is the most powerful reason I have for doing anything. Although we have lived in different cities since she was five years of age, she remains a vital part of my life. She is now on the cusp of adulthood. I want to ensure in whatever ways that I can that the world in which she lives and moves is morally and materially better than the difficult and cluttered “now” that we currently experience.

It is worth remembering, amid all of the words, that what we do in this place and what is done in every Parliament has a genuine consequence for the material wellbeing of a great many people. It is worth remembering, too, that the opposing sides that we take in any debate here might, in other communities, in other lands, in other times or in other contexts

be the entrenched positions in a more violent conflict. I believe that the first gift that we can give to the future is to preserve and enhance parliamentary democracy, which is what we do instead of civil war and what Westminster Parliaments have done since the restoration of Charles II in 1660. I want the next generation to believe in this funny, wonky and quirky system as much as I do. One challenge for the fortieth Parliament will be the constitution of this chamber since it remains gerrymandered in favour of rural constituencies. I am pleased to see that this matter has already been raised by Hon Bill Johnston in his role as Minister for Electoral Affairs.

Parliaments and governments do good work, but that is obscured by a hyperactive and scandal-hungry media. The problem, for which there is no easy answer, is to build a degree of public trust in the integrity of our institutions. We cannot function as a community if we do not trust the things that are there for our benefit—the police, the legal profession, the justice system, the schools, the teaching profession, the hospitals, and the nursing and medical professions. I want a future for my daughter in which those institutions are naturally trusted and in which corrupt behaviour is regarded as unusual and aberrant. I want a future for my daughter in which she can be whomever she can be, marry whomever her heart beats for, embrace whatever religion she wishes, or none, because no matter how powerful the nostalgia for a past that never was remains, amongst both the mainstream and marginal conservative movements, the multicultural boat sailed a long time ago and it is not turning around. I bless the fact we have a multicultural community. I love its depth and I revel in its joy. One thing I have been able to do in my short time as an MP is attend a number of cultural festivals, and what a boon they are to our broader community. Multiculturalism is about so much more than a wider range of food in food halls. It is about the depth to our shared culture as each community, from our first Australians to our latest arrivals, adds their own history to our common experience, and what we are often accustomed to thinking of as a young country turns out to be very ancient indeed.

For this to continue to work as well as it has, we need to be so much better than merely tolerant. Tolerance is ambiguous and insipid. We need to go higher—to acceptance and to celebration—and we need to remember something that our teachers tried to teach us in school: we need to remember to listen to one another. That is the wonderful thing about this place. It is a place for speaking—in French, *parlement*—and if for speaking, then for listening. In Parliament, we get our best work done in committees when we are actively listening to one another. If we spend all of our time sitting in our quarantined silos, shouting slogans at one another, then neither our political life nor our public institutions will prosper. Rather, they and we will fragment and our community will become a society of competing truths, forever seeking to trump one another rather than learning from one another.

The temptation to open our mouths and close our ears is deep and perennial, and it has become more and more enticing as extremists have flourished and moderation has been spurned. When my daughter Maia was 18 months old the world in which we live changed suddenly and dramatically. The images of aeroplanes flying into the twin towers in New York remain with me, as they do with many people—and I am sure many of you in this chamber. It was an event that changed our world profoundly. It led to wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, to the emergence of Daesh, to the collapse of dictatorships in Libya and Syria, to the stifling of Turkish pluralism, and to acts of random terror, even here in Australia, and even to the tightening of security in this chamber. Make no mistake: the enemy that we face is the enemy of moderation, secularism, pluralism, multiculturalism and human rights. It is the enemy of not only Christians, Jews and secularists, but also Muslims the world over. The best form of resistance to such a foe is to be ourselves; to celebrate a society in which many cultures can form a single community and people of many faiths can pray together for peace. That is the world I want for my daughter, her friends, her sister and her generation.

Mr President, 11 March marked a new stage in the life of our state. Labor's decisive victory heralds, dare I say it, a fresh approach to government in this state. One of the hallmarks of the previous government was that, while it was prepared to put an enormous amount of resources and energy into legacy projects like Elizabeth Quay, Perth Stadium or the rolling disaster that is Perth Children's Hospital, it was not prepared to devote a similar amount of energy to actually running the state. One of the key issues that the McGowan government is delivering on, and doing so early, is to commence the long process of reforming the public sector, a sector that has been permitted by a practice, which I can only describe as maligned neglect, to balloon out of control.

I have to say that I am really excited and impressed by the policy by which Perth Modern School will be taken into the twenty-first century. I know many will feel nostalgic for wood panelling—I can see in this chamber the reasons for doing so—but wood panelling and heritage are not in themselves things that make a great school. Just ask the governors of Hale School who have moved that school twice in its history. What makes a great school is not real estate, but community; that is just as possible in a CBD high-rise as it is in an Edwardian grammar school. I commend the McGowan Labor government and the Minister for Education and Training, my parliamentary colleague Hon Sue Ellery, for this far-sighted policy, and I look forward to the day when Perth Modern will actually be modern.

Moreover, as someone who lives on the fringe of the urban fringe, right at the edge of the city at Bullsbrook, I also eagerly anticipate the day when I can park and ride into the city from Ellenbrook railway station. These are the projects that matter far more to people than a riverfront development with a toxic water park at its heart. I am honoured that even for this brief and shining moment I am a member of a government that will do these things.

Mr President, it only remains for me to wish you well. You have served this Parliament and this state honourably and diligently. You are an adornment to this Parliament and your presence in this chamber has been a steadying influence as governments have come and gone. You have been an outstanding servant of the people of Western Australia and upon your retirement you shall be missed.

This Legislative Council is as old as the colony of Western Australia. Great ones have sat here—indeed, still sit here. It has been my honour to have become one of that number. By next week it shall all be gone; this moment, a treasured memory. Many of my Parliamentary colleagues here will still be here and they will be joined by others. Certainly, this Council will still be here, carrying on the work that was begun in 1829, and so will the need to represent the people of Western Australia in this place. It is a weighty task, but I am sure that the incoming members of the fortieth parliament will be up to it. I thank the house.

[Applause.]

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