



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Rita Saffioti MLA
(Member for West Swan)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 13 November 2008

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Motion

MS R. SAFFIOTI (West Swan) [9.15 am]: I begin by acknowledging the Nyoongah people, the traditional owners of this country. I congratulate the Speaker on his appointment and all the members of this Parliament on their election—in particular, the team of 2008. I also thank the people of West Swan for electing me to the Parliament. It is indeed a great honour and privilege to be elected to public office. I will strive to serve the community well and to promote the public interest.

The seat of West Swan is a new seat, created after the last redistribution. I acknowledge the work and the effort of the former members who have served the area that now forms my seat—in particular, the former member for Wanneroo, Dianne Guise.

The electorate of West Swan covers many communities, including the new suburb of Landsdale; the established suburb of Ballajura; the industrial precinct of Malaga; and housing developments north of the Reid Highway. It covers half of the Swan Valley—the other half about which the member for Swan Hills just spoke—that is, the west side, which incorporates the suburbs of Caversham, West Swan and Henley Brook. Although a new electorate, the area is rich in history. We are told that the Swan district included parts of the territories of four Aboriginal tribes and we understand this land to now be the land of the Nyoongah people. In his book titled *On the Swan*, Michael J. Bourke states —

The Swan Valley had for many thousands of years been one of the best sources of food supplies for the Aborigines of the Swan coastal plain.

...

The lush grasses of its river meadows made it the haunt of kangaroos and other marsupials ...

...

It was precisely these areas from which the Aborigines had obtained most of their traditional foods ...

The valley was also the setting for the 1827 landing of Captain James Stirling. Captain Stirling was on a voyage to explore the Swan River region. He went beyond the mudflats of what is now known as the Causeway and pitched camp at Ellens Brook.

According to Bourke, Captain Stirling described the area in glowing terms, stating —

The richness of the Soil, the bright foliage of the Shrubs, the majesty of the surrounding Trees, the abrupt and red-coloured banks of the River occasionally seen, and the view of the blue summits of the Mountains from which we were not far distant, made the scenery around this spot as beautiful as anything of the kind I had ever witnessed.

While my electorate has a very rich past, it also has an exciting future. The Swan Valley continues to be a source of food in the region, with market gardens, fabulous restaurants and of course the vineyards producing magnificent wine.

The valley has become a tourist destination. It hosts visitors from Western Australia, interstate and overseas on a daily basis. Tourism in the valley continues to grow, with popular festivals and fairs drawing big crowds every year. These events, and the valley's natural attractions, make it one of the most popular destinations for tourists who come to Perth.

As well as serving the community with food and wine, my electorate is also providing new places for Western Australians to live. Significant urban development is about to take place through the Lord Street corridor. A number of new housing developments that will accommodate thousands of new residents are planned for Caversham, West Swan and Henley Brook. The suburb of Landsdale is still accommodating new homes. The Malaga industrial precinct is growing rapidly with new businesses moving to the area every day. An electorate as diverse as West Swan brings with it many challenges. As the member for Swan Hills outlined, it is important to get the balance right between catering for the increasing number of visitors and preserving the uniqueness of the Swan Valley. We need to not only maintain the valley as a great place to live, but also accommodate new commercial ventures.

As many other members of this place have said, the problem of antisocial behaviour is an issue. Hoons on suburban streets and graffiti on public buildings is an issue throughout the West Swan electorate. The electorate is also in need of a greater police presence. I know that a priority project for the police department is to establish a stand-alone police station in Ballajura.

The growing suburbs will need new schools over the next five to 10 years, and older schools will require maintenance funding.

Another key challenge for the West Swan region is to improve transport infrastructure; namely, roads and public transport. My electorate is not that far from the city centre and it contains a major industrial and commercial precinct. However, it does not have a freeway or highway connection to the central business district, making travel into the city centre far more time-consuming than it should be. The east-west connections are being developed by key access roads, such as Gnangara Road, Hepburn Avenue and Reid Highway, but these require further upgrades. My electorate also does not contain a train line or a mass transit system of any kind. Given the size of the electorate and given its proximity to the city centre, this is something that must be addressed. I am glad that the Liberal Party adopted Labor's election commitment to build a new rail line to Ellenbrook. I cannot wait to see it happen. Done correctly, the new rail line will service a large number of suburbs in the north east corridor, including those suburbs in the member for Morley's electorate. In fact, when we stand back and look at the metropolitan rail map, we notice there is one missing spoke in the rail network—that is, a spoke serving the north eastern corridor. With the right route, communities such as Ballajura could be served by a new line. It would also ensure that the new housing developments in the West Swan area could be connected into a public transport system, allowing for better planning and more affordable living in the future. I look forward to working with

the new government on this project. The electorate also requires better bus services into the area. Most of these initiatives would not cost too much but would vastly improve the quality of life of the community.

The former Labor government made some significant commitments to roads in the region. Labor committed to and signed the contract for the extension of Reid Highway from West Swan Road to Great Northern Highway, including the new Middle Swan Bridge. Labor also committed \$72 million to the Reid Highway and Alexander Road overpass, which is an overdue project that will help ease traffic congestion and improve safety in the area. The funding for that project is in the forward estimates. I hope that the project is not consigned to history and that it gets underway soon.

I will work hard to represent the people of West Swan. I want the people of West Swan to be given some priority over the next four years. Simply because West Swan is in the metropolitan area, it should not be seen as a less worthy electorate. I understand the royalties for regions deal and I acknowledge the need to spend throughout Western Australia, but not to the complete detriment of people living in the suburbs. I also do not subscribe to the notion that changing economic conditions means all bets are off for people living in the suburbs. When Labor won government in 2001, the budget was in deficit and the economy was contracting. That is not the case now. We are here to hold the government to account. The Liberal Party made a number of commitments, including the adoption of some Labor commitments. The Liberal Party has made some big spending promises and it has failed to properly budget for the royalties for regions deal. I do not think that people in the suburbs should suffer as a result of this.

I thank the Labor Party for giving me the opportunity to serve in this Parliament. The Labor Party is a great party representing ordinary people. It is the party of the public interest. I know that many people who voted for me on 6 September did so because I was their Labor Party candidate. I hope to continue to serve the party well and to repay the faith and trust that has been shown to me.

I became attracted to politics and the Labor Party while I was growing up. My parents were both post-war migrants from Calabria, Italy. My father was born in a small town called Melicucca. He migrated to Australia in the 1950s. When he arrived in Perth it was a very different place from what it is now. I am glad to be following the member for Swan Hills' speech because I think we have some common themes. My father spent many years helping develop Western Australia by clearing land in Wanneroo for housing developments, building stations along the Armadale and Fremantle train lines, and fencing properties for the pastoralists in the regions. In many instances, as a migrant labourer, he was not treated very well. Yet he had a very, very lucky escape. He and his three friends were offered a job in a mining town—Wittenoom. Fortunately for my father, he rejected that job offer. My dad is here today; sadly, his friends are not. My mother was born in Campoli, where she lived with her six brothers and one sister. She migrated to Australia in the 1960s and was joined over a period of time by her six brothers and her parents. Her sister moved to Switzerland. My mother took jobs in the local restaurant industry and worked as a cook and cook's assistant. My parents met and married, and established an orchard in Roleystone. They still live on that property. I spent many days working on the orchard with my sister and it was during these times that I gained a deep understanding of the philosophies and ethics of my parents. My mum and dad were not political activists, but they taught me many political lessons. When they were growing up, they never had health care and they had limited schooling. They looked on in their respective regions in Italy as some, the wealthier, did what they pleased. The member for Cannington mentioned that Labor people often debate about who was poorer. My mum and dad used to have the debate about whose town was poorer all the time in our household. I think my mum's town won the day, with probably fewer donkeys per capita than my father's town. From my parents I gained my political philosophy: fairness, opportunity, a proper distribution of wealth, and an acknowledgement that

everyone has the right to live on this planet with a sense of integrity, security and economic freedom. These are my beliefs and these beliefs led me to the Labor Party.

As I stated, I grew up in Roleystone. I attended the local public schools: Roleystone Primary School, Roleystone District High School and Kelmscott Senior High School. I attended Curtin University of Technology and did a degree in business, majoring in economics. After graduating, I moved to Canberra to work for the Department of Finance. I then moved back to Western Australia to work in the department's Western Australian office. After that I went to work for the state Treasury department in Perth. I had the opportunity to be involved in many areas of public policy, including the production of federal and state budgets. In 1997 I left the Treasury department to work for the then Leader of the Opposition, Dr Geoff Gallop. Since that time I have worked for both Geoff Gallop and the member for Willagee, Mr Alan Carpenter. I had the privilege to be involved in a number of significant projects and policies of this state. I also had the opportunity to work for not only two great Premiers, but also smart and hard-working ministers and some very professional and talented public servants. Some of the achievements that I believe the former government can be most proud of include the Mandurah and Thornlie rail lines, the Clarkson extension, improved train stations, electronic ticketing—all huge improvements to our rail system; the health reform process; the protection of our forests and Ningaloo; the increased school leaving age; Australia's first major desalination plant and the commitment to the second; and the development of a domestic gas policy. These achievements look even stronger when coupled with the set of books the former government produced: billions of dollars of investment and net debt under control. Most importantly, this was all done without privatisation. I am not a supporter of privatisation. To me it is a lazy option of government. Governments are elected to manage, invest and to serve, not to sell. The outcomes of privatisation are never as good as promised, particularly in the areas of transport and health. Privatisation often leads to higher charges, a decline in services or taxpayer bailouts. The sale of the Westrail freight network was a clear example of this.

I will also touch upon our federal system of government. I am a strong federalist. I believe our Federation fosters innovation and creativity. It allows for our economies to develop natural strengths and diversity. Diversity is not a bad thing. I do not subscribe to the notion that to be pro-Western Australia one is somehow un-Australian or secessionist. Many countries with strong democracies, such as the United States of America, have a strong federal system. The states of America have rich history and proud identities, which, rather than detract from, enhance the nation's character. I feel that Australians are preoccupied with the desire for uniformity. Yes, uniformity is good for business but in the same respect flexibility is also good for business. If a federal industry assistance scheme is abolished, should not a state have the flexibility to step in and offer an alternative? Would we have a gas industry if all the decisions about its development had been left to Canberra? Let us work to make our Federation stronger, and as a state let us gather those benefits.

I am also a strong supporter of our education system. I attended my local public schools and I believe that I was well served by them. I believe that we, as members of Parliament, have a role to support our educators and our schools. In my electorate of West Swan I have a number of public and private schools. I have met with all the principals and have been impressed with their level of dedication and professionalism. I saw committed individuals who care deeply for the children they are in charge of. However, I believe that sometimes we expect too much from these schools. I do not believe that we should either expect or rely on the classroom to be the only vehicle for teaching values and responsibilities in the community. It is impossible to do that. When a problem is identified in society, we tend to try to fix it in the schools. We expect teachers to teach everything: values, ethics, social responsibility, physical fitness, healthy eating etc. The responsibility needs to be more broadly shared. More generally, we need to take some responsibility for our actions. Our natural tendency is to either blame or put the responsibility onto others. We react to issues by trying

to prescribe everything. Governments have a legitimate role in regulating, protecting and caring for their citizens but we cannot abrogate our personal responsibilities.

I am a supporter of creating a more connected and cohesive society. While doorknocking during the election campaign, I was struck by the level of security in people's homes. A number of new members raised in their speeches the sense of isolation people have. I believe that we need to get smarter about how we plan our suburbs and create our communities. We need to create more alive and inclusive suburbs. We need to revitalise and re-energise our suburbs to create a better sense of community and to make people feel safer in their homes. This is particularly relevant for older people in society, who often feel more vulnerable and isolated. One of the tools to achieve that is the enhancement of our public transport system, and another is to better plan our suburbs. It also means revitalising our older suburbs and creating safer suburbs. We need to be better at developing places for our young people to hang out at after school and on weekends. We need to focus on creating safer places where our young people can socialise and get support when they need it. It needs to be more sophisticated than just building a skate park. There are different models out there, and we should apply those models throughout our suburbs.

I want to speak about the future. Western Australia is a great place. We have so much to be proud of. We have the confidence to take on the world, abundant resources and a great lifestyle. We have an exciting future ahead of us but we need to be up to the challenge. Western Australia is changing. We have experienced a growth spurt.

More people are living in our cities and there are more international and interstate workers and visitors. Younger people want to stay here; they do not want to travel interstate to have an exciting life. We need to put forward a positive plan for the future. I believe that the former Labor government had a plan and that the Labor opposition has a plan. Yes, there are always competing priorities but governments must look beyond the next day and to the next generation. Our plan is to build world-class sporting, entertainment and cultural facilities; to create a foreshore development; and continue to modernise and expand our public transport system.

I have heard it said that Perth is not big enough to have a stand-alone museum and that Perth does not experience urban congestion like other cities. I fear sometimes that I have jumped into the DeLorean and gone *Back to the Future*. Prince once wrote a song called let's party like it's 1999. Let us hope the government does not govern like it is 1999.

Before I conclude I would like to thank a lot of people. I thank the previous two leaders of the Labor Party, Geoff Gallop and the member for Willagee, Alan Carpenter. They are people with integrity and honesty who understood and represented ordinary people. They never compromised their integrity or values. I respect them greatly and thank them for the opportunities they have provided me over the past decade. I also thank the many people I have worked with over the years, including Kieran Murphy, Guy Houston and Olivia Crowley, who brought a lot of enjoyment to my working life.

On a more personal basis, I thank my husband, Tim, who has been a great support to me and who took a month of leave to help me during the election campaign. The deal between us was that if I won the seat, he would get to pick a dog of his choice. We did this deal before the Obama deal, I can assure members. Unfortunately, his choice was a Rottweiler called Oscar, who now lives in our backyard, which he has half destroyed!

I thank also Daniel Pastorelli, who managed my campaign, Tristan Cockman, David and Barbara Doepel, Darren Foster, John Carey, Ryan Taaffe and Daniel Smith.

I thank also the other people who helped me on the campaign and on election day, including a cousin of mine who is a psychologist and who worked on a polling booth for the first time. I think he needed counselling after his exposure to the rawness of politics! I thank my mum, Pina, my dad,

Nick, my sister, Connie, my brother-in-law, Denis, and my niece and nephew, Lauren and Matthew. I thank them very much. A better family I could not hope for.

I thank my good friends, Joanne Young, Gabriella Rogers and Michelle Auld. Joanne is in New Zealand, Gabriella is in Sydney and Michelle is in Southern Cross. I thank them for their lifelong friendship and support.

To my extended family, including cousins, aunties and uncles here in Perth, Geelong and overseas who have followed my fortunes, thank you very much. I give a special hello to my aunty from Switzerland, who is in the public gallery. Ciao, Zia.

I will finish with a quote from the recent vice-presidential debate between Joe Biden and Sarah Palin. Do not worry, members, it is not a quote from Sarah Palin! Democrat Senator, and now vice-president elect, Joe Biden was talking about his fiery relationship with the Republicans. He recalled some advice he received after a fiery exchange with a Republican Senator. The colleague told Senator Biden—I wish I could do the accent, but I will not attempt to—“Joe, understand one thing: everyone’s sent here for a reason because there is something in them that their folks like. Don’t question their motive.” I was struck by that comment and I hope that it stays with me. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]
