



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Peter Katsambanis, MLA

(Member for Hillarys)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 16 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 16 May 2017

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.

MR P.A. KATSAMBANIS (Hillarys) [4.30 pm]: Thank you, Deputy President —

Several members interjected.

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: Deputy Speaker—I need to make the transition from one house to the other. It is a great honour and privilege to be standing in the Legislative Assembly of the Western Australian Parliament as the member for Hillarys. I praise God for the magnificent blessings he has bestowed on my family and me throughout our lives. I pay respect to our sovereign and thank Her Excellency the Governor for addressing us at the opening of Parliament. I congratulate the Speaker on his election to the position. I point out that the Speaker and I have three very important things in common: we both have a great name; we both saw the light and moved to this wonderful state from Victoria; and, most important of all, we both support the mighty Collingwood Football Club.

I congratulate every member of Parliament for their election to this place and I sincerely wish the new government the very best because, irrespective of which political party we represent, our first and most important duty is to represent the best interests of all Western Australians. That is what I am here to do and that is what I intend to do for all the time I am here. This may be the third parliamentary chamber to which I have been elected in my life, but my sense of duty and service to my electorate and to our state does not diminish in the slightest with the passing of the years.

The recent election campaign was the toughest I have ever personally been involved in, in more than 30 years in politics. Just like every member in this chamber, I chose to go into politics knowing that politics is a tough game and not one for the faint-hearted, but I did not choose to be subjected to daily vitriolic abuse, to have me and my family threatened and intimidated or to be racially abused. No person in Australia in 2017 should have to explain to their children what “wog” means after they have heard that word yelled at them at a shopping centre by a person who really should know much better.

Everyone else seems to have had their say on the Hillarys campaign except for me and my family. We are expected to grin and bear it, to turn the other cheek and to rise above it all. But I speak up today because death threats, slashed tyres and racial abuse do not belong in any part of Australian life—not now; not ever. I hope no candidate from any party has to endure them ever again. After all, we need more good people to put up their hands to run for public office.

Despite every obstacle placed in my way, I managed to get elected, and for that I owe a huge debt of gratitude to many people. First, of course, I owe it to the residents and voters of the seat of Hillarys. Throughout the long and tough campaign, I was heartened and encouraged by so many local people who would come up to me at community events, shops, sporting clubs and local schools to express their support and encourage me to continue. That is why I am so proud to represent our local area in Parliament. Every single day, I will work diligently to make our area and our state an even better place to live. I will advocate strongly for the things that matter to our local residents and my office door will always be open to listen to them and assist them in any way I can.

A special thankyou in all this must go to my family. My Greek name is not Peter. It is Panagiotis, but in Greek the name Peter means rock. In our family, my wife, Karalee, is my rock and the person who keeps the whole show on the road. She has been an absolutely amazing support to me and I could not have done any of this without her. Thank you, my angel, for everything. The kids—Andrew, Angelica and Zoe—have grown up around politics and their fun-loving nature certainly improves our spirits even on the darkest days. Ross and Nicolette likewise have lived politics for all their lives—more than 20 years now—and to have been by my side at all times in support. My parents, Argyrios and Nicoletta, are the people who have guided me through my life and instilled in me the values that I still hold true today—love for family, thrift and savings, respect for others, and the certainty that the individual who is prepared to work hardest for what they really want will triumph in the end.

I also thank my sister, Rani, and her husband, Peter. I wish them well in the health struggles that they are going through right now. My cousin Ourania Katsambanis, or “Nitsa” as we call her, is like a second sister to me and an indispensable part of our family. She was again by our side in March when we needed her most. My mother-in-law, Diane Tilvern, is a strong local support for us, and, of course, she was the first of our family to move to Hillarys almost 30 years ago.

I could not have got here without the enormous hard work of my wonderful campaign team, and I want to pay tribute to them for all they have done for me and my family. I refer to the campaign chairman, Brent Fleeton, the deputy chair, Daniel White, the members of the Robe River Club and all our tireless field workers; I will try to name all of them. I apologise if I leave anyone out. I thank Nick Warland, Ben Moore, Alex Daniel, Christine Hamilton-Prime, Adam Walker, Jessica van Zwam, Louis Hutton, Ahmed Suliman, Josh Hughes, Frances Herd, Adam Gangemi, Stefan Deselys-Claite, Sharni Cutajar, Tony Brooks, Sarah Panizza, Troy Clayton and Sandy Evangelisti. I acknowledge the great support from the Moore division through Ian Goodenough, Kevin and Sue Fairman, Colleen Bartels, Kate Taylor, Matt Holliday and Michael Strachan. My brilliant campaign officer Jonny Heron was an amazing source of support and advice, as was the Liberal Party campaign team headed by Andrew Cox and Sam Calabrese. I thank all those people.

The Katsambanis clan certainly answered the call and I was really lucky to have my dad here. I was really lucky to have my father, my son Ross and my cousin “Nitsa” all offering their support when it was most needed. I want to thank my amazing Liberal Party friends across Australia, who were only too willing to lend a hand when needed. I thank my old mate Hon Bernie Finn, Michael Hughes, Harry Hughes, Henry Blacketer, Hamish Jones, Frances Henderson, Brent Crockford, James Duncan, Chris Jermyn, and Dylan Pedersen. The solid freedom crew was back in town for another election like they were in 2013. I give extra special thanks to my former upper house leader, Hon Peter Collier, for all his guidance and support, and to my friend and colleague Hon Liz Behjat, who proved once more that she is an absolutely brilliant campaigner. I wish her and her family every success in the future. The ongoing support from Senator Mathias Cormann and Senator Michaelia Cash has been invaluable, as has the political wisdom of Hon George Cash. I must also thank one of

my longest standing friends in politics—Michael Kroger. He has been by my side for more than 30 years and I know I can count on him any time I need assistance or political wisdom. Thanks very much, Michael.

I am a proud Australian but I am also immensely proud of my Hellenic roots. Being Greek and being a Greek Orthodox Christian are intrinsic parts of who I am as a person. I pay special tribute to the entire Greek and Cypriot communities of Perth and Western Australia. They embraced me and my family and made us feel at home within the local Greek community when we first moved here, and they were there by my side during the election campaign. I thank the clergy, the local community leaders and all people of Greek origin who have contributed to so much of this state over many generations and will continue to do so in the future.

The 2017 state election needs to be forever a reminder to the Liberal Party of what happens when we lose touch with our values, and how those values when put into practice are the best values upon which to build a better and more prosperous future for every resident of Western Australia. We must no longer be just a party of government; we must be a party of smaller government. We need to champion lower taxes, rather than just say that we will raise taxes less than the other mob will. We need to cut red tape in a meaningful way so that everyone, from tradespeople and small business owners through to the volunteers at the school fete or the junior sports club canteen, can see a real reduction in the bewildering set of often nonsensical rules, regulations and paperwork that they are confronted with in their daily lives. We do not need to do this for ideological purity. We should do this because lower taxes and less red tape allow people to get on with making a better life for themselves and their families. They inspire businesses, especially small businesses, to grow and create more employment opportunities. More jobs mean that more people get to have control of their own destiny and can proudly provide for their families. Over the past 200 years free enterprise and market capitalism have been the forces that have lifted more people out of poverty than ever before and have built a more prosperous, healthier and better world. As the party for small business, smaller government, lower taxes and less red tape, we should start promoting these values as the basis for improving the living standards of every family in the future. The Liberal Party has a proud record of helping those in society who need a hand due to age, disability or personal circumstances, but we should not build a hammock for those who do not want to pull their weight or subsidise those who simply do not need a handout.

One of the most fundamental things required to build a strong, cohesive and prosperous society is for us to have a sense of safety and security in our homes, our streets, our suburbs and our towns. There is no doubt that today many people, especially the more vulnerable members of our society, do not feel as safe or as secure as they deserve to feel. The causes of crime are many and complex, but, sadly, the consequences for victims of crime are only too familiar. That is why I unashamedly always stand with law-abiding citizens and with victims of crime. I support our police, who do a great job under the most difficult and confronting circumstances. I will never apologise for supporting tougher sentences for dangerous criminals who commit serious crimes, especially crimes that hurt others. I will continue to champion mandatory minimum sentences for offenders at the most serious end of the spectrum, such as murderers, drug traffickers, serious sex offenders and particularly those who commit offences against our children. Although the previous Liberal government made a start by introducing mandatory jail sentences for those who assault police, there remains unfinished business, especially with the most hardened serious criminals in our society, and that includes drug traffickers.

During the election campaign the new government talked a tough game on crime. I sincerely hope it will be tough on crime now that it is on the treasury bench. If it is, I will applaud and support it, but if it is just the usual political rhetoric that is quickly ditched post-election,

I will be right here holding it to task and continuing to stand up for the rights of victims of crime and law-abiding citizens.

Our corrections system, especially our juvenile justice system, is an area in which I would really like to make a difference during my time in this place. We know that most crimes are committed by those who have offended before—the so-called recidivist offenders. We also know that recidivists more often than not start off offending at the lower end of the scale and escalate to more serious crimes over time. Although often dismissed as a pipedream, if we could intervene and put these people on to a different and better pathway early on, we would reduce crime, reduce the impact of crime on our society, have far fewer victims of crime and eventually require fewer jails or detention facilities. The overall benefits to our society are obvious and clear, which is why we should not dismiss attempts to reduce reoffending but, instead, support them and seek best practice. I do not have all the answers in this area and nobody else has come up with a fail-safe solution to stop criminals reoffending, but I know for sure that the answer is not to let more dangerous criminals onto our streets. We will not solve the problem by throwing open the doors of our prisons and letting out offenders who the criminal justice system and our society have already determined need to be in jail. That would be our society's worst nightmare and lead to more crime and more victims. Instead, we need to examine the programs that have been put in place in Western Australia and in other places to see what works and what does not work, and adopt only the best practices that have been proven to give better outcomes. But at all times we cannot lose sight of the fact that keeping dangerous criminals behind bars is the necessary cost of keeping Western Australians safe.

Sadly, when costs and government expenditure are mentioned in modern day Western Australia, the elephant in the room must be addressed. We do not get our fair share of GST. As I pointed out as far back as my first speech in the other place, we also miss out on our fair share of nearly all types of federal funding. I said then that we were approaching crisis point and that unless the matter was addressed, we would need to consider whether the federation was still relevant to us. The people of Western Australia spoke loud and clear at the recent election. They no longer care about the politics, the niceties or the intricacies of GST reform. They are demanding that the problem is fixed immediately and that WA finally get a population-based share. They do not care who fixes it or how it is fixed; they just want it fixed. Right now federal politicians from every state need to stand up and prove that I was wrong in that first speech I made four years ago when I said that the problem with Canberra was not that it does not understand Western Australia, but that it simply does not care about Western Australia. I do not think I need to expand on the pitfalls that will be faced by those who continue with this dismissive attitude.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr P.A. KATSAMBANIS: By getting our rightful share of GST, we will finally be able to genuinely improve the lives of Western Australians. During the election campaign, the people of Hillarys made it clear to me that they were extremely concerned about the opportunities that would be available to future generations. Every parent and every grandparent wants their children and grandchildren to have a better standard of living than they did. That can only be achieved by ensuring that employment opportunities are abundant now and into the future so that young people can be confident that they will be able to find and keep a job, buy a house and start their own family in Western Australia, rather than having to go interstate or overseas. The role of government in providing such opportunities is one of the great political debates of any era, and it has been discussed for centuries, but all the evidence suggests that the best way to achieve a more prosperous society is for government to get the taxation settings right and to let the private sector get on with creating more jobs. When we get our GST back, the first priority of government must be to cut job-destroying taxes such as payroll tax, stamp duty and land tax.

As members of Parliament, we must also look at successful examples of how critical government services and infrastructure can be delivered better and more cost-effectively by the private sector. Joondalup Health Campus, in the heart of the northern suburbs, is a prime example of this. It has been delivering high-quality health care to the people of my electorate, including my family, for more than 20 years. The Productivity Commission uses Joondalup Health Campus as the prime example of how all Australian governments can use the private sector to reduce the ever-growing costs of the health system without compromising quality. Too often it is said that governments are great at repeating the mistakes of the past. It is time they started replicating their successes too.

Back in 2010, my family and I decided to make Western Australia our home because, like so many other people who have settled here in the past decade, we worked out that this was the best place in the world to raise a family. It is a place where people are rewarded for their hard work with a wonderful standard of living and they become part of a fabulous local community. In 2010, we chose Hillarys to be our local community in Western Australia and we soon became an active part of many local groups, including play groups, the Whitford Family Centre, Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club, Whitfords Junior Football Club and Whitfords Junior Cricket Club. As the member for Hillarys, I will remain an active member of our local community, and I am an active part of all those groups and many more, but now I get the extra bonus opportunity to be so much more. I intend to be a strong and effective voice in our state Parliament for residents of Padbury, Craigie, Sorrento, Hillarys and Kallaroo.

Our area is generally seen as relatively prosperous but we have lacked rigorous representation for far too long. This is reflected in a lack of basic state government infrastructure that other places take for granted. Our local schools do a wonderful job and are fantastic proof that independent public schools work to give better education opportunities for young people. However, ageing school buildings at schools such as Hillarys Primary School and Springfield Primary School can no longer be simply patched up. The 40-year-old buildings at these schools need to be rebuilt to allow the teachers and the local school community to continue their great work in modern facilities. For people who live in my local area, easing congestion is critical. Congestion costs their businesses money and, even more importantly, costs them precious family time. Throughout the campaign, locals told me that the mess on the Mitchell Freeway in the mornings needs to be fixed immediately. We need an additional city-bound lane on the Mitchell between Hodges Drive and Whitfords Avenue—and we need it now. The previous government set aside funds for this work to be done and I call on the new government to honour this commitment because it is vital for residents not just in my electorate, but across the entirety of the northern suburbs.

I will continue to campaign strongly for other important local projects, such as lights for sporting ovals so that young people can remain active, and support local early childhood centres that provide a solid foundation for lifelong learning. I will continue to advocate for keeping our local streets safe through important road safety initiatives such as improved intersections near school drop-off points, staying tough on hoons and improving cycling infrastructure. I will also fight to see the stamp duty concessions become a reality for seniors who are downsizing. This would reward our seniors for their many years of contribution to our society and will stimulate our housing market by providing a better choice of accommodation and making housing genuinely more affordable for new home buyers.

Deputy Speaker, today I begin a new chapter serving the people of the Hillarys electorate as their local member of Parliament. I will continue to work tirelessly to make my local area and Western Australia an even better place to live in the future. Thank you for the indulgence of the house.

[Applause.]