



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Mia Davies, MLA
(Member for Central Wheatbelt)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 16 April 2013

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Parliamentary Secretary) [8.32 pm]: Thank you, Mr Speaker, and may I congratulate you on your own recent election. I would also like to start by acknowledging the staff here in the chamber and Parliament House who assist us as we acquit our duties in this place. You have been most welcoming and I thank you for your assistance in advance. I also acknowledge my friends and family in the gallery and watching via the web. It is wonderful to have you here this evening.

I would like to start by saying a few words about the previous member for Central Wheatbelt, Hon Brendon Grylls, MLA. I find myself in what may be a unique situation; the previous member representing my electorate is still seated in this chamber, now representing the electorate of Pilbara. In his inaugural speech in 2001, having been elected to the Parliament in a by-election to represent the electorate of Merredin, the honourable member made the following comments —

As the new member for Merredin, I represent not only the 43 per cent of the electorate who put a one next to my name on polling day; I represent every single person in my electorate, and I will fight for the advancement of every person in this great State. I will represent my most ardent opponents with the same passion as my strongest supporters.

There is no doubt that he acquitted that promise with distinction reflected by his return in 2005, 2008 and now 2013 as the member for Pilbara. He went on to say —

I thank the National Party and its members for the opportunity to represent this great country party, and I look forward to playing my part in its resurgence. This can be achieved only if we look at new and innovative ways of promoting and running the party, and it will be exciting to play a leading part in its change.

The member's strength of character, leadership and dedication to making our regions the best place to live, work and invest are a matter of public record.

As the architect of royalties for regions and the driving force behind a regional development framework for the state, he has struck a chord with regional people across the state, and it has been through his leadership that the Nationals WA have returned the greatest number of members to this Parliament since the early 1970s. This has been achieved in the context of changes to our electoral laws through the introduction of one vote, one value and predictions that he would be leading a party of one. Political commentators have been predicting the demise of the National Party, and the Country Party before it, for many years, yet regional Western Australians continue to support the values and aspirations that bind together the party and the customs of this grand old party—she turns 100 this year—and it is a great honour to be a member of the organisation.

On a personal note, I thank Brendon for his support and friendship and look forward to taking up the challenge of representing every person in my electorate with the same passion he did. On behalf of the electorate of Central Wheatbelt, we thank him for his service. The people of the

Pilbara were right to put their faith in the Nationals and Hon Brendon Grylls, and he will serve them well.

I would like to extend my sincerest thanks to the Nationals and the team that ran our state campaign. What an outstanding result. I would also like to take this opportunity to sincerely thank my campaign team in Central Wheatbelt—a dedicated group with unending patience, dedication and enthusiasm for the task. I could not have asked for a better support network. Thank you for your commitment. To my colleagues who ran on the Agricultural Region ticket—Hon Martin Aldridge, Paul Brown, Jill Sounness, Rosalba Butterworth and Cathie Bowen—thank you for joining us on the journey. We knocked on many doors and met many people. We put ourselves in front of the electorate and asked them to test us, and I am sure it has given me a good grounding to meet the demands of this place. To the many people who volunteered to man the 37 polling booths in Central Wheatbelt, thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I also wish to place on the public record thanks to my parents, Leonie and Dexter, and sister, Emma, for their steadfast support. Mum, who should have been enjoying her first months in retirement, instead pulled on the trainers and walked the streets of the Central Wheatbelt doorknocking in 40 degree heat on some days. It is a credit to you and dad that you have two daughters committed to public service. Both you and your own parents have been the finest role models we could have asked for. In my first address in the other place, I reflected that I had had a privileged upbringing, saying my family gave me the best possible start in life. I did not mean privileged in terms of material goods. It was a safe and loving home surrounded by friends and family with an opportunity to gain a quality education.

The path that led me from Wyalkatchem to the state Parliament was formed by the foundations laid by my family, my teachers and the desire to make every moment in life count. I was raised on the family farm where my father's family were pioneers in the district and are still there today. My mum's family farm in Darkan and Wagin in the southern wheatbelt, and they are still there today. I owe my determination, ambition and strength to my family and the community I grew up in, surrounded by people with a strong drive to contribute and volunteer their time to make our part of the world a better place to live and work. To complete my schooling, I attended a boarding school in Perth and went on to attain a degree from Murdoch University in marketing and the media. Professionally, I have worked in a number of different fields—as policy adviser to the Leader of the Nationals, as an executive officer to the Chamber of Minerals and Energy in the Pilbara, as a communications and marketing consultant and a member of the Legislative Council. I know that these roles, along with other interests I have pursued, have provided a strong foundation for the four years ahead.

I am honoured to stand here as the member for Central Wheatbelt and thank the electorate for their support. I offer my congratulations to Stephen Strange from the Liberal Party and John Watters from the Labor Party for running strong campaigns. There is no doubt that each candidate put their best foot forward and the electorate will be the beneficiary of the hard work that was required to gain their support and trust during the campaign. I give an undertaking to honour this support and trust by continuing to work hard.

The Central Wheatbelt encompasses 53 898 square kilometres, starting at the local government boundary of Northam and stretching east to the furthest boundary of the Shire of Merredin. It covers the north east from Mukinbudin to the south eastern point of Hyden and in the north west from Ballidu to the southern point of Brookton. There are 22 local government authorities and many more towns and localities. Each community has a distinctive identity and history. Despite this, there are many more similarities than differences. The region is defined by the people who have chosen to live, work and invest in what I think is a beautiful part of this world. There is a unique social fabric that holds them all together, draws people in in times of crisis, nurtures our

youth, honours our elderly, celebrates our history and seeks out a sustainable future. There is tradition laced with innovation and modernism, whether it is cutting edge technologies and science applied in the agricultural sector, new industry or the evolution of our small businesses in a global marketplace. Some families, like mine, have called it a home for over a century. I hope many people choose to make it their home tomorrow and into the future.

In these prosperous economic times there is real opportunity for regional Western Australia, particularly the communities in the Central Wheatbelt electorate. With the state's economy and lifestyle driving significant population increases, the region is ideally placed to play a key role in accommodating and capitalising on this growth. We are close to Perth. There are existing key transport and infrastructure corridors. There is land available and we are blessed with fabulous natural assets. I am probably biased but I think we live in a pretty fantastic part of the world. In addition to growing and retaining our own, our challenge is to attract and retain those people who seek to make Western Australia their new home.

I am delighted that the Nationals have been returned to government with the opportunity to deliver another four years of the iconic regional development program, royalties for regions. This billion-dollar-a-year investment scheme focuses the government's attention on the regions. Far from being just a chequebook, it is about how the state prioritises spending and policy in every portfolio across government to the benefit of our regional communities. The existence of royalties for regions demonstrates an ongoing and serious commitment by the state government to the prosperity, growth and sustainability of our regional towns and cities. A billion dollars a year is a significant sum of money. A billion dollars a year leveraged with funding from other sources is even more significant, but then we have significant challenges ahead. There are more people accessing our health system, more children requiring access to education, more cars on our roads and more demand for energy. This rapid and unrelenting growth—not projected, but actual—is a challenge for government now and most certainly into our future. Royalties for regions is certainly not designed to be the panacea for all of these challenges, but in the past four years we have started to tackle some fairly major issues including health, education, housing, communications, child care, tourism and aged care.

In the electorate of Central Wheatbelt, this has been manifested through a variety of projects and initiatives. The \$565 million Southern Inland Health Initiative is delivering more doctors and health professionals, upgrading the bricks and mortar infrastructure of hospitals and nursing posts, installing state-of-the-art telehealth technology and support, driving change through primary health initiatives to better manage our population's health, and planning for our ageing population. There have been upgrades to schools and residential colleges including a state-of-the-art K–12 college in Merredin and a brand-new residential college that is already at capacity. I could not be more excited about the education opportunities this school will offer and provide to families in the eastern wheatbelt.

A number of mobile phone towers have gone up through the regional mobile communications project. We take it for granted that our phones will work here in the city but it is the exact opposite in many communities in my electorate—we take it for granted that they do not work! The program is modernising the region and making it safer by ensuring we are connected to our neighbours, to our major centres and to the rest of the world. This has implications for our emergency services, our businesses, our ability to attract visitors and the general inequity of being cut off from the benefits of access to mobile broadband and phone communication.

There has been support for our community childcare centres—a vital service and one that has become increasingly difficult to sustain as a result of regulatory changes made by the federal government, with little thought to the implications for regional providers. For many operators in my electorate, the royalties for regions regional childcare grant has meant the difference between remaining open and providing a service, and shutting the doors. A flexible approach to

the new regulatory framework is needed or many of the childcare centres in my electorate will be forced to close. This will have a significant impact in each town as parents will be unable to participate in the workforce or access respite. I give an undertaking to work with the volunteers who run these not-for-profit organisations. It is a struggle at times. They are dedicated and passionate about their service and so have my full support.

Royalties for regions has also provided funding for tourism strategies such as the Wheatbelt Way and regional events such as the Avon Valley Vintage Festival and the Avon Valley Gourmet Food and Wine Festival, drawing people through the electorate, highlighting our history, natural amenities and our vibrant communities. There has also been investment in aged-care and respite facilities, such as the expansion of the Dryandra facility in Kellerberrin and the Killara Adult Day Care and Respite Centre in Northam. It is very important to look after the people who built our towns, and most important that they can grow old with dignity, surrounded by their family and friends at a time when they need them most.

There has also been strategic planning across local government areas. The most recent example was launched in Merredin just last Friday by 11 local government authorities in my electorate that have collaborated on an integrated aged-care solution for the central east wheatbelt. We may have a reputation for being a difficult region to service from a government perspective, but, as these local governments have shown, we have the capacity to collaborate and offer solutions that will benefit the region. There has been investment in community infrastructure such as the Northam, York, Bruce Rock and Kellerberrin recreation centres, and they are most appreciated by everyone who lives in those communities. There is the magnificent Cummins Theatre in Merredin, and many, many more.

As we look to the next four years of government and beyond, I see both challenges and opportunities for the electorate of Central Wheatbelt. I will be working hard to ensure the region, and the state, is prepared to capitalise on these opportunities.

The Nationals WA took a \$300 million agricultural policy to the state election. We believe the next big economic opportunity for the state and nation is to position ourselves as the preferred provider of food and fibre to meet the needs of a rapidly growing China and our Asian neighbours. To achieve this, we will require investment in key infrastructure to ensure we can move product to port in an efficient manner, the identification of new markets, funding for research to ensure we are developing produce that meets the needs of our climatic conditions and our end markets, and the investment in the workforce that we will need to service this industry. It means identifying where we can value-add and attract investment to grow the sector.

At the launch of our election campaign in Toodyay earlier in the year, our leader spoke of the changes we have seen in the mining sector since the year 2000. No-one could have anticipated the scale of growth in this sector over the past 10 years. In 2008, 25 per cent of royalties collected by this state government equated to around \$375 million. In 2012, it was more than \$1 billion. The same customers that purchase our iron ore are modernising their economy; they have a growing middle class with a changing diet and a greater income. With investment and support, we can position Western Australia to become a food and fibre provider of choice, but we have to work at it; it will not just happen.

In my electorate, agriculture underpins the economy. We export a majority of what is grown—predominantly wheat and other grains, along with animal products. I will be working to ensure we can sustain and adapt to meet these new opportunities. This does not detract from the fact that some businesses within the sector are suffering serious hardship, particularly in the eastern wheatbelt. Conditions have conspired to create the perfect storm—the high Australian dollar,

successive poor seasons, the impact of policy decisions in relation to live animal export made by the federal government, and a rapidly changing and ever-evolving global trading environment.

I commend the work done by the previous Minister for Agriculture and Food, Hon Terry Redman, to prepare and support the sector towards a sustainable future. I look forward to working with the newly appointed Minister for Agriculture and Food. My electorate depends on the fortunes of our primary producers, and although I am convinced that there is a strong and sustainable future in the agricultural sector, there are challenges in the here and now that this Parliament must remain cognisant of.

Over the past four years there has been a strong focus on the built or hard infrastructure through the royalties for regions program. The Nationals put forward a strong culture and the arts policy during the election campaign. I attended the C.Y. O'Connor Institute graduation ceremony last week, and a discussion with one of the board members reaffirmed my belief that the arts can play a powerful role in community development and wellbeing. It was pointed out to me that many of the students at our training institutes engage or re-engage in formal learning through the arts. Funding for the arts and cultural activities pays dividends in social cohesion and education outcomes, and can deliver economic returns. In particular, in the last term of government, I was thrilled with the royalties for regions funding initiated in 2012 specifically to assist performing arts companies to tour the regions, especially the development of a wheatbelt touring circuit that showcased local talent alongside respected Australian artists in a number of our pubs in the region.

Tourism is another economic driver within the electorate of Central Wheatbelt. Members may be familiar with Wave Rock as a tourist destination; it is certainly a destination for many of our overseas visitors. But for those who have not experienced the beauty of the Avon Valley in a hot air balloon, taken the time to meander along one of our Pioneers' Pathway self-drive tours or tasted the culinary delights of our primary producers, I encourage you to do so soon. Proximity to Perth and welcoming communities provide a strong foundation for future growth in this area.

The small business sector is a significant employer in the electorate and vital to the region's future prosperity. The challenges most often raised with me by the sector are excessive red tape and a difficulty in successfully tendering for government contracts. Improvements to these areas will have a significant impact on the viability of businesses, and the flow-on effect of job creation is vital if we are to retain our young people in the region. At the risk of sounding clichéd, they are our future, and in my electorate they are a valuable and sometimes rare commodity. One of the most satisfying parts of this job is the opportunity to interact with our young people to encourage them to think about their role in society and to learn from them. I have forged great relationships with people and organisations in my electorate that are dedicated to empowering our young people, and I am looking forward to continuing to work with them over the next four years. Likewise, I look forward to working with those committed to the empowerment of the Aboriginal people who call the region home; it is essential that we all take an active role in closing the gap and achieving better outcomes for our first Australians.

That brings me to my final point this evening. We must be prepared to invest in our human and social capital. I hold the view that strategic investment in our human resources has the potential to return the greatest dividend for our region's future. We need to nurture, grow and support current and new leaders across every sector in the region; small business, agriculture, education, health, service industries, government—all of them. This will allow us to continue to proactively shape a future for the region into one of opportunity compatible with our region's assets. Investing our in leaders and the capacity of our communities will allow us to take control of our future.

In concluding, I would like to share with members a quote by George Bernard Shaw that I reflect on often. It hung in my grandparents' kitchen on the farm in Yorkrakine and captures the work ethic and approach to life that I endeavour to lead —

I am of the opinion that my life belongs to the whole community and as long as I live, it is my privilege to do for it whatever I can. I want to be thoroughly used up when I die, for the harder I work the more I live.

In my electorate, in this house and in my duties as a member of Parliament, I look forward to the next four years.

[Applause.]
