

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

**MS L. DALTON (Geraldton)** [3.41 pm]: I move —

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

To His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, 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.

Madam Speaker, I cannot express enough how honoured I feel to be the member to give the reply to the Governor's address. I congratulate you on your new position as Speaker and I acknowledge you as the first woman to have held that position. The significance of this is not lost on me as I, too, have achieved a similar first; that is, I am the first woman to be the member for Geraldton in its 131-year history.

Members: Hear, hear!

**Ms L. DALTON:** When I look around this place, I can clearly see that the 2021 election was an historic and galvanising moment for Western Australia, the Labor Party and women in general. From 1921 until today, only 93 women had been elected to this Parliament, starting with the election of Edith Cowan—only 93 women in the past 100 years. Today, with 13 new women sworn into the Legislative Assembly, that number has risen to 106, and it will rise again to 114 when the new Legislative Council members are sworn in. To add some context to that, Madam Speaker, you were the thirtieth woman elected to this Parliament, and Hon Alannah MacTiernan was only the twenty-sixth. It is my hope that an ever-growing number of women will see leadership as a genuine possibility. My role going forward is to ensure that this place offers opportunities for everyone in my region.

It is appropriate to acknowledge the land on which this Parliament stands. I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we gather today, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and I pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My region is the midwest of this state. It is big sky country—flat plains, endless ocean vistas, sand dunes, blasting winds from ocean and desert and seemingly endless sunshine. It is a region that requires grit and tenacity to succeed. It takes a lot of hard work and determination to come to this place from Geraldton, and one cannot do it alone. My path from the midwest to Parliament here today was forged by my loyal team, family and friends. It has taken me two elections and a huge amount of support from my dedicated group of people to arrive here.

Parliament House is not a place I had naturally considered for myself, but the seed of the idea of being here was planted after a chance meeting with my now friend and mentor, Hon Alannah MacTiernan. Alannah recognised something in me that, until that point, I had not fully recognised in myself. Alannah saw the person standing before members here today—a person committed to her community and Labor values—and recognised those attributes as integral to being a great local representative. I will be forever grateful to Alannah for her encouragement, support and friendship. Thank you.

I would like to thank my family, who are my biggest cheerleaders—my dad, Barry; mum, Annette; and my children, Riley and Keeley. I give a big thankyou to my wonderful partner, Mike, who has supported me, listened to me and most of all loved me through the demands of the campaign. I thank Terrence and Emily for all they do for our family and for coming to the rescue at times of need. I thank my sister, Jane. I really would not be in this place if it were not for her. Her love and fierce protection, honesty and belief in me has kept me focused and determined, and I feel very lucky to have her.

I would like to thank my campaign director, Laurie Graham. He has been a solid, calm influence. Laurie's depth of knowledge and understanding of Geraldton and the midwest region has been invaluable to not only me but also the people of our city. Laurie is retiring at the end of his term and I would like to take this opportunity to thank him most sincerely for his service to the people of Geraldton over many, many years. I wish him and his wife, Heather, the best of health and happiness. It means more time in the garden for you, Laurie!

My biggest thankyou and gratitude goes to the formidable Judy Riggs. Judy was my campaign manager and is my dear friend. Judy is a true believer whose unwavering support and commitment to the Labor Party is inspirational. Thank you, Judy. Your dedication, breadth of knowledge and friendship mean the world to me.

I also thank my small campaign team, Donna Plummer, Geoff Cannon, Sandra Carr and Margie Robinson, for the hours and hours of work they have committed to me and the campaign. I could not have done this without each one of them and I owe them so much of my gratitude.

I am particularly grateful to all my volunteers, friends and the Geraldton branch members who worked so hard to return Geraldton to safe Labor hands. I thank them for their encouragement and support, the doorknocking, phone calling and letterboxing. I thank Rosie for her wise words. When I was having doubts about my capabilities to be a good member, she reminded me what it means to truly represent people and how important it is to democracy and diversity to have people from all walks of life and life experiences be a voice in Parliament.

I thank Ian Bunker, Adam Dusty and Andy White—the faithful three—who put in months of work and were always ready with encouraging words. I also thank Lindy White for hosting the most fabulous election night party ever seen in Geraldton!

I was fortunate to have a wonderful mentor in Candy Broad through EMILY's List. Thank you for your understanding of the trials and tribulations of a regional candidate, your shared knowledge and your good humour.

My campaign, like all others, also greatly benefited from donations, contributions and supports received from various unions, local businesses, individuals, family and friends. I thank them for their investment and belief in me and our campaign and for helping us to make such a great impact.

I also thank the Premier for the leadership he has provided to this state throughout the pandemic and across the last four years, as well as heading up a strong campaign. The Premier and the ministry were frequent attractions in Geraldton, and it is clear from the public response that they put together a compelling plan for Geraldton and the midwest.

To the people of Geraldton, I am humbled by the way in which you have overwhelmingly presented me with the privilege of representing you—thank you. The magnitude of this endorsement is both overwhelming and comforting. I will work hard for you at home and in this house so that we can move forward together and build upon our already vibrant city, which is rich in both opportunity and community spirit.

As I look around this place today—I note the restrictions in place—I am reminded that COVID-19 is part of our every day and I remain grateful to the McGowan government for protecting our state and providing its citizens with a lifestyle and security that other nations wish they had. My heart goes out to those around the world who have lost family and friends to this devastating virus. I wish you all peace and comfort as you grieve.

Geraldton, or “Gero” as it is affectionately called, has always held a special place in my heart. I was born and raised in Geraldton and I have spent most of my adult life there, raising my family. Many members will be familiar with the howling southerlies that blow through the city at the height of summer, but Geraldton is more than just wind; it is rich in history and diverse in industry and community.

Although Geraldton, or Jambinbirri, is the traditional home to Southern Yamatji cultural groups, such as Wiluyu, Amangu and Naaguja peoples, it is now home to many other Yamatji cultural groups, including Widi, Nhanda, Wajarri, Badimaya, Inggarda and Malgana. Additionally, other Aboriginal groups from throughout Western Australia—the Western Desert Martu, Noongar, Wongi, Gija and Pilbara Malpa—now call Geraldton home. The Southern Yamatji cultural groups have a history in this region of Western Australia, stretching back thousands of years and generations, and their rich culture, heritage and traditions are weaved through the cultural fabric of contemporary Geraldton.

I have witnessed the strength and spirit of the Geraldton community many times. I experienced it at a personal level when my father suffered a stroke 13 years ago. The rallying of the community and the wrapping of their collective arms around my family in love and support was truly awe-inspiring. I recently saw it at the community level in the aftermath of ex-tropical cyclone Seroja. Geraldton was fortunate that the winds receded and the storm was downgraded before reaching us. Geraldton incurred some damage and it lost power for several days, but it did not experience infrastructure devastation, unlike its neighbours, who bore the brunt of damage to their towns. I have been immensely proud of the people of Geraldton for pitching in, providing comfort and working together to ensure that our neighbours in Northampton, Kalbarri, Perenjori, Three Springs, Mingenew and Morawa had the support they required.

I have hit the ground running as a new MP, with briefings and meetings and being available to an electorate that sometimes just needs to know that they are not forgotten. Bearing witness to the wonderful work of the Department of Fire and Emergency Services, the State Emergency Service and the Department of Communities, and seeing individuals within those agencies work above and beyond, has reminded me that community takes many different forms. Many people from my community spoke of being stunned by the effective and efficient response from these services, which, at times, seemed to appear like a team of superheroes ready to swiftly come to our assistance. Cyclone Seroja was a reminder that although our good fortune and blessings can alter in an instant, recovery is always possible with a supportive community. Change is inevitable but, thankfully, it is not usually as dramatic as what we witnessed in the past weeks. Compared with the Geraldton of my childhood, Geraldton has changed considerably, largely in part because of the great vision of the Gallop government. Its decision to remove the

railway line from along the foreshore allowed for new development in that area, which beautified the heart of the town. No longer do we look out to see a rail fence cutting off access to the ocean. Instead, we have been able to capitalise on the beauty of the sea. That vision gave us a renewed belief in the possibilities and opportunities in our city.

The busy port of Geraldton, which is situated in the heart of the town, reminds us every day who we are and what industries support us. I am gladdened to see the cargo ships anchored offshore waiting to come into port to load whatever commodity for a particular vessel, whether it be iron ore, grain or mineral sands. The grain silos standing tall behind the port and shadowing the West End remind us of our beginnings as an exporter of grain and the farming community that surround us. The families on these farms play an integral role in our community by attending our schools and patronising our businesses.

The fisherman's wharf and the bustling comings and goings of the fishing industry crew—from the largest providers of rock lobster, or crays, around the world to yellowtail kingfish—are tucked out of view for most of us but they form a large part of our city's industry. These places and primary industries, and the families and secondary industries they support, are iconic organisations and tightly woven into the fabric of the region.

As members can see, the Geraldton electorate is demographically diverse. Through doorknocking and being involved in many community groups and services over the years, I have witnessed that although many of us are living full, healthy and happy lives, many of us are not. Sometimes the divide seems insurmountable. But over the past four years, the McGowan government has worked to bring down that divide and I am so grateful to now be part of a government that keeps working to ensure that the wealth of our state and the opportunities that many of us enjoy are shared with everyone. I will be advocating for Geraldton's government agencies and community services to be as well-resourced as possible so that the people of Geraldton receive the financial, physical and emotional supports that they need and to which they are entitled. In my electorate, I have come face to face with poverty, family and domestic violence and life circumstances that have crippled families. I will be working hard for everyone in my electorate, but I will be working particularly hard for those who struggle and need a little bit of extra help so that they, too, can pursue the abundant opportunities in our city.

I really do feel that we in Geraldton are lucky; it feels like we have it all. We are well-catered for at all levels of education, from pre-primary schools to tertiary institutions. We have fantastic facilities with our hospital, library, museum and regional art gallery. We have a large sporting hub and sporting organisations that have been in existence for several decades that are rich in ritual and history. We have a vibrant coastline on our doorstep and a creative and cultural community that enriches our streets and our minds, but we need to diversify and build upon and harness existing opportunities. I have already been working on the cycle network, tourism and initiatives that capitalise on our natural assets and resources. I know there are many more to come.

This re-elected McGowan government is committed to investing in projects throughout our community that will support and grow our local visionaries. As the member for Geraldton, it will be my privilege to work alongside them.

It is certainly safe to say that Geraldton was a small town when my parents were married at the local registry office in 1969. I came along the following year and my sister, Jane, three years after that. We lived in state housing in Rangeway and attended the nearby Catholic school. My dad, Barry, worked for the Main Roads department as a soil technician. It was solid and dusty work. He spent a lot of time on the road in places such as Mt Magnet and Paynes Find. My mum, Annette, worked as an office clerk and manager. According to her, she was back to work with me tucked under her desk when I was six weeks of age. I do not remember them ever not working. They were—and still are—working-class people who worked hard and loved hard. We did not have a great deal, but my sister and I did not go without. Life was simple. At times it felt a bit hard, but we certainly had love.

Our parents raised us with strong Labor values. My dad loved the Labor Party—he still does—and my grandmother on my mother's side, Julia, was a staunch Labor member. When she was a young woman, she migrated from Ireland with her sister. She married my grandfather Jim, an Irishman, in Geraldton, and went on to raise nine children with her railway worker husband. Life was really tough for them, but that did not stop Julia from working hard for others. She helped out with charities and when the cyclone hit the north west in 1961, she was at the recreation ground preparing food for the evacuees who came down from Carnarvon. I learnt from an early age, sitting at my grandmother's knee, that there is always someone who could use a helping hand. The lesson was not to make you feel better than others, but to be grateful for what you had and to know that you can always spare something of yourself to help out someone else.

My parents and my grandmother have really been the inspiration for me. We lived the values of fairness, compassion, workers' rights and equality. Now that I have the privileged position of being in this place, that will be the lens through which I will look at everything. It guides and supports me and I am grateful for the counsel of the wise people who raised me.

I graduated year 12 from Stella Maris College in 1987 and one of my first jobs was as a children's television presenter on the *GWN Saturday Club*—I was “Lara from Geraldton”—and my role was to make up little stories of things to

do around town as well as to tell jokes that the children had sent in to the show. One of the questions I posed myself whilst drafting this speech was: what is my connection to Geraldton and it to me? It dawned on me that during that period of my life, straight out of high school, I was building my relationship with my community.

Over the years, that connection has strengthened through my different experiences of owning and operating my own small business and my involvement in sporting clubs, not-for-profit organisations and roles on school boards, the Mid West Development Commission and the Mid West Ports Authority have all prepared me for the role of representative. What I realised was that I did not suddenly become a leader or representative: my community and the trust they placed in me over all those years has prepared me to take on this role. I will serve my community with everything I have because I am part of it—and they are part of me.

I have worked for over 20 years in the hospitality and training sector as a lecturer. I have seen the opportunities it can create for people and, most significantly, the importance of a well-resourced TAFE that people are able to afford to enrol in! Having access to this training is vital to our futures, particularly in the regions as it retains and attracts young people to our town who are skilled. Let us face it: there is no point in having a city humming with industry if there is nowhere to get a good coffee!

My journey to becoming a TAFE lecturer started when I was waitressing part time. My son, Riley, was about two years old and I was a single mum and 29 years old. I realised quite early on that the money and the hours would simply not be enough for me to support myself and my son as I would like. I recall a lot of stress and financial strain at the time. As much as I loved the hospitality industry, and it had given me so many opportunities as a single parent with a little boy, it simply would not cut it. I got to talking to a friend of mine who worked at TAFE, and I asked him, “How do I transfer my real-life, on-the-job skills into getting a job there?” I knew the hours would be more conducive to parenting and that it would pay better money. My friend told me how I could earn my qualifications, so I enrolled straightaway with the Geraldton TAFE and I quickly became certified in hospitality and supervision. I was ready when the opportunity arose to apply for a position at TAFE as a hospitality lecturer. I studied hard for that interview and I got the job! To be honest, the thought of presenting lectures and training students terrified me. I had had a lot of experience in training staff, but it had been on the job, not in a formal setting. But off I went, and I did it. Twenty-odd years later, here I stand in Parliament House today, telling you how it was a great job. It gave me so much: stability, security, and professional rewards.

I tell you this story to demonstrate who I am and what Alannah recognised in me when she encouraged me to run for the seat of Geraldton in 2017. I was quite dismissive of the suggestion at first, and I said things like “Why me?” and Alannah said, “Why not you?” Then it came to me, “Yes; why not me?”

We all come to this place from different backgrounds, with different skills and abilities, which is a strength of this Parliament. I look around me and I see lawyers, farmers, doctors, journalists, small business owners, tradies and teachers—people who have worked for a living, people who have fought for the rights of those workers, and people who have served our nation. Whether you come from academia, from the cab of a truck, from the floor of a busy restaurant or the floor of a busy factory, I believe your contribution to civic life is equally important.

I am an ordinary person who seizes opportunities when they present themselves, and I have been thinking: what does it mean to the average person who lives in Geraldton when such notions of delivering a “diverse economic base” are raised, or the opening of the Oakajee industrial estate? Perhaps it means a single mum can support herself and her son; perhaps it means opportunities can be seized by the people of Geraldton.

It is not hard to envisage an epic or even poetic vision of future Geraldton: renewable energy, regenerative agriculture, blue carbon farming, let alone the excitement of renewable hydrogen and the multitude of employment and economic opportunities such initiatives will create. With energy and enthusiasm, together we must build upon existing opportunities and create new ones to attract people to work and live in Geraldton. This means opening industries such as the green hydrogen hub and the Oakajee industrial estate. We boast vast amounts of renewable energy resources, a highly skilled workforce, established markets and strong proven supply chains. I see Geraldton and the midwest uniquely positioned to be a global, renewable resources leader.

Geraldton is on the cusp of being a well-connected smart city that specialises in natural resources and related industries. Industries such as tourism play an increasing role in our economic diversity, with the opening of the Abrolhos Islands being the star in the Geraldton crown and truly connecting land and sea. We are globally recognised for our windsurfing and kitesurfing. Our wind and wave culture is a huge tourism opportunity that we are capitalising on. Word is finally out—Geraldton is the new destination of choice; though we locals have always known that!

These opportunities for varied and diverse industries will pose new challenges, such as retaining that small town feel that attracts many to Geraldton in the first instance, even though we are currently a small city. With the attraction of more people to Geraldton to take up these opportunities comes the contemporary problem of housing and, of course, the other knock-on effects to services and agencies’ resources with an increase in population. These are all

things I am very much looking forward to working on with the relevant groups, because each of these challenges is really an opportunity to create the Geraldton we are all working towards.

Unearthing opportunities for the people of Geraldton to have jobs, to raise families, to stay in town after graduating high school because you can—that is at the core of my task as the member for Geraldton. I am not here to decide what our city grows to become; I am here to amplify and support those who are already building it. My invitation to our community and to my colleagues in this house is: let us work together to take Geraldton into a strong prosperous future!

[Applause.]

**MR D.A. TEMPLEMAN (Mandurah — Leader of the House)** [4.07 pm]: Madam Speaker, I formally second the motion.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman (Leader of the House)**.