



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Matthew Hughes, MLA

(Member for Kalamunda)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

Legislative Assembly

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 16 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 M. HUGHES (Kalamunda) [4.03 pm]: I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we are meeting today and of my electorate, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and pay tribute to their elders past and present. I wish to extend my congratulations to the member for Albany on his election to the position of Speaker and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, and extend congratulations to members from both sides of the house on their election to this fortieth Parliament. I thank the people of the electorate of Kalamunda for supporting the Western Australian Labor Party's promise during the state election of a fresh approach, and in electing me as their member in the Legislative Assembly. It is an honour and a privilege to be standing in this place. I will do my utmost to ensure that I live up to the trust placed in me as the people's representative and reiterate my pledge to work hard for all people in the Kalamunda electorate. I succeed Hon John Day, MLA, who held Darling Range, as it was when he first came into this place, from 1993 to 2008 and then the seat of Kalamunda from 2008 to 2017. This is a significant period of continuous parliamentary service and in my capacity as his successor it is fitting to acknowledge his significant contribution in public life both as a member of the Legislative Assembly and as a minister across a range of portfolios. I wish him well in his future endeavours.

As members will be aware, the electorate of Kalamunda, through its various iterations from 1974 to 1989 and from its re-establishment in 2008, has never returned a Labor MLA—until 2017 that is! I am deeply appreciative of the commitment and work of the grassroots members of the Zig-Zag branch of the WA Labor Party, some of whom are here this afternoon. Over decades, they have remained steadfast and determined to represent Labor's values in the community, providing the base from which my campaign team was able to establish its 2017 election campaign. It is the hard work of the branch members, in combination with the efforts of many other supporters and volunteers in a crazily concentrated three-month period, that has resulted in me standing to deliver my inaugural speech this afternoon.

The Western Australian Labor victory in seats such as Kalamunda cannot be simply attributed to "it was time". It was not simply that the Liberal–National government had held office since 2008 nor that it was tired and in disarray. From its performance in opposition,

disarray seems to have followed it to the opposition benches! Its approach towards people became increasingly arrogant and distant. Post the 2013 election, its record was a litany of broken promises. I know that many traditional Liberal voters in Kalamunda made decisions at the 2017 general election to support Western Australian Labor, because they told me so at every opportunity during the campaign. They were tired of being taken for granted, they were tired of a lack of action to tackle a range of issues in the electorate and they were tired of what they saw as the government's gross mismanagement of the state's finances. The previous government and the local member were seen to have become increasingly cavalier and disconnected from the needs and concerns of the community. Our contract on the government benches is to honestly seek to fulfil the promises made before and during the election campaign. The government values its trust with the people and will not squander it. My personal contract is with the 29 906 Kalamunda electors and their families to be their strong voice in this Parliament with the new government, advocating for the resolution of issues that were brought to my attention as a Western Australian Labor candidate, and now as a member of this fortieth Parliament to contribute to the good governance of the state as a whole.

The local issues that were left untouched were many. There are too many for me to offer in detail this afternoon, but they include the complete lack of available high-needs aged care and the need to ensure that our fellow citizens who benefit from the National Disability Insurance Scheme are not disadvantaged by the WA NDIS agreement. Asbestos-contaminated sites litter the electorate and there are concerns from parents about the requirement for the rigorous management of asbestos in older school buildings. Other local issues include community safety, police response times and crime prevention; clarity about the continuing services to be provided by Kalamunda Hospital and plans for its future; a complete response to the recommendations of the Ferguson report and the need for a comprehensive hills and rural fire strategy; the poor state of the fabric of many of our public schools; the metropolitan region scheme processes used for determining scheme amendments, including the role of local government; environmental conservation, urbanisation and the proposed green growth plan; the need for improved public transport service routes across the hills and foothills; and, not least, the human health concerns related to water quality and greenhouse gas emissions posed by the licensing of unconventional gas extraction by fracking, should it be allowed to proceed. There is much to keep me busy for the next four years.

The electorate includes parts of the City of Gosnells, the Shire of Kalamunda and the Shire of Mundaring. In the changes brought by the Western Australian Electoral Commission in 2015, the electorate lost parts of Maddington and Forrestfield to the west and south west, and gained Hovea, Parkerville, Mahogany Creek, Glen Forrest, Stoneville and part of Mundaring. I have lived in Darlington in the Kalamunda electorate for the last 15 years. I love the place, its tranquillity, its history, and the particular village residential lifestyle that it affords. Darlington shares much in common with the communities across the electorate, but each has a distinct character and flavour that the communities wish to enhance and are determined to preserve.

I came to Australia in 1979, to Fremantle, following the members of my immediate family some eight years after they had migrated to Australia. I was born in 1950 into a relatively poor family in socioeconomic terms in postwar Britain in the industrial part of Lancashire. We lived on a council housing estate. For most of my childhood and into my teenage years, our family of three girls and four boys depended on our mother as a sole parent. The two eldest boys, my half-brothers, left school early at the ages of 14 and 15 respectively. Stanley was apprenticed in an iron foundry, and John started work on the railways. Both, in their youth, helped to keep food on the table and a reasonable roof over our heads.

Although my father, whom my mother partnered after her first husband's death, was not an entirely absent figure during my childhood and adolescence, he did not live with us and contributed little to our upbringing. The little money that came in each week was expended in that week and there was no room for savings. I have a distinct recollection as a five or six-year-old of hiding under the stairs with my mother and younger sisters and brother and having to be very quiet as the rent man knocked and needed to be avoided. But we coped and were no different from many families who struggled to manage at that time. In this context, the schools that I attended and my teachers were strong and important influences in my life that enabled me to marshal my modest abilities and to contemplate a tertiary education. It was the culture of Egerton Park Secondary Modern School, which largely served the council housing estate on which I lived, and the vision, encouragement and prompting of Norman Williams, the headmaster, in the period from 1961 to 1966, that opened up the possibilities for me to proceed into the sixth form at the nearby selective Audenshaw Grammar School, where I completed my A levels, whereas joining the workforce at the end of the compulsory years of schooling was the general rule for my peers.

Mr Williams introduced O level courses into Egerton Park because he recognised that in his non-selective secondary school, many capable students were missed by the selection process at the age of 11 years. As a result, he provided the option, encouragement and support for his pupils to contemplate tertiary education. Without out his vision for his school, my life story would have been quite different. He recognised our disadvantage and used his energy to enable his pupils to see a range of possibilities for their futures and gave us the means to realise them. It was his passion and commitment to improving the lot of his pupils that helped shape my view of the world. He gave me options denied to my older brothers and sisters, and I knew I wanted to be a teacher like him. I know that as a principal he has been my role model.

I began teaching in 1974 at Fernley High School, Melton Mowbray, and then moved to King Edward VII Upper School in the same town the next year. Both were part of the Leicestershire plan that had brought in a system of non-selective comprehensive schools. My first school in Western Australia was the Foothills School, Guildford, which in the 1980s had an enrolment of 120 students in years 8 to 12, but sadly no longer exists. It was established by Hugh Thompson, the founding coordinator, at the behest of a group of families in the hills and foothills who found their children not readily catered for by the local schools. Some were very bright but oddly eccentric, some had degrees of intellectual and/or physical disability and some were simply badly behaved. One student, I learned in my first week, had been expelled from their previous school because they had set fire to a classroom.

I started as an English teacher, but over the years expanded my talents to teaching woodwork, cooking, running and physical education classes, driving the school bus and eventually running the outdoor pursuit and wilderness survival camp for year 10 students. By the end of 1979, there had been a steady turnover of staff, including the acting coordinator, and I was approached by the chair of the school council to see whether I would take on this stupendous role. I agreed on one condition—that I be allowed to stay in the position, warts and all, for two years. I ended up staying for nearly 11 years, leading a team of 10 multi-tasking, very capable teachers. The few disagreements amongst students were resolved by peer mediation and the use of what we called the house meeting—similar to this—where serious matters could be resolved. The calling of a house meeting took precedence over all other activity and, remarkably, they were called infrequently. The result was that in the school, students developed a close connection with one another, developing both self-reliance and acceptance of self and difference in others and the ability to engage with their studies sufficiently well to succeed when previously they had not. Those connections have endured for many and I, now a very old man, attend the annual gatherings where I swap stories with men and women, many of whom are now in their 50s.

My life was enriched by the experience and I developed skills of personnel management and leadership that I was able to translate into a larger and quite different context at John Septimus Roe Anglican Community School, where I must have got something right because I remained employed there for 21 years. In a nutshell, I learned that leadership, to be successful, must permeate through a school with a vision and set of values shared and understood by all the staff, students and parents, and that every member of the community is in fact a leader and that we do not abrogate responsibility for actions simply by following others. The education of a child is the shared responsibility of all the adults who come into contact with the child. The curriculum in that respect is the sum total of the child's experiences. Above all, education is about social engagement and understanding that in "you" I see "me" and understanding that "I" am "me" because "you" exist, and that without the other, there is no self. As Bishop Tutu puts it —

We don't come fully formed into the world. We learn how to think, how to walk, how to speak, how to behave, indeed how to be ... human beings in order to be human. We are made for togetherness ... to exist in a tender network of interdependence.

There is an African concept that captures this sense of interrelated togetherness of individuals in community. "Ubuntu" means "I am because you are". These ideas have steered me as a principal and have informed all the decisions that I have taken with my students, parents, teachers and support staff in the development of John Septimus Roe, with pastoral care at its centre and the wild celebration of diversity in our common humanity.

I became politically aware as a 14-year-old. It was the 1964 UK election and Harold Wilson's emphasis on increasing opportunity within society, particularly through change and expansion within the education system, crystallised for me the evident role that governments could and should and must have in driving social change. It was then that Labour values and the Labour Party resonated with me. It was, for want of a better description, my light on my hill. I saw, as a 14-year-old, that it had been the expansion of the welfare state under the immediate postwar Labour government that had radically altered the prospects for the poor, including mine. I came to the view that the Labour Party was the party of progressive politics, dedicated to the common good and alleviating disadvantage arising from inequality of opportunity. Fifty-three years on, I have had no reason to change that view.

The expanded welfare state in the immediate postwar years and beyond gave me, amongst other social and economic benefits, access to free tertiary education and a student grant to meet my living expenses. In 1968, this support enabled me to embark on an education degree through the University of Leicester despite my mother's lack of means. Between 1964 and 1970, Labour enacted a number of major social changes, including the liberalisation of laws on censorship, divorce, homosexuality, immigration and abortion, and the abolition of capital punishment.

What was true of my experience in the United Kingdom had been true of my experience in Australia. It is the labour movement, the trade unions and the Labor Party that provide the engine room and agency for progressive change for the betterment of the common good. Labor is the architect of Medicare, the superannuation guarantee scheme, the Gonski funding reforms of our schools and, most recently, the National Disability Insurance Scheme.

[Member's time extended.]

Mr M. HUGHES: These are major Labor initiatives that have improved people's quality of life, improved people's security in retirement, and expanded access and opportunity in our community. By contrast, the conservative side of politics resists such measures. It is the labour movement and the Labor Party that seeks to protect conditions of employment and wages while the other side seeks to weaken them. Labor is the party of compassion and a fair

go for all, believing that all people are created equal in their entitlement to dignity and respect and should have an equal chance to reach their potential. Words such as “lifters” and “leaners”, language that seeks to separate and denigrate, are not part of the Labor lexicon. The Western Australian government has a crucial role in bringing about fairness. Social justice is at the core of Labor’s values. It is in our party’s DNA. We believe we should work together as a community to use the instruments of government to channel the resources of the state to help alleviate suffering and hardship and to address exclusion and disadvantage. We do not need to be dragged to that view.

My modest roots are an important part of what makes me who I am and I do not forget those whose circumstances are less fortunate than mine are now. I appreciate that my schooling and the influences of a caring and dedicated group of teachers, coupled with the direct intervention of government in the form of the welfare state, enabled me to have a broader set of choices in what I could do with my life than were available to my older brothers, my older sister and my mother. That is what I aspire to provide for all those who through the accident of birth find themselves materially impoverished, marginalised and excluded. Ms Deputy Speaker, we know that despite the affluence and opportunity afforded the majority of people in our state, far too many of our children are born into intergenerational disadvantage. We know that the gap between the advantaged and the disadvantaged is widening. For many of our children, sadly, theirs is not a lucky country. Our responsibility as decision-makers in this place is always to remember them and to want to make a difference for them.

What did I stand for in this election? I want a better future for all our families than was promised by the previous government. I want a state government that is responsive to the needs of all Western Australians. Christine and I have six adult children—some of them are here this evening—and eight grandchildren. They are young people with young families. We are acutely aware of the pressures placed on families and the cuts to and underfunding of essential services by the previous Liberal-National government. The McGowan Western Australian Labor government has a solid plan promising a solid future for the people of our state. It is a plan that focuses on Western Australia being a modern inclusive society where each Western Australian is treated equally and afforded the same access to services and opportunities in health, where patients are put before profit, and in education, where our teachers and education assistants are valued. Above all, Western Australians deserve Western Australia Labor’s plan for jobs, for reducing unemployment and for dealing with the economic challenges now facing the state. Labor is already realising its plan to diversify the economy with its sharp focus on local jobs for local people, where local manufacturing will be driven through the stimulus of a fully-funded Metronet and the establishment of Defence West, where tourism will be promoted through Brand WA and where we look to growing our export share into Asia. Members of the opposition, this is a promising, bright future.

I believe that good schools are the key to bringing about social change. For disadvantaged children, their schools and their teachers provide what may well be the only stabilising influence in their lives. Good schools are well-resourced schools. The relocation of the state’s academic selective school to the CBD is an exciting project. I hope that in years to come, we can look to ways of creating a means by which students attending the school come from a broader range of socio-economic backgrounds than is currently the case. At the moment it is a leafy suburbs’ place of indulgence. I want kids from Lockridge, Balga and Midland to go there. I want kids from council housing estates to go there, not just those who can be driven there in Daimlers and the like.

Schools generally and, with them, the schools in my electorate, were sadly neglected by the previous government, which cut a total of \$203 million from primary and high school budgets and 1 455 jobs from education—I want to keep reminding opposition members of

that—including essential education assistants in schools. Promises were made in the 2013 election campaign by the Liberal–National parties to improve or replace school buildings, but these were then broken and we were told this was just part and parcel of electioneering—I think I heard someone say! Promises were daringly repeated in the 2017 election campaign using the sale of Western Power to fund them. In contrast, Western Australian Labor will invest in education and provide more one-on-one attention for children. WA Labor will do this by putting 300 education assistants, 500 Aboriginal and Islander education officers and an additional 120 teachers back into WA schools where they should be.

The sterling work of our teachers in the special education centre in Kalamunda—I know that the member for Cottesloe has seen it—that enrolls students from across Kalamunda and adjoining electorates is impeded by less than adequate facilities. Co-located at Kalamunda Senior High School, our teachers of students with special needs and their support staff are limited by inadequate accommodation spread over three levels of the school and with teacher preparation areas established in corridor space. This is simply not good enough. Lesmurdie Primary School and Walliston Primary School are two schools in similar need of care and attention.

My electorate knows that funds are tight and that not everything can be done in a single term of government. But, as we invest in the operational costs of schooling through the needs-based funding given to us by Gonski, equally each of our children and their teachers deserve up-to-date and well-maintained facilities. I believe that the McGowan Labor government will do all it can in the current circumstances to support our schools in their essential work in community building and opening up opportunities for all children, but especially for those with disabilities. I think I have six minutes left. I will keep going.

People want to continue to live and be supported in retirement and old age in the communities where they have made their homes and where they can be supported by their families. The provision of additional appropriately located aged-care facilities in the electorate has been an unmet need for the last 30 years. Specifically, there is growing requirement for high-needs care. The resolution of this issue is the top priority for me and I pledge to the aged in the electorate that I will prosecute this vigorously. Importantly, there needs to be a coordinated, planned approach to the adequate provision of aged care across the East Metropolitan Region as a whole involving the three levels of government in a collaborative process to facilitate both commercial and not-for-profit providers to address the changing needs of an ageing population and to deliver these much needed services to the community.

My predecessor was responsible as the Minister for Planning for the “Perth and Peel Green Growth Plan for 3.5 million”. I want to say this about the green growth plan: although it appears attractive, I suggest it needs much more work as it appears as though there will be a net loss of 90 000 hectares of land earmarked for conservation in the system six report and the Bush Forever plan handed over for development. Estimates would indicate that the green growth plan, as it stands, proposes to protect a mere three per cent of the original wetlands system, 80 per cent of which has been lost since European settlement.

I wish to end, though, as I began by extending my sincere thanks to the host of volunteers and families who assisted in the campaign. Ours was a very short three-month campaign from Saturday, 3 December 2016 to 11 March 2017. I wish to thank particularly Hon Dave Kelly, my astute campaign director; Zita Pal, my determined campaign manager; and Alan McCallum, my long-suffering field organiser, for their consummate hard work and combined efforts in the face of other competing demands on their time. On the ground we were enthusiastically supported by the Zig Zag branch members. I wish to mention in

particular Howard Watts, Chris Brown, John Walker, Marcia Maher, Jess Cunnold and James Martin, who provided the core of our relatively small but effective campaign. I am also very indebted to the extraordinary support provided by Patrick Gorman and the central campaign team, by the broad membership of the trade union movement, but particularly Carolyn Smith and United Voice for their practical contribution to the campaign for Kalamunda and for their great moral support.

I would especially thank our children, Jacob, Amy, Liam, Esther, Carla and Niall and his wife, Natalie; their friends, Annika and Luke Lowery; my sister Susan and brother-in-law Keith Mann; and my niece Lisa and nephews James and David for their strong support. I would also like to extend my thanks to my friends and former colleagues Dr Ken Evans and David Hill who willingly supported me. I am especially grateful for the support and encouragement of my wife, Christine, and her wise counsel throughout the campaign and who, despite undergoing major surgery in the weeks before 11 March, was out before and on election day setting up the coordinated support for booth workers. I am constantly amazed by her tenacity, resilience and capacity for downright hard work. Together, my family and team Kalamunda did the impossible, and here I am.

In conclusion, the new Labor Government has much to do to restore faith in the government of this state. It has made an excellent and purposeful start under the strong leadership of Mark McGowan, and I am humbled to have been given the opportunity to contribute to the good governance of our state. I relish the opportunity to continue actively to engage and work closely with the communities in my electorate that have long felt neglected and have had their needs under-represented. The people of the electorate of Kalamunda have deserved a new approach, have been promised a fresh approach, and they can rest assured that they will get one.

[Applause.]
