



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Pierre Yang, MLC
(Member for South Metropolitan)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 25 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 24 May on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON PIERRE YANG (South Metropolitan) [11.49 am]: Thank you, Mr Deputy President. Congratulations on your election to this high office, and I would like to also congratulate Hon Kate Doust on her election as the first female President of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia.

I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting on the traditional lands of the Whadjuk Noongar people and pay my respect to elders, both past and present. I would like to begin my first speech with the Lord's Prayer —

Our Father, who art in heaven,
Hallowed be thy Name.
Thy Kingdom come.
Thy will be done on earth,
As it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread.
And forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us.
And lead us not into temptation,
But deliver us from evil.
Amen.

Madam President, I thank the people of the South Metropolitan Region and WA Labor for their trust and support in electing me as a member of the Legislative Council. As a matter of fact, my presence here today is pretty unlikely. I am only the second Chinese Western Australian, and the third Asian Western Australian to be elected to the Legislative Council of Western Australia in its entire 186 years of history. Hence, it is an extraordinary privilege and honour for me to be able to speak on the floor of this historic chamber.

Madam President, I am a migrant. I was born and spent the first 15 years of my life in China before coming to Australia as an overseas student. Chinese culture goes back 5 000 years; it puts a lot of emphasis on respect for one's ancestors and seniors and on self-restraint, moderation, family and collectivism. I am proud of my Chinese heritage.

My mother and father decided to send me to study in Australia because they heard that Australia was a beautiful country with a very strong and excellent education system. I must thank my mother and father for their foresight. When I came to this great nation in 1998, as

a person with a non-English speaking background I never thought that one day I would be elected by the people of Western Australia as a member of the Legislative Council. As it has turned out, Australia is indeed the land of opportunity and the land of the fair go.

Some three years after I came to Australia, on 3 September 2001, I joined the Australian Labor Party because I was attracted to its core values. The Labor Party believes in a fair and compassionate society where a fair day's work will return a fair day's pay and the most vulnerable of our community are supported and protected. The Labor Party believes in giving voice to the voiceless and creating jobs for the jobless, and the Labor Party believes in giving people a fair go.

After completing high school education in Sydney and Perth, in 2002, I went on to study law, political science and philosophy at the University of Western Australia. After my study, I was trained as an articled clerk by my mentor, Mr Raymond Tan, for about a year. He spent the next few years training me to be a competent legal practitioner. Mr Tan helped me tirelessly and patiently to improve my verbal and written English skills. I owe Mr Raymond Tan and his wife, Ms Annie Sim, a debt of gratitude. Without their support and training, I could not have set up my own practice in 2013 and become self-reliant. During my 10 years in the legal profession, I mainly practised family law and frequently dealt with violence restraining order cases. I experienced firsthand how inadequate the system can be when it comes to protecting the most vulnerable. In one extreme case, the former partner of a woman breached the VRO protecting her more than 200 times. She was genuinely fearful for herself and her children's lives. I believe the system should be more responsive and more efficient in protecting the most vulnerable.

I mentioned previously that Australia is the land of opportunity and the land of the fair go. I was not only accepted to study law and later welcomed into the legal profession, but able to join the Australian Army Reserve as a general service officer. I must admit that at the beginning, it was not easy. During the early part of my training, some doubted how a Chinese immigrant who could not even speak English properly could possibly be of use to the Army. Lieutenant Colonel John Fisher and Sergeant Max Doogood were willing to give me a go at the very critical junctures of my Army Reserve time. I thank them for their trust and faith in me, and I am glad that I did not let them down. I also would like to thank Lieutenant Colonel Mike Stewart, Commander Michael Pounder, Major David Graham, Major Shaun Fenn, Major John Liston, Captain Jim Patterson, Captain Brenton Just, Captain Jo Harper, Captain Demelza Newlove, Captain Charlotte Woollard, Lieutenant Matthew Papalia, Warrant Officer second class Callan Ford, Sergeant Matt Erkens, Sergeant Marc Drew and Sergeant Peter Darch and many others for their friendship and support during my Army Reserve years.

I served in the Australian Army Reserve for more than 10 years. The Australian Army is one of the most egalitarian and multicultural institutions I have ever been involved in since my arrival in Australia. The Army's four core values—courage, initiative, teamwork and respect—are instilled in me. The Army has changed me forever. It trained me to be a leader, to be a more resilient and a more resourceful person and, in the end, a better person. I am very glad that I have served Australia and my fellow Australians on Operation Southern Indian Ocean and contributed to the effort for the search of the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370.

I would like to thank the good people of the City of Gosnells. I began living in Langford in 2005. We are blessed with many good neighbours. We experienced firsthand that the people of the City of Gosnells are happily living together in a multicultural community. The annual Multicultural Food Fair in Langford, which is organised by the City of Gosnells, is attended by thousands of people, and more and more attend each year. After living in the

City of Gosnells for eight years, in 2013 I decided to put up my hand to serve my local community as a councillor. Of the 25 candidates in that election, I was elected with the third highest number of votes. I thank the 5 358 people who put their trust in me. That number never escapes my mind. With their support, I became the first East Asian-born councillor for the City of Gosnells. I believe that result is a testament of the people's support for multiculturalism. I would like to acknowledge Councillor Olwen Searle, the Mayor of the City of Gosnells, and former Councillor Ron Hoffman for their friendship and mentoring during my time as a councillor.

I would like to thank the WA Chinese community. In particular, I would like to thank Dr Edward Zhang, JP. I met Dr Zhang shortly after I arrived in Perth. He advised me, encouraged me and supported me on my journey to become a parliamentarian. Dr Zhang is like an uncle to me, and I am privileged to have known Dr Zhang. I would like to thank also the following people from the Chinese community for their encouragement and support: Ah Hong Lai, Eddie Kwah, Fei Zhi, Xu Yi, Wang Xiaoxiang, Lin Xiang Pei, Ben Pan, Huang Fengzhuo, Tom Wang, Fang Yun, Kevin Zhang, Tim Song, Leon Zhu, John Hong, Bruce Sun, Mark Sun, Yang Qun, Lv Liang, Yuan Jianwen, Zhang Ting, Simon Yan, Lin Zi, Qian Guiyuan, Zhou Wei, Peter Zhao, Herbert He, Wu Ming, Sophia Tang, Ding Shaoping, Chen Ting, Su Li, Sun Xiaoxing, Yolanda Wang, Yuan Haobo, Chen Jie, Fan Linqun and many friends of mine in the Chinese community.

The Chinese community has existed in Western Australia since the early 1800s. In the nineteenth century, there were two waves of Chinese immigration to this great state. The first wave of Chinese immigration was mainly indentured coolies, which literally translates as hard labourers, who were organised by the colonial government in the 1840s and 1850s. The second wave of immigration happened in the 1880s and those Chinese were mainly free settlers who set up small businesses such as market gardens, Asian grocery stores and laundries. At its peak in the nineteenth century, Chinese were the second largest non-Indigenous group in Australia, but the overall proportion of Chinese in the total population barely passed three percent.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, community support for Chinese migration, which was originally built around economic reasons, gradually lost momentum. Many pieces of legislation were passed by this very Parliament with the aim to limit, among other ethnic groups, Chinese migration. For example, the Act to Regulate and Restrict Chinese Immigration 1886 imposed a limit on how many Chinese a ship could carry into Western Australia and how much poll tax Chinese had to pay before entering; the Goldfields Act 1886 excluded Chinese from obtaining any licence to operate on any goldfield; the Chinese Immigration Restriction Act 1889 required all Chinese and only Chinese who intended to enter WA to obtain a permit beforehand. Legislation that did not specifically refer to Chinese people was also used to disadvantage the Chinese in practice. Such legislation included the Sharks Bay Pearl Shell Fishery Act 1886 and the Immigration Restriction Act 1897. At Federation, these sentiments culminated in the commonwealth Immigration Restriction Act 1901, which was one of the first pieces of legislation passed by the new federal Parliament. This act marked the beginning of the White Australia policy. In the following decades, Australia gradually moved on from the White Australia policy and eventually abolished it. Multiculturalism was adopted as its official policy in the 1970s. Forty years on, Australia is the most successful multicultural nation in the world.

I believe that mutual respect is one of the fundamental pillars of multiculturalism. It is human nature to be fearful of the unfamiliar and the unknown. But instead of being fearful and resentful towards unknown and unfamiliar cultures, Australians have shown great warmth and respect to all newcomers. Australia and Australians have done so much more than merely

tolerating immigrants. In my humble opinion, tolerance is not the right word to describe the relationship between communities and cultures. Immigrants are not only tolerated; we are embraced and accepted as equals by our fellow Australians. In comparison with the Chinese Western Australians who lived here a century ago, I am lucky to live in a modern Australia that is inclusive, harmonious, generous, respectful and multicultural. This is to the credit of my fellow Australians and I am proud to say that I am an Australian, too.

Multiculturalism is the right way for us to move forward as a nation, a state and as a people. Our Lord has created us in his image. We are of many diverse ethnicities and it is his wish that we look the way we look. We should follow his teaching to love and care for one another, irrespective of the way we look or the colour of our skin. Like Dr Martin Luther King Jr, I also have a dream. I dream that when my two young children and all children of today grow up, they can live in an even fairer and more respectful society where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin, or their ethnicity, but by the content of their character and deeds. I will do all I can to strive to achieve that dream.

Talking about multiculturalism, no party supports multiculturalism more than the modern Australian Labor Party. I have the greatest admiration and deepest respect for Gough Whitlam, Bob Hawke and Paul Keating, who were instrumental in the establishment of multiculturalism in Australia. The Labor Party advocates for the dreams and aspirations of everyday Australians, including new Australians. The Labor Party believes that all Australians deserve a decent life, and its deep support for social equality originated from the labour movement and was later heavily influenced by the traditions of Catholicism. While on this topic, I would like to thank Father Timothy Corcoran, the priest at Thornlie Sacred Heart Catholic Church, who brought me to the Catholic faith many years ago. The more I learn about Catholicism, the more I realise the similarities between the Labor Party's values and the Catholic traditions. I am proud to be Labor and I am proud to be Catholic.

I would also like to especially acknowledge Carolyn Smith, the secretary of United Voice. Carolyn is a great friend and has been a great inspiration since we met many years ago. She is a person of great integrity and talent and I thank her for her unwavering support for multiculturalism and diversity in politics.

I also would like to thank Mark McGowan, Sue Ellery, Roger Cook, Alannah MacTiernan, Steve McCartney, Christy Cain, Simon Mead, Chris Tallentire, Amber-Jade Sanderson, Terry Healy, Mark Reed, Sheila McHale, Yvonne and Ray Omacini, Jack and Mary de Groot, Brian and the late Agnes Wright, Emma Roebuck, Sarah Seymour and many, many others for their friendship, help and guidance over the years.

I would also like to thank those who have helped me during my campaign: Patrick Gorman, Lenda Oshalem, Caitlin Goddard, Sarah Keegan, Alyesha Anderson, Matt Kavanagh, Kay Hallahan, Marion Boswell, Yew Han Hee, Judy Zhu, Simon Wu, Bruce Zhang, Mickey Sun, Chris Chen, Liang Xiao, Kevin de Souza, Wang Jia, Tom Beyer, Kevin Drake and the hundreds of people who supported me and volunteered their time during the campaign.

Without the help and support of those I have mentioned, I would not be standing here today.

Australia is known as the Lucky Country and many of us are doing very well in this free country. Yet, some are doing it very tough. More and more Australians have become homeless and it is estimated that over 105 000 Australians are homeless on any given night. This is a real human tragedy, especially so because Australia is one of the richest countries in the world. I am passionate about fairness and social justice and I am proud of the Labor Party's achievements and history on these issues. One of the first things I did after knowing that I was elected as a member of the Legislative Council was register for the

St Vincent de Paul Society's 2017 CEO Sleepout. I have donated to Sleepout for many years but I hope by participating in this year's CEO Sleepout, I can help to raise more awareness about this very sad social issue and to make a small contribution. We, as a nation, will be judged by the history of how we treat the most vulnerable among us, and we parliamentarians are duty-bound to do more.

All people are created equal. I am especially proud that Mr Mark McGowan and WA Labor promised to expunge historical convictions for LGBTI people convicted of crimes that would not be illegal today. Now Labor has been elected and Mr McGowan is our new Premier, I look forward to being a part of the legislative process which will carry through that commitment.

If all people were created equal, it should be self-evident that in a modern democracy all votes should be given the same weight when voters are selecting their representatives. However, a non-metropolitan vote for the Legislative Council at the 2017 state election was weighted, on average, at three times that of a metropolitan vote, and some non-metropolitan votes are worth almost six times. Hon Dr Geoff Gallop, AC, once said —

It does not make sense either logically or ethically to establish the right of a person to vote and then diminish the value of that vote in relation to the votes cast by others.

Hence if you believe that all people are created equal, you have to believe it all the time. Electoral reform about the method used to elect members of the Legislative Council is needed in order to achieve that equality.

Having lived in China for the first 15 years of my life and then in Australia, I hope I can put my experience in both cultures to good use and help to foster, in addition to the strong trade relationship, a better people-to-people and culture-to-culture relationship between Western Australia and the greater Asian region.

Last, but not least, I would like to acknowledge my beloved wife. Although having little interest in politics, Hazel has always been willing to help the Labor Party and me. She started letterbox drops and volunteering her time for the party soon after we began our relationship some 13 years ago. She even stepped up to be a booth captain on 11 March 2017. It is not easy for my wife to look after our two boys—Pierre Jr, who is five years old, and Malcolm, who is two years old—by herself, as I was often absent from home. The good thing is we now have two extra volunteers who have already started letterbox drops for the party! I feel so privileged that I have always had Hazel's fullest support in whatever I have pursued and I will strive to earn her continued support and trust. I also would like to thank my extended family for their help and support, especially my parents-in-law, my mum, my cousin Nick and his wife, Joyce.

Madam President, Confucius once said (correction: it was said by Lao Tzu) —

千里之行，始于足下

That means: a journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step. I am ready to serve the people of Western Australia and the journey begins now.

[Applause.]