



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Liz Behjat MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan)

Budget Debate

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 16 June 2009

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ESTIMATES OF REVENUE AND EXPENDITURE

Consideration of Tabled Papers

HON LIZ BEHJAT (North Metropolitan) [8.29 pm]: Mr President, I congratulate you on your election and I look forward to working closely with you over the next four years as I strive to make a positive and worthwhile contribution to the people of Western Australia as one of their elected parliamentary representatives. I also congratulate Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm on his election as Deputy President and Chairman of Committees and look forward to working with him also. I pass on a huge vote of thanks to the Clerk of the house, Mr Malcolm Peacock, and the Deputy Clerk, Nigel Lake, and all the other officers of the Legislative Council for their expert advice and guidance during our induction sessions and the first sitting weeks, which has ensured that the new members have not made complete fools of themselves straightaway. No doubt, in some instances, that will come later and be of our own making.

I do not know whether I can fully express in the time allotted to me what it actually means to me to have been elected to this house and what an honour it is to stand here today introducing myself as an elected representative of the North Metropolitan Region. I thank the electors for entrusting me with their votes.

TRIBUTE TO FORMER MEMBERS OF NORTH METROPOLITAN REGION

Before I proceed to introduce myself to the house, I will take this opportunity to acknowledge and pay tribute to two former members of the North Metropolitan Region who have both served this house and, indeed, the state of Western Australia in an exemplary manner over a number of years. I refer, of course, to Hon Ray Halligan and Hon George Cash. If it had not been for the retirement of these two esteemed gentlemen, I would not be standing here today, so, for that, I thank them, but the state of Western Australia owes both of them much more than my thanks.

I long admired the energy and enthusiasm with which Hon Ray Halligan undertook his duties, especially in the area of participating strongly in and advocating for a large number of the ethnic communities and organisations based in the North Metropolitan Region and throughout the state. Ray served as shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests for a number of years. It was a role that he undertook with great pride and professionalism. The welfare and wellbeing of migrants and the advancement of ethnic interest groups is a subject that I am particularly interested in. If I can make a contribution in that area that comes even close to that of Ray Halligan's, I will be very happy. I also know that Ray made a great contribution within the Parliament, serving on and chairing various committees from the day he was elected in 1997 right through to the expiration of

his term last month. I wish him well in his future pursuits. I will not say “in his retirement” because he will, I am sure, still make a valued contribution to public life in his future endeavours.

With regard to Hon George Cash, it is with much pride that I claim him as a friend, mentor and close confidante. He was a colleague and friend of my father’s, the late John Williams, who was a member of this house for 18 years. I will speak more about dad later, but for the moment I will pay tribute to George and thank him from the bottom of my heart for the advice and guidance he has given me over the years, particularly in the past 15 months when I made my decision to seek preselection for the 2008 state election. I have a very deep fondness for George and have valued the experiences we have shared over a long time. Growing up as a young Liberal in the 1970s and 1980s, George was also an enthusiastic supporter of our causes. I know that a number of my friends who have gone on to serve in Parliaments both here and in Canberra hold George in high regard and still seek out his guidance and counsel today, and will continue to do so for a long time. In fact, George returned to this place only days after his retirement to conduct a most worthwhile session for the newly inducted members of this house. To all new members I can wholeheartedly recommend that they take the time to read George’s valedictory remarks and take good note of what he said about the workings of this chamber and the Parliament in general. We all have a lot to learn. Without my own father here today to give me the advice I would seek about political life, I am lucky to count George as one of my friends and, in some ways, my surrogate father. Again, I will not wish him well in retirement, but wish him well in his future pursuits, which I know will be many and varied. Thank you, George.

I also mention George’s daughter, Michaelia, who is today an extremely hardworking and popular member of the Australian Senate, representing Western Australia in the federal sphere. It is evident that the apple has not fallen far from the tree and the comparisons that are made between Michaelia and George are inevitable, but I know they are both very proud of their achievements and neither would mind being compared with the other. Michaelia also gave me invaluable advice and support in the months leading up to my election, for which I sincerely thank her. She is certainly her father’s daughter.

FAMILY BACKGROUND AND EARLIER WORKING LIFE

Now let us talk about me. As I alluded to earlier, I have a keen interest in the welfare and wellbeing of migrants and ethnic communities in Western Australia. The main reason for this is that I am a migrant with a proud Welsh heritage and I am married to a migrant, an Iranian, whom I met whilst I was living in England and he was in France. The story of how we got together is a story for another time. We were married in Amiens in France and we both came to live in Australia in 1992. In 1994 my husband became an Australian citizen. I had taken citizenship with the rest of my family in 1975. Our son is a first-generation Australian.

The most recent statistics from 2007 show that a large proportion of people living in the North Metropolitan Region, well over 55 per cent, originate from Europe. Without doubt, the largest of these groups has an Anglo Saxon-Celtic background, and this is the group to which I belong. Although my parentage is Welsh, I was born in England. Perhaps today it is not politically correct to use the term ten-pound Pom. I do not see it as a derogatory phrase, and it is exactly what I am. I was reminded by my sister a few weeks ago that it was mum and dad who paid the £10 and the three kids came free, so in reality I suppose it makes me a freeloader, and some would say, “Quite appropriate for a politician.”

I apologise if I offend anybody by using the phrase “ten-pound Pom”, but honourable members will come to learn over the next few years that I do not always do or say what is politically correct because I sincerely believe that we have gone overboard in the politically correct arena in recent

times and we need to return to a time when commonsense and mutual respect automatically prevails, without compulsion or legislation being necessary.

I came to Western Australia on board the *Castel Felice*, arriving on 6 July 1966 as a seven-year-old with my family—mum and dad, my older sister, Bronwen, and my younger brother, Rick, both of whom are in the gallery tonight. I remember our arrival at Fremantle most vividly, especially the excitement amongst all the children on board, when we first saw the lights of the city that was to become our home. The novelty in the very early hours of that morning soon wore off when we realised that in order to go through the necessary migration, quarantine and other sorts of checks, we had to stand in alphabetical order. Being the Williams family, we were waiting in line for quite some time. Apart from being a traditionalist, it is probably one of the reasons I took my husband's surname when we married because now I am a Behjat, and the Bs are always up there in the front!

Thank goodness times have changed, and today migrants arriving in Australia are processed in a much more timely and welcoming fashion, as long as they arrive using the legal channels available to them. Unlike many of our fellow passengers, we did not have to go to Graylands Migrant Hostel, for which I am extremely thankful, having visited families who did go there. We were fortunate to have relatives already in Perth who arranged a house for us to move into straightaway. It was, however, a great source of amusement to us children to learn that the house was in a place called “Innaloo”, a suburb name that for obvious reasons has always been a constant source of amusement to visitors and young children alike. Today I am very proud to say that Innaloo is part of my electorate and I am very happy to represent the good folk of that area. It is something that I certainly did not dream about back in the 1960s when I attended North Innaloo Primary School, which today is known as Yuluma Primary School. I have very fond memories of my primary school years at that school. The rest of my formative years, from 1971 onwards, were spent growing up in Floreat Park, and I attended Churchlands Senior High School for most of my high school years, after one year at Scarborough Senior High School.

I have over the years worked in several different areas including the law as a paralegal specialising in conveyancing and commercial law; in the racing industry working in a thoroughbred bloodstock agency; in the hospitality and gaming industry in Tasmania and Perth, where I was the pre-opening coordinator and guest services manager of Burswood Casino. For the past 11 years I have worked as an electorate officer for several federal members of Parliament. As members can see, I have had a varied and quite diverse career path, which I believe will stand me in good stead for this new chapter of my working life.

FEMALE REPRESENTATION IN THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

But why the Legislative Council? In 1971, my father, John Williams, was elected to the Legislative Council as a representative of what was then the Metropolitan Province. That entire province is today encompassed in the North Metropolitan Region and I am incredibly proud to say—those members who read “Inside Cover” this morning got the scoop—that I am led to believe that I am the first Liberal Party woman in Western Australia, if not the whole of Australia, to represent the same electorate as did her father. It is a badge of honour that I am very proud to wear. I know dad would be extremely proud of me if he was with us today. As a 12-year-old I sat in the public gallery, where a number of my friends are sitting this evening, and thought that one day I would like to sit down there in one of those big red chairs. Today is the fulfilment of that dream and words cannot describe the immense pride and humility I feel at this moment.

Today I join a small group of Liberal women who have been and still are fortunate to serve as members of the Legislative Council. Since the formation of the Council there have been a total of 334 members, and of that number only 38 have been women, and of that 38 only 11 women have come from the conservative side of politics—and I am one of them. I know that that is not a great

number, but I am proud to say that our numbers are growing and that we have achieved this, through the Liberal Party preselection process, on our own merits and not subject to any tokenism or affirmative action, as may be the case in other political parties. Although we lost one of our Liberal women at the last election with the retirement of Hon Barbara Scott, to whom I also pay tribute, we have gained two at this election, namely me and Hon Alyssa Hayden from the East Metropolitan Region. It is interesting to note today that the East Metropolitan Region is represented by five women members; the token male representative of the region, Hon Jock Ferguson, who sits on the other side, is therefore in very good company! With the male to female ratio of the house now standing at almost 50-50, we are in for some very interesting times.

VIRTUES, VALUES AND EDUCATORS

As I said previously, my family's early days in Australia were exciting. It was fun growing up in a neighbourhood full of kids in a time when it was safe to run around the streets and local parks without our shoes on and without the fear of treading on a hypodermic needle or of being abducted or assaulted or exposed to "stranger danger". Growing up in those days a stranger was just a friend we had not met yet; sadly we cannot say the same thing today.

There has without a doubt been an increase in violent crime in recent times and I know that law and order is a huge issue in the electorate. I am pleased to be part of a government that intends to address these issues. I do not intend to expand on this area today because the problems are probably larger than the time allotted. I will be working closely with the Attorney General and the Minister for Police to make a positive contribution in the months and years to come. But change cannot be brought about by legislation alone; there has to be a change in attitudes as well.

The Huckleberry Finn idyllic childhood has been missing from our neighbourhoods for many years, but I am pleased to say that slowly, in some areas, especially in the streets where we live, in Madeley, there has been a return to the games of street cricket and tennis, and to children playing safely in their front gardens. I think the revival of playing out in the street with friends could be due in part to the welcome return of some of the old-fashioned values, such as respect for elders and peers—values that seemed to have been lacking in the latter part of the twentieth century. If the attitudes and deeds of the generation to which my 11-year-old son belongs are anything to go by, we are starting to see definite change. Attitudes are changing.

I am encouraged by some of the programs being run in our schools today, such as the Virtues Project, which I am familiar with through my son who attends Ashdale Primary School—a government school in the suburb of Darch, which is another great area of the North Metropolitan Region. Each fortnight, the students, under the guidance of their teachers and their peer support groups, concentrate on learning and practising one of the virtues from the project. The virtues are too numerous for me to list today in total, but examples include caring, compassion, consideration, diligence, enthusiasm, honesty, humility, humour, loyalty, justice, unity, and so the list goes on. In fact, when I was looking through the list to prepare for today's speech, it struck me that the virtues that I have just mentioned are ones that we as members of Parliament should adopt and adhere to—especially when it comes to the way in which we frame legislation and deal with each other during our debates and deliberations. I highly recommend the full list of virtues to all members and I am happy to pass it on later as compulsory reading if members wish.

Some members may think it is an indictment of parents today that it is our teachers who are teaching our children virtues, and not the parents themselves, but perhaps some parents were not brought up this way and they in turn will now be learning from their children—this is not a bad thing. I pay tribute to all those who have taken up the vocation of teaching. I affirm that they are a precious commodity charged with the education of our future generations and I know that they all undertake their commitment to their vocation with the utmost of pride and professionalism. I know that I still

think fondly about a number of my teachers from my schooldays and I thank them for the values that they, together with my parents, helped instil in me.

In today's hectic and electronic society we must ensure that we carry forward those old-fashioned values such as good manners, respect and caring for each other. These are the values that we must all hold dear, no matter what avenues we pursue in our daily life. If we do not maintain respect for ourselves and our fellow Australians regardless of creed, religion or colour, what hope have we got of maintaining the peace and the fantastic lifestyle that we all enjoy today?

MIGRANTS AND ETHNIC COMMUNITIES

The lifestyle we enjoy is made richer and more interesting by the influx of the many ethnic groups that today form the diverse community to which we all now belong. It began back in the 1940s and 1950s with the Italian and Eastern European migrants fleeing post-World War II Europe looking for a fresh start. They brought with them their traditional values, love of family and of course the skills and work ethic that saw much of the Osborne Park-Balcatta area of the region quickly transformed into the market gardens and small businesses that flourished for a number of decades. Of course, they also brought with them the wonderful cuisines of their regions and if there is one thing that Australians have embraced wholeheartedly, it is the food and cafe lifestyle that our climate lends itself to so well.

The 1960s and 1970s were not only a time for the ten-pound Poms to arrive, but the late 1970s also brought to our shores the Vietnamese fleeing an oppressive regime; unfortunately, the violation of human rights in Vietnam continues today. I acknowledge the tireless efforts of two people from my electorate, Hieu Tran and Dai Nguyen, whom I was lucky to come to know through my immediate-past employer, the hardworking federal member for Stirling, Michael Keenan, when he advocated, along with these men, for members of the Viet Tan who were imprisoned by the communist regime. Once again, people in this ethnic group brought with them family values and a strong work ethic and they continue to develop the market garden industry, which is still going strong today. A visit to the Wanneroo markets, again in the North Metropolitan Region, on any weekend gives testament to this.

In more recent times we have seen the arrival of people from the Middle East, the Horn of Africa and India. All of these groups are making a new home for their families whilst passing on to our community their diverse languages, cultural histories, cuisines and skill sets. Western Australia can only become richer for the contribution made by all of these groups. However, it has long been recognised that these different ethnic groups need support from the government in order to not only keep alive their heritage and traditions, but also assist them to integrate into Australian society. It is vitally important that we allow these groups to maintain their own cultural identities, but they must also be recognised as fellow Australians—not just by them becoming citizens but by acceptance by the community and integration into the Australian way of life. Funding for programs offered by the various ethnic associations to assist in migrant integration has been, up until the election of the Barnett government, a bit of a hit and miss affair and it was the squeakiest wheel that seemed to get the most oil. There also appeared to be a lack of accountability for funding received and criticism was levelled at the leadership of organisations that often seemed to have their own personal agendas for advancement and often promoted their own views before representing the views of their membership.

Under the guidance of the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Interests, Hon John Castrilli, we have seen long overdue reform to the way funding is delivered to ethnic groups through the advent of the Ethnic Organisations Fund. It is clear to the government that multicultural communities themselves clearly want change. After a series of extensive consultations, the funding model has been developed to allow triennial rather than annual funding, which gives the various

ethnic groups more time to get on with delivering their programs instead of having to continually focus on applying for funding each year. These changes have been welcomed by the majority of ethnic community groups and are seen as a positive step to assist in the empowerment and advancement of these ethnic groups, something that has been lacking over the past decade. I look forward to working closely with the minister and all ethnic groups in the electorate to deliver the best possible outcomes to help them become more at home in our community.

LIVING IN THE PILBARA

One of the great things about being a member of the Legislative Council is that we are able to use all of our life's experiences to add value to our deliberations and decisions concerning the lives of all Western Australians, not just limited to those in the metropolitan area. This brings me to the part of my story that is about the Pilbara, a place that I hold dear for a number of reasons. In 2005 my husband took up a posting with the Australian Customs Service in Dampier, and we were very happy to fully embrace the wonderful lifestyle that can be enjoyed in towns such as Karratha, where we lived. We were very lucky because housing was provided to us at a very reasonable cost as part of the deal. I am fully aware that affordable housing for those who work in areas other than large mining companies and government departments is at a premium, but it is something that I am glad to say is being addressed by our current government in a number of ways. We were originally meant to be in Karratha for three years but we stayed for only 15 months. Our time was cut short for a couple of reasons but the main one was that due to a lack of medical facilities and associated support for families, we were unable to get the treatment required for our son for what was a relatively minor medical problem—minor if one lives in Perth but disastrous if one lives in the Pilbara. We made the only decision that we could and that was to return to Perth. We were lucky because we had the choice. However, many families living in that region cannot make the choice. We need families to stay in the Pilbara. It is incumbent on us as a government to make it better for them. I was delighted to see significant funding committed to the upgrade of Nickol Bay Hospital in Karratha in the most recent budget. No doubt the royalties for regions program will continue to deliver better services in all of those areas in the coming years. I was speaking with friends in Karratha recently, and they are excited about the future under the Liberal-National alliance.

DEVELOPMENT PLANS FOR THE NORTH METROPOLITAN REGION

I do not bring to this place any fantastic blueprints, plans or grand schemes for the future of Western Australia. I will leave that part to others more qualified than me. However, I am certain that under the guidance and with the foresight and planning of our current Liberal government, I will be able to contribute to the groundwork that will see some wonderful advancements and developments made to both the physical and social infrastructure that will improve our already great way of life. I am extremely excited about the plans to sink the railway line in the centre of Perth in order to join the city to Northbridge. The future for this area is exciting and will certainly help breathe life into an area that can only currently be described as an eyesore in an otherwise beautiful city. I am also excited about plans to develop the foreshore of the Swan River, not in a fantastic or futuristic way as mooted by the previous government but in a way that is in keeping with the relaxed, laidback lifestyle that we cherish here in Perth. I would certainly like to see more places for families to gather and recreate but I would also like to see us develop more than just a Ferris wheel and a belltower to encourage tourists to come here and spend time at or on the Swan River. We need more casual dining and accommodation that utilises what the area has to offer. As the City of Perth is contained within the North Metropolitan Region, I will save more detailed discussions of future plans for another time.

I am also looking forward to developments that will be put in place along the coastal areas of my electorate, in particular, redevelopment of the Scarborough waterfront area under the care and

guidance of the hardworking popular member for Scarborough, my colleague from the other place Liza Harvey. The proposal for the Ocean Reef marina development is also exciting and one I know that Albert Jacob has worked diligently for in his previous life as a councillor for the City of Joondalup and now as the member for Ocean Reef. All these developments will be good for residents and tourists alike. Ours is a vibrant state that needs to move forward in the way of development whilst remaining conscious of the fragile ecosystem along the coast, but I think we can achieve this through collaboration and cooperation between the various interest groups.

GRATITUDE, THANKS AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

What I do bring with me today is a sense of immense pride, gratitude and anticipation. I am proud to be a member of the Liberal Party, proud to be part of the Colin Barnett government and incredibly proud to be a member of the Legislative Council. The gratitude I feel is firstly to my parents John and Sylvia for giving me a wonderful start in life and to my sister Bronwen, brother Rick and their spouses James and Sue, who together with their children and my husband and son make up a family that is full of love, laughter, guidance, friendship and the occasional squabble; gratitude, secondly, to my friends, many of whom are here tonight in the gallery, and in particular, I mention my dear personal friends, Kim and Penny Keogh, Wendy Gillan and Rachael Turnseck, Liza and Hal Harvey, Betty and Jack, Mark Trowell and Chris Lawford. Thank you for being my friends and for keeping me grounded and in touch with reality, something I hope you will continue to do well into the future.

I express my thanks and gratitude to the members of the Liberal Party who sat on my preselection committee and who were willing to listen to my request for them to be bold and to choose a representative who may not have been the one they originally had in mind. I promise not to let them down. Special thanks also to Danielle Blain, Robyn Nolan and the Liberal Women's Council. Their support is much appreciated.

I would also like to pay tribute to two federal members of Parliament whom I previously worked for. I am very proud to say that I worked for the former Senator Chris Ellison and the current member for Canning, Don Randall. To Chris and Don, both of you have played a pivotal role in my journey to this place and I sincerely thank you both for your guidance, friendship and encouragement in seeking my own political career. Thank you also to the members of the Stirling division of the Liberal Party, my home division, especially Marie Grout and Anne Johnson, both wonderful women who continue to amaze us all with their enthusiasm and drive, especially when it comes to elections and fundraising activities. I also acknowledge Hon James Clarko, a former Speaker of the Legislative Assembly who is here tonight and who was a great friend of my dad and one of my referees for preselection. Thank you, Jim.

I make mention of my staff—my electorate officer, Lisa Yarwood, and my research officer, Mark Davidson, who have made the leap of faith to join team Behjat. I thank you for the commitment you have shown already and I hope that ours is a long and happy association.

There are so many more people that I could thank but time does not permit, and I am frightened that I would leave someone out. One of the drawbacks of being a migrant and married to a migrant is that at times like this not all of your family and friends can be with you. Tonight I send a special message to everyone watching on the internet in England and Wales, especially my great Uncle Arthur—everyone needs an Uncle Arthur—and to my dear friends and family in Nashville and Iran. I love you all and wish you were here.

THE MOST IMPORTANT BIT

I have saved the most important bit until last. To my wonderful husband, Reza, and my darling son, Ali: without the unfailing and unconditional love and support that you both give to me, none of this would have been possible. You are both my treasured loves and I thank you for believing in me. I promise in front of all these witnesses tonight to never lose sight of the fact that you are the most important people in my life and that without you I am nothing. We are on this journey together as a team and I love you both very much.

Finally, the anticipation of what the future holds is enormous as I embark on this latest journey, which is a fulfilment of a lifelong ambition. I promise that I will faithfully serve the people of Western Australia as their representative in this place for as long as they will permit me. I look forward to a long and happy association with you all. Thank you.

[Applause.]
