



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Dr Jagadish Krishnan, MLA

(Member for Riverton)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 6 May 2021

Reprinted from Hansard

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 6 May 2021

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 29 April on the following motion moved by Ms L. Dalton —

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.

INTRODUCTION

DR J. KRISHNAN (Riverton) [9.11 am]: Good morning, Madam Speaker. I am so proud to stand before you all as the member for Riverton. Let me first of all acknowledge the traditional owners of the land, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I am acutely aware that I am addressing the chair in historically auspicious circumstances. Congratulations on being elected as the first female Speaker of the house, Madam Speaker. I am proud to be serving under you in this house. With your permission, Madam Speaker, may I say a few words in my mother tongue.

Hethaiamma Arulnoge, Hiriodayyana Asirvathanoge Jana seve maduthuga sikkitha vaippuga Kodana Kodi Nandri.

In my culture, Madam Speaker, we pay respect to our elders, and that is what I was saying in my mother tongue. I come from the state of Tamil Nadu in India. In that respect, I would also like to say a few words in Tamil.

Yaadhum Oore Yaavarum Kelir.

Three thousand years back, a poet, Kaniyan Pungundranar, said, “Yaadhum Oore Yaavarum Kelir.” The meaning of that is, “Any place is our place. Any people are our people.” He spoke about unity and diversity 3 000 years ago.

COMMUNITY

I am really proud to be representing Riverton, which is the most multicultural community in the state. At this juncture, I would like to thank the contribution of the previous member for Riverton, Dr Mike Nahan. In conversations with many people in Riverton, I came to know that he had served the electorate to his fullest ability. Although we do not agree with each other on our political views, one thing that we agree on is making Riverton better. I wish him good luck and I hope he has a safe and happy retirement.

I was born in a town called Kotagiri in the Nilgiris District in the state of Tamil Nadu in India. It was a huge transition for me to move from India to the UK and then to Western Australia, eventually making WA my home. During the process, I have had the opportunity to connect with various communities. I have always respected my connection with the elderly community. I have been welcomed by the Indian and Chinese communities here in Western Australia.

Reprinted from Hansard

I have dealt with people, starting from newborns to adolescents to young mothers, and with many sporting communities in the electorate of Riverton, and I am looking forward to working across the board in serving the community in the coming years.

EDUCATION

Education is close to my heart for many reasons. As a kid, when my dad took me to the doctor, who was the most qualified person in the town, I went into the room and said, “Good morning, doctor. How are you today?” That made my dad so proud. He was going about town saying, “My son can speak English.” Today, I am sure he is more proud that I am addressing the Legislative Assembly of Western Australia. My parents had a big dream of providing me with the best education possible. There were reasons for their aspirations. My mum could not continue her schooling beyond year 2 because she had to care for a cousin of hers so that her aunt could go to work to put food on the table. My father lost his father when he was aged one and a half. He was brought up in his maternal uncle’s house. It was not the same as his own house. At the age of 15, after year 10 he had to give up his education because he felt he was obliged to contribute towards the income of the family. But that did not stop my parents from contributing towards giving me the best education possible in the world. I am thankful to them today.

I would like to mention their names. My father’s name is Krishnan Bellie and my mum’s name is Saraswathi Krishnan, and she is mainly known as Pachiammal—my community recognises her as Pachiammal. I can remember the days when my mum was sitting with me, though she had studied only up to year 2, when I was studying late in the evening. I remember the days my mum was repeatedly ironing my school uniform and repeatedly polishing my shoes to make sure that I went to school spick and span. I am very thankful to them for contributing towards my education.

I am really proud to say that I am very fortunate to represent Riverton, because the people of Riverton have education in their DNA. I am proud to say that I represent an electorate that has three schools, two public, one private—Willetton Senior High School, Rossmoyne Senior High School and All Saints’ College—that are all topping the tables in the state over and again. People move into the electorate to be able to provide the best education for their kids, like my parents did for me. I am very fortunate and proud to have made a commitment of \$12.5 million to Willetton Senior High School and \$35 million to Rossmoyne Senior High School and also to primary schools towards STEM education. I know that the people of Riverton are very proud to be providing the best education to their kids. Being a medical educator and Adjunct Associate Professor at Curtin University and a medical educator at Notre Dame University and the Royal College of General Practitioners, I very often see medical graduates coming through from either Willetton Senior High School or Rossmoyne Senior High School, which makes me even more proud. I look forward to the next four years, with the help of our Minister for Education and Training, Hon Sue Ellery, and under the leadership of our Premier Mark McGowan, delivering on the promises that we made to schools and continuing to fight for the people of Riverton.

HEALTH

My background is in health. I graduated from JSS Medical College in the city of Mysore in the state of Karnataka, India. I am very proud of that college and its teachers who taught me the basic values of medicine, which were more valuable than the clinical skills that they taught me. I started as a GP in my hometown, serving my community and its families. I had the great opportunity of working in a remote area of India that had basic facilities yet trying to provide the highest quality of care for the patients I cared for.

It was a huge transition moving from India to the United Kingdom. Strange things happen in people’s lives. On 7 July 2005 something happened that caused me to wake up at 1.30 in the morning. I have never done this in my life. I started ironing my clothes for the day. I had a shave. Maybe that was the reason I left a little bit early that morning. When I reached Wimbledon train

station, I was told that a bomb had gone off in Central London. I escaped that bombing by a few minutes probably because I left home a little early. In the aftermath of that bombing, I saw an efficient health system that worked effectively for people in need. I was proud to be part of a management team, working as a senior health officer in public health, in the South West London health authority. We were in charge of St George's Hospital and Mayday Hospital and managing the aftermath of that day.

When I moved to Australia I started my career as a GP in Byford. Day and in and day out, my work involves dealing with people's problems. It is my duty to find out what people's issues are and to also find solutions to their problems. Now, in my new role, which is a little different, I am sure I will be providing a holistic approach to finding solutions to problems in my electorate.

I am proud to say that I have been part of a management team that has been managing two COVID-19 clinics—namely, the High Wycombe Respiratory Clinic and the Alexander Heights Respiratory Clinic—and providing COVID-related services to the people of Western Australia. I am proud to be joining the team that has managed the pandemic in the best way in the world. My sincere thanks go to the Minister for Health, Hon Roger Cook, who is the architect of the management plan of the pandemic. The whole world is looking up to Premier Mark McGowan and at how well the pandemic has been managed in WA. I am thankful to him on behalf of every Western Australian.

SMALL BUSINESS

I was fortunate to be a small business owner in 2010 and owned my first practice in South Lake. I took so much pride in looking after my people, be it doctors, nurses, cleaners and all staff involved in running the practice. With that experience, I empathise with the mum-and-dad small business owners who have the courage and commitment and who work hard to make things work. We all acknowledge the difficult times that small business owners have been through during the pandemic in the last year. I am confident under the leadership of our Premier Mark McGowan all small businesses will come out the other end stronger and better.

WOMEN

This house has a lot of unique things about it, especially in regard to women. It is 100 years since the first woman was elected to this Parliament; the 100th female member elected to the Parliament is the member for Hillarys, Caitlin Collins; 50 per cent of members in the house are women; and we now have the first female Speaker of the house. I also want to acknowledge Hon Kate Doust, President of the Legislative Council, who has been my mentor and friend and is the first female President of the Legislative Council.

In these circumstances I would fail in my duties if I did not speak about the women in my life. I have been fortunate to have lived with four generations of women in my family.

The first is my grandmother. Her name was Rukkiammal, born to Mooka Gowder. She was so proud of her father. She became a widow when my father was one and a half years old. She decided not to get married again, but cared for her family. I remember the days when I would come back from school in my suit and tie and my grandmother would have returned from the farm, full of mud and dust. That did not stop me from giving her a hug. I thank her for teaching me the values of hard work, being humble and taking every opportunity to help people whenever I can.

The second generation of women in my family I want to mention is my mother. She still regrets today that she was not able to study further, but there was a time when I insisted I sit with her to make sure that she could sign her name. Today she can. I thank her for everything that she has done to make me who I am today and so that I can be standing here before you.

The third generation of women I want to mention—I hope you all have guessed—is my wife, Yaamini. She is a doctor. She is a great woman in herself. I have no shame in accepting that she is my better half. We have been through good times, bad times, all times; she has stood with

me every time. When I had to quit my job because I was preparing for exams to qualify to go to the UK, she was the single earner. Maybe it was in my culture, but I was hesitant to approach her and ask her for money for my petrol and out-of-pocket expenses. She realised this and would put money in my shirt pocket, which pleasantly surprised me and made me emotional as well. When we were living in London we rented a single-bedroom apartment. I was so scared to break the lease because I did not want to pay for two rents. In that one-bedroom apartment, she occupied the bedroom with my kids and I was left to sleep on the couch—for months. The house was not big or luxurious, but it was home. It made us feel comfortable and united as a family. Maybe one small benefit from that is she had escaped my snoring and slept quietly in the bedroom.

[Member's time extended.]

Dr J. KRISHNAN: I thank my wife for standing with me in my most difficult times; I am sure she will stand with me until the end of my life.

The fourth generation of a woman I would like to mention is my daughter. During my campaign a lot of people asked me how I was going to be able to manage being a parliamentarian and my multiple businesses. She stepped in and also stepped up to take up the responsibilities, relieving me from my duties. I am proud of her for being able to step into my shoes in the business side of things so that I could focus on the people of Riverton and aim to make Riverton better.

I was very fortunate to attend an RSL Anzac dinner. One of the speeches made brought tears to my eyes. We always pay respect to the war veterans who fought for the freedom we are enjoying today. We often forget the women behind those men. In 1916, the women of Australia knitted 80 000 pairs of socks to send to Europe for the men who were fighting there in the cold environment. That is just physical work. But what about the mental strain those women were enduring? Those women were not certain whether their husbands were coming back. The kids were not certain whether their fathers would return, and many did not make it back. I think I have spoken enough about women. I once again salute every woman who has contributed to the sacrifices of every man.

JOURNEY IN POLITICS

My journey in politics started with a text message from my friend the member for Jandakot, Yaz Mubarakai, who asked whether I had time for a coffee. I replied yes. My first thought process was, “He’s jumping in early for his fundraising for next year’s election.” Entering the room for the coffee, I was so annoyed with him. That was not the first time and it will not be the last time. He was sitting with Sel—Raj Selvendra. He was not giving me a heads-up. My thought process was that Raj Selvendra owns a practice in East Victoria Park and if I was going to negotiate to buy that practice, Yaz was not going to get a chance to get a heads-up in preparation. A few minutes into the conversation, it was about me putting my hand up to run for Riverton. I took a week. I am very pleased to say that I accepted—I put my hand up—and then the process started.

I knew I could only win the election by doorknocking. I went to the member for Southern River, Terry Healy, because I was told he was topping the table. He gave me a four-hour lecture on doorknocking. Until today, after knocking 14 000-plus houses twice, I was not able to execute all the tactics he taught me at a single house. I will make an attempt next time to follow all the advice. At one point he was visibly upset because I was beating his record time and again.

There were many doorknocking stories that were so interesting. We enjoyed talking to the residents of Riverton. There is one particular story I would like to share with the house. I had the opportunity to have our Premier, Mark McGowan, knock on doors with me. As we were walking through the streets of Willetton, we saw a car parked with its headlights on. The Premier and I decided we would knock on the door of the house where it was parked. The Premier knocked on the door. A bloke came out and the Premier said, “Your headlights are on, mate.” The man said thank you. As we were walking away, he kept chasing us, saying, “Are you Mark McGowan?”

The Premier said yes. A week later, I heard that an elderly lady walked up to the Premier and said, "I'm going to be voting Labor this time because I heard you saved my son's battery." Doorknocking was difficult, as we all acknowledge; it is not easy.

My son also helped me during the campaign, bringing his friends along to doorknock. One evening after a tiring day of doorknocking, we were driving back home and my son asked, "Dad, which was the best door you knocked on today?" That spun my thoughts. Which was the one? Before I spoke, he gave the answer, saying, "That door is yet to be knocked, dad. It is our door where mum is going to be inviting us inside with a big smile and a hot plate of food on the table." I thank my family for the support that they provided me during difficult times. It was not an easy campaign. I survived one of the most brutal campaigns.

THANKYOUS

At this juncture, it is time to say thank you to many people. Madam Speaker, please bear with me as I have many names to read. I would like to acknowledge my wife's father, who has been my father ever since we got married. He is 79 years of age, still serving as a doctor in his home town. He has a nickname, "10 Rupees Doctor", because the fee he charges is 10 rupees, which is equal to 20¢ for a consultation. Unfortunately, we do not have my wife's mum, my late mother-in-law, but I am sure she would have been proud to see me achieve what I have achieved today.

I would like to thank a lot of my family members who have supported me morally all the way back from India: Kamalkumar, Ranjini, Nithin Bellie, Monicasri Kumar, Tej Tejas, Sivakumar Dhonan, Vasanthi Sivakumar, Muruges Raman, Sunil Nataraj, Ramya Sunil, Chandrasekharan Kari and Prabhuram Kari.

On behalf of my family and my community, I would like to sincerely thank my mentor and my friend, Hon Kate Doust, President of the Legislative Council, who was my campaign director. She worked things out in such detail that she even made time for my family to spend time with me. She was checking on my family to see whether they were coping with all the stress. I am sincerely thankful to her to have run an excellent campaign. I thank my campaign manager, Cassandra Maney, who had an eye for details. She made sure that day-to-day issues ran very smoothly. Mark Fahey, my field officer, brought in a lot of positive energy every time we were out in the field. I take this opportunity to thank Lenda Oshalem, who put the campaign plan together, which was executed excellently.

I would like to thank a few more people. I had the biggest campaign team of volunteers. I will be here until the evening if I mentioned all those names. I will mention only a few: Karishma Arora, Arthur Clancy, Dilip, Mithun Dharmaraj, Murali Manohar, Uttam Brahma, Lakshmy Chandramohan, Devi Sridharan, Reka Somasundaram, Dulmini Wijebandar, Nipuna de Silva, Divvi Bavirisetty, Ponnai Umopathy, Melvin Matthew, Babu Kurian, Satish Kailasam, Venugopal Natarajan, Sreekrishna Chowdavarapu and Achanthodi VasuDev. There are some special names. Kiran Puttappa was my uni mate and the person I have known the longest in Western Australia. Vishnu Gopalan took the brunt of my business side of things, being my business partner, to give me more time for campaigning. I thank Dr Padmanabhan Ramanathan, who has been my mentor since I arrived in Western Australia; Praveen Kallimath; Lachlan Blom; Will Ho; Alex Knowles; Matt Kav; Claire Comrie; Ally White; Fred Parkey; David Barry; and Bevan Green. I would like to thank at Labor headquarters, Tim Picton, Ellie Whiteaker, Hugo and the team who supported me big time.

I was very fortunate to have some veterans involved in my campaign, particularly Minister Bill Johnston, who had various one-on-one sessions with me and, with all his experience, guided me all the way through. I give a special thanks to Pierre Yang, who especially helped me connect with the Chinese community, was a mentor throughout and ran the phone-booth sessions. I thank Sue Ellery, Rita Saffioti, Ben Wyatt, Roger Cook and Paul Papalia. Sometimes I even had Premier Mark McGowan handing out how-to-vote cards in my electorate!

COVID IN INDIA

Before I finish, I would like to take the opportunity to send my prayers and thoughts to people in India, who are going through a very difficult time. I thank our Premier Mark McGowan for approving \$2 million of funding for sending relief material to India.

CONCLUSION

Before I conclude, whatever it has been, when I won the election, there was one sentence that my father said that is still echoing in my head. My father told me, “The people of Riverton have now accepted you as their son. Do to them as you would do to me.”

Thank you, Madam Speaker.

[Applause.]
