



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Adele Carles MLA
(Member for Fremantle)

LOAN BILL 2009

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 9 June 2009

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Second Reading

MS A.S. CARLES (Fremantle) [5.02 pm]: I begin my maiden speech to this place by acknowledging the Nyoongah people as the traditional owners of this land, and I pay tribute to their enduring culture.

Tonight I greet all members here for the first time. They are my new colleagues, and I greet them in a spirit of cooperation and hope. I am here to work constructively with them, and I am here to work towards a safe future for our children. I know that we are all joined by a common desire for our children's future, and this knowledge gives me hope that we can work together. Although members may see me as a lonely figure at the back of the chamber here, I am not, because I am here on the wings of the Australian Greens, the Fremantle community and people right across our state who care for our environment.

Now I will turn to the historic Fremantle by-election. It is my absolute honour and privilege to stand here today as the member for Fremantle. In the 16 May by-election, Fremantle people chose to be represented by the Greens for the first time in history. Fremantle people chose a community voice this time—one that will not sell out to big corporations and one that has the very essence of Fremantle at heart. A lot has been written about why they did this. The sheer force of the numbers of people who voted green has stumped many commentators. I can tell the house that people voted for change at this by-election. They pushed through apathy and cynicism. They were tired of the same old politics, the same parties and power, and the same hollow promises. They decided to do something about it. We had young people coming into our office offering their time, quietly dispelling the myth of apathy that plagues their generation. But when the seniors began turning up, offering to knock on doors for us, we knew that we were on to something very big. People who had never voted green came through our door offering help. Something was brewing. Momentum was building. We could all feel it. I tried to not get carried away because I knew the disappointment of the near miss firsthand. However, the result on election night spoke for itself. It was a victory for our democratic system because people power won the night. We did not start out with as much money as the other candidates. I am not the likeliest of candidates myself, being a woman with three young children. Our advantage was that we had people behind us, and as our campaign got going, more people came, joining in the chorus for change.

I want to thank the hundreds of volunteers who worked tirelessly to ensure that we Greens finally took our rightful and long-overdue seat in this chamber. Many of them are in the gallery tonight. I thank them for their committed belief that we could actually do it this time. I personally thank my

key strategy team—the small band of people who worked full time on this campaign. Thank you to Scott Ryan, Kim Dravneiks, Lynn MacLaren and Andrew Sullivan. Without their individual and unique contributions, this result would not have been possible. I also thank my generous and loving husband, Francois Carles. You provide a rock-solid foundation for us, and I am so grateful for this. I also acknowledge my three daughters, Genevieve, Claudia and Charlotte: you give me the daily inspiration to keep standing up for our environment.

Our Greens' electoral breakthrough in Fremantle comes after many years of increasing support and community campaigning by the Greens going back to the days of our first Greens senator, Jo Vallentine, who campaigned in Fremantle and throughout our state for nuclear disarmament. We now have many Greens members of Parliament across Australia. I pay tribute to the immense contribution of Senator Bob Brown, who has been a personal inspiration and support to me. I acknowledge the hard work of Paul Llewellyn and Giz Watson, who represented us in the last term of government, and I recognise the ongoing commitment of our federal WA senators, Scott Ludlum and Rachel Siewert. I look forward to working with my Council colleagues, who I am delighted to have with me in the chamber tonight—Lynn MacLaren, Alison Xamon, Robin Chapple, and of course our mentor, stateswoman Giz Watson.

I was born in Kalgoorlie in the late 1960s. My mother was working as a nurse at the Kalgoorlie Regional Hospital and was minding a very tiny Wongi baby who had been abandoned there for complex tribal reasons. My parents adopted this baby, my brother Andrew, when he was only five weeks old. A year later they had me. Unfortunately, they divorced and my mother decided to return to her native New Zealand to raise us. Those years were very hard for the three of us. My mother struggled to make ends meet as a sole parent without government support. Andrew struggled with identity and race issues. My mother knew she had to get Andrew back to his country and his people, so we returned to Perth when we finished school. The transition to Western Australia was a culture shock, particularly for my brother Andrew. He did reunite with his people but he had to face the cold reality of what it meant to be Aboriginal in this state. It meant being under suspicion and being subjected to overt racism. It is a testament to his strength of character that he has gone on to work as a health worker helping Indigenous people in remote desert communities. I am delighted that he caught a plane from Alice Springs to be here today. He is sitting at the back of the chamber with our mother, a woman who I also pay tribute to, a woman who courageously raised two children alone and never gave up on her Aboriginal son receiving an education.

Therefore, it is with great personal significance that tonight, on behalf of the Greens, I acknowledge that the first Australians never ceded or sold their land to the white occupiers who came. Their land was stolen and their people were forcibly dispossessed, removed from their families and in some cases massacred. We know that this dispossession and cruelty cannot be removed with words. However, until we all fully acknowledge the reality of our history, we cannot move forward as a reconciled society. On behalf of the Greens, I apologise to the Aboriginal people of this state for their loss of country and for the injustices imposed on them and acknowledge their sovereignty to the land known as the state of Western Australia.

It is with some irony that from this acknowledgement of Aboriginal sovereignty I move on to what happened last week when a young Nyoongah man came to see me in my office. He had been homeless for two months. Two weeks ago in a moment of desperation he attempted suicide. He has the shocking scars to prove it. If he can get on the priority list for a Homeswest house, he could get a house in 18 months' time. He has run out of favours with friends, and he is estranged from his family. He has nowhere to go. When he spoke to me he was articulate and lucid; he took pride in his appearance. He just wanted somewhere to stay. He needed help to get back on his feet. It was a cold, damp afternoon and to my dismay, after making many phone calls, I found that there was no crisis bed available for him that night. The image of him still haunts me. In my time here I will

endeavour to work with this government to secure funding for additional crisis accommodation. It is inhumane that in a wealthy state like ours hundreds of people sleep rough on the streets every night in the city. We can do better than this.

I am lucky to own a home in Fremantle, because Fremantle is a very special place, as anyone who is fortunate enough to live there will tell you. I live at the south end in an old renovated cottage amongst neighbours who are like family. We all know each other in this part of town. People walk and cycle; children roam in and out of our homes. People rarely sell their houses here. They are not interested in bigger houses, the latest appliances or new cars. There are no lock-down garages or security gates to keep people out. We have our doors open so that people can come in. It is almost old-fashioned, and I would not trade that for the world. It is this sense of connection and desire to preserve what is special that sees Fremantle people being active citizens and politically engaged.

Fremantle is our vibrant port city, with its historic buildings, iconic markets and eclectic mix of people; it draws tourists from all over the world. I am privileged to personally know heritage campaigners who saved many of our historic buildings in the 1970s. Many of these campaigners are still contributing their time to protecting the heritage of Fremantle. Tonight I pay tribute to Councillors Les Lauder and John Dowson, and to current Fremantle Society president and former member of Parliament, Dr Ian Alexander, who is in the gallery tonight. Many longstanding Fremantle residents volunteer countless hours in committees and community meetings expressing a desire to see Fremantle develop in the best way possible. These active citizens should be valued and respected by our politicians. They are people to be worked with, and they often possess invaluable local and historic knowledge. Too often they are ignored by government.

I know what it is to be ignored by government. I learnt the hard way at South Beach. I chose to stand up for South Beach because it is my country. I use the word “country” in the way that Aboriginal people have taught me. It is my place of belonging. It holds spiritual significance for me. I know many other people who feel like this about their beach. In the process of standing up for South Beach I learnt a lot about government failure. Greens Senator Christine Milne said in 2005 —

I came to realise that you need to know and love a special place in order to empathise with other people’s special places and that to stand up for one special place is to begin the process of standing up for them all. It is the beginning of becoming a global citizen.

Global citizens are often labelled activists to marginalise them, to create a sense of them being outsiders. Whatever the label, these citizens will act when the government fails to. That is the beauty of our free society. Despite this voluntary work being exhausting, relentless and thankless, people keep doing it because they are not prepared to give up. They are taking responsibility for our environment in the face of government indifference.

On behalf of the Greens, I thank all the people around our state who are standing up for their special place or an environmental ideal against the odds. I thank campaigners standing up for peace, nuclear disarmament, our beaches and the Burrup; I thank the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society for looking out for our whales; I thank climate change activists, contamination and toxics campaigners and forest campaigners.

I recently visited Chester Forest in Margaret River, staying overnight with the people who put their lives on hold to stand vigil over our state forest. These people stand firm in the face of violence, arrest and legal costs orders. Our native forests act as crucial carbon sinks storing carbon instead of releasing it into the atmosphere. However, in this state we continue to log our native forests because we place value only on the timber produced; we fail to place any financial value on the carbon benefit. I know why forest campaigners chain themselves to trees. I just do not know why we make them wrong for doing this. People in Fremantle are no strangers to community campaigns. In fact, many of us unwittingly became campaigners as we saw our special places being threatened by

inappropriate developments. We must move on from the days of imposing unwanted plans on people in Fremantle. During the boom years we had a lot foisted on us, from houses on the ocean at Port Coogee, to high-rise apartments in the dunes at South Beach, to lead contamination at South Beach, to the proposal to build apartments on top of the toxic tip site at South Fremantle, to the ING proposal on Victoria Quay, to the three harbours proposal—the list goes on. The final insult, to top it all off, was last year's approval to export lead carbonate through the port of Fremantle. No wonder the North Port Quay consortium is under the illusion that anything goes in Fremantle.

I urge this government to enter a new era of cooperation and consultation with the residents of Fremantle. These residents are not antidevelopment; they want appropriate high-quality developments. The government should choose to work with them. Let us create a vision for Fremantle that can be owned by the community, business and government. I know this is possible and I am committed to all stakeholders being included in future planning. Fremantle could be a vibrant regional centre, properly funded to support the important services it provides our state. We have lived through an era of unprecedented growth and Fremantle people have suffered the consequences. Our streets are congested and polluted with too many trucks and cars. We got the boom years without the infrastructure benefits.

Strategic regional planning needs to occur so that we can keep a vibrant working port without compromising the amenity of Fremantle. People told me during the by-election that they want the port retained; they do not want it to become a museum or a theme park for the wealthy. However, limits need to be placed on what enters the port. The container numbers should be capped at manageable levels; the inhumane live sheep trade should be banned—no-one wants it; and lead and other harmful substances should not be allowed through our port. We need to remember that this is a residential port, so health and safety must come first. We should invest in a comprehensive rail system that incorporates both freight and light rail. With the oil crisis looming, now is the time to invest in rail, not roads.

All of this is possible and, in fact, necessary if Fremantle is to survive the unprecedented threat of the triple crunch. By this I mean the current economic crisis, accelerating climate change and depleting oil reserves. For Fremantle to flourish in the face of these threats, we need to be smart about our long-term planning and we need to start the process now. Climate change is on our doorstep. There is no serious doubt about this now. We have melted the north polar ice cap and face the prospect of no summer sea ice within a year or two. Climate scientists are warning us that global warming is accelerating and that we need to take urgent action to protect the Greenland and west Antarctic ice sheets. If we lose these one day, the consequences will be catastrophic. There will be sea level rises, species extinction and the dislocation of millions of people around the world. The time for cynicism has gone, the time for making excuses has gone, and the time for indifference has gone. As elected representatives, it is up to us to take responsibility for this in Western Australia. If we do not, who will? There are people in my neighbourhood who care enough to have invested in expensive solar panels on their roofs, but this will not solve the problem. Governments, through policy and legislation, can solve it. I urge this government to get serious about climate change and to start thinking big about this.

The government should make a promise to the next generation to have no more coal-fired power stations, and to reinstate the gross feed-in tariff because the government promised it and it is the right thing to do.

We have enviable supplies of land, sun and wind in Western Australia, which makes our failure to act even harder to comprehend. Why has this Parliament not agreed to take genuine action? Is it because it is too hard, or do we prefer to simply disagree in this place? Whatever the excuse, imagine trying to justify it to a child, a child who is now learning about global warming as part of the school curriculum. European countries have already taken action. Look at the examples set by

Germany and Spain; countries that have flourishing renewable energy industries. Cloudy Germany now leads the way in solar technology. German members of Parliament possess something that we in this chamber collectively lack right now—intention. Members who want a clear example of intention need look no further than to President Obama. He made big promises in the face of cynicism and ridicule by many. He is now working on the multibillion-dollar Green New Deal for America, which includes investing tens of millions of dollars in retraining the workforce to transform its old polluting infrastructure into clean renewable energy infrastructure for the future. He acknowledges that this transition will take about a decade, but he has started now.

Now is the time for us to start. We must rise to the challenge of transforming our polluting energy industry into a clean industry. This is an opportunity for innovation and new job markets. Now is the time in this state to upgrade our outdated and unreliable electricity grid infrastructure. We need to invest in high-quality intelligent grid design which will produce energy savings and efficiencies in the long run and which can be powered by renewable energy. That is the type of investment that our children will thank us for. Such a grid will prevent blackouts and save consumers money. Ironically, renewable energy is free once we have the infrastructure in place because no corporation can own the sun or the wind. This is the smart way forward and it is the ethical way forward. We Greens like to ask: In 50 years' time, will our children be looking back at us smiling? Are they thanking us for taking action right now to secure a safe future for them? I am committed with my fellow Greens to this vision; we will not give up on it.

I dedicate this speech to my dear friend Loreta McMaster, who passed away three years ago at the age of 39, leaving her husband, Shane, and their three children, Jack, Casey and Ruby. A Fremantle person to the very core, Loreta loved these words spoken by Nelson Mandela —

Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do.

On that note, I conclude my remarks and I remind members that it is about the children. I again thank the Fremantle community for insisting that, this time, we got this seat.

[Applause.]
