
[Thursday, 17 June 1993.]

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON B.K. DONALDSON (Agricultural) [3.49 pm]: I move -

That the following Address be presented to His Excellency, Sir Francis Burt, AC, KCMG, QC, 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 to thank Your Excellency for the Speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

I express my great sense of privilege in moving this Address-in-Reply. I should also like to express the honour I feel at having been elected a representative of the Agricultural Region. I have enjoyed a close affinity with the people of the region at the farming and community levels for 37 years. My involvement in recent years has been with the Country Shire Councils Association and the Western Australian Municipal Association. It is an honour to now represent electors of the Agricultural Region in this Parliament. I am deeply conscious of the responsibility and commitment that is needed to meet their expectations.

I recall an incident which took place at last year's Esperance agricultural show in the lead-up to the last State election. I was manning a party booth at the show giving away balloons which had the word "Liberal" printed on them. I was asked by two girls if they could have two balloons. They followed up their request by saying that they would give me some of their Maltesers because all politicians liked to be bribed! One could say that remark was pretty cheeky, but it made me think about the public's perception of politicians. To have made a comment like that those two young girls must have had discussions round the family table - or possibly it was what they have read or heard in the media - about what was happening, not only in this Parliament but in other Parliaments in the world. It was a reminder of the standards we need to set in this House in order to rebuild people's confidence in us as legislators. They did not get their balloons, and I was not eating Maltesers for the rest of the day! Instead, I gave a diplomatic reply that politicians did not stand for bribery and corruption, and that they were standards we did not strive to achieve. Unfortunately in society we find bad apples whose behaviour inevitably leaves a smear on others. This view is not a legacy I wish to leave, nor must it be a perception of this Parliament.

I attended a lecture by a professor on advanced studies discussing the need to strive for excellence. He took the line that in the pursuit of excellence many people look in the wrong place. It is found in the mind - yours and mine. That means that it is up to all of us here to set our own standards and to strive to achieve those standards during our time in this House. Anything less would be unacceptable to those people who chose us as their representatives.

It would be remiss of me not to pay a tribute to the unsung heroes in the Agricultural Region. I refer to those people who played a major role in ensuring my presence here this afternoon. They are not apathetic in politics. They sought suitable representation in the legislative framework and got off their backsides to ensure that happened. I refer to the lay party members and supporters who sit for 14 hours at preselection time, who continue to organise functions and events, who attend the conferences and meetings, and who make it all happen. The dedication of the enthusiastic staff at the O'Connor division, Marcia, Adrienne and Neil, left a mark on all of us and a desire to try a little harder. The hard working office bearers and members of the O'Connor and Pearce divisions gave invaluable help. I acknowledge my colleagues on the Agricultural Region ticket, for whom I have the highest regard; they made a solid contribution. I single out Wilson Tuckey, the Federal member for O'Connor. His support and guidance, as well as the threat of his famous iron bar if we did not measure up, certainly kept us motivated. The respect and high regard with which he is held in that electorate is testimony to his representation of the community that constitutes the seat of O'Connor. I know that if I falter, these people will remind me very quickly what they expect.

Without the support of spouse and family none of us would aspire to be in this House. I am truly indebted to my wife Lyn. At a time of family tragedy some six years ago when our eldest son was seriously injured she encouraged me to continue in government at the local, State and national level and shouldered the whole burden of our son's rehabilitation. I thank my wife for that ongoing support without which I would not be in this House today.

My involvement as a local government councillor, first as the President of the Country Shire Councils Association and then with the Western Australian Municipal Association, has given me an insight into

community expectations not only in Western Australia but also in the Eastern States. I have been pleased to see an erosion in the long held view that differences exist between city and country councils. In reality, it is a scale of relativity existing between the delivery of services to meet specific community needs - these are not differences.

I often wonder whether the Darling Range has created an artificial barrier between the country and the city over which metropolitan residents cannot see to understand the problems that exist in country areas - and vice versa, as it may be that country people do not see the problems facing people in the metropolitan area. Seeing those barriers broken down, at least in local government, was a most rewarding period of my life. I have a healthy respect for local government, the councillors and staff who work for those councils. It saddens me to see problems that arise from time to time within a local government council that smear and overshadow the good work that has been going on in local government for many years. Over many years local government has played a prominent role in the development of Western Australia and its communities.

I realise the time constraints, but I would like to raise a few issues that are of concern to my electorate. It has been said many times that if a person wanted to cripple a country's economy, especially in a nation as vast as ours, the best way would be to tax transport. That is because it is a burden we all share whether we live in metropolitan, rural or remote areas. Western Australia is reliant on the Eastern States for consumer items, and the vast distances involved in distributing those items mean a cost imposition on the family income. It is more than an imposition for those who live and work in country areas, it is also a tax on valuable exports such as mining, fishing and agriculture. Until we find a way to remove this burden from the exporters of our wealth it will continue to erode our competitive position and create hardships for our electors.

I turn now to the bombing range north of Lancelin. I wonder how many nations use their own coastline for target practice and bombing as we approach the twenty-first century. Western Australia has a pristine coastline, so it is horrifying that it is still being used in this way. I sometimes wonder where all our conservationists are and why they are not standing up and being counted among people wanting to stop this practice. The coastline between Lancelin and Cervantes demands the construction of a coast road to develop and encourage tourism and to better manage the coastal environment. Off road, four wheel drive vehicles must be kept away from this sensitive coastline and prevented from damaging this valuable natural attraction of great beauty. I hope enough pressure will be brought to bear to see the use of this area as a bombing and firing range cease, and a road established.

Another area of interest to me is the development of the Mt Lesueur National Park. Nobody could dispute the need for this park to be gazetted; however, I dispute the inclusion of the Crown vacant land, which has proved to contain valuable coal seams. I do not accept that any Government of any persuasion has the right to lock away proven resources, denying our children's children resources which they may seek to make use of in the future.

Finally, I refer to the ongoing concerns which confront the community in the Agricultural Region. I must mention those Western Australians who have suffered personal and financial losses during recent years, particularly in country areas, while this country has battled the effects of the recession. Although this subject has probably been mentioned many times in this House, much pain and anguish still remains over the dramatic fall in wool prices since the dismantling of the reserve price scheme and the stockpile debt which must be serviced. The vagaries of grain price commodities have already been mentioned today. People with children to educate are struggling to fund the basic requirements to enable their children to meet what is needed in this day and age.

There continues to be a vacuum in recognising the high cost of living and of educating a family in regions such as that which I represent. I foresee many heartbreaks if this situation is not addressed by the Federal Government and if it does not recognise its obligation to ensure that all Australians receive an equal opportunity to participate in this nation's quality of life expectations. The communities in such towns face hardship and disappointment as young people leave school and undertake further training, only to find at the end of the day that no work is available in that town. It becomes increasingly difficult for young families to establish themselves and prosper. Unemployment and the seemingly helpless outlook for our young people have probably contributed to the increased crime rate in our community.

Mr President, I have given a brief outline of some of the concerns which touch all our lives; concerns which must be addressed to restore Western Australia to a prosperous and vibrant community. I thank you, Mr President, and honourable members, for your attention this afternoon, and for the privilege of moving the Address-in-Reply.

Government members: Hear, hear!