



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Amber-Jade Sanderson, MLA

(Member for Morley)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 16 May 2017

Reprinted from Hansard

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 11 May on the following motion moved by Ms J.J. Shaw —

That the following Address-in-Reply to Her Excellency's speech be agreed to —

To Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, 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.

MS A. SANDERSON (Morley — Parliamentary Secretary) [4.53 pm]: Firstly, I acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, the Noongar people, and pay my respects to their elders past and present. I congratulate the member for Albany, Peter Watson, on his election as Speaker and, of course, you on your election as Deputy Speaker. I congratulate the Premier Mark McGowan on leading an emphatic victory for WA Labor and all the newly elected members in this place.

I am in the fortunate position of making my second inaugural speech, though I am a little bit less nervous this time. Coming from the Legislative Council, I am quite practiced at making long, meandering speeches, but I will try to contain myself for this one. I am really thrilled to stand as the member for Morley in this place. It is a particular thrill to be here with so many other Labor members of the McGowan Labor government. I am excited about the next four years and what we can achieve together. My recent election to the Legislative Assembly has been a real journey for me, having spent the previous Parliament in the Legislative Council as the member for East Metropolitan Region. Picking up the east metro spot for Labor in 2013—a very difficult election for us—was in some ways unexpected. At that time I was acting assistant secretary of United Voice and would very happily have continued down that path. It was a very eventful four years for me, both personally and professionally.

In my valedictory speech in the other place I said that I was hoping for a quieter few years. I have changed my mind! I want the next few years in government to be exciting, busy and productive while we work together to implement our agenda. I have a strong connection with the community and electorate of Morley, which takes in the suburbs of Morley, Noranda, Dianella and Nollamara; the suburb of Morley is split across four electorates. My parents bought their first house on Guildford Road in Bayswater. Indeed, my father still lives there. I spent a large portion of my childhood growing up there and attending local schools, with a number of memorable moments. I smoked my first cigarette at the bus stop outside John Forrest Senior High School—I will not tell you how old I was, mum! While running for a bus, I was hit by a car outside the old Morley bus station and instead ended up in an ambulance. I generally spent too much time hanging out at the then brand-new Galleria Shopping Centre in the late 1980s.

I was motivated by a number of things to run for the seat for Labor: the total lack of development in the nearly 30 years since I was at high school; the broken promises of the previous government about the much needed improvements in public transport; the strong connection I built with local parents and citizens associations, community groups and residents as the upper house member; and, of course, my family and I live in the area and we love it. Moving from a held spot in the upper house to run for what was a Liberal seat against a two-term incumbent was a risky strategy, but I firmly believed it was the right thing to do for the community and the Labor Party. To win government we had to win Morley, so I put myself forward as a genuine alternative for the electorate and, gladly, it paid off! It must be said that this was not a task I undertook on my own. I had huge amounts of support from many quarters who are here today, and I will go over that later.

Morley is a great area. It is close to the CBD and the river. There is lots of diversity and local businesses, great schools and strong areas of community. The suburbs in the seat are quite distinct in character and there are some challenges. I will talk a little about each of the areas. Morley, although mostly residential, has a very strong commercial district with many small and medium-sized businesses that are owned by local people. However, it is under-serviced by public transport and suffers from chronic congestion. The Walter Road–Wellington Road intersection is a shocker and is, frankly, choking local businesses. People who live close to the commercial area around the Galleria go elsewhere to shop to avoid this nightmare. The area lacks cycle paths, integrated public transport, pedestrian zones and, of course, a train. In Morley, the car is king and people take their lives into their hands when they walk around and cross local roads. Navigating it safely with a pram or wheelchair is virtually impossible. I am excited about the prospect of developing this area into a modern, thriving hub over the next 30 years.

Noranda is a peaceful suburb with beautiful parks, although the imposing NorthLink freeway is changing that for many residents in both Morley and Noranda. I do not think anyone truly understood the scale or local impact of this enormous road. Of course, there is no doubt it will benefit local businesses and ease congestion but it threatens the ongoing viability of at least one local school, a key environmental asset and, in many instances, it will push more cars onto quiet residential streets. There seems to be a culture of over engineering many of these projects in which a single interchange appears to take over a good portion of a suburb. It seems these road engineering principles dare not be challenged regardless of what bush, forest, houses or existing community infrastructure may be in the way. We must look at smarter options for these projects and make more effort towards making them more sympathetic to the existing environment. Both Noranda and Dianella, despite being close to the transport hub of Morley, are public transport black holes. Those suburbs are geographically spread out, and unless people live close to a major road like Benara Road or Alexander Drive, they cannot catch a bus. Dianella, where I lived until very recently—I now live at the Morley end of the electorate—is also a very peaceful suburb. There is not a cyclepath to be seen—a missed opportunity given its proximity to the city. Residents tell me they crave more vibrancy and activation of local areas, and I have to agree. It is also worth noting that a recent national survey had Dianella as one of the suburbs across the country suffering the worst mortgage stress. The unemployment rate and job insecurity is really biting in those middle-income areas.

Another area suffering in the current economic climate is Nollamara, which has almost double the state average of unemployment. I love Nollamara for its diversity, for its previous member, for its mix of new arrivals and people who have lived there for more than 30 years. Recent overdevelopment of blocks without adequate supporting infrastructure has created some social and practical challenges for residents. In all, it is a great area to represent and live, and I hope to look over this speech at the end of my time as the member for Morley—whenever that may be—and see that we have addressed many of these issues.

I have always believed that in public life we should be open about what we believe in. I will outline the set of principles by which I will be guided when making decisions in this place. I am, and have always been, a strong believer in choice. Women and women alone should have the right to determine their reproductive outcomes. This hard-fought-for right was consistently undermined by the previous Liberal–National government through its privatisation of Midland Public Hospital to a Catholic provider, and the systemic tightening of funding and bureaucratic processes that significantly limited access to family planning and termination services to women in our state, particularly in regional areas.

Choice does not end there. It also applies to birth choices. Compared with most other countries, Western Australian women have limited access to a range of safe birthing choices. The World Health Organization states that ideal rates of caesarean section should be between 10 per cent and 15 per cent. On 2013 health department figures, the WA C-section rate was around 34 per cent, with one private hospital at a staggering 55 per cent. We compare poorly internationally. Many countries have managed to keep their caesarean section rate low, despite facing the same medical issues Australia does. An emphasis on medical intervention has undermined the confidence of women's own ability to give birth naturally.

I also believe, at the other end of life, that we should have the ability to make our own end-of-life choices when faced with a chronic and terminal illness. The circumstances in which we currently allow our loved ones to die, frankly, lack humanity.

I support marriage equality. It is so overdue that, frankly, we just need to get on with it and end this discrimination. To my good friends in same-sex relationships who have and do not have children, I think you should be able to experience the joys and misery of marriage and divorce just like the rest of us if you chose to!

I joined the Labor Party because I felt strongly then, and still do, about working people's rights, equality, access to education, health and services regardless of their income, postcode or birth circumstances. I am a product of the government education system. If we do not address the current appalling equity issues around gender, it will remain a fact that our daughters, when they graduate from university if that is what they chose to do, will immediately earn less than their male counterparts. That gap will widen further as they progress in the workplace. They will have fewer opportunities to obtain senior positions and promotions, and our daughters will have less superannuation. All those factors mean they will have a higher reliance on government support in their older years, with a high likelihood that they will end up in poverty and/or stuck in an unhealthy and dangerous relationship. Economic independence for our girls should not simply be a lofty ideal. So much is at stake here that it should be viewed as an essential outcome of any government when measuring its success. Pay equity and equal access to economic opportunity are key to this success.

Although women's participation in higher education and paid work has increased, industrial segregation remains entrenched. According to the Workplace Gender Equality Agency the most senior roles are heavily male-dominated, and only 37 per cent of all management categories are female. Australian women are in part-time employment at three times the rate of men, and not by choice. A recent report by Conrad Liveris on the analysis of Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that for every underemployed man aged between 25 and 34 years old there are four underemployed women. So, when women are not being paid less than their male counterparts, they are clustered in low-paid professions like cleaning, child care and aged care, and even in those professions they are screaming for full-time work and the majority are unable to get it. A couple of weeks ago I was chatting to one of the cleaners at Hale House. She is a registered nurse in an aged-care facility. Registered nursing requires extensive study; it is a very skilled profession. Even so, she supplements her income with cleaning because she cannot get enough hours in the aged-care facility.

Along with a daughter I have a son, and like all mums I worry about his future. Women are not the only ones struggling in the new and emerging employment markets. Young people are bearing the brunt of the significant trend downwards of full-time jobs. When I started my career after graduating 20 years ago, it was a given that if we got a job it would be full time. Not so now. Many supplement their income with hospitality and cleaning. Not being able to get a full-time job impedes their ability to even rent—let alone buy—a property, get finance for a car or plan for their futures. Being aged 40 I am, sadly, no longer considered young, and I have been guilty of the odd eye roll at “young people”. But we should be in no doubt as to the challenges faced by young people today. It is more expensive than ever to access higher education or training, and no matter what level somebody is educated to it is harder to obtain a job that will actually cover their living expenses.

We need an economy that supports everyone. Over the election period I spoke to so many conservative voters who feel the economy has tipped too far away from ordinary people, and feel that we as decision-makers have not focused enough on the things that directly impact people’s lives. An important role of government is to curb some of the harsher aspects of capitalism on the population, while supporting growth and job creation. We can do both. That is why now is such a particularly important time for our state to have a Labor government. Labor can innovate in ways necessary to stimulate and diversify our economy. Only Labor will do so while protecting the most vulnerable from the harsher aspects of this brutal economic environment we find ourselves in.

I want to touch on Parliament and the abject lack of progress and reform made in the past nine years. Every organisation must evolve and reform if it is to remain relevant and to survive, and Parliament is no exception. In the last term I was forced to resign from a committee to take leave to have my baby so that another member could replace me for that time. That was all because of one antiquated standing order. Despite, yes, months of negotiation, the Liberals in the upper house refused at the last minute to agree to a simple amendment that would have allowed the temporary substitution of a member mid-inquiry because of absence through either maternity leave or illness. Demanding someone resign from a position to take maternity leave is illegal in the real world. If an employer did that we would expect them to suffer the full force of the law. Backfilling someone on leave is a scenario dealt with every day in workplaces, yet those simple concepts were beyond the Parliament of Western Australia.

I have no doubt there will be some internal eye rolling about me banging on about this again. Well, I can assure members that I will go on and on and on until it is addressed. If we are to truly represent, we must be prepared to support diversity.

I will now get to the inevitable call for breastfeeding in the chamber. As MPs we have to return to Parliament quick smart after having a baby—often within weeks. That is our choice. Ironically, the government has a strong policy supporting breastfeeding in maternity hospitals, yet we make it entirely prohibited in the Parliament. It is a point of deep sadness for me that my son stopped breastfeeding when I returned to Parliament. Despite the constant, awful expressing, it simply did not work. There seems some irrational fear from members, particularly those on the other side, that to allow this reform will turn the chamber into some sort of chaotic creche.

Ms S.F. McGurk: It already is!

Ms A. SANDERSON: Indeed, it will probably lift the standard!

In reality, it will be used by one or two members with young infants on occasion, in order for them to participate in important debates or divisions. It has been suggested that we have a pair system for that. This is simply another way of excluding nursing mothers. Why should we be shunted off into a quiet room while the important business carries on without us? In

Australia a number of Parliaments have successfully grappled with this issue and moved to address it. The House of Representatives and the Senate allow breastfeeding, as do the ACT and Tasmanian Parliaments, and the New South Wales Legislative Council. Internationally, the Parliaments of Iceland, Spain, the European Union and Argentina are all examples. I also support the concept of a family room up here. The family nights in the dining room are delightful, but totally impractical. Your other half has to get a suit on or get dressed up, get the kids up here and bring them up at the worst time of day. The children have to sit nicely in the dining room and then you see your partner off home to deal with all of the fall out of tired, cranky children while you stay here for the rest of the night. Although that might suit some members, it does not suit everyone. These changes are small and frankly the community expects them. This is not about looking after ourselves, but broadening our appeal to those who may wish to run for Parliament in the future, instead of self-selecting early out of the process because it is too hard. I am optimistic about the prospect of changes in this place with the election of a new Speaker, and soon President, and so many women in the Parliament. Sadly for the Parliament, the vast majority of the new women are only on the Labor side, which is not good overall for democracy.

There are so many people to thank and it is really hard to know where to start. Many, many people have supported my journey. I want to thank United Voice members for their incredible support for me and so many other people who sit here today. The political process is heavily stacked against working people, particularly low-paid working people, yet they are the ones who most often bear the brunt of government and economic decisions. These people should have a voice.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms A. SANDERSON: As a union representing mostly low-paid women facing a relentless drive to lower wages, strip penalty rates and reduce working conditions in a demanding economy, you are the only thing standing between members and minimum-wage poverty. I am proud to work with you all now and into the future. It is important to me to have a good network of support, particularly of women. Carolyn Smith and Sue Lines, two women in the Labor movement I have admired for many years, are always a source of incredible support. You have taught me to be fearless and not to back down when you believe deeply in something, and you have always got my back. There are not too many people I trust to boss me around effectively, and, Sue, as my campaign director you did an outstanding job, keeping us accountable, on target and lifting us up when we needed it. Cheryl Davenport, my EMILY's List mentor, is a legendary Labor woman, though I am sure she will be embarrassed by my saying so. You have left a true legacy in Western Australia and I hope I can make even a portion of a difference to people's lives in my time in this place. To Patrick Gorman and Lenda Oshalem, the leadership team at the party office, I have to say you led an outstanding campaign and congratulations to you. The sheer volume of people we spoke to over the last year attests to the kind of campaign we ran. It was positive and focused on people, and the community responded strongly to it. Thank you to Tom Beyer for the relentless doorknocking and phone schedule, for the kilos I lost in the process and for your willingness to get out there yourself and push us all hard, although I think I did pull rank once when you were insisting on taking our volunteers out in hurricane conditions! To all of the incredible local volunteers—too many to name—you came out in pouring rain or 40-degree heat and humidity. It has been such a pleasure getting to know you all and none of this is possible without you. I look forward to a long friendship with you all over the coming years. To my good friend, Lisa Jooste, who doorknocked with me for the past 12 months, I cannot tell you how much I value your friendship and support. Alicia Anderson, and Miscka, the campaign dog, thank you for lifting us all up when we needed it and for your outstanding navigation of digital media. To Dominic Rose and Naomi McLean, who have been with me

since I entered the Legislative Council in 2013, my decision to run for Morley meant deep uncertainty for you both, but was met with nothing but excitement and support. I have loved working with you both over the last few years, and you simply cannot put a value on knowing that things are well looked after. Special thanks for keeping everything going when I had my son and allowing me the short space to really enjoy him in the early days. Dom, I have been lucky to work with such a good friend. I have become so accustomed to seeing you every day and working with you that your absence has left a big hole.

To Kate and Julian, my long suffering parents: mum, I know you would not have chosen politics for me. It is a rough business, but you guys have always supported me in every aspect of my life. It is ironic that it is not really until you become a parent that you truly understand what your parents do for you, and you have been incredible parents. To my partner, Phil, who I have known more than 20 years, that is a long time to know someone before getting to know them on a different level. Sometimes I think we have crammed 20 years of life events into the last three, but there is no better person to share it with, and you have brought warmth, humour and joy into mine and Chloe's lives. There is no doubt it is hard going doing this job and having a young family for us and our partners. I made the decision to run for Morley when I was around seven months pregnant with our son. I could have stayed in the upper house and in many ways it would have suited our family life much better, but you never hesitated in your support, and that is not to say that it is always easy for you. The unpredictable nature of both politics and small children means these two are not comfortably matched, but we tackle the daily challenges together on an equal footing and I feel very lucky to share my life with you and to have your support to follow my dreams. My daughter Chloe, you came along at just the right time. You brought sunshine into my life when it was most needed. Watching you grow into a funny, smart—too smart sometimes—and gorgeous girl is a delight. To my son Hugo, such a happy soul, you have brought us all together with your cuddles and fun and you take the sting out of any bad day. My children are a constant reminder of what is really important.

Ultimately, thank you to the voters of Morley for putting your faith in me as your representative. Particular thanks to the many long-term Liberal voters who supported me at this election—'tis not a task I undertake lightly. I cannot say that I will be perfect, but I will give it everything I have and do the very best that I can for you and our community.

[Applause.]
