



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Ms Josie Farrer, MLA
(Member for Kimberley)

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 April 2013

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

MS J. FARRER (Kimberley) [2.56 pm]: I would like to speak in my own language, Gidja, which is my first language, and then say some words in Kriol; for members and Hansard, I will follow with an English translation. Hansard will be pleased I have also scripted these words in English —

[*Words spoken in Gidja language* —

Gilingaan ngeningka rurt — yarrurn ngeningka perrem-pe Parliament-ji Taam, Nawarr-arram purru, jarrak-jarrak purreu- Kili Marnum-pe Dul-ji kaayan, ngarak Kerrem Western Australim-pe — LAWS]

What I have just said in literal translation is —

Today, right here, we are sitting here, in/at Parliament House

This is where (Big) important people meet.

They talk (discuss) and plan/making LAWS (policies) for Western Australia.

Speaking again in Gidja —

[*Words spoken in Gidja language* —

*Ngayaan pilij-pe ngenaan ngeningka,
MenKawum-pe warringarrem-pe Kimberley yurru.]*

Which translates as —

I find myself right here. Thank you to everyone from the Kimberley. Good one.

Now in Kriol, which is another language; it is a form of English, but more in tune with the Indigenous people —

[*Words spoken in Kriol language* —

Di-jaan belanga Nyunga cantri, e, same Spiritual belief.]

Translated this means —

This is for Nyunga country us Aboriginal have the same belief of a spiritual connection to country.

So I pay my respects to this land and the people who come from here.

My name is Jarlbinyimiya, but to you I am Josie Farrer. I am a traditional Gidja woman; that is to say my values, customs and practices are based on the same values and traditions my ancestors have passed down through thousands of generations to me.

In 1953, I started school in a little rough schoolhouse—a bough house—with a spinifex roof. It is interesting to note that during this time we—the schoolkids—also discovered wax matches, and the devastating effect matches can have on a spinifex roof! We got up in the morning and were made to wash using a homemade cake of soap that consisted of ingredients such as caustic

soda, boric acid and beef fat. I remember that if the soap was left on your skin for too long it would start to burn—perhaps it was an attempt to wash the black off us! Our hair was cut short and rinsed in kerosene, and we were dressed in Dingo brand flour sacks and sent to school.

On arrival, we were all given a pannikin made from an empty Carnation milk tin with a handle riveted onto the side. We dipped our pannikins into a diluted mix of water and milk, then, standing in a line, sang *God Save the Queen*. No-one actually told us who the Queen was back then, but we drank our milk and started school. Moola Bulla was closed in 1955, and all the Aboriginal families were forcibly removed from the property. We were relocated to Halls Creek so that the station could be sold and run as a privately owned pastoral lease; I have lived in Halls Creek ever since. My partner of more than 30 years, Mario, and I have raised 13 children together, and now enjoy spending time with our grandchildren as well.

This story of my early life may seem a long, long time ago, but, unfortunately, the reality for many Kimberley Aboriginal people today is similar. In recent years many people were forcibly removed from Oombulgurri, not by packing them into a truck like we were, but by turning services off, not repairing power generation, switching off water and closing the school. They were sent packing to Wyndham before adequate housing was provided for them. Today we can drive into Wyndham and see many of these people sitting in the middle of town, still without homes, jobs, training or possessions; they are living hard in parks, bushes and mangroves.

A big thank you to Nyakiny-ji Ngulngany, my husband and partner, Mario —

Ngarrarlk ngemima.

He recognised what I was doing and supported me. I thank my children —

wanyanyaKem NgaKiny-pe

Shirley, Lingkalbal; Christine, Waatbi—these are all their Aboriginal names because most Indigenous children are born with Aboriginal names that give them the right to their country and their identity creates an affiliation with their country—William, Yougkiny; Jonathan, Garngkiny; Priscilla, Jarnimbal; Vaughan, Jingarrijiny; Minetta, Murlu; Renaté, Wujarrel; Shonelle, Kuyu Kuyul; and Elliot, Yarlmariny. I thank Elliot today. He is here in the audience, so thank you, son. A special mention to my grandson Seymore, Yambiljiny, for his support in driving me and changing tyres in the mud during the campaign; for wanting at just 19 years old to learn about campaigning and politics; and for showing that young people can work hard for a cause even when young people, I am sure, would prefer to be doing other more fun things. To other members of my family whom I helped raise, I thank Preston, Zorran, Rasheeda, Chrysanthus, Wayne and Jason. I thank these people for their support: my sister, Ethel Walalgie, Goongali; Phyllis Wallaby, Waayagurral; Jennifer Tait, Wajala; and their children, who are part of my family, from the Gidja language group that reside in the Ngarrawanjie and Yurranyangem Taam native title claim area.

The values and traditions of my people are based on a foundation of land, law, language and culture. The survival and continued practice of our culture in the region in large part can be attributed to the work of the Kimberley Land Council, the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre and the Kimberley Language Resource Centre. I thank them all for that, but it is our old people, our cultural leadership, our elders who work, worry, encourage and teach us the foundations of our faith. I thank people such as Old Man Watson, Joe Brown, Old Man Davey, Merle Carter and Edna O'Malley.

I have lived my whole life in the Kimberley and I have had to fight for my family just to live most of the time. So like a lot of people I have experienced hardship and difficulties and I understand what a lot of people are going through. I understand what it is like for people to feel

as though they have been forgotten about because they live in a small town or a remote community. I understand firsthand the entrenched bigotry and prejudice that I and people like me suffer daily. In fact, during my preselection for the ALP it was suggested that I had no idea what Parliament is like and what being a member of Parliament involved. Who was I to think I could be a member of Parliament? I was growled at on the main street of Halls Creek and yelled at. "Do you understand that you will have to turn up to work every day?" Many members here will know that I served the Halls Creek community as a shire councillor for 16 years and I spent seven years as shire president. So why did this person think I could be treated this way? I can only assume that it is because I am black and worst of all I am a black woman. I was asked recently if I had received any apologies subsequent to my election and I replied no. It does not matter, you know. You just get used to these sorts of things. I should point out that a great strong woman in her own right, Irene Davey, also said to me during that time, "Stick in there sister, girl; you know and I know, the only good man for the job is a WO-man." So here I am, proudly elected, proudly black and proudly woman!

I have heard that Aboriginal people are not capable of making decisions on land and economics and on preserving culture and the environment. In the recent and current debate on James Price Point, I make the point again that as a traditional person, I cannot speak for this land because it is not my country. We have protocols in place in which Indigenous people do not talk about other people's country. That is something I think, in all fairness, that we all need to understand. Because we are all Indigenous people does not mean to say we can speak on behalf of somebody else's country unless we have permission from them. I can say though, that a lot of people have been hurt by paternalistic, racist and uninformed commentary. The owners of this land considered long and hard their culture, their customs and their lands and environment. They voted for opportunity for their young people, not at any cost, but through hard and deliberate processes. Let me say this: we are not some living museum for your entertainment or curiosity, although we have been studied over and over again. Aboriginal people have a right to participate in the real economy. It is only through this that we will gain our self-determination. We know what we want and we do not need privileged people preaching to us.

I would like to touch on something that is very dear to me. This is an issue that has been in my heart for a long time. It is about Kimberley youth suicide. Why do so many Kimberley children feel that the only option they have in life is to take their own life? Why is little money or government resources dedicated to helping these young people live long and happy lives? Why do we in this place think a debate on the location of a football stadium or the development of Elizabeth Quay is more important than keeping an Aboriginal person alive or in proper housing? I think we need to question ourselves on that. This is an issue of utmost urgency and I think the government has to place a high priority on stopping the flood of young lost lives.

My people are refused access to their land to carry out the rites and customs of thousands of years by pastoralists who are in fact just tenants of the people of Western Australia. How can any government allow this to continue and claim that all people are treated equally? I want people to be treated equally throughout the Kimberley and the state. I am sick and tired of seeing people standing outside courthouses because they have no money to pay their bills or feed their families. I get angry when I see in our remote communities desperate eyes looking at me with feelings of hopelessness. All people need to be treated equally no matter who they are and where they live; no one should be forgotten.

I will work for opportunities for our young Kimberley people in industries other than mining. I want to fight for a strong beef industry because it has been the backbone, economically, in the Kimberley for generations and I would like to see an agriculture college located in the Kimberley so our young people can be trained and can get the work opportunities generated by this industry.

[Member's time extended.]

Ms J. FARRER: I bring my life's experiences with me to this new and challenging job and I intend to work very hard to make sure Kimberley people are not forgotten by this government or anyone else. I will work hard to ensure that proper health services, adequate housing and education are equal with those in Perth to provide access to opportunity for all Kimberley people. And I will fight for a concerted effort by government to rid the Kimberley of poverty.

We also need native title issues to be resolved as quickly as possible. The whole process takes too long; it creates a lot of humbug, division, frustration and worry for everyone. Simply put, more resources need to be given to courts to expedite outstanding claims because in the process we have lost a lot of older Indigenous people; so we need this process to happen a lot more quickly than it has done in the past. Certainty is important not just for the WA business and government sectors, but for traditional owners as well!

Finally, before I move into acknowledging some more supporters and friends, I want to state that the Kimberley should be recognised for its great spirit of community, strong Aboriginal culture and iconic environment. I would like to say thank you to Muliga—all of you members here know him as Mr Jon Ford—Sally Talbot, Stephen Dawson, Claire Comrie, Ryan Casey, Mima Comrie and of course Leslie, my very good secretary in Broome. Thank you for supporting me through the campaign. Thanks to Irene Davey, Mary Durack, Mark Bin Bakar—his twin Mary G!—Tina O'Connor, Craig Comrie, Faye from Bidyadanga, Mary O'Reerie, Gordon Smith Jnr, Wossy Russell, Ted Wilkinson, Terry Wilson and family, and not forgetting Daron Keogh and the Indigenous Labor Network, and the whole polling day team! I would like to say a special thanks to my friend and Perth mob's leader Steve McCartney.

One thing I have seen over time, and especially recently over the gas hub, is how quickly we in the Kimberley get divided as a community. A lot of what I have seen and heard I believe could be resolved if people remember to keep talking to each other. I want us to keep talking and fixing our differences, and I am happy to help make that happen. If we keep fighting each other, only outsiders win.

I want to talk about suicide again. This is very personal for me. Just a few years ago my grandson took his own life. He was only 16 years old. No-one who has not suffered this type of grief and loss can understand the very real pain a family goes through when someone who is dearly loved takes their own life. For me, I left public life and service to my community. I retreated from my community and my life to mourn, to be angry, to hate, to feel guilty and to find answers. For me, still, there has been no adequate closure, no help in finding answers, no support outside my family and culture—and I am not alone. Unfortunately, too many young people have died and too many young people continue to take their own lives. This means that more and more Kimberley families are searching for answers and trying to deal with grief. Just in the lead-up to my swearing in and becoming the member for Kimberley, we had about six to seven deaths through suicide in the Kimberley; so it has been a hard time for people up in the Kimberley. Also a young boy was taken by a crocodile.

The Kimberley is a small place by number of people, and like all regional communities loss is felt across the country; and the loss is multiplied in families and friends, in cafes, in shops, in homes and also around camp fires. I plead with this government and to anyone who can help that the Kimberley needs people who can help with the issues that those left behind after suicide face—more often by themselves. We need mental health professionals located in the Kimberley dedicated to assisting these families and individuals who can break through the barriers of pain and grief. In our work here in this place it is important that we all remember that no-one should be forgotten—no one!

I would like to finish my speech with the following words in my language —

[*Words spoken in Gidja language —*

Please, Rangka, Rangka perne perrem-pe Jarrak-ngarri ngenan. Wanyakem Kaapuwa purren-kili yurriyangem waranja!]

In English it is translated as —

Please listen, listen to the words I am saying. We need to stop what's happening to our young people because they are our future.

Thank you.

[Applause.]
