



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Frank Alban MLA
(Member for Swan Hills)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 13 November 2008

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Motion

MR F. ALBAN (Swan Hills) [9.04 am]: I will commence by first congratulating you, Mr Speaker, on your appointment, as well as congratulating all members who were elected to this Parliament, especially the class of 2008. It is a great honour and opportunity, and I hope that the excitement and awe we felt on our first day is with us every day that we are in this Parliament.

I would like to publicly thank the large number of supporters during the recent election campaign who helped to make my presence here possible. In particular, I thank my wife Shauna, who is looking at me from up in the public gallery and who was with me every step of the way during my campaign, including doorknocking the thousands of houses in Ellenbrook. I should also mention that Lara, our almost-five-year-old daughter, also doorknocked for several days with her mum and dad. She showed great potential as a future politician. Unfortunately, she was proving more popular than her dad and I had to put a stop to it! I also thank all our babysitters, particularly Lara's grandparents, Pat and Ray Davey, Mel Fernandes and Lis Cassey. We chalked up some magic moments and memories and made a lot of new friends along the way. I am sure nothing will rival the passion of a first election campaign.

For me, it has been a long journey, which started on a hot February day in 1956 when I arrived with my mother and younger brother by ship in Fremantle to 45-degree heat. It was not a good first impression! I did not care, because I was seeing my dad for the first time in over a year. My father had arrived a year earlier to work to pay for our fare and had adjusted to being in a strange country. Judging by my mother's face on every one of the 300 kilometres of endless gravel and bush to Pemberton on the back of a farmer's truck full of furniture and supplies, I knew that she had more than normal concerns. We settled in a mill house, as my father was working in the timber mill. I attended St Joseph's Convent School in Pemberton, and the sisters of St Joseph's were saints. I initially received a basic education, the equivalent of year 10. This was quite common 40 years ago as at that stage my parents were farmers. However, I share the passion of all migrants and Australians for the best possible education for all our kids. In the same week as my election, my youngest son, Julian, graduated from down the road at the University of Western Australia with a law degree. My eldest son, Juan, has a marketing degree from Monash University in Melbourne. My eldest daughter, Emily, is currently at Curtin University of Technology and my youngest daughter, Lara, will be offered the same opportunity. Not all students want or need a university

degree. My wish for young Western Australians is that they are able to access the best education option that we can provide for them. We live in an extremely competitive world and education is a key to our future.

This story of migrants arriving in Australia with only a suitcase is familiar in Western Australia and to many in the Swan Valley. However, I do not remember it all in a good light; perhaps because of the war or perhaps because few Australians ventured overseas, the normally friendly Australians were not that friendly. Life as a migrant in the 1950s and 1960s was difficult. No-one ever complained. We were here to stay. The way my father described the situation in later years was that very few hands were extended in friendship and very few doors were opened for us. The Italian philosophy for success was to work longer and harder than anyone else—that would guarantee success. It is a philosophy that still works today. It is interesting to note that the racial problems stopped the moment that my brother and I both made the A-grade football team and gained places in the combined lower south west football team. It did not matter if someone was purple with pink spots as long as he could play football! We became instant Australians at that point. Nothing much has changed in the status of and passion for sport in Western Australia.

I am sure that the early Italian migrants would be proud to see that there are five members of Italian descent in this chamber today. My parents are both gone, but I am sure they are both smiling down from somewhere. I must add that I believe that we do now extend our hand in friendship and open as many opportunities as possible to our migrants.

I spent the early part of my working life as a farmer, so I am pleased to say that the electorate of Swan Hills has a large proportion of agricultural land as well as a balance of residential areas. It really has three distinctive parts: Ellenbrook, with its many estates; the Swan Valley, with its agriculture and tourism precincts; and the lifestyle sections of the hills communities. In some of these areas, development is welcome and in others, development is of concern.

The first part of my electorate is the township of Ellenbrook and its surrounding estates. This well-designed township has won many awards. The area was established as a potential regional centre, and being at least 20 kilometres from other regional centres is relatively isolated. So much was promised on the establishment of Ellenbrook—relatively inexpensive land, initially \$50 000 a block, with so much potential. It was claimed that Ellenbrook would be “the equivalent of Bunbury”. However, after 14 years, the promised land of Ellenbrook is better described as a land of promises, of which very few have been kept.

There was an expectation that Ellenbrook would quickly be a self-sufficient regional centre, but that expectation has stalled. Currently, 17 000 people live in Ellenbrook, but the business district is at a standstill because of a restrictive covenant that will remain in place until December 2018. Public transport, essential because of the isolation, is basic. There are no jobs worth mentioning and the population needs to travel for most of its services. This is all largely due to the covenant. I am happy to say that this government has committed to investigate the legality of the restrictive covenant. The challenge is to get Ellenbrook back on track and progressing as soon as possible. I am not happy with the current daily exodus of people who travel elsewhere for services and jobs.

The electorate of Swan Hills contains a large part of the Swan Valley. Although protected by the Swan Valley Planning Act 1995, this remarkable and predominantly agricultural area is under threat. The very essence of the valley, that is, the vineyards, is under threat because ageing farmers and the attractiveness of the area as a lifestyle location are leading to the removal of vines—they are not viable on small acreages. We will need to find an answer to this problem soon.

Tourism has been extremely successful in the valley and support for this industry, both in the Swan Valley and other areas of Western Australia, is important. Unfortunately, tourism, like agriculture, is treated as a poor relative in economic terms and does not compete with the mineral boom for attention. We should be careful not to put all our eggs in one basket. Booms do not last forever and

a balance of industries is necessary for the state's income. This state needs to be able to do more than dig endless holes in the ground for our financial survival and future.

The hills area, stretching from Bullsbrook in the north to Gidgegannup, Brigadoon and Mundaring in the east, is the most environmentally sensitive part of the Swan Hills electorate. All these areas are under threat from development; not all development is bad, but a balance needs to be found. The eastern hills are an important border and complement the Perth metropolitan area. Although some development is welcome, wholesale subdivision is not. It is important to have in place adequate infrastructure such as schools, police and emergency services, as well as the basics of power, water and sewerage. However, these should be planned at the same time as the developments so that we do not establish ghettos and create more problems than we solve.

In the hills, on the rise of the scarp overlooking Bells Rapids, there is a great opportunity for the state to create a dream destination for future generations—this area is a potential tourist destination in its own right—just as Kings Park is to the people of this state. The pieces of the puzzle have not come together at this moment, but nothing worth doing is ever easy.

This portion of land—approximately 400 hectares, and the same size as Kings Park—is presently privately owned and in the process of being developed. In my opinion this development poses a considerable number of environmental challenges for developers and is of great concern to the community.

I believe that this land of rocky outcrops, waterfalls and wildlife in almost pristine bushland overlooking the Swan River, the last of such land in metropolitan Western Australia, should be preserved for posterity. We should not only plan for today, but also bank environmental assets for future generations to enjoy.

Finally, while we are busy planning and developing our state with skyscrapers, railway lines and stadiums, and performing economic miracles, it is important that we do not forget the disadvantaged, the handicapped and the elderly, all of whom are our responsibility. These people are the most likely to be overlooked in the rush of progress. My commitment is that I will not forget those most in need.

[Applause.]
