

[Tuesday, 28 April 1992.]

MR RIEBELING (Ashburton) [2.11 pm]: I rise today to make my maiden speech with mixed feelings of pride, sadness, indebtedness and anticipation. I feel proud that the people of Ashburton have chosen me in a hard-fought by-election campaign to represent them. I express my appreciation to them for their support and trust in me.

The sadness I feel derives from the passing of Pam Buchanan, my predecessor as the member for Ashburton. With Pam's death a chapter of Pilbara history closes. I have read the tributes to her from both sides of the House. Pam served the people of the Pilbara with integrity and dedication. If I can emulate her performance in representing Ashburton I will have achieved much. As Roebourne Shire President I shared Pam's commitment to the people of Roebourne to build a swimming pool in the town in which she and her family lived for many years. I wish to state here that I will ensure our vision is realised. After consultation with George Buchanan, and with his permission, I will move to name the new Roebourne swimming pool after Mrs Buchanan in acknowledgment of her commitment to the people of Roebourne and the progress of the town. I regret that Pam did not live to see the project under way.

The indebtedness I feel is, of course, to the many local people who helped me with my election campaign. Their support was overwhelming and inspirational. Firstly, I want to acknowledge my family, especially my wife Colleen, who supported and encouraged me from the time I decided to seek preselection and throughout the campaign. I also thank my three sons, Brendan, Shane and Paul, for their understanding during the difficult months leading up to the by-election. Knowing I can count on my family's support as I face the challenge of my new career is a great help to me.

Secondly, I could not have achieved a decisive victory in Ashburton without the support of all sectors of the Labor Movement. Bruce Wilson, Glen Ivory, Mick Dayes and Henry Rozmmianic of the Australian Workers Union, Wally Pritchard, Tony Papaconstuntinos and Erol May of the Seamens Union of Australia, and Martin Pritchard and Mark Bishop of the Shop Distributive and Allied Employees Union were all of invaluable assistance throughout the campaign. My local Australian Labor Party branch president, Jon Ford, showed true leadership and dedication to winning the seat for Labor, and his wife Taryn gave magnificent support. Other members of the local community whom I would like to acknowledge particularly, and not all of them are Labor Party members, include Kevin Richards, Patrick Bourke, Cathie Wyllie, Wendy Whitchurch, Gina Pritchard and Noel Nielsen. In Pannawonica Steve and Clare Kelly always provided a weary candidate with refreshment and were excellent hosts to the Premier and her guests at their tavern, while in Onslow Mike and Jessy Callaghan's help was indispensable.

I thank all the Australian Labor Party members of Parliament, both Federal and State, who assisted in many ways. My thanks must especially go to the Australian Labor Party members of Parliament with whom I share the privilege of representing the Ashburton area. Their support was magnificent, especially the efforts of Hon Tom Stephens and Hon Mark Nevill. Also, if my support in Ashburton ever reaches the level enjoyed by my colleague, the Federal member for Kalgoorlie, Graeme Campbell, I will be very happy. I followed his campaigning precepts and we doorknocked Pannawonica in suits and ties when it was 48 degrees in the shade. I am pleased to be able to inform the House that he took off his coat before I took off mine. As well, I particularly thank Jerry Maher of Maher Durack Media for his assistance in getting my message across through the media. I know his skills and competence are recognised on both sides of this House and I am indebted to him for his contribution on this occasion. I will have more to say about the media later.

Finally, the direction and back up given to me by Chris Evans, the State Secretary of the Australian Labor Party, Lois Anderson, the Assistant State Secretary, and my campaign director once more demonstrated the professionalism and unity of the Labor Party at a time when the so-called experts were writing us off.

In contrast to the support I enjoyed and the party unity from local to national level shown in Ashburton, I would like to make a few comments on the Opposition's efforts. I think it is important that the electors of Western Australia and those members of the media who have an open mind appreciate the level of disunity and disharmony demonstrated by those opposite. It was left to Hon Norman Moore and the member for Nedlands to run the campaign. I know they are responsible because the Leader of the Opposition has been giving them all the credit since 4 April. Mrs Joy West, one of the best candidates the Liberals have put up in recent years, placed her fate in such capable hands. The Liberal campaign began quite positively but it did not take long for it to degenerate into the usual negative effort. Perhaps the lowest point of all was the advertisement authorised by Hon Norman Moore which referred to Pam Buchanan. I will not go into details, but that advertisement would

have to rate as one of the most tasteless and insensitive seen in any campaign. The electorate saw it that way as well.

Another leading light conservative also added to the confusion of the Liberal campaign by publishing a pamphlet purporting to give my views on a number of issues without, of course, any reference to me. Finally, on election eve and election day a number of unauthorised and anonymous anti-Labor election pamphlets and posters were produced. I do not hold the Liberal Party responsible for those; however, one could well imagine the Liberal candidate asking, "With friends like these, who needs enemies?"

I would like to make a few comments about the media coverage of the by-election. I understand the Liberal Party has some complaints about its treatment by the Ashburton media. Perhaps they have become so used to reading *The West Australian* that they actually believe the earth is flat. However, on this occasion the local newspapers, *The Karratha Guardian* and the *North West Telegraph* had a much better grasp of the issues than did *The West Australian* and were quite willing to give all three candidates a fair go if they had something newsworthy to say. Neither paper nor their journalists or editors had any ideological or personal axes to grind. Similarly, the local ABC radio and the commercial radio and television stations provided balanced coverage. With the exception of articles under the by-line of Mr Magoo - I mean Mr McGlue; that is my mistake, Mr Magoo was blind in both eyes - I think readers would agree that the Labor campaign was positive and constructive, in contrast to what the Liberal campaigners offered the electorate.

The last point I wish to make about the by-election should be noted by every member of this House. I refer to the contribution of the Premier, Dr Carmen Lawrence. It is not surprising that a recent survey showed that if one adds together the percentage of popularity of the member for Nedlands and the Leader of the Opposition the total does not match that of the Premier. It is not difficult to explain the difference in appeal. I have witnessed the Premier's capacity for hard work and commitment to her party and its members. The public know that, even if not all of them support our party. The best and most telling example of the Premier's leadership qualities was her decision to remain in Ashburton on election day. She stood by her candidate, party members and supporters, win or lose. Not so the Liberal leadership; the Leader of the Opposition went jet skiing in Perth, while the member for Nedlands nicked off on a jet to Perth two hours before the polls closed. I know what team I am proud to be part of. Thank you, Premier.

I come to this Parliament after 22 years' service in the Crown Law Department of Western Australia. I am proud to have been a public servant and to have spent most of my service in the north of the State. I thank my many friends in the Crown Law Department at all levels of the organisation for their friendship and support over the years. As managing registrar of the Karratha court and clerk of other country courts I have seen progress in the administration of justice in this State over the past 10 years. For example, the support services now offered in areas such as family law and to the victims of domestic violence attest to this Government's commitment to the needs of women and families. I also acknowledge the contribution of lay justices of the peace in northern communities. It is particularly pleasing to record that the Government has seen fit to appoint a substantial number of women and Aborigines as justices of the peace, which ensures that local courts reflect a wide cross-section of the diverse communities in the north of the State.

As President of the Roebourne Shire Council it was my privilege to serve on an effective and hard working council ably served by professional and dedicated staff. We worked as a team and as a result the Roebourne Shire Council's financial position will soon be the envy of other local authorities, ensuring that the burden on ratepayers and others who contribute to shire revenue is minimised. As shire president, my policy was to encourage unity and harmony both in the council and in our community and to be available and accessible at all times. I intend to continue that approach and I can assure all electors, whether they supported me or not at the poll, that I will always put their interests first.

My task of representing the people of Ashburton will be assisted by the Lawrence Government's commitment to developing our State's resources. As members would know, some of our nation's most important resource projects are located in Ashburton or their products are despatched from our ports. The Premier's commitment to expedite project approval procedures will help to ensure job growth continues and offers a secure future to the young people who choose to live in the Pilbara. I have no hesitation in describing myself as pro-development. We must develop our State's resources for the benefit of our people. I recognise our standard of living and that of my children depends on reducing our current account deficit. We cannot go on living on the savings of foreigners which we borrow to sustain our lifestyle. We must pay our own way, and to encourage our most efficient and unprotected industries to export is one way we can continue to enjoy a good standard of living.

Environmental and heritage concerns are also of critical importance. One of the Pilbara's greatest assets is its natural beauty and its Aboriginal heritage. Both these concerns can be addressed to the satisfaction of all parties. We must have the right mechanisms in place first, however, and the State Government's new approval procedures will ensure this. One thing for certain is that environmental and heritage issues are usually the last on the agenda of those countries with low or declining standards of living. By increasing the export wealth of our State and nation we will ensure that we have the resources and the will to protect our natural and cultural heritage. Even more important, however, is the development of downstream processing and industries which service our resource sector. The Pilbara is well placed to develop these industries through its proximity to South East Asian markets.

Over the years the people of the Pilbara have shown how innovative and hard working they are. This type of Pilbara spirit is shown in small but important local companies. A classic example of that spirit is Mermaid Marine with its drilling and supply based developments. One of the keys to attracting more industries to the north is a reduction in electricity prices. Tourism is an area of special interest and involvement for me. The Pilbara tourism industry contributed \$48 million to the economy in 1989-90. The Pilbara region continues to attract increasing numbers of visitors from within Australia and from overseas, with 118 000 arrivals in 1990-91. Our growing hospitality and tourism sector offers job opportunities for women, young people, and Aboriginal people in particular. We can do more to market the Pilbara effectively, and we ought to be able to develop an industry in the north west which competes with that of the Northern Territory and Queensland. One of our greatest obstacles is the monopoly enjoyed by one airline into our main towns, and I will do all I can to open the skies of the Pilbara. The completion of the new runway at Karratha will enhance our capacity to draw other operators into the region.

Good industrial relations are also fundamental to the future of both the Pilbara and the State. Last year saw the number of working days lost due to industrial disputes drop to 9 400 from 128 000 in 1981, and the trend is continuing. This is a fact of which the Labor State and Federal Governments, employers and unions can be proud. In the early 1980s, when I came to the Pilbara, industrial disputes were the norm; now the opposite is the case. This is only one result of the cooperative approach to industrial relations encouraged by Labor over the past 10 years. It has enhanced our appeal to our export customers whose constant complaint under previous Governments was the uncertainty of supply arising from industrial disputation.

The Opposition is seeking to undermine all these achievements. It has succumbed to the ideological prejudices and ignorance of its Eastern States' mates and adopted an industrial relations policy about which even its supporters have qualms. The Opposition wants to test its divisive and alien industrial relations policies on the people of the Pilbara. In contrast I support a tripartite industrial relations system; a consensus approach. I do so not only because I believe it is in our State and national interest to ensure economic stability, but also because the conservative alternative is a recipe for social disorder, uncertainty and inequity. One need only look to New Zealand to see the effects of ideologically driven deregulatory policies, from either side of politics. I am pleased that the Federal Labor Government has never embraced the snake oil policies of Roger Douglas - particularly his goods and services tax. It is a pity the Liberal and National Parties are not so selective about importing their conservative New Zealand cousins' "kiwi oil" industrial relations policies. The Liberals in Western Australia must be desperate if they have to look so far east for ideas.

While on that topic, I thank the Liberal Party for its assistance in highlighting how damaging a goods and services tax would be to the Pilbara, indeed to rural Western Australia. I understand the Liberal candidate in Ashburton also felt some discomfort about aspects of her party's new tax. The new tax proposals of the conservatives would impact severely on rural and regional Western Australia. Tourism and hospitality, two of our fastest growing industries, would suffer the devastating impact of the proposed 15 per cent tax on hotel and restaurant patrons. Families from the north west who enjoy a few weeks each year in the south west will pay 15 per cent more for every motel or accommodation bill. Local government authorities which provide garbage disposal services will be forced to collect an additional 15 per cent from ratepayers, and small businesses and community and sporting groups will be stuck with paperwork and extra expense to satisfy the tax man.

Like one of those broken shopping trolleys - stacked to the gunwales with Harpic and Pal, no doubt - that always pulls to the right, the goods and services tax is a vehicle for disaster. I am pleased that the Ashburton by-election played some part in informing country and regional Western Australians of the impact the proposed GST would have on living standards. I understand that after the by-election the Liberals had another look at their Fightback package as it has not produced the results they had hoped. I understand a more appropriately named package has been chosen; namely, the "Punch Drunk Package"; the policies remain the same but the ability to market the package may be improved.

Of course, taxation is an important issue to the people of the Pilbara, and I support the Premier's efforts to persuade the Federal Government to review the impact of the fringe benefits tax on north west residents. At the very least we must examine its effect on entitlements like rental and air-conditioning subsidies, which are an essential feature of north west communities. I will be working with my Federal colleague, Mr Graeme Campbell, to ensure that zone rebates are meaningful for north west residents.

Health and medical services is one of the most critical issues affecting the people of Ashburton. As in most parts of regional Australia, general practitioner services are provided in this area largely by the private medical profession. Although we are told that there is a surplus of doctors in Australia, that is certainly not the case in many north west communities where substantial incentives and benefits - those not enjoyed by other businesses or professional groups - still seem insufficient to draw enough doctors to the north west. Although the Health Department must be prepared to locate its own doctors in areas of need, the long term solution lies in providing a choice of medical services catering to the area's special needs of women and children, Aborigines and industry workers. The Pilbara's unique population and age profile, along with its concentration of industrial workers and the distances involved in accessing specialist services, requires innovative responses to the provision of medical services by Government, the private medical profession, community groups, employers and unions.

All these groups have an interest in good health services, yet our community responses to these needs are often ad hoc and driven by the urgency of the moment.

During the Ashburton by-election I was made acutely aware of the pain and distress inadequate medical services can cause in that electorate, as well as the inherent cost of family disruption and financial hardship. I pledge to honour my election promise to the people of Ashburton to ensure a satisfactory level of medical service is provided. Additionally, misperceptions and misunderstandings - by doctors and patients - about the provision of other services such as PATS - the patients' assisted travel scheme - and specialist services contribute to community concerns. Also, it is apparent that communication between these interested groups is inadequate. These problems have no quick solutions, but I undertake to ensure that proper communication and consultation occurs in the process to improve the situation.

Housing and other accommodation is also a major community concern, and I support the sale of Homeswest stock to local families under Homeswest's Right Move scheme, both as a means of encouraging long term residence in the region and to provide new funds to build accommodation for families, single people and pensioners. However, the funds generated from those sales must remain within the market from which they came.

Aboriginal people comprise a substantial portion of the population of Ashburton. These people have the same needs for housing and health services as other residents, but employment is their greatest need. Although we have excellent schools in Roebourne and Onslow, which are staffed by committed teachers, the teachers' job is made harder by the lack of tangible employment opportunities for young people at the end of their schooling. Without successful role-models in the community, it is difficult to encourage young people to see the full benefits of education.

Grandiose schemes are not the answer; small scale enterprises directed at the tourism market, house building and other local needs will provide Aboriginal people with the opportunity to break the cycle of dependency. The dignity and improved morale which result from having a job are priceless benefits to any individual or community.

Mr Speaker, we still imprison far too many people, and the attendant risks and costs are well known. I would like to see our prison system using living areas away from major population centres as places of detention - if detention is the only alternative available - for Aboriginal people. Such a scheme, properly administered, would provide both financial and social benefits by strengthening the traditional authority of Aboriginal community elders and leaders. In this respect, I commend the work of the Roebourne police who have demonstrated a strong commitment to their community, especially to young people, above the demands of normal duty and working hours. I hope the commissioner continues to encourage this attitude in his officers, particularly in north west communities.

I have already touched on the need to encourage alternative air services in the Pilbara region; similarly, I will be working to develop the Port of Dampier as a regular port of call for the State Shipping Service. We have seen already the flow-on benefits of such development in the Kimberley with reduced freight costs to local businesses

and consumers. It is amazing to note that the Opposition wants to scrap Stateships, despite the benefits which accrue from its operations to the north and the development of interstate and overseas markets. Also, I hope that we will continue to see more Australian registered ships on our coastal and overseas runs. When I inspected the Kirki last year off the coast of Dampier, I was appalled at the condition of the vessel and the crew's living conditions. That sort of floating disaster would not have occurred on an Australian ship.

Mr Speaker, finally I thank you and the staff of the Parliament for your assistance and support in helping me settle into my new duties. I am honoured to take my place here as a member of the Lawrence Government team, and I look forward to serving the people of Ashburton for many years to come.

[Applause.]