



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Simon Millman, MLA
(Member for Mount Lawley)

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.

MR S.A. MILLMAN (Mount Lawley) [5.17 pm]: I acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation and I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. I make that acknowledgement not merely because it is important to pay our respects, but to recognise that there must be a proper appreciation of the importance of connection to country.

Madam Acting Speaker, this evening I wish to speak to three separate constituencies: firstly, to the people of Western Australia; secondly, to the people of Mount Lawley; and thirdly, to the honourable members assembled in this chamber. I speak first to the people of Western Australia. Let me introduce to you the neighbourhood and community I now have the great honour and privilege of representing. Mount Lawley is geographically the smallest electorate in the state, yet it has all the diversity that our great state enjoys. It stretches from Wanneroo Road and Morley Drive to the shores of the Swan River, and takes in places named in the language of the custodians of our country, like Yokine and Coolbinia, and suburbs named for symbols of religious significance, like Menora. This last one is appropriate in a region that holds the largest Jewish population in the state. It has the best Jewish school in the state, Carmel School in Dianella, and it has best Muslim school, the Australian Islamic College, also in Dianella. Whilst we are on education, it has the terrific Mount Lawley Senior High School and the renowned Perth College. At the Edith Cowan University Mount Lawley campus we are blessed with the Western Australian Academy of Performing Arts, one of the pre-eminent performing arts schools in the country. We have community-based early learning and childcare centres and wonderful primary schools like Mount Lawley, Coolbinia, Yokine, West Morley and Sutherland Dianella. We have Catholic primary schools like St Paul's, and Infant Jesus School in Morley, and TAFE campuses like North Metropolitan TAFE in Lord Street. We have wonderful sporting and community groups like the Coolbinia Bombers, the Mount Lawley Inglewood Roos, the Beaufort Street Community Centre, the Dianella Community Centre and the Yokine Community Playgroup. We have thriving Kenyan and Greek expatriate communities and people from all over the world. Just last week, I was honoured to attend a citizenship ceremony in my community and witnessed as scores more people swore an oath of allegiance to our great country. We have industry, we have small businesses, and we have a thriving cafe and retail scene along Perth's best-known street, Beaufort Street. We have an active and energetic LGBTI community, and a terrific constellation of older Australians, centred on a wonderful retirement community in Menora, who have contributed so much to our history and yet who remain so passionate about our future.

It is no surprise that our thriving community relishes and protects its diversity, for we also have those who have fled dictatorships, holocaust survivors from Nazi Germany, and South Africans of all colours and creeds who have fled the abhorrence of apartheid. Too many of my constituents know first-hand the devastating consequences when politicians and demagogues divide communities with hate on the basis of race and fear.

This is the first time the seat of Mount Lawley has ever been won by the Labor Party, but the Labor Party is well-known and well-respected in the suburbs that make up most of the electorate. I acknowledge the former member for Yokine, a great friend and former Labor government minister, Hon Bob Kucera. Bob, you were by my side for so much of our campaign, and everywhere we went, people were rushing to greet you. You have left an indelible mark on our community and I thank you. Your joy in my victory seems to outshine my own!

I want to thank the people of Mount Lawley for placing their trust in me to be their representative in this place. In the short period since the election, I have had an opportunity to reflect on our campaign to win the seat of Mount Lawley. Together with my tireless campaign team, we campaigned on our vision for the future of our community and, more broadly, for the future of Western Australia. To those who fear that the mainstream political parties are growing too close, I tender as exhibit a this most recent state election. We on this side of the chamber advanced a socially progressive and economically responsible agenda—a classic Labor blueprint built around jobs, health, education, and public transport. In Mount Lawley, we put an emphasis on responsible investment back into our community, as well as restoring integrity and discipline to our financial affairs. There was and is a deep philosophical difference between the progressive and the conservative sides of politics. We on the progressive side recognise and respect the active role that government must play on its side of the social contract. We staunchly opposed the privatisation of Western Power.

I pause at this point to convey my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to the Mount Lawley campaign team, without whom I would not be in this place this evening. Hon Alanna Clohesy, MLC, a member of the other place, has diligently advanced the interests of all her constituents in East Metropolitan Region, and has dedicated her life to public service, but has done so with a full-hearted and full-throated commitment to social justice. Lan, I hope to emulate your achievements, but also your methods. Thank you. Our campaign manager, Dennis Liddelow, is tireless, accommodating, sympathetic and passionate, and an inspiration to the team. I also thank the campaign committee of Rewi Lyall, Brad Geatches, Hope Smith, Tim Dymond and Mia Onorato Sartari. To the two field organisers, Ben Latham and Jack Eaton, it is so good to have you both on board for the next part of the journey. You recruited and inspired a terrific team of activists and volunteers.

I had the pleasure of being preselected as Labor's candidate for the seat of Mount Lawley in February 2016. Within weeks, Phil O'Donoghue was by my side week in, week out as we knocked on doors throughout the electorate. For more than a year, we knocked on doors and spoke to voters, constituents and neighbours, and even some friends—and, Phil, it was always a delight to have you out there with me.

To our countless volunteers, such as Aaron Mackrell, Sonia Gurrin, Emily Baldwin and Joe and Hazel Butorac; the many other doorknockers, such as Eugene Duggan, Mike Hatzidakis, Tom French and Jai Wilson; the letter-boxers and leafletters, like Mima Comrie and Phil Kennedy; the phonecallers like Pete Mudie, Lee Smoire, Amy Bracegirdle, Caleb Gardiner, Andy Skinner and Brock Oswald, and everyone else—many of whom I am sure to have forgotten, for which I am sorry—you were an incredible source of encouragement and support, united as we were in a common goal, but for an amazing variety of reasons.

I personally had many reasons for wanting to succeed in this endeavour, but there was one reason that kept coming up time and again. Parliament has a tremendous role to perform in our society, and it needs to perform that role well. So often, people would tell me that they had been put off politics by the divisiveness, bickering and pettiness of our politicians. They were disappointed by so many broken promises, and by a government that had lost belief in the important role of government in society. A recent poll by the Lowy Institute found that only 42 per cent of 18 to 29-year-olds agreed with the proposition that democracy is preferable to any other form of government. Members need reflect only on what I said earlier about the danger of demagogues to know precisely where I stand on this issue.

Too many of our earlier generations of Australians have sacrificed too much for those of us with the privilege of serving in this chamber to allow this state of affairs to go unchallenged. There has been an eroding of credibility in this institution that must be reversed. Our history and our heritage are littered with the souls of the faithful departed who have made the ultimate sacrifice to defend and advance our freedoms—be they the miners on the goldfields of Ballarat who made a stand at the Eureka Stockade and took an oath on the Southern Cross, be they our diggers across too many wars, or be they anyone who has challenged unjust laws with the aspirational and clear-sighted aim of advancing a fair Australia.

It was because I felt I could make a difference, advocate on behalf of my community, and restore some credibility to our democratic process that I decided to nominate as the Labor candidate for Mount Lawley. I have always voted Labor. When you are raised by a father who is a tradie and a mother who works as an education assistant, you are raised on the classic Australian working-class and middle-class values of looking after your mates, looking after those less fortunate than you, and looking after the community. You are raised on the values of reward for hard work and effort and of contributing your fair share. You are raised with a view that you should always give back more than you take.

With these values as my guide, I left home when I was 19 and moved to Western Australia. Two great friends, Dave Turk and Tim Huggins, and their families welcomed me when I arrived in Perth and helped me get on my feet. I had the great privilege of studying at the University of Western Australia, and for a time served as a representative on the university senate, the student guild and as president of the National Union of Students. In Western Australia, we are blessed with world-class educational institutions that produce outstanding graduates. We need a government that recognises the importance of diversifying the economy and supporting these institutions in the pivotal role they play in that endeavour.

After I graduated from UWA, I began working at Slater and Gordon, renowned as the most progressive law firm in Australia. I want to thank my colleagues from Slaters who have provided inspiration, support and encouragement along the way. To those on the eastern seaboard—Marcus Clayton, Hayden Stephens and James Higgins—thank you. During my time at Slaters, I had the honour of working alongside some outstanding legal practitioners—Tricia Wong, Luisa Dropulich, John Fiocco, Alex Illich and Toby Borgeest being foremost among them—but also of working on fascinating and worthwhile cases that reflected my values. These included advocating on behalf of a security guard who had been racially vilified; women who had been discriminated against by their employers for having had children; and native title and Indigenous claim groups that faced the might of resources companies that seemed to have scant regard for traditional connections to country or for the preservation of ancient cultures.

My day-to-day work was, however, much more prosaic. Routinely, I would help workers who had been injured at work or prosecuted for standing up for their mates. During this time I met Mick Buchan who, when I started doing workers' compensation cases at Slaters,

was the occupational health and safety representative at the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union. Mick's mantra was that the members should always come first. As everyone in this chamber will know, Mick has risen to become the secretary of the CFMEU and one of the most thoughtful and respected union leaders in WA. So to you, Mick, and to the officials, organisers and members of the CFMEU, you have been steadfast in your support. Thank you. Dare to struggle, dare to win. In addition to helping members of the Construction, Forestry, Mining and Energy Union, I was also privileged to work extensively on behalf of the State School Teachers' Union and its president, Pat Byrne, and the Asbestos Diseases Society, and Robert and Rose Marie Vojakovic. Each of these organisations and the people who dedicate their working lives to them have provided an inspiration to me. It is these people who understand the myriad trials and tribulations faced by ordinary Western Australians and who do everything in their power to help.

There is nothing quite like sitting down with Rose Marie Vojakovic to hear the story of a young woman in her 40s who is dying from mesothelioma because she played with deadly asbestos dust and fibres when she was a little girl in Wittenoom. There is nothing quite like hearing that because she is a single mum, her young kids will be left without a parent. There is nothing quite like hearing her describe how the dust fell like angel's wings. If I had done nothing else in my career, these stories would have provided enough inspiration for me to seek election to this place. As you watch these victims die, as all your clients inevitably do when they have been diagnosed with mesothelioma, you are astounded by the hard-heartedness of an earlier generation of lawyers who obfuscated and delayed legal cases, awaiting the death of the plaintiff, to help their negligent clients avoid liability and punishment. To those lawyers though, I say: through your actions you provide inspiration to people like me, for only this place has the power under our constitution to introduce industrial manslaughter laws and hold guilty employers to account. Thank you for inspiring me to run for Parliament.

Sadly, industrial manslaughter is not confined to victims of asbestos diseases, as some of my colleagues have already said this evening. It remains prevalent throughout industry, particularly in the transport and construction industries. When we see backpackers come to our beautiful state, with no training, experience or skill, and take jobs on construction sites only to have their lives cut short, we know something is horribly wrong. When I see these workers die, I am motivated to do everything I can to improve workplace health and safety. When you consider the circumstances of their deaths, you do not think it is industrial manslaughter, rather, it is bloody blue murder. For so long as I have the honour of being in this place, members can rest assured that improving workplace health and safety will be an unwavering commitment.

Before I finish, I want to speak to every person who has the privilege of being in this chamber. Firstly, let me congratulate all of you on being re-elected or elected for the very first time. Let me turn to the duty that rests with every person here. You have chosen to become representatives of your community. Presumably, you have done so because you are passionate about the future of our great state. For that I commend you. Now is the time for us to put aside historical differences and focus on what WA needs. Our task is to look to a clear-sighted future built on the proper foundations of democracy, liberty, equality and community. To these three pillars of an inclusive society I would also add the great objectives of compassion and sustainability.

As the neoliberal project of the last 40 years slowly unwinds, it falls to us to strike a new accord, a new social contract. Speaking to the voters of Mount Lawley during the election campaign, they knew that a collapse in commodity prices was not the fault of the previous government. Whenever I pointed to the state of the economy, traditional Liberal voters

would respond with, “That’s not the government’s fault; they don’t control commodity prices.” But these same voters would have to agree when I pointed out the parlous state of WA’s finances, the profligate spending and the terrible assumptions that were characteristic of the previous government. These same voters would demur when I suggested that that same government had blown the mining boom by failing to diversify our economy and capitalise on our natural economic strategic advantages. These same voters would agree that the privatisation of Western Power was the most fiscally irresponsible strategy for addressing this state of affairs. People throughout the electorate were undoubtedly influenced by the effective and disciplined campaign that was run in opposition to the privatisation of Western Power by the Electrical Trades Union headed by Les McLaughlin, and the Australian Services Union and Wayne Wood.

Firstly, let me put on the record my gratitude to both Les and Wayne and to the rank-and-file membership of their respective unions. Secondly, let me congratulate them on running an excellent campaign that put this issue squarely in voters’ minds. To them, I say this: do not be put off by the criticisms of those who say you should not have run this campaign. Too often it seems that those who criticise unions for making public comment are the same who portray themselves as defenders of free speech. You cannot have it both ways. When you have a bad, unpopular policy, you have to accept it is a bad, unpopular policy.

[Member’s time extended.]

Mr S.A. MILLMAN: The voters of Mount Lawley whom I spoke to agreed that the privatisation of Western Power was a bad policy. These same voters also agreed when I suggested that everyday Western Australians needed stable, well-paying jobs and personal economic security in an economy encouraged by an activist government with a plan for jobs. The small businesses along Beaufort Street desperately need an improving economy and customers who can spend money. Ultimately, the people of Mount Lawley recognised that the neoliberal Institute of Public Affairs philosophy of government getting out of the way and letting the market decide had failed the people of Western Australia and resulted in ballooning debt and deficit. It had resulted in cuts to education and cuts to health. It had resulted in increased crime and a scourge of drugs. The people of Mount Lawley realised that without a plan for economic recovery centred on local jobs, too many people would be too poor to play an active role in society. For those champions of freedom without equality opposite, Madam Acting Speaker, through you, I ask this: what is the point of having freedom to do everything when you cannot afford to do anything? The people of Mount Lawley know that there is no point. They now look to a Labor government to whom they have given a ringing endorsement to implement that activist state and lead an economic recovery based on fairness and equality.

After the train smash that was the economically irresponsible Liberal government, once again it falls to Labor to make things right. And we will, whilst maintaining good schools, good hospitals and a properly resourced police force, because we believe that as a society we are better when everybody is okay. There is an emerging consensus in the developed world that only when prosperity is shared equitably can economies become and remain resilient. Once inequality and disparity take hold, economic nationalism destroys the neoliberal program. The IPA philosophy is condemned to the dustbin of history and we must look to a new theory of equitable economic growth in a sustainable environment. Can we do it? Yes, we can! When I look around this chamber, I am filled with optimism about our ability to accomplish this task, blessed as we are in this place with so many who have so much experience, combined with my fellow new parliamentarians, armed as they are with their energy, enthusiasm and intelligence.

As I conclude, let me speak to those I love, without whom I would not be here. Mum and dad—thanks for instilling in me those values that are so much a part of who I am. To my sister, Marni, and my big brother, Marcus, thanks for keeping me modest, giving me guidance and for always being so supportive.

Thanks to my housemates from Leura Street—Tim Huggins, Eric Heenan, Mike Preston, Ivor King, and Ryan Batchelor. All those years ago, you helped shape my political philosophy and my world view. Together you represent a terrific spectrum of political thought from social democrat, through to liberal democrat, through to libertarian. Interrogating our ideas and defending them in debate serves only to strengthen our conviction. To the three people who have been instrumental in providing encouragement and support, and without whom I would not be here today—Chris Prast, David Scaife and Tim Hammond, MP—I say you have kept my head in the game, my feet on the ground and my eyes on the prize. Each in your own way you have provided inspiration by virtue of a philosophy you live; namely, the life you lead is the lesson you teach. Thank you for your advice, your encouragement, your support and your counsel.

Finally, to my wonderful family—my wife, Tara, and my sons, Willis and Otis. To Tara, thank you for everything. Thank you for your patience and your perseverance, for your kindness, thoughtfulness and strength. Thank you for always reminding me to stay true to what I believe. To my two sons, Willis and Otis, when you came into this world you provided me with the last spark of inspiration I needed to pursue this dream, this goal. It is my responsibility to pass on to you two boys a better world than the one we have inherited. The best way I know how to achieve that is by being a passionate campaigner in this chamber for our community and our state. Unless someone like me cares a whole awful lot, nothing is going to get better. It is not.

Let me finish with hope. I hope to bring energy and enthusiasm, passion and compassion, thoughtfulness and diligence to this role. I hope to repay the faith and trust that the people of Mount Lawley have placed in me and provide a clear and articulate voice as a dedicated advocate. To the people of Mount Lawley, thank you.

[Applause.]
