



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Samantha Rowe, MLC
(Member for East Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan) [5.36 pm]: Mr President, I stand before you humbled to be part of this great institution, the Parliament of Western Australia, and to be delivering my maiden speech tonight to the Legislative Council. It is both an honour and a privilege to be elected to the thirty-ninth Parliament as a Labor member for the East Metropolitan Region. The East Metropolitan Region is an exciting area to represent. It is a diverse region that covers electorates from Mount Lawley to Armadale and the hills of Kalamunda to Midland. It takes in Perth Airport, Ascot Racecourse and the tourist attraction of the Swan Valley.

I would like to acknowledge and congratulate my Labor colleagues in the East Metropolitan Region, Hon Alanna Clohesy and Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, whom I look forward to working closely with over the next four years. And may I congratulate all new members in this place tonight. The process and procedures of Parliament can seem daunting at first, but I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Mr President, the Clerks, the staff at Parliament and the government Whip for making the new members feel welcome and ensuring our transition is as smooth as possible. I appreciate the professionalism that has been extended to me, and as the Whip for the opposition, I look forward to having a strong working relationship with all of you in the chamber.

Like every parliamentarian before me, I did not reach this position on my own. This opportunity afforded to me is the result of the hard work of many. The East Metropolitan Region is made up of 14 lower house seats and I would like to acknowledge the hard work of all our Labor candidates in the East Metropolitan Region including Tony Buti in Armadale, Dave Kelly in Bassendean, Cassie Rowe in Belmont, Barry Urban in Darling Range, Andrew Waddell in Forrestfield, Chris Tallentire in Gosnells, Mick Wainwright in Kalamunda, Lisa Baker in Maylands, Michelle Roberts in Midland, Janine Freeman in Mirrabooka, Reece Whitby in Morley, Bob Kucera in Mount Lawley, Ian Radisich in Swan Hills and Rita Saffioti in West Swan.

BELMONT

I personally worked on the Belmont campaign committee for the past 12 months. I was glad to be part of a strong committee made up of Stephen Price, the campaign director, and Brendan McShanag, the campaign manager. We were supported by many: Peter O'Keeffe, Patrick Gardner, Barry Rowe, Lauren Cayoun, Sue Pethick, Merrilyn Ercegovich, Matt Dixon, Alana Herbert, Tim Hammond, Megan Anwyl and Eric Ripper. This was supplemented also by the work of the party office, under the direction of the state secretary, Simon Mead, and the assistant state secretary, Lenda Oshalem.

As has been previously stated in this house, the Liberal-National Party alliance received between 57 and 58 per cent of the two-party preferred vote; the highest vote for any political party since 1917. It was clear that the tide was going out for Labor. In spite of these

circumstances, we were able to hold the primary vote for Labor in Belmont; however, on a two-party preferred basis, a collapse in the vote of the minor parties led to a close Liberal victory in Belmont. The 2013 election result was a clear mandate and a strong victory for the Barnett government, and it is now incumbent on the government to deliver on its promises. I am also confident that WA Labor has the capacity to rebuild from this electoral defeat and provide a strong alternative at the next election. It is worth noting that even though Western Australia has public funding for elections, the parties are not starting from an even playing field. The Liberal Party had an enormous financial advantage in the 2013 election that WA Labor was unable to compete with. I believe this issue should be above party politics, and reform is fundamental to protect the integrity of the democratic process.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My family has been a constant source of inspiration and encouragement to me, and have helped shape the person I am today. They are my mum and dad; my sister, Cassie Rowe; my brother-in-law, Patrick Gardner; and my beautiful baby niece, Bobby Rowe-Gardner. I thank you all for being you. My dad, Hon Barry Rowe, was a minister in Victoria, and my mum, Helen Rowe, was recently awarded life membership of the WA Labor Party. I am grateful to have grown up in a household where issues of social justice were debated around the kitchen table. To my partner, my husband Tom Hodgkins, I want to thank you for your unwavering love, support and belief in me. Tom has an optimistic outlook on life and always believes in doing the right thing—a quality I greatly admire.

I would like to thank my godparents, Ron Curwood and Rob Grimmer, close family friends, Colin Clarke and Carol Jordan, and my mother-in-law and father-in-law, Julie and David Hodgkins, who all travelled from interstate to assist in the campaign for my election to Parliament. A number of family, friends and business associates helped extensively during the campaign; unfortunately, I cannot list them all, but they know who they are and I thank them. However, I would like to acknowledge the Belmont branch of the Labor Party, and the network of supporters who worked tirelessly.

I would like to acknowledge and thank a number of people tonight who assisted in my journey to Parliament. Joe Bullock, secretary of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association of WA, and Stephen Price, secretary of the Australian Workers' Union. They were strong advocates and mentors through the preselection process, and I extend my heartfelt gratitude to both of them. Since entering Parliament I have received support and guidance from Hon Kate Doust, Hon Michelle Roberts, Hon Sue Ellery, and for my current role as Whip, Hon Ed Dermer.

TRADE UNIONS

I am a proud member of the WA branch of the Transport Workers' Union. Unfortunately, Rick Burton, secretary of the union, is unable to be here tonight. Affiliated trade unions are the backbone of the Australian Labor Party. I have great respect for the role of trade unions in society. Unions work as a collective to fight for the rights of many of the lowest paid workers in society. The Labor Party is proud of the work unions do to ensure that the rights of workers are protected now and in the future. It is worth remembering that the introduction of the eight-hour working day and public holidays, as well as the provision of sick leave, annual leave, leave loading and universal superannuation are all enjoyed due to the hard work of the Australian trade union movement. There are few more noble professions than the dedication of a career to the betterment of others. I look forward to being an advocate for the protection of workplace rights in my role as a member of the Legislative Council.

EMPLOYMENT BACKGROUND

My introduction to the WA branch of the Labor Party started six years ago when I moved to Perth, and the former state secretary, Bill Johnston, employed me as the executive officer for the Labor Business Roundtable. This opportunity meant I was able to establish relationships with the WA business community and industry associations. I am proud of my time at the Labor Business Roundtable, as I was able to promote a strong dialogue between Labor members of Parliament and the WA business community. I consider it a privilege to have worked for the Labor Party—an organisation I truly believe in. During my four years with the Labor Party, I was fortunate to work with many inspired and like-minded people, all striving to realise our shared values.

From the Labor Business Roundtable I joined the American Chamber of Commerce, where I was employed for the last 19 months as the business development manager, under the leadership of the general manager, Penelope Williamson. The American Chamber of Commerce is Australia's largest chamber of commerce; it works to promote trade, commerce and investment between Australia and the United States, and in the Asia-Pacific region. It was another great opportunity to work closely with hundreds of the leading businesses in WA. It has been an absolute honour to work alongside women of such calibre in my role at AmCham, and I would like to thank my former colleagues for their support and friendship.

LABOR'S RECORD

I joined the Labor Party at the age of 17. Growing up in the Hawke-Keating era meant I was heavily influenced by their policies and the way they shaped our nation. Not only did they open up the Australian economy, but also they embraced trade with the Asia-Pacific region. They introduced native title legislation, and compulsory superannuation to help working people have a more dignified retirement. In the present context, I am immensely proud that the first female Australian Prime Minister, Hon Julia Gillard, is a Labor Prime Minister. The federal Labor government is responsible for revolutionary policies, including the national broadband network, the National Disability Insurance Scheme, paid parental leave and the historic investment into the education system, to name a few.

At a state level, WA Labor has delivered a range of political and social reforms. These include upgrades to the state's industrial and labour laws, and Labor was at the forefront of a spirit of reconciliation to the resolution of native title. WA Labor stopped the logging of the state's old-growth forests, creating a record number of new national parks; restructured the state's electricity and racing industries; and started construction of the Perth-Mandurah railway and the associated city rail tunnel. Our history is testament to the fact that the Labor Party has delivered significant and positive changes to the nation and the state of WA.

EQUALITY FOR WOMEN

I would now like to talk about other issues that are close to me. The first is equality for women. Although I appreciate we have come a long way in equality for women over the years, I believe we still have a long way to go in achieving full participation for women in every facet of society, be it at an economic, social or public level. There is still a pay gap of 26 per cent in WA between what women working full-time earn, in comparison with men. This is the highest gender pay gap in the country. Financial independence and empowerment should not be a luxury bestowed only on men. Equality for women in the form of equal pay for the same work, more flexible work environments to genuinely encourage workplace participation for women, particularly mothers, is of paramount importance; the role of a government is to foster and facilitate such changes in our society.

EDUCATION

Everyone in this great state of ours should be afforded the opportunity for employment. Education empowers individuals and provides greater choices for employment. That is why the Gallop Labor government changed the legislation to require all 16 and 17-year-olds to be in education or training, thus allowing them the opportunity to gain qualifications to find meaningful employment. It is the state government's responsibility to ensure that our children are provided the very best start in life regardless of their postcode. That means adequately investing in our public school system. If children fall through the cracks of the education system, we, as legislators, are failing them. We owe it to the next generation to make sure that we do the utmost so that every child has a fair and equitable start in life.

ECONOMY

With my business background, I recognise that it is critically important to have a strong economy and to ensure that everyone is provided the opportunity to gain employment. The extraordinary level of growth from the past decade in WA delivers the responsibility to policymakers to ensure that the state retains this economic value into the future.

The mining industry is vital to the prosperity of WA. However, I believe that more could be achieved in relation to local content to ensure that the benefits of the mining industry are shared by local small businesses, apprentices and manufacturing businesses. I believe WA is the engine room of the Australian economy. The success of the mining and resource industries makes our economy the envy of the nation. There are a number of important industries in the East Metropolitan Region, including the mining services industry, the transport industry and the racing industry. I particularly want to acknowledge the importance of the racing industry, which is the second-largest industry by employment in WA. The WA racing industry contributes nearly \$600 million in value to the WA economy and it is crucial that this industry receives strong support.

It is imperative that the state government and policymakers do everything possible to ensure that the economy is diversified and our younger generations are appropriately skilled and ready for the challenges this region will face over the coming century. A government's role should be to support, manage and foster a strong and diversified economy. A strong economy provides jobs for working people.

POVERTY

Regardless of our religious views, it is hard to disagree with Pope Francis's view on poverty. Recently, the Pope referred to "a new and heartless image in the cult of money and the dictatorship of an economy, which is faceless and lacking any truly humane goal".

Whilst we have a strong economy here in WA, there is an alarming disparity between those who are benefiting from our economy and those who have been left behind. All too often this issue is swept under the carpet. I would like to see policies that look to address poverty for Western Australians—single parents, pensioners and young people alike. It is estimated that more than one in every eight Australians are living below the poverty line. In a resource-rich state such as WA it is simply not good enough that many in our community are unable to afford to pay for heating, cooling, medication or even regular meals. During the course of the election campaign I heard many distressing stories of poverty. I will quote one example of a pensioner who said he stayed in bed during winter just to keep warm because he could not afford to put the heater on. Others told of borrowing money from their neighbours to pay their electricity bills. The concept of broadening equality within our community is not political; it transgresses the established belief system of our society. What did someone who is poor do to deserve that situation? Almost universally, nothing, of course, and as a trade-off, we must do something to address this. It is an

injustice that is not chosen and not aspired to. No-one grew up wanting to be poor and without the basic necessities of life.

CONCLUSION

Why do I want to be a member of Parliament? The answer is simple: I believe in social justice. I want to assist those in society who are most in need. I want to promote a more equitable community here in WA. What better way to achieve this than by influencing and shaping public policy and creating a voice for those who do not have one. Mr President, I want to conclude with a quote I heard at a forum recently from someone very close to me who said that politicians should be bold in their pursuit of their convictions. I agree. We must not be afraid to do what we know is right and to be courageous in our decision-making processes. I have been entrusted to represent the people of the East Metropolitan Region and I intend to do so with empathy, integrity and determination. I intend to make every day count. Thank you, Mr President.

[Applause.]
