



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Donna Taylor MLC
(Member for East Metropolitan)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Council

Thursday, 26 May 2005

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON DONNA TAYLOR (East Metropolitan) [12.14 pm]: I convey my congratulations to Hon Nick Griffiths on his election as President and Hon George Cash on his re-election as Chairman of Committees. I stand today in this house as one of two new Liberal members for the East Metropolitan Region. I am deeply conscious of the honour and privilege that has been granted to me by members of this community. I acknowledge my direct predecessor, Hon Derrick Tomlinson, who, with great distinction, served this Parliament and the Western Australian community since 1989. His eloquence, good humour and commitment to the East Metropolitan Region will certainly be missed and I place on record my personal thanks for his support and encouragement of me.

THE EAST METROPOLITAN ELECTORATE

The East Metropolitan Region is as vast as it is unique. It is the largest of the three metropolitan regions and comprises the two largest metropolitan Legislative Assembly districts of Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Swan Hills. I pause to congratulate the member for Serpentine-Jarrahdale on his recent election. The East Metropolitan Region encompasses, among many others, the towns of Bullsbrook, Gidgegannup, Chidlow, Bassendean and Midland; the Cities of Armadale, Gosnells, Belmont and Swan; the Shires of Kalamunda and Mundaring; and the historic towns of Guildford and Jarrahdale. The region boasts many of the attractions of Perth's surrounds, including the Swan Valley, Mundaring Weir and Araluen Botanic Park, to name but a few. However, it also has its dangers. The January fires that raged through the hills and devastated farms, orchards, pastures and indeed many people's livelihoods were a timely reminder of the destruction and heartache that can be caused by fire, which was made worse in the knowledge that they were deliberately lit.

BACKGROUND

In turning to my own background, my mother's family has a long and proud history in the East Metropolitan Region, dating back to my great-grandfather Scottie Jamieson, who was a local councillor for 21 years and also the Mayor of the then Midland Junction Municipal Council. He and his wife, Sarah, and 11 children, lived their lives in the Midland area and the family was known across the town for opening their doors to

the sick and homeless. Today several of their grandchildren and many great-grandchildren still dot the east metropolitan landscape. For my part, I was born at Swan District Hospital and have lived all of my life in Bassendean. I went to primary school in Guildford and worked throughout the region during my university days. I am proud to be the daughter of two now retired police officers, Don and Joan Taylor, who are in the public gallery today. My parents instilled in me from a young age important values akin to our Liberal beliefs, from personal responsibility to being good to others and creating opportunities through hard work and effort in both employment and study. In applying these values I got my first job at the age of 15 as a church organist. I progressed to pulling beers at the Rose and Crown Hotel to waiting on tables in the Swan Valley and since I began work full time some eight or nine years ago, I have learnt to juggle work, study and family life, much like anybody else.

By standing here today, I acknowledge that I am a relatively young member; indeed, the youngest Liberal woman to have stood in either house of this state Parliament. Therefore, there are many things that I have not yet experienced, but I feel that through my own experiences to date and those of my peers in their 20s, 30s and 40s, I can positively represent the issues, aspirations and challenges facing these Australians. Most importantly, however, I stand here as a representative of all members of the East Metropolitan Region, irrespective of age or political persuasion. I will listen and act on their behalf on the issues that are of concern to them.

Like many Western Australians, I am concerned about issues such as education, law and order and the future of Australia's youth, and I am focused on pursuing these and many other issues throughout my time in this place.

EDUCATION

In the area of education, as a trained teacher and school psychologist, I believe strongly in the need for quality schooling. There is no doubt that after parents and immediate family members, schools have the strongest influence on the development of Australia's children. Teachers charged with this great responsibility inevitably face pressure from a range of sources, and I acknowledge the invaluable work that they do on a daily basis. The quality of school education directly influences both learning outcomes and the opportunities that young people will have in the future workplace. Education also impacts on the quality of Australia's democracy and the values that its citizens possess. While some suggest that the focus of schooling should be on the secondary years, I believe that early childhood and the primary years of schooling are the most critical. It is at this time that a young child's skills, such as literacy and numeracy, are developed and it is these same skills that are vital for a child to inevitably cope in their high school years and beyond. It is essential that targeted assessment and intervention in early childhood is available when needed. Learning difficulties can arise from a variety of causes, from a slight hearing impairment to a diagnosed disorder. Indeed, around one in 10 children present some form of learning difficulty. Thus, it is imperative that these are identified and strategies are put in place; if not, they can affect a child's self-esteem and confidence and may lead to problems such as crime and drug abuse later in life, which ultimately impacts not only on the child but also their family and the broader community. Of course, the area of education is one often fraught with difficulty. There are often conflicting opinions about how best to teach and the resources needed to ensure the best possible learning outcomes. Recent research titled "The Sufficiency of Resources for Australian Primary Schools" examined whether primary schools had sufficient resources to meet the National Goals for Schooling set in 1999 by commonwealth and state ministers for education. The researchers identified a number of areas for consideration, including the difficulty to teach all of the learning areas identified in the national goals during each school week, the additional demands and pressure placed on staff as a result of increased assessment and reporting, the need to improve the support allocated to teachers with students in their classroom who have special learning needs or are disruptive and the requirement to better allocate resources according to student needs. Unfortunately, the ability to

sufficiently and effectively tailor a statewide system to meet the individual needs of every child across every school is not only difficult but also perhaps doubtful when there are competing government priorities in areas such as health and law enforcement. However, it should be a priority of government, teachers and parents alike to strive for excellence at every opportunity. Indeed, often better and more focused strategies can be put in place or more effectively resourced to ensure that young people who inevitably hold the key to Australia's future are given the best possible opportunities and choices for their endeavours in life, whatever they may be.

MENTORS

One thought I have long held, whilst not directly related to education but undoubtedly linked, is the need for greater use of mentoring programs. Unfortunately, we do live in a society with ever increasing family breakdown, crime and isolation. As a child I was fortunate to have had a happy and caring upbringing. This is not the same story for many other children. Some live in homes characterised by violence and drug abuse; others are lacking in appropriate or positive role models. Not all mentoring programs have a positive effect on every child in need, but often they can, from increased participation in education and improved self-esteem to better social skills and behaviour. Sometimes a child might just need to talk to someone who listens in a non-judgmental way or have an opportunity to participate in a positive activity which he or she might not otherwise be able to share with a family member. I believe that governments of all persuasions should actively encourage the use of effective mentoring programs in schools as a form of early intervention to hopefully put a child on the right path to a happy and productive life.

ILLICIT DRUGS

I now turn to an area that I am particularly concerned about. As the former National Illicit Drugs Strategy adviser to the federal Justice Minister, Senator Hon Chris Ellison, who is in the gallery today, I am particularly concerned by the apparent increasing acceptance of cannabis and other illicit drugs in our community, particularly among young Australians. Indeed, statistics show that one in five young Australians smoke cannabis every week and 10 per cent of those become addicted. I remain concerned by the term "harm minimisation", or rather the phrase "harmful drug use", which is being increasingly used by commentators, researchers and policy makers in a variety of ways. While I acknowledge that we must obviously help and treat those who are addicted and reduce the supply and demand for drugs, through law enforcement, education and rehabilitation, I believe that in no way should harm minimisation be seen to condone an acceptable or non-harmful level of drug use. There is no acceptable level, and we must have one united and unequivocal message: that illicit drug use in any form should neither be promoted nor deemed acceptable to society.

Illicit drugs represent one of the greatest scourges on our community. But I ask: how can we teach young children about the dangers of illicit drug use when we have laws in Western Australia that effectively state that cannabis, which is often seen as a gateway to harder drugs, is okay? Research suggests that for those who are vulnerable, cannabis use can lead to mental illness, paranoia, suicide and distress and can be exacerbated if the user starts early in life. The increasing popularity and trend towards the use of amphetamine-type stimulants in Australia is also particularly concerning. These supposed party drugs, which they are clearly not, can produce similar side effects to cannabis, but also can increase the likelihood of erratic and often violent behaviour. Amphetamines also present a particular problem for domestic law enforcement, given that much of the production is domestically based and is now moving to more transportable box labs. The cocktail of often volatile chemicals used for amphetamine production, with all their fumes and susceptibility to explosion, also increases the danger to innocent bystanders and nearby residents. Statistics provided to the Ministerial Council on Drug Strategy last year from the United States enunciates this more fully. In 2002 some 8 000 clandestine laboratories were detected in the United States,

of which nearly 3 000 involved the presence of children. Some 40 per cent of those children present were found to be affected by the drugs themselves or the chemicals that produced them. There were also cases of injury and even death. Australia must not go down a similar path. While I acknowledge the work being done in Western Australia and nationally to combat this particular drug endangerment problem, with the increasing trend towards these insidious drugs, it is incumbent upon governments at all levels to continue to respond swiftly and effectively for the wellbeing, health and quality of life of Australia's children and young people.

VOLUNTARY STUDENT UNIONISM

Finally, it would be remiss of me if I did not mention one of the very issues that led me to join the Liberal Party in the first place, that being voluntary student unionism or VSU. Opponents say that VSU is just an ideological obsession of the Liberal Party. It is not. Rather, it is simply a pursuit of one of the fundamental principles upon which liberalism is based: that of freedom of association, including an individual's right to choose whether to join a union or not. Universities should not be seen as closed shops and the notion of no fee, no degree is, quite simply, unjust. Why should a student who does not use union facilities or necessarily agree with its activities be compelled to join a union on the threat that if he does not he will not be able to graduate? I note that the Australian government is again pushing ahead with the introduction of VSU nationally, based on the highly successful model introduced under the previous Court government in Western Australia by the then Minister for Education, Hon Norman Moore, who is in the chamber today. VSU does not mean an end to student activities or life on campus; rather, it ensures that guilds become more responsive to the needs of the students they represent.

LIBERALISM

Of course, I stand in this place not only as a representative of the East Metropolitan Region but also of the Liberal Party of Western Australia. I am deeply conscious of the important role that branch members and their divisions have in choosing candidates for election who they believe will best meet the needs of the wider community and the opportunities and honour that their roles afford to those who are successful. I am a proud member of the Liberal Party and am acutely aware of the great band of people who not only founded the party in 1944 but also those current members who continue to promote our ideals and make the Liberal Party possible. Our great Prime Minister Hon John Howard perhaps put it most eloquently in an address to the Australian Women's National League last year when he said -

The men and women who formed the Liberal Party embodied a particular ideal of Australian society based on virtues of individual freedom, personal responsibility and social obligation. These are virtues with a timeless place in the Australian Liberal inheritance.

However, can I say this: as a party we, at times, do not recognise enough our own achievements. For example, building on the work of Sir John Forrest and Sir James Mitchell, it was the Liberals in government in Western Australia who were the first in Australia to promote a woman to head a ministry; to transform Western Australia to an economic powerhouse for the whole nation under the leaderships of Sir David Brand and Sir Charles Court; to oversee major projects such as the North West Shelf gas project; and who restored Western Australia's credit rating and financial good name in the 1990s under the leadership of Hon Richard Court. Although I do not suggest that we should ever rest on our successes, Liberals do have a proud history, and I believe our achievements should never be forgotten or rewritten to suit other people's ends.

THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

I now acknowledge this very Council. Having been a parliamentary adviser to a federal minister who is a member of the Australian Senate, I understand the importance of a bicameral Parliament and appreciate the

necessity of the differing roles of the two houses. Checks and balances upon governments, such as the use of a second parliamentary chamber, are an essential part of our philosophy and the philosophy of all democracies. As Hon Peter Foss said in his maiden speech -

This House has a very important part to play in the Government of Western Australia.

He went on to say -

. . . we have a duty to the people of Western Australia to provide a sensible check on the power of the Executive. I hope by doing this we will have a better Western Australian Government than may otherwise be the case.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, I wish to thank a number of people, many of whom are in the public gallery today, for without them none of this would have been made possible. First, I thank again Hon Derrick Tomlinson and Hon Peter Foss for their encouragement and invaluable advice. In this vein, I also acknowledge the Federal Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, who had the faith to take on a young university student and who provided many professional opportunities and guidance over eight years. I recognise my Liberal East Metropolitan Region colleague, Hon Helen Morton and, in particular, Mr Bill Munro, a valued member of the east metropolitan team. I also thank all the divisional presidents that encompass the East Metropolitan Region, their committees and branch members, for their ongoing support and precious assistance. I thank Daphne Bogue and all the members of the Liberal Party State Women's Council for their encouragement. In particular, I acknowledge my own division of Perth, where I was honoured to be president of the women's division for some four years. I thank my friends both here in Perth and interstate for their support, patience and understanding and to my fiancé Scott Faragher, for his love, enthusiasm and ever-enduring encouragement of me. Finally, I acknowledge my family, particularly my parents. I thank them sincerely for all they have done and continue to do. Most importantly, I thank the east metropolitan community for placing their trust in me to represent them in this place over the next four years. I do not take this trust lightly. I say to them that they have my commitment to work hard, to contribute and to strongly and effectively represent the interests and concerns of the east metropolitan community while at the same time upholding those beliefs and values that we as Liberals proudly hold. Thank you.

[Applause.]
