

**GOVERNOR'S SPEECH***Distribution of Copies*

**THE SPEAKER** (Mr Harman): Accompanied by members of this Chamber, I attended His Excellency the Governor in the Legislative Council Chamber to hear the speech which His Excellency was pleased to deliver to members of both Houses of Parliament. For the sake of greater accuracy, I have caused printed copies of the Speech to be distributed among members of this Chamber.

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY: FIRST DAY***Motion*

**MRS BEGGS** (Whitford) [12.38 p.m.]: I move—

That the following Address-in-Reply to His Excellency's Speech be agreed to—

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.

The opportunity to move this motion in reply to His Excellency's Speech is an honour I fully appreciate.

I am also very honoured to have this opportunity to be one of the first in this Chamber to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your appointment to that position. I do so with sincerity and with pleasure.

I would like to thank my colleagues who have assisted me in the early stages of my term in Parliament. I thank also the Clerks and other officers of the Legislative Assembly for their courteous and efficient assistance.

On 19 February the electors of Western Australia gave the Australian Labor Party a mandate to govern this State for the next three years. The vote for the Australian Labor Party was a vote in recognition of the positive policies presented to the electorate on behalf of that party by our Premier, Brian Burke.

One of the policies for which the ALP was highly commended through the media and all sections of the community was its programme for electoral reform—a programme to ensure that everybody will be regarded as equal citizens under the law and therefore to ensure the right for all citizens to be regarded equally in the formation of those laws. At this election, perhaps more than ever before, there was a vote of dissatisfaction by

the electorate at being treated as second-class citizens.

It cannot be denied that a very bad case of malapportionment exists between electorates for the election of this Assembly. My electorate of 17 400 electors has more than five times the number of voters in Murchison-Eyre. It has on average twice as many voters as does the average country electorate. I agree that there is certainly some justification in the argument for giving some weighting to country voters to give them sufficient representation in Parliament. However, I hasten to add that under the present electoral system, particularly in reference to the Legislative Council, democracy is no more than just a word. Voters who live outside the metropolitan area account for 32 per cent of Western Australia's total electors, but they elected almost 70 per cent of the Legislative Council members at the last election.

To illustrate graphically another gross anomaly I ask members to consider a recent Bill that was debated in this House. The Bill to ban tobacco advertising was thrown out of the Legislative Council. This confirmed the Council's historic role of protecting the interests of capital, in this case tobacco products manufacturers and advertisers, against the wishes of the more democratically elected lower House.

The voting figures for that Bill—Noes 17, representing 274 415 electors, against Ayes 12, representing 278 590 electors—prove that only a shocking gerrymander can arrange for the representatives of a majority to lose in Parliament.

A letter I have sighted from the Australian Council on Smoking and Health in reference to this fiasco dramatically sums it up as follows—

- The trouble, as we see it for us, is that whereas our primary concern is over an issue of health it is daunting to face the prospect, that we have to reform the very structure of Parliament to do anything about it.

In other words the Government which imposed that system, and the Opposition now through its numbers in the Legislative Council, will continue to endorse the system, blatantly disregarding the will of the people. I warn the Legislative Council and members opposite that this situation is no longer tolerated by the constituents in my electorate or in WA generally.

Government members: Hear, hear!

**Mrs BEGGS:** The current state of the electoral system in this State is a source of shame to any individual who believes that democracy is worth preserving.



The aim of this Government will be to establish an equitable electoral system that will give neither side an inbuilt advantage. That system will give all citizens the right to an equal vote—a vote of equal value—a right that has been spelt out in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights of 1966 and the 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.

I am very proud to be the first woman to represent the State seat of Whitford in Parliament. The massive swing to Labor in Whitford of 15.1 per cent was a definite indication of rejection by an electorate of a Government's failure to recognise the needs of a community facing enormous problems. My task in Parliament and in my electorate will be to address myself to all those problems and to represent all sections of the community—families, the business sector, youth and the aged, men and women alike—to ensure that many of those problems are rectified. The conservative system under which this State has been languishing over the years has meant that women in particular, in Whitford and in Western Australia generally, have been severely disadvantaged.

As 51 per cent of the population are women it is incongruous that under successive conservative Governments in Western Australia no constructive attempt has been made to include this section of the community in the decision-making process of Government. I have no doubt that had this situation been remedied a long time ago the advice and knowledge which would have come from that sector would have gone a long way to improving the effectiveness and quality of policies and programmes for the community generally.

The nature of the structure of Australian society has excluded many women in the past from becoming directly involved in the drafting of legislation as members of Parliament. Although the number of women in Australian Parliaments has increased significantly since the 1970s, the comment made in 1972 by Dame Enid Lyons, the first woman MHR, is still relevant. She said—

As a community Australians are a highly conservative people and even today the tradition of male supremacy still holds in a manner not matched in any country of comparable development.

No doubt exists in my mind that the significant absence of women from Australian Legislatures for most of this century may be connected with Australia's loss of leadership in the sphere of progressive social legislation. While the equality of numbers is not likely to be realised in the immediate future, this Government's decision to set up a

Cabinet committee to consider the proposal for a women's adviser and a women's advisory council indicates the recognition of a growing need for a formal structure to advise the Government on women's interests.

The advisory council should draw from a cross section of the community representing urban and rural women, migrant and Aboriginal women, as well as women in the home, in the work force, and the professions. It should reflect all age groups and opinions. This will then serve to give the Government a better understanding of the diverse needs of the whole range of women and girls in Western Australia, which ultimately will benefit the whole social and economic structure of this State.

I will conclude my remarks as extremely important legislation is to be introduced into this Parliament today, specifically, prices control legislation. It is the initial and very significant part of the Burke Government's mandate.

I support the motion.

[Applause.]

**MR TROY** (Mundaring) [12.46 p.m.]: I formally second the motion.

Debate adjourned, on motion by Mr O'Connor (Leader of the Opposition).

*Sitting suspended from 12.47 to 2.15 p.m.*

#### SWEARING-IN OF MEMBER

**THE SPEAKER** (Mr Harman): I have to announce that on this day I administered the oath of allegiance according to law to the Hon. Peter Vernon Jones (Member for Narrogin).

#### CHAIRMAN OF COMMITTEES

##### *Appointment*

**MR BRIAN BURKE** (Balga—Premier) [2.18 p.m.]: I move—

That the Member for Rockingham (Mr Barnett) be appointed Chairman of Committees.

Question put and passed.

#### DEPUTY CHAIRMEN OF COMMITTEES

##### *Appointment*

**THE SPEAKER** (Mr Harman): I desire to announce the appointment of the member for Kalgoorlie (Mr I. F. Taylor), the member for Scarborough (Mr Burkett), the member for Gosnells (Mrs Henderson), and the member for Albany (Mr Watt) as Deputy Chairmen of Committees during the present session.