



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Laine McDonald, MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 16 May 2017

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON LAINE McDONALD (North Metropolitan) [9.07 pm]: I thank the house for its indulgence and I recognise the traditional owners of the land on which we meet. I also acknowledge their elders, past, present and emerging. As I rise to make my valedictory speech, I do so with some sense of melancholy, given that my tenure in this place has been fairly brief. However, this sadness is tempered with an overriding sense of pride. I am proud to have represented the people of the North Metropolitan Region and I am honoured to be here tonight as a parliamentary member of the McGowan Labor government, a government that has a progressive, innovative and forward-thinking agenda; a government that will put the needs of people front and centre and that will be grounded in the values of fairness, equality and compassion; a government that will be confronted with a huge set of challenges given the state of Western Australia's finances, but that can be trusted to carry on its business in an economically responsible and sensible way; a government that will focus on job creation and that will diversify and innovate in order to help insulate the economy from mining industry shocks; a government that will not sell off major public assets such as Western Power and that will be accountable, honest and transparent.

Though my tenure in this place has been only about eight months in length, it certainly has been a short and intense journey. Being a member of Parliament is a unique and sometimes strange position, and each day has been filled with eclectic duties and varied tasks. From walking the hallowed halls of Parliament, to doorknocking in the blistering heat, to attending community morning teas, to meeting with international and state dignitaries, each and every day as a member of Parliament has been challenging, rewarding and diverse. I have had the great pleasure of welcoming our newest citizens to this country by speaking at numerous citizenship ceremonies. I have been delighted to meet so many bright students, parents and teachers by attending school graduations, Anzac Day ceremonies, and openings. I have met with constituents and attended community events to celebrate cultural festivals and to lend my support to various causes.

In my time as a member of Parliament, I have served as a member of the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review. I have asked many questions of the previous government and have participated in debate. Of course, there are many reforms and objectives I would have liked to have achieved as a member of Parliament, but have failed to do so whilst being in opposition. The reality is that many of these reforms can only practically be achieved whilst in government. That is why I am proud of the role I played in supporting the 2017 Western Australian Labor state election campaign, particularly in the northern suburbs seats. I would especially like to recognise the newly elected members in these seats and congratulate the member for Joondalup, Emily Hamilton, who joins us in the chamber; the member for Burns Beach, Mark Folkard; the member for Wanneroo, Sabine Winton; and the member for Kingsley, Jessica Stojkovski. I would also like to congratulate the member for Balcatta, David Michael, and my good friend and former City of Vincent colleague, John Carey, as the new and funky member for Perth!

Working alongside each of these impressive people during the campaign, I saw at first-hand their dedication to their respective communities and their unwavering ability to work hard and for long hours under immense pressure. It was also humbling to see the diverse range of skill sets each of them bring, with varied backgrounds ranging from teaching, policing, local government, community work and town planning.

Over the past few months I have also had the immense pleasure of working with a member for North Metropolitan Region, Hon Martin Pritchard. I thank him for his kindness and generosity. Martin is a true gentleman, and I wish him the very best in his new role as government Whip.

I also congratulate the incoming member for North Metropolitan Region, Hon Alannah MacTiernan. Undoubtedly, her experience, energy and ability to get things done will be an asset to the people of the North Metropolitan Region.

In preparing for this valedictory speech tonight, I took the time to read over my inaugural speech for inspiration and for quiet reflection on the expectations and goals I had coming into this role; this appears to be the customary practice. I spoke on many issues in my inaugural speech. I acknowledge my predecessor, Hon Ken Travers, and pledged to take up the mantle he left by being a champion of job creation in the northern corridor and for the need for a Joondalup train line extension to Yanchep. Whilst I have been driving against traffic from Perth to my electorate office in Joondalup each day, I have seen across the lanes of the freeway the clogged traffic, at a gruelling standstill, of people commuting from the northern suburbs.

Most pleasingly, this government has already made positive announcements with regard to job-creating, congestion-busting projects in the northern suburbs. This government has announced a \$186 million investment in four northern suburb road projects to create jobs and ease congestion. These four projects will help reduce traffic around Wanneroo Road and the Mitchell Freeway, creating more than a thousand jobs in the process. Federal funding for Metronet has also been secured, with \$1.2 billion allocated to its delivery, including the extension of the Joondalup train line to Yanchep.

In my inaugural speech, I also recognised the importance of having well-resourced state schools to ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive a quality education, regardless of their background or family's wealth. Investment in our schools, including in the areas of innovation and new technologies, is vital to prepare our kids for the jobs of the future. Investment in education was central to Labor's election campaign. I am so proud that this government will return education assistants into classrooms, as well as increase the number of Aboriginal and Islander education specialists. This government will build a new academically selective school in Perth city in a centrally located education precinct so that all students will be able to access the school easily no matter where they live. I am also particularly proud of the election commitments made by Labor to invest in schools in the North Metropolitan Region. That includes Ocean Reef Senior High School, Balga Secondary College, Wanneroo Secondary College and Balcatta Senior High School, as well as the new primary schools that this government will be building.

Given my background as an asbestos litigation lawyer, in my inaugural speech I took the time to speak at length about the desperate need for asbestos compensation law reform in Western Australia. Asbestos law reform is needed to assist people suffering from asbestos-related diseases or dying from mesothelioma to access compensation fairly. I have spoken and written about the need for asbestos compensation law reform many times both in this place and in the wider community, and I will continue to do so until justice is achieved. At a minimum, legislative reform is needed in two important areas of law—provisional damages, and *Sullivan v Gordon*-type damages. Regrettably, I was unable to achieve this law reform during my short time in the previous Parliament, but I am most optimistic that this reform will be an initiative of the Labor government in the future.

In my inaugural speech, like so many women before me, I spoke about the gender pay gap and the uneven division of unpaid labour in the home. I championed the need for greater access to flexible working options, for greater access to paid maternity leave, including superannuation, and for greater access to affordable child care, including after school and vacation care. We still have a long way to go in this regard.

Just recently, it was announced that only 8.7 per cent of the directors on WA ASX 100 boards are women. Given that the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Act was passed more than three decades ago, this is truly disappointing. However, I am heartened that this government has announced that it will lead by example and ensure that 50 per cent of members on government boards are women.

Among all of the important issues I raised in my inaugural speech, I also raised the need for Parliament to be more family friendly, and in particular the need to allow members of Parliament to breastfeed their babies in the chamber. This issue was of particular importance to me given the unique circumstances I found myself in when I entered Parliament. I was on maternity leave and the full-time primary carer of my then five-month-old daughter, Matilda, when I found out that I would be entering state Parliament to fill a casual vacancy. At the time, I was breastfeeding my baby exclusively and she was 100 per cent reliant on breast milk as her food source. Being a mother entering Parliament, with a partner who also worked full time, presented a particular set of challenges. That included the need to arrange child care, the need for facilities to express and store milk, the need to have access to sterilising and expressing equipment, and options to breast and bottle feed. I therefore made the call for the Western Australian Parliament to modernise its standing orders to allow nursing parents to bring their infants into the chamber. Parliaments in other jurisdictions in Australia have amended their standing orders to provide for the admission to the floor of the house of an infant being cared for by a member. These are the federal Parliament and the Parliaments of New South Wales, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory,

just to name a few. Other jurisdictions have also gone further to allow for proxy voting and increased facilities for nursing parents. Therefore, to my mind, the suggestion to amend our standing orders was in no way revolutionary or controversial given other Parliaments, both in Australia and around the world, have done so already. Little did I realise—perhaps showing some naivety and newness to life as an MP—that I would wake up the morning after my inaugural speech to a barrage of missed calls and a flurry of interest from the media. The topic of breastfeeding in Parliament was suddenly again the subject of print, radio and TV media interest. I thank Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson and Rita Saffioti for their support on this issue, who, of course, have had to navigate the same challenges of balancing the duties of an MP with having young children. Whilst unfortunately family-friendly parliamentary reforms have not yet been enacted, with the swearing in of many newly elected members with young children and babies, I hope that they will be agitators of this small but important and symbolic change.

I turn now to the future. Whilst I will serve as a member of this government for only a few more days, I am very proud of what it has achieved and what it will achieve in the future. With such a decisive election win comes the weight of high expectations from the community. The Western Australian people have put their trust in a Labor government and quite rightly deserve that these expectations be strived for, met and surpassed. The challenges this new government will face over the next four years will undoubtedly be immense given the dire economic situation that it has inherited. Nevertheless, the achievements of this government have already been notable, which is remarkable given the election was held only 66 days ago.

This government has prevented the sale of Western Power. The sale of Western Power was a central policy that was put to the Western Australian people during the election campaign, and a resounding mandate was achieved to keep this monopoly state asset in public hands. By retaining Western Power, we have the opportunity to prevent the reduction of quality of services and undue increases in costs to the consumer. By keeping Western Power in public hands, new policies and technologies can be explored to ensure outcomes for the greater public good.

This government has successfully secured federal funding and transferred \$2.3 billion in funds from the Perth Freight Link to the visionary Metronet project and other infrastructure projects. During the election, commentators and detractors said that it could not be done. However, the recent announcement means more jobs for Western Australians and less congestion on our roads. It means that Western Australia will have transport infrastructure to meet future needs and that people will spend more time with their families and less time in cars. A central tenet of the Metronet project will be the focus on local job creation by ensuring the local manufacture of carriages. By halting Roe 8, attention can now be turned to the rehabilitation and recovery of the Beelihar wetlands.

Protection of the environment should be front and centre of any government that cares about preserving our lands, air and water for generations to come. I am hopeful that new and innovative solutions can be found for protecting our pristine environment in Western Australia, such as looking to renewable energy sources, to ban or minimise plastic bag usage and to incentivise recycling schemes.

A key Labor value is access to universal health care and this government has signalled loudly and clearly that it will put patients first. It will build more urgent care clinics to relieve pressure on emergency departments and provide timely and quality health care closer to home. It will build medihotels to support patients who have been discharged from hospital but are still recovering and require further support. This will take pressure off our public hospitals and allow patients to be treated quicker. This government will expand mental health services and rehabilitation facilities. In the north metropolitan region it will upgrade and expand the Joondalup Health Campus and address issues with the Perth Children's Hospital to ensure that it can be opened safely.

By freezing TAFE fees, this government will support young people and those wanting to undertake training. This will allow more Western Australians to develop necessary skills to be job-ready and it will grow and diversify our state's economy. Shockingly, and as pointed out by Hon Bill Leadbetter, the previous Liberal government increased TAFE fees by up to 510 per cent. This has meant TAFE has become out of reach for many young and struggling Western Australians. The cost of this fee freeze is expected to be paid for by a foreign buyers surcharge. The introduction of this surcharge will bring Western Australia in line with measures applied successfully in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria.

Western Australia's first female Director of Public Prosecutions has been appointed and this government has created WA's first Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence.

Finally, and perhaps most pertinently relevant to being able to achieve each of these commitments, this government has openly and transparently publicised the reality of the state's current finances. The inequity in Western Australia's GST share is a national disgrace. In a recent determination by the Commonwealth Grants Commission, Western Australia currently stands to get only 34c for every GST dollar. This is the lowest of all

states. To highlight this unfairness, Queensland's population is less than double WA's, yet it will receive around six times as much GST revenue. Advocating on behalf of Western Australia's interest in respect to its GST share will continue to be an important task for this government in the coming months and years.

With the house's indulgence, I turn now to some thank-yous. I thank the President of the Legislative Council, parliamentary staff and my parliamentary colleagues on all sides of this place for their professionalism, warmth and good humour. In particular I thank Hon Samantha Rowe with whom I shared an office, and Hon Sue Ellery for her mentorship and guidance. I also congratulate Sue for being the first ever female leader of the Legislative Council.

Thank you to my electorate office staff, both past and present, Prue, Alex and, more recently, Kayleigh. I also thank Emily Hamilton who worked in my office for a brief period and congratulate her again as the new member for Joondalup. It has been a pleasure to work with such confident, capable and intelligent women in what we fondly refer to as the "Joondy" office. You all have bright futures ahead.

I thank WA Labor, especially Patrick Gorman and Lenda Oshalem, for their ongoing guidance, sanity and willingness to answer my phone calls at all times of the day. Their wise counsel has been truly appreciated.

Finally, I thank my family for their support over the past eight months. I thank them for encouraging me with gusto to take up this position and for providing me with the emotional and practical support to enable me to do so. To my mum, Ileana and Katie, thank you for helping to look after Matilda, and also all staff at her day care who provide her with love, nourishment and care. I want, of course, to make special mention of my partner, Patrick, and daughter, Matilda. They make every single day a joy and I am thankful for our small family. Patrick could not be here this evening because he is at home taking care of Matilda. However, I hope Matilda is safely tucked away in bed and I am sure Patrick is watching online. Patrick, thank you for your kindness, love and encouragement to just say yes to opportunities that arise, and Matilda. Since entering Parliament, Matilda has grown from a baby to a resourceful, resilient and clever toddler with a wicked sense of humour. Matilda's smile and confident swagger when she enters a room lights up my life and I burst with pride seeing her development and growth each day. Matilda will be too young to remember my time as a member of the thirty-ninth Parliament, but I hope one day she will read *Hansard* and realise how much her mum cherishes and adores her.

My parliamentary position will soon come to an end but many things will remain unchanged. I will continue to be an advocate for those in need and champion justice through my role as a lawyer. I will continue to be an active member of my local community and of the Labor Party. As I take my seat tonight knowing that there are only a few short days left in my term as a member for North Metropolitan Region, I do so with a sense of optimism and hope for the future. I do so knowing that I have fulfilled my twin goals of representing the people of the North Metropolitan Region to the best of my ability and having taken a seat in the historic McGowan Labor government.

[Applause.]
