



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Mark Lewis, MLC
(Member for Mining and Pastoral Region)

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 17 May 2017

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 16 May 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 MARK LEWIS (Mining and Pastoral) [3.22 pm]: Today I rise to bookend my inaugural speech with my valedictory speech in the Address-in-Reply to the Governor. Obviously, one is a bit more sombre than the other but, conversely, one is a bit more wizened than the other, and I say that hopefully. One generally sets out what one intends to do; the other sets out what one did do. At the outset, I say that it has been a privilege and an experience for me and one that I will always be grateful for.

On looking back, I can report that although I did not fully complete most of the areas that I wanted to pursue in my inaugural speech, I have progressed many of the issues that I identified. I say that I did not fully complete them as I do not think there ever stops being jobs to do in this role. I am mindful of Hon Norman Moore's final speech in this place when, even after 36 years, he had unfinished business. I guess it is unlikely that in my four short years the list that I outlined in my inaugural speech will be fully completed.

In my view, there are probably two areas in which I have unfinished business—that is, tenures and approvals. On Monday I attended a local government forum in Kununurra. By far and away, they are still the two most outstanding issues that are causing impediments to growth and, more particularly, jobs, particularly for Indigenous people from the north. It is with some regret that I leave this place without fully dealing with those issues. Unfortunately—or fortunately!—I will have to leave these two issues in the capable hands of Hon Alannah MacTiernan. With her known history of dogged determination, she will be needed to deal with these issues. It is a very recalcitrant issue and it is a very, very important issue. I am pleased that Hon Alannah MacTiernan has taken over my role. If anybody can push this stuff through, she might have a crack at it. I wish her well with that. As I said, it is critical that those things get progressed for jobs in the north.

As an MP, I have represented many issues in the Mining and Pastoral Region to ministers, governments, bureaucrats and probably anybody else who would listen. Again, I am eternally grateful to have been able to do that, as all members do within their own electorates, particularly around the issues we become quite passionate about in moving forward. As members know, the Mining and Pastoral Region is a very large area, and it takes a lot to get around it. The six of us here in this house know that more than anybody. I guess the interesting thing about it is the diversity of the issues that we face out there. In my term, it was from Esperance to Kununurra to Carnarvon. There is a broad range and diversity of issues and we deal with a broad range of industries and sectors.

As an interesting aside, people probably do not understand what it is like to represent the Mining and Pastoral Region, particularly within government. As an upper house member in government, which has no members of the same party in the lower house seats, that member ends up being the lower house member as well. I notice Hon Stephen Dawson nodding his head, but there is more to come. When a constituent feels like their issue has not been dealt with by their local lower house member—that is nearly everyone with a long-term recalcitrant, difficult or complex issue—they will bring these issues to the upper house member, as that member is in government and that government is in power. As such, they think that member can fix the issues. If that member cannot fix them, they can just pick up the phone to the Premier and the Premier will fix them. Again, I congratulate Hon Stephen Dawson on being a minister. I am glad that he is there because it is important that we have more ministers in this place. I am very happy for him to be there representing the Mining and Pastoral Region in any shape or form. This next comment will be particularly relevant too. If the minister thinks he is busy now, there is another avalanche to come when people work out that as a minister and an upper house member in an electorate where there are non-Labor Party members in the lower house, the minister by default

will now be the lower house member, effectively, given that Josie is already over there. I raise this because it is a peculiarity and a quirky thing that happens for us upper house members. In this case, I am talking only about the Mining and Pastoral Region. I am sure it happens in the Agricultural Region. It is interesting and it is the quirky nature of being a member in this house.

Where was I? I was talking about representing constituents and looking back. One passion of mine has always been the north and the opportunities it brings; not that the south of the Mining and Pastoral Region is less important, but areas like Kalgoorlie and Esperance have more mature industries, whilst we could always say that the north is virtually still the frontier and offers a huge number of opportunities for growth, particularly for jobs.

I was fortunate to continue to pursue where I left off in my old job, particularly around water resource development. When we do the numbers, we see that the things that give the biggest multiplier effect to jobs and employment, and that are the biggest internal multipliers for an economy, are effectively water resource development and agriculture through the development of things like abattoirs. I was particularly grateful that I was able to continue to pursue those interests, particularly the ones I started while I was out there. Those areas across the north are now well known. They have had major resources assessments done on them and if they have not been already, are in the process of being fully developed. For example, there is the completion of the northern bore field in Carnarvon, which will give Carnarvon the risk management required to manage future droughts going forward and obviously add value to the size and scale of that district. There will be better utilisation of water onto agricultural areas for mine dewatering in the Pilbara. Hopefully there will be a more sustainable utilisation of the magic artesian water on the north coast, east of South Hedland. There is also the identification of the huge resource of the West Canning and La Grange aquifers, which are now properly understood. In my time there has been further definition of water at Knowsley, Fitzroy River and other known resources around them. We have also targeted Cockatoo Sands in the Ord and Bonaparte regions in the far north. I mention this because all those in total add up to an area 10 times the size of the amount of water currently in the Ord Valley, so it can be done outside the Ord, and if those developments across the north from Carnarvon through to Kununurra are fully developed, we will see, as I said before, the multipliers of agriculture working. As I said, those multipliers are real jobs and real dollars, particularly where they are needed in the Indigenous areas.

As members know, things turn far too slowly, and delivering core services of government is always another critical part of what we do as MPs. Delivering things like housing, health, schools and policing et cetera is difficult, particularly in regional and remote areas. There are moments when we get a win in this job that really makes things worthwhile. They are few and far between, but they do come and we cherish them when we get them—as I said, even wins like the Carnarvon Community College finally getting across the line in full. What makes those wins important is seeing the relief that comes from the community stalwarts who have for many years fought bravely, ferociously and tirelessly for such an outcome. To all those committee groups out there, thank you for bringing those issues to me, and I guess the message is to never give up.

I go from electoral matters to what I mentioned before, which is the very privileged point in my life of being offered the position of Minister for Agriculture and Food. I have to tell members a little story about the time leading up to that. I was in the electoral office and a phone call came from the Premier's office. I do not think I had ever had a call from the Premier's office before and I thought, "What's going on here?" I presented myself on time at the Premier's office fully expecting an absolute bollocking over something—I did not know what, but I was expecting a bollocking. Members can imagine my surprise when I picked myself up off the floor after the Premier offered me the portfolio of agriculture and food. I think I will always remember that moment. I did not know what to say. In fact, I think it took about 30 seconds for me to respond, because I was absolutely stuck for words. The thing that struck me was the honour that the Premier had placed upon me to be a minister. To those members who have been ministers and those who have not, it is a very special moment.

As a minister coming in with the fuse burning to an election, I was conscious I had to go really hard. I am proud to say I was able to build on the work of previous ministers in bringing the ag department budget back to a more sustainable position. I am proud that in the six months I was in cabinet we delivered \$300 million into driving agriculture forward. The important thing was that it was across six portfolios; it was not just to the agricultural portfolio.

All levels of government need to work together to pursue agriculture development, for the reasons I alluded to earlier. As part of that \$300 million, \$54 million was dedicated to grains research and development to make sure that the fantastic grains industry—the staple that underpins not only Western Australia, but also human life—could go forward with confidence. I am also proud that we finally got the wild dog strategy off paper and into action. Even though I had six short months, I was pleased to be able to drive the re-engagement of the department back to the industry, and I hope this continues. I think it is a good idea that the Department of Regional Development and the Department of Agriculture and Food will be under the same roof, as I think it can only be a good thing for agriculture and the regions. I wish Hon Alannah MacTiernan well,

and in the spirit of bipartisanship I am very happy to have a chat anytime, because I think it is such an important industry going forward. Wherever I can help, I am pleased to do so.

As I was putting my tie on this morning—do not visualise this too much!—I was thinking about what I was going to say today, particularly about the benefits of learning I have had since coming to this place. There I was looking in the mirror doing up my tie and I became aware that probably the first real learning I had coming to this place was how to do a double Windsor knot. You never know where your learnings come from on a journey. Another moment of reflection this morning was when I was putting on my suit—the suit I am wearing now. I noticed that I have lost weight. As we all know, one of the occupational hazards of this joint is gaining kilos. I suspect that the weight loss was due to being a minister for those short six months, racing around all over the place being hyperactive and whatnot. I also think it was due to the election, when we did not have time to breathe. I guess the message and learning from that is that even though you might lose elections, they can be good for you because your suit fits a lot better than when you first came in!

It is customary to thank a range of people in a valedictory speech and I would like to do that. Firstly, I would like to thank to the staff of this place, Parliament House, but more specifically the people in the chambers. I am sure other members in their valedictory speeches will put this more eloquently than I, but the first thing I noticed when I came here was the culture. Coming out of the public service, and without denigrating the public service, I found that this is a different place, a special place, and the culture is very different; it is unusual even. People actually go out of their way to help you. It is striking in that sense. I still find it extraordinary and wonder why this place has a different culture to, say, the Department of Regional Development or the Department of Agriculture and Food. It is unique to this place and most valuable. As an outgoing member, I thank you all for your efforts, help and assistance in this place while I was here.

I want to also mention the committees. We have an unusual set of talents and skills in committees. Given the complexity of the issues and the time those guys have available to get over the top of them, I find it incredible. How they do it, I do not know; all I know is that I am grateful for their services and I pass my thanks on to them.

To my staff, both in the ministerial office and in the electoral office, one can forget how staff also put up with the vagaries of politics, just as members do. We are all looking for new jobs, given that there are rents, mortgages and school fees to pay. I thank you all. You all stuck by me to the end, as is attested by the presence of Georgia and Brian up in the gallery. The last supper for you two will be Friday, so could one or both of you please book the dining room for Friday, so we can all enjoy our last supper!

To my family I say that public life takes an incredible toll on families, too. All I can say is that I am very, very grateful to Michelle, who is here today as well, and to Matthew, my son, and Bridget, my daughter, for their support and time. The pain they have to put up with, particularly going around a region like Mining and Pastoral Region, is incredible, so I thank you very, very much for that.

Politics is a strange and fickle beast. We are roosters one day, feather dusters the next, as I think the saying goes. But so be it; we all know that to be the case when we come in here. We know that that is what happens. It is incredible when the moment finally arrives that we exit stage left. The phone stops, the emails stop; the silence is deafening. To those who rang in the aftermath of the election, I thank you for your good wishes. To those who are still ringing: stop! But seriously, if you are yet to ring, please keep in contact, and thank you for your ongoing support. That is the thing about being a member of Parliament—you pick up a whole range of people and contacts who will be with you for the rest of your life.

I must make special mention, as I did in my inaugural speech, of a past member of Parliament, Hon Ian Laurance, AM, a former member for Gascoyne. I guess he was a mentor to me. It is probably his fault, along with Hon Ken Baston, that I am here! But be that as it may, Ian was almost the first person to pick up the phone and offer me his experience of life after politics, because we all go through it. I thank Ian for that. He also has a wide range of networks and people out there in commerce who I am sure I will be able to contact and lean on, and hopefully one of them will take desperate pity on me and give me a job going forward! I thank Ian; that is the sort of bloke he is. He will always be the first on the phone and, as I said, I have worked with Ian and been his friend for probably 20 years, so I thank him for that.

To you, my parliamentary colleagues, I can seriously say I have enjoyed this place immensely. It is an experience that you just cannot replicate, and I know that that is one of the benefits of being in this wonderful institution called the Legislative Council. I made a very conscious decision to come here rather than to the other place, and that is again because of the way this place operates. It is more collegiate; it is a house of review. We have the odd blue here now and again, but at the end of the day, we are here to make sure good legislation passes through this house, and we do so in a way that is civil. That is the sort of environment that I want to work in. I do not know whether I could have got into the other place; I did not particularly want to but, as I said, I am grateful to have been here with you all.

Finally, Mr President, I thank you for your support and your stewardship of this place and Parliament more generally. You can probably leave here on Friday knowing that you have added considerable value to this Parliament. I will always remember you probably more than anybody because we share the same birthday! It is not that the rest of you mob are less memorable, but I will probably remember him more than the rest of you as I get to my dotage!

Hon Col Holt: He looks a lot younger!

Hon MARK LEWIS: A lot younger!

The PRESIDENT: You did not mention what year, though!

Hon MARK LEWIS: Ah-ha!

With that, I wish all members the best of luck for the future. As I said, it has been an absolute privilege to be here and I bid you all adieu.

[Applause.]
