



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

## **INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Stephen Pratt, MLC**  
**(Member for South Metropolitan)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 27 May 2021

*Reprinted from Hansard*

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 26 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, 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 STEPHEN PRATT (South Metropolitan)** [2.28 pm]: May I begin by acknowledging the Whadjuk Noongar people, the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet today, and pay my respect to the elders, past, present and emerging. I extend that respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples here today. I am proud to be a part of this Legislative Council that has already created an important moment in history with the election of Hon Rosie Sahanna, and I look forward to working closely with her into the future. I have also learnt today that we have the first Serbian-born person elected to the WA Parliament. Congratulations, Hon Klara Andric.

I congratulate you, President, on your election to the position of President of the Legislative Council. I know that you will fulfil the role with the respect, dignity and authority that it requires. I feel incredibly lucky to have worked closely with you over the past four years in the Minister for Health's and the Minister for Mental Health's office. Although you take on this new and exciting role, I know that you will continue to have a focus on mental health along with the alcohol and other drugs sector.

Let me say at the outset that I know I am fortunate to be here. In saying that, I also have no intention of just making up the numbers. I am here to work hard for the people of the South Metropolitan Region and the people of Western Australia. This is my time to step up and make my voice heard as I forge my own path. For any political party to have their fourth candidate elected under our voting system is a rare feat, so I acknowledge the special circumstances of the 2021 state election that produced such a remarkable win by WA Labor, a win so resounding that for the first time in the history of our great state Labor has a majority in this house. Of course, that was all predicated on the back of the hard work of our Premier, Mark McGowan, and an outstanding Deputy Premier in Roger Cook. It should never be forgotten that in a moment of crisis in WA's history, as the devastating pandemic hit our shores, these two leaders stood up, took responsibility and kept us all safe. It was this response that has allowed the economy and jobs to grow. Today, I am proud to be part of the McGowan government.

At 36 years of age, happily married with two young daughters—four-year-old Imogen, who is at kindergarten, and two-year-old Phoebe, who is still at home—I probably have an ideal profile to represent the South Metropolitan Region. One-third of the region are married couples with children, the median age is 35 and one in four has a substantial house mortgage—almost a mirror image of my current circumstances. I understand the economic household factors that affect most people in the region because they affect my family as well. We are all well aware of the education needs, the health aspirations, the need to have adequate public transport, the cost of living and the effect fees and charges have on the weekly budget.

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President, I would like to take the opportunity to acknowledge the number of newly elected members from a diverse range of backgrounds on both sides of the chamber. To think that 100 years ago Edith Cowan had to endure heckling as she delivered her inaugural speech is unfathomable to me. Almost achieving gender equity in the Parliament of Western Australia is worth recognising and I look forward to seeing this continued into the future. On that note, I make special mention of Hon Sue Ellery on being elected again to the position of Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council and to the other Labor candidates elected in the South Metropolitan Region, Hon Kate Doust, who has served this chamber well as President for the past four years, and Hon Klara Andric, who I know will make a significant contribution in years to come.

While referencing the accomplished women in this chamber I would like to acknowledge my wife, Elena, who is sitting in the President's gallery today. A wife, mother, friend and colleague, she wears multiple hats at multiple times. She currently juggles looking after our two young daughters with part-time work as a media coordinator for the South Metropolitan Health Service, which includes Fiona Stanley Hospital, Fremantle Hospital and Rockingham General Hospital. Supported by her mass communication degree from Murdoch University, Elena's professional career spans 16 years, starting as a trainee journalist at Network 10 where she spent several years in the Perth broadcast media industry before making the move to corporate communications in the public service. She has spent much of her time in the health sector where she initially worked for the Child and Adolescent Health Service at Princess Margaret Hospital for Children. She then went on to spend several years at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services and the Department of Lands before making her return to WA Health. Elena is constantly striving to tell people stories and genuinely make a difference. With her commitment and tenacity, she is an incredible role model to our daughters.

Politics has been a big part of my life thanks to both my parents, Baden and Cheryl. Growing up, our family spent some time living in Bunbury. My parents would put me in the pram and walk the streets as they letterboxed Labor Party material on Bunbury 2000, a multimillion-dollar Labor policy that transformed that city. My father worked for three Western Australian Premiers—Brian Burke, Peter Dowding and Carmen Lawrence—and was the manager of policy in the Department of the Premier and Cabinet when Carmen Lawrence was Premier. As a journalist, he was head of bureau for the *Perth Daily News* in Canberra and chief of staff for *The Sunday Independent*. He also served two terms as a councillor for the City of Fremantle in the city ward, hence my involvement from a young age in both local and state politics. My father will turn 79 in August and is currently in his fourth year studying at the University of Notre Dame.

Mum worked briefly in journalism as well, after completing an arts degree at the University of Western Australia, beginning with a cadetship at *The Sunday Independent*, which is where my parents met. She also spent some time at *The Mandurah Advertiser*. My mother has had a varied career, initially working in special education then turning to school chaplaincy prior to the completion of a masters in counselling. She also worked part time as a research officer for Jim McGinty, a former member for Fremantle. It was an unpredictable transition from electorate office to St Patrick's homeless centre, where mum worked as a frontline emergency relief officer charged with the task of finding shelter for homeless people as well as overseeing crisis accommodation for homeless men. Over the last 12 years she has focused on addiction and trauma counselling at Fresh Start Recovery Programme, as well as building up her own private practice specialising in the treatment of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder.

A central figure in my life growing up was my granddad, Frank Everett. Following the untimely death of his mother in the Channel Islands, Frank became an orphan, leaving behind three brothers, a sister and his father, who he never saw again. He spent five years at Fairbridge Farm School in Pinjarra where he learnt the importance and value of a hard day's work. He led an itinerant life travelling the length and breadth of the state working on cattle stations. He later became a prospector in WA, working for major mining companies. I spent many hours with him listening

to stories of the outback. He lived with us for the final 10 years of his life, along with his partner, Joy Johnson, affectionately known as Nanna Joy. When we talked, his mantra was to always have a job. My grandmother Florence Brayley lived in Saharanpur and Lahore—now Pakistan—for much of her early life before making the journey to Fremantle on board the former HMAS *Manoora*, arriving on Indian Independence Day. The voyage, from all accounts, was an incredibly challenging one, leaving behind lifelong friends and a beloved country in the grip of religious and political turmoil. Sadly, I never had the opportunity to meet Florence or my father's parents, Cliff and Doris.

Believing in Labor values and voting for Labor runs deep in my family, including my in-laws, Robyn and Gary Kane. As students at the University of Western Australia at a time of the Vietnam War, they marched against Australia's involvement and the practice of conscription, and were advocates for a free tertiary education and universal health care. They also handed out how-to-vote cards in Kim Beazley Snr's electorate for the 1972 federal election, which saw Australia pull out of Vietnam and the introduction of the tertiary education assistance scheme and Medicare. Following her passion for public education and inspired by her father Donald Kay, who taught at Como Senior High School for many years, Robyn became a secondary schoolteacher of English and literature. Her first appointment was to Rockingham Senior High School, followed two years later with a transfer to Lynwood Senior High School. On her return from maternity leave, she taught at Hollywood Senior High School until its closure. She was a member of the inaugural staff at Shenton College until her retirement in 2016, with her teaching career spanning 40 years across the public education system.

Reflecting on my family, I look back fondly at my childhood growing up in Fremantle with my parents and my brother, Clifton, and my older half-sisters Nicole and Suravi. My early education began at the North Fremantle Primary School, where former Labor Premier the late John Tonkin taught. In my youth, I wanted to be an AFL footballer. When the Fremantle Football Club was established, I regularly attended Dockers training sessions at Fremantle Oval, collecting footballs and running water. I joined the mighty North Fremantle Football Club as a teenager, where I played 85 games. I really did not have a choice; my dad is a double life member of the club and a life member of the Perth Football League. However, a broken leg, followed by a broken arm and a collapsed lung made me think I should get into something easier, such as politics.

One of my cherished childhood memories was when our family bought a campervan and set off on a journey travelling around Australia. As a nine-year-old, crossing the Nullarbor and seeing parts of the country and wildlife that a person rarely gets to see was an incredible experience. It gave me a greater understanding of how vast many parts of Australia are, especially Western Australia. It was also great to spend quality time with my brother Clifton and to grow up with him leading the way at school and in sport, along with, of course, testing the waters with our parents.

As I grew older, my parents insisted that Clifton and I go to a school with more formal Christian teachings. Consequently, I enjoyed eight years at Christian Brothers College in Fremantle, where I made lifelong friends. I appreciate the lessons that were learnt in my time as a student there, values that I have carried with me ever since. The school motto, "Palma Virtuti", which translates to "goodness is its own reward", has stuck with me to this day and driven my passion for community service. As deputy head boy in my final year, I assumed responsibilities that prepared me for life ahead.

After graduating from high school, we went on a family holiday to Europe. Unfortunately, two days into the trip, I found myself in hospital with a collapsed lung. I received the best of care in hospital in France, where I celebrated my eighteenth birthday, and then later, when my lung collapsed again, I required surgery at a hospital in Germany. It was a memorable trip but not for the reasons we had hoped. Nevertheless, it was enough to convince me that I wanted to see more of the world once I was given a clean bill of health.

Having a strong connection to Fremantle, it was an easy decision to continue my education at the University of Notre Dame Australia. In 2007, I graduated with a Bachelor of Arts in both politics and journalism. Deciding what to study at university was not the easiest choice as I was not sure what career I wanted to pursue. Naturally, wanting to follow in my parents' footsteps had some influence over the path I chose. With that in mind, my high school friend Kieran Cranny and I did what all young energetic university students do; we joined our local Labor branch. In 2007, the Coolbellup branch recruited two new members. It was the beginning of an enduring partnership with the party that would become central to my professional journey.

After graduating from university, I took a year off to travel overseas, which was an unforgettable experience for all the right reasons. I volunteered, worked and was a spectator at major world sporting events—the Rugby World Cup in France, the world short-course swimming championships in Manchester and, finally, the Summer Olympics in Beijing. My tasks may have been minor, such as controlling the movement of photographers on the pool deck, but for a sports fanatic, it was centimetre perfect. I truly cherish my memories of Germany, where I spent the majority of my time overseas, and the friends that I made while living there. However, all holidays must come to an end, and that is when reality set in.

Not only did I not have a job, I could not find one. That dreadful feeling that a person gets in the pit of their stomach when they have little money in their pocket has stayed with me. That is why I am so supportive of the McGowan government's plan for jobs. We must find work, smart work, for our future generations, and I will take great interest in the various jobs and skills centres across the South Metropolitan Region.

While contemplating my future as a 24-year-old, it became clear in my mind that I wanted to get involved in politics, and it was not long after this that the Carpenter government called an early election. I made sure that I was at the campaign launch, and it was at that event that I was introduced to Roger Cook. For the past 13 years, I have had the privilege of working every day with the Deputy Premier, Roger Cook, initially in his role as the member for Kwinana, and for the past four years as his senior adviser while he has been Deputy Premier and Minister for Health; Mental Health. Some of that role has been performed in the Parliament, liaising with Labor members and members from the other side.

I have learnt a great deal through assisting people across the state who have raised issues with their local members of Parliament, and certainly one of the most demanding experiences has been assisting with the huge amount of COVID-19 related queries. I enjoy dealing with the policy areas of mental health, men's health and organ donation, all areas that I wish to continue working in if given the opportunity. It was a privilege to be involved with significant pieces of legislation such as the Public Health Amendment (Immunisation Requirements for Enrolment) Bill 2019 and the Western Australian Future Fund Amendment (Future Health Research and Innovation Fund) Bill 2019 as they traversed both houses of Parliament.

The past four years working in the areas of health and mental health have highlighted some of the great work being done every day that often goes unrecognised. I now have a greater appreciation for organisations such as Rare Voices Australia, and its deputy chair, Kane Blackman, which advocates on behalf of families and individuals with rare diseases. I am also excited about what the future holds for innovation and medical research. A number of organisations are doing amazing things right here in Western Australia, such as the Centre for Entrepreneurial Research and Innovation, the vision of Charlie Bass—I thank him for welcoming me and providing a tour of the organisation—the Telethon Kids Institute; and Curve Tomorrow. The Women and Infants Research Foundation has been a great support to friends close to me who tragically suffered a preterm loss, and it is an organisation that I look forward to working with, given that Elena and I experienced our own heartbreaking early pregnancy loss on our journey to starting a family. Now it is my time to continue assisting these worthy organisations in my own capacity as a member of Parliament.

It was truly a daunting experience to be in the Minister for Health's office when we started hearing news of a disease spreading from country to country; COVID-19 was headed our way. One of the more humbling moments from that time was the overwhelming number of offers of support from different sectors of our community. Suddenly, a large part of my role was to look through hundreds of pieces of correspondence from people offering items such as parts for respirators, personal protective equipment and hand sanitiser. It showed that we really do live in a great part of the world and in a community in which people are willing to put up their hand and help. I feel very fortunate to have been able to witness firsthand our political, health and police leaders working together to keep Western Australia safe as the disease caused devastation around the world. I look forward to playing a role in support of different industries that have been impacted by COVID-19 as we learn to live with the disease and move into a phase of new normality, including the events and entertainment industry and local manufacturing.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the minister, his wife, Carly Lane; and all members of his ministerial office, including Julie Armstrong, Michael Beach, Marion Buchanan, Neil Fergus, Gino Marinucci and Ruth O'Toole; as well as former colleagues Tony Clark, Emma Collyer and Stephanie Enkel for their friendship and assistance. Those four years went by in a flash. They started with the issues related to lead being found in the water at the new Perth Children's Hospital, followed by a large focus on the voluntary assisted dying legislation that was eventually passed by the Parliament, and then dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. A health minister's office has a frenetic workload. Everyone works long hours and the success of the minister in one of government's hardest portfolios is testament to the fact that his staff must play an important role.

It was also a privilege to be Roger Cook's campaign manager in the 2013 and 2017 state elections, campaigns that saw him increase his vote each time. Most recently, I was his campaign director for the 2021 election. Following the first three years in Roger Cook's electorate office, I decided to throw my own hat into the ring in the local government election. I served the Cockburn community for two terms as a councillor for the central ward; I was elected in 2011 and re-elected in 2015.

The City of Cockburn is a wonderful place and many people have worked hard to make it a great community. I particularly thank the past and present members of both the Bibra Lake Residents Association and the Coolbellup Community Association, including Greg Patterson, Jane Burnett, Katie Attwell and Pip Brennan, for their work. Like many of them, I was right at the forefront of the campaign to save the Beeliar wetlands. Apart from the environmental impact of bulldozing a road through wetlands, there was the important question of the impact on Aboriginal cultural heritage. I am pleased that the McGowan government will include the wetlands in an A-class conservation reserve for the use of future generations.

It was an honour to represent the local community for eight years on Cockburn council and to promote the interests of ratepayers, residents and small business. I learnt a lot from the Aboriginal Reference Group and from being chair of the grants and donations committee. Given the number of hours we allocated to the planning of the Aquatic and Recreation Centre in Cockburn Central, both here and interstate, it is refreshing to see the thousands of people now using that facility. It was also a highlight to work closely with the Fremantle Football Club and I hope, along with many other devoted fans, that it can achieve premiership success in the near future. The people of Cockburn have a special place in my heart, and I will continue to do all that I can to assist them in the future.

On that note, I thank Cockburn Mayor Logan Howlett and his wife, Pat, for their kindness, advice and friendship over those eight years. Of special importance was also the help I received from Councillor Philip Eva and his wife, Michele. Another Cockburn councillor who assisted me was the member for Jandakot, Yaz Mubarakai, who became a close friend and I congratulate him on being appointed parliamentary secretary to Minister Tony Buti. It is a pleasure to again be working together for our local communities.

I extend my appreciation to the staff at the City of Cockburn for their assistance. I also acknowledge Stephen Cain, Stuart Downing, Don Green, Daniel Arndt and fellow councillors Kevin Allen, Bart Houwen, Lara Kirkwood, Val Oliver, the late Steve Portelli, Carol Reeve-Fowkes, Tony Romano, Michael Separovich, Chantelle Stone, Lee-Anne Smith, Chamonix Terblanche and Lyndsey Wetton. Although we did not always see eye to eye, it was clear that everyone around the table was passionate and committed to the community they represented. My time on the council at the City of Cockburn showed me that local government most definitely plays a much bigger role than just rates, roads and rubbish; it builds communities, provides avenues for social inclusion for all members of society and the expectations of residents continue to grow daily. The City of Cockburn does a lot of these things very well.

My electorate office will be in Canning Bridge in a building occupied by the previous Liberal member for South Metropolitan Region, Hon Simon O'Brien. I have big shoes to fill. He served in the Legislative Council for just shy of a quarter of a century, was Deputy President, a former government minister, and Chair of Committees. I recognise the contribution that he has made during his time in this place.

The South Metropolitan Region is dynamic and diverse. It is a huge area, covering the 15 lower house electorates of Baldivis, Bateman, Bicton, Cannington, Cockburn, Fremantle, Jandakot, Kwinana, Riverton, Rockingham, Southern River, South Perth, Victoria Park, Warnbro and Willagee. All those seats are now held by Labor members of Parliament. I look forward to working with these members, the host of unions, local governments, small business groups, sporting and social clubs and key organisations such as the South West Group, a voluntary regional organisation that comprises six local government authorities across the South Metropolitan Region. More than a third of people living in the South Metropolitan Region today were born overseas, with the biggest increase coming from India, China, the Philippines and New Zealand.

Of course, I am familiar with big parts of the region after growing up and studying in Fremantle, working in Kwinana, living and raising my family in Coolbellup, and working as an elected member for eight years across Cockburn. I look forward to getting out and about to meet more local people.

I now take the opportunity to thank the many people who have worked behind the scenes in assisting me to enter Parliament. To Tim Picton, the hardworking state secretary of WA Labor, Ellie Whiteaker, the assistant state secretary, and all the team at WA Labor, thank you for your immediate and ongoing advice. I also thank the union movement generally, but specifically the hardworking people at the Community and Public Sector Union–Civil Service Association of WA and the administration of the United Workers' Union, its president Carolyn Smith and national political coordinator Dominic Rose.

Now to my family. I would not be standing here today if it were not for my pillars of strength—my parents, Baden and Cheryl. They continue to be my biggest supporters and without their love and generosity, my path to politics would not have been possible.

To my wife, Elena, thank you. Your support gives me the confidence to be here today and I know that with you by my side, I will be able to serve the people in my electorate with the energy and enthusiasm it requires. Your constant encouragement, guidance and belief allows me to take on this new role.

To our two girls, Imogen and Phoebe, who I had hoped would sit quietly in the President's gallery, perhaps one day when you are older, you will come across this speech and, if you read through far enough, you will come to this part. I want you both to know that I love you very much and that the important work we do here is an attempt to make Western Australia a better place for you to grow up in. It should provide you with every opportunity to live a happy and healthy life, with world-class education and health services, job opportunities and a natural environment that ensures that this state continues to be a great place to, one day, raise a family of your own.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my mother-in-law, Robyn, her mother, Beryl Kay, who celebrates her ninety-second birthday this coming Monday, and my brother-in-law Alexander Kane for their ongoing guidance, support, friendship and, of course, endless hours of babysitting.

A range of individuals have gone above and beyond the call of duty to assist me, such as Kwinana Labor stalwart Vic Smith, who is always there to help. I thank my nephew Joshua Cunniffe for his ongoing advice and sense of humour, along with Nicole, David and the whole Cunniffe family. I thank my cousin Nathan Buzza, someone I admired growing up, and his wife, Trudi, for always being so generous and welcoming.

Then there is my former housemate Chris Patroni. He not only is a valued friend, but also volunteered to assist me in the early hours of the morning on election day. I also acknowledge Peter Connolly and Daniel Turco for their constant support and entertaining banter and my other friends who have taken the time to be here to support me today. Our friendship group has expanded over the years since high school to include wives and now many children, and it is special to watch as our families spend time together.

In addition, I thank Lyn Sherwood for her professional advice. I appreciated the regular check-ins from former Mayor of Fremantle Peter Tagliaferri, along with Zoey McMillan, Boba Goricanec, Richard Storey and the entire Kwinana team. I thank the former and current federal representatives in my electorate, which include Gary Gray, Matthew Keogh, Madeleine King, Melissa Parke and Josh Wilson. I was fortunate to assist on some of their election campaigns in previous years and look forward to working with them for many years to come. Thank you to Tony Piccolo in South Australia, who I was able to assist on a successful election campaign in 2010 and has stayed in contact ever since.

Finally, I thank Roger Cook for giving a young person a chance back in 2008. It is fortuitous that after all this time we will continue, as colleagues, working for the betterment of Western Australia. I am glad to be given the opportunity to do the same and I am looking forward to working with my new staff, Matthew Clarke, William Mathers and Julie Valentine. In a way, the past 13 years working with Roger could be deemed an apprenticeship. It has taught me the importance of hard work and the significant outcomes that can be achieved. From today, that apprenticeship is over. I am ready to take this next step, to be there for everyone living in the South Metropolitan Region and across Western Australia. Thank you.

[Applause.]