



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Ms Caitlin Mary Collins, MLA**

**(Member for Hillarys)**

Legislative Assembly

Address-in-Reply

Tuesday, 4 May 2021

*Reprinted from Hansard*

# Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 4 May 2021

---

## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 29 April on the following motion moved by Ms L. Dalton —

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

To His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, AC, Governor of the State of Western Australia.

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.

**MS C.M. COLLINS (Hillarys)** [3.45 pm]: Madam Speaker, may I congratulate you on your appointment. As the first female Speaker and the longest-serving female MP in Western Australia, I look to you for guidance. Attaining an almost equal caucus of female members is a proud achievement for the WA Labor Party and our state. It is in honour of Edith Cowan, not only as the first woman to be elected to this place exactly 100 years ago, but also for paving the long road to the realisation of women's value in the workplace and society. By no more than a quirk of statistics, I am honoured to be the 100<sup>th</sup> woman to be sworn in to the Parliament of Western Australia.

Members: Hear, hear!

**Ms C.M. COLLINS:** I pay my respects to the traditional owners, the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, past and present, on whose land we meet today. We all have a responsibility to ensure that we continue our path towards reconciliation.

I extend my sincere congratulations to the Premier, Mark McGowan, and all members newly elected and re-elected. It is with pride and humility that I stand before this Parliament. In service to the people of the electorate of Hillarys and the people of Western Australia, I will share with you my story, my commitment to the community and my vision for the future.

As a teacher, I am proud to stand in the company of many new Labor members who come from such diverse backgrounds. This Parliament is a cross-section of our society. We are a smorgasbord of everyday people and professions, whether it be a paramedic, a naval officer or an electrician. We truly come from all walks of life.

I wish to take a moment to reflect on the past year, one which none of us will forget. It was a year that shone a light on the best and worst of us; a year of movements and moments that I will carry with me as I forge my path in public service. The year 2020 was the year of the Black Lives Matter movement. In Australia, the matters of deaths in custody and the incarceration level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were raised in public protest. The year 2020 was also a year of devastating bushfires, and the year that Australia awoke to the full impact and enormity of the climate emergency. The year 2020 was the year of a global pandemic that has impacted us all. Western Australians united in their commitment to work together to protect our most vulnerable. I congratulate this government for having the political will to make the hard decisions.

*Reprinted from Hansard*

The McGowan government earned a reputation that was built on dependability, integrity and strength of action. Western Australians voted to demonstrate their confidence in us, and we must continually work for their support.

### **EXPRESSION OF THANKS**

My deep and lasting gratitude goes out to the people of Hillarys, Padbury, Craigie, Kallaroo, Beldon and Mullaloo. I am deeply honoured that you have entrusted me to represent you. I promise to meet this responsibility with all that I can offer. Thank you for welcoming me into your homes and for your engagement and your connection. I recognise the service of Peter Katsambanis and wish him well in his future endeavours.

Of course, I would not be here as the member for Hillarys without the support and belief of so many people. In particular, I want to thank all the volunteers who committed their time and energy to the Hillarys campaign. Every weekend, a small brigade of dedicated volunteers turned up to meet with thousands of residents and hear their stories. It was their belief in the Labor Party that connected so well with the spirit of progressive change in the electorate.

Sir Isaac Newton once said, “If I have seen further, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants.” I would like to make a very special mention to a particular giant of WA politics—the fabulous and formidable Hon Alannah MacTiernan, whose counsel as my campaign director was invaluable. She is a political force of nature who taught me that no problem is too big or too small to address; that everything is in the detail. The inspirational Pam Beggs welcomed me into her family and continues to be a constant source of wisdom, humour and love, coupled of course with the not insignificant fact that Pam, as the member for Whitfords, was the first female Labor minister. She has been my guru of the electorate and my wise guide through WA politics.

A very special thankyou goes to my campaign manager, the vivacious Russian Alisa Shibalova, and to Gareth, Jack, Doug, Andrei and Holly for your past and continued support. To our state secretary and assistant state secretary Tim and Ellie, you are the unseen champions behind WA Labor’s historic election victory. I would, of course, like to extend a huge thankyou to our Premier, Hon Mark McGowan, for having faith in me, for your strong leadership and continual encouragement during your frequent visits on the campaign trail. Thank you also to the larger-than-life and warm and generous characters of Dr Paddy Ramanathan and John Hammond. The world needs more people like you. I would also like to thank Ben Harris, Peter O’Keeffe and the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association of WA for their support. The members of the SDA are the essential frontline workers. They deserve fair pay and our respect for continuing to provide services during the most unpredictable and uncertain of times. To the many people working in the City of Joondalup, I share your passion about our community and look forward to working with you.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to the headmaster of Scotch College, Dr Alec O’Connell, for your guidance these past four years and for allowing me the space to follow my passion. Running for Labor—twice—could not have been easy on your public relations team in the Liberal heartland of the Cottesloe electorate! Thank you to my former students for the passionate debates and for encouraging me to take the leap into politics. I give my love and appreciation to my partner, Jack, whose sharp intelligence, humour, dedication and ever-present gentle patience got me through the difficult and dark moments of self-doubt. Mum and dad, thank you for instilling in me a sense of social justice and a hard Celtic work ethic, for always loving me and encouraging me to spread my wings, and to my big brother Sean for the happy memories growing up as the two new Scottish kids in Oz.

### **LIFE BEFORE POLITICS**

In speaking to the Assembly today, I have an opportunity to share a bit about my background, which led me to this place. Like so many others in the northern suburbs, my family shares

a similar story of recent arrival to Western Australia. We emigrated from Scotland when I was three years old. I come from an extended family of teachers who have always been active in the labour movement in the UK. Both of my grandparents became teachers later in life, with grandpa being an electrician who only started teaching at the age of 54. I would later follow his footsteps by also becoming a teacher of history and politics. To me, they embody the transformative power of education—giving them the ability to take control, make decisions and ultimately change the course of their lives.

While studying at university, I had the opportunity to volunteer in the remote community of Oombulgurri in the East Kimberley. I remember a community with a difficult history but a fierce pride in the land and a deep sense of connection and ownership of the rugged and beautiful area. Oombulgurri closed in 2011, a victim of austerity and short-sighted economic pressures. Back then I could never have guessed that an entire community could simply close based on a decision made 3 000 kilometres away.

Like so many young Australians before me, I decided to expand my horizons by travelling. I volunteered to teach in the slums of Varanasi, India. There, I was made brutally aware of the consequences of social and financial inequality. It was in Varanasi that I personally came to understand that teaching was not simply passing on facts and figures. I came to the realisation that receiving an education represented hope and the means to escape the impossible burden of poverty.

Growing up, my mum would tell me stories of her upbringing in Northern Ireland during the troubles. I developed a natural interest in the history and politics of Ireland. In 2008, I took the opportunity to study abroad in Dublin and undertook an internship in the Irish houses of Parliament. This was my first exposure to the mechanics of government. This was also the year that the global financial crisis hit. The Celtic Tiger was wounded and I witnessed the immediate human impacts of economic mismanagement and the despair of a boom-and-bust economy. I saw how a bright economic future could disappear virtually overnight.

I was teaching English in Bogota in 2011 as the Colombian government was attempting to enact major cuts to social welfare and privatise universities. I marched with young, politically active students passionately defending their right to higher education that was run for the people, not for profit. As a somewhat naive, privately educated schoolgirl from Perth, it opened my eyes to the understanding and fundamental belief that education is not, and never should be, a commodity. Universal access to quality education is a basic right for everyone, and a right worth defending.

I moved to Vietnam in 2013 and taught English in schools, language centres and at a university. Having taught people of all ages and from all socio-economic backgrounds, I witnessed again and again the importance of education in the lives of people not graced with the same level of wealth that we as Australians take for granted. T.S. Elliot wrote —

We shall not cease from exploration  
And at the end of all our exploring  
Will be to arrive where we started  
And know the place for the first time.

And so I returned to Australia. Through teaching abroad, I realised that education fundamentally expands the possibilities of opportunity. I wanted every student who came through my classroom to have every opportunity in life available to them. I believe that the measure of a good government is that it must always expand opportunity and it must always work to provide hope and optimism to its people. I had a stronger appreciation for a party wedded to the pursuit of equal opportunity, and it has always been Labor governments that have a core understanding of the true long-term value of equitable investment in the community.

## **MY POLITICAL JOURNEY**

I did not come back from my travels with the answers to the great questions of our time, but my eyes were opened, and for the first time I had many questions about the realities of life in Western Australia. Despite being in the middle of the greatest economic resources boom in Australian history, it appeared to me that the so-called miracle trickle-down waters had evaporated somewhere between the Pilbara and the boardrooms of the Perth CBD. Profits were soaring yet public services were either under-resourced, in the process of being sold off or visibly struggling. How had it come to this?

As a politics teacher here in Perth, I was always encouraging my students to be politically engaged. I realised that I, too, had something to contribute and I decided to practice what I preached. This resulted in a somewhat baptism of fire in state politics. I ran for Labor in 2017 against then Premier Colin Barnett within his stronghold seat of Cottesloe. I did not win. But in the process I met hundreds of residents who shared common ground with me. We wanted the best for our state. We wanted a long-term plan and we wanted equity in opportunity.

## **THE SPIRIT OF COMMUNITY**

Four years later, I had the privilege to run for Hillarys, which had been a Liberal-held seat for almost 30 years. The electorate of Hillarys is without doubt one of the most beautiful places to live in Perth and I am proud to now call it home. While out doorknocking, I met dedicated people who shared with me their life experiences and hopes and fears for the future. The one recurring theme that touched me greatly was the strong sense of community. Whether it is the passionate P&Cs or the spirited sporting clubs, community groups make up the social fabric of this electorate. One such local group that embodies this spirit is Dadbury, which is a group of local dads from Padbury who selflessly help local families in need. Surf lifesaving clubs such as Sorrento and Mullaloo play an important role in keeping our beaches safe and families connected. I am proud that this government will deliver \$8 million towards the rebuild of Sorrento Surf Life Saving Club. The beach lifestyle along the Indian Ocean coastline attracts many from far and wide. The McGowan government has committed to upgrading cyclepaths across the electorate, as well as contributing to a bike trail network for enthusiasts to enjoy the pristine bushland.

Hillarys is an electorate full of young growing families who deserve the best that this state has to offer. I was particularly moved by the passion and commitment of the numerous principals, teachers and parents I met when discussing the future of their children. For too long there has been a lack of focus by previous Liberal governments on our local schools, which are, after all, the foundations of any community. The McGowan government is investing in our local schools and I look forward to delivering on my major election commitment to rebuild Hillarys Primary School, Springfield Primary School and Duncraig Senior High School.

Looking after our senior citizens is a priority of mine and I will continue to advocate for community and personal safety, as well as improved accessibility across the electorate. This re-elected McGowan government is committed to upgrading Joondalup Health Campus to ensure the highest standard of care for residents in the northern suburbs.

The Hillarys marina is enjoyed by everyone. Parents take their children down to its calm waters for a first-ever encounter with the ocean. Shrieking, joyful kids get their first up-close interaction with an undersea creature at AQWA. Visitors board ferries for adventures on Rottnest Island, while local retirees catch up over a coffee on the waterfront. Small businesses, which add so much value to any community, have suffered this last year. We must continue to support them in order to prepare for the renewal of the tourism industry. I will work with the City of Joondalup, the Department of Transport and other key stakeholders to ensure that Hillarys Boat Harbour continues to be an iconic Western Australian destination for everyone.

[Member's time extended.]

**Ms C.M. COLLINS:** During the months leading up to the election, many people in the Hillarys electorate spoke to me about what they consider to be the great challenges of our time—the issues that they want our leaders to grapple with to provide real outcomes and renew confidence in our future.

### **EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES**

Sometimes it is worth viewing who we are in Australia from the outside. Both my parents were educated in state secondary schools in the United Kingdom. When they arrived here, they were taken aback by what appeared to be the widely held belief that Australian public schools were inferior in quality, facilities and educational outcomes compared with private schools. Indeed, federal Labor member Chris Bowen wrote —

... in Australia, how much money your parents earn, where you live, and whether you come from an Indigenous or non-English-speaking background, have a bigger impact on your educational outcomes than they would in other comparable countries.

Continuous improvement of outcomes for all students should be the constant goal of any government. This is and always has been a fundamental principle of the Labor Party. The McGowan government is investing in STEM classrooms in every public school to equip them with state-of-the-art facilities. This is an encouraging investment in a vital component of our education system. However, on a personal basis, as a student and teacher of humanities, I was appalled that the federal Liberal government saw fit to double the cost of a humanities degree. As William Butler Yeats said —

Education is not the filling of a pail but the lighting of a fire.

The power of critical thinking developed by the humanities is paramount to understanding both our past and the way forward. Good teachers are not in the business of producing workers; they produce well-rounded citizens. Working as a teacher, I witnessed the impact that an uncertain future can have on our young people.

### **YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH**

The mental health of our teenagers and young adults must be a priority. Nationwide, over 300 000 young Australians will experience high psychological distress. Ask any high school teacher and the chances are that they will hold a story of a young person, full of light and potential, who has been lost far too soon. I would like to recognise the work of not-for-profit services such as Zero2Hero, a group dedicated to increasing the understanding of mental health issues through support camps that teach teenagers how to speak up when the burden becomes too great. When you teach a classroom of young people, you want your students to have the skills to voice when they need help. Western Australia's young people will have the support of the forty-first Parliament. This state government is investing in mental health services at record levels by strengthening our mental health safety net, including telehealth services, referral pathways and more school resources.

### **CLIMATE ACTION & OUR ENERGY FUTURE**

Before the pandemic silenced our streets around the world, the sight of schoolchildren marching for a safer climate future was not uncommon. Western Australia's young people understand the science and they understand the risks that are lying ahead; they are watching us. For our economic size, Australia boasts the richest renewable energy resources of any developed country. This promise of hope has been well documented by the economist Ross Garnaut, but he has also emphasised that the cost of not getting to zero emissions will be greater than the cost of making the adjustments to get there. Last year, the McGowan Labor government approved progress on the Asian Renewable Energy Hub in the Pilbara—over 6 000 square kilometres of renewable energy resources. This energy will be used to begin producing exportable green hydrogen. Western Australians should be encouraged by this government introducing

two new portfolios—Hydrogen Industry and Climate Action. We are committed to achieving net zero emissions for Western Australia by 2050. This is a government that is creating manufacturing industries, new jobs and export markets in order to move away from the historical boom-and-bust-cycle economy.

For too long we have been comfortable with the cliché title of the Lucky Country. In 1988, Bob Hawke found himself surrounded by scientists at a research facility, who were urging him to pivot away from Australia’s over-reliance on the export of its natural resources and to become the clever country instead. While we continue to be a resource state, we need to build a vision for the future that would further unlock this state’s potential. We can walk and chew gum at the same time. We are a forward-thinking government that will leverage our education system to unlock new technology to grow our economy and build our intellectual capital. Perhaps we can become known as the “smart state” in the “clever country”. This state government is playing its part.

Learning never fails to provide a solution in dark times. Education’s purpose is to prepare the next generation to find a meaningful purpose in the unknown world that awaits them. Education gives us the tools to confront uncertainty with hope, skills and a plan.

### **OPTIMISM AND DETERMINATION IN THE AGE OF UNCERTAINTY**

The McGowan government has provided optimism and determination in the face of uncertainty. This was not just about COVID-19 and the disruption we still face. It is far bigger than that. We have the responsibility to encourage public dialogue and determine the future of the state—to navigate away from partisan rhetoric and division towards progress and real outcomes. It is in how we develop an education system that supports all schools to deliver the highest standard of teaching. It is in protecting our young people by giving them the mental health safety net with the support and confidence to look forward to their lives with optimism. It is in how we face environmental challenges and how we grasp the great opportunities new energy sources present to us.

I will continue to be a strong advocate for the Hillarys electorate, and I take seriously the responsibility entrusted to me. We will ensure our community remains a brilliant place to work, raise a family and live a life with meaning. I promise to undertake every action I can to work tirelessly on my constituents’ behalf—to serve, to bring optimism and determination in this age of uncertainty. Thank you.

[Applause.]

---