



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Mr Bill Marmion MLA
(Member for Nedlands)

Address-in-Reply Debate

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 12 November 2008

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Motion

MR W.R. MARMION (Nedlands — Parliamentary Secretary) [1.07 pm]: I proudly stand in this place representing the families and businesses of Nedlands. It is a privilege and an honour to be their voice. I note that I follow several luminaries in Western Australian history as the member for Nedlands: Sir Norbert Keenan, Sir Charles Court and Richard Court. They were all men of great substance, principle and sound judgement. They were all highly regarded for not only their passionate support of free enterprise, but also their vision for Western Australia and their commitment to the electorate. My hope is that I will equally serve the people of Nedlands in this place as they have been supported in the past. Looking back on history, I am reminded that great men and women built this state, including men like my parliamentary predecessors. They were men who believed in free enterprise and who had a vision and were not afraid to step out to create that vision.

I am here today because my great-great-grandfather was such a man. His name was Patrick Marmion, and in 1841, at the ripe old age of 25, he migrated from Northern Ireland to Fremantle. Although Fremantle and Perth had been settled for only 12 years before Patrick arrived, his energy, drive and commercial nous must have suited the times. Officially, ship's records list his occupation as a clerk, with one historian suggesting that he arrived as an indentured servant. Even so, he managed to develop a successful merchant business in Fremantle, along with a whaling station up the coast, close to where the suburb of Padbury is now located. He died in 1855, leaving his wife, Charlotte, and son, William Edward Marmion, to continue the family business. William went on to make his mark in other ways. He was the first member for the seat of Fremantle, and was Minister for Lands in the first Forrest cabinet. He served in the Legislative Council from 1870 until 1890, when he moved into the Legislative Assembly.

William Edward Marmion had a reputation for being honest and clear-sighted. He was an outspoken supporter of Fremantle as a gateway to the state and he was not afraid to stand up on behalf of his constituents. From the 1870s through to the 1890s, when Albany's King George Sound and other hubs threatened Fremantle's position as Western Australia's major port, William Marmion fought hard alongside other Fremantle businessmen to get the government to build a much-improved longer jetty, thereby assuring Fremantle's place as the state's premier port facility. He also argued for the retention of the railway workshops in Fremantle rather than moving them to Midland Junction. In his support for John Coode's plan to develop Fremantle's harbour on the coast, as opposed to the mouth of the Swan River, he took on some formidable opponents when he reportedly criticised and bullied the engineers who supported C.Y. O'Connor's alternative plan. It is interesting that now, more than 100 years later, the very nature and location of the Fremantle port is again on the agenda

as the state considers its future export and import tonnages bound to and from the Perth metropolitan area.

We can be proud of our heritage. We must learn from our history. My pledge to the people of Nedlands is similar to that given by all those statesmen who have gone before me; that is, I will energetically defend and champion their needs even in the face of great opposition.

Incidentally, I have also read that William Edward Marmion's fellow parliamentarians believed that he lacked tact. That piece of information, not surprisingly, was never passed down to his ancestors through family historians. That is one trait of William Marmion's that I do not plan to emulate. Fortunately, I am surrounded by many good people, including my wife, Katelyn, who I have no doubt will remind me of this pledge in the months and years to come.

It is to these same good people that I owe a debt of gratitude. Thanks to their efforts and support I survived the rigours of preselection in a nail-bitingly close election. I wish to publicly record my thanks to them, along with the hundreds of people who supported me through this process. I was amazed and humbled by those who came forward to help me. To the people who manned my campaign office, who doorknocked more than 7 000 homes and who worked the booths and scrutineered, I say a heartfelt thank you.

I would not have considered running for the seat of Nedlands without the support of my family. I refer to my wife, Katelyn, and my five children—Brittany, Olivia, Richard, Trent and Kezia. My parents, Betty and Dick Marmion, who are here today, were less enthusiastic about my possible entry into politics. It is their observation that politics makes one's hair prematurely grey or, in some cases, white!

I pay particular thanks to Peter Collier, a North Metropolitan member of the Legislative Council. As my campaign manager, he devoted an enormous amount of time and energy to my campaign. At the risk of leaving out the names of some 300 people who worked on my campaign, I single out Barry Ireland, Des Wells, Ross Roberts and Del Willmott for the time they devoted. I also acknowledge the advice and grounding from the following experienced campaigners—Richard Court, Liz Constable and my mother's dear friend June Craig. Most of all I thank the electors of the seat of Nedlands—the people who placed their trust in me. I regard it as a great honour and responsibility to represent them, and I sincerely thank them for the opportunity.

The Nedlands electorate is a special place. It is bounded by the Swan River to the south and south east, Thomas Street and Kings Park to the east, Loch Street and Brockway Road to the west and Cambridge Street to the north. Within its boundaries are the suburbs of Crawley, Daglish, Dalkeith, Jolimont, Karrakatta, Nedlands, Shenton Park and Subiaco, along with parts of Claremont, Floreat, Mt Claremont, Wembley and West Leederville. Major features within the electorate include Subiaco Oval, Karrakatta Cemetery, Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital, St John of God Hospital Subiaco, Princess Margaret Hospital for Children, King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women and the University of Western Australia. It has more than eight kilometres of Swan River foreshore with some wonderful recreational walks and rivers parks. The electorate is home to a wide cross-section of people. We are generally a happy group of people, but we are not without our challenges.

Nedlands has more than 6 000 residents over the age of 65, which is nearly 14 per cent of its population. That compares with the figure for the rest of Western Australia, which is 11.8 per cent. Given that the median age of those who live in Nedlands is 40, Nedlands has one of the highest age profiles in Australia. Already my constituents have sent me a clear message. One of the principal issues that concerns them continues to be a lack of timely access to hospitals for emergency care and the waiting period for those requiring important surgery, which they want reduced. I am pleased that the new Liberal government has an experienced and very capable person in Dr Kim Hames who, as

the Minister for Health, recognises the need to address these pressing concerns. I will work hard to keep this issue high on the government's agenda.

Provision of aged-care places is another major issue for the electorate of Nedlands. With a much larger proportion of elderly residents than is the case in other electorates in Western Australia, we are already facing the problems of having to place loved ones who need residential aged-care accommodation in distant metropolitan suburbs that are unfamiliar to them and far from close relatives. Exacerbating this problem is the need to upgrade and rebuild most existing aged-care facilities. Sadly, the renovation of many of these facilities is simply not an option. Rebuilding is usually the only answer, but that requires relocating residents to temporary accommodation that is often out of the electorate. That places enormous stress on the residents and their families. Solutions are not easy. Tough decisions have to be made. Land is a somewhat scarce commodity in the western suburbs. Not surprisingly, councils and developers want to maximise the return on their investments, and any land that is available is invariably used for residential development. This is where our Nedlands heritage provides the background for our future vision. We need to be mindful of the ever-diminishing residential aged-care places in our electorate and what that means to us as a community. A failure to support our elderly residents will greatly diminish our social fabric and intergenerational family links. If we sever the very roots of our community tree, we will not have a strong community. Now is the time to plan for the future. Now is the time to identify suitable sites on which to build new facilities and now is the time to upgrade existing facilities. Just as we plan for schools, hospitals, public open space and other essential community infrastructure, we must assure our elderly residents that we really do care. Now is the time to create a future network of residential aged-care sites throughout the whole metropolitan area, including Nedlands. The generation that is being affected by this challenge deserves better because they have served our communities and defended our country. There are horror stories out there; indeed, anyone who has recently tried to find care for their ageing parents will know exactly what I am talking about. The situation is un-Australian and needs to change.

Equally, we must invest in our future younger generations and in parents and their families. The deteriorating standard of state school facilities is driving them towards the private education system. That issue concerns me greatly. As a parent I have chosen to use the state's primary school system. The teachers at both Nedlands Primary School and Hollywood Primary School are dedicated to the learning needs of my children. I was given great comfort when, in the first few weeks of the new Liberal government, the Premier and the Minister for Education decided to improve the conditions and pay rates of our valued state school teachers. That is a great first step, but we now must work hard to improve the standard of our schools' infrastructure. It is evident that the older schools in my electorate are run down and in desperate need of an upgrade. Sadly, the once temporary demountable classrooms have become permanent reminders of quick-fix options. There has been no thought for the future. A failure to increase maintenance expenditure during the past eight years has meant that the burden to cover the shortfall rests with parent associations. Whilst parents in some suburbs may be able to fund school infrastructure needs, that is certainly not the case for parents in other suburbs. I am advised that the current written-down depreciated value of Western Australia's schools is a conservative figure of \$7 billion. Using the Australian Taxation Office's allowable depreciation rate of two per cent, that equates to an annual maintenance expenditure requirement of \$140 million, yet the total funding allocated by the previous government during the past eight years was only \$60 million. I recognise that there is not an endless pot of money available for the government to allocate. However, this simply means that we need to focus on the priorities and ensure that we get the best value from the taxpayers' dollar.

Although well established, Nedlands is not without its transport planning and infrastructure issues. There are some good roads, a train line and bus routes, yet we can make our transport system a

whole lot better. Integrating these modes of travel and introducing a network of safe bicycle and pedestrian paths will increase our community's faith in our transport system. With five children, I am particularly keen to have safe environments that encourage them to use our footpaths and bike paths without fear of a possible collision with a vehicle. Again, it is important that we have a vision and a plan for the future that takes into account all travel options, including passenger cars, commercial vehicles, buses, trains, bicycles and pedestrians.

The areas of transport planning and infrastructure are a particular passion of mine. I come from a family of engineers. I have a Bachelor of Engineering and Master of Business Administration from the University of Western Australia. These have stood me in good stead through 24 years in public service, starting as a civil engineer at Main Roads and finishing as a director in Premier Richard Court's office.

My time as an engineer in Main Roads allowed me to gain valuable experience in designing, planning, costing and constructing roads throughout the state. This included being posted in the divisions of West Kimberley, Bunbury, Narrogin, Kalgoorlie and Perth. At Main Roads I also had the privilege of reporting directly to some great leaders and engineers, including our current governor, Dr Ken Michael; Dr Jim Gill, the current chief executive officer of Water Corporation; and Don Aitken, who was the Commissioner of Main Roads for over 20 years and the chancellor of the University of Western Australia.

For the past six years I have managed, in partnership, a successful consulting business that focused on strategic planning of urban developments and the economic assessment of major government infrastructure projects. My most recent work included developing business cases covering major state infrastructure projects such as the Perth Arena, Fire and Emergency Services' volunteer and career fire stations, schools and train stations.

With this background, I am passionate about developing a vision, plans and policies that will meet the needs of our state now and well into the future. One of my greatest frustrations is the reactionary planning and implementation of major infrastructure projects, particularly transport projects, in a vacuum of any overall master plan or visionary context. Where is our draft 2050 passenger rail network; our 2050 port network; our 2050 land use plan for industry; and our 2050 road and rail freight networks linking major industry? It is not easy to develop such plans, but the first step is easy. We just have to say we will to do it, allocate the resources and start. It is nearly 50 years since the Stephenson-Hepburn plan was prepared. From this plan came the metropolitan region scheme and a planned road network. It gave the metropolitan area a developmental framework. It is well past the time for this plan to be looked at again and for a completely new start to be made.

Since my preselection I have often been asked why I have chosen to enter politics and why Nedlands. The "why Nedlands" part is easy. Nedlands is well and truly part of my family history. My grandmother and father lived in Nedlands in the 1940s and my father and aunt both obtained their first degrees at the University of Western Australia. I have travelled and resided all over Western Australia, from Bunbury to Derby, but I have returned to my heritage and have now lived in the Nedlands area for more than 20 years. I am a passionate advocate for Nedlands and for delivering a plan to ensure that its future is as strong as its past.

And why politics? That question is slightly harder to answer. Choosing to stand as a candidate and entering Parliament is a challenge for anyone, and I have always admired members from all sides of politics who have taken on this challenge. Although it is an enormous privilege to represent an electorate, it also carries with it the enormous responsibility of making decisions and judgements on significant issues for the state. I have been blessed with a career path that by chance has given me a broad experience in all levels of the public service. I believe that I have much to offer the people of Nedlands and Western Australia and that it is my duty, as well as my passion, to utilise my knowledge and experience in the most important forum—the Western Australian Parliament.

Growing up I learned from personal experience the value of hard work, determination and, above all, the importance of a team approach to getting the job done. As well as reinforcing the need to work hard and do my best, my parents also instilled in me the values of honesty and integrity and the need to give back to and play an active part in the local community.

For most of my life I have done this. I am the current president of the YM Coastal City Hockey Club, chairman of Engineers Australia's Centre for Leadership and Management, and chairman of the Engineering Excellence Awards for Western Australia. I am also heavily involved in my children's sports and education because, like many of us, my family means the world to me. They keep me grounded in reality and provide me with a reason for ensuring that the decisions I make do not adversely affect their future.

My wife, Katelyn, and I believe that strong family values are vital to the social fabric of our local community. It is important to me that my children grow up learning the lessons that I did and that they understand the value of hard work, the benefits of teamwork, the importance of honesty and respect and the joy that comes from getting involved in the community and giving to others. They also need to understand that we all have a role to play in our local community.

I am very fortunate because I can remember the time when anyone could get a hospital bed, when education, not funding, was the issue for our public schools and when our local roads were safe. I want my children to experience the same things that I did, and this can occur only when we have a government that works to meet the challenges of the future to benefit us all.

I believe that if we want to make a difference, we have to play our part. I want to play my part in a government that sets the bar high; a government that looks to the future with courage and resolve to create a vision that all communities can strive for; and a government that plans thoroughly to create realistic and intelligent policies that benefit us all. By that I mean policies that deliver health services more efficiently to the whole community and reduce the time patients spend in emergency waiting rooms and on surgery waiting lists; policies that allow aged-care residences to coexist with other residential properties in all our suburbs to allow families to stay close to one another for a lifetime; policies that look at the optimal size and location of schools, taking in the future demographics of our state and future educational requirements; policies that consider the operational life cycle of schools and fund them accordingly; policies that look to our future transport needs, including sea ports, major freight routes, rail links, bus routes, cycle paths and walkways; and policies that address reactionary town planning by setting a vision for the future for our urban development that will set the infrastructure goals for the metropolitan area for the next 50 years.

In closing, I wish to affirm my belief that the fundamental role of government is to facilitate the freedom of the individual and to provide services for the protection, safety and benefit of all individuals. In making decisions regarding what is best for the state, we must never forget that our state is made up of many individuals, some of whom require additional support due to their particular physical, financial or social circumstance. Laws, regulations and other red tape are necessary but we should work hard in this Parliament to make sure that, where possible, we keep legislation simple, unambiguous and to a minimum. It is my hope and desire that I will have the wisdom in this house to make decisions that will be to the greater benefit of the state and, as a consequence, every individual who lives here.

Today I have outlined a number of issues which my electorate feels passionate about but which affect us all. I look forward to working with my parliamentary colleagues to deliver solutions and to create the vision, develop the plans and draft the policies that will benefit not only my constituents, but also our entire state.

[Applause.]
