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Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (18:05): Mr President, as this is my first speech, may I start by congratulating you on being elected as President of the Senate. I'd also like to congratulate my fellow Western Australian Senators elected at the 18 May election: Senators Linda Reynolds, Patrick Dodson, Slade Brockman, Louise Pratt and Jordon Steele-John. Together we have the immense privilege of representing Western Australia, and I look forward to working with you to deliver for the great state of Western Australia.

Like all senators, standing here in this place has to be one of the greatest honours one could ever experience. It's difficult to describe just how I feel. For those who have known me for a long time, and some of you are here, you know just how passionate I am about this nation—the potential of our place in the broader world, and the potential of our people.

For all that Australia represents, and for the opportunity it provides, we truly are a blessed nation. Western Australia has been home to six generations of my family. It's terrific to have my parents, my amazing wife and my beautiful children with me here today. I'll have more to say about them later; but Amy and Sam, this is dad's work! All of us in this place are here to work for you and every other kid like you in this country.

My great-grandparents, Michael and Kathleen Kilrain, migrated to Australia and seized an opportunity created by the Group Settlement Scheme in Manjimup in the great south west of Western Australia. The Group Settlement Scheme was an assisted migration scheme which operated in Western Australia from the early 1920s. It was engineered by Premier James Mitchell to provide a labour force to open up large tracts of agricultural land and create a dairy export industry. Like the other settlers in group seven, Michael and his bride were provided with 100 acres of heavily wooded land and a small interest-free loan to get started. My great-grandparents used that loan to purchase a cow, a bucket and an axe. They got to work with other settlers to clear the land, build the fences and dams and, together, they also built a school to educate the local children. It was an impossible task. This was tall timber country—mostly karri and jarrah—and many of the settlers failed. And after a royal commission into the scheme, it was abandoned. But Michael, unlike many in the scheme, had farming experience back in Ireland and, through their strength and effort, he and future generations were able to make it a success and purchased the surrounding properties, and the farm is still in the family today.

Mick and Sarah O'Sullivan, my other great-grandparents, worked and raised their children in Manjimup too. Mick was one of the first foresters appointed by the government. His job was to implement the Forests Act. He would take his horse and sulky deep into the forests, camp for nights on end and mark out the trees which needed to be preserved. He was pro-development, but knew it had to be done in a sustainable way.

When I was a child, my father would tell me the stories of his parents and grandparents, and I would be absolutely mesmerised. These stories were to light a fire in my imagination and became a visceral part of my own thinking and imagination. The virtues of hard work and determination, personal responsibility, reward for effort, working with and giving back to community, the importance of family and family values have guided my life and my career. These are the values that led me to the Liberal Party.

Upon leaving school, I completed an apprenticeship in electronics and communications. Those familiar with Perth would have seen the Central Area Transit, CAT, buses running around the CBD. Well, my claim to fame is that I installed the passenger information system in those buses back in 1996. You would walk up and press the button on the bus stops and it would tell you when the next bus would arrive. In fact, I had the rather poetic experience of attending the declaration of polls at the AEC offices last month and then stepping out onto Hay Street to catch the bus back up to West Perth. And even though I could see the bus coming down the road, I just had to press that button—and the good news is that some 23 years later, it's still working.

While working in that trade, I was volunteering in my local church youth group, and I soon realised that I much preferred to work with people rather than with an oscilloscope and soldering iron. So for the next eight years

I worked as a youth worker across a number of churches and community organisations. It was fulfilling work, but it was tough, because I was exposed to some very challenging circumstances that a lot of young people find themselves in. It was a defining experience which enabled me to work with young people that maybe didn't have the best start at life. Along with the other youth leaders, I was able to see the influence that you can have as a role model and mentor to young people in those developing and vulnerable years.

My faith is an integral part of my life. I am a Christian, and I believe and affirm the Apostles' Creed. In my late 20s, I seriously considered studying theology and becoming a minister of religion. But, while my faith was, and still is, a very important part of my life, I came to the realisation that being a pastor wasn't the right path for me. In 2008, a friend of mine told me about philanthropists Andrew and Nicola Forrest and their foundation Minderoo, or the Australian Children's Trust as it was known then. I learnt that the foundation's motto was 'Give a man a fish, you feed him for a day; teach him how to fish, you feed him for a lifetime.' And this just jumped out at me. You see, I kind of felt like in my work I'd been handing out a lot of fish. Now, there is nothing wrong with that—in fact, if you're going to go fishing you often need to have had a feed before you go. So I don't take anything away from those wonderful charities and organisations that provide such important welfare services to our community. But, for me, I wanted to be a part of something that could help people break free from the cycle of welfare and teach them how to fish. So I took up work with the Forrests, where we started Generation One, an initiative to create employment for Indigenous Australians.

In a defining moment, on an early project with Generation One I had reason to be in Fitzroy Crossing in the Kimberley. While I was there, a huge storm broke out and it rained so much that it turned Fitzroy Crossing into an island. The roads and all the communications were cut off. So over that weekend, with some spare time on my hands, I walked down to the football oval and made conversation with a small group of Indigenous teenage boys. After a brief kick of the footy, I asked them what they wanted to do when they finished school, and they looked at me like I was from another planet. They said: 'School? We don't go to school.' I said, 'Well what do you want to do when you get a little older?' They said, 'We'll just go on CDEP'—essentially the Work for the Dole program, as it was called at the time. These were smart, funny, athletic kids that ought to not have their aspirations cut so short, yet they couldn't see much more for their life than a life of welfare dependency. That conversation was the turning point for me. I knew exactly what I wanted to do—give kids like these hope and aspiration.

So cue GenerationOne, an initiative to create employment for 50,000 Indigenous Australians. The program worked by turning the training and employment services system on its head. Typically, an unemployed person would go to Centrelink to register for Newstart. Centrelink would send them off to an employment service provider—or a jobactive as they are now known. The service provider would enrol them in a course and then hope for the best that they would get a job. By and large this is kind of still how it operates today, but, more often than not, the training is just training for training's sake. The problem is that jobseekers cycle in and out of courses with no job to show for it at the end. It's often said, that Indigenous jobseekers in particular have more certificates than there are TAFE colleges, to wallpaper their hallways with. Or as my friend Jeremy Donovan, who is sitting in the gallery today, says, more tickets than a raffle book.

We have to fix how service providers are incentivised. This, to me, seems to be the genesis of the problem. The jobactive contract is the second-largest procurement of government services, second only to defence. It's a \$7 billion industry, and I know the government is committed to further reforms, and I look forward to contributing to it, because failure in this policy area is not an option. The training for training's sake issue not only wastes an enormous amount of taxpayers' dollars but it completely depletes the trainee of any sense of pride and aspiration.

Under GenerationOne, we started with an employer who had a job, designed the training around their requirements and guaranteed the individual a job before they commenced training. For some time Fortescue Metals had been running this model quite successfully in the Pilbara, so I thought: let's see if we can get it working here in Fitzroy Crossing. We found an employer with 12 civil and mining works jobs available. We designed the training course and went about recruiting. It was made clear at the start of the program that the expectations would be high. We needed the participants to turn up on time, every single day, and they had to be fully competent across all the units before they could graduate. And boy did these fellas rise to the occasion. They knew it would be tough, but they wanted to take it on. Several months later, we held a graduation ceremony where all the families were able to attend. We gave each of the graduates a certificate and a fishing rod, not because of the plentiful barra in the Fitzroy River but to remind them that their training and their job were setting them up for life.

There was one particular family that I noticed. I could tell by looking at them just how proud they were of their father. Now, I had no idea of the effect that this conversation I was about to have with them would have on me and on my own life. But it profoundly impacted me. I went up to them and congratulated them. I spoke to the gentleman and I spoke to his family. I said to his wife, 'You must be so proud.' She said, 'More than you could possibly understand.' She then told me her husband had been on course after course. He'd been through drug and alcohol rehab and all sorts of counselling. He'd been in and out of jail and nothing was working. She then said, 'It was only a few months ago, on Christmas Eve, that we sat down together and I said to him, "With the way things are going, this is likely to be our last Christmas together."' It was not because they were going to separate, but because it wouldn't be too long before the drugs or the alcohol, or quite possibly suicide, would take him. She said: 'You came up here, you and your team, and you told us there were these jobs and that you believed in these fellas and that they could rise to the challenge. And now I've seen the transformation in my husband. He turned up 30 minutes early every single day. It was tough, but he was up for it because he knew the commitment was there. And now we're looking forward to next Christmas and many more to follow.' You see, employment won't change everything, but without it nothing will change.

This model, originally pioneered by Fortescue Metals Group and trialed in Fitzroy Crossing, became a template for the Vocational Training and Employment Centres (VTEC) program. As a Liberal, I'm extremely proud the coalition government committed over \$40 million to roll out 29 VTECs across Australia. Today, as a direct result of this, over 10,000 long-term, disadvantaged jobseekers have moved off welfare and into work. Not only that, the data shows that over 70 per cent of these jobseekers were still in work some six months later. We say that the best form of welfare is a job. I've been privileged to see the reality and practical effect of this on countless lives. When you lift people up so that they can see over the horizon, when they earn their first pay cheque, when they see that they can independently support their family and take part in all the advantages that life in the 21st century enables, the transformation is truly amazing. This is why I'm proud to be part of a government that has created 1.3 million jobs since coming into office.

Those familiar with my background know I'm a big supporter of the cashless debit card, having spent many years working with technology companies and policymakers to develop the platform. In 2015 I spent much of my time in Canberra, lobbying for its introduction, and later worked with the trial communities to make sure it had the best opportunity to succeed. It's a critical tool to help communities deal with the devastating effects of alcohol, gambling and drug abuse. I'd like to see a wider rollout into other vulnerable communities across Australia, but for that to happen we have to invest in the further development of the technology. It's important that this tool becomes a tool of empowerment, and with item-level blocking on the card, rather than the current merchant-level blocking, we'll be able to see that happen.

I'm also a passionate advocate for early childhood development. As a nation, I believe we need to apply resources to initiatives we know will achieve game-changing results for children and the communities in which they belong. Fostering and investing in resilience targeted initiatives for young people is critical to prepare them for the rapidly changing world in which we live. We know a child's early experiences have a significant impact on the elemental structures and development of their brains. The evidence around this is well established, as is our understanding of the multiplier effect on the investment we make in this area.

As those in this place would have heard my colleagues say many times before, Western Australia is the state with endless potential, but we also have a great deal of work to do to ensure that we fully realise it. The experiences I've had through my professional life are why I'm so passionate about pursuing industrial opportunities for Western Australia. My singular focus in this place will be on job and productivity-enhancing initiatives which benefit not just the Western Australian and national economy but individuals and the communities in which they live. Western Australia has the unique and deepening economic and cultural relationships with nations in our near region. We're also on the same time zone, plus or minus two hours, with 60 per cent of the global population and have overlapping business hours with key markets in Europe, the US, the Middle East and Asia. And despite Perth being an isolated city, we're also Australia's gateway to the great cities of the world, including London, for which we have former Premier Barnett to thank. China and India, along with nations on their periphery, have growing middle classes. People for the first time are seeking to explore the world and grow individual wealth. There are also key markets on our doorstep for new inbound investment and tourism opportunities.

As a state, we're leading the nation and, in many cases, the world in research and development for processing and refining lithium and rare earths; in groundbreaking technology for the resources industry; and in building the agriculture industry of the future. But it is clear to me we need to do more. The establishment of critical

raw minerals lists by both the United States and the European Union present a key opportunity for Australia to move past the mining stage and into the refining and development of new battery technologies. We have a clear logistical advantage by having a large portion of global lithium and rare earth deposits and a burgeoning share of global research and development happening right on our doorstep.

Western Australia is without a doubt a global leader in automation, remote operations and processing technology, which has been pioneered by our resources sector. These advances in technology mean we can continue to grow this critical industry in a sustainable and responsible way in the face of fierce global competition. They are also opening the door to new partnerships across complimentary industries seeking to exploit the advantages of automation and remote operations in harsh environments both above us in space and below us in the deep sea.

It would be remiss of me not to expand on the potential of Western Australia's agricultural industry. Firstly, I am proud to be part of a government that's committed to growing the value of our national agriculture industry to \$100 billion by 2030. As a state, we can position ourselves to contribute significantly to this goal, particularly in our northwest, both by leveraging current infrastructure such as the Ord River Irrigation Scheme and reviewing how we can unlock water resources in our north which can be put to work for the agriculture industry in a way that is sustainable and cost-effective.

Despite our large size of around one-third of the Australian continent, the spread and scope of economic opportunity does not match the spread of our population, with around 92 per cent of Western Australians living in the city and southwest. It's time we restart the discussion of not only how we grow the economy in regional and remote Western Australia but how we ensure this growth delivers employment, opportunities and practical development outcomes for the communities in which it occurs. We need to develop a vision in the same spirit of those great Western Australians who came before us who weren't afraid to think big and be bold.

My great-grandparents Michael and Kathleen Kilrain, with their farm in Manjimup, and Mick and Sarah O'Sullivan, who played a significant role in conserving our old growth forests, are great examples of the everyday Western Australians who have built our great state. Add to this statesmen such as John Forrest and CY O'Connor, with the Fremantle port and Goldfields Water Supply Scheme, and David Brand and Charles Court, who worked with the Menzies government to first open and then develop our iron ore sector. It is the efforts of those who have walked before us—no matter how grand or minor their legacy—which has culminated in Western Australia becoming the economic powerhouse that it is today.

For the next generation, our water, our resources, our people and our passion to get things done hold the key to this future. We have a great deal of work to do. It remains true that if you scratch any Western Australian deep enough, you'll find a federalist; if you scratch even deeper, you'll probably find a secessionist. As the 97th senator for Western Australia since Federation, I come to this place with a full appreciation of the intent of the Senate as envisaged by our founding fathers. In this place, I'll always remain a Western Australian first.

Canberra is a long way from Perth, and it's an even longer way from some of our regional centres. Granted, we now have a much shorter travel time than our delegates who travelled to the Federation conferences in 1800s by coastal steamer, but it remains my job as a senator for our great state to ensure communities right across WA, no matter how far away they are, do not feel disconnected from our decision-making processes. It's a critical part of our Westminster system: every Australian has equality of access to our democracy. I'm doing my part to ensure this continues to be the case for Western Australia.

As a member of this place I'm going to have a singular focus on ensuring both Western Australia and its people are able to reach their full potential. The best way we can achieve this is through incentives, big and bold thinking, sound economic management, careful and minimal regulation, job-enabling and wealth-creating legislation and a good, traditional Liberal government.

Like all of my colleagues, I have not arrived here simply by my own efforts. I've received an enormous amount of support, firstly to the Liberal party: President Fay Duda and Director Sam Calabrese, what an amazing campaign you ran in WA. We returned each of our 11 Liberal-held seats, won three Senate seats and, with the extraordinary efforts of our lower house candidates—who are behind me here today—we achieved the highest state-wide lower house and Senate primary results in the nation.

To all of our volunteers, I simply would not be here without you. As insufficient as it is, thank you. Thank you to all my WA colleagues, ably led by Senator Mathias Cormann—I've been humbled by his support. Team WA is a united and disciplined team and I'm very proud to be part of it.

I'll also express my sincere appreciation for the Prime Minister, Scott Morrison, whose energy and vision inspired the nation. To my TCC brothers, Aaron, Brad, Gareth and their wives, we've remained best friend since primary school and I'll forever be grateful. To all of those who have played a role in mentoring me at various stages of my life—some of them are here today: Brad, David, Bruce, Ken, Court, Joe, Nick, Ben, Andrew and Nicola—I sincerely appreciate your generosity belief and confidence.

Now, to my family. Firstly, to my wife's parents, you've been my mum and dad for pretty much half of my life, almost, come December—that's right. You are the kindest most sincere people I know and I'm truly blessed to have you in my life. To my mum and dad and nanna, I'm completely indebted to you. You've never stopped believing. And my siblings, Simon and Sarah, you've made great sacrifices. You've been the perfect example for our lives. Your love and support has provided me with the confidence to aim high. To the absolute loves of my life—my beautiful wife, Montanique, my daughter, Amy and my son, Sam: you are my inspiration. Babe, we've been married 20 years this December and you have not aged a bit, but me, on the other hand—well. I can honestly say I love you as much today as I did back then. Your selfless love and your unrelenting commitment to our marriage and our children is something that I know will carry me through in this new chapter of our lives. To Amy and Sam, I'm so proud of you. I'm so proud of who you're growing up to be. You definitely get your good looks from your mother, but you need to know that whilst I'm going to be spending a lot of time over here in the east, you'll never be a far from my heart and my mind. I love you.

Finally, to the people of Western Australia: you've placed your confidence in me to deliver for you. The real work starts now, and I will not let you down. Thank you.