



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

INAUGURAL SPEECH



Hon Wendy Duncan, MLC
(Member for Agricultural Region)

Legislative Council

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HON WENDY DUNCAN (Agricultural) [7.32 pm]: I thank the Leader of the House for this opportunity. My friend and colleagues in the National Party of Western Australia and my family all know that when I wear my little turtle brooch it means I need courage for a momentous occasion or a challenge. This turtle brooch was given to me by one of my children. It reminds me firstly of that old, well-known saying that slow and steady wins the race, but tonight, more importantly, it reminds me that we never get anywhere without first sticking our necks out. Today I have really stuck my neck out, and it is an honour and a privilege to take my place in the Legislative Council of Western Australia.

It is my intention in this house to do my utmost to serve my state, regional Western Australia and the people of my Agricultural Region electorate. I have very big shoes to fill in the shining example of my predecessor, Hon Murray Criddle, who retired from this place on 2 January. It was Murray who first placed before me the form to sign to seek preselection for the Agricultural Region and who encouraged me to take my desire to see my community served better by government to the highest place. I thank him personally for that. I would like to place on record the appreciation of the Nationals WA for the contribution made by Murray during his service in this Parliament for the best part of 15 years. Murray, with the unwavering support of his wife, Del, and four daughters, travelled hundreds of thousands of kilometres over the length and breadth of the Agricultural Region and this state, listening to the needs of people, hearing their solutions and supporting their causes in Parliament.

Hon Murray Criddle served as Minister for Transport in the government of Richard Court from 1998 until 2001, during which time he oversaw the completion of major projects and initiatives for this state, such as the completion of the Graham Farmer Freeway; the completion of the dualling of the Narrows Bridge; the Transform WA initiatives that directed \$1 billion to rebuilding much of Western Australia's rundown road network; the enhancement and streamlining of Western Australia's ports, particularly the deepening and upgrade of the Esperance port; the commencement of the Geraldton southern transport corridor; and the regional airports development scheme. Yet in spite of all this, Murray did not let high office affect his outlook on life or his relationship with his colleagues, family, friends and constituents. He remained approachable, empathetic and a true gentleman at all times with integrity and honesty, which made us all proud to be associated with him. Most of all, Murray continued to listen to people and hear what they had to say. Having done so, Murray would always say, "And what do you think the solution is?" without presuming to know better. From Murray I learnt: never stop listening.

My love for regional Western Australia stems from my unique and yet universal Australian childhood. I was born in Kalgoorlie, lived my primary school years on Menangina Station, north

east of Kalgoorlie, and studied by correspondence and the School of the Air. My classmates were my sister, Kay, and my brother, Steve, and my playmates were the wonderful children of the local Wongi tribe who often passed through and stayed a while. I learnt some of their language and we were naturally included when the women went out hunting and gathering and imparting their knowledge to the next generation. By the time I went away to boarding school at age 11, I could ride a horse and a motorbike, I could shoot, I could dig up honey ants and bardi grubs and I could track. I could tell whether a goanna egg contained a little goanna or a yolk without cracking the shell. I even had a go at riding a bucking bullock with a leather belt around its belly. This is when I learnt one of the greatest lessons of my life. When I went away to boarding school, in spite of all the skills I had acquired to suit my home environment, I was ridiculed for being stupid and weird because I could not play hopscotch, I could not juggle, I could not skip and I could not swim. The lesson is: never judge people. Everyone has talents that have developed from their own life experience and environment and everyone has the ability to be adaptable and to learn to share their skills to make our world a richer place.

I survived boarding school and successfully gained entry to study medicine at the University of Western Australia. However, after a year in South Africa on Rotary Youth Exchange, I returned to Western Australia and completed a Bachelor of Arts in politics and Australian history. After some postgraduate study in Canberra, I had the honour of working with farm organisations to help create the amalgamated body of the National Farmers' Federation. Many years later, after four babies and studying entirely externally, I completed my Graduate Diploma of Business Management. The highlight of my studies through the Curtin Graduate School of Business was a two-week study tour of China and time spent at the Shanghai University of Finance and Economics studying the art of doing business with the Chinese.

Apart from partnering my husband in our pastoral and farming businesses and in between producing and caring for our four amazing children, I have gained a valuable range of work experiences to bring to this house. I have worked as a legal executive in law firms in Kalgoorlie and Esperance, in aged care and finance with the Shire of Esperance, as research officer to Ross Ainsworth, MLA and as company secretary and executive officer to Esperance Wool Exporters and the Centre Cinema, Esperance joint venture.

In more recent times, as strategic project officer with the Shire of Esperance I oversaw the development of the shire's strategic plan, the approval of the Shark Lake Industrial Park and the development of Esperance's foreshore master plan. Through leadership positions in community groups, I have had the privilege of making a contribution to the Esperance community by obtaining funding for the first purpose-built childcare centre in town, new tennis courts and extensions to Esperance Home Care. Currently I am the independent chair of the Recherche Advisory Group, which is seeking a community-driven management plan for our unique marine environment.

I had always been one of those elusive swinging voters until I returned to the goldfields and back to station life with my husband, Ian. It was then that I began to realise that while the rest of the nation was going forward, life for people in the regions was deteriorating.

Having studied a smattering of economics along the way, I decided that the basic theories of "Economics 101" are fatally flawed; therefore, much of the theory of economic rationalism is also fatally flawed. There is no such thing as a level playing field. It is impossible, even with modern communication technologies, to have full knowledge of the marketplace and, unfortunately, we cannot depend on that marketplace to be benevolent.

I believe we need to govern our state and nation for the benefit of our citizens, and, in doing so, ensure our future sustainability and security. I commend the Premier for his initiative in conserving some of our gas for domestic consumption. I also share the concern about too much foreign

ownership of our resources. I believe that governments should not be passive bystanders as market forces run roughshod over the little bloke, the weak and vulnerable. I believe that governments have the ability and power to influence the future direction and development of our nation through truly visionary investment projects that will bear dividends for future generations. The courage and foresight of Sir John Forrest to commit a whole year's state budget to the C.Y. O'Connor pipeline gave us the vibrant, exciting and self-sufficient city that Kalgoorlie-Boulder is today.

I also believe that to keep our democracy healthy, vital and safe we need more than just the Coles and Woolworths of politics. During the last federal election campaign it was hard to tell the difference between the two major political parties. Minor political parties are needed to add depth and diversity to the debate, to ensure that the views of key minorities are heard, to ensure that all options are considered and to slow down the process enough to fully assess the implications of what is planned.

Throughout history, many nations have experimented with very efficient governments that are not necessarily democracies. The Premier has criticised the inefficiencies of this chamber, but our democracy must ensure that everyone has input into the laws and regulations that govern them. Do we really want our democracy to become a stoush between two teams—one notionally left, the other notionally right—going hard at it, the aim being for one or the other to win at any cost? It is actually a great cost to the taxpayer. Do we want our democracy to be all focus groups, powerbrokers and ex-politician lobbyists seeing how much shenanigans the public will bear before it throws out the government and, reluctantly, gives the other mob a go? These are the depths to which politics, in this great state, have plunged.

It is my party's firm belief that the focus on marginal seats and election cycles, "short-termism" and the domination of Parliament by city electorates means that the people of the regions are not being well served by either side of politics. Some eminent Australians share this view. Lieutenant General John Sanderson, in his 2007 oration to the Order of Australia Association, noted —

. . . a large part of this continent is increasingly neglected and, for a significant number of our rural people, governance is weak and intangible.

He further stated —

Even the major regional centres of the mineral boom are becoming dysfunctional as a result of the economic distortion brought about by too few resources being invested in social infrastructure.

Lieutenant General Sanderson described an alienation from our inland, with the population —

. . . huddled around the estuarine regions of the South East and the South West like aliens ready to jump off to some faraway planet when the land turns against us.

He warned that we are failing to recognise the perils of not nurturing the whole continent, and reminded us that terra nullius is being created in Australia again today.

Fred Chaney, another eminent Australian, put it very well when he addressed the Chamber of Minerals and Energy last year. He was reported as saying —

It's impossible to spend time in any of the remote towns without realising that the people have a sense of estrangement, abandonment and a feeling that they're regarded as irrelevant or worthless over metropolitan communities, . . .

He further stated —

We govern metropolitan Australia really well. For most metropolitan Australians, things work; for most rural remote people, things don't.

When visiting Kalgoorlie-Boulder, it is immediately apparent that this vibrant town experienced a boom a century ago. The stately buildings still stand as testament to the wealth generated in the goldfields at that time. However, where are the stately buildings, the universities and the hospitals that will bear testament to the current boom in places like Karratha and Port Hedland? All we see is people living in containers and tents, driving hundreds of kilometres for medical attention, and sending their children away for education. In Ravensthorpe, people are totally hamstrung and frustrated that they cannot develop their town to take advantage of the boom because of the lack of power, water and waste disposal services.

Contrary to popular belief, those of us who live in the regions are not hanging out for the first opportunity to escape back to Perth, and we are not lesser human beings for having made that choice. I recently met a fellow in Coolgardie who yesterday drove his unwell body to Perth—a five-hour trip each way—for the eighth time to undergo an operation that has been repeatedly rescheduled. On one occasion he was even on the operating table when the procedure was cancelled because the hospital did not have the necessary pre-operation information. Each trip costs \$220 in fuel, but he gets only a \$150 refund from the patient assisted travel scheme. PATS gives him \$35 a night for accommodation, which, according to him, gets him a bed with drunks, drug addicts and down-and-outs. I am informed that the operation went ahead successfully yesterday, but my friend will be out of pocket by more than \$1 000, to say nothing of the considerable discomfort and distress of his ordeal and the disruption of his ability to work and earn a wage. What this gentleman has been through is no way to treat a fellow human being. To be thrown in the back of a van like a stray dog and driven for hours to face charges over a traffic offence is no way to treat a fellow human being. To be flown to Perth for treatment in a mental health facility and then to be discharged onto the street to find your own way home is no way to treat a fellow human being.

The Nationals have a constituency to serve, and we will do just that. We will ensure that good policy and a fair go for the regions is always on the table. We will aim to ensure that the people of regional Australia have what they need to prosper and to benefit from the economic boom to which they contribute so much. We will persevere with this task, whether we have one or 20 members of Parliament. The Nationals in Western Australia had the choice to throw in the towel when the “one vote, no value” legislation left the regions with 11 members of Parliament, and the metropolitan area with 48. However, we are now even more determined to maintain a voice for our people in Parliament and to gain a commitment from whichever party is in power to allocate the equivalent of \$1 out of every \$4 from mining and petroleum royalties to infrastructure so that some of the benefits of the boom can flow back to whence it came. This will ensure that future governments will be forced to look up from their local constituency and make some statesman-like decisions on the future development of our state.

For more than 20 years now I have lived with my family in the south east of our state, not far from the beautiful town of Esperance. I give notice to this house that one of the first tasks I will be tackling is the need for the allocation of substantial funds for the clean-up of the lead contamination around the port. It is scandalous that Magellan Metals can turn its back on Esperance and seek approval to export from elsewhere without first being part of a commitment to make reparation for its terrible mistakes. The people of Esperance are not interested in the argument over who is to blame. Let us establish a fund so that we can systematically define the extent of the contamination and pay for a proper clean-up. We can argue later about who is responsible. I will seek funding for a long-term solution to the foreshore erosion problem that has plagued the beautiful Esperance town beaches. I will remind the federal government of its commitment to allocate \$60 million to the upgrade of the port access corridor, and seek matching funding from the state government. I will seek government approval for the proposal to desalinate water in Esperance and pipe it to the goldfields. This will provide safe, secure and palatable water for the people of Esperance while at

the same time reducing demand on Mundaring Weir, which currently supplies water to Kalgoorlie-Boulder. I will remind the government that it is about time it allocated \$13 million for the upgrade of the Esperance Residential College, where more than 100 students are accommodated in a facility designed to house 82.

During boom times, governments fall into the trap of neglecting social infrastructure in deference to demands for ports, roads and rail. However, I call on the government to act to help those who have been made homeless by skyrocketing rents and dwindling public housing stock. It is also tempting in boom times to fail to look to the future and make sure that we have laid down the foundations for our long-term prosperity. We need exploration incentives for the mining industry, such as a flow-through shares scheme and initiatives such as the Plan for Accelerating Exploration introduced by the South Australian government, or the Rediscover Victoria Drilling project.

I place before the house and the government a proposal to help alleviate the crippling labour shortage in our state. Our near neighbour East Timor currently has an unemployment rate of approximately 40 per cent for youth aged between 15 and 25—the figure is as high as 80 per cent in urban areas. It is a well-known fact of history that where there is poverty and unemployment, unrest and instability inevitably follows. We owe it to the people of East Timor to help them to their feet economically. What better way to do so than to offer training and employment that will benefit their community into the future? East Timorese workers could work in fly in, fly out positions in the hospitality, mining and services industries of Western Australia and return home with money to invest in small businesses, and experience that can be used to help develop their economy. Training centres could be established in East Timor to assist with English language and trade skills. These fly in, fly out workers would be no different from Australian citizens who work in fly in, fly out positions on oil rigs in the South China Sea or the Arabian Gulf. There would be no need for promises of permanent residence, and there would be long-term benefits for both sides of the equation.

I thank my family for their love, support and encouragement. I thank my parents, John and Maxine Tonkin, both of whom have recently received Order of Australia medals for their dedication to the goldfields community. Their example is my inspiration; their motto is that we all have a responsibility to serve our community and to endeavour to leave this world a better place.

I thank my husband, Ian. We have been mates for over 30 years. He has given me his support and blessing in all that I do, and I could not do it without him. I thank our four beautiful kids—Kat, Anna, Elise and James—for their tolerance, understanding and sense of humour. They keep my feet on the ground.

I thank my mentors and supporters in the National Party—Hon Eric Charlton; life member Jocelyn Bowey; Allan Holmes; Brendon Grylls; and the Nationals team—for their encouragement and support over the past few years. I thank Peter Drummond and his wonderful wife, Lachie, who is sadly no longer with us, for being my mentors and for their faith in my ability to aim for this day.

Finally, I thank my friends Marg Agnew, who has remained committed to the Nationals and our cause through good times and bad, and Jane McMeikan, the only person who will put up with me talking politics for hours on end!

I thank honourable members for their indulgence. I look forward to working with them for the betterment of our state.

[Applause.]
