



## **PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

### **VALEDICTORY SPEECH**



### **Hon Simon O'Brien, MLC** **(Member for South Metropolitan Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Thursday, 6 May 2021

*Reprinted from Hansard*

# Legislative Council

Thursday, 6 May 2021

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 5 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 SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan)** [3.09 pm]: In my first address to the house in 1997, I quoted this article of belief —

Under the blessing of Divine Providence and given goodwill, mutual tolerance and understanding, an energy and individual sense of purpose, there is no task that we cannot perform and no difficulty that we cannot overcome.

Later, when officiating at the opening of a major infrastructure project in 2009, I introduced my remarks in this way —

When I was very young and travelling in the family car through the South West I was intrigued to learn that my father had been a member of the team that had built the substantial wooden bridge we were just then crossing. I was enormously proud of having a dad who had made such an impressive and enduring structure.

There are a lot of Western Australians of all ages who can be mighty proud of their family connection to this project. 3 000 workers were involved in creating this magnificent addition to our road network—a total of some 3.8 million man hours, to create more than 140 km of carriageway with six interchanges, 10 intersections, 19 bridges. They moved 12 million tonnes of sand, a million tonnes of crushed rock base and 27 000 cubic metres of concrete. The bridge just here is two separate structures each 272 metres long. A prodigious physical and technical achievement, completed months ahead of schedule. Most importantly of all, they did those 3.8 million hours using heavy equipment and hazardous materials without a lost-time injury.

To those 3 000 men and women I say congratulations on a job well done; this will be an enduring symbol of your achievement and we are all very proud of you.

Thank you for your efforts.

The latest Kwinana Freeway extension and the new Forrest Highway is an investment in Western Australia's future.

Of itself, this is the largest single road project in our history. It has transcended several State and Federal Governments and I thank the many members, both State and Federal, for the roles they have played in its concept, funding and construction.

Occasions such as those demonstrate that my optimism is justified, and that is the message I want to leave with members for posterity.

*Reprinted from Hansard*

I have to approach this speech with a theme, because I cannot possibly refer to everything that has happened over the journey—to the hundreds of local government members and officers I have worked with, the many inquiries I have been part of and all the remarkable incidents and events. But I do want to recognise that it is not all about me; it is about the many people who have made it possible for me to achieve whatever has been achieved and who demonstrated by their commitment and support that, by acting together and with the right motivation, we can do some amazing things.

I reflected also in 1997 on the debt I owed to my parents, Everard “Bill” O’Brien and my long-suffering but eternally loving mother, Dulcie O’Brien nee Shooter. He was the member for Murchison from 1952 to 1959, but, more importantly, a fundamentally decent family man and she was a much-respected nurse and carer. I restate now my thanks to them for everything.

People come to Parliament with various aims. Some want to legalise this or ban that. I was motivated to enter Parliament because I wanted to be involved in public affairs, whatever the issues of the day, and pursue worthwhile outcomes, and I have been able to achieve more than I might have hoped.

I joined the Liberal Party in August 1985 at the ripe old age of 25. I ran for a tough seat at the 1989 election. I did very well, never admitting that I could not win, coming second. Informals came third! I became president of the Fremantle division, applied myself to growing the party, learnt that one man’s branch stacking is another man’s membership drive, and did all the other stuff you do when you are young, ambitious and keen in this game.

At this point, I want to acknowledge some of the many people who have supported me all this time, some for over 30 years, and never let me down, including Stephen Knight and Hayden Shenton; together with apologies to my oldest friend, Brad Hankinson, who is in theatre as we speak, for prevailing upon him to be the inaugural president of the Bibra Lake branch, a role we can safely say he needed like a hole in the head; friends and family members such as Marilyn and Clive Noall, who stood at a polling booth, she vivacious and no doubt vote attracting and him big and ugly and also vote attracting for another reason; my brother, Bernard O’Brien, who dressed up in his Liberal rosette finery, with his hat on, hoping that his Labor schoolmates from Mt Magnet would not happen by on that day, no doubt; and sundry O’Briens, Shooters, Mehmts and so many others.

In 1993, I was number three on the South Metro ticket. We got 45 per cent of the primary vote; the Greens got five per cent. We got two seats and the Greens got one. No complaints. That is the system. In a strangle-worthy example of stating the bleeding obvious, a kindly assistant returning officer gave me the nose-tapping advice: the secret is to get higher up the ticket.

Then in 1996, at a surprise early election, I gained the number one spot on the ticket and was duly elected. That same electoral official came up, beaming, shook me by the hand in congratulations and said, “See, I told you that would do it.”

Now, there have been many elections since and, to chop and change around a bit, in the thirty-ninth Parliament, I was chair of a standing committee. A new Labor member arrived for our first meeting. For the purpose of the exercise, I will just refer to her as Samantha. My colleague noticed that she looked a bit unsure and uncertain as she entered the room and I said to him, “Don’t worry; she’ll be all right. The Labor Party probably teach them the Liberals eat their young.”

Indeed, she was all right and the five of us had a great four years, with some very worthwhile inquiries, including a two-year inquiry into hydraulic fracturing, which produced a landmark report that passed muster with the Environmental Protection Authority inquiry a few years later. We travelled to exotic locations like the Canning Basin, the far north west of South Australia and Dongara! Hopefully, our friend concluded that we were not too bad after all and do not eat our young!

There is a TV show called *Australian Survivor* that members might have seen; it can be a bit addictive if you start watching it. It has the motto “Outwit, outplay, outlast”. Members who are used to the political scene will understand. I have sometimes felt like I am just in a very long running series of *Survivor*, because when preselection came around in 2000 or thereabouts, some presumed to recognise my efforts by giving me the flick. My wife, Joy, came to the preselection meeting, which was an all-day affair, to show support and wait outside for the results. During the meet-and-greet stage, Joy’s greeting to another candidate’s partner of, “Hi, how are you?” was met with, “We’re very well, but for you it’ll be bye-bye.” Charming! I am sure Joy had a great day sweating on our future. I am sure that after I held on by a slim margin, she enjoyed farewelling that same couple with a cheery “Bye-bye”!

I came in here on the following Tuesday and Norman asked me how I went at preselection and I told him that it was a near-run thing. He said, “Oh, yes; the first re-endorsement is a real danger point. Sorry; I should’ve warned you about that.” The next preselection, or visit to tribal council as I have come to know them, was really interesting, with the late Doug Shave throwing his hat in the ring. Doug was a serious player, and this matter attracted considerable attention. A number of the delegates were friends of us both, which prospectively made things very difficult for them. In the end I scored the number one spot with a solid majority and he got number two by one vote. The bottom line is that he was the best counter of numbers I have ever encountered, but paradoxically he could also be ruthlessly pragmatic: “Outplay, outwit, outlast”, as they say on *Survivor*.

Let me tell you a bit more about the Liberal Party. The Liberal Party is a collection of like-minded people working in concert to get members elected, and to get them elected in sufficient numbers to form governments. Together we have shared great highs and morale-sapping lows. The show always goes on, though, and there will be more of these in the future. As Hon W.N. Stretch used to put it, all governments fall. Bill also used to observe that there are some people who are indispensable; as proof, we have cemeteries full of them! But I digress.

One thing I do know is that I would not have arrived here or stayed here without the Liberal Party, its thousands of volunteers, its handful of staff, its many members, office bearers, state presidents, former state presidents and state directors. I refer to the Val Kloppers, the Jo Stantons, the Collette Wiltshires, the Sandra Browns and the Jim Maddens. To the Liberal Party and all its supporters over the years, I say a sincere and humble thank you. This appreciation extends even to those among you who taught me the hard way that sometimes the only person you can take at their word in politics is the one who looks you in the eye and says, “I’m not voting for you.” Yes, even to those who try to take me down by various means, I extend a backhanded thank you as well. Those experiences helped toughen me up for a tough game, and in due course avoid being eaten up and spat out.

When I arrived in this place, on day one, I was elected to the estimates committee. When we knocked off I said, “What happens tomorrow?” They said, “Oh, it’s estimates week.” So on the second day I found myself in estimates hearings, even sharing sessions, which is a great introduction to the structure and functions of state government, the personalities, the major agencies and their budgets and all that.

There were maiden speeches. Some members over the years have declared at the outset that the Legislative Council should be done away with. Those same members, in my experience—and I have seen a fair few of them—declare in their final speech that they have changed their view, with the benefit of experience. I commend those members for their frankness. That should be the answer to any armchair expert who persists in the view that a unicameral system is a superior option for legislative integrity.

I feel sorry for people who come in here thinking they know it all, because if you think you know everything, you are ultimately destined to learn nothing. In my political career it has been

a great privilege and delight to explore so many parts of our wider community. People want to show their member of Parliament their project, their school, their business or their factory. They open up about their aspirations and share their concerns. I certainly worked hard to get to know my region and its people, and I think all members are busy. They work long hours and get roped in to serve on management committees and so on.

I soon learnt that most people go to their Assembly member first for assistance, then come to an MLC—sort of as a member of last resort, perhaps because they were not happy with the response they have received. The funny thing is, I always found that about 90 per cent of the problems that came to me—usually they were matters late in the piece, such as final notices or court summonses for unpaid fines—could be fixed with a phone call or an article of advice. That was surprising.

I also found satisfaction in sorting things out that others had given up on. Again, they tended to be difficult or protracted problems, but so much the better if I could make it happen through my own efforts. There is a place down on Almondbury Road in Applecross, between the high school and Garden City. They all told me, “It can’t be done. We’ve all tried. Don’t waste your time.” That crosswalk has been there for 20 years now.

The sound walls you see completed by the freeway off-ramps at South Lake—when they were the new freeway off-ramps, they were not completed, because of noise contours and stuff like that. I got on to Rob Harvey, who I knew through the Melville safer roads committee as a colleague. He was then acting as head of Main Roads. I said, “Rob, I don’t care about your noise contour measuring. My housewives in South Lake are getting your dirt blown onto their washing.” Rob is a decent man and a married man. Go down the freeway now and you will see those completed sound walls.

I was once told by a working group that I was on, “Look, we know it’s a tragedy this student was killed, but the thing is we do not put 40-kilometres-an-hour signs up on 70-kilometres-an-hour roads, we don’t put fences up on the median, and we do not paint the speed limit on the road.” If you go to Murdoch Drive now you can see all of those, there and elsewhere.

I had a lot to do with Kidlink in Kwinana. For years it did not have the wherewithal to move into the surplus Homeswest house that my predecessor had arranged for it years before, so my office had to step in and arrange the refurbishment through a number of private contractors that were involved in the Kwinana refurbishment at the time through council utilities providers, and I remember David Lloyd in my office being particularly effective; he is no longer with us now.

I was made an honorary member of the Totally and Partially Disabled Veterans of WA organisation, because I worked with the organisation to obtain a peaceful bushland site for permanent respite accommodation. I also managed to get it an ex–Public Transport Authority bus, which it put to good use. We then secured funding to build dwellings that have now long been occupied by veterans in need of such accommodation.

Yes, there are many things we can all achieve as private members assisting community groups and individuals, but we do not do it without owing a great deal to electorate office staff who, as our colleague Hon Colin Holt just observed, actually run the place. My current team of Danielle Rudolph, Laurissa Forbes, Natalie Strother and Myleigh Barclay have been with me, between them, probably for about 30 years, and they are more than wonderful. The end of my Parliament term is also a challenge for them as they contemplate the next chapter of their respective lives. I also want to acknowledge Kelly Terry, Renee Dunstan, Chelsea Kierath, Nichol Kabugua and every other casual, relief, volunteer or work experience helper who has contributed to the life of my office.

Hon Norman Moore often told us that you really need to be a minister to get things done. Well, that is easier said than done, as we all know. I did an apprenticeship for many years, establishing good working relationships in a variety of sectors, doing the hard yards of travelling the state,

going out to sit on the oil drums, as Howard Croxton used to say, and getting up at 5.00 am to ring around the media outlets to see if they would let you have a grab on whatever the issue of the day was.

I came into the disabilities portfolio with little experience. I was in the Developmental Disability Council's "Politician Adoption Scheme", having been "adopted" by Toni Catlow and her parents, Chris and Helga, but I was really starting from scratch. Over several years I got to know the sector. Haydn Lowe provided great support, as did John Knowles and a host of others. Colin Barnett and I launched a major project signalling disabilities as a major priority. After the 2005 election, quite a few people in the sector privately expressed their disappointment that I had not got in to deliver the outcomes that we had identified, which is some comfort; not much.

I had a number of shadow portfolios that kept changing with the merry-go-round of opposition leaders from 2005 to 2008. The amount of money I wasted on redundant business cards! Predominant amongst these was transport.

I launched a policy about the future of Fremantle port container operations. Labor attacked me with enthusiasm; the Libs loved it. Now the Labor government is all for moving container operations to Cockburn Sound, while the Liberals are deadset against it! It surprises me that no-one in all this has thought to come and ask me what the thought processes were behind my proposal in 2006, when I first brought the idea into a public debate. I would tell them for nothing, and it might help. Still, perhaps some people reckon they know it all.

In late September 2008, we found ourselves in government after a remarkable string of occurrences. I was sworn in as Minister for Transport and, to my surprise and delight, Minister for Disability Services. About a week later I started suffering severe pains in my back for about three days continuously. To cut to the chase, I had been having a series of heart attacks. I owe my life to the expert care of cardiologist Dr Xiao-Fang Xu. After six days in the ICU at St John of God Murdoch I was able to go home on a very strict regime of rest and recovery, which does not go well with initial ministerial duties.

At a subsequent consultation I had with Dr Xu, as she was whacking on the blood pressure cuff, she said, "Oh by the way, my mum said to thank you for bringing in free off-peak travel for seniors." Xiao-Fang and her husband, Bruce, are now valued friends. My wife, also, was amazing in providing the care and diet that I required. I really did not know how ill I had been. It was a difficult time because there was a great deal to be done. I was initially unable to walk to the end of the street, let alone assume ministerial responsibilities and it took a long time eventually to clear the backlog.

In all the things that I have mentioned, there is one constant companion and one full capacity partner—my wife of 41 years, Joy. She has organised polling booths—indeed, whole election campaigns—in difficult seats. Of course, we upper house members are condemned to look after all the difficult seats—we have plenty now—sometimes, dare I say it, with difficult candidates who come and go. She organised fundraisers of all sorts—quiz nights, dinners and fashion parades. She even had Brendon Nelson walk her down the catwalk at one of them when he was federal leader. She has crocheted many blankets and donated to many worthy causes or run many raffles to raise money. She has been a branch president and suffered through more AGMs and conferences than any human being should have to suffer in a lifetime. With Mrs Lee Moore, she helped organise functions for members' spouses not only for social purposes, but as a form of pastoral care for members of the wider team who might otherwise feel isolated by the harsh realities of political life. In due course, Joy took over the role Lee had established, assisted by the very capable Margaret Buswell. More importantly to me, she has been the one person on whom I could rely in all circumstances—the one to help me be strong when I might be flagging and to endure when I might have thrown in the towel. There have been occasions that she has provided the inspiration for me to dig deep when extra effort was needed to prevail.

Many of you have noted my wide and eclectic collection of ties, and some of you have scoffed—go on and admit it—when I told you that my wife is the one who selects my tie every day. Over the years, many people have noticed us as a couple at a function and said, “Gee, you guys go well together, and doesn’t Joy always look immaculate.” There is no accident here. It is just that Joy is the only person who could possibly enable me to be simultaneously a minister of the Crown and a matching handbag!

Joy and I are looking forward to new challenges and new chapters. At this point, Hon Donna Faragher, I hope you have those tissues handy. Together with our daughter, Nadika, and extended family—grandchildren Rita, Hayley, Tania, Jacob and Jazzmine, and seven great-grandchildren—we have got a whole new purpose. It is great to have someone calling me “dad”. I have so much to be grateful for and I am quite happy to declare it to the whole world. If it were not for Joy, my life would be crushingly incomplete. Thank you.

I come back, however, to the ministerial office. One of my first priorities was to re-establish the Department of Transport. That involved separating the transport areas of the then Department of Planning and Infrastructure and uniting them with Main Roads WA and the Public Transport Authority. I will never forget the look of gratitude on the face of Eric Lumsden as he was relieved of all the transport stuff—licensing, school buses, taxis, regional air routes, ramps, jetties and all the rest—so that he could concentrate on his beloved planning. The new Department of Transport works well, as does its various constituent parts. Visiting Carnarvon at the time of the new department coming into effect, I was surprised to be warmly greeted by the DoT officers at their waterfront office. They were already wearing black jerseys with new Department of Transport logo on the breast. It turned out that they were not issued; they were so pleased to be within the Department of Transport that they had gone off and arranged for them to be made themselves.

The new head of transport whom we appointed was Reece Waldock, who I imagine would be known to most of you. He delighted in playing Humphrey Appleby to my Jim Hacker. I embarked on a great learning curve—me doing the learning and him doing the curving. There are one or two other people in this chamber he has worked with and they will recognise this. When I would come up with a bright idea and say, “Why don’t we do this?”, he would say, “Well, minister, you could do that, but what would happen”, and then he would recite a litany of potential disasters about how the world would end and everyone would hate it and I would be attacked left, right and centre. He would then conclude with the phrase, “But, minister, it’s your call!” I would then go, “Right, next item on the agenda.” If I looked particularly disappointed, he would say, “Don’t worry, minister. It’s my job to make you look good,” a challenge worthy of his talents I suppose.

When I left that portfolio at the end of 2010 I was provided a typed list of achievements. I have it here. It runs to about four pages, which I look back on with great affection. But some of it is what I would call “business as usual” matters such as funding rounds for regional boating facilities and regional airport development. But most of it, though, I am pleased to say is for standalone projects, and ones where I either had to fight to get the funding or fight to get blooming Buswell in Treasury, when he was there, from taking it away.

One of the major decisions I had to take to cabinet was for the deepening of Fremantle harbour and associated works that fundamentally would rebuild the north wharf area through land reclamation that would greatly increase—I would say at least double—the port’s land estate. Some might see that as a variance with my previously mentioned views on the future of container operations, but I can assure members that it was not without consideration that the cost of \$360 million could be ameliorated. The fact is that land will be able to be used for container operations for many decades if land-side transport links can be established in some sort of suitable form indefinitely. Conversely, they will greatly increase the value of the location in funding the development of other facilities elsewhere, if that is ultimately the chosen course.

Another notable success I want to touch on is the construction of the Utah Point multi-user facility at Port Hedland, which had stalled when I arrived. There is no blaming anybody; it was a partnership that had not been able to achieve what it needed to achieve. I was able to resurrect it, get the required government input particularly by way of funding—about \$80 million I think it was—and we were able to complete the building and open that facility. I am proud of both those projects. I cannot think of too many transport ministers who have built substantial new port facilities such as at Fremantle and at —

**Hon Alannah MacTiernan:** Check out Geraldton.

**Hon SIMON O'BRIEN:** I said “too many”.

The Mandurah entrance road project was brought forward by a year and, more importantly, expanded to be a major four-lane road complete with rail tunnels to meet future needs. We initiated and completed the second stage of the Lancelin–Cervantes road, providing 55 kilometres of new sealed coast road from Ocean Farms Estate up to the Pinnacles drive. That was widely welcomed by tourists and locals alike, who had been calling for it for years. It took a great deal of pressure of the Brand Highway by separating much of the tourist traffic, which still remains problematic, from the heavy traffic, which had been in conflict for many years. I apologise to my brother, Mitch O'Brien, who for many years has had the biggest panelbeaters in the midwest at Moora, for any reduction in business that might come his way—tongue in cheek of course—because of the conflict being taken off the Brand Highway! Many of you would probably know Mitch, but he looked at me conspiratorially and said, “Simon, you have got very clever engineers at Main Roads, but they cannot engineer out the kangaroos!” The business is still running very well indeed!

I thought one of our biggest successes was the contribution of my department, particularly the Public Transport Authority, to getting the federal funding necessary to commence the Perth City Link project, which was failing until it was identified, basically by me, at a late-night meeting at Perth Airport with Colin Barnett and then Prime Minister Rudd, that what was actually wanted was a public transport project not a planning project. So we rejigged it, sinking the bus stations, the railway and all of that. The next thing you know I was out there announcing it with Minister Albanese just down the road here. That was a major coup at the time.

There were many other roads and bridges constructed at the time, much of them made possible by a more favourable tendering environment that fortuitously arrived, so there was luck as well. We introduced air-conditioning to school buses in the regions. I have already mentioned the free off-peak travel to seniors and people with disability. I also initiated the Butler rail extension. I took it through cabinet and the Economic and Expenditure Reform Committee. I took the enabling legislation through Parliament, awarded contracts and started construction, but did not get to finish it, because that is what happens when you move on. There are always projects underway.

It is not very often a new ferry comes into service in South Perth. They are good, because they are the parts of the public transport system that almost pay their own way. It was a happy occasion when Maxine Pandal, Joy, and the similarly irrepressible Shelley Taylor-Smith got together to launch a new South Perth ferry, *MV Philip Pandal*, at about the anniversary of his passing. Do you remember Reece Waldock, whom I mentioned a minute ago? “My job, minister, is to make you look good.” He showed me the two big bottles of bubbly with ribbons around them and all of that so that I was able to tell the ladies officiating, “You tip the cheap one over the boat to launch it and for the official toasts use the good one.” Thanks very much, Reece!

In late 2010, there was a ministerial shuffle of cabinet, and having been the first Liberal transport minister since Cyril Rushton, I now became the first Liberal finance minister since Max Evans. We set up a new portfolio and another department I created within the portfolio of finance, commerce and small business.



With the Department of Finance, formally commenced in July 2011, we had the redoubtable Anne Nolan in as director general, with some other very good people on board. The portfolio was responsible for a whole range of industry boards and so on, as well as the principal Office of State Revenue, Building Management and Works and the Office of Shared Services. I promptly took a cabinet a proposal to wind up the Office of Shared Services, which in my view was a failing experiment that had cost hundreds of millions of dollars and was about to cost hundreds of millions more, and just about everyone was fed up with it. That move was well received by just about everyone in the public sector and beyond. It was lurching on and needed someone to bite the bullet and say enough, so we did. The first thing I did after the decision was to go to Cannington and speak with all the staff to reassure them that they would have options to return to their parent agencies, to be employed elsewhere or to receive a redundancy. It was their choice. Ultimately, I think most were satisfied with the arrangement. It was not easy, as you can imagine, and I think I earned my pay that week. Curiously, no-one has ever asked me how shared services, which are pretty good in theory, could work. If anyone wanted to ask on either side, I just might tell them! Just saying!

I was pleased to work with another building agency, and Building Management and Works was a great success story, and still is, I think. The works program we had inherited in late 2008 was beset by cost overruns. I do not want to make this a political thing, but there were all sorts of difficulties that were systemically embedded, as well as an unfortunate economic environment at the time. Government projects worth over \$10 million—there were 58 of them at the time I think—were on average 92 per cent over budget. I did not bring on the works reform package, but I did consolidate it with BMW with a thing they called strategic asset management to make sure that these projects were actually funded and planned right in the first place, so we did not have people wanting to put car parks under the Perth Arena, then take them out and then put them back again, or put extra floors on hospitals when they had almost finished construction, and all of those things that are very poor practice indeed. I used to take a spreadsheet of all of our larger projects to cabinet every now and then. There would be about 60 or so on them at any one time. The spreadsheet listed all the projects in progress, maybe 60, as I say, at any point, with a green, amber or red light by them to show whether they were at risk of cost or time overruns. I was very glad to see that the predominant colour was green, green, green.

That is a tribute in particular to the people in that agency. In commerce there was a great deal to be done, and working with the team headed by Brian Bradley and Anne Driscoll, who many of you would know, was a great pleasure indeed. We did all sorts of things that were outstanding. I think we were charged with a sense of purpose. I do not know why so many things had been languishing, but most of this legislation here, which I took through this place, is from commerce. We did a great deal in sorting out problems in commercial and retail tenancy. One of these large volumes here is a rewritten Workers' and Compensation Injury Management Act. I remember Greg Joyce, the chairman and, Michelle Reynolds, the then CEO, of WorkCover were so happy with that outcome—it went through the Parliament, and I acknowledge the then opposition for its assistance—that they arrived at my office at the next meeting with one of these enormous box of Whitman's samplers. I had never seen one like it; it was about an arm's length long. For months afterwards my ministerial staff were saying, "Hey, does WorkCover need any more legislation going?"

We did all sorts of things, and I will not try to go through them all, but there were some things that are worth noting. We brought in Sunday and public holiday trading and the world did not collapse, but most people found that after Saturday, Sunday was now the most popular day of shopping. I even brought in a workers' compensation system for the first time for jockeys. They had their national president and everyone out here on the front steps with me. I was really hoping we would have some pictures, because it is not often I am in a gathering and I am the tallest person in the picture! The national president of the Australian Jockeys Association said,

“Minister, we really appreciate what you’ve done; that is what counts. If this had been a bad story about cheating at the races or something, the media would have been here in their droves, but this is good news, so we’re happy, let’s leave it at that”, and we did.

I appointed the state’s first Small Business Commissioner along with his alternative dispute resolution service, which does not sound that sexy at first glance but it provided a free or low-cost alternative to resolve disputes without people having to get blooming lawyers, courts and what have you involved and it taking forever. It has been a great success and it continues to this day under the commissionership of David Eaton, whom I appointed. I also want to acknowledge Jacky Finlayson with whom I worked closely at the Small Business Development Corporation.

It is in disabilities that I want to conclude my discussion of ministerial jobs. We were able to greatly increase resources in a range of areas, something carried forward by Hon Donna Faragher as a subsequent minister as well. I will mention just one area: the Alternatives to Employment Program. Members may think “Oh, bewdy!” Well, the Alternatives to Employment Program is so important. Previously, families with a child with very high-care needs would receive perhaps two hours per week of respite assistance after that child had left school, while full-time schooling in effect provided about 40 weeks a year of respite. We increased that entitlement from about two hours a week on average to four days a week.

I want to give a shout-out to the people in disabilities. About one in six of us has a disability. Look at the numbers in this room. About one in six of those needs some assistance in their daily life. Of course, another smaller cohort requires a very high level of care and assistance indeed. But of all of the care that people need that is provided through the various mechanisms, a lot of it by government, 73 per cent is provided by family and friends. If it were not for that spirit of caring that exists across all divides in our community, our system would collapse and a lot of people would be in a parlous state.

I have told this story before but I want to tell it again. Several years later, I was visiting a senior campus and over morning tea in the staff room I was approach by a lady who said, “I hope you don’t mind. I just wanted to say thank you very much for the program you brought in when you were Minister for Disability Services. We have a grown child with high-care needs and we know many other families in the same boat. Thanks to you, our family, unlike others that we have seen in the past, has stayed together. I have been able to keep working, which has saved my sanity and brought in some money. Unlike others, we haven’t had to commit our child to care or suffer divorce or even suicide in the family. We are doing okay and I just wanted you to know how much it is appreciated.” Madam President and members, I think that is why we are in this game, to achieve those sorts of outcomes.

I would like to thank my ministerial staff over the years. My chief of staff all along was Eacham Curry. He was that big, shaven-haired bruiser who apparently the member for Armadale at the time took exception to as an adviser in estimates, I believe—happy memories. I also thank Brett Barton, Tony Papafilis, Keetha Wilkinson, Steve Eadie, Nichole Kabugua, Dean Roberts, Alan O’Brien, Ursula Checksfield, Lom Piggott, Susan McCall, Ginny Jankowski, Yvette Roper, Hanh Tran, Mae Sta Maria, Phil Payne, Peter Groves, James Campbell-Everden, Charles Hayne, Ashleigh Clarke, Stella—Stella knows I could never pronounce her name but it will be in *Hansard* as Grgurinovic—Jessica Humphrey and Rebecca Hawkins. Rebecca Hawkins was one of my personal assistants who used to look after my diary and, jeez, she was good. She was the apple of Mrs Minister’s eye—they use to call her Mrs Minister—because she would look after the diary so well and make sure arrangements were made. But I will never forget—again, like the Australian Jockeys Association—Bec, bless her, was about yay high. After all those years of doing it all for myself in opposition, if someone needed an appointment, not a ministerial appointment, but for an electorate issue, I would say, “Why don’t you come up on Friday at whatever time?” And I would just put it in the computer calendar thing.

The next thing you know, Rebecca would be there looking up at me, lips pursed, hands on hips like this, and go, “Now, minister, you know you’re not meant to do that, don’t you?” Then in due course she would go on and say, “I’ve spoken to you about this before, haven’t I!” Me, my old chief of staff—the big shaven-haired bruiser—and anyone else who was nearby would all be shuffling our feet and I am going, “Yeah, sorry, Bec. I won’t do it again.” Bless her!

Madam President, I am hoping to conclude my remarks shortly so that I can earn the gratitude of members, by decision, for you to leave the chair early for afternoon tea. With that possible point of ingratiation said, I will just note that I have been a member for 24 years. I guess that amounts to around 500 sitting weeks. That is a lot of standing committees and committee inquiries. I know I have attended over 200 cabinet meetings, each of which was a substantial exercise. Here is where I do the old codger bit! I never had a mobile phone or an email until I came into Parliament.

There were 34 members then—36 now. It surprises me how few names that we have all had between us. When I arrived in 1997, we had the three Murrays. The Liberal Hon Murray Nixon, who I acknowledge in your gallery, Madam President, and the Nationals WA Murrays—Criddle and Montgomery. Recently, of course, we have three Colins—two of them are Nats. Indeed, there are some in my crowd who think that possibly, on occasion, one might even be a bit much! We used to have a couple of Toms—Tom Helm, who used to make me and everybody else laugh, and Tom Stephens, who I quite liked even though he was mad as a cut snake! God bless you, Tom, if you are reading this. But it gets worse, Madam President. Now, we have two Alanna-hs! By any measure, we are exceedingly blessed!

Bill Stretch, who I mentioned before, was one of the great characters who I met in this place as a colleague and I just want to recall briefly the benefits that I received over the years through the example, experience and friendship of members like the Hons George Cash, Norman Moore—these are my mentors—Peter Foss, the inimitable Derrick Tomlinson, the lovely Muriel Patterson, Bruce Donaldson, Robyn McSweeney, with whom I shared an office—that ministerial office and then the on-the-way-out office—for eight years, and many others. I also acknowledge the late Kim Chance, the Hons Nick Griffiths, John Cowdell, Ljiljanna Ravlich, Murray Criddle and Ken Travers as members who featured on so many occasions on my parliamentary experience.

There have been 107 members of the Legislative Council during my time here—or 109 if we count a couple who have been and gone twice. Therefore, I hope members will understand that I cannot mention them all, but I do say to each of them: thank you for sharing and adding to my life experience as a member of the Parliament of Western Australia. To all members I would say, we have had many shared experiences. I will miss you and, of course, I wish you well in every phase of your lives.

To my Liberal colleagues, I am not going to go round and give an individual greeting on the floor of the house. Judge not lest ye be judged. But to those of you who will be going on, if you continue to perform as well as you have during all the time I have been here, the future of the Liberal Party and the Parliament is in good hands. I wish you all the best.

To others, I will single out only our new Leader of the Opposition, and congratulate him on acceding to that role at the tender age of —

**Hon Dr Steve Thomas:** Fifty-three.

**Hon SIMON O’BRIEN:** — fifty-three. All members need to know for now is that he is a short-tempered veterinary surgeon, so some of you blokes over there, do not be too smart alecy. That is my advice; take it or leave it.

I have some general reflections, Madam President, as I bow out. One thing that the media and reporters particularly want to see is people they can write about who have, in their terms, set the world alight. I have always preferred to see a minister’s role as stopping bushfires in the first

place, anticipating problems and making sure that either they do not occur or that measures are in place to deal with them. I think that is the measure by which all ministers should ultimately be judged. I also point out, and some do not agree with me on this, but I reckon—I firmly believe, in fact—that it is a minister’s duty to be a buffer between the bureaucracy and the people they represent and not an apologist.

In politics, we hear so much about getting tough on this or cracking down on that. When I reflect on my time in Parliament and in government, I am very pleased that my contribution has not been centred around that. It has been about making it easier for people to go about their lives and their businesses. I am very satisfied to be able to look back on my time here in that spirit.

Before I go, I want to thank some long-suffering people in the Parliament. The “Clerks party” and chamber staff. There have been many over the years. To all of them, together with the committee office staff, and, indeed, all the staff of the wider Parliament, particularly in the dining room, and the paymaster—I have one more transaction with him—I say thank you for your service, but, more pointedly, thank you for helping me to go about my role in a professional and tolerant environment.

To you, Madam President, it has been a privilege to know and work with you these 20 years, now. We have had an interesting time over the last four years, working ever closer together. All sorts of issues of the day come along, but I will say this: I know that there are unique challenges in the role of President. Sometimes, you cannot freely acquaint members at large or your party room with facts that are related to your job in a way that others may pretend they can. I do not know if you are able to share or if those members at large know about some of the stresses and strains that you have been exposed to and how you have dealt with them, but I will tell members that the Deputy President does know. In that capacity, I say to you that you have performed and continue to perform your role with distinction.

Members: Hear, hear!

**Hon SIMON O’BRIEN:** May I go on to say that it has been my very long experience in public life that those who are prepared to stand up to the duties of their office and perform them when others might presume to suggest that their duty lies elsewhere, those who resist that sort of pressure and show integrity and strength thereby, are the people who grow in stature, respect and understanding. You, madam, deserve all of those accolades. It is a great privilege to serve with you and I wish you well in the future.

To all members, I recognise that it is a hard game we are in. As Norman used to say, “You don’t go through it without acquiring some scars along the way, and if you haven’t got any scars, then you probably weren’t a player.” Having spoken about all the good stuff, as one does in farewell speeches, I will acknowledge the tough road that you all have ahead. It can be tough when you have all sorts of pressures from your party room or the media or constituents—whatever the pressures are—and people presume to tell you what your duty and responsibility is, but you know in your heart of hearts that it lays somewhere else and in what you are going to do about it. I wish you all the best in being able to deal with those challenges that you will confront in the future.

In offering my house—this house; it is not mine anymore—my most genuine best wishes for the future, to each and every one of you, I conclude where I began —

Under the blessing of Divine Providence and given goodwill, mutual tolerance and understanding, an energy and individual sense of purpose, there is no task that we cannot perform and no difficulty that we cannot overcome.

[Applause.]