

VALEDICTORY REMARKS

Member for Central Wheatbelt

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt) [11.01 am]: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I also say that former member Hon Jacqui Boydell and her family are in the gallery, along with a daunting number of other people, so I am not looking up! Paul Brown—“Brownie”—is somewhere there, too.

I stand for the last time in this house with a mixture of emotions—amongst them satisfaction, pride, sadness and gratitude. After two terms in government and two in opposition, I have served in the Legislative Council and Assembly, spent nearly a decade as Deputy Leader and Leader of the Nationals WA combined, two of those as Leader of the Opposition, and some time as Minister for Water; Sport and Recreation and Forestry. I am rounding out my career with the prestigious role of being Whip for an opposition with a grand total of being six members strong in a chamber of 59 members. There have been a few firsts along this nearly 17 years, including being the first woman to represent the electorate of Central Wheatbelt, the first female to hold the role of Deputy or Leader of the Nationals anywhere in Australia, and Western Australia’s first ever sport and recreation minister. I was the first Nationals Leader of the Opposition since 1947. I can assure members that that is not something one anticipates when one joins the Nationals WA!

I am from heartland National Party country, but no electorate should feel taken for granted, and I have always maintained that a candidate has to work hard, no matter their margin, to earn the trust and support of those they seek to represent. I have increased my primary vote at every election, including in 2021, during the COVID pandemic, when the popularity of then Premier McGowan and the Labor Party was unsurpassed. When I was preselected for the seat, following on from Brendon Grylls, I was told more than a thousand times, “You have some big shoes to fill!” I doorknocked in nearly every town comprising 27 local governments—more towns than that—spread across 100 000 square kilometres. I had great help and support, including from my mum and my dad and one Paul Brown, who is here today, who is slipping on the sneakers and about to hit the campaign trail with me once again. I was also backed by a marvellous group of local people who have become like my second family in this time, and I am so pleased that some of you have made it here today.

The course of my life over this nearly 17 years has run through the highest of highs and the lowest of lows, both professionally and personally, and it is sometimes hard to delineate the two in this most public of roles. Knowing that I had a strong network of friends and supporters across the electorate and the state has made the role far less daunting and vastly more fun. It may be clichéd but it is absolutely true that it has been an honour to represent the people and communities in the electorate of Central Wheatbelt from Northam to Southern Cross, Hyden to Boddington, Mukinbudin to Wongan Hills, York and everywhere in between. I have loved it. I have loved the challenges and opportunities of serving people who are practical and forthright, expect hard work and accountability and will rally in a heartbeat to help a neighbour or a stranger. I love the diversity in the electorate and I have loved working with our Aboriginal elders and community leaders—those patient and fiercely proud people with the longest enduring culture in the world. We all have a responsibility to walk alongside them and chart a better path forward together.

That diversity in my electorate extends to those who have made Australia their home, many of whom fled a war-torn Europe at the end of World War II and survived the harsh conditions of the Northam and Cunderdin army camps. We have families from Poland, Hungary, Ukraine, the former Czechoslovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Italy and many more. They have enriched our communities and helped build our region, as have those who have arrived since.

My upbringing in the small town of Wyalkatchem—West Yorkrakine, if we are being very specific—has played a significant role in shaping who I am and what I do today. I was surrounded by people who volunteered, took on leadership roles and made things happen on a daily basis. If they did not, our town and the opportunities we had would have been significantly diminished. Public service, volunteering, having a go and making a difference was embedded in our psyche from a very early age, as was the importance of education. As I did in my first speech, I thank my mum and dad and our extended family for prioritising our education, whether that was through active participation in our primary and secondary schooling or creating space for us to pursue our studies beyond that. They made sacrifices to make this happen, and we are all extraordinarily grateful.

Education is the game changer, and in a state as wealthy and prosperous as ours, our public education system should be the best of the best. Sadly, that opportunity is not afforded to every child or young adult, either through economic or societal circumstance or, sadly, geography. Finding pathways to improve the access to and quality of education at all levels should remain a priority for every person who takes their place in this house.

During our first term in government, we delivered upgrades to Merredin College and Merredin Residential College in my electorate and a number of other colleges across the state to support the completion of secondary education closer to home. I fought for funding to purchase more land and update the accommodation at Western Australian College of Agriculture Cunderdin to give more students the opportunity to complete their schooling at a topnotch

education facility with a focus on agricultural excellence. We delivered funding into Northam Senior High School for a state-of-the-art performing arts centre and much-needed upgrades to this 100-year-old school, and we delivered millions into Muresk Institute for upgrades to accommodation and to underpin the delivery of a tertiary agricultural degree, short courses and professional developmental opportunities for the sector.

At the other end of the spectrum, I worked closely with our local governments and community leaders in childcare to build support for a new model of early learning tailored to the wheatbelt. In 2011, with significant changes afoot for childcare funding coming in courtesy of our federal government, the then member for O'Connor Tony Crook and I hosted federal Minister for Early Childhood, Childcare and Youth Kate Ellis in the wheatbelt, driving her to Quairading, Narembeen, Kulin and Katanning, with representatives from all over the wheatbelt joining us to share their frustrations and concerns. After many meetings with Fleur Wilkinson from Brookton and the Wheatbelt Organisation for Childcare Services, Deborah Clune and her team, we were adamant there was a better way to deliver childcare services into the wheatbelt. A small-scale project led by the Shire of Brookton gathered support from other local governments and stakeholders and, with the work of Jill Cameron and a dedicated group of supporters, the Regional Early Education and Development Inc, or REED, is now embedded as a bespoke wheatbelt childcare provider. On this, I thank the then incoming Labor minister, Simone McGurk, for her support for this project throughout the change of government. It was a wonderful success story, and it will only continue to grow.

Creating the opportunity for our seniors to age close to home and in a dignified and supportive community has also been a passion of mine. It is not acceptable to me that our elders—those who have worked and built our communities, supported our families and enriched our lives—are often given no choice but to relocate to where they can access services and medical care. In a small way, working with our local governments and key stakeholders, I was part of securing funding to give our seniors a choice of staying in the wheatbelt, close to home. We delivered 71 independent living units across the central and eastern wheatbelt as part of the biggest investment in housing for seniors and those living with disability in our region.

The wheatbelt is often used as the stalking horse for local government reform—do not get me started on that! We have all been in governments that have flunked on policy implementation and execution. In my time, we have proven again and again that a collaborative approach can deliver great outcomes without the need for a big-stick approach. I sincerely congratulate the shires that contributed to and continue to work on creating fit-for-purpose housing. I make mention of Tuck Waldron, who is now the independent chair of this organisation. In the same wheelhouse, I will never forget the day that the then Premier and I opened the expanded Dryandra residential aged-care facility in Kellerberrin. It grew from a community-run lodge to a 39-room facility, including dementia-level care, allowing countless families to stay closer to their loved ones while they received the care that they deserved. To me, these investments are about putting our families and communities first, and every dollar spent has been worthwhile. They all have a common thread—they were all enabled by royalties for regions. I cannot let this opportunity pass without talking about this phenomenon, and there is no other way to describe it. Our detractors will say that it is nothing more than a slogan, but those who lived through the creation, development and delivery of royalties for regions will know that it is far more than that. Not a corner of our state has not been untouched by this program. It was truly exciting to be a part of the team that argued for the change and was then part of delivering it. Synonymous with Brendon Grylls and his leadership, we pitched the story that there had to be a better way of driving development and funding in regional WA. Instead of rolling into an election cycle and asking for a laundry list of projects, the concept was simple: come up with a way to fund them now and into the future and take a long-term view on regional development instead of waiting for election promises to drop like crumbs. We needed to think about it in the long term. Some of the wealth generated in the regions returned to the regions; it was so simple, yet so powerful. We said that local leadership should have more say in the decision-making that impacted their community. We invited government departments to think outside the square when solving wicked problems and we gave people and departments that wanted to do what had always been done a serious headache. Over time, royalties for regions shifted from a deficit funding model, filling in long-neglected gaps in infrastructure and services, to an investment and innovation model. It created hope for communities and people who felt forgotten and taken for granted and were far from the decision-makers and government.

In opposition, we gathered a dedicated little team, and we set about trying to do things just a little bit differently. Policies like the Country Age Pension Fuel Card, the local government fund, the Living Lakes Network, the Ord-East Kimberley expansion, the Pilbara Cities project, the exploration incentive fund, new aircraft and funding for the Royal Flying Doctor Service and backing for our community resource centres were developed by that little team just prior to and after the election. We crafted them in opposition and we delivered them in the first iteration of royalties for regions. They have fundamentally changed our state for the better. In my electorate at the time, the Southern Inland Health Initiative became the single biggest investment in regional health in our state's history—over half a billion dollars. We now have a state-of-the-art telehealth network as a result, linking specialists, primary healthcare providers, doctors and patients within a moment. It also delivered upgrades and investment into infrastructure and piloted the Pingelly and Cunderdin primary healthcare services. In Cunderdin, we have more work to do. The community has spoken volumes with a petition containing more than 600 signatures, which was

tabled today, calling for palliative care and overnight observation capacity. There are those in our health system who know that the premise of that project was a pilot and there was always the potential for additional investment to get the model right. I know that Lachlan Hunter and our team will continue to fight for what they deserve.

In Pingelly, the investment has created the ecosystem for transformational change in aged-care living and service delivery in our regions. The innovative Staying in Place initiative that has been driven by the local community resource centre under Lee Steele's leadership, the dedicated Helen Morton and the Pingelly Somerset Alliance is now being replicated across the state, generating new jobs and providing care for those who want to remain living independently and close to their loved ones.

Outside of my electorate, I had the opportunity to tap into royalties for regions as I took on the ministerial portfolios of water, forestry and then sport and recreation. The irony of me holding those portfolios! I was from the wheatbelt where there was little water and few trees and anyone who knew me knew I had not an ounce of sporting talent. I am looking at you, member for Mandurah! I was the kid in the tunnel ball and flag races and D-grade on the nettle court. My competitive spirit was definitely directed elsewhere! Nonetheless, it was in water that I saw the biggest challenge and opportunity, and it was twofold. The first, which every Minister for Water will attest to, is to manage our most precious resource where the impact of climate change is evident and real. Second, to tap into an opportunity to drive economic growth and prosperity in regions that had undefined or poorly understood water resources. I can assure members that this did not involve a pipeline or a canal from the Kimberley!

We supercharged the groundwater investigation scheme and started digitising decades of data so that it was readily available for industry, government and community. But the most exciting project was the creation of a program called Water for Food, which invested \$40 million into 11 projects across the state to identify water and land resources and develop new land tenure pathways that could increase the value of Western Australia's fresh food and animal protein production. These projects spanned everywhere from the north of the state to the very southern part of the state. It was extraordinarily ambitious. We pushed boundaries and asked communities to think expansively about their precious water resources. In the Kimberley, where there is an abundance of water, it was a different challenge to the food bowl in the Gascoyne, southern forests and Midlands. We made no excuses that there would be some challenging conversations and that we would need to work hard to garner community support to prove the case and find the right partners to help us deliver. I want to thank everyone who took that leap of faith, brought their expertise and experience to the table and shared the vision. We had some great successes. For those that did not come to fruition either as a result of a change in government or because the project simply did not work, learnings have been banked for the future. There was no place for timidity. Anyone who has been between business, a community or grower and water will attest to the intestinal fortitude required to navigate that challenge!

It allowed me to forge new friendships; in particular, the community of Mowanjum will have a special place in my heart forever. The glorious silver lining from this period is that I had the opportunity to work alongside my great friend and mentor Doug Cunningham and my dad, both of whom had a passion for the project and its transformative potential for our state. Growing up, I never envisaged that I would take the seat that my dad vacated in 2001 or work with him as a member and minister. It was truly special to share our passion for agriculture and politics on this project. As a state, we are internationally renowned for our mining credentials, and rightly so; the men and women who work in this sector drive our national economy. But there is still untapped opportunity out there in irrigated agriculture for a future ambitious government.

Before I move on from my time as a minister, I want to touch on the portfolio that most refer to as fun and games. Tuck Waldron and Colin Barnett had already put us on the path to delivering a world-class Perth Stadium when I took over the reins. If members recall, Tuck had embarked on the arduous task of touring the most modern and fan-focused stadiums in the world! It was a tough job, but someone had to do it! In all seriousness, the outcome of that fact-finding mission was to create a fan-first experience and world-class venue. It was well on its way to being up and out of the ground when I started.

Would you believe me when I say I was happy to be charged with negotiating the financial terms of the agreement with football and cricket as the two key tenants? I was delighted to front up to Parliament day after day for the scrutiny that was brought to bear by the now Deputy Premier and excited to front press pack after press pack, which were fond of taking the bait from football that we would bankrupt AFL in the move from Subiaco stadium. History now proves that the stadium has been one of the most successful public infrastructure projects we have ever delivered, having hosted international music and sporting events and even the AFL Grand Final. I would like to thank Ronnie Hurst and David Etherton, two consummately professional public servants who took enormous pride in the project and its delivery for their work with me and my office during that time. I would also like to thank WA Cricket, under the leadership of Christina Matthews, for understanding the assignment and seeing the opportunity that the new stadium presented for world-class cricket in Western Australia. She is a legend! It was a privilege to play a small part in delivering this iconic project for our state.

As I move on from my time as minister, I acknowledge that I had a style that tested some relationships. There was, in fact, an entire editorial written about it in *The West Australian*. All I will say is that when you refuse to accept that things must be done the way they have always been done, there is inevitably a healthy tension. I actually consider myself relatively collaborative and consultative, but I have no time for people who seek power for its own end. That is not public service; rather, it is empire building and there is no place for that when you are working for the people of Western Australia.

With that, let me address an issue that I have spoken about in this house many times. It is no secret that I am unashamedly supportive of the industry that has been my family's life for multiple generations. Western Australia is exceptional at producing high-value and high-quality food and fibre, but that is at risk every day unless we have people in this Parliament who understand agriculture and its drivers, opportunities and challenges. Government has a responsibility to make decisions based on science and common sense. It has a responsibility to challenge ideologically driven policy with facts and to take a broader view than those with a narrow or singular focus.

It has been devastating for the people who are involved in the sheep industry to see it ripped from underneath them by a government that has shamelessly chased votes in inner-city suburbs on the east coast of Australia. Instead of taking pride in the fact that we have some of the most rigorous animal welfare standards and celebrating the marvel of science and hard work to produce first-class protein that the world wants and some of the best wool clip in the world, their own government has shut them down. Instead of thanking our stock agents, our shearers and our truckies for the role they play as cogs in a finely balanced supply chain, this government has sent a message: they are not valued or valuable. We need more people to understand what it takes to produce food and fibre, not less. On this, I give my commitment that the agricultural sector will always have an unequivocal friend and advocate in me and the Nationals.

Finally, before I acknowledge those who have helped me along the way, I want to share how I have navigated nearly 17 years in this place. It is not as long as some. We have had the privilege of listening to a number of valedictory speeches this week and they have all been varied and heartfelt. It has been a pleasure to listen to them. At the end of the day, all we have in this place is our integrity. For that to remain intact, we have to balance the threads that pull at our own heart, our party and our constituents' best interests. Over the years, the tension in those threads has challenged me from time to time.

I have used my voice on issues and matters that are important, but that has sometimes seen me at odds with our party or my electorate. This has never been done lightly or without the belief that we are elected to set the bar high, lead change, speak truth to power and challenge the status quo when it is needed. Accountability and integrity are two things that we can control in an environment and world in which there are so many variables that we cannot. I have participated in debates on stop and search laws, abortion access legislation, the Voice, justice for survivors of forced adoption, gender reassignment, redress for child abuse survivors, same-sex marriage, juvenile justice and voluntary assisted dying, just to name a few. Although I accept that there are those with strongly held views on all these matters, I hope the public and my peers have seen me approach each issue that we have considered by putting people at the centre of the debate.

We are powerful people in this chamber and what we say and do matters. I urge those who seek public office to be bold, brave and authentic. I can attest that it may test friendships and loyalties, but none of us should be here simply to bide time or make up the numbers. Temper that boldness and bravery by showing respect, kindness and compassion, even for your toughest of opponents. I can attest that your electorate and support base only grow stronger when you are prepared to do this.

Before I thank those who have been on the journey with me, I want to thank the amazing organisations that I have had the privilege of serving as patron or vice-patron over the years. These groups do amazing work—unsung heroes—and it has been my pleasure to have been associated with them and assist in some small way. To the Royal Life Saving Society of WA—they literally save lives—it has been an honour to be your vice-patron. Comfort Quilts Against Cancer, Northam Women in Business, Northam Army Camp Heritage Association, Perth Hills and Wheatbelt Band, Toodyay Race Club, Northam and Districts Historical Society Inc, Corrigin Agricultural Society, Northam Cricket Association and Northam Community Men's Shed are just a few. Everyone in these organisations is a hardworking volunteer and they do amazing work. The Country Women's Association of WA also has my continuing admiration and respect. The CWA has been empowering women and championing positive change for our communities for a century this year, and I am proud to stand in this place as a member.

I now go to those who have shared this roller-coaster ride with me. I have made the strongest of friends and held on tight to those people who knew me before my public life, some of whom are here today, and that is so very special to me. To my friends and colleagues in the National Party, you all understand what it is like to be a part of something bigger than yourself. This grand old party has been serving the people of our state for over 100 years. We are custodians of its legacy and future, which I know will be strong and effective for many years to come. To Brendon Grylls, the person who backed me before I was confident enough to back myself—a person of vision,

drive and commitment to make a difference—you challenge us to be better, think more expansively and be agents for change. Thank you for your friendship and your leadership. Thank you to both you and Susan: I am so very lucky to have you in my corner. To Jacqui Boydell—fiercely loyal, forthright and great fun—who was my deputy and is my friend. She is someone who challenges and supports me to this day. Your amazing parents, Tom and Maggie, are stalwarts of the Nationals and the Carnarvon community, and are hard work embodied. I will never forget your generosity of spirit when it came to our party.

To Tony Crook, a genuine advocate for regional Australia, helping you become the member for O'Connor is one of my favourite memories of all time. I thank you and Karen for your contribution to public life. To Colin Holt, my former Council colleague, disruptor and friend, thank you. To Colin de Grussa, who has served in the Council and as our state president, I wish you well in the next stage of your career. To the members for Moore and Roe, who are sitting in front of me, I understand the assignment as no-one else might. You have my respect and gratitude for your service to the state. You are both quality individuals who have shown me great support and kindness, and I thank you for it. To you, Julie Freeman, Julie Kirby and our growing team of candidates, we have faced down adversity before. I have faith that as you steer a new path for the Nationals, there will be many who will be drawn to our pragmatic and commonsense approach to politics. Keep backing yourselves and stay strong. There are more chapters to be written for this little party that you lead. To Martin Aldridge, an extraordinary talent and friend, your policy brain is surpassed only by your work ethic. It has been a pleasure to serve with you. The Parliament and our party has been better for your contribution to public life.

The network of members and supporters who keep the wheels turning, volunteer their time, invest their own money and share their expertise are the beating heart of our organisation. Rob Tinetti, Heather Giles and their families—there are too many to mention—have gone above and beyond. Lisa Logan served as my electorate council president for a decade before heading back to the hills with her family to pursue her own political career. To Lachlan Hunter, whom I know will be standing in this Parliament next year as the member for Central Wheatbelt, you will be a force to be reckoned with as you embark on this next role.

We all know that none of us can do this job without a strong team. To those in my ministerial office—those whom I spent more time with than my own family and friends—thank you for your endless patience, good humour and dedication. I give particular thanks to the tenacious Nicole O'Keefe, the fierce Amy McAllister, Evan Stewart, Dan Nevin, Carolyn Hills and Simone Knox. Thank you for those who signed on when we came to opposition in 2017 and kept the energy and drive going in our little team, in particular the talented and committed Joshua Nyman, Alex Massey, Tay Alers and, later, Emily Evans and Heather York. To Theresa Middis, who worked in my electorate office, ministerial office and leader's office, you are one in a million. To the dream team in my electorate—you amazing women, starting out with Clare Creegan in the very beginning, and then Kath Brown, Michelle Alvaro, Rhonda Lawrence, Wendy Chambers and Georgia Brown—I receive nothing but praise from constituents and people who interact with our office. You do the hard work behind the scenes to solve the most challenging of problems, lend a kind and generous ear to those who need support and are fearless in your advocacy for our communities. I count you amongst my closest of friends and I simply could not have done the job without you by my side. Be proud of the difference you have made to the lives of so many who have sought our help.

To my friends, you know how important you are to me and how much I value your support and love. Thank you for being a constant in my life and allowing me to be Aunty Mia to your beautiful kiddos. I am lucky to have your unconditional support and for you to be willing participants in my car conversations at any hour of the day or night while on the road in my electorate! To Em, Nick, Harry and Ella, who are my safe haven away from politics and where I am just Immi, sister, sister-in-law and aunty are my most treasured roles. You inspire and amaze me, and I love you all dearly. Finally, to my dear Mum, who has lived through two political careers with all the conferences, meetings, doorknocking, polling booths, glare of the public and more when all she really wanted to do was spend time with her beautiful family, you have been my number one cheerleader, a role that you and Dad have played for both your daughters and now your beloved grandkids. You are far stronger than you give yourself credit for and we have seen your inner resolve to be our anchor in the wake of losing Dexter, and we love you for it. I have always tried to be true to what you both instilled in us: that if you think you can make a difference, you should.

To all of you in this place—I cannot see—members and staff alike, I genuinely wish you the best as the parliamentary term draws to a close. Aren't we so very lucky to have trod these halls together with the shared purpose of making our state the best place to live and work? Finally, to the people of the Central Wheatbelt, I thank you for the privilege of being your representative. It has been the experience of a lifetime. Thank you.

[Applause.]

Member for Cannington

MR W.J. JOHNSTON (Cannington) [11.34 am]: The last of the last! I rise to deliver my final speech to the Parliament of Western Australia. I have 1 800 seconds to summarise 41 years of political activism. To start, I want

to acknowledge the Whadjuk Noongar people as the traditional owners of this land and of the land of the Cannington electorate. I am very grateful to the people of Cannington for electing me four times. It has been an honour and privilege to represent you in the Parliament. My first loyalty has always been to the people of Cannington.

My next acknowledgement is to my family. My wife, Kate Doust, and I have a unique relationship. While we are not the only married couple in the Parliaments around the country, there are not many of us. When Kate was elected in 2001, I was elected as Australian Labor Party state secretary shortly after. Our kids were aged just nine, six and three at the time and it was difficult for them. Many families have both parents working and there are many fly-in fly-out families. It is not as if our family struggle was harder than the struggle of other families, but that does not mean our family life was easy. The toll on our children was huge. That our three kids, Bek, Zoe and Liam, have successful lives is a credit to their own endeavour and resilience. Kate and I are very proud of them.

When Bek got married, she had the great imagination to marry another Liam, but he is called “Rochie”, so we do not get confused between our son Liam and our son-in-law Liam. I think Rochie was happy to move to the United States after their wedding, literally on the other side of the planet, because he was able to get away from his in-laws. When he and Bek moved back to Perth with their two children, Kora and Tash, I am sure that made him nervous!

I am the eighth child of eight children of hardworking parents, Barney and Carmel. My father died when I was only two years of age, and my eldest sister, Mary, was just 15. My mum was a tough woman, but very caring of all of us. Raising eight kids as a war widow was no easy job. I am very pleased my eldest sister Mary, and her husband Ian McLean, have joined us in the chamber. It is a big effort to fly across the country to be here for this speech, and I appreciate it deeply. I hope that Andy, Marg, Stephen, Clare, Bert and Jo are watching, plus the various spouses, children, and grandchildren. There are more than 80 “Johnno’s” around the country!

In particular, I want to note my sister, Marg and her husband Eike. All of us love Marg and are proud that she was awarded an Order of Australia for her services to education. As I explained in my inaugural speech, my childhood shaped my politics; it is why I always support those who are doing their best for their families and our community. I also need to acknowledge the Cannington Labor branch members, some of whom have joined us today. All members of Parliament stand on the shoulders of others, and it is on their shoulders that I have been standing as the Member for Cannington.

It is said that politics is “Show business for ugly people”, which is probably why I have fit in so well. I have spent 41 years as a member of the Labor Party, including nine years at the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees’ Association of WA, 11 years in party office and 16 years in Parliament. I have had a charmed career, and I am always grateful for the opportunities that have come my way.

I got involved in politics to help change the world and I am pleased I have had some success. I finished year 12 in 1980, and I expected that I would go on to university and become a schoolteacher—a noble profession, I am sure you would agree. However, instead, I was accepted into the American Field Service student exchange program. That meant that while my friends started university in 1981, I worked full-time at the Department of Foreign Affairs in the basement packing mail bags for six months before heading to Indonesia in July of 1981, going back to high school for an extra year at SMA2, Government High School No 2, Bandung. Living in Indonesia certainly changed me forever, and not just because I learnt a second language. It changed my attitudes and it exposed me to a different life, a different religion and many different cultures. Keluarga Sumawiganda, the Sumawiganda family, accepted me as a son. I still keep in touch with Lerry, Rudy, Ben, Titan and Pri, my five “brothers”, as well as Ibu Sumawiganda. They still treat me as one of their family all these many years later. It is a joy to be with them, including their wives, children and now grandchildren.

The other students on the program also made a big impression. Tim Dalzell, my Kiwi mate from “Palmy North”, was with me in Bandung along with Maaiké Newhuis from the Netherlands. Sylvie Nys from Belgium, who now lives in Spain, Peter Diamond from Wisconsin, as well as Tania Teese, Mark James and Lucinda Chappell from around Australia. They are all still friends all these many years later. Penny Williams who was in Jakarta for her year is now the Australian Ambassador to Indonesia. What a job that would be. It was great to see her last year as part of the Western Australian delegation led by Premier Cook. I also want to acknowledge the many friends I had at SMA2—classmates like Nyta Pusparia and her sister Irene Apriyanthi. It was certainly an incredible experience.

I have been very lucky to make some great friends along the way in life. Dan Kennedy and I started in kindergarten together and we still keep in touch. Leon Hribar did an AFS program like I did, but he went to the United States. Steve Hodgkin is into cars, even more than I am. Paul Wentworth is still a true friend. I keep in touch with many of the guys from Daramalan. One of those guys was Stephen Conroy. We met in 1974 and we were always talking politics. One night in June 1983, Steve rang me to say he was heading off to a Labor Party meeting and asked whether I would like to come and join as well. It seemed like a great idea at the time, but I must say I had no idea where that decision would take me. At the meeting, I met Michael Kerrisk and Stephen Booth, who were at the Australian National University with Steve. The four of us had much to learn, but we quickly worked out that we needed to take over the Australian Capital Territory Australian Labor Party. That is why we formed “the faction”

complete with our own salute. Later, we were joined by Craig Shannon and although we never did manage to take control of the ACT ALP, we certainly took control of ACT Young Labor and I got to be ACT YL president in 1988. There were lots of others like Sally Standen and Ruth Webber who were also part of the team. We supported an engineer the New South Wales railways to be the ACT YL secretary, Mike Kaiser. Like so many of the people I have met over my Labor years, Mike is a contributor.

Stephen Conroy was the first of us to get a job in politics, going onto the staff of Ros Kelly. Ros introduced us to the whole pantheon of Labor icons of the 1980s from Bob Hawke and Paul Keating to John Button, Kim Beazley and Graham Richardson, just to name some. Later, Steve moved to Melbourne and became a dominating influence in Victorian politics. A senator for Victoria, he was Deputy Leader of the Labor Party in the Senate and a minister. When Steve decided to leave the Senate—we have just been texting about this—he famously just tabled his speech rather than read it live. It meant that many people missed the big story. In the speech, he outed my high school nickname. Given that I had been labelled as one of the leaders of the WA Labor right faction, it surprises some that my nickname at high school was “Johnno the Commo”. But for me, Steve is my mate, and while I cannot ski, it is always great to get together with Steve, his wife, Paula Benson, and their lovely daughter Bella. It is remarkable that we are still friends after more than 50 years. Perhaps our friendship has lasted this long because I live in Perth and he lives in Melbourne!

Michael Kerrisk went on to be the ACT ALP branch secretary and put the branch on a professional footing. Stephen Booth worked for the Australian Workers’ Union, including in Western Australia, and later worked for Victorian Labor governments. Craig Shannon, a close friend of both the Speaker and member for Landsdale, has worked hard for Labor in many ways. Craig’s parties at his rental properties in the 1980s were legendary. I cannot say out loud what they were called—of course, something to do with “Bond”.

We did not hang out with just the Young Labor types. I met a rising talent at the time, Margaret Quirk, who was a local branch member as well. I am proud to have served here in the Parliament with the member for Landsdale, the godmother of my son. In the 1980s, I met a staffer for Kim Beazley called Ed Dermer and we are still friends today. He served the people of this state very well as a member for the North Metropolitan Region. Canberra in the 1980s was a great place to meet staffers, including Morris Iemma, who would go on to be a NSW Premier, and my friend David Tierney who has had a very interesting life. In fact, the members of our Mt Ainslie branch included Gary Gray, Dr Craig Emerson and Bob McMullan, just to name a few. It was an exciting time. We all knew that the Hawke–Keating Labor government was changing Australia forever and for the better. Economic reform, industry reform, the accord, Medicare, superannuation and the social wage was the start of modern Australia, a dynamic, trading, multicultural country, setting a path to prosperity. Another Mt Ainslie branch member was the Labor legend the late Fred Daly. Fred had been elected to Parliament in 1943 and retired in 1975. He treated our group of activists with great respect. Fred was a generous mentor to us. One of his most important lessons was to make sure that at least one of us had read the rules. That became my job and I have continued to do that with the standing orders. He also told us to never assume how anyone will vote. He said you can believe that the person who says they will never vote for you under any circumstances is a “no”, but that everyone else is a “maybe”! Likewise, I met you, Madam Speaker. One night Ed Dermer invited me to join a dinner in Manuka with some of the members of the ALP national executive, and that is where I met the Speaker. The Speaker’s husband, Greg Roberts, is likewise another good friend. I have always been pleased to have Greg as my plus one at the V8 Supercars each year.

I have been able to do some really interesting things through politics. In 1985, it was the United Nations International Year of Youth, and two big international youth conferences were held, divided by the Cold War. The KGB funded the International Union of Youth and Students and held a conference in Moscow. Instead of going to that conference, I went to the pro-Western event, the International Youth Conference in Kingston, Jamaica. I met Michael Danby at the conference, who went onto be a federal member of Parliament. I also met Matthew Strasbourg, a staffer from NSW, and Ian Blandthorn, the assistant national secretary of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees’ Association. Steve Conroy asked me to nominate as the youth representative on the board of the Australian Bicentennial Authority. I still have the letter from Prime Minister Bob Hawke appointing me as a director. On the board of the authority from 1985 until 1989, I was given an education on the workings of a quango, learning that you are ahead of the game just by reading the meeting papers. That is a good lesson in life no matter what job you have.

In 1991, I went to Indonesia as part of the Australia–Asia young political leaders’ program. The delegation leader was Cameron O’Reilly who at the time was a staffer for the Minister for Foreign Affairs Laurie Brereton. Cameron and I are still friends and he is now a leading voice in Australia’s energy transition. Another friend from that trip is Jody Fassina, who was also a Labor staffer. Jody’s friendship endures through many changes. I also met Dean Smith on that trip.

In 2002, I was guest of the United States Department of State for the mid-term elections. It was a fascinating insight, but I also met some interesting people. Lizzy Blandthorn and Jason Clare were both part of the delegation.

I had been to the conference in Kingston, Jamaica in 1985 with Lizzy's father, and Lizzy is now a minister in the Victorian government. Jason Clare is now the federal Minister for Education. Simon Birmingham was also on that trip and is now a senator for South Australia, and even Barnaby Joyce was one of the crew.

One day, when I was assistant state secretary, I went to Fletcher Rowe and Associates. When I walked in, Ian Fletcher said, "I've met you before." He had been the first assistant secretary at the Australian Customs Service when I was a lowly payroll clerk, but he still remembered me. I have always appreciated Fletch giving me advice and suggestions over the years. I am pleased to say that not everyone that has helped me during my career has been a Labor person. I have always been up-front about my views—some people might suggest too up-front—but if you do not get along with people with whom you disagree, how can society function, and if you will not consider other people's views, how do you know your views are correct?

Bradley Woods started as CEO of the Australian Hotels Association at the same time as I started as assistant state secretary and we met soon afterwards. I am pleased that we are still friends. I always tell Bradley that he is my "second favourite Liberal", because Paul Everingham and I are also friends. Paul was the WA Liberal state director in 2005, which is not the usual path to becoming a friend of the Australian Labor Party state secretary. However, once Paul was off in industry, we struck up a great friendship. He was great to work with at the Chamber of Minerals and Energy during COVID. On that score, I want to acknowledge Claire Wilkinson from the Australian Petroleum Production and Exploration Association and Warren Pearce from the Association of Mining and Exploration Companies for their contributions during COVID.

I am pleased that many people in business have helped me over the years. Hon Nick Griffiths introduced me to his university friend Neil Hamilton, and Neil Hamilton introduced me to Tony Howarth. They have both been great supporters over the years. My good friend Peter Clough, who is in the chamber, has always been a strong Labor man and at the time he worked for Western Mining when I was assistant state secretary. He put me in touch with many people in the mining industry, too many to name, who are happy to educate me on how mining works, how a mine plan is connected to commodity prices, how exploration is the key to sustaining projects and how mining services make a strong mining sector. These lessons have proved very valuable. Likewise, as state secretary, I helped Eric Ripper manage energy reforms through the party. He and his team helped me understand the complexities of the energy system and why an efficient energy system serves working people. This was the foundation on which I built my interest in energy policy, which is so fundamental to our economy.

Of course, my career through the SDA, to party office and into Parliament would not have happened without the support of many Labor stalwarts. I met the late Jim Maher, national president of the SDA, as a fellow director of the Australian Bicentennial Authority. His common sense advice and support were instrumental to my journey through the party. In 1989 I had decided to leave the public service in Canberra and move to Melbourne to see what might happen down there. On my last day at the customs service, Jim rang me up and asked me to come and work for him. Because Jim was also the Victorian SDA secretary, I assumed he meant in Melbourne. When I said yes, he said, "Great, you start in Perth next week!". So, I arrived in Perth the next week, to be met by the SDA's assistant secretary Joe Bullock and a senior organiser, Kate Doust. Yes, Hon Kate Doust is literally the first woman I met in Perth! At SDA, I worked with some great officials. Mark Bishop, SDA secretary, was very supportive of my career. Bill McIntosh, now a life member of WA Labor, was a great mentor. Hon Martin Pritchard and Stuart McLean were part of a talented team of dedicated officials. I also made friends with SDA officials in other states like Don Farrell and Ton Koutsantonis from South Australia.

At the SDA, I also served as vice president of the Trades and Labour Council—now UnionsWA. It was an important time, fighting against the first, second and third waves of anti-worker laws in this state. The late Tony Cooke, Steph Mayman, Tony Robinson, Sharryn Jackson, Fran Logan and Janine Freeman were just some of the people who I got to know as we worked to rid our state of those unfair laws. Peter O'Keeffe and Ben Harris would each in turn be the SDA secretary while I was the member for Cannington, and I thank them for their support. Union secretaries are in touch with working people; their thoughts and advice should not be undervalued.

I also got to know a man with "a brain the size of a planet", Dr Tony Buti, and I enjoyed sitting next to the Minister for Education for three years in Parliament. From the SDA I went on to be WA Labor's assistant state secretary in January 1998, and then state secretary in May 2001. This is how I met Raj Selvendra, a great friend and supporter. Sel is a true Labor icon. We all wish Ambiga all the best.

Inside the Labor Party there is an indestructible bond that I have always been pleased to be part of—the ex- secretaries' club. Mark Cuomo, Stephen Smith and John Halden helped me as part of that special bond. I was pleased to help both Patrick Gorman and Tim Picton while they were secretaries as part of the responsibilities of the club. However, I do not know that either of them really needed my help. I am looking forward to Ellie Whiteaker becoming a senator and joining the club very soon. The club includes ex-assistant state secretaries, and so Hon Sally Talbot and Cassie Rowe, the member for Belmont, are also members. I look forward to Lauren Cayoun becoming an MLC and joining soon as well. And then there is Lenda Oshalem, the most dynamic of all the assistant

state secretaries. I hope that her immense talents can be found a role in public life in some way. Oh, that is right—I also acknowledge Lenda’s fiancé, the Minister for Mines and Petroleum! The ex-secretaries’ club includes members from all around Australia, and I have always enjoyed talking with people like Tim Gartrell, Michael Brown, Mark Arbib and Stephen Loosley, just to name a few.

At the Labor Party, I worked with the late Jim Millar, Rob Meecham and Rob Mitchell to set up the Labor Business Roundtable to reconnect WA Labor and the business community. It must have worked, because 25 years later, it is still operating.

I do not have time to go through every campaign that I have been involved with, but there are a few that I want to mention. In 1999, I spent six weeks working on the Monaro state campaign in NSW. Our candidate was John Durst, a restaurateur. He needed a 23.5 per cent swing to win. We got a 23 per cent swing, and fell just half a point short. When John found out that I was into cars, he lent me his own car for me to drive on those country roads in New South Wales—a Porsche 911. It is not the car you expect to use as a Labor campaign worker!

When Geoff Gallop resigned as Premier and stood aside from Victoria Park, Ben Wyatt replaced him. I live in that electorate and thought about running myself, but Ben was clearly a better candidate. I wanted someone to be Ben’s assistant, so I hired a Young Labor activist. Even 18 years ago I knew Varun Ghosh had a bright future. I am so pleased he is now a Senator for Western Australia. The 2007 Peel by-election was very tricky for WA Labor, but Paul Papalia was the correct choice. His service to Australia in the Navy is unsurpassed, and he increased the Labor vote. Again, I needed a Young Labor person to look after Paul. That was Terry Healy, the member for Southern River, who is not in his seat. In the lead-up to the 2007 federal election, Kim Beazley said to me that we should run an ex-military person for the seat of Stirling and I told Kim that I knew just the man. I had met Major Peter Tinley, AO, sometime before. Although Peter missed out narrowly in 2007, he was ready to step up as the member for Willagee, and I am pleased to have shared so many experiences with my friend Peter over our years together.

The period of opposition between 2008 and 2017 was very tough. Time in opposition is never fun, never fun at all, but it is the time of opportunity. It was a rare privilege to work with a talented group of people to hold the Barnett government to account. No successful opposition just whinges. It has to put together a genuine vision, and we certainly did that. What a talented group—Ben, Paul and Peter, as well as Mark McGowan, Roger Cook and Rita Saffioti, just to name a few. The whole team played their part. Mark McGowan became the dominating personality in WA politics like no one before him. No observer of politics in 2016 predicted how dominating Mark McGowan would become. The 2021 election was the biggest political victory in Australia’s history. I met the Premier, Roger Cook, before I went into party office. Even then, in the 1990s, I knew Roger had the talent to go far. The Deputy Premier has no equal in being across policy detail, which is probably why the opposition never ask her a question. Rita was part of Geoff Gallop’s opposition office from 1997, and we worked together right through my time in party office, along with Kieran Murphy and Bruce Campbell-Fraser.

WA is very lucky with the calibre of our cabinet: Hon Stephen Dawson, along with the Minister for Housing, the Minister for Health, the Minister for Training and Workforce Development and the Minister for Local Government, just to name a few. I have known them for many years, before they were in Parliament, and Western Australians know they will always do what is right for WA.

I acknowledge the people who were elected as part of the class of 2008. It has been great to serve with you, and particularly the Members for Maylands and Gosnells, who are leaving with me at the same time, and also all my PL friends. You know who you are, as the member for Landsdale said.

After the 2001 election, I needed to find a new executive officer to do the Labor Business Roundtable’s admin work. Kate suggested I hire our neighbour, Fran Laine. Fran built the organisation a strong foundation. I used to threaten businesspeople that they were not allowed to offer Fran a job, but eventually that is what happened. I was very pleased that Fran came back to work with me after I was elected to Parliament, and Fran has been my electorate officer for 15 years. Fran has been indispensable. During my time as a minister, Fran was the real member for Cannington. After Fran left the Labor Business Roundtable, I needed to hire another hard worker, so I was pleased when Hon Samantha Rowe came to work, and I am pleased she is now contributing in the Legislative Council.

I have been very fortunate with my electorate staff. David Ashton, a friend and supporter, set up my office; a job he did well. My first full-time electorate officer was Geri Madden, and she stayed for over 10 years. Other staff have included Danae Synot, Jessie Yang and Grace Lamont, among others. Penny Bond worked with me in Cannington prior to the 2017 election, and then worked in my ministerial office. Now Penny is a lawyer and will probably end up as a High Court justice.

Joseph Stephens replaced Penny in my Cannington office. He is an incredible talent. He later came into my ministerial office as well. Joseph was replaced in my electorate office by Matt O’Keefe, who was stolen from me by the Minister for Housing, so I hired Matt’s brother, Luke. They job shared with Ashley Wynhorst, until Ash

went to work for Madeleine King. Now Shane Hill is with me. That steady and experienced hand is the former member for Geraldton.

Of course, Ron Sao worked for two years in my Cannington office. Ron grew up in the Cannington area, attending local schools, and his mum would bring him lunch in my EO most days. We all miss her after her passing. Ron first worked for me at the party office as a campaign organiser in 2004. Later he worked in the Gallop and Carpenter governments, before coming to Cannington in 2008. After working in federal and local governments, I was pleased he joined me in my ministerial office in 2017 as my deputy chief of staff. After the 2021 election, when Neil Roberts retired, he became my chief of staff. Ron is now WA Labor's candidate for Cannington for the 2025 election. I know he has the skills, education and experience to be a great member for Cannington. It makes it easier to retire from politics when I know that Ron Sao is ready to serve the Cannington community.

My seven years' service as a minister was a rare privilege. The workload is unbelievable, but it was made possible by my personal staff. They are all talented people: lawyers, journalists, clerical workers—even a diamond valuer! They are people like Mark Andrews, David Alexander and Hope Smith, to name a few. I thank them all for their efforts; I appreciate them all. Any achievements I had as minister were only because of the hard work of my personal staff. I particularly pay tribute to Vetti Kakulas and Belinda Linke, who both started with me in 2017 and were still there in 2023! I acknowledge the thousands of public sector workers in government departments and government trading enterprises who I worked with. Society can only function with a strong public sector, and I thank you for your service and support during my time as a minister.

I now come back to the Cannington community to talk a bit about the huge changes to the residents of Cannington over these 16 years. The 2007 census recorded about 36 000 residents in Cannington; the 2023 census recorded almost 55 000. In 2007, 35 per cent of residents were born overseas—in 2023 it was 51 per cent. In 2007, about 21 per cent of residents spoke a language other than English at home—now it is 45 per cent. Cannington is home to people from literally every corner of the world, with the top source countries being India, Malaysia, China, Philippines, Indonesia, New Zealand, Singapore, Burma and Pakistan, as well as many people from the African continent. They join previous waves of migrants from the United Kingdom and Italy.

Cannington is not only more ethnically diverse, but also more religious. About 50 per cent of Western Australians told the last census they had a religion; however, in Cannington, almost 63 per cent are religious. While Catholics are still the largest religion, 10 per cent of locals are Muslim, which is four times the state average. Hindus, Buddhists and Sikhs are just as common as Anglicans. This is all part of the dynamic change to the Cannington community. When I host—or used to host—the student leaders from local high schools such as Lynwood Senior High School, Sevenoaks College or St Norbert College at Parliament for lunch each year, those young leaders would tell me that multiculturalism is the best thing about their schools.

Cannington is now a community of first home buyers, parents with school-age children, skilled trade workers and people with technical degrees, and Cannington is Western Australia's most multicultural community. It strikes me that it is hard to recognise the huge shift in what it means to be Australian if you are not exposed to the changing Australia every day, like I am in Cannington. If you want a taste of the "real" Australia, do not go to the beach or to a farm—come out to Westfield Carousel! Multiculturalism is Australia's superpower. It allows us to be strong and vibrant. Yes, we need to manage the challenges of growth, but managing growth is a much better problem to have than managing economic and social stagnation.

I am very proud of the work I have done on behalf of the Cannington community. I am not going to list everything that I have helped with, but the current Metronet project to remove level crossings is clearly the highlight. In 100 years' time, this project will still be benefiting the Cannington community. My job as the member for Cannington has been to work for our community and help local people to find solutions to the problems in their lives. There is always more to be done, but that is the real work of politics.

The process of politics is under attack from many quarters. I think the breakdown of discussion and debate is a serious challenge for public policy. How can you debate a policy if everyone you talk to agrees with you? How can you have a debate if you label anyone who disagrees with you? It does not make sense. Once upon a time, we agreed the facts, then argued about the consequences. Now, we live in a post-truth world. How can complex policy issues be progressed if conspiracies and innuendo are given the same value as facts and analysis? What is the point of election policies if costings and timelines are considered just boring details? We can all do better.

To close, in the movie *Invictus*, Morgan Freeman playing the role of Nelson Mandela sends Matt Damon in the role of Francois Pienaar a copy of the poem *Invictus* to inspire him for the Rugby World Cup final. *Invictus* is the poem that Nelson Mandela had used for inspiration during his 27 years on Robben Island. This is not well known, but this was a Hollywood variation. Mandela in fact sent Pienaar *The man in the arena*, an extract from a speech by Teddy Roosevelt, the then US President, that was delivered at the Sorbonne in 1910. So, my last words to Parliament are from *The man in the arena* —

It is not the critic who counts; not the man who points out how the strong man stumbles, or where the doer of deeds could have done them better. The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood; who strives valiantly; who errs, who comes short again and again, because there is no effort without error and shortcoming; but who does actually strive to do the deeds; who knows great enthusiasms, the great devotions; who spends himself in a worthy cause; who at the best knows in the end the triumph of high achievement, and who at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly, so that his place shall never be with those cold and timid souls who neither know victory nor defeat.

I am honoured to have spent time in the arena.

[Applause.]