

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT - VALEDICTORY SPEECHES

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR MINSON (Greenough) [3.49 pm]: Before I moved to adjourn earlier today, I was referring to the way that, in my opinion, we had begun to tear down the leaders in our society to such an extent that we were about to reap a whirlwind. In my view that has already started.

Young people, particularly those under 25 years of age, do not have the respect for this place and its members that I had when I was a young man. I regret that, and I do not believe it has anything to do with the quality of the people in this place, nor do I think that members in the past were that much better. The media have now become so invasive and cynical that they have lost sight of the fact that people who are elected to this place do not have special qualities - they are ordinary people who for the most part do their best. Although the media expect some sort of superhuman performance, that is unlikely to occur. It is time for the media to try to deal with members of Parliament and the operations of Parliament in a more balanced way. There is a glimmer of hope, which was pointed out to me by the member for South Perth. He found that, while people will say that members of Parliament in general are ratbags and that the process is no good, they always seem to have respect for their local member. Since the member for South Perth said that to me, I have noticed it myself. People will refer to various members of Parliament in disparaging terms, but approve of their local member. That is a glimmer of hope. Unfortunately we are now at the point at which the destructive cycle has begun, and I am desperately worried that it is about to become self-perpetuating. Members of Parliament must do the best they can, but they will not be able to turn the situation around unless they have some sort of balanced cooperation from the mass media. If we continue to tear down our leaders in the way that we have, we will reap the whirlwind.

I am proud of the things I have been associated with in my time in Parliament. I like especially to look back on my contribution as Minister for Disability Services. Disability services have been evolving in Western Australia for some time. They probably began, in the modern sense, in the early 1950s, with the formation of the Slow Learning Children's Group. Various organisations have sprung from that group, and some have amalgamated. When I became minister, it was represented to me that it was time the field came together under a single unifying force, and to take control of itself. The Government formed the Disability Services Commission. Many felt that body would not achieve its aim, that those with physical problems would suffer in some way, or would dominate, and those with developmental and learning problems would similarly either be ignored or take over. I like to think that the Disability Services Commission has been a success. The board has always been balanced, and I trust it will continue to be so. I look upon that period, and the formation of the Disability Services Commission, with some satisfaction. The problems certainly have not all been solved. With disability services, the more help that is put on the table, along with dollars, so the need increases, almost exponentially. That is what happened when the five-year plan was produced. We found the need was much greater than we thought, and the current minister has produced another five-year plan, which has brought more people out of the woodwork.

Mr Omodei: It is a great credit to the member for Greenough that the five-year business plan was developed when he was Minister for Disability Services.

MR MINSON: I thank the member for Warren-Blackwood for that remark, but he knows as well as I do that I asked for the five-year plan because I could not get all the money in one lump! We had to have the money. A lot of other people were involved in developing that plan. To that end I thank Ray Young and Barry MacKinnon for their work. The use of local area coordinators in rural areas across the State has helped enormously to extend services to non-metropolitan areas. That is something in which I am very pleased to have been instrumental. A lot of people with a lot of knowledge have committed their lives to this area. They are the people with the ideas, and who work up the programs. Nevertheless, I recall with some satisfaction that I listened to them and took their requests to Cabinet. Similarly, the post-school options program, while very expensive, is necessary.

Before I left the Ministry of Justice, I started a program of restorative justice. The early fruit of that was the system of mobile work camps, which I started to work up as a policy in conjunction with Hon Peter Foss. It is a pity that so many people run private agendas on environment issues. It is an area that affects us all, but never have so many people told so many fibs to one minister. Since this is a valedictory speech, the less I say about that area and some of the people involved in it, the better.

Outside of the parliamentary sphere, but touching on it, I look back with some satisfaction at helping a few people form the parliamentary prayer group. This led to the Governor's prayer breakfast, which now has attendances of 500 to 600 people, and has become a significant event in the Western Australian calendar.

I will make some general comments about this Parliament. I say with some regret, that when I sit in here I often wonder what percentage of what is said in here is really for the benefit of Western Australia. The challenge is before us to try to raise the standard. Earlier it was said that the state of this House is such that it should be rebuilt. When it is rebuilt, I would like to see the structure of the Chamber completely changed. I once visited the Iowa Legislature, in Des Moines. In that Chamber, the seats faced the Chair, and members who wish to speak must walk out to the Table and address the assembly. The arrangement in this Chamber is silly. It is extremely adversarial - it cannot be anything else - and if any improvement in parliamentary behaviour is to occur, with speeches delivered without excessive interjection, the physical structure of the Parliament must be altered, as well as the standing orders.

I do not leave the Parliament with any regrets whatsoever. I have enjoyed my time here. In particular, I value the friendships I have made here. If we were truthful we would say that we make many acquaintances here, but not a lot of friends. I will keep in touch with a number of people here, and I value those friendships very much. I look back on the opportunity to serve in this Parliament with great fondness, and I thank members.

The honour that is bestowed upon a person chosen to represent people in the supreme Legislature of the State should never be underestimated. That is why it is such a shame that the standing of this place has become diminished of late. I look forward to future years, when perhaps we can see a change in that.

One of the things that I will not miss too much is question time. We had a pretty good example of that today. I will not particularly miss party meetings on Tuesday morning, although I know that people on both sides of the Chamber cannot understand why I hold that view. I will look forward to a more predictable life. Perhaps my hours will return to what they used to be, when I could go to bed and get up with the chooks, instead of going to bed at odd hours and getting up somewhere between 4.00 am and 7.00 am.

I promise that I will not become a member of "the older I get the better I was club". Some people come to this place at certain times for meals. As a new member I was asked to join them for lunch - no names! When I joined them for lunch I thought those guys must have been fantastic in their day, because I heard about all the things that they did. I then read some of their speeches in *Hansard*. I could not find any reference to one of those people, who was supposed to have done all these things, for a year. I labelled them after a bumper sticker that I read in Subiaco one day: The older I get the better I was. I undertake to the House that I will never become a member of that club.

I want to give thanks to all of the people who have worked with me over the years, particularly Kaye Marsh who was my electorate secretary for six or seven years and was the electorate secretary for Reg Tubby for about eight years before that. Following her, Margaret Rowe has been my electorate secretary. Having two electorate secretaries in 12 years indicates that I had two excellent people. I thank them for their dedication.

Like other members, I particularly want to thank my family - my wife Marg, and my children Judy, Suzy, Scott and Ben. Our families always bear the brunt of politics when it gets tough.

I thank the people of Greenough, because without their support I would not be here. I also thank the Liberal Party. I am conscious of the fact that, while one might disagree with some things that happen within a party, which is inevitable, I would not be afforded the privilege of being here had it not given me its patronage. People who belong to parties and arrived here through a party machine will concede that fact.

I thank those people who worked with me when I was a minister, in particular my principal private secretaries. Of all the people in the public sector, they probably work the hardest. Being a minister's principal private secretary or chief executive, as they are now known, means they are considered to be tainted, and when there is a change of government they have to go somewhere else in the Public Service. Those people make a sacrifice.

I did intend to do four terms here, which would have been 16 years. However, I had to be honest with myself and say that there was no point in staying. I have lost that fire in the belly, and it is time for someone else to occupy the seat of Greenough. I have enjoyed my time here. It has been a great privilege, and I wish everyone the best of luck.

[Applause.]

MS WARNOCK (Perth) [4.04 pm]: I take this final opportunity in this place today to make some remarks about my time here, and about the fact that those eight years have been in opposition. Necessarily, because those years have been in opposition, my perspective is somewhat different from those who have had the opportunity to be in government.

I recently re-read my first speech. I have a fair few copies left if members would like me to send them one! I re-read the rather inappropriately named "maiden speech" - in my case certainly - just to see whether I had managed to achieve any of the aims that I set myself in 1993. As I said, my career in politics has been somewhat coloured by the fact that it has all been in opposition. However, when I look at those aims: To vigorously represent the

people in the Perth electorate; to support the advancement of the rights of women and minorities; to fight racism and all forms of discrimination; and to foster the lively development of the inner city of Perth, among other things, I see that I at least spent a lot of time and energy on those issues.

Mr Trenorden: You got a tick on all four.

Ms WARNOCK: I thank the member for Avon; I appreciate that. I hope I can be here for the member's final speech, so I can do the same thing.

Mr Trenorden: You made me an honorary feminist.

Ms Warnock: I did, absolutely. "Real men do eat quiche", and I want the member for Avon to remember that!

I spoke often about racism and the republic, about the status and rights of women and the gay and lesbian community, about affordable housing for the homeless, about crime and safety in the city, about the condition of the older schools in the Perth electorate, and about the problems of those Northbridge and near-city residents and businesses affected by the tunnel construction. I spoke enthusiastically about City Farm and preserving old-growth forests, and about the Labor Government-instigated East Perth redevelopment - just to remind members opposite about that. I also spoke frequently about the importance of safety on our roads. British child migrants - that other group of "stolen children" - claimed my attention, as did the problems of the mentally ill, the problems of Aborigines in the city, the need for an Asian police squad, and those new prostitution laws.

Recent newspaper and television coverage shows that the present Government, despite a great deal of tough talk before the last two elections, still has not succeeded in making serious inroads into inner city street crime, drug addiction among the young, and antisocial behaviour on our train system. These are all subjects which I have canvassed in this Parliament, along with a lot of other people. We still have a big problem with housing the homeless, and there is not nearly enough affordable housing for lower income people in the inner city. Women in this State are not yet sufficiently represented on high profile boards and in Parliament. Many still suffer from domestic violence, and despite the efforts of the minister today to convince us otherwise, it is still true that Western Australian women are the worst paid in Australia. The gender wage gap is 18.5 per cent here as opposed to 10.5 per cent in the rest of Australia. I call on what I hope will be a future Labor Government under the present opposition leader, my friend and colleague, to take up the baton on those issues.

When I first came to this place I spoke of joining the Australian Labor Party because I was interested in reform and social justice. The party's long history of working to improve the conditions for ordinary men and women in our community was my inspiration for becoming first an activist and eventually a member of Parliament. However, since finding myself in opposition I discovered that progress was pretty slow on the "wrong" side of the Chamber. Ironically, one of the few advances I was able to effect was not supported by every member of the Opposition. I speak of the abortion legislation in 1998 which gave Western Australian women the right to safe, legal termination. The passing of that hotly debated and controversial legislation gave me a great deal of satisfaction - a relatively rare occurrence in Parliament if one is in opposition. That debate also gave me an unusual opportunity, which I know many of my colleagues have shared, since it was a conscience vote, to work closely with the members of the Government who shared the same views. It was a rewarding and interesting experience which caused me a great deal of respect for some government members for their integrity and moral courage in a pretty hostile and unpleasant environment. I do not think anybody outside Parliament could possibly understand the personal stress placed on all members by that very emotional debate. As my colleague the member for Greenough said, he would like to see more respect for members of Parliament, as indeed I would. I believe that it is because most people do not understand very much about the nature of the work we do that perhaps people have so little respect for members of Parliament - a fact that I regret a great deal and that I would like very much to see changed.

Like many members, I came here hoping to be an instigator of reform and change. As I have said, I found that relatively difficult from the opposition benches. For example, despite the Labor Party's efforts in 1996, and subsequent attempts by the Australian Democrats with Labor and the Greens (WA), to change anti-gay laws, Western Australia still has the worst laws dealing with homosexuality in Australia. People should not be able to discriminate against others because of their sexuality any more than they should be able to discriminate because of a person's race, sex, age or disability. These changes will have to wait for a more sympathetic Government, and I hope that will be soon.

On the subject of reform and how difficult that can be, I will quote from a publication on the history of England written by Paul Johnson - an interesting person perhaps for someone on this side of the House to quote. Paul Johnson was once editor of the *New Statesman*, and, like Paddy McGuinness, he crossed the divide and now 30 years later is a stalwart of the extreme right in Britain. Johnson's 1972 book *The Offshore Islanders* details how shockingly long it took to abolish the abuse of children as chimneysweeps in Britain, telling the remarkable story of the Earl of Shaftesbury, a reformer who spent his long parliamentary career trying to change people's

conditions for the better. The book details how it took 102 years - I repeat, 102 years - to get legislation forbidding the abuse of children as chimneysweeps. That must have been extremely disappointing for the Earl of Shaftesbury. I will quote briefly from Johnson's book. It is a fascinating and well-written history. It states -

... Shaftesbury succeeded in placing on the statute book an astonishing variety of progressive laws, from his great Factory Act to the Act for the Protection of Merchant Seamen. But he died almost in despair: 'I cannot bear to leave the world,' he wrote at 84, 'with all the misery in it.'

The book then details the extraordinary collection of people who turned up at his funeral, including the Anti-Vivisection Society, the Association of Bradford Factory Workers, London Flower Girls, Unemployed Cab Drivers, Unemancipated Slaves, Poor Curates, Sons of Poor Clergymen, and so it goes on. He was extraordinarily well respected for his efforts.

I will briefly detail the story of the infant chimneysweeps, or climbing boys as they were called, as an extraordinary example of how long change can sometimes take. Johnson says -

These boys formed a small group, perhaps never more than 10,000, but they were typical of many forgotten and brutalised classes, too weak to organise themselves, and therefore wholly dependent on philanthropic champions.

The Earl of Shaftesbury was one of those champions. It continues -

They were recruited from workhouses, from the age of four up, ... they could be imprisoned, and flogged, ...

Of course, it must be remembered that children not only swept the chimneys but also were used to put out fires. Often they were forced up by the use of long sticks and by applying wisps of flaming straw to their feet.

As far back as 1760, two Sunday school teachers tried to get this changed. Someone published a detailed account of it. An Act was passed in 1788, but it was totally ineffective. Subsequently, in 1804, 1807, 1808 and 1809, Bills came in and were thrown out, and so it went on for almost the rest of that entire century. The book continues -

In 1875, following the death of a boy aged 14, Shaftesbury at last secured a conviction for manslaughter against a master sweep. The sentence was only six months, but the case caught the eye of *The Times*, and in the ensuing agitation Shaftesbury finally carried a draconian bill through what he called a 'very inattentive' Parliament. It had taken precisely 102 years to secure this elementary act of justice to defenceless children.

I thought it was worth relaying that to the House to indicate how very long it can sometimes take to change things. When people approach a member, as lobbyists do all the time about any number of subjects under the sun, to ask when he or she will do something about such and such, it is as well to remember that sometimes it takes a long time to change things. One sometimes must convince one's own party; one sometimes must convince one's fellow parliamentarians; and one sometimes must also convince the community. It is well worth remembering that it took 100 years for America to give the vote to women, and that was about as long as it took to abolish slavery there as well.

I turn now to mention those people to whom I owe thanks for my being here in this House, because, as is the situation with the rest of my colleagues, a great many people contributed to my ability to be here. My first thanks are due to the people of Perth, who have twice voted for me as their representative in this State Parliament. I regard this as an enormous honour and privilege, and I thank the people for it. They will certainly have first call on my time right up to 12 midnight on election day - I used to say six o'clock on election day, but I have found that it is 12 midnight on election day. Therefore, those people have absolute first call on my time until then, whenever that may be.

Secondly, I must thank all those good people from a wide variety of backgrounds - some old friends, some new - who helped me to get here. I thank them most sincerely for their hard work on my behalf. I thank particularly some people who made a special contribution to my ability to be here. The late Jack Marks was one of them. He was a union stalwart, wit, rabblouser and first Mayor of Vincent, who, with John Cowdell - he is one of my colleagues here in the Parliament now - first approached me about standing for the seat of Perth. I thank the late Ron Barry, journalist, speech writer and adviser to many Labor politicians. He was a good friend and wise counsel. I thank the late Dick Keegan, a long-time Labor supporter who worked tirelessly in all weather, as I recall very vividly, for my first, very tough campaign.

Any campaign team, particularly one in a marginal seat, has a great many people on board. Some, by reason of their business or public positions, would not appreciate being mentioned in a political context. I am sorry about that, because I would like to mention a large number of people. I can say that I owe a great deal to the advice and support of Stephen Smith, my federal colleague and long-time adviser and supporter in the political field,

and to Mark Cuomo, who managed my first campaign and who was as relieved as I was when I found out five days after the election that I had succeeded in getting across the line by 106 votes, redefining the meaning of marginal. I also owe something to Tony Henry, who I believe is out of the country these days, in Ireland. I remember the part he played. He was one of the toughest number crunchers anybody could meet. I owe a great deal to Michael Beahan, and to the member for Eyre and his wife, Lesley, who hosted early support functions for me. I owe a great deal to Joe Berinson, a former member whose first successful campaign for the federal seat of Perth I worked on in 1969. I thank Fred Ward, Ross Callaway, Pam Sazonov, the Li Castro family, Bill and Gaye Van Der Helm, Di Green, Karen Davidson, Thelma Loudon, Dean Elek-Roser, Terry Maller, Ruth Greble, Margaret Clements, Barbara Buick, Queenie Fogarty, the Mayor of the Town of Vincent, John Hyde, who I hope will be my successor in the seat of Perth, and Wendy and Ian Silver. They are among many people from whom I have had support and whom I thank here today.

I have had very strong support from the gay and lesbian community, in particular Gavin McGuren, Samantha Dowling, Holly Wood and Ivan King, and all those involved in the "Diana Doorknocks" in the recent Pride Parade. I thank them all. Not all of them got their hair right, and they wore white shoes, but never mind about that. It was wonderful. I enjoyed that tribute a great deal, and I thank them very much for their continuing support.

Having been an activist for women for most of my adult life, I have also had strong and continuing support from countless women activists, both young and old. Being on the barricades together has a way of bonding people for life, and I thank you, sisters.

I have also greatly appreciated the warmth and support of many members of the Jewish, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese, Italian, Macedonian and French communities.

I must also thank my present Labor colleagues who elected me as Opposition Deputy Whip even before the results were confirmed in February 1993, and later as Whip and President of the State Parliamentary Labor Party. I must also thank former state and federal members Wendy Fatin, Judyth Watson, Kay Hallahan, Yvonne Henderson and Pat Giles for their advice and support.

I also thank the many and interestingly diverse Labor Party branches in Perth for their support. It has been an interesting ride. Notwithstanding the fact that I share one branch with the member for Midland, I have always greatly appreciated the warmth of those members. I am still waiting for one of the branches to invite me to a meeting, but one can always hope for change. I have a great number of branches in my electorate!

It was a great privilege indeed to serve on committees such as the Select Committee on Road Safety and as Acting Speaker.

My only real regret is not to have been in government - obviously every politician has that aim - and also not to have had the chance to contest a ballot and perhaps to become the first woman Speaker in this place. Those disappointments are tempered by the rich and varied experience provided as a member of Parliament. The lives that one is able to change for the better and even those adrenalin-charged pleasures of life as a candidate are part and parcel of the rich tapestry of this arena. I am sure no member will disagree that a preselection contest is an experience one never forgets, even if one would never seek to repeat it!

I thank you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Masters), and the Speaker for the fairness and judgment that has been displayed. I thank the very wise Clerks for their excellent advice.

I thank the skilled Hansard reporters for their remarkable ability to reconstruct one's failing grammar. More than one member has had good reason to thank the Hansard reporters for their amazing ability to discern what we really wanted to say as opposed to what we did say.

I thank the education officers for their great skill and the wonderful job they do with young and elderly people visiting this place. They play an important role in acquainting the younger generation with the whys and wherefores of politics. I missed that as a young person; there was no civics education when I was at school. It is a very valuable service, and we hope to see many of those young people in this place as members.

I thank the switchboard operators for the marvellous, diligent job they do. I also thank the library staff; the security staff for keeping us safe; the chamber staff for the marvellous work they do and for making this such a pleasant place in which to work; and, of course, the catering staff for their hard work and unfailing good humour. Despite the exigencies of the lack of airconditioning in this place, it has been an extraordinarily pleasant place in which to work.

Finally, I thank some people who have been especially important to my work as a politician. My electorate officer, June Belton, is in the gallery today - as she was on day one. I think she was almost as relieved as I was when I managed to scrape over the line. I also thank my researcher Ross Belton. No-one could have been more

loyal and hardworking than those two people. I believe I owe the increase in my majority from zero to 7 per cent largely to them. I will always be grateful for their remarkable work for me and for the constituents of Perth.

My final thanks go to the person who encouraged and supported me from the first moment I entered the gladiatorial arena of politics. When he attended his first party meeting - a preselection meeting - that was his first impression. Of course, I am speaking about my husband, Bill Warnock. He is my bodyguard, my driver, my constant companion, my co-campaigner, my good adviser, and all the other things one's partner might be. He has always been there for me. I thank him for that strength and constancy. It is always appreciated. Here with my husband today is a very good, longstanding friend, Terry Owen. Like many of my close friends, she has been part of my support team for the past nine years.

Mr Acting Speaker, I wish you and all members and staff in this place a very happy festive season and very good health in the year 2001, whatever else that year might bring to all of us in this Chamber. I thank everyone.

[Applause.]

Question put and passed.