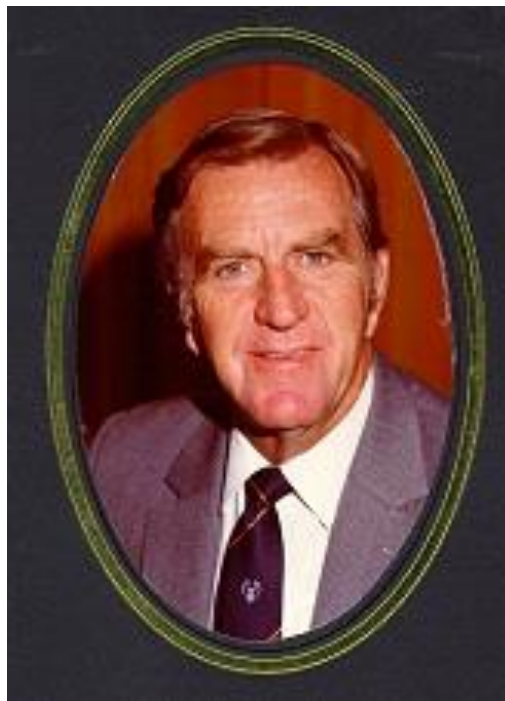




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON RAYMOND O'CONNOR, MLA
(Member for Mount Lawley)

Legislative Assembly

Members of Parliament: Retirement — Motion

Thursday, 23 August 1984

Legislative Assembly

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MR O'CONNOR (Mt. Lawley) [4.55 p.m.]: I thank the Acting Premier, the Leader of the Opposition, the member for Katanning-Roe, and Don Taylor for the comments they have made about me.

I have been in Parliament for 26 years and now realising that this is my last speech and that I am leaving here today, I feel as though I am leaving home. This has been my second home, as it has been for many members for a long time.

I do not think the average individual outside Parliament understands the difficulties and traumas faced by members of Parliament and the strains their occupation places on their wives and families.

I shall make a couple of comments on that aspect before I turn to some other issues. I have been a member for 26 years and I have handled 18 portfolios. I assure each and every member that, while some backbenchers may think they work hard, if they become Ministers they will find they will need twice the time to do their work and if they become Deputy Premier or Premier, they will have to find a little extra time again.

I would rise at 5.15 am and leave home at 6.30 or 7.30 am. On many occasions, I have gone out to get the newspaper at 6.00 am only to find two or three cars out there with people waiting to see me before I went to work. They knew the time that I left for the office.

The family of a member of Parliament must frequently sit at home on their own at night, not only because members or Ministers must sit in Parliament two or three nights a week, but also because functions must be attended frequently, often three or four nights a week. Therefore, one's wife and family are often left at home on their own.

On occasions when I have been at home and my children have been living at home also, I have not seen them for a fortnight, because I have gone to work before they have risen in the morning and they have been in bed by the time I have returned home at night.

The general public do not realise the strain and pressure placed on the families of members of Parliament because of the nature of this job. Some people may ask, "If you had your life over again, would you do the same thing?" I guess I would, because I have enjoyed being a member of Parliament. I treat any job as a hobby and I have always worked as hard as I can and I have enjoyed what I have done. Had I not, I would not have done it. I would have got out.

On many occasions a member of Parliament attains a great deal of satisfaction from his work, but there are a great number of frustrations, and each and every one of us has experienced those.

Members referred to the sitting times of the House. The improved sitting hours indicate what can be achieved by co-operation between the Government and the Opposition. I know you, Sir, will forgive me if I breach the Standing Orders of the House by mentioning a couple of people by name rather than by their electorates. A couple of years ago it was recognised that the sitting hours were silly and something should be done about them. Colin Jamieson, Jim Clarko, Terry Burke and I got together and worked out a solution. Gradually we instituted those procedures which have resulted in much more sane and sensible sitting hours than those which previously existed.

I appreciated the work Don Taylor did in Parliament. He was a tremendously hard working member of Parliament. If a member entered the Chamber and could not see him, he had only to look behind the huge pile of papers on his desk and there he would be. Don Taylor always brought a great load of papers into the Parliament and he would work on them throughout the proceedings of the House. He is a very approachable person who is always prepared to make himself available to talk to those who need to see him.

Don Taylor is extremely courteous, and, as has been explained here today, he is a perfect gentleman. Had he been a Premier of the State he would have made a good one. He would have worked well for everyone. He is that sort of man, and I appreciated the way in which he worked.

I recollect some rather humorous occasions in Parliament and you, Sir, will forgive me if I comment on some of them. I recall the time that Arthur Moir retired because he was too old and Tom Hartrey, who was a year older, took his place! Arthur Moir was not very amused at the time.

I recall many of the quips which were made in the House. Tom Hartrey was one of the funniest men and one of the toughest debaters I have ever seen in the House. He was always very generous. He might have been slightly advanced in years, but he had a great deal of ability which he displayed in this House.

Another fellow who had a good sense of humor and who knew how to work was Arthur Bickerton. One day he was sitting in the House about where the member for Floreat is sitting at the moment.

The member for Kimberley at the time, Jack Rhatigan, was speaking on a Bill for the sterilisation of Alsatian dogs, and he was really going crook about them, telling the Chamber how bad they were, how difficult they were to handle, how they bit people, and how the Bill should go through so that they should all be sterilised. Arthur Bickerton jumped to his feet and took a point of order, saying, "Excuse me, Mr Speaker, I believe we are attacking this problem from the wrong end. I am sure we should be extracting their teeth!" These are the sorts of things many of us have heard over a time and I am sure we could compile a book of some of the comments made in this Chamber.

I would like to make some comments on three or four points, and I will do so without wanting to be critical. What I say is meant to be constructive.

The issue of Aboriginal land rights must be defused, because if it is not, it will pit people of this State against one another and bring discredit on us overseas. I believe the issue can be and must be defused, and I hope members on both sides of the House will work together in that vein.

Members: Hear, hear!

Mr O'CONNOR: We have a great deal to do in the area of employment. It is upsetting to see young people today who feel they have no future at all. Many of them see little hope for themselves when they leave school, and if they go onto the dole for three or four years, they might find themselves in a position where they do not look for much more than that. I know the answers to this problem are difficult to find, but all those members who remain in Parliament after I have left today must look at just what they can do to overcome the problem.

I did make a suggestion to the Fraser Government—which suggestion I think was eventually thrown out—which was that it should provide the unemployed with a couple of days' work a week to give them something other than just the dole. It would give them something to do and they could at least get some idea of what work was all about. We could arrange for them to clean road verges for local authorities or we could perhaps establish a 10 000-acre market garden on which they could grow the sort of produce which could be exported to those countries which need that food. We must look to help these people so that they feel there is something for them in the future, so that they can see a light at the end of the tunnel; unfortunately, many of them do not believe there is such a light.

The America's Cup challenge series coming up is something in respect of which I do not believe a lot of people understand just what is involved and what we should do with it. I have visited the Eastern States and other countries recently, and I realised that Western Australia is gaining a tremendous amount of recognition, thanks to the magnificent efforts of Alan Bond and his crew in winning the America's Cup. I visited the United Kingdom and Europe and found that many people wanted to set up an "Australia Day" in their hotels and other venues so that they could show some of the people there what Western Australia was all about and could try to encourage people to take a charter plane out here in 1987 for that cup series. World attention has been focused on WA and we must obtain the maximum benefit from it.

We must be sure to get value from this attention, because this may be a once-only opportunity to show the people of the world that Western Australia not only is capable of winning the America's Cup, but also is capable of giving everyone who comes here an example of the good life and times we are able to provide.

Many people may not realise that 500 elimination races will precede the actual America's Cup challenge and that those elimination races will be conducted over four months. Unless we prepare, I do not believe we will be able to keep people interested in WA for all 500 of those four-hour races. I suggest we do more than provide an America's Cup challenge, and I say this bearing in mind that the Government has asked the Opposition to suggest things we consider might be able to help make a success of the challenge series.

My first suggestion is that we should commission a 30-minute film showing beautiful Perth, Rottnest and our coastline, and a bit of "Up there, Cazaly". It should include scenes of fishing at Exmouth, a rodeo and other sports, and it could finish with perhaps 10 minutes of the final race of last year's America's Cup series. Of course, it would need to be professionally prepared and it could be shown on international and interstate flights. It could also be sent to those venues overseas which would like to set up an "Australia Day" in order to entice people to Western Australia.

We ought to set up something else to complement the America's Cup elimination races which, as I say, will be held over about four months. We should put on an "America's Cup Sporting Challenge", a mini Olympics which would run during the time of the elimination heats. It would be a real sporting challenge. I believe we in Western Australia can do it, and do it well. In Western Australia we have 331 000 people registered with sporting bodies. We could get all these people working for us, and we could get the community working for us, to make sure that those four months were the best that we have ever had in this State.

This “America’s Cup Sporting Challenge” could incorporate such things as a 1 000-kilometre foot race, in which we should try to get people like Cliff Young and Joe Record to participate. It could be run down through Rockingham, Mandurah, to Bunbury and back up through Katanning to Perth. We could also hold a 1 000-kilometre cycle race that could be routed through another area—perhaps up to Geraldton—so that as many of our people as possible can participate in these events. We could hold a “de Castella Marathon” and invite him and Lopes to participate. I am talking big because we will need to retain people’s interest in the State over those four months. We want people to return to their homes full of praise for Western Australia. If we leave everything just to those 500-odd elimination races and the finals, the whole thing could fall down somewhat. We could organise an around-Australia yacht race. We could have an interstate cricket competition and an international tennis tournament. We could have a superstars football round robin competition and invite Australia’s two best teams to play a best-of-five series.

Mr Clarko: Who would play Claremont?

Mr O’CONNOR: I know who would barrack for them. If we got the two best teams in Australia, and selected the best from Western Australia, Tasmania, Victoria, and South Australia, we could have them play a five-game knockout competition over a week or 10 days. People from outside Western Australia see the best in Australia. We could do the same with soccer and formula 1 racing. We could hold a special racing, trotting, and greyhound cup; in fact, I believe that may be organised already. We could hold an athletics meeting, and with elimination contests in each of our major country centres, country people would have a chance to see our sporting stars. The finals could be held in the metropolitan area. We could involve the Government, local authorities, sporting bodies, and various other organisations. We could make use of people who had been to the Olympics—the officials, the athletes, and the sports writers.

We should take advantage of the opportunity we have before us. This opportunity has been brought about by the wonderful efforts of Alan Bond and his crew. I am not detracting from what they will do for Western Australia when I say that the 500-odd elimination races might not provide the attraction that people want. They ought to be complemented with events such as those which I have suggested.

We should also provide cultural activities and perhaps have a country and western show and invite Kenny Rogers, Dolly Parton, and many others. We have our own Ernie Bridge. The competition could finish with awards for the best international performer and the best Western Australian performer. Everything could culminate with a march through Perth on the Sunday after the final cup race was held with the presentation of awards on the Esplanade so that many people could see it. All this could help tremendously the tourism industry in Western Australia and it would help to bring back the people who visit here.

Finally, I would like to thank members from both sides of the House for the friendship and courtesy which they have extended to me over a long time. I met Don Taylor back in 1943. I will be leaving an old rucking mate in you, Mr Speaker, and I recall that we played in a good side some time back. I appreciated your friendship then, and I have appreciated the way you have filled your duties as Speaker of the House.

I would like to thank the electors who have kept me in Parliament for something like 25½ years. Some people may say that I ought to thank them. I do, and I appreciate their confidence in me over the years.

I say, “Thank you” to the media for the efforts of the reporters and their support in many ways. There have been times when I felt I could write an article, from my point of view, a little better, but I understand reporters have their jobs to do.

The staff of Parliament House are marvellous. I thank them for the courtesy they have extended to me; it has been second to none anywhere. I also offer my sincere appreciation to the staff who assisted me when I worked as a Minister, as Premier, as Deputy Premier, and as Leader of the Opposition. The loyalty of the staff and their efforts were appreciated very much. I say, “Thank you all”.

In conclusion I say that I hope that what I have said will be considered as constructive. I certainly hope this House continues in a vein whereby parties in the future will work together closely in an effort to achieve what we all want for this country. We all want to achieve the same sort of things: more affluence and more assistance for the needy in the community.

I wish to thank my family, my wife Vesna, and my children. They have had to suffer for many years because of the amount of time I have been away. I know the wives of Ministers and members suffer in that respect also.

To all members I say, “May you always put the interests of the community above your own”, as I know you have done in the past.

[Applause.]