



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Liz Behjat, MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council
Address-in-Reply
Wednesday, 17 May 2017

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ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

Resumed from 16 May on the following motion moved by Hon Sally Talbot —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our Most Gracious Sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

HON LIZ BEHJAT (North Metropolitan) [3.46 pm]: I am another feather duster; I would like to be a nice ostrich boa, actually!

I rise this afternoon to fulfil a duty that I do not yet want to carry out, but circumstances are such that here I am. I am delivering my valedictory speech, and it is an understatement to say that I am reluctant to do so. It gives me no pleasure to be standing here today, summarising what I think has been my contribution to the workings of this chamber and to the political landscape of Western Australia over the past eight years. It is, however, important that those of us who have had the privilege of being a member of Parliament should be given the opportunity, if circumstances allow, to place on the record what we believe our highlights and achievements have been, and to give thanks to those that have helped us on our journey. I was going to take this opportunity to make a speech without using detailed notes and speak from my heart with a few dot points, but today I must rely on more detailed notes and not speak off the cuff, because emotions run high and I do not want to leave out anything important.

However, even though I am not delivering this speech off by heart, I can assure you that all my comments are heartfelt and that whilst I am deeply disappointed, I am not heartbroken. I am made of sterner stuff than those who engineered my demise, but I do not want to forget the most important points and highlights, so forgive me if I breach standing orders and refer to these notes from time to time.

It was my ambition to serve one more term as a member for North Metropolitan Region and then retire at a time of my choosing, but unfortunately that is not going to happen. I am not leaving you this week because of the defeat at the recent election of a government I was proud to be a member of, but because of a brutal, factional preselection battle in which I fell victim to a ruthless group of people—a group of people who had determined that I was not the sort of person that their faction of the Liberal Party wanted to represent them in this chamber. If you want to know more about the events of the preselection battle, I humbly suggest you take it up with my successor in the future. I do not propose to waste anymore of my time talking about people who are not worthy of my attention, but I did want to put it on the official record that my departure has nothing to do with the democratic election process of this state, and I am a reluctant retiree from this institution—for the moment.

On Tuesday, 16 June 2009 I gave my first speech to this chamber, and today, Wednesday, 17 May 2017—232 speeches later—I am giving my last. In that first speech, I said the usual things and thanked previous members of North Metropolitan Region for the wonderful contributions they had made, told you a little of my family background and earlier working life, and spoke about female representation in the Legislative Council, which unfortunately is going down, down and down. We have to do something about that, particularly on this side of the chamber.

I spoke about the virtues and values of our society and the importance of educators and the role they play in the lives of our most precious commodities—our children. I also gave my perspective, as a migrant married to a migrant, of the wonderful contribution that migrants and ethnic communities make to the rich tapestry that makes up our society here in WA and, indeed, throughout Australia. I gave members an insight into my experiences living in the Pilbara, as I did for 18 months, and how my experiences there would no doubt help me when making decisions on legislation and other matters that directly affected those who choose to live in the rural and remote regions of our wonderful state. Penultimate to thanking all those who played a role in helping

me to achieve my long-held ambition to become a member of Parliament, especially my family, friends and colleagues, I commented on how excited I was about the plans that the Liberals had taken to the 2008 election to improve areas in North Metropolitan Region, the development of what is now Elizabeth Quay, the sinking of the city rail line to create the city Northbridge Link and the redevelopment of the Scarborough foreshore, all projects that are now completed or will soon be nearing completion.

I want to quote some exact words from the final paragraphs of my maiden speech because I think they affirm what small contribution I have made during those eight years. On that day, I said the following —

I do not bring to this place any fantastic blueprints, plans or grand schemes for the future of Western Australia. I will leave that part to others more qualified than me. However, I am certain that under the guidance and with the foresight and planning of our current Liberal government, I will be able to contribute to the groundwork that will see some wonderful advancements and developments made to both the physical and social infrastructure that will improve our already great way of life.

Looking back on the eight years I have been here, I believe that I have always kept foremost in my mind, when making members' statements, contributing to second reading debates or undertaking inquiries and hearings through our committee process that everything we do should be for the benefit and advancement of the people of Western Australia.

My contribution to the proceedings of this chamber started with the tabling of a petition asking for a pedestrian crossing to be installed on Scarborough Beach Road near Gildercliffe Street, Scarborough, a project I am happy to say was completed a few years ago so that the residents of the area can now safely cross the road, which is a very busy road indeed.

Soon after I moved a motion in the house urging the then opposition, now government, to reconsider its decision not to support an extension of retail trading hours and give the people of WA what they wanted—more hours during the seven days of the week to shop when they wanted. Again, I am very pleased to say that over the past eight years we have indeed seen sweeping changes to those trading hours and WA has finally caught up with the rest of Australia and we can just about shop whenever we want to. I would like to see further deregulation in this area but for now I am happy to have played a small part in the current retail landscape.

In 2010, I think I made what is my most significant contribution to second reading debates in this house and that was to join with a majority of members of the chamber to speak out and vote against the Voluntary Euthanasia Bill, a private member's bill introduced by Hon Robin Chapple. It was a highly emotionally charged time in the chamber, but the debate was carried out with a maturity and respect sometimes not seen during second reading debates in this place and I was proud to make my contribution to the negative arguments. I was happy when the legislation was defeated because I believed then, as I do now, that no person has the right to end the life of another in the manner prescribed in euthanasia legislation. As we have seen throughout the world, the misuse of this type of legislation in other jurisdictions demonstrates that we are not mature enough as a society to ensure that proper safeguards are in place and that only those who have absolutely no hope of recovery have access to that final solution. I note that there may be another move afoot to introduce euthanasia legislation in this Parliament and I urge all of you who will be charged with the decision-making process to look back on the contributions that were made in 2010 and bundle them together with your own current opposition and do not place in the hands of legislators and the medical profession the role that must remain in the hands of our creator.

What we must strive to achieve is to improve and adequately fund the best possible system of palliative care to ensure that those who are nearing the end of their lives are doing so with dignity and comfort in the loving company of their friends and family until the very end. I know my good friend and colleague Hon Nick Goiran, through the work of the Parliamentary Friends of Palliative Care, of which I was a member and hope to remain involved in, will continue to fight to ensure that euthanasia is never legalised in Western Australia.

There are, of course, a few more occasions when I made what I think were valuable contributions to second reading debates but time does not permit me to elaborate on these in today's contribution.

What I would like to speak about next is the importance of the committee work that is done both here in the chamber and in the formal standing and select committees and it is my fervent hope that this system will remain strong and be very well utilised in this coming and future Parliaments. I think given what the make-up will be of the fortieth Parliament in the Legislative Council, the Legislation Committee will be kept very busy scrutinising legislation that will no doubt be referred to it in large numbers. I wish the new members on that committee good luck and best wishes.

In my first term I served on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations and the Standing Committee on Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review, and in this current term I was privileged to serve as the Chair of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. I also served on the Parliamentary Services Committee, or as it is more colloquially known, the "Tea and Cakes Committee".

In 2009, in my first term, Hon Norman Moore appointed me to the Estimates and Financial Operations Committee and my first reaction was, “Norman, why would you want to do that? I can’t even balance my chequebook! Why would you put me on the Estimates and Financial Operations Committee?” But I soon learnt that as a government member on that committee it meant so much more than just being able to read a set of books. It certainly was an interesting four years on that committee and I was happy to serve alongside former members Giz Watson, as the chair; Ljiljana Ravlich; Ken Travers; and Phil Gardiner, all now former members, as I will be in the days to come. They were all very interesting and strong members in their own way. I think the highlight of my time on that committee was participating in the inquiry into Peel Health Campus and I am very pleased to say that largely due to matters that were brought to light through that inquiry, the management of the hospital changed and today it is a thriving, world-class, well-respected facility servicing the needs of the residents of the Peel region in a wonderful manner.

As I mentioned earlier, I also served on the Uniform Legislation and Statutes Review committee in my first term. It was a privilege to serve on this committee with Hon Adele Farina as chair, and two other members, one from the government and one from the opposition. As a staunch federalist, I was always keen to ensure that our state’s sovereignty was not being totally eroded by way of national schemes and I recall that on at least one occasion, because of the careful scrutiny of the committee, the government withdrew one of its bills from the notice paper as it was demonstrated that enacting the legislation in the form it had been tabled would indeed impact on Western Australia’s sovereign rights.

Unfortunately, during the time I served on the committee our terms of reference under the standing orders were amended and the committee lost its ability to commence inquiries of its own motion. That meant that an important inquiry on federalism and subsidiarity that had been commenced was not able to be finished. Perhaps it still may be revisited in future years.

During the thirty-ninth Parliament I was privileged to have been appointed as Chairman of the Public Administration Committee. It is a role I was very proud to accept and I thoroughly enjoyed the four years in which I served as the chairman. I would like to take this opportunity to formally thank my fellow members of that committee, Hon Darren West, Deputy Chair; Hon Jacqui Boyde; Hon Nigel Hallett; and Amber-Jade Sanderson, now a member of the other place, who was also substituted on the committee for a period by Hon Sally Talbot. I am very proud of the way in which this committee worked together. Given that we all have fairly strong personalities and represent different political parties, we were certainly able to adopt the “leave your party hat at the door” philosophy that I often speak about to students when I am giving guest lectures on the parliamentary committee system.

Hon Rick Mazza was co-opted onto the Standing Committee on Public Administration for the inquiry into recreational hunting systems. It was a controversial inquiry that came about as a result of a motion moved in this house by Hon Rick Mazza, and I think, perhaps indirectly, because of the recommendations of that report we now see a better managed scheme of recreational hunting in place to help alleviate the problem of feral animals in this state. There is a long way to go, but I think we have made some progress.

During this Parliament the committee also inquired into pastoral leases in Western Australia and the patient assisted transport scheme. Our final report handed down last year was on an inquiry into the transport of persons in custody. These reports covered very different topics and they gave me an insight into areas and organisations that I previously knew nothing about.

I would like to place on the record my deep appreciation and thanks to all the staff who assist the committees in their work. They are too numerous for me to thank individually, but to all the advisory officers, committee clerks and the support staff a heartfelt thank you for providing us with your expertise, professionalism and, above all, sense of humour in what sometimes can be very trying times when dealing with MPs who all have very well developed egos and a sometimes-lacking sense of humour. You are a wonderful group of people who service this Parliament in an exemplary manner.

As members of Parliament we are given amazing opportunities to broaden our knowledge of other cultures, religions and peoples from other countries, especially through the various community groups and through the diplomatic corps based here in Perth. We are also given wonderful opportunities to travel to other countries to learn about different parliamentary systems, attend conferences, deliver speeches or participate in a process, and I have been very lucky in this regard. As a committee member undertaking inquiries, I have travelled extensively throughout Western Australia and have met some incredible people living in the rural and remote regions of this vast state. As part of the oversight duties of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, I was invited, along with our committee, to visit most of the corrections facilities in WA, which, although probably not high on the list of things you think you might like to do as an MP, were nonetheless informative and insightful—and hopefully the only time I get to see the inside of a prison!

During my tenure I attended a Commonwealth Parliamentary Association seminar held in London that dealt with public accounts committees, at which I delivered a paper on the procedures of the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations. It was attended by over 60 delegates from different commonwealth Parliaments and I made some wonderful connections with other MPs, some of whom I remain in touch with today. I was also very fortunate on this trip to be introduced to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II at a state reception held at Marlborough House. As a monarchist, this meeting is a stand-out moment of my parliamentary career.

The other stand-out moment was in 2014 when I was fortunate enough to be in Turkey on a privately funded tour at the time of the ninety-ninth year of the Anzac commemorations and was given the immense honour of representing Western Australia at Gallipoli on Anzac Day and, in particular, laying a wreath on behalf of the government and the people at the Australian service held at Lone Pine Cemetery. It is something I will never forget. I was also proud on that day to have my son Ali standing at my side during those commemorations.

In 2010, together with seven other MPs, including Hon Michael Mischin, Hon Kate Doust and Hon Adele Farina from this chamber and others from the other chamber, I travelled to Israel and spent 10 days seeing firsthand what life is like in Jerusalem and other more remote parts of a most fascinating region of the world. We also spent a short time in the West Bank visiting Bethlehem. Visits to this region are unforgettable and I am grateful to the Australia/Israel and Jewish Affairs Council for its partial sponsorship of this trip. Thanks go to Steve Lieblich and John Schaffer for their support of this visits program. If anybody gets the opportunity to undertake one of these programs, I can certainly highly recommend it to them.

I returned to that Middle East region in 2014 with the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network and went to not only some of the places I had previously visited, including Jerusalem and Bethlehem, but also Hebron, Nablus and Ramallah. I also visited refugee camps in Beirut and Amman in Jordan to see firsthand the plight of refugees from several countries. It was an extremely interesting trip to learn more about the fascinating region from a different perspective.

On another occasion, Mr President, you will recall that I visited India and became part of a parliamentary delegation from the south west region made up of you, Mr President, Hon Adele Farina and Hon Col Holt. Hon Kate Doust and I were made honorary southerners for the duration of that whirlwind trip, which in eight days took in Delhi, Chennai and Bangalore, together with a 24-hour stopover in Colombo. During this trip, we not only participated in a promotion of south west region produce in Bangalore, but also attended the signing of a memorandum of understanding between Chennai Business School and Curtin University that resulted in a student exchange program being developed between our two cities. Upon our return from this trip, at your suggestion, Mr President, Hon Adele Farina and I, as co-convenors, formed the Parliamentary Friends of India. This friendship group has been very popular with members from all sides of politics and we have developed a very strong bond between our Parliament and the successive consul generals of India. Up until 2011, India had only an honorary consul in Western Australia, but I am pleased to say that for the past five years we have had a full consulate office here, and both previous Consul General Subbarayudu and current Consul General Amit Kumar Mishra have become close associates of our friendship group. I trust that this friendship group will continue, and I know that the opposition leader, Hon Dr Mike Nahan, is very keen to see this group flourish. I am aware that in the new intake of members in the other place, at least two members are proud to boast Indian heritage, so hopefully they, too, will become involved in this friendship group.

On the topic of parliamentary friendship groups, I have also been responsible for the formation of two other groups. The Parliamentary Friends of Tourism and Hospitality, affectionately known as FROTH, was formed, again on a nonpartisan basis, to allow organisations and individuals involved in tourism and hospitality in this state to showcase their product to members by arranging in-house functions or site visits. These have always proved to be very popular functions, well supported by all members. I encourage those members with an interest in developing the tourism industry in WA to continue to interact with the industry on an informal basis at every opportunity. My thanks go to Bradley Woods of the Australian Hotels Association and Evan Hall of the Tourism Council Western Australia for their support of this friendship group.

More recently, I formed the Parliamentary Friends of Azerbaijan after I visited the capital city, Baku, in September last year as part of a delegation invited to be official observers of a referendum process held to make constitutional change in that country. Again, it was a most interesting visit and I honestly believe that Azerbaijan has the potential to become one of the world's leading economies and is a great example of how religious tolerance and multiculturalism can prosper in a region not renowned for either peace or tolerance. Members will recall that I have spoken in this house on a couple of occasions about Azerbaijan, and again I encourage those members remaining to consider joining the friendship group and help to develop our growing relationship. The honorary consul in WA, Aydan Rzaeva, is keen for this group to grow.

On the subject of tolerance of multiculturalism, I have been proud to be the co-host, together with Bill Johnston, of the parliamentary iftar dinners held in the dining room of Parliament House each Ramadan since 2011. Iftar dinners are held each night during the holy month of Ramadan and have become a way that those from the Muslim faith can share their beliefs and delicious foods with non-Muslims in the spirit of reaching a better understanding. Previously, these functions, although still titled parliamentary iftar dinners, were held off-site because it was thought to be difficult to hold it at Parliament House because of the need to have a place to carry out the iftar prayers and to serve halal food. Nothing is too hard if we put our minds to it, and I want to thank all the staff at Parliament House who have worked closely with me and the organisers of the event, the Intercultural Harmony Society, to ensure that each year it is a success. I know that the member for Geraldton, Ian Blayney, is going to co-host that event once I have left Parliament. Through activities such as these taking place with our support and sponsorship, we can work towards a more tolerant and understanding society, and I hope that these events and more of them continue.

Another area in which I have been very pleased to have made a contribution is science and medical research. I was not a student of the science, technology, engineering and mathematics subjects during my school days, but during my time here I have been introduced to the world of medical and scientific research and I find it fascinating. Again, I have been given tremendous opportunities to visit the outstanding research facilities we have in Western Australia, especially the Harry Perkins Institute of Medical Research, which is a world-class facility right here in our home town. I know that the incoming government places medical research high on its agenda, as did our government, and I hope that these outstanding research facilities will continue to be the recipient of generous government grants. It is easier for these organisations to attract philanthropic funding if the government has some skin in the game. I know firsthand that it can sometimes be difficult to convince the executive that it needs to continue a funding stream in times when belt-tightening measures are in place.

Four years ago I was appointed as the government representative on the Neurotrauma Research Program executive. This group is very ably chaired by Professor Bryant Stokes, a man I am in constant awe of with his capacity to take on projects and programs as though they were the only things on his plate at the time. Other members of the executive are Nobel laureate Professor Barry Marshall; CEO of the Harry Perkins Institute, Professor Peter Leedman; and community representative Anton Zappelli, who suffered a spinal cord injury as a result of a car accident many years ago. The NRP brings neuroscientists, neurosurgeons and clinicians together in collaborative research programs to improve the lives of people affected by brain and spinal cord injuries in Western Australia through a contestable grants program that receives \$1 million funding from the government directly from the health budget. The funding was not always guaranteed and did not come directly from the health budget in previous years. During the time of my involvement, the funding used to be cobbled together partly from the road trauma trust fund and partly from non-specific project allocations and other funding streams. This was not acceptable to me or the others on the executive, and I made it my mission to secure the funding for the group by having it appear as its own line item in the health budget. My mission involved me staging a sit-in outside the former Premier's office until he saw my side of the argument and found the money in the budget. I am very pleased to say that I achieved this feat at the last budget when I saw \$1 million in that line item for the Neurotrauma Research Program. It really did make my heart sing and I thanked the Premier very much for it.

I feel honoured and privileged to be able to sit as an equal at the table with the other members of the NRP executive and also to count other amazing scientists such as Professor Lyn Beazley and Professor Peter Klinken amongst my friends and mentors, and I hope that my post-parliamentary life will allow me to remain involved in this space. In that vein, I am delighted to say that I have recently been asked to be a member of the management committee of the newly opened Ralph and Patricia Sarich Neuroscience Research Institute building—a pro bono role that I am very happy to accept.

Earlier in this speech I made the comment that if circumstances allow, all retiring members of Parliament should use the opportunity available to them to make a valedictory speech. Unfortunately, for some of my former colleagues from the other place, our party's defeat at the election meant that, apart from those who knew they were retiring, there was a large group who were not given the opportunity to make a valedictory speech, which I think is a shame.

As part of team North Metro—at least for the next three days—I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank all the defeated North Metro Region Legislative Assembly members for their service to our state and to our party during their time as members of Parliament. I would like to mention my very good friends and former colleagues, Andrea Mitchell, Eleni Evangel, Chris Hatton, Jan Norberger, Albert Jacob and Paul Miles, all of whom devoted themselves to the service of their electorate but were not able to stave off the wave of rejection that hit us like a tsunami on 11 March. We were a great team. Who knows? Perhaps one day the old team may get back together to continue to serve the people of WA in either this place or in some other capacity. I wish them all well in their future endeavours and I am sure that the friendships we made during our terms will endure.

To my colleagues from this house who are also retiring on 21 May, I wish you all the very best and thank you for your friendship and support during my eight years, especially to Hon Alyssa Hayden. Not many know that our friendship was originally formed in a different Parliament House on the other side of the country. I still remember that plane ride home from Canberra when we had both been preselected for the first time and the conversation we had about what our chances were of ending up as parliamentary colleagues instead of being staffers together—also together with Hon Donna Faragher. We have had some amazing times together and I know we will stay in touch no matter what the future throws up for both of us.

To those of you staying on in the fortieth Parliament, I cannot count the number of times I heard this expression in our party room and other places: your worst day in government will be 100 times better than your best day in opposition. Some of you are about to find out. For others, it is a second chance at opposition. If only I was to have the opportunity to find out! I think I might have liked to have had the shackles of being a government backbencher removed and be given free rein to speak out against a government that will no doubt make some decisions about which I will disagree.

You will be a much smaller black hand gang than the one I have been privileged to have been a member of, but you will be formidable if you remain a cohesive team. I know that you will be taking it up to the government at every opportunity to ensure that they keep all those promises made during the campaign which now allow them to occupy the government benches. Four years can seem like a long time, but if you stay together and never waver from the prize at the end, you will be able to reclaim those benches that are rightfully yours. I will be there to cheer you on every step of the way—in spirit, anyway.

To my leader, my regional colleague and my very good friend Hon Peter Collier—here come the tears—the words I speak today will not be able to adequately reflect the way I feel about the friendship, encouragement and guidance you have given to me over the past eight years. I know that ours is a friendship that has flourished and will endure outside these four walls but it will, of course, be a different type of friendship. Your dedication to the Liberal Party and to the roles you have played in the past eight years and continue to play today are an example for all of us. As the Minister for Education you oversaw one of the biggest changes in education that this state—indeed, this country—has ever seen. Thanks to you as the architect and ultimate facilitator, the independent public school system is thriving and our children and teachers have opportunities given to them that were only dreams 10 years ago. Cheers, Pete! Keep on keeping on, just like the Energiser bunny that you are!

To you, Mr President, may I take this opportunity to thank you also for your counsel and guidance throughout the past eight years and during the past four years when I have had the privilege of serving this chamber as an Acting President and Deputy Chair of Committees. It is an honour that not all the members are given and together with our Deputy President, Hon Adele Farina, you have helped me to develop my chairing skills and to learn the art of what you draw to the attention of others and rule out of order and the ones that you let go through to the keeper. Hon Stephen Dawson, on reflection I think I should have let the word “crock” go through to the keeper. I apologise.

At this point I would also like to thank the Clerk of the Council, Nigel Pratt, and all the chamber staff for the assistance you have given to me over the years. You have always been so cheerful and helpful in your duties and you are true professionals who never bat an eyelid at the strange and sometimes fanciful requests that we as members make of you. I shall miss you all very much indeed.

To Hansard, thank you for taking our mumblings and rantings and turning them into coherent speeches that when we go back and read quite often sound a whole lot better than they did when we delivered them. I apologise for the times that some of us have become so unruly that you have not been able to hear yourself think let alone take down our words, although I am sure you have found some of the interjections over the years just as amusing as I have. I have very fond memories of some of the cross-chamber exchanges between the then Leader of the House, Hon Peter Collier, and Hon Ljiljana Ravlich; as a double act they were very amusing. She used to stand here and say, “I’ll get to you, yet, sunshine. Don’t worry.”

To my colleagues on the other side of the chamber, we may not share each other’s political views but we do share a bond that brings all members of this place together. We have often said that we spend more time with each other than we do with our families and in a very strange way we are all a family. It is dysfunctional at times but nonetheless it is a family. At the end of the day we are all here trying to do our best for the people of WA and I think we do a pretty good job. We have had disagreements, for sure, but we have had laughter and tears and you have given me experiences that I will cherish for years to come.

To the staff in Parliament House, particularly in the dining room and the members’ bar, a huge thank you for looking after me so well during these eight years. I hate to think of the number of grande flat whites I have drunk and the number of meals I have eaten in the dining room. You really do spoil us all. We are so well catered for here. To Enno, Roger, Mark, Deb, Anthony, Lee, Steve, David, Anna, Maria, Paddy, Jacqui, Jill and all the others, who I apologise for not naming, a huge thankyou and no doubt as a former member I will still be seeing you all from time to time.

For one of my final thankyou's I want to pay tribute to Lisa Yarwood, my wonderful electorate officer—the best electorate officer that any member could ever wish for. Lisa joined team Behjat on day one and she has stayed with me until the very last day. Lisa, you are an amazing woman who has never once complained about any of the crazy ideas I came up with and you have always carried out your work in the most professional manner, even when it comes to the full moon constituents that we all know who contact our offices on a regular basis. I always admired the way you could handle them while still maintaining your professional demeanour. We have been colleagues and friends for nearly 20 years now and I wish you and Scott well on your next adventure as you hitch up the wagons and head east. I am truly blessed to have you remain as a friend in my contacts list. Will you still keep that up to date for me? Also, thank you to Amy Yelash, who was part of our team for several years and although employed with a federal member now is still a great friend. Thank you for all your hard work and dedication. In these last few months I have also been very fortunate to have Emma Withers as part of my team. Thanks for your great sense of humour when it has been needed.

This brings me to the end, and all that remains is to thank my wonderful husband, Reza—who I could not have here today because I really would have broken down completely—my gorgeous son, Ali, and my fabulous mum, Sylvia, for putting up with me and loving me all these years. For all the times I could not do something or go somewhere because of my parliamentary duties, thank you for understanding. For all the times I may have acted a bit precious and you grounded me, thank you. For putting up with all the ranting when things did not quite go to plan, thank you. Who knows what the future holds for any of us? I do know that if I have you guys by my side I will be happy and content and nothing else will matter.

Here they are, the final words: as I have said to several of you since I found out that my time would be up on 21 May 2017, the President of the United States only ever gets eight years; why should I be any different? All that remains now is to label myself as Obama Behjat and say, “It has been an honour and a privilege to work together with you side by side to strengthen our democracy. With that, I just have two more words to say, “Behjat out!”
