



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



MRS CAROL MARTIN, MLA
(Member for Kimberley)

Legislative Assembly

Loan Bill 2012

Wednesday, 14 November 2012

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Second Reading

MRS C.A. MARTIN (Kimberley) [1.48 pm]: I rise to make my farewell speech and I start by acknowledging my husband, who is in the public gallery. If I did not do that I would probably be doing the wrong thing. My husband has been my conscience, my backbone and my number one supporter and fan. Brian, thank you very much. I also need to thank him for actually being here. For those of you who do not know Brian, he was the president of the Labor Party branch in Derby. In 1996, he ran against Ernie Bridge, who was then an Independent. Brian missed out by 400 votes, and when it came to preselection in 2000, he said, "Well, it doesn't look like I am going to bother going for preselection; I won't get it." He said, "You'll have to do it." I said, "No way, mate; I want to finish my masters." Anyway, he won. We made a few phone calls and people said that they wanted me, so I thought I would at least give it a go. Brian said I should, and I did; so I blame him, in part. But what an amazing experience this has been.

Tom Stephens was my campaign manager. I met Tom in 1981 in Port Hedland, when I worked at GJ Coles as a fruit packer. He was just amazing. He had this big black beard and he would come in, and he would go, "Oi! Who's this?" He used to hang out with the welfare mob, and I ended up working for them. Tom and I go back a long way. I have listened over the years to all the things he has said. The only time Tom and I have ever come to blows is when he has tried to protect me from myself; that is, when I pick a fight with somebody, he will try to protect me, which is the wrong thing to do because I like a fight now and again. That is the only time that my feminist principles have had problems with Tom.

It has been a wonderful journey. I have worked with some amazing people. I also have to acknowledge my mother, Rose Pilkington, who is in the Speaker's gallery. When you have great matriarchs in your family—I hope to be one, by the way—it helps to make life a little easier. When questions niggle at you that you are not sure of, you can go to your mum and mum will say, "This is the right thing to do." My mum is here today and I really appreciate that; she came down from Broome. I also have in the gallery Margaret Anne Martin, who I call "mini-me". Margaret Anne is currently doing her graduate year at Armadale hospital. She is the first Indigenous direct-entry midwife in Australia. So, not only is she a mini-me, but also she is doing a couple of records herself, because of course I am the first Indigenous woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament, something that I am very proud of and so are my family, most of whom are in the gallery.

To my son, Billy, and his wife, Renee, and of course my newest grandson, I would like to acknowledge them and say that I love them and really appreciate their support. One thing I have not been able to do that peeves my boy is to be his anchorman. I have not been able to go fishing with him a lot. But I have told him that after 9 March next year, that will change; we are going fishing for 10 days. So, there you go, Bill.

Another person in the gallery is a woman called Bev Davies. She is my cousin; our mothers are sisters. Bev and I are the first university graduates in our family. We graduated in the same year. We changed the nature of our family by the achievements that we have made. It was really right for Bev to be here, because she was here at the beginning of my journey in this place. Thank you, Bev.

Then there is Eugene McMahon, who is my brother. He is sitting in the public gallery. In the 30 days of the campaign leading up to election day, Eugene and I would get in a car with a couple of swags and we would just go. We would drive for 30 days. We would go to the remote communities. We could not wait to get there, because it was the right thing to do. Once we got to these communities and saw the people we wanted to be with, it was really hard to come home. But we had a great time. Of course, we would share the driving and that sort of thing. Then, on election day, his job was to keep me out of trouble. He had the hardest job of all. When I was standing in the polling place and people wanted to have a go at me, it was his job to get me in the car before I said something that I might regret! Thank you, Eugene.

There are two other people I need to mention. One is a woman called Elsie Archer. She is the president of the Shire of Derby–West Kimberley, and I have known her for many years. On 6 May 2003, I got the terrible news that my son-in-law had died. Elsie and her daughters went to my daughter and stayed there for nine hours until I arrived. These are people in my community.

Mr T.G. Stephens: Elsie is a class act.

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: She is.

My daughter in law was really ill when she was pregnant; she had a really hard time. Mum had run away. We call her “Gypsy Rose”—we never know where she is! We were not sure whether she was in Northampton or still in Darwin, so I could not call my mum to go to my daughter-in-law. I rang my mate Jenny Bloom. I thought if anyone can get to this girl, it is her. She had to get to the hospital and find her way to where my daughter-in-law was to give me a report. People cannot just walk into Broome Hospital unless they are a relative, and here was this blonde girl; it was really funny. Jenny and I are now negotiating nanna rights on this child. We are not sure how that one is going to pan out!

When I speak of family, I also speak of some of the important people in this whole journey. One of them of course is Sam Gowegati. When I first met Sam, I had not actually decided to go into Parliament, but when I did decide, he and his family got behind me. Michelle provided me with a home. She is just brilliant. How can I thank people enough for what they have done for me? Yvonne and Nibble, their parents, took me in and I really appreciated all of that.

There are also the Jarlmadangah Burru community members, such as Harry, Johnny and Anthony Watson, and my family members out there. I would go out there, even if it was just for the night, and when I left, I was energised and I knew that I was focused and I felt strong enough to do the next bit. It was just like going home. I really need to thank them for their love and support.

There are a few women I need to name because they are very important in my life. When I worked for those 12 years, it would have been really difficult without the support of these women: Ruth Webb Smith, who is also in the gallery, from Yakka Munga Station and others; Annette Henwood from Fossil Downs; and Catelin Westlake from Mt House. Ruth was the chairperson of the Kimberley chapter of the Pastoralists and Graziers Association and Annette was the secretary. These are really great women of the Kimberley. These are amazing women. Once people meet them, they cannot forget them. At one stage in the Kimberley, three of the four shires had female shire presidents—Elsia Archer at Derby, Michele Pucci at Kununurra, and Josie Farrow at Halls Creek—and the deputy president in Broome was Niki Wevers. These women had amazing roles throughout the region. Of course, at the same time, the Department of Health, the Department of Education and the University of Notre Dame Australia had female heads. We were actually called “Petticoat Junction”. The local member was a woman. People were getting worried, especially some of the blokes, who were wondering what we were going to take over next! I am really proud to be one of those trailblazing women from the Kimberley. As I said before, I am the first Indigenous woman to be elected to an Australian Parliament. Nobody can make that sort of claim or achieve anything like that without the help of their community and their constituency. So I would like to take this opportunity to thank the people of the Kimberley for the right to serve and for the fact that they found me worthy.

Dean Ellis is also in the gallery. Dean is my sidekick when I need an extra driver. We have been travelling around and doing all this stuff. Dean also helped me with one of the hardest things I have ever had to do, which was to make a complaint to the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission. Dean was the person who helped me to get my complaint up. Thank you for that, Dean, and for your support since.

To the Kimberley Land Council, I acknowledge the staff, executive and members past and present. Thank you, Tom, for helping to create that amazing organisation; you were the first director. I just want that on the record. I want to thank the KLC for that long association and for the ability to learn new things and to be a part of something as important as that. In the early days, it was Peter Yu who actually gave me the job. It had just become a representative body and it needed to employ all these extra people. I was a new social worker out of Curtin University and he gave me the job to recreate and restructure that organisation. I want to thank Peter Yu.

There are a couple of other people who have done some amazing things for me. One of them is George Christoudias. George and his son, Peter, own Broome Air Services. George would come over from Victoria every now and then and remind me of the old values that people like me should have. He would hear me say something, because I do terrible things on radio; I slip up every now and then and say these words that should not be on radio, or do things to dogs or whatever. I have been picked up and put in my place. George used to come and tell me, so thank you, George and Peter.

Of course the other one is a friend of mine called Pete Altman. Pete is also from Broome Air Services. I would do silly things such as drive out to these communities and a big storm would come in and I would get stuck. This fellow knew where all the airstrips were that would remain dry enough to get me out, so he was my rescuer. I ended up calling him “Autopilot” because I would ring him and he would go on autopilot to come and get me.

One of the first pieces of advice I got in this place was from a bloke called Arthur Marshall. He said to me, “You have to give every point of view while you are in this place. Everything needs to be recorded and you need to explore things and investigate them from all different angles, and make sure they are on the record. But most of all, when you leave here, you must leave the stuff here that is no good and that does not feel right. When you leave this

chamber, you leave everything in it. Do not take it out there. Do not let it colour your world.” That is the best piece of advice I have received and I have stuck to that.

I thank Maureen Carter from Nindilingarri Cultural Health Services in Fitzroy Crossing. Maureen has been a trailblazer in changing the nature of Indigenous health. If we look at the co-location of Fitzroy Crossing Hospital and Nindilingarri, we know that the next step is for amalgamation of both. In other words, the next step to make it work is an Aboriginal hospital. I know that it has been hard for people to get their heads around these concepts, but without Maureen we would never have got as far as we have. We now know the scope of foetal alcohol spectrum disorder and have some idea of what we have to deal with. Now that we have that, this place has the opportunity to make a difference for those children afflicted by FASD. I acknowledge all the hard work that has gone into that research. I hope that there is a future for these children.

I thank Patrick Green. I have known Patrick Green for 35 years. He was a young fella when I first started with welfare and we have worked together at all different levels. We have been through some pretty hairy times together. I acknowledge his support because whenever things have been a bit low, he has given me a call and said, “We’ve got this work to do; don’t slack.” Of course, I have got back into it. To the Australian Manufacturing Workers’ Union and the Maritime Union of Australia and my factional caucus, one of the reasons that I came into this place was my family’s long association with the wharf and the Maritime Union. I acknowledge Chris Cain and Steve McCartney and thank them for their support and care over the years.

Parliament can be a lonely place sometimes, such as when I am sitting here and my family is nearly 3 000 clicks away. I found a way of dealing with that boredom. I started to write a book in my spare time. I hope members all buy a copy! They will probably be in it. I am not seeking asylum in Indonesia; I was just joking. I have to say to members that the other thing that being in this place has provided me with is the hunger to travel overseas. I have been to India. I had a terrible experience there and gave up smoking and, of course, that will be in the book! I have been to Sri Lanka; Israel, which is an amazing place; New Zealand; and Vanuatu. I think the answer to our native title issues is in Vanuatu and the Pacific in terms of their native title and way that they deal with traditional owners and customary lands. There is a way for Aboriginal people to own the means of production and benefit from their land with exclusive use. As they say, exclusive use in native title means the traditional owners can hunt and gather. However, it does not give the traditional owners the means of production or the ability to get themselves out of poverty. All it means is that the traditional owners can go there and get a kangaroo or goanna or whatever.

I have a goanna story for members. Those members who know Shane Hill know that he has a great sense of humour. He was a good Whip. I cracked a rib tightening the braces on the battery in a hire car I had. So I rang Shane and I said, “I’ve got a busted rib, mate, I can’t fly. I am buggered up here in Kununurra.” This woman called Barbara Johnson, who was the shire president up there, came around and got me all these drugs to keep me all right. I rang Shane and I said, “I cannot make it back, mate.” He said, “You’ll do anything to get out of this. I said, “No, no; it is genuine.” We left it at that. He said, “You can have a pair.” The next week I was in Derby and the kids had come in from the station and they had brought this huge goanna. “Go on, mum, cook it.” It takes a few hours to cook, and I had to drive down to the airport in Broome—I was in Derby. I rang Shane and I said, “My goanna is sick, mate”. Shane said, “We will not have these sick pet excuses.” I said, “No, it is not a pet; it is in the freezer. I need to do this.” He said, “You’re not doing it!”

[Member’s time extended.]

Mrs C.A. MARTIN: Shane reckons that he dined out on that goanna story for years. It is the best excuse that has ever been given for a pair! “My goanna is a bit crook.” Actually, he was really crook!

Geoff Gallop was one of the bravest people I have ever met because he commissioned the Gordon inquiry. After he saw the report from the inquest on that girl Susan Taylor, I went into his office and I could see he was really troubled by this. I was hoping that he would send it to the committee that I chaired, but he did not. That is okay, because I think the Gordon inquiry did a number of things. For the first time ever it provided safety and security and law and order for Aboriginal women and children in their communities—for the first time ever! He stuck by it. On behalf of Aboriginal people everywhere I thank Geoff Gallop for his support, assistance and development of a safer community for Aboriginal women and children. It was just one of those things that needed to be done, and he did it. Against the odds he has made a difference.

The member for Bassendean said last night—I think he is right—that some people in the party have a bit too much power. I think of my roomie, Hon Linda Savage, and her contribution to this place. Linda did not get preselected. It needs to be said that a person such as her really could have had a great place here for a number of reasons. One of which is EMILY’s List, of which I am a beneficiary. Fifteen years ago Hon Linda Savage was a founding member of EMILY’s List. Without her I would not have had the support of people such as Joan Kirner, who became my mentor through EMILY’s List when I was first elected. Jenny Beacham came over and worked with us on my campaign. I am grateful for all the help that they have provided me since. Hon Linda Savage is just this amazing woman. The other thing is she set up the Women’s Law Centre of Western Australia. This woman has made all

these great contributions but will no longer be in this place. Maybe there is a way we can deal with it; maybe we could look at a quota for unaligned Labor members who could just come and do the work. She has done some amazing stuff in early childhood development. I needed to acknowledge her and thank her.

I need to speak to the Premier about some commitments for the region. Two of the three biggest projects in the state are in my area. One is the Ord. If we are going to have a food bowl, get a bloody rail—a rail! Get that food down to people in the south where we will actually do something. We should have an airstrip that can take a cargo plane and service Asia. We need a bit of vision for the next 15 years. If we are going to get rid of sandalwood, it will be in 15 years; we all accept that. Let us have plan B in place so that we can do something with the food. Even if we had a cannery, it might be helpful.

The other big project is the Browse project. I spoke on this a couple of weeks ago and members know my views. As far as I am concerned, everybody has the right to put their positions out there, and do it respectfully. I have had my say on that. However, a lot of things concerning that project need to be sorted out. A prescribed body corporate was created from that—Waardi. My friend Warren Greatorex is up there. Warren was one of the people I helped recruit in 1996 when I was employed by the Kimberley Land Council. He is now the chairman of Waardi. I want to say to members that we need to acknowledge young people such as him. He stepped up against the odds, against everything. He stepped up to do the right thing and to make a difference in his community. I need to acknowledge Warren—thank you. I also have in the gallery up there Phil Clews and his wife, Marie. These people have been supporting me forever. He was a policeman up in Broome, actually. Whenever I would do something that was not quite right, I would get a phone call from him or his boss and of course she would tell me off as well. One of the things Marie told me to do today is to try not to swear, so I have been good.

My son has asked me bring up this next topic because it is very important; the boat ramp in Broome. Come on guys, get behind the program here. We need a boat ramp in Broome. We need it pretty quickly; it has to happen because nearly every second house has a boat, and some have two. My son and I have trouble with our boat; I am a bit short and the boat gets away from me because it is a bit big. However, there are hundreds of people who need these facilities, and I agree with them. I know government members have had a few problems, and we did too, but it is time, guys.

There is the perception that I am leaving this place because of some racial slurs. Believe me, that is not the reason. I came into this place on my own terms and I will leave on my own terms. I have picked my time and I have done everything the way that I have wanted to. Regardless of what the media said during the week, I went to Fitzroy Crossing to ask my elders for permission to retire, not to give a directive. I said, “Is it okay if I retire now? I have done three terms. I have five grandkids, guys; is it okay?” They said, “Yes, it is. Thank you for your service.” That is why I went there. So whatever the media stuff was all about has no credence at all. I can tell members right now that I have never stepped down from a fight, except when Tom has got in my way. I pick a fight and I want to follow it through. If somebody says something to me, I will go at them; I will not stand back like that sweet little thing everybody thinks I am. I knew members would laugh at that.

Last year, a terrible thing happened to the pastoral industry in my area; an export ban was put in place. We have not recovered. I say “we” because 70 per cent of the land in my region is made up of pastoral leases and 30 per cent of those are owned by Aboriginal people. We are trying to make a difference to the industry up there. What happened maligned every pastoralist in the state. What happened in another country had nothing to do with them, yet they walked away stained and tarnished, with their reputations dragged through the mud for something they had no control over. I can tell members right now that I have seen the pain on the faces of the people in the pastoral industry up there and I feel ashamed because it should never have happened and it should never have happened in that way. For the record, please never ever, if members can, allow this to happen again. Things must get better and we need to promote and support pastoralists to get back on board because, at the moment, they are in a really dark place. It is not fair and it is not just. In a fair Australia, we need to look at this industry. We cannot allow it to be dealt with in the way it was.

The Department of Indigenous Affairs is my bugbear forever. It is a colonial structure that is still in place in this day, in this age and in this country where Aboriginal people are given second-class service. I say that because all Australian citizens should get the service that every other citizen gets. This is not the case with Aboriginal people. They have to go through an organisation that does it. Get rid of it, please. I can talk about it forever but it is not going to help unless we have goodwill in this process. Give Aboriginal people the rights of citizens like any other citizens. While we water down services and say that we cannot deal with Aboriginals directly, it allows government departments to abdicate responsibilities for Indigenous people. Do not allow it to happen. Please get rid of that department.

I move on to birthing rights for women. Do members know that birthing is women’s business? I have a midwife in the gallery and if I do not talk about this, she might hurt me later. Mini-me has asked me to do this because it is important. Margaret Anne had her last baby at home in her front bedroom. It was something that all the women in our family were involved with. We had four generations of women in the house to share in this experience. When

the woman is healthy, please give her the right to birth at home with her family. There has to be a way of doing this. Why do we have to “medicalise” childbirth? It is women’s business. Doctors need to be there when there is a problem but when there is not, please—so midwives need insurance cover, they need the support of people, but they are not witches. They stopped burning them in Salem years ago. Let’s move on. Let’s do something about it.

Every time I go into the dining room or anywhere in this place I am met by happy, smiling faces. The staff here are amazing. I want to say thank you so much for your care and commitment over the years that I have been here. I remember when Pauline Hanson came here one time. I would be walking along and one of the staff would say, “Mrs Martin, come this way.” I would say, “What is this about?” It was okay so I would do it. Finally, someone said, “Look, you really need to come this way” and I said, “No, I want to go that way.” Pauline Hanson was there. I said, “Oh, no worries, she’s my cousin” or something like that. Members should have seen the look on their faces. The staff have always tried to protect me, even from myself sometimes, but I want to acknowledge everybody. Peter McHugh is an amazing person. He is very tolerant of people like me who do silly things sometimes. I have to say, my time here with all of you has been amazing.

I know I have heckled people from time to time and given a little scratch, but I am actually quite sweet and loveable. A bloke sent me this letter to Broome—he lives in Gosnells—and it said, “You are a coconut. Coconuts are brown, tough and resilient on the outside, and on the inside they are white, soft and sweet.” He said, “It’s okay, they can do that because you know what? You are.” I had never heard that before, and this fella was actually married to a woman who used to live up in Derby and who was a friend of mine. So some amazing things have happened. In this place, there are lots of amazing people and I have appreciated working with all of you.

Vince, thank you for being my son’s friend and for being there when that kid needed you. Thanks, mate.

Again, thank you all. I know I have missed out lots of people, I cannot put everybody in, but I can say that this has been one of the most amazing journeys with the most amazing group of people. As Eric said, you have all of these things that you need to say but you cannot actually get them all in one, so I suggest that members buy the book and I am sure they will be able to find something interesting in it.

Mr Speaker, it has been a privilege being in this place working under your direction and rule. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]