



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Mick Murray, MLA
(Member for Collie–Preston)

Legislative Assembly

Tuesday, 17 November 2020

Reprinted from Hansard

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MR M.P. MURRAY (Collie–Preston — Minister for Seniors and Ageing) [5.14 pm]: Thank you, Mr Speaker. Wow. It is pretty hard to start! I will have a drink first. It is not very often I get stuck for a few words.

The SPEAKER: You will be all right, Mick! Sorry, member for Collie–Preston.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I rise this evening to make some comments ahead of my retirement in March and the 2021 state election and to reflect on a few issues and some of the work that has been done over the last 20 years—who would believe that? Who would have thought that of a young bloke born in the small town of Duranillin, where mum and dad and my sister lived in what now would be called a shack. Fran Logan, the member for Cockburn, mentioned that when I showed him some photos. He was astounded, but had a very similar upbringing. We share a lot in that area. Mum and dad worked hard to support their family. Mum used—oh, shit!—to turn sleepers, which meant you got on the end of a sleeper and turned it over. The person came through and marked the sleeper so it could be passed, then you got paid for it. Mum was about that high. At times, she worked so hard—oh, shit; I am like a sook! I am just trying to compose myself because of memories like that. Honestly, my parents were doing it for me and my sister. After a time, they moved to Collie because they wanted us to get an education. That was a task and a half. For a person in their first year of high school, as I was when we came into town, I was not the most studious person, as you could put it. After a report card that had an average of 33 per cent, I went back and repeated the first year. I am standing here today—amazing! But I must say that in the next year, my average was 88 per cent. I think dad’s hand across my ear was partly to do with that. As the first minister from the seat of Collie or Collie–Preston—respects to Gordon Hill and Julian Grill, who both became ministers. They lived in Collie but were not the members for Collie.

I suppose I will get the other harder part out of the road first—that is the thankyou. Up the back are my kids, wife and grandkids. Not all of them could get here because some of them are down in Collie and it is a bit hard to get up this way, but Melissa, Heidi, Bree, Jerrie, and their partners, Steve and John are here. Who let you in! I have seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren; here is my first grandson. I had a bit of a run. I had four daughters and then four granddaughters. We thought it would never happen, but look what we got. He is a pretty good one. There were times, in my marginal seat, when I could not afford to miss a function so the family suffered. There were missed birthdays, anniversaries and the like. I still miss anniversaries even when I am reminded, but that is another issue. I think one is coming up now for 47 years of marriage—nod please? It is 49 years of marriage! Thanks for the prompts up there. It has been a tough road at times living on the edge of my seat, margins that I will talk about a bit later.

I owe a big thanks to many other people and I will run through them. Catrina Teirney, now Catrina Campbell-Fraser, was my 2001 campaign manager. When I look at it, she was really only a kid when she came down and helped me out. I did not know what a campaign manager was during the previous two elections. She worked through that with us under the guidance of John Cowdell. I have to thank him for talking me into standing for the third time. He said, “What if someone else stands up and wins and you’re standing on the footpath when you could’ve been that person?” I also thank him for his generosity in kind and for his financial generosity when we did not have an income stream as such. I thank Bruce Roberts, who was the branch secretary for many years and also the shire president for quite some years. We had a lot of fun teasing the National Party and the well-entrenched Dr Hilda Turnbull, who held a huge margin. We had a bit of fun and we went to branch meetings to think of what we could do next to upset and annoy her because she used to get a bit toey from time to time. I thank Peter Bentley, and Gary and Evelyn Benton. Gary was the branch president for 10 or 12 years. I thank him for that.

I thank Tom Palmer. Members might have heard his name. He is a chief of staff. When he came back from England, I had just lost a staffer and he fitted straight in. I must say that at one time I thought he was going to kill me. I had given him a pretty hard week. It was around election time. He put his hands around his head and said, “Oh for f-sake, just let me have 10 minutes to myself to think!” I must have been a pain in the bum, to be quite honest. I thank Sally Talbot. Her advice in the early days was sometimes heeded but sometimes not. I thank Sally for always putting up with me. I thank Stan Liaros, who has been a long-time member of the Labor Party and has worked very hard behind the scenes. When I needed someone to talk to, I could ring him. I thank Kristy Smith and her husband, Bevan, and the kids. Kristy was my electorate officer for seven and a half years. She sorted the town out by herself! She was tough and very focused on the job, but she was an absolute legend in organising the diary and, by geez, if I put an entry in the diary without asking her, I copped it!

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I thank John Borlini, Kenny Woods and Bill Fraser, my mates who have been in the background. If I needed to go on a fishing trip, needed a load of wood or some ding snaggers or something like that, they would turn up. I thank Rhonda Roberts, a young person who has also worked hard for the Labor Party for a long time. I thank the Collie–Preston branch members and those in the wider Forrest federal electorate. Ross Verne may be up the back of the chamber. He wrote a nasty article about me in the *Collie Mail* one week, and the following week he wrote an extraordinary paragraph about the town of Collie. His writings are exceptional. He has come down from Collie and worked with us along the way. He is now in another office, but when he was needed during election time, his work was extraordinary.

From more recent times, I thank John Carney. He put his hand up to be preselected. He missed out and kept on working with the party. You cannot ask for more than that. I thank my current staff Vivienne Moloney, Leonie Scoffin and Stuart McGuckin. I think Steve McCartney is in the public gallery. I thank him for his support and for being a backstop at times. A few good shepherds have kept me from being flattened or knocked out—one or the other! Thanks for that and thanks for the financial support along the way. Steve was there when I needed a hand. From the early preselection days, I thank Keith Peckham and Jim Davidson from the Australian Manufacturing Workers' Union, which is in my veins. I thank the Collie miners' union officials and members.

I thank Emma from my Perth office. Put your hand up, Emma, please! Anyone who is not in Parliament would not recognise her. She can be a pain in the butt, there is no argument about that! I thank her for her hard work, for keeping me on the straight and narrow and making sure we were on track. I bet she had some sleepless nights, especially when I would ring her and say, "We're going to do this." She would say, "No, you're not!" and then we would have this big argument. She has had to put up with me. She has gone home cranky, or late, because I have got things back-to-front and she has tried to straighten me out. To Shae Rya and her kids, thank you for your help. I thank Michael Watts for the steady pair of hands that was needed in my office from time to time—actually, a lot of the time! I thank Matthew Kavanagh; he is poor cricketer but a good research officer! Clint Thomas is one of the blow-ins; he has been in and out. I think my office, especially my ministerial office, could be tagged as the training office because as soon as we got someone going, someone else would pinch them. Anyone who knows Alex Hamilton knows that there are two things that she is not allowed to do when she is on the job. The first is not to drink. The second is to only give us an idea and do not go into detail because—I will not read that! I thank Caroline Claeys, Elizabeth Went, Meredith Graham and Karen Stacey.

I thank all the staff from the Department of Communities, VenuesWest, the Western Australian Institute of Sport, the Combat Sports Commission and the Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries. I will not name anyone in particular because we have all worked together over the past few years and it has been a team effort so it would be remiss of me to forget someone. I thank everyone from the five agencies who contributed, whether it be attending a meeting, writing a briefing note or walking behind the scenes to keep things running smoothly. Thank you!

I bet I have given the Hansard staff a few headaches over my time, not only by yelling. It is a great pleasure when you have had a pretty bad day and you have made a speech and you think, "Geez, that's rubbish" but you pick up *Hansard* and it is pretty good! Thank you to all the Hansard staff. I must say, some Hansard staff have been here longer than me. They do not look as though they have been here longer than me, but they have been.

I thank the parliamentary staff up and down the passageways. They are always pleasant. I have to tell the story of a couple of barmen who used to work in the bar. I walked in and one was doing the dishes over here and the other one was on the till. They looked at each other and then they looked across and they were not going to serve me. I am sorry for what I said to you, but I was glad to see you get off your bum and do the job!

The SPEAKER: I think you said something else, too, minister!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I am not allowed to swear!

The staff have to deal with different people and put up with different personalities and they do a magnificent job. Thank you to all them.

Parliament itself is a bit of a bubble. Members make a lot of acquaintances, but they do not always come out the other side with a great deal of true friends. We have acquaintances and, sure, we can have a beer with them. Sure, it is hard, but sometimes it is a place where games are played, and that saddens me to some degree. It happens on both sides because people talk crossways and sideways. We are in a bubble and it is very difficult for people who are outside that bubble to understand that we actually talk to members on the other side. They only see what is on television. The other thing is getting too involved with people because sometimes you get burnt. I learnt that very early on in the process. To anyone who has been a true friend, thank you. I do say that there are many, but there are a lot of what I call acquaintances. I will leave it at that. It is very hard for people who do not work in this area to understand that bubble and the pressure of the bubble and the pressure of elections. What seems to be a simple issue outside this bubble can be so complicated by the parliamentary process. I think we all understand that.

It is worth reflecting on the campaigns that I have fought in for more than 30 years now. The seven elections that I have contested have been interesting, to say the least, with my first win in 2001 by just 34 votes after three counts. Since then, there have been a number of redistributions of my electorate. In serving my electorate, I have made sure that I have kept on my toes. I have covered nine different shires during my time as the member for Collie–Preston, in various versions of a seat that seems to have been chopped up every time—Capel, Dardanup, Harvey, Collie, Donnybrook, Balingup, Boyup Brook, Waroona and Boddington—so, members can see, from one end of the scarp to the other. In one draft of my seat, I had half of Busselton. I am sure Libby Mettam put in a complaint about that. I was glad about that, Libby!

In my first election in 1993, I got a flogging. It was 55 per cent to the National Party and 44 per cent to the Labor Party. In the second election I got an even bigger drubbing—59 per cent to 40 per cent. Only two parties contested that election—the National Party and Labor—and the Libs did not put anyone up. I got an absolute flogging and went away with my tail between my legs for a while.

But in the 2001 election, I got up with 50.1 per cent of the vote—a small number of votes when we look at it—with 5 947 votes, and Hilda Turnbull got 49.9 per cent, with 5 913 votes. That was a difference of 34 votes. They wanted to count the vote a fourth time but a decision was made that it was all over and I got the phone call at 10 o'clock on a Thursday night. Wow! I did not know who to ring or what to do. I went for a walk outside and came back and could not believe that we had actually won.

My first caucus meeting was not the first Labor caucus meeting after the election, because I was not invited to the first one. They did not think I was going to win. When I did turn up, all the plum jobs had gone. To make matters worse, Jim McGinty called me, the Speaker and Shane Hill to tell us to enjoy ourselves for the next four years because it would be the end of it because he planned to instigate one vote, one value.

The SPEAKER: Jim who?

Mr M.P. MURRAY: That was a really good introduction to the Labor Party—walk in one door and you are going out the other. I can say that my colleague from Albany and I worked our bums off to hang on to those seats and we are still here 20-odd years later. So, Jim McGinty, suck that one up!

After completing my apprenticeship as a mechanic, I worked in places such as Dampier, Port Hedland and Millstream before starting work underground in the coalmine. I spent 12 and a half years down the hole, learning to see in the dark, and another 12 and a half years on the surface in the open-cut mine. It was hard work but it was for good wages and there were mates that you could rely on.

When I was elected to Parliament, it was a huge change to my lifestyle. I even needed to buy a suit for the first time. When I came up to Perth to meet the Labor Party gang after the elections and all the photos were being taken, I did not have a jacket. After some quick delays, one of the orderlies was walking past, and we “gangbanged” him and got the jacket off him and I got my photo.

Several members interjected.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Gang tackled, I mean! If members look at the photo, they will see that the sleeves were down to about here, but I did have a jacket on.

The SPEAKER: I think there was a “withdraw” in there, Hansard, and he has put in another word.

Mr M.P. MURRAY: Life as a member of Parliament is certainly interesting. I remember one time I was at a senior citizens Christmas eve dinner in Burekup and the guy sitting next to me dropped dead. Two guys had been talking about how one had had a hip replacement and the other had an elbow operation and then this guy slid down. His sister was shouting, “Help me!” I thought he was messing around, but he was dead. He was laying there, so I got down with my best parliamentary style and started to give him mouth to mouth and heart compressions. All of a sudden he started to wriggle. He opened his eyes and said, “What are you doing?” Then he said, “I don’t even vote for you.” When I saw him later he said the same thing, “I don’t know why you brought me back. I wanted to die and you go and bring me back.” You cannot help some people, I tell you!

In the 2005 election, I received 59 per cent of the two-party preferred vote. The electorate then included Brunswick Junction, Harvey, Waroona and Boddington—down that way. But, again, the aeroplane came and the boundaries were changed. I went from 9.3 per cent to 0.4 per cent and was bumped to the bottom. What do you do? You pick yourself up, dust yourself off and have another crack. The rub is that at the next election two seats were amalgamated into one. One was Steve Thomas’ seat and one was mine. He had the bottom half and I had the top half. There is a lesson in this for anyone going to an election. A fortnight out, Steve was putting it around that he had got the polling that they were in front and he put the cue away. They stopped doorknocking. I doorknocked right up to the morning of the election and got up by 400 votes. The lesson for anyone who is out there campaigning is to make sure that you do it right to the end and keep your name out there.

At the 2013 election, the Liberal Party just about sent their bankbooks broke trying to put me out. I have never seen so many mail-outs in my life. I was counting them. I knew how much they cost. They were \$5 000 a pop and they

were doing five a week. Phew! I nearly fainted. But it came down to the position that I won by 56 votes. That was probably my most memorable and the best win in my political career. Even with the work that was being done against me, there was a six per cent swing to the Liberal Party at that election. I managed to hang on, so I am very, very proud of that. I see a note here that I must thank the Leader of the Opposition for getting me across the line with those 50-odd votes because she would not commit to a police station at Capel. That is where the swing came from, so thank you very much. I say that tongue in cheek. That is politics.

After that election, I was behind on the Tuesday and sitting out the back with my wife—for once in our lives we were agreeing on everything and deciding what to do in the future—when the phone rang. On Wednesday morning I was being told that I was 150 votes in front. I said, “I thought I was 150 behind and I thought it was all over.” What had happened was the Collie electoral officer had left Collie on the Saturday after the election, gone to Perth and had not put the pre-poll votes into the Electoral Commission until the Monday morning. That swung it completely around. I had gone from “I was gone” to “Goodbye, Liberal Party.” I did feel a bit sorry for Jaimee Motion because she had done her acceptance speech without winning the election. It was one of Tom Palmer’s final gigs, I suppose, in my office when he said, “Can I ring them and ask them if they are looking at the figures?” The night before, the campaign manager for the Liberal Party had rung us and asked whether we would concede. Tom said, “On the figures we’re looking at, we’re just in front.” We would not concede. Tom had the pleasure of ringing them the next day when we finally got in front and asking them to concede. That was Tom’s little bit. He thought it was quite good, and so did I to be honest.

Another incident is when we were doing the rounds with the Premier. Three or four of us got on this bloody great bus and went to Bunbury where we were meeting some people. After, they took off and left me behind. I had to ring my wife in Collie to come and pick me up to get me home. Thanks for that, Premier!

The SPEAKER: He was heading to Albany!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: I will have to rush a bit. At the start of the 2017 election campaign, due to another boundary change I started at minus three. As I said, at one stage I was minus four because I had a bit of Busselton in there, but they moved it back. I got across the line by a large amount. That showed the faith the Collie people have in me—83 per cent of the people in Collie voted Labor. What do you say? Thanks.

Something I am very proud of is that in the whole of the electorate—I am not picking out one part over another—there has been a \$100 million spend on schools, education and facilities. I would like to thank all ministers on both sides for that spend because it means a lot in country areas to have those sorts of facilities. I can walk away knowing that the kids do have the proper facilities to go forward.

But there are some things that really do worry you about the speed of government. Thirty years ago—it might have been 35 years ago—I was elected to local government and my platform was that we would fix the Collie Roundhouse and get rid of the asbestos. Guess what? It got finished last week! I worked to move that along. Lake Kepwari was one of the things that nearly got me buried after the election, when I got the Premier to say that it would be ready in six months. Well, I wish I had never said that because we got an absolute belting over Lake Kepwari. But again, a few years on, we are nearly there. I do not think I am leaving the electorate underdone.

I thank the Premier and all the other ministers for understanding whereabouts Collie is in the transition period. There has been some criticism of the funding that has been put out there, but we have to change. The town knows that we have to change, and we are changing. We can look at different things like the electrical licensing centre with 10 jobs; the relocation of the frontline fire services, which the minister talked about; the building of heavy-duty fire engines in Collie; a new training centre for firefighters; and Australia’s first training centre for driverless trucks. We are trying to get away from the past and get on with what we have to do into the future.

I am also very happy to be able to say that Donnybrook got its share as well. That card-carrying Liberal member and shire president, Mr Piesse over there, and I have had a great working relationship, and I mean that. He has been willing to work with us to make sure that the town of Donnybrook goes forward. That is really good.

With the department of seniors, we have worked very hard on elder abuse. We have put money into that. Finally, we are starting to get the message through that it is not about a whack on the ear; most of it is about financial abuse. We are now getting people trained up in the banks—they are doing it themselves—in the police and in those sorts of areas.

The other part I am very pleased about is that we have pushed money down to grassroots sport. Too often, the money is spent at the top. Okay, we might get results with premierships and those sorts of things, but what about the kids at the bottom who do not get that chance? We have worked very hard and have followed on from KidSport and those sorts of things to make sure that kids at the bottom get a go. There is no better place for a kid who is having problems than to be on the sporting field to work through them.

The other one is gender diversity. The process that we put forward that all boards should have 50 per cent women has been picked up Australia-wide.

I will get through to the last bit. It is no secret, Premier, that I was not the number one pick in the cabinet. This is when I talk about friends in Parliament. During the early stage, I had a bit of a rough start. People tried to disrupt me because they had other ideas. Bad luck! When an old dog can bark, he can still bite. To the public servants who work so hard, thank you for that. To the ones who are disruptive, go and get another job! It is simple.

Finally, to the Premier, I am sure you had some doubts about my capability to hold in my temper at times, but I hope I proved you wrong. I say thanks, Premier.

I have only got a minute to go. The divide between country and city in this state is only growing. Towns are getting smaller and regional centres are getting bigger. I do not believe there is enough consideration for country members in Parliament, and I am sure the Nationals WA would agree. I remember the special family nights when country members used to have priority. That has now gone. Even today, it is impossible to bring the kids into Parliament for extended times as there are no facilities for families to relax in after travelling up or down from the regions to spend the day with partners and for them to have a rare dinner with their family. For example, most of my family would have visited Parliament only half a dozen times in the 20 years that I have been here. The regional accommodation allowance went up in recent years and that change was much appreciated, but there is little help for members who want to actually get back to their communities at the end of sitting weeks. If you think of the extra hours that I spent travelling, take time to think about Josie, who has spent extra days, because she should be able to get away and get up to those areas. That is something we have to look at in time. In my years here, I have done just under a million kilometres in travel in cars up and down the road. I brought a few cars back in sugar bags after using them in the paddocks for a while, but it is still there. I was able to stay in my electorate, but if I had a young family and got a ministerial job, I do not think that would be possible. I think we need to look at that very, very seriously.

My last remarks —

The SPEAKER: I hope so!

Mr M.P. MURRAY: — with respect, Mr Speaker, is that Fran Logan and I are probably the last of the two tradies who are in Parliament and we are both going out at the same time. I ask the Labor Party to think about that—think about the 72 per cent of non–university degree holding Australians who should not be excluded from coming into Parliament. I think it is very important that we keep the grassroots of the Labor Party in there and make sure that opportunities are given to those people. As a tradie, honestly, what else can I say? I walk up the backyard now and look at the toolbox and faint. I do not want the grease under my fingernails anymore! But in saying that, it has been a tremendous ride. Many, many people have helped me through that, on both sides of Parliament. It has been something special.

Again, Mr Speaker, thank you for your service to Parliament. I wish you well in your retirement. To departing members, I also wish you well. To those continuing, may you have a good election campaign and may you keep the election campaign out of the gutter and keep it up there, so that the rest of our state can be proud. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]