



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON ED DERMER, MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Thursday, 16 May 2013

Legislative Council

Thursday, 16 May 2013

ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

Motion

HON ED DERMER (North Metropolitan) [2.01 pm]: I must say that I am very pleased to speak in support of the motion moved by Hon Liz Behjat, by way of which we express our loyalty to Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, and I would also like to thank His Excellency the Governor for his speech. His Excellency represents Her Majesty in Western Australia. I think they both do a very fine job in their allotted roles. In my assessment, the roles of the sovereign and of the Governor of Western Australia are both integral to our Westminster system. When I look around the world, although I am aware of the imperfections in the Westminster system I do not believe that there is a better system on offer. We are very blessed to have inherited it. Entailed in our system is government by peaceful persuasion. Traditions such as the distance of two sword lengths between the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the House is a reminder of the importance of peaceful persuasion, and, most importantly of all through the democratic system, our system of government is one that occurs with public consent. Without public consent in government terrible trouble will follow, and people do not actually live as free people without public consent in their government.

I enjoy the official opening of Parliament; I enjoy the rituals associated with it. They may appear quaint but those rituals have a very important role in acting as historical reminders. Remembering the mistakes of previous generations makes us less likely to repeat them. Each of these rituals in the official opening of Parliament, and in many of the rituals that we observe daily, are based on past problems. It is interesting to look at the evolution of the Westminster system whereby past problems often—eventually always, I think—led to an adaptation, and over the centuries that circumstance or problem arising for which an adaptation has been found led to the quality of the Westminster system that we enjoy. Rituals that remind us of past problems help us avoid future problems.

I am particularly fascinated by the role of the Usher of the Black Rod, and I think our incumbent performs with a particular style and appropriate gravitas in what she does. I am hoping that, with the President's assessment of my behaviour, I will be invited to the official opening of Parliament in four years' time. If that happens, I will be on the horns of a dilemma because I really enjoy watching the procedure here in the senior chamber where the Governor comes in and delivers his speech, but I would be fascinated to watch the activities of the Usher of the Black Rod outside the Legislative Assembly chamber. I think that is a very important ritual. It reminds us of a time when the Crown in government and the Parliament were not getting on well and Charles I endeavoured to arrest members of the House of Commons. A terrible civil war followed and a period of military dictatorship followed the execution of Charles I. It is very important that we remember this, but actually watching our Usher go through the process of bashing at the door of the Assembly and of the Assembly's reluctant loyalty, or reluctant obedience to the instructions, would be a fascinating ritual to watch. Not knowing how to be in two places at once, if the President is kind enough to invite me in four years' time, I do not know whether I would rather be watching in here or probably—because I have not seen it before—hanging around outside the Assembly. I do not like being associated with hanging outside the junior chamber, but I will make the effort on a special occasion because I want to see the Usher of the Black Rod from the senior chamber in action with that ritual.

I expect this to be my last extended contribution to debate in this place. I expect to hear the call during question time this afternoon and next Tuesday —

The PRESIDENT: I might notice it!

Hon ED DERMER: I would be disappointed if the President said, “No, Ed, you've had your last say and you're not going to get a question”. I will seek the President's attention then, but other than that, my plan is for this to be my last extended contribution. I always try to observe the short questions requirement, Mr President, so this will be my last extended contribution.

I think it is an appropriate time for me to thank the people of the North Metropolitan Region for the privilege that it has been for me to serve them. Our electoral system is complex. Members have been elected to this chamber previously as Independents, with this current proportional representation system, which I think is a fine one; but by and large we are all elected—certainly everyone in the chamber today—as team members. The team that I am very proud to be a part of is the Australian Labor Party. I would like to thank the Australian Labor Party for endorsing me on a number of occasions. I would also like to thank the Australian Labor Party for being such a great team to campaign with and to promote people's needs with. I have really enjoyed that privilege as well. I would like to

thank all the party members. I worked very closely with three particular WA Labor Party branches. I would like to thank each of the members of those branches as they are today and each of the members who have been members in the past and contributed to that strength. I would like to mention the branches of Marangaroo–Darch, Kingsway and Ballajura. There are others as well but I have promised Hon Giz Watson that I will not go beyond three o'clock, so I will be a little constrained in that.

I would also very much like to thank the members, officers and staff of the trade unions who are affiliated with the Australian Labor Party. Those trade unions got together in 1891 and reached the view that an important way to promote the interests of their members was to seek to have representatives elected in Parliament. We have been hard at work since 1891 with that purpose. I thank the members, officers and staff of each of the trade unions affiliated with the Australian Labor Party and also note how much I have enjoyed working with the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees Association of Western Australia, which is the affiliated union that I have worked most closely with over my time as a member of the Labor Party.

I talked a little before about the Westminster system and democracy, which I think is best guaranteed by the Westminster system. I have had discussions with constituents to say that my job is to come in here and vote according to their views. That is interesting when one has 300 000-odd constituents who have variations in their views! I think that is not quite right. I think we are here to deliberate and actively consider, but I will get onto that later.

If you asked me what I thought democracy was, Mr President, I would say that it was about the public will being able to achieve a peaceable change in government and Parliament. As an individual member of Parliament, I regard my role as an employee of 300 000-odd employers. I have occasionally woken up in the middle of the night concerned that they may all want my attention on the same day, but that has not happened and there are three or four more days to go, so it is unlikely. I consider myself as an employee of the 300 000-odd electors of the North Metropolitan Region in Western Australia. I believe I have a four-year reviewable contract. I have been lucky enough to have my contract reviewed successfully four times, and I have decided to not put myself forward for a fifth time, so I will never know whether I would have been re-elected. I like to think I would have been, but that is one of those historical things one can never be sure of.

I think I am engaged to think and to consider proposals to change the laws that every Western Australian must live by, and to take responsibility for those decisions. I do not believe that a member of Parliament's job is to be some sort of automatic reflector of popular opinion. The best example I can think of is the possible majority of opinion in support of capital punishment in Western Australia. I believe that the role of our state and our system is to protect people, not to kill them, so I am totally opposed to it. I would not care if the whole 300 000 told me I should do their will and support capital punishment; I would not do it, because I am not engaged to simply reflect majority opinion in my constituency. I am engaged to consider and make decisions on their behalf. I am still accountable to my electorate because if I were to put myself forward for election four years hence, they would assess my contract as their employee. It is very important. I am not impressed by arguments to say that this opinion poll says whatever, therefore I am bound to vote as my electors say, because I do not think people who are canvassed in opinion polls have the opportunity to sit in the Legislative Council, the senior chamber of the Western Australian Parliament, and deliberate and thoroughly study the proposals before us. I am not here as an automatic voting machine to be guided by popular opinion; I am here to think, consider, make decisions and be a responsible representative, rather than simply a reflective representative. I think this is very important to remember and, ultimately, we are accountable, as we should be, to the public will by way of each election. It is very important to think about our work in that way. I think that considering myself as an employee of 300 000-odd people engaged in the job to the best of my judgement and the best of my ability is a helpful way to think about my role as a member of this chamber and a helpful way to think about representative democracy in general.

I was recently with some people who saw a union demonstration march by Parliament House. The people I was with were lovely people, but they did not respond positively to the demonstration. Sometimes union demonstrations can be quite colourful and sometimes they tend to appear quite revolutionary as part of the theatre of it, as far as I am concerned. The Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association, which I work most closely with, does not normally present itself as revolutionary. It is probably one of the reasons I feel most comfortable working with it. It has had its moments, I am sure. In fact, I think it is very important that, as much as the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association understands the importance of employers and private enterprise and working responsibly with them in the interests of their members—I think I will call them the “Shopees”, otherwise I might run out of my hour before three o'clock—there are times when they exercise industrial action, but it is not their habit. I think even the unions that like to present as being very ferocious, revolutionary and militant are probably too smart to unnecessarily take industrial action. When I listened to those people the other day I thought I should have been more forthright in saying what I felt, but it was one of those events in which we have a conversation and think more about it afterwards. I honestly believe that trade unions are essential to a civilised community. One of the things that concerns me about my colleagues opposite is the dangerous radicalism we often see in the Liberal Party when they try to stop trade unions doing their work. I think we are blessed to live in Western Australia and

Australia. I have a predilection to demand proof of the benefit of a change before I support it. I think that is quite logical when we live in a good place. I know those trade unions are very important to our community being a civilised one, so I am very concerned by radical proposals to undermine the work of unions.

Why do I think trade unions are essential to a civilised community? They bring a balance to the relationship between the employer and the employee. I suppose, ultimately, elections bring a balance between me as an employee and my 300 000-odd employers. But for more people, trade unions form a vital role in providing balance to that relationship. That balanced relationship results in incomes being higher than they would otherwise be, conditions being better than they would otherwise be and, most importantly, occupational health and safety conditions being better than they would otherwise be. People may say to me that I am overemphasising the importance of trade unions, because a minority of employees in our state are trade union members, and that is true. I also believe that even the employees in our state who are not trade union members benefit enormously from the work of the trade unions that represent other employees. The negotiations for pay and conditions conducted by trade unions on behalf of their members benefit not only their members but also other people employed in the workforce. For these reasons I think trade unions are essential to a civilised community.

I hope that the advocates of business recognise a few fundamental points. Employees are customers. Without an effective trade union movement and people's wages correspondingly being much reduced, there would be fewer customers for the businesses that operate in Western Australia. I believe that one of the reasons there is enormous trade imbalance in our world is the absence of independent trade unions in countries such as China. Independent trade unions are not allowed in China; therefore, the wages of most workers are very low; therefore, how do we compete with very low paid non-trade union supported workers working very hard in very unfair conditions in other countries? It is not possible. I would like to see an independent trade union movement active in every country so that the wages of workers throughout the world can be similarly beneficial, as they are here where there is an active trade union movement. That would have the added benefit of making manufactured goods of countries such as Australia competitive with manufactured goods in countries that today do not have independent trade unions. They would be much better countries if they did. The absence of independent trade unions in other nations contributes to the international trade imbalance. When I consider the economic and strategic consequences of that international trade imbalance, I become very anxious. I think the economic and strategic consequences of the international trade imbalance are very grave. Being an amateur student of history, I am well aware of terrible and bloody consequences that follow international trade imbalances and other causes of anxiety and instability at an international level. Of course, trade unions, like the Westminster system, are human institutions and therefore imperfect. They may be imperfect, but they are nevertheless essential for maintaining peace and wellbeing in our community.

I would like to talk about some other essentials for a civilised community. One is quality public education, and the hope that entails for everyone who receives it, to build a better life for themselves and to see that developed in their children and people close to them, including, I might say, older people who are in a position to take up educational improvement. I am looking at my colleague Hon Ljiljana Ravlich and remembering the work done when she was education minister to encourage Western Australians of whatever age or circumstance to realise that it is never too late to take up education.

Adequate social security is also linked to hope; in fact, if there were no adequate social security, what would follow is the opposite of hope, which is fear.

In respect of quality public health, one of the proudest achievements for me as a member of the Australian Labor Party is the establishment of Medicare. Can members imagine being in a situation in which their child needs urgent medical attention, so they have to decide between buying food for the week or paying the doctor's bill? My very wise wife, Sylvia, brought this one to my attention, either at a meeting or privately, and it really crystallised for me how important Medicare and public health care is if we want to have a civilised community. Obviously, it is essential to have that kind of backup to provide people with medical aid when they need it, rather than when they can afford it or have saved up money for it. Obviously, if one is saving up for their child's medical attention and it is urgent, it is going to be a pathway to disaster. Medicare, as a Labor Party achievement, is an institution that is part of our community and provides hope for Western Australians. I see quality public education, adequate social security, quality public health care with Medicare as a key part and the essential role of independent trade unions, as all the different aspects that make our society a civilised one.

Mr President, hope was the theme of my first contribution in this place; I was standing roughly about here, and my delivery was even more nervous than it is today, under the careful gaze of your predecessor, Hon Clive Griffiths! The idea of hope was the theme of my first contribution to the debate here, and after 16-plus years, you might think, "Well, Ed's stuck in the same rut because he's going back to exactly the same theme", but there have been a few diversions in the 16 years in between.

I am not talking about false hope; we need to provide Western Australians with realistic hope for a better future. We want a realistic expectation for a better future for ourselves, our children and all the people who we share our

lives with and have come to know and love and have affection for. Hope is essential to the wellbeing of Western Australians; hope is equally essential for keeping the peace in Western Australia. The violence and other forms of disrespect that we see from time to time are very closely linked to a lack of hope in the perpetrators, as displayed in their unfortunate behaviour. Providing realistic hope is a key to providing a peaceful existence for us. The idea of hope is a common thread for each of the aspects of a civilised society that I have been talking about: independent trade unions, public education, public health and social security. All of those have the common thread of hope, and they are four reasons why I am a member of the Australian Labor Party; there are others, but by and large they are the main ones. They are the four reasons why I think we provide hope, civilisation and a peaceful way of doing things in our community.

I am attracted to an old slogan that I saw on a badge once, which said, "Unity of Labor is the hope of the world", and I think that is true, otherwise I would not be here. I have done my best today to explain it, and I hope that my colleagues across the chamber will give due consideration to my thoughts. I imagine that my colleagues on this side of the chamber are here for largely the same reasons that I am. Often, though, the Labor Party is unfairly criticised by the suggestion that our unity is somehow uniformity. They are two very, very different concepts. We are united, but very different. Anyone in this chamber who has eyes to see and ears to hear could look over here and see that we are far from uniform; the same eyes and ears will also tell you that we are united. They are very different concepts, and it is very important to understand the difference.

This is my last week of more than 16 years in Parliament. I was mildly terrified when someone told me that I was the third longest-serving member in the house; I thought about the records set by my esteemed colleagues Hon Norman Moore and Hon Barry House and I thought, "No, no, no; I won't be inclined to try to match them", particularly when Hon Norman Moore responded to being congratulated by the then Leader of the House on 25 years in Parliament by making reference to entering the second half of his parliamentary career! I was looking forward to coming back as a former member to watch you in your fiftieth year, Hon Norman Moore, but unless you decide to make a comeback, that is probably unlikely to happen!

This is my last week of 16 years and five months, roughly. I think it was Christmas Eve of 1996 when I had the pleasure of meeting Malcolm Peacock and his colleagues and being sworn in in the Clerk's chamber. I think that making an objective self-assessment of my own work in the last week of 16 and a half years would be a bit silly; I probably should have made those assessments a bit earlier on! That is just as well, because for me to make an objective self-assessment of my own work would be not only silly but also impossible. What can I say about the work that I have tried to do? The most obvious thing that I can say is that I hope that my work has contributed to the wellbeing and hopefulness of a number of Western Australians. I hope that is the case; I cannot be certain, but I hope it is the case. What I can be certain of is saying that whatever I have been able to achieve would not have been possible without the support of my family and my colleagues who work with me in my electorate office in Balcatta.

Meeting my wife, Sylvia, is the great good fortune of my life. Sylvia has been untiring in her support, her advice and, probably above all, patience over decades of my political activity, including earlier times as a volunteer and, for the last 26 or 27 years, in a professional capacity. I am blessed to have an elder son in Alex; we very carefully called him Alexander, but he prefers Alex, so he gets the last say on these things! Alex is very thoughtful in his consideration of public matters. He sharpens my wit, if that is possible, with challenging debates around the dining room table, and that is really good. I am not saying it is impossible because I am already so sharp—I am saying, how much can you sharpen the blunt, Hon Linda Savage! I appreciate Alex's support with how-to-vote cards and his attendance at many, many, many Labor Party meetings. Pride is not the type of instinct that I look for, but I could not help it the day that I listened to Alexander stand up at the Marangaroo–Darch branch meeting and put the case of his opposition to general retail trading on Sundays. That was easy for me to listen to, because I entirely agreed with him, and I think I am allowed to say that now! If I had my way, I would also abolish Saturday afternoon trading and encourage people to go to WAFL matches, but that is me! Alexander may have had an element of self-interest, because he is a member of the Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association of WA and a happy employee at Camera House. When I heard him put that case so well at that most excellent of Labor Party branches, I was very pleased and proud of him.

I am blessed with two sons. My other son, Cameron, is my enthusiastic and constant companion through so much of my life, and not least my political work. I reckon I am very, very lucky, because that very patient lady in my life, Sylvia, is probably more understanding of me wanting to spend the time when I am not involved professionally at football and even cricket matches because our son Cameron and her father, Manfred, similarly enjoy those activities, so that is probably to my advantage. Cameron is the most energetic of campaigners. Any honest person involved in politics professionally would have to stop and think before they answered the question: are you looking forward to that election coming up very soon? Cameron is. Cameron loves elections; he loves campaigning, he loves handing out how-to-vote cards, and he loves dropping letters and pamphlets in letterboxes. Between elections he has to satisfy his political appetite in other fields. When we have branch meetings or other party forums, Cameron enjoys making a contribution. I recollect giving my state parliamentary report to a meeting of the Marangaroo–Darch branch some years ago and Cameron, quite out of the blue, said that it was time for his report.

Cameron then gave a detailed precis of Robert Ray's examination of Labor's structure and electoral prospects. We all learnt from it. Listening to Cameron's precis was more time-efficient than reading the whole of the Robert Ray report. I must say that I have enormous respect for Robert Ray. If I believed in reincarnation, I would believe that Robert Ray was a reincarnation of Louis XIV in terms of him being a consummate and capable politician, but that is an argument for a different day. He wrote this report and Cameron analysed it and gave a precis of it to a meeting of the Marangaroo–Darch branch. The sort of pride I felt when Alexander argued the case for people doing things other than shopping on their weekends, I similarly felt when Cameron gave the precis of Robert Ray's report. I think Robert Ray would have been pleased to have received the precis, but he was not there. He might have been a bit jealous of someone being able to more concisely put his main points, as Cameron had done.

The other important role for Cameron politically is as my personal media monitor. Members who have been here awhile might remember that in early 2005 I had a brush with cancer, which I am very lucky to have survived, and not only survived, but managed to survive with only surgery being required and without needing chemo and all that type of thing. I had a day in August 2008 when I was driving and I very safely used an excellent hands-free mobile telephone to take the opportunity to contact home to say that the most recent blood tests were very good. Cameron answered the phone. Cameron did not want to talk about blood tests; I think he knew I was pretty okay without hearing about the blood tests. He told me that the Premier, Hon Alan Carpenter, had been to visit His Excellency the Governor to call an election. This was August. I think it was unprecedented, or there had not been an election at that time of the year since 1913 or something, so I made a mistake and ventured to suggest that Cameron may have misunderstood what he had heard. This was a mistake. I said to Cameron on this excellent hands-free and very safe mobile phone while I was driving, "Cameron, I think what you heard was some journalist—and we all know what they are like—speculating about the Premier going to visit the Governor." Cameron said, "No, dad. The Premier has been to the Governor to call the election." I said no. Anyway, I looked at the clock in the car and saw that it was getting close to the hour, so I told Cam that I would hang up and ring him back in a minute. I got the ABC news a few minutes later. I am glad Cameron could not see my red face, because I was alone in the car. I rang him and said, "Cameron, you were absolutely correct; I was absolutely incorrect." I promised Cameron that I would never again doubt his political advice. That is one incident, but there have been many when the first time I have heard of something has been through Cameron monitoring the media. His favourite media institution is the Australian Broadcasting Corporation, and he has a bit of an aspiration to one day be something of a Kerry O'Brien. I hope it comes true. He is my media monitoring service, so I am very lucky.

I am going to keep talking about my family because I like talking about my family. The other very important member of our family is our little Maltese–Silky cross, Peppa. He has been a member of our family for the last 13 years. We are hoping that he will set some record similar to Hon Norman Moore's by being in our family for the next 13 years as well, if we are lucky. Peppa is a good friend. I had a day when I had a draft report of the Standing Committee on Public Administration of some depth. I think the public administration committee is terrific. I enjoyed being on the committee with you when you were the chairman, Mr President. I think I was your deputy chairman for a fair bit of that. The whole idea of the public admin committee is to find the imperfections in the public administration in Western Australia and see where we can improve it. I had a very good draft report and I was going through it, reading it and annotating it. I thought, "What is the best way of doing this?" I think I had the house to myself so I stayed home in a rocking chair with a pen, Post-it notes, which my colleagues here like to refer to, for tagging the annotations, and I had my companion, Peppa, on my knee. If he was taking a sly look at this privileged document, I apologise for that! I think the probability of Peppa leaking the information he acquired by his sly looks at the draft report were probably minimal, so it was probably okay in terms of a security risk! When I read about the failings of certain officers in the public service of Western Australia, I must say I was seething. When you are seething, it is bad for your blood pressure, so it is very important when you are seething to be soothed. The best way of soothing me while reading this report was for me to pat Peppa. He thought that was the only sensible thing I was doing all day. That brings me to a very important point about the enormous value of companion animals. As they bring us great joy, they deserve great respect. If anyone wants advice about a companion animal, I have become a keen advocate of Maltese–Silky crosses, but I am sure others have a similar view. Particularly when one has a small backyard, a dog the size of the average cat is probably of the right order. We recently acquired a fish. I think Sylvia has waited for a few more girls in the family, but the fish is a boy, so his name is Lance. I have not come to the point, you will be pleased, Mr President, of consulting the fish on parliamentary matters, but if I had decided to seek a further four years in this place and Lance lived long enough with us, as I hope he will, you never know what might have been possible!

I referred to my family as being an essential component in making my work possible. The other essential component in making my work possible has been my colleagues in my electorate office—that is, my electoral officers and research officers. My constituents and I have been very fortunate with the quality and dedication of the staff I have had in my Balcatta electorate office both in the past and the present. I was lucky to have work for me when I first started Maurene Palmer, who had many years of experience with Hon Graham Edwards, who had a very distinguished career in this place. Maurene was always efficient and encouraging. For me, as a brand-new member, to have an electorate officer with that experience with a very accomplished long-term member of this

place such as Graham Edwards, was a great advantage. We had a young fellow called Darren Klarich around that time. Darren was always good to be with, enthusiastic and full of ideas. Earlier on, and since 1998, I had two very close and good friends in my electorate office, Dr John Crouch and Mrs Jane Saunders. I will not talk at length about John Crouch because, sadly, last year I had an occasion to talk in some detail about John's life, our friendship and the contribution of his work both in our electorate office and more broadly in policy and campaign work for the Australian Labor Party, because sadly we lost John to cancer in March last year. I am aware of the impending three o'clock, Hon Giz Watson, so I have said what I have to say about John, other than to say that more than a year since John passed away, we still miss him enormously. He leaves a great gap in my life and the life of many others who had the good fortune to share their life with John. We miss his wisdom and friendship.

I am very fortunate to have still working with me Jane Saunders and Margaret Pearce. Jane started off doing relief work with me. I had the good fortune to work with Jane and John together when they were volunteering for Kim Beazley's campaigns when he was the member for Swan, and I was fortunate to be working in his office. I now have Jane Saunders and Margaret Pearce working for me. Jane comes into work at Balcatta every day from Roleystone and Margaret comes in from Lesmurdie. We get traffic reports regularly and I have had reports from Jane and Margaret that have led me to ask questions in the house about different points related to traffic. If members wondered where some of those questions came from, I have now given it away. Jane, efficiently and effectively, manages our office. Most extraordinarily, Jane also efficiently and effectively manages me. I would have to be the most difficult member of Parliament to manage in Western Australia, Australia, the world, and every jurisdiction, and Jane achieves this herculean feat. Furthermore, Jane is also very skilled in translating the script of one of the least legible members of Parliament in the world, and she regularly provides this member of Parliament—I commented earlier about having the ears to hear and the eyes to see—with very honest advice and she makes sure that I have those ears working.

More importantly than all of that, Jane's care and commonsense has been of enormous importance to many who have visited our electorate office. That sentence does not do justice to the amount, the quality or the effectiveness of work that Jane has performed in our office to make the lives of many people tremendously better than they would otherwise have been. I cannot really talk about that sort of thing without giving away personal details, but it is just extraordinary what she is able to do and how much she has transformed and improved people's lives; she has given them more hope and a better future through the work she has done.

Margaret Pearce is always a joy to share time with but I put one caveat on that comment. Margaret has one flaw—her devotion to the Perth Demons Football Club. The only time I have not really enjoyed sharing time with Margaret is when Perth have had the temerity to beat Claremont, because Margaret does tend to rub it in. Other than that, Margaret is always uplifting and a joy to share time with. Margaret's advice and managerial work are vital to our office team, and I have seen people in very challenging and distressing circumstances benefit from Margaret's care and commonsense.

I have been lucky enough to make some terrific friends among the Parliament House staff. I will not even start with that because it is getting close to three o'clock but I just want to say to all of them, thank you. I like to consider people in here my friends as well—thank you. I was hoping to say a little word to everyone before I finished but I am starting to be concerned that that may not be possible. I hope you all achieve what you want in life and enjoy your experience here as much as I have, and I fully intend to enjoy the next three days.

I want to talk about a handbook for political success and a handbook for anyone—it should be compulsory reading—who ever hopes to lead anyone else, William Shakespeare's *King Lear*. It is an excellent read and I am tempted to start on page 1 and read right through the book. However, Hon Giz Watson might lose patience and her guests might get cross at me if I were to do that, so I will try to provide a synopsis. Perhaps I will try to do for *King Lear* what Cameron did for Robert Ray's report on the internals of the Australian Labor Party.

King Lear was a legendary figure. When Geoffrey of Monmouth wrote *The History of The Kings of Britain*, he had a collection of legends about kings for which there is very little historical record, and one of them was King Lear. King Lear, as he got on in years, decided that he liked people to tell him how good he was and how much they loved him—a very vulnerable quality. I am reminded of Simon and Garfunkel's wise words in *The Boxer* when they said —

All lies and jests
Still a man hears what he wants to hear
And disregards the rest

It is comforting to hear a proposition that resonates with our preconceived ideas. Our preconceived ideas are, no doubt, the accumulation of thoughts we have heard, shared and considered in the years of our life up to today. So when we hear something that resonates with what we already think, it is comforting. Our skill in this place is the art of persuasion, which can mean drawing people to have the confidence to leave behind a preconceived idea and to move on to a different point of view. I am talking about the merit of doing such; I am not claiming to be good at it.

I remember and greatly admire the day when Hon Norman Moore—the war horse of the Liberal Party—fought against the electoral reform legislation, which I thought was appalling because as a democrat I was enthusiastic to support the electoral reform legislation. However, I remember seeing him find the last clause and last constitutional variation about the Legislative Council not initiating an expense to the people of the state, and he thought he had a winner. I thought, “Norman Moore does not give up”, and I admire that, Norman. I have enjoyed our exchanges. Norman, I have a suspicion that after another four years Mrs Moore, Lee, will bring you to the front door and say, “Norman, in you go. Stop getting under my feet in the kitchen. Go and play with your friends in the Legislative Council.” That is why he will come back and finish another 15 years to make it 50 years, but that is another theory.

Let me get back to King Lear. Someone is distracting me; I have no idea who it might be. I normally look this way and that way when I say that, but I think it might be me. King Lear had three daughters. When I look down the list of characters in the play, the villain in the play is called Edmund. I am sure that has absolutely no significance whatsoever. The other interesting thing is that the wisest person in the play is described as the fool, and that is fairly poignant in itself. When members read the play, they can see how wise that particular fool was in the court of King Lear. King Lear decided, probably self-indulgently, that he wanted the comfort of hearing what he wanted to hear so that he could disregard the rest and feel comfort in that. He asked his three daughters—Cordelia the good one, and Regan and Goneril—to tell him how much they loved him. Regan and Goneril laid it on with a trowel about how magnificent he was, what a fine father he was, how much they loved them, and their devotion to him for ever and ever and the loyalty that goes with that. Cordelia, without me quoting extensively—to the tribulation of Hon Giz Watson—basically said to her father, “You are okay.” King Lear was not smart enough to understand these things as he should have. He decided to divide his realm into two and to allow the daughters who told him how much they loved him to govern half each. Before long they were treating him with total disrespect and war and violence prevailed throughout Britain. The good news was that the honest daughter, Cordelia, was able to prevail in the end and bring peace to the realm.

My thesis is that if we are to bring peace to the realm—that peace or civilised community that I talked about earlier—it would be far more likely to occur if we spent more time listening to Cordelias who are brave enough to give honest, true and often critical advice, rather than the Gonerils and Regans who are prepared to lie and claim the love and affection that they do not really hold in their heart. I think I have been blessed with many Cordelias in my life; foremost who come to mind are Sylvia and Jane, whom I referred to earlier, and I would like to thank them both for all their services, but most particularly for being my Cordelias and not allowing me to be a silly old fool like King Lear.

I want to raise two more issues. I talked about the staff in Parliament House, and I did not want to be specific; but I will be a bit specific and talk about the ladies who operate the switchboard. I strongly suspect they might be quietly running the state, with some of the extra roles they take on. I am about to venture into something mathematically challenging, so I might get some help from the more mathematically astute people around the chamber. I have estimated that when I needed to find a member to bring them into the chamber or for some other reason to satisfy the requirements of the Whip—the reason I sit behind my fearless leader, Hon Sue Ellery, is that I hear her instructions and I relay them to others—the ladies who make that possible for me are the switchboard ladies. One day I had rung for the fifth time to ask where Hon John Cowdell was—I am sure I said “the honourable” and not some other form of description—the switchboard lady said to me, “Ed, have a look in the Chair.” As the Chairman of Committees, he was over there and therefore not in his place over here! But I got very exasperated at the time. Without doubt, the switchboard ladies provide that support. They do at least half of my work as the Labor Party Whip. The other person who does at least half of my work as the Labor Party Whip is Jane Saunders. Jane manages the pairs. On a Monday she would give me the program of pairs that have been allocated at that date, and I would take over. Jane had done this for weeks and weeks and weeks, and I, in a very princely fashion, decided to do the work for the most recent week. That is basically how we do it. This is where the mathematical challenge comes in: the switchboard ladies are doing at least half my work as the Labor Party Whip and Jane is doing at least half of my work as Labor Party Whip; and if I was very clever, I would not have had to do any work at all as the Labor Party Whip! But I did manage to find some, which may suggest three halves. Mr President, if you can resolve the mathematical quandary of finding three halves in a whole, I understand why we have been electing you as President! That would be quite an achievement. I would particularly like to thank the switchboard ladies for their role, amongst all the other staff who make working in Parliament House such a delight, but I particularly wanted to thank them.

I listened with interest to our new chums in the chamber last night—Hon Dave Grills and Hon Martin Aldridge. I think the National Party is an interesting outfit. It certainly brings along candidates who are very different, one from the other. Listening to Hon Martin Aldridge, I was delighted to hear his references to Bremer Bay and Gingin. He took me back to the days when I was doing my botany degree at the University of Western Australia, when I used to run around chasing slow-moving wildflowers—the kangaroo paws, *Anigozanthos manglesii* and *humilis*, at Gingin Cemetery, and others around Bremer Bay; they were great days. It was terrific listening to that speech. I remember both of those gentlemen, and others—Hon Matt Benson-Lidholm and I think Hon Linda Savage—

making a similar point. They spoke about how often political parties—I am not going to be silly enough to pretend the Labor Party is pure in this way, but we have had a recent example from the other side of the chamber—go into an election and promise the sun and the moon and the stars and are reluctant to make any reference to where they might raise the tax revenue to pay for either the sun or moon or stars, let alone all three! And then, when they get in, they say “Oops!”—or when they get re-elected, they say, “Oops! There’s even less money than we realised when we were last in government”, which was before the election. It is pretty extraordinary to be in government and to make a whole set of promises, and then when they are re-elected to try to say they did not realise how bad the books were so they could not keep their promises. All sides of politics have done this. If our colleagues in the Greens ever get large enough to get close to a treasury bench, I suspect they might do it as well. Political parties promise the sun, the moon and the stars; they avoid reference to how they will pay for that and they make excuses after the election. I am very pleased that we have a system of government as excellent as the Westminster system, because the Westminster system is going to need all of its inherent strengths to deal with the public disillusionment that will follow from people putting themselves forward for election with promises that cannot be paid for. I think all of us here, particularly our colleagues in the junior chamber, need to examine our souls on that question. If we promise less and deliver more, we will be held in higher respect in the community, and this excellent system of government will be less sorely tested. Testing even the best systems of government is something that we should not do. Honesty is the best way of avoiding that testing.

I have never studied political science, and the more I go along to talk to school students who are doing politics, the more I say, “I don’t know why I am up here and you are down there, because you are more educated in politics than I am; I have never studied it at all.” That is true, but I will propose a political science experiment for whichever party in this chamber is brave enough to try it first. We are four years out from an election, so members can plan it; in fact, I would like to see all the parties do it. They can go into the next election and say: we have problems with traffic congestion and transport. We would like to have a health system that is more readily able to meet people’s needs and an education system that delivers a better system so our young people would benefit. We are going to do our very best to improve each of these essential services; and, by the way, unless we are going to go down the path of Greece or Cyprus or one of those other unfortunate places I am happy I do not live in, we will need to find the revenue to pay for it. It would be fascinating to see what electoral support a party would receive from the electors if it was that frank and honest in putting itself forward to govern the state. I have raised this before with people who have had leadership experience. They have said, “But, Ed, you have to be strident and confident.” Can someone be strident, confident and honest at the same time? I like to think it is possible.

Hon Ken Travers: And your opponents do not mislead about your admission.

Hon ED DERMER: It would work best, if everyone adopted this. It is interesting, Hon Ken Travers, because we cannot control anyone else’s behaviour, and trying to persuade them is often a waste of time. The best chance of someone listening is if they ask for advice in the first place—no-one has asked me, but I am offering it anyway! I would like to see Australia’s political parties go to future elections with realistic assessments of what can be done to improve things and not promise the sun, moon and stars and to have a realistic discussion about how we pay for that. If a party that was brave and honest enough to approach an election in that way did badly in the election, I suppose the adage about democracy that people get the government they deserve might be true. But I think Western Australians deserve to have an honest engagement with all of the political competitors who put themselves forward to govern this great state. There should be a little bit of examination and a little bit of determination, hopefully, on all sides of politics, for people to be honest with the electors in the next vote. I think the electors in Western Australia are people of wisdom and commonsense, by and large. I think the party that was brave enough and honest enough to engage with the electors to talk honestly about the limitations on what they can achieve, but can indicate the incremental achievements they are able to achieve and the need to pay for those incremental improvements, would receive their respect and support. I am putting forward a political science experiment. I am hoping everyone in this place will think about it and, hopefully, decide to put that political science experiment to the test at the next opportunity.

Colleagues, thank you for putting up with me. Thank you for sharing the last 16 and a half years with me, and that extends to people who are not in this place anymore; sadly, that includes Hon Max Trenorden, who I think was a marvellous Chairman of the Standing Committee on Public Administration. Now I am distracting myself, and it is just about 3.00 pm. I am going to try to be the politician who leads by example and keep to my promise of sitting at down at three o’clock. All the very best, and thank you.

[Applause.]