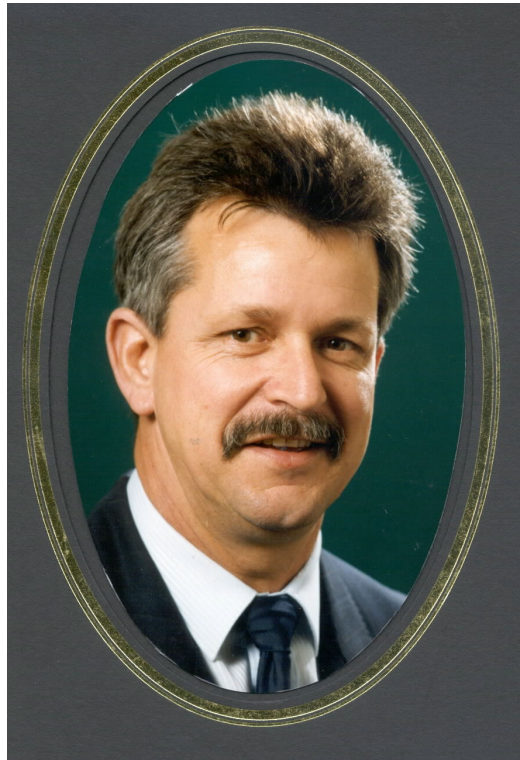




PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Mr Michael Barnett, MLA
(Member for Rockingham)

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 13 November 1996

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Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 13 November 1996

APPROPRIATION (CONSOLIDATED FUND) BILL (NO 4)

Second Reading

MR M. BARNETT (Rockingham) [9.50 pm]: After 23 years in this place it will come as no surprise —

Mr Cowan: It was a very good year.

Mr M. BARNETT: Yes, the Deputy Premier and I were elected in the same year.

I want to point out to members the justification and the reason for the Public Gallery being so full of people and the Press Gallery being so full. Members will understand why that is when they have been in this place for 23 years. Those members who came to this place in 1974, as the Deputy Premier did, were a particularly good vintage. The most important person in my life is actually in the Public Gallery tonight and I want members to know who it is. So that members can pick her out among the throng, I point to the young lady who is on my left.

[Applause.]

Mr M. BARNETT: Members know that without a particularly good partner they could not properly serve their electorates. When I went home and told Ros that I had finally made the decision to leave Parliament and go on to other things, she asked me how I felt about it. I had all sorts of mixed emotions, but I told her that I felt really sad. She said, "That is interesting, so do I." I asked her why she felt that way and she replied, "Because from now on you will be home on Tuesday and Wednesday nights, and they are my nights"! The rule in my house is that I must find other things to do on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. If next year members see a lonely face in the Public Gallery, it will be because I have been thrown out of my house, where I will not be recognised on Tuesday and Wednesday nights.

Mr Thomas: Try darts.

Mr M. BARNETT: The member for Cockburn is not supposed to interject on me.

In trying to determine what I would say in this speech I cast my mind back to the beginning of my political and parliamentary career. I remembered that in 1973 the Australian Labor Party told me that the seat of Rockingham could not possibly be won by the party because the area had been looked after by Cyril Rushton and he always won his seat with a two-thirds majority. The party told me it was not sure about me, but it was prepared to give me a test run. It told me if I turned out all right, it would select me for a winnable seat at a later stage. That was the start of the process by which I was selected for the seat of Rockingham in 1973. In 1974 somehow or other I fell over the line by 187 votes. Within a couple of days the local media came to my home and took a photograph of me at 27 years of age. I raise this matter because one of the things that members who have been in this place for some time are supposed to do is drop pearls of wisdom and other such gems. I will not do that, but I will have time to tell members a couple of yarns. To come back to the photograph, it is of me and my family when I was 27 and they were younger. My electorate will be interested to see photographs of me on my retirement date because I have been using that photograph ever since I was first elected. I do not think they will recognise me. I will table the photograph for the balance of today's sitting.

[The photograph was tabled for the information of members.]

Mr M. BARNETT: In those days Serpentine, Jarrahdale, Keysbrook, Byford, Singleton, Golden Bay and Rockingham made up the electorate of Rockingham, which had 8 000 electors. The electorate covered quite an area to get that number of electors. At the time it was a country electorate and it has changed a lot since then.

Several members interjected.

Mr M. BARNETT: I do not want members to interject on me because I do not want to extend my time if I can avoid it. I certainly do not want members to miss any of my pearls of wisdom.

The high school had just been built and there were no traffic lights in Rockingham. It was a huge electorate and covered almost half the State to give the electorate 8 000 electors. Currently, there are 62 000 people in Rockingham and I am unable to tell members the number of traffic lights and other facilities in the town.

Mr Kierath: Do you claim credit for the 62 000 electors?

Mr M. BARNETT: No, but I do claim credit for every one of the public facilities that have been provided in the time I have been in this Parliament. None of them would have been provided had it not been for me. They were

provided because the third electorate office to open in this State was the office I occupied in Rockingham. Electorate offices were first established in 1974. The Deputy Premier is shaking his head and he would not be doing that if I were right. What is he trying to tell me?

Mr Cowan: At the risk of incurring the wrath of the Acting Speaker (Mr Ainsworth), electorate offices actually commenced under the leadership of John Tonkin. Very few members on the conservative side of Parliament took them up.

Mr M. BARNETT: The Deputy Premier is exactly right. As always, there is a shade of grey. The electorate office of Rockingham was the third electorate office to open. Mal Bryce's electorate office was the first to open and that was under the leadership of John Tonkin. At the end of John Tonkin's three year term as Premier he had agreed in Caucus to the opening of electorate offices. The Deputy Premier is right—the conservatives did not take up the offer. We did not tell them until after all the Labor Party members had made their arrangements.

Mr Thomas: The member for Merredin has caught up.

Mr Blaikie interjected.

Mr M. BARNETT: Excuse me, I did not particularly like the speech by the member for Vasse.

Mr Blaikie: I like yours.

Mr M. BARNETT: It is because of the electorate office that members are able to properly communicate with their electorate. Constituents are able to visit members on a regular basis rather than make trips to Parliament House, which is where members of Parliament used to hide before 1973. Members are now aware of exactly what is happening in their electorate and they know what people think about them and what their requirements are. It is a longwinded way of saying that I was responsible for all the things that occurred in the 23 years I have been in Parliament. Obviously, I was not, but I like to think I played a small part in some of them.

My first visit to Parliament House was an interesting day. Almost immediately after being elected I came to this place and when I was 27 years old I was more naive than I am today. I distinctly remember walking along the corridors of power, with chandeliers all around, and thinking it was a grandiose place. I kept looking behind me for the person who I thought would tap me on the shoulder and say, "What are you doing here, you are not supposed to be here."

After a short time I became used to it and I was given the opportunity to make my maiden speech. It was at that time I recognised the good sense in the dress patterns in this place. My fear was so great that had I worn anything other than long trousers people would have seen my legs shaking and my knees knocking together. John Tonkin recognised that fear and after my speech he came to me and said, "Mike, what is wrong?" I said, "I am just so nervous after making that speech. It was not as good as I wanted it to be." He said, "Mike, I have been in this place for 40 years and I still get nervous before every speech I make." It gave me great hope and I sat in this place for quite some time before I gained the courage to make another speech.

When I first came to this place Rockingham had very few facilities, but I thought, in my naivety, if I worked hard enough I would do something for Rockingham. I stole for Rockingham from Kwinana a decision to establish a technical and further education college and a hospital. I thought I had convinced the Government to move these facilities to Rockingham, and that the people of Rockingham would be so happy with the hard work I had done. It transpired that it was not through my hard work that those facilities were moved to Rockingham. The Government was trying to buy Rockingham. It did not take any notice of me. It had moved those facilities into Rockingham because it was a marginal seat and it thought if it filled the area with all those goodies it would win it back. That did not happen. However, it is interesting to note that the philosophy has not changed at all. I cannot blame only the current Government, because the previous Labor Government did the same thing. Have members seen the facilities earmarked for Mandurah? They are unbelievable. It is half the size of Rockingham and growing at half the rate. All the facilities that should be in Rockingham are going to Mandurah. One Government after the other has favoured Mandurah. Do members think that the electors of Mandurah deserve those facilities? Of course they do not. Governments keep trying to buy their vote. We should serve the electorates in a much more balanced way. I know that is long way off, but it will happen at some stage or other.

It is right that I should mention the Rockingham–Kwinana District Hospital. As the local member of Parliament I was fortunate to be invited to attend the opening of the hospital. That was on a Friday. On the Sunday I played rugby, and on the Monday I was the first patient in the hospital's operating theatre. Interestingly, the twenty-first birthday party of that hospital was held this year. After going through its records, the hospital invited me to its celebrations in two capacities: The member for Rockingham and the hospital's first patient! That was an honour and a thrill.

Another injury I incurred during the time I was a member happened when I was knocked off my bicycle. I had been riding home from my electorate office on my push bike, keeping very fit so I could work hard for my electors.

Mr Board interjected.

Mr M. BARNETT: The member for Jandakot thinks I would have got \$60 000 if my name had been Leo McLeay. Riding home from my electorate office, I went round the roundabout and a car came from the left and knocked me flying. The bike was ruined and I landed on the other side of the roundabout.

Mr House: Those Liberals will do anything to win the seat.

Mr M. BARNETT: Exactly. I was in great pain; I had broken my leg and I could hardly move. The bloke in the car rushed over and said, "I didn't see you Mike; I'm so sorry." I thought, "Goodness, he's recognised me, isn't that good." He asked me whether I was all right. I was so pleased he had recognised me that I said, "I'm fine", so he got in his car and drove off. I was left lying on this roundabout with a broken leg. Ros was driving down the street at the same time, and she said to the kids in the car, "Look at that poor man; he's been knocked off his bike." That was fortuitous; luck just follows me around. Ros was there to pick me up, and the bloke recognised me! What more could I ask for as a member of Parliament?

I have been a member for a long time. I often think of Albert Facey's *A Fortunate Life*. If I ever have the chance to write my history—which I will not—it would show that Albert Facey's life was nothing compared with my life. I have been the most fortunate person with all the people around me and all the opportunities that have been afforded to me.

Five Speakers have been in this place since I became a member, and I was one of them. I well remember the first day I was appointed as Speaker, and the look of horror and disgust on the face of the now Deputy Premier at the appointment of the member for Rockingham, whose antics and behaviour on the back bench were outrageous and as a Deputy Chairman of Committees probably not much better. I suppose I started from a bad base. I hope that by the end of the two terms I served as Speaker that the Deputy Premier and all those around him felt that I had finally come to terms with the job of Speaker of this place and was performing the duties in a fair and impartial way to the benefit of the Parliament.

I have also served under six Premiers. I have contested seven elections, and my constituents have treated me extraordinarily well. I do not believe a member of Parliament has been treated any better in any electorate than I have been treated. From time to time even the conservatives have been particularly good to me. I can remember some elections when the conservative party members came to my office and said, "Mike, we can't vote for you; we couldn't possibly bring ourselves to vote Labor, but here are all the pamphlets we were supposed to put out." Who could ask for more than that? That is an incredible gesture of support for a member who really wants to look after his electorate.

There have been nine leaders of the Labor Party since I came here. I have seen eight of them off. The current leader is an excellent leader. All the current members of the Labor Party are top quality members of Parliament, and some are in the early stages of their careers. Most, if not all, will make excellent members of government when that opportunity is given to them. That is not to say there are not excellent people on the conservative benches and I am sure some good things should be said about them at this stage, so I should do that—no, not that! Could someone help me out? I am trying to think of some good things to say about the conservative members of Parliament. In all seriousness, I find that it has been a pleasure and privilege to serve in this Parliament with members of both sides. Although I take the opportunity from time to time to tease my opponents I do find that many of them are excellent members of Parliament. I do not wish them long and illustrious careers; however, I wish them well in the future.

I thank the staff of the Chamber, the Clerks of the Chamber, the people who service all our wants and needs, and the Press, although most of the time the Press have a totally different agenda from members. I want to thank all those people for the contribution they make to the Parliament. I should mention too that one of the most fortunate events that I remember in relation to the Press related to a local newspaper in Rockingham called *The Eagle*. It was established at the time I was first elected as Speaker. It published an article about my election that I took exception to, so having been a member for a long time I chose not to give it any news for about three years. The newspaper took such strong exception to not getting any news from me that at the next election it took out a series of quarter page advertisements that were in the form of blank sections of the paper with only one or two words. They were, "This space was set aside for Mike Barnett, but he will not use it." I thought that was particularly helpful. The newspaper's agenda was slightly different from mine, but it was helpful.

[Leave granted for the member's time to be extended.]

Mr M. BARNETT: I particularly thank Hansard. Some of my first speeches in this place were dreadful, and some people might think they are still. I well remember a speech in which I mentioned that the Government had altered the boundaries of Rockingham dramatically. In my speech I said, "This is an outrage; I can't believe what the Government is doing with the electorate of Rockingham. It is just like that bloke in America did when he rigged the boundaries over there." When the speech came down from Hansard it said, "This is a gerrymander, similar to the one conducted by Governor Gerry in Massachusetts in 1812." I have never forgotten that. I reckon I should have known it then. I tell all members that Hansard is a great benefit to us all. If I have messed up anywhere in this speech, I am sure Hansard will look after me again.

I acknowledge the hard work that the staff in the library do for members. I am particularly grateful for the assistance they have given to me. The education section attached to the library has also been most helpful. What can I say about those in the finance department? We cannot survive without them. They do an excellent job. I also thank Vince Pacecca and all of the dining room staff, the kitchen staff and the gardening staff. Given the huge number of hours we work, we cannot survive without the good work they do. I thank the staff at the annex at 34 Parliament Place for the excellent work they do.

Mark McGowan, the candidate selected by the Australian Labor Party to stand for the seat of Rockingham is an excellent prospect to take up a high office in this place.

Mr Grill: Hear, hear!

Mr M. BARNETT: He is a Royal Australian Navy lawyer; a young man who is about to be married to a lovely young lady who has a long history with the community of Rockingham. Although it has been an honour and a privilege for me to serve in this place, I am convinced that, no matter how long that man is in this Parliament, he will serve Rockingham as well as, and probably better than, I have. I hope he will go on to provide a service to this State from a high office. In fact, I am sure he will.

I must mention my family again. No member in this place can do the job well, in here, in the electorate or at home without a very strong support base. My strong support is here tonight, hoping that I have already found things to occupy myself outside the House on Tuesday and Wednesday nights. I must admit, that I have not done that as yet, but I will try.

The member for Applecross has already told the House that when I was the Speaker he was vociferous. That is an understatement—he was rabid; he was any words that can be linked with that description. He was fair dinkum about getting his job done, and I was just as fair dinkum about getting my job as the Speaker done. In that situation there must be a clash—and we clashed. When I was the Speaker I decided to work on developing the sister state relationship this State has with other countries. Members will know about our sister state relationship with the Hyogo Prefecture in Japan. I went to the then Leader of the Opposition, Barry MacKinnon, and I told him I was going to Japan to further the sister state relationship and I wanted to take with me a person from each political party. I asked him to select a member from his party. He said, “Yes, Richard Lewis.” I asked him not to kid about, that that was not possible and to give me someone else from the party who I could take with me, who would fit in. He said, “Richard Lewis.”

I was devastated because I knew our relationship in the House was so drastic that this visit could not possibly work successfully. I was absolutely convinced of that. When we got to the airport all members of the party were together, except the member for Applecross. We checked in our suitcases and had them tagged to go to Osaka. The member for Applecross was not there. When we checked, we were advised that he had already been checked in. I thought he must have been desperate not to sit beside me on the plane! When we got to Osaka, the welcoming delegation came towards us. Members who have been to Japan on these sorts of visits will know how delicate that operation is. It is well planned, down to the last second. We all got off the plane, including the member for Applecross. We picked up our suitcases—with the exception of the member for Applecross. His suitcase had been sent to Tokyo. I said, “There you go, you just can’t do anything right; you won’t come with us to the airport; you put your suitcase on the plane and have it sent somewhere else; you are absolutely hopeless. I told Barry MacKinnon it would not work.” I must tell members that by the end of the trip I recognised that the member for Applecross was a human being. Ever since then, irrespective of the view held by other people, I have had a sneaking, grudging respect for him, and on many occasions I have been able to have civil chats with him. I recognise that by working together, we can achieve a great deal. I hope other members, without having to go to that extent, can achieve a good working relationship after the next election, no matter who wins.

Mr Thomas: What about Monty House?

Mr House: Chrissie bathed naked with him in a hot spring.

Mr M. BARNETT: We will not talk about the photographs! The member for Kalgoorlie will not forgive me if I do not tell the House about TJ, the world junior champion sheepdog that came to live with me two years ago. Every morning TJ and I walk in the most fantastic environment that members can possibly imagine—Warnbro Sound. It is a beautiful ocean vista, surrounded by sand dunes and a pristine beach, and looks out over miles of water. I can see so far from Warnbro Sound that I swear this morning I saw David Dicks sailing his boat. It is a phenomenal place. Every morning, without exception, between two and six dolphins cruise along within 25 or 30 metres of the beach.

I can hear members ask why I am telling them the story. It is a marine park adjacent to which is the Port Kennedy Scientific Park comprising 400 hectares. Adjacent to that is the Lark Hill complex, which comprises a further 200 ha of vacant land which could be linked to the land about which I have already spoken. If that were to occur, that land would be immediately adjacent to Lake Cooloongup and Lake Walyungup. It would make a national park of 4 000 ha—a fantastic greenbelt area around Rockingham which would satisfy all the planning requirements

and protocols and would provide for Rockingham and the whole of the State a magnificent national park, linked to the marine park. It would be a gem for not only Rockingham but Western Australia. Furthermore, it would provide ecotourism jobs by the hundreds, possibly by the thousands, if properly executed and used.

In conclusion, I deem it an honour and a privilege to have been given the opportunity to be a member of Parliament for 23 years and to have served my electorate for that time. I wish each and every member well in their chosen careers, and I thank members for the time they have shared with me in this place.

[Applause.]
