



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Amber-Jade Sanderson, MLC
(Member for East Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 22 November 2016

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HON AMBER-JADE SANDERSON (East Metropolitan) [3.32 pm]: With your indulgence, Mr President, I appreciate the opportunity to start earlier. It is an enormous privilege to have represented the East Metropolitan Region for the last three and a half years. I am very lucky to be able to leave this place at a time of my own choosing. Of course, I hope not to be going very far. When I reflect on the last three and a half years, it has been a massive learning curve. I have learnt about a wide range of issues and have met a range of people. There is no other job in the world in which one would get the opportunity to do that, so it has been really expanding for me, in so many ways, to be a member for East Metropolitan Region and to represent it in this place. The committees, of course, are a big and important part of that. The process of committees, whilst sometimes incredibly arduous, is always very, very worthwhile and there is always a good outcome at the end. I particularly want to thank the other members of the committees that I have sat on and, of course, the staff, who are really the engine room of the committee process. They put up with a lot, they do the same hours as us when we are completing urgent reports, and they really do always bring so much to the table. They make us all look really good, I have to say.

I learnt a lot about myself on this journey in Parliament. Before I came into this place, the closest I got to Liberal members of Parliament was yelling at them outside their electorate offices with a group of angry education assistants or school cleaners, so it has been an enormous culture shock and I have learnt a lot about myself in that process. I have learnt a lot about working with people who have different views. I have learnt about finding commonality and points of agreement rather than points of difference. There are actually many more points of agreement in this place than points of difference. That has been maturing for me and I have appreciated that.

I have learnt a lot from people on both sides of this chamber, and I thank them for that. I have learnt to enjoy the debate and respectful disagreement on issues that we feel strongly about. The way that members conduct themselves on both sides of this place has been very informing for me as I go forward in my career. I think I have gotten better at this; I have gone from being terrified of standing up and speaking in this place to quite enjoying it sometimes. It really is an enormous privilege to get paid to give one's opinion on the laws governing Western Australians. It is a really lucky job, and I cannot say that enough. Personally, it has been a very eventful three and a half years. I have had a very sad separation and divorce, a new partner, a baby, three house moves and preselection for a marginal seat. After March 2017, I am hoping for a less eventful few years.

I am leaving this place, with some sadness, to contest the seat of Morley. It has come around very quickly, I have to say. I am excited about the next challenge, and contesting the seat of Morley for Labor is an enormous risk. It is a huge leap of faith, and it will be a big fight. Lots of people ask me why I am doing it. Most people spend a lifetime scrambling to get into Parliament and do not easily give up their spots, but I have always believed that with great risk comes great reward. Life is too short to ask what if, and to wonder what would have happened had I not taken up this opportunity or that challenge. It is important to take opportunities as they arise. I have a strong connection with the Morley area. I attended local schools and spent a large part of my childhood growing up there; I live there with my family and my office is based there. Morley is an important strategic centre that has not done well under this government. The surrounding suburbs are suffering record crime rates and lack public transport infrastructure while experiencing choking congestion. Local schools have lost funding, elective surgery waiting lists and ambulance ramping are at record highs, and internet connectivity is appallingly bad. Basic services and infrastructure that taxpayers pay for and rightly expect are inadequate if not completely lacking in some areas. The priorities of this government have left the suburbs in and around Morley feeling really left behind.

Political events in Australia and around the world over the past couple of years have turned political conventions on their heads. No longer can politicians or political operatives be certain of any particular outcome. The community is tired of the formula we have written for it, and that is forcing us to come up with something new that the community can connect with. People are unimpressed with politicians who get themselves elected only to use their positions to access travel and perks while delivering nothing for their struggling electorates. It is pretty simple, really. Electors want a representative who will be honest, will fight in their corner and will at least try to solve their issues. There will be a real choice at the next election, not just in Morley, but in the general election, and that is a good thing, because at the end of the day politics is about choice.

Prior to entering Parliament I worked in a fairly flexible and progressive work environment, so it was a huge culture shock to meet the rigid parliamentary and committee system that we have here. Although there are times of enormous flexibility, when we are in this place it is very inflexible. I have made my views known on the anachronistic and sometimes antiquated processes of the Parliament, and the increasing risk of further isolation from the community. To remain relevant, the Parliament must reform. Diversity is the key to community engagement. Although I am a very strong believer in quotas, I acknowledge that that is not the case across all parties in the Parliament. Quotas are delivering more women into the Parliament, but they are only one part of the puzzle. The Parliament and the campaigning environment are very hostile for family life for both men and women and for all people here with children. Rigid processes and silly sitting hours need to be addressed. Frankly, my family miss me when I am here and I miss them, as do many other families in this place. We should not have to choose; we should be able to be good representatives without having to miss our families so much and them having to miss us so much.

Hon Laine McDonald called for breastfeeding to be allowed in this chamber, and I support that call. With no maternity leave, Parliament needs to offer other flexibilities to be accessible to women. There seems to be an unnecessary fear. It does not mean that there will be loads of women in the chamber breastfeeding all the time. The reality is that it would apply to a small number of women, who would have the ability to return to their parliamentary duties immediately, which they have to do, while breastfeeding young babies, because breastfeeding is constant. We promote it endlessly in the community, to the point of harassment in hospitals because the benefits are so widely understood. There seems to be some fear that it would turn the chamber into some sort of crèche or playground. That would not be the case at all. The women who are breastfeeding also need to get on with their work. We also need to attend to an infant. Breastfeeding my two children was one of the greatest things that I have ever done in my life. When I returned to Parliament, my baby got used to having a bottle because I had to express so frequently, and he stopped breastfeeding. That was a point of enormous sadness for me. I do not think it is reasonable that any workplace does not facilitate it. When Hon Laine McDonald raised the issue, Hon Phil Edman tweeted during the debate that he does not support it, and he has young children. With all due respect to the member, I assume that he did not breastfeed his children and he did not have to return to work quickly whilst he was doing so. It simply reflects a lack of understanding about the debate. I am committed to this because it would be a very small change but a very powerful symbol to the community. If I am elected in March, I will continue to agitate for this change with my colleagues.

To thanks; there are so many. No-one does this alone. There are so many people involved in supporting you as an MP and a candidate. I have to start with my electorate office, and Naomi and Dominic. I have been very fortunate to have very stable staff. They have been with me from the beginning. I worked with Dominic for many years before coming to Parliament. It is a pleasure to know that everything is taken care of. They are really incredibly committed and competent people and make me look really, really good, which helps. I thank Cameron Barnes and Tom Beyer, who have also spent significant amounts of time in my office, and all the volunteers and relief staff. To my Labor colleagues in this place, it has been lots of fun working with you over the last few years. I have really enjoyed the sense of team and camaraderie. At times we have had lots of jokes. I have to particularly thank Hon Sam Rowe for being really good company during very long hours. She is very tolerant and a very patient Whip. I thank Hon Sue Ellery for all her guidance and advice in the inimitable Sue way.

Hon Sue Ellery: That's a good thing, right?

Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON: Yes. You are very supportive.

I thank the parliamentary staff for making us feel so special; no request is too much. Really, the staff make this place; it is such a warm and welcoming environment. I know that all members feel that very deeply. I want to particularly thank Deb for letting me follow her around when she had the food trolley and I was very heavily pregnant and hungry all the time. She let me steal things off the trolley and brought out afternoon tea early for me. Dave Kelly, Carolyn Smith and Sue Lines are good friends and colleagues and have unwavering support and faith in me, and I thank them for that. United Voice members, cleaners, aged-care workers, disability support workers and hospital and education staff are in many ways the heart and soul of the Labor Party—working people. They are my union family. It has been a tough few years for them. I really hope to be part of making it better for them and their families.

To the Labor Party: it is an honour to sit in the Labor caucus and enjoy the support of party members, and to do so both as a member for East Metropolitan and as the candidate for Morley. Of course, I thank my parents for the practical and emotional support of us all and our family and being willing to be there all the time. Most of all, to my partner Phil; I have never met anyone so open to possibilities and adventure. He makes everything seem possible with his support and love. When it comes to my career choices, which have a huge impact on my family, I thank him for saying, "Yes, let's give it a go", and for always being there.

I have thought about what I have enjoyed the most. My daughter, Chloe, who is here today, likes to ask lots of questions at the moment, such as, "What's your favourite animal?", "What's your least favourite animal?", and, "What's your favourite mammal?" They are very specific questions. The other day she asked, "If you had to

choose, would you be a cockroach or a fly?" I chose a fly because then I could fly. Amongst all that, she asked me what I liked the most about my job. I really had to think about that because there are so many things. It is the ability to be able to help people in a small way in their everyday lives. When someone comes into the office with an issue that is overwhelming in their lives, I am able to resolve that issue. For me, that is without a doubt the best part of this job. I hope that I have done as much as I can. Opposition is hard, and that is really the best way to make a difference in people's lives—from opposition. I hope I have done enough in my time to make a small difference to those people who have come in and sought help from me.

Nothing is permanent; everything is temporary. I firmly believe that we are owed nothing from anyone; all we can do is work hard, try our best, and I believe I have done that. Thank you.

[Applause.]
