



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon Peter Katsambanis, MLC
(Member for North Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Tuesday, 22 November 2016

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HON PETER KATSAMBANIS (North Metropolitan) [3.46 pm]: Like the other members before me, I thank the house for this indulgence. It is very few people who get the opportunity to deliver a valedictory speech when we analyse the number of members of Parliament who go through both houses of Parliament over time, so I thank members for that and treat it with the utmost respect.

Since my election in 2013, I have been just one small part of a great Liberal team that has continued to deliver good government for the great state of Western Australia. At the outset I want to thank all my parliamentary colleagues who have embraced me with friendship and support since I came to this place. I know they have tolerated my passion for certain causes and I hope that they have come to understand that that passion comes from a good place and is motivated by achieving better outcomes for all the people that we, as members of Parliament, serve and represent. In particular, in this place, I want to thank the Leader of the House and Minister for Education, Peter Collier. Peter Collier has been an amazing supporter of and mentor for me, both before I got elected and since my election. I want to thank him for the trust and confidence he has placed in me and for his very wise counsel and guidance over the years. I also want to thank him for the amazing job he has done for the future of Western Australia through the revolutionary reforms in education that he has delivered, whether it has been the introduction of independent public schools, compulsory preprimary, year 7s in high school, one-line school budgets, minimum literacy and numeracy standards, the reforms to the Western Australian Institute of Sport, and massive infrastructure builds, both new and rebuilds. I know that those changes were motivated by Peter's strong desire to improve our education system and to provide a meaningful education for each and every student in our state. The reforms that Peter has shepherded through will have intergenerational impact, and he needs to be acknowledged for his amazing leadership and vision.

I thank Premier Colin Barnett for his support, encouragement and leadership. I stand here with a unique distinction of having served four parliamentary leaders in two very different state Parliaments. I can say without doubt that Colin Barnett has been the best leader I have served under. Despite some public perceptions and misconceptions, I have found his leadership style within the parliamentary party to be inclusive and collegiate, giving every member a fair hearing to state their case and advocate for their electorate. There is nothing more we could want from a leader than that.

I could not have been here in the first place without the faith and trust of the thousands of members of the Liberal Party across Western Australia. I thank all of them for the opportunity to be a member for the North Metropolitan Region. I thank them for their loyalty and the hard work they do for each and every one of us in this place, and I thank them for placing their faith and trust in me again for the challenges ahead. I thank them in advance for the work that I know they will put in across the state between now and the forthcoming election.

Special thanks needs to go to the Young Liberals and Liberal students who work tirelessly for our party. It was those groups that gave me my start in politics many, many years ago, before the current generation were even alive. It is gratifying for me, and I take a fair bit of paternalistic or perhaps grand-paternalistic pride in seeing that the new generation of younger Liberal members has the same fire in the belly, the same strong philosophical grounding and a commitment to campaigning that each previous generation has had. I am proud of their efforts and thank them again for their support.

I thank my friends in the Moore division, especially the president of the division, Kevin Fairman, and his team for their good counsel, support and friendship in what have been some pretty difficult times. I wish a special thankyou to the federal member for Moore, Ian Goodenough, for his friendship, his rock-solid support and his amazing loyalty. We have been a united and committed team in Moore, which has seen us overcome some big obstacles that were placed in front of us all. We have survived and thrived despite all that because of the unity and commitment that we have had as a team and to each other. I want to thank Senator Mathias Cormann for all his encouragement and support. It was Mathias, back in 2012, who eventually convinced me to leave private practice as a lawyer and return to the government sector. The rest is history. I also want to thank Senator Michaelia Cash for her great passion and positivity. Michaelia's enthusiasm and hard work inspires all around her.

As the other members have said, we are made to look good in this place by the teams around us in our offices. I particularly want to thank my office staff and my volunteers. I thank Julie Delcanho, who has been the office manager extraordinaire, kept the show on the road, kept me focused and made sure that everything ran smoothly. I thank Brent Fleeton and Tom Murphy, who were with me at the start and have flown on to bigger and better pastures this year. I wish them good luck in their careers. I want to thank Stephen Puttick and Nick Warland, who have joined the team this year and are already putting in a great effort. I want to thank some of our more recent volunteers, such as Marlon Lockyer and Ben Moore. I thank them for the work they are doing and will continue to do. All the work they do makes me look good. I very much appreciate and thank them for their efforts. I thank Daniel White and the members of the Robe River Club for their tremendous support. They are a very inspiring and talented group of young people. I know that they will be the future leaders of this state in business, the arts, the community sector and in public life.

Of course, the most important thanks need to go to my family. Members have already heard from the other leaving members today, and I reinforce what they have said. As members of Parliament, we know that this life can take a massive toll on our families. People on the outside get some insight into what our families go through, but only those who have served in Parliament in this place and others across Australia really know how much our families endure and have to put up with on a daily basis. It tests the strength of relationships and the strength of individuals. I am sure that almost all members in this place have had a moment in their careers when they have wondered whether it was all worth it when they see the toll that this life sometimes has on our families. My own family has been extremely resilient and amazingly supportive of me. I thank my parents, my sister and my children. Ross and Nicolette, who are adults, deal with the impacts of having a father who is a member of Parliament in a different way from Andrew, Angelica and Zoe, who are much younger, but they all put up with a lot and it is a real testament to their character that they survive and thrive whilst providing me with love and many fun times that we all really cherish.

My wife Karalee, of course, is a very special person. Without her love, her support, her encouragement and sometimes her special words of advice, I simply would not be here today or be continuing in this life. She is not only my rock, but the rock of our whole family. She keeps the show on the road at home and is always there for me. Even today, she could be here but there are things that need to be done to keep the family going and she is doing them. She has chosen to make sacrifices in her career and in her life to help me fulfil this role, and that, again, is one of the hidden costs of this job that often does not get acknowledged. I love her dearly; I treasure having her in my life every single day. Every day, I thank God for the wonderful blessings he has bestowed on me throughout my fantastic life in my 50 years so far, but there is no doubt that the greatest blessing from the good Lord was when he brought Karalee into my life.

It is no secret that my family and I have been subjected to extraordinarily difficult events over the past 12 months. There have been threats, harassment, verbal attacks, distressing phone calls and some other downright awful things that desperate people have done. They could well have broken us and made us walk away. I have absolutely no doubt that that was exactly the intention of those people and that is what those actions were calculated to do. But they picked on the wrong people because walking away was never an option for us when so much work needs to be done.

That brings me to the future. I am primarily motivated and driven by one thing in my time in public life. I want to make Perth and Western Australia the best place possible to bring up my children and for other families to bring up their children. I want this place to be even better in the future for all of us than it is today. I will not stand for re-election in the upper house for one main reason. I do not believe in tearing down other people who are doing a good job. In the North Metropolitan Region our team of four Liberal members has been doing a great job. I have already spoken about Peter Collier. Michael Mischin, as Attorney General, is serving our state well and delivering important legal reforms. I thank him also for all the support he has personally given me. My friend and colleague Liz Behjat has been a very effective member of the Liberal team for eight years, and it is simply not my style to cut short the career of someone whom I consider is doing a good job. Liz, I am sad that your time in this place is going to be cut short but you should hold your head up high and be proud of your achievements; you really should. Thanks for your friendship and support and I wish you and Reza all the very best in the future.

When the opportunity to stand for the seat of Hillarys came up, I jumped at the chance, not because I wanted to tick a box or because I was looking for any old seat to call my own; Hillarys is the place where my wife and I chose to make our home here in Western Australia, the place where we are bringing up our children, the place where our friends live and the place where we see so many other people, just like us, trying to enjoy their life with a minimum of fuss and a minimum of interference from others, including government. Call me old-fashioned, but I really believe that a representative of a local area should be someone who knows and understands the needs of that local community through living there and being part of that community—a local; someone who sees other locals in the street, at the shops, the local church or the local clubs; someone who stops and listens to local people's concerns and acts on their concerns. It is not someone who likes to pop in and visit the area occasionally because they like the local restaurants or the local beaches, but then quickly disappears to some other place that they choose to call home. I know that many in the community consider the electorate of Hillarys to be relatively well-off, and in some parts it is, but when you move across the suburbs of Kallaroo, Sorrento, Craigie, Hillarys and Padbury you get

a vast cross-section of people who reflect the diversity of our entire state. Apart from specific local factors, they are driven by the same dreams, desires, aspirations, needs and concerns that other Western Australians share in common. There is no doubt that people across our state are feeling less secure and less confident about the future than at any time over the past decade that I can recall. In an ever-changing and more complex world, people are fearful about their own job security, about the impact of technology on their lives, about whether their savings will be sufficient for the entirety of their retirement, about their children's or grandchildren's future and about housing affordability for young, middle-aged and old people.

Government by itself cannot magically take away or solve those concerns. No government can simply promise everyone a job for life, free food, a free house or to wrap everyone in a cocoon to shield them from the impacts of change on our society. Whenever that has been tried in human history, it has been an abject failure. It has brought misery, starvation and sadly, we saw it in the twentieth century, it brought death on a truly tragic scale. Governments, politicians and members of Parliament such as us can help set a framework in which every citizen can step confidently into the future, set goals and aim to reach those goals for a better life. As a starting point we need to accept that no civilisation on earth has ever taxed itself into prosperity. We need to generate government revenue—taxes are government revenue—to pay for essential services such as education, hospitals and police. We need to deal with increasingly complex social problems such as mental health and drug abuse. We need to ensure that our senior citizens live in the dignity they earned over their years of contribution to our society. But to do this successfully over the long term we need to allow business, especially small business, the breathing room to grow and create jobs. As I have stated many times, we need to cut payroll tax, which is just a tax on jobs, and we need to strive to eventually abolish this job-destroying tax. We need to revisit land taxes and stamp duties because they so directly impact on the cost of land, and therefore the cost of housing. We need to strive for a lower taxing economy that allows every citizen to keep more of what they rightly earn and encourages people to take risks to create new enterprises and new jobs. That is how we will create the well-paying jobs of the future and generate the revenue needed to continue to provide high-quality services. Fundamental to all this—members have heard me say all this before, but it is fundamental—is the desperate need for a new deal on the goods and services tax distribution and federal funding more generally. The Turnbull government has already admitted that the system is broken, and we should keep the pressure up to ensure that it is fixed sooner rather than later. Importantly, we should ignore calls from those who say we should forget about GST and focus on other matters. Why would we give up on recovering what this year will cost us over \$4 billion? Over the past four years Western Australia has missed out on almost \$20 billion because of an unfair and broken system of federal redistribution of taxes. That is a lot of taxes. Had we had that \$20 billion, a lot of taxes could have been cut in this state, including payroll tax, land tax and stamp duties. That is a lot of debt we could have reduced and a lot of services that we could have delivered additional to the services that this government is already delivering. To those people who are advocating that we should give up the fight for fairness in GST, I have this to say: to give up on the fight for a fair distribution of GST is to give up on the future of Western Australia. I am not prepared to do that, and I do not think anyone in this place is.

If I earn the right to represent the Hillarys electorate in the other place, I will continue my commitment to deliver for Perth's northern suburbs as part of our strong Liberal team. I will fight to ensure that our independent public schools are not dismantled by ideologically driven zealots who seem to believe that education is all about a system rather than the people it should be for—our students; our future generations. I will fight to build an extra lane on the Mitchell Freeway travelling south from Hodges Drive to Hepburn Avenue, to help ease the local congestion that we suffer on our local roads every single morning. I will fight to preserve our unique coastal environment and lifestyle; it is what attracts people to our area, it is what is wonderful about this area and we need to keep it that way. Of course I encourage new development, but we need to ensure that as we develop and bring in more medium-density housing and more mixed-use developments we do not lose the unique character that makes our local area such a great place to live. I will also fight to make the rail extension to Yanchep a reality sooner rather than later, because it will help open up more affordable using options for many young families in our region.

In law and order, I will continue my support for law-abiding citizens and victims of crime. They are often the forgotten people in the law and order debate. I do not think law-abiding citizens and victims of crime should be disrespected. They should be at the forefront of what we do. I acknowledge that we need to look at options other than imprisonment for young and low-level offenders so that we can break the cycle of criminality. However, I reaffirm my long-held support for tough mandatory minimum sentences for the most serious offences, especially those involving sexual assault of innocent women and children.

This government has a great record in health, with new hospitals that will service our community for decades to come. However, the growing population of our northern suburbs means that we need to expand the brilliant Joondalup Health Campus sooner rather than later. I hope that we can continue the successful public-private partnership with Ramsay Health Care so that local residents can continue to receive world-class medical treatment in their local area. That is critically important, because it means that local residents will not need to come all the way into the city but can deal with or visit a sick relative and still get to work or pick up the kids from school. That facility needs to be extended sooner rather than later.

Mr President, although my time in this place has come to an end, members can see that I have not run out of passion and will continue to put ideas that I hope will help make our state an even better place in the future.

I want to thank everyone in the Legislative Council, all the members and staff, and all the staff across Parliament, for their assistance and support during my time in this place. On a personal note, I also wish you, Mr President, all the very best when you move on to new endeavours in May next year.

From now until 11 March 2017, I will work tirelessly to earn the trust and respect of the people of Hillarys so that I can represent them in the Legislative Assembly in the next Parliament. I promise that when I get to the Legislative Assembly, I will not become one of those lower house members who, as we all know, can sometimes be a bit disdainful about the role of the upper house. I treasure my time in this place. We have had a wonderful time. I am sure we will continue to have a wonderful time. I respect the important role that the Legislative Council plays in our democracy. I treasure every single moment of the four years in which I have had the pleasure of being a member of this place. Thank you.

[Applause.]
