



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON ANTHONY FELS, MLC
(Member for Agricultural)

LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL — RETIRING MEMBERS

Thursday, 21 May 2009

Legislative Council

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Valedictory Remarks — Motion

Resumed from 20 May on the following motion moved by Hon Norman Moore (Leader of the House) —

That this house expresses its appreciation to retiring members for their significant contribution to the Legislative Council and the state of Western Australia.

HON ANTHONY FELS (Agricultural) [11.15 am]: I wish to conclude my remarks of last night about the recent debate on genetically modified crops. I want to make one more mention about my role in Parliament. I do not believe that I have ever abused or breached the privileges as far as naming people unnecessarily or unfairly. I have spoken at length about Noel Crichton-Browne in particular, but I have never said anything in this place that I would not say out of it—certainly I have never intended to say such things. My phone is always on if he or anyone else wants to ring to complain about anything that I might have said. I would be happy to correct the situation.

Some interjections were made in this place recently about the matter of GM crops, and Bill Crabtree rang me and complained that I had lied and that I had said all sorts of things that were wrong, but I do not believe that I did. However, I reckon more lies have been told on both sides of the GM crops argument than has been the case in argument I have heard on most other issues. However, I have offered to clarify any issue for Bill Crabtree that he says that I have lied about. He has been helpful in the last few weeks in our discussions, and I am going to his farm next week to share a bottle of scotch with him when he has finished seeding.

Hon Bruce Donaldson: Is he still your farm consultant?

Hon ANTHONY FELS: No; he will not be this year—we are still talking!

I want to clarify the situation about the employment of parliamentary candidates in the government sector. I have mentioned to Hon Ken Travers that he may like to introduce a private members' bill on this matter. One issue that came out of that matter is that an elected person can be employed in a ministerial office earning more than \$100 000 a year. The only penalty for a breach of that provision is a \$1 000 fine, yet such a person cannot be a candidate in an election. This arose as a result of the lengthy delay between the election of upper house members and the arrival of the new members in this place. That issue still needs to be addressed. I do not think a \$1 000 fine is sufficient penalty for a person employed on a very high salary; therefore, it is worthwhile for a person to pay that fine in that situation. I urge the house to revisit the joint parliamentary inquiry conducted in 1982-83 in the years prior to the amendment of our Constitution, and the recommendations the committee made for that requirement to be incorporated into the Constitution.

Another very serious issue related to my petition and what occurred in the last state election. A dozen ballot boxes sent back from the central wheatbelt area of the agricultural region arrived at the official counting centre in Fremantle unsealed. That is a very serious breach of the Electoral Act and the requirements in a modern western democracy that our election processes are both democratic and beyond reproach. A number of comments were made about how the last election was run, and I think some unfair criticism was made of Warwick Gately, the boss of the Western Australian Electoral Commission. All my dealings with Mr Gately have been first-class. He is very fair and reasonable, and I believe he handled the election very well given the circumstance of the calling of the election short of the expected time. As far as I am aware, the election result was actually declared more quickly than was the case in previous elections.

I brought a couple of issues to Parliament—issues that were raised with me by Noel Crichton-Browne. I copped a lot of bad publicity in relation to those issues. I brought both those issues to Parliament because they were very worthwhile. I am very proud that I was able to achieve a \$30 million settlement on behalf of the victims of the finance brokers scandal some six years after the issue broke. During that period, a change of government had occurred, yet the government had done nothing.

The other issue was the iron ore policy. I think Parliament really needs to revisit the state's iron ore policy, and that debate will continue after I leave here today.

I thank the President, the Clerk and the assistant clerks. I also thank the executive assistant to the Clerk, Janeen Robertson, and more recently Corrine Bryant, as well as the executive assistant to the President, Lorraine Coogan. They are very professional staff and are very helpful to members of Parliament. I would also like to thank the

dining room staff, in particular Mark Gabrielli, as well as Oswaldo Lopez and Debbie Kapoor. I also thank the Usher of the Black Rod and the chamber staff in this place for all their assistance. I thank the committee staff of the committees I served on, in particular Lisa Peterson who is the assistant to the Estimates and Financial Operations Committee, the committee I had most of my involvement with.

I also acknowledge Hon Helen Morton's work as chair of the Select Committee into Public Obstetric Services that I was a member of. I believe the report produced by that committee was very worthwhile, and I acknowledge the federal government's recent announcement about the incorporation of midwives into the category of obstetric services throughout Australia, to complement the work of professional obstetricians I acknowledge Hon Louise Pratt, who was on that committee and is now a federal senator. I believe she probably had some contribution in getting the federal Labor government to take notice of that recommendation.

I acknowledge the Hansard reporters, who do an excellent job—I do not know how they do it! I could never type as fast as some members speak! I acknowledge the work of all other staff around Parliament, including the gardeners; security; and the library staff, who have always been most helpful. I am running out of time to fit in some of the other things I wish to say.

One other issue I wanted to talk about was the proposed change to retail trading hours. I am disappointed that the government is considering introducing the change, after the referendum result was overwhelmingly against it—returning a stronger vote against it than the more recent daylight saving referendum.
