



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**VALEDICTORY SPEECH**



**Hon Kim Chance, MLC**  
**(Member for Agricultural)**

**LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL — RETIRING MEMBERS**

**Thursday, 21 May 2009**



# Legislative Council

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## LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL — RETIRING MEMBERS

### *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 KIM CHANCE (Agricultural)** [11.28 am]: I am not entirely sure how it is we should go about this job of summing up our own parliamentary career. I think everyone who has had a crack at it so far has done a pretty fair job, but they all did it in very different ways. There seems to be general agreement that it is a good time to reflect on why we came here in the first place, and then to comment on which of those objectives we articulated in our first speech in this place that we think we have achieved. It is also a time to pass on a few comments to people—particularly to those who are fairly new in their own careers—that we think might be helpful. Most importantly, I think it is a time to thank those who have been our supporters, our friends, our colleagues, our adversaries, our advisers and our shoulders to lean on.

My family, of course, has to come first in that list. My family were there when we ran all of those tough campaigns out in what was pretty much tiger country for a Labor candidate—electorates like O'Connor, where I ran for election five times, Central Province, and eventually the Agricultural Region. My family would stand all day on their own at isolated country polling booths—some of which were pretty remote—knowing that I had no chance at all of winning. They did that because they thought that one day I might get here. My daughter, when she was five years old, fronted and stared down the local Liberal Party branch president because she thought a comment that he had made about me in my absence was inappropriate. She was five years old, and she has just got tougher.

**Hon Ken Travers:** Was she working at a polling booth on her own?

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** No, we waited until she turned nine before she did that.

My wife, Sue, who is here with us today, ran a local branch. She ran as a candidate herself and she ran my campaigns and somehow she kept the team together through the good times and the bad times, but always with a great spirit of teamwork and enthusiasm. My family were there when I ran six or seven unsuccessful campaigns. They were there when I finally stood in this place as a member of Parliament in 1992 and made my first speech. The one time I sort of choked up in this place was when I looked up to the gallery on that day and saw the expression on their faces because their bloke had finally got here after all that work. Both my kids were at school then. Now, one of them, Ceridwen, is a mother herself. Sue, Ceridwen and Tom were always there for me in exactly the same way. Without them I would not have had a reason to do what I did and I certainly could not have done what I did without them.

There are also those wonderful people who work with me in my office. John D'Agostino was my right hand for 13 years, both in opposition and government. I once tried in Algeria to explain to government officials what John's role was.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** We never understood it.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** Given that they do not speak a lot of English in Algiers, and my French is even worse than my Arabic, the best I could come up with was that he was my commissar. That drew understanding looks from the Algerian officers and "Daggers" assured me that he was given a great deal more respect than he previously had from those same officials.

I have had only two electorate officers in my whole 17 years in Parliament. Dianne Spowart, who sadly died a few years ago, was a dear friend to me as well as one of the most amazing community workers I have come across. I did the eulogy for Dianne at her funeral and my research for it was the first time that anybody had ever gone through the community organisations that Dianne worked on. We tallied up the non-government organisation community work plus the community-type work she did as a member of the Geraldton City Council and we got to 32 organisations, most of which she had either initiated or chaired at some time in her life. For 18 of those 32 organisations she was, at the time of her death, the current chair. It was an amazing contribution to the people of Geraldton.

My present electorate officer, Judy Riggs, also came out of the community sector rather than from the political structure. Judy has been an incredible support to me. Judy, along with Christa and Tom, shouldered the whole burden of running the electorate office for the entire time that I was a minister. They never once complained and they never once let me down and, believe me, I gave them a lot to complain about.

I was unreasonably fortunate in the ministerial staff that joined me when I became a minister. My core staff stayed with me from the beginning of my term as minister to the end of my term—seven and a half years of working with the same minister on essentially the same portfolios. Those three people deserve a medal. In that time, Mike, Wendy, “Daggers” and the rest of the team, some of whom were also very long-serving, worked through the ups and downs that occur in a ministerial office and the tensions that exist in a ministerial office with a real sense of teamwork. We were able to do that because as a team we never lost our sense of humour. There was always something to laugh about at the end of the day.

I also want to thank the Australian Labor Party. I have been a continuous member of the Australian Labor Party since 1971, some 38 years. In that time I never lost faith in Labor’s ability to somehow find the right answer, be that to a local, state or national issue and particularly so in our global region. It does not mean that I do not think that Labor never made mistakes. It has made some spectacular mistakes, as everybody and every group of people do. In the end it has been my view that Labor has been able to overcome those errors and to move on to try to find the right answers because it has a system that enables it to do that.

Somehow Labor never lost faith in me. I guess in many ways I was not regarded as a classical Labor candidate, although I have to say that if that was Labor’s view, it managed to hide it pretty well because I never felt anything but welcome in both the Labor lay party and the parliamentary party. Things were very difficult for me and my family in 1991, the year before I came here to the Legislative Council. The Australian Labor Party picked me up, dusted me down, pointed me in the right direction and enabled me to get on with my life. It is something I will never forget.

It is a funny relationship that exists between an individual and a political party. It is somehow different from the relationship between a person and an organisation almost anywhere else. I can imagine that there would be some military units and possibly even the police service that might have similarities to political parties in the way they build loyalties. The relationship between a person and his political party, particularly for a member of Parliament or a player in the political system, is a two-way loyalty thing that defines this unusual relationship. I can only begin to imagine the pain that is felt when people feel that those bonds of loyalty have been broken and broken unreasonably. I have enormous sympathy for people who find themselves in that position. At one level I have that sympathy; at another level I have nothing but contempt for those people who accept everything a party gives them and then, because they do not get everything they want, set out to destroy the people and the party that put them there in the first place. It is a fine line between that sympathy and contempt. It is a very personal thing. Somebody said the other day that the Labor Party—I imagine the same applies to all political parties—functions as a family. Sometimes in a family the boys might have a punch-up when they are playing cricket in the backyard at mum’s house. Perhaps it is not a family one would want as neighbours; it is dysfunctional as a family, but it is a family nonetheless. That is the kind of relationship I am referring to and that is why I feel that sympathy and, indeed, that is why I feel in some cases that degree of contempt.

It is impossible for an ALP member to recognise the role that Labor has played in his life without also recognising the role that the union movement has played. The union movement has been the reason for the Labor Party’s existence for over 110 years. It is the reason for our beginning and it is the reason for our future. Every affiliated union warrants my thanks and my ongoing support, but in particular I thank the left unions—the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union and the Liquor, Hospitality and Miscellaneous Union WA and their left affiliates—for the uncompromising support they have given me through my entire political life and long before I became a member of Parliament.

People inside and outside this place have made some pretty harsh judgements about unions from time to time. I can say that my own experience with unions as a person who did not come from a union background—indeed, I came essentially out of an employer organisation—is that unions are made up of people who genuinely care about their fellow human beings. Their collective contribution to our society and to the Australian way of life is underestimated massively. It is important to the continuation of the things that we hold so very dear about the Australian way of life—the principle of a fair go regardless of who we are and the belief that every Australian is equal—and depends heavily on the ongoing influence of the Australian union movement.

In thanking individuals I will start at the top by thanking the three Labor Premiers and the three Labor Leaders of the Opposition with whom I have had the enormous privilege of working. First, Carmen Lawrence, whose clear intelligence and enormous compassion always left me and still leaves me awestruck. I never knew anybody who could grasp a complex set of facts so quickly. They were sometimes delivered in a way that was a bit garbled because I did not actually have my head around them myself, and I would get three-quarters of the way through explaining it to her and she would say, “Oh, you mean” and—bang!—she would just hit the nail on the head. It is

that kind of intelligence that I had never come across before nor have I come across it since. Secondly, Geoff Gallop, who was good enough to call me yesterday, after having suffered such a cruel loss. Geoff did so much for our state. He became a beacon for WA and for Western Australians' ambitions. Thirdly, Alan Carpenter, who wanted so much to return to people what they had given to him, such as opportunity and ambition, and who went so very far in achieving that aim in his short time as Premier, will always be a hero to me. I thank Ian Taylor and Jim McGinty, who were Leaders of the Opposition at the most difficult time imaginable. Both did that sometimes grim task with dignity and distinction, and both made a real contribution to Labor, eventually winning back government. Eric Ripper has the same task to keep unity and focus while in opposition but, unlike Ian and Jim, Eric will himself become Premier.

I also thank Richard Court, whose term as Premier was marked by his commitment to the state and its future. Richard was never too busy to sit down and talk to an opposition member about whatever he or she wanted to talk about, to share his experience, or in my case just to have a chat about old Ford Mustangs. Convention forbids me, of course, from thanking Colin Barnett, but I do wish Colin well in the heavy burden of responsibility that he carries for all of us as the state's Premier.

Mr President, I also thank you for our long association as colleagues. Like the Leader of the Opposition, I must say that I was most inspired by your performance as a legislator. We all learnt massively from what you showed us—not only as a minister, but also as a leading member of the opposition frontbench prior to that—on how to perform as a legislator. Before I embarrass you, Mr President, by saying that everything I know I learnt from you, I assure you that I would have been a lot worse and a lot clumsier as a legislator if it were not for the example that you set us. Thank you very much.

To my colleagues on this side of the house I must say that I have one enormous regret; that is, I was never able to get closer to them personally. It is one of the perverse outcomes of leadership, and one that I discussed with the Leader of the Opposition as she took up the role, that it is a lonely job. It is a job that prevents the leader from forming close friendships because they get in the way of doing the job; I am sorry for that. I am sorry because I have enjoyed every minute of the time that I have spent with each of my colleagues. None of them ever let me down, and when I let them down, they just got on with the job. I thank them for that.

**Hon Ken Travers:** You never let us down.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** I did it a lot.

**Hon Ken Travers:** No, you didn't.

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** Ljiljanna, Jon and Sue were my ministerial colleagues in the last government. We worked in cramped quarters, particularly when we were sitting. Ljil, in particular, had enormous pressure as a result of her ministerial duties, and in all that time there was never a harsh word between us; not once. There was always support, goodwill and friendship in our public and private lives. Thank you.

Ed has been to me what every leader dreams of: the most reliable, trustworthy person imaginable. He and his opposite number, Hon Bruce Donaldson—again, an old friend—have been shining examples of what a quality Whip means to a well-regulated house. I think we all owe Ed and Bruce a huge debt of gratitude for their unflinching work, even when sometimes I have made their lives difficult.

Hon Norman Moore and I sat opposite each other as the leaders of our respective parties for the better part of eight years; that, in itself, is pretty unusual. However, to be able to do that without any lasting malice at all is pretty special, and I wish Norman well in his next 28 years in this place! I have to add, however, that I expect by then Norman will have got our standing orders sorted out properly!

**Hon Norman Moore:** That's next week's job!

**Hon KIM CHANCE:** Norman did something for me that I will never forget. He might not think it was a big thing and he may not even recall it. There was a time early on in my term as Leader of the House when ABC television decided that my taking a week's leave from Parliament and going to race in the Targa Tasmania rally was a newsworthy event. We had some great footage of the car, actually, which I was very pleased with; however, it was thought to be the wrong thing to do. Norman was buttonholed as he walked out of the south entrance and the question was put to him: "Do you think it is appropriate that the government leader in the Legislative Council should be racing cars in Tasmania at a time when the house is sitting?" Norman's answer, which I will always remember and respect him for, was: "Kim's on leave. What he does when he's on leave is no business of mine nor is it any business of yours"; and then he walked away. I will never forget that, Norman.

I also thank all honourable members and—if I can through you, Malcolm—all the members of staff who work in this chamber and inside and outside Parliament. I will not list them; however, there is an incredible group of people who work here, both inside and outside the chamber, and who make what we do a liveable thing to do. This is our workplace, and at the end of the day the way in which a workplace operates depends on every link in the chain actually doing its job. All members and staff do their job in a superb way. Thank you very much.

It is also important that we get to enjoy a little humour, and that brings me quite naturally to the subject of a former member, Hon Bob Thomas. Bob, members will recall, had that dreadful story that he used to tell regarding a goat. Somehow, with the passage of time, the goat joke inexplicably became as much mine as Hon Bob Thomas's. More in the interests of protecting my own reputation than Hon Bob Thomas's copyright, I want to make it quite clear the goat joke still belongs to Hon Bob Thomas and not to me. None of that assurance, Mr President, ever dissuaded some of my colleagues from challenging me to repeat the immortal punchline of that story right here in this chamber. All I can say to them is that a good goat would definitely not do that!

When I first came here I got some very good advice from a number of members, not just from my own side. Indeed, I can still recall and value the advice I received from Hon George Cash—he may not but I do. I guess neither of us expected then that we would be retiring on the same day.

Hon Philip Lockyer also gave me advice that I thought was particularly useful for a new member; so useful that I thought I would pass it on as well. He said, “Always be yourself. We work very close together here and we get to know more about each other than our own families do. If you pretend to be somebody you are not, you will be found out.” I thought that was great advice. Philip was right of course but he might also have added that because of that close working relationship in what is essentially an adversarial environment—however we dress it up, it is still an adversarial environment—we need to take particular care that we do not lose either our sense of humour or our sense of courtesy. To do so not only makes our own life miserable, but also impacts on all those around us.

I have been enormously fortunate and privileged, as we all are, to have been able to serve the people of Western Australia as a member of the Legislative Council. We have had good times and we have had bad times here. I add that today it was such a good thing to see Hon Batong Pham make his speech while standing in this place. That was really uplifting. It is a particular privilege to have had a hand in the governing of the state, and, in doing so, influencing the lives of so many people. It was my privilege also to serve as a minister. That is something that I feel I have been enormously fortunate to have had the opportunity to do. In that role, as I said, I was supported by a wonderful group of people. I thank them for believing in what it was we were trying to do. It is a sad fact that in the earlier years in my office, our attention was dominated by the issues caused by ongoing years of drought. Although we were able to deal with those issues—and I think in the end come out okay, with a better structure for handling those awful issues—sometimes the personal tragedy of individuals caught in successive droughts caused a huge strain on members of my office who took those calls on a daily basis from men and women at the very limits of their desperation. Although it was enormously distressing to me to walk into an office and find a staff member sitting in her office in tears as a result of one of those conversations, it was also inspiring to me that somebody in my office cared so much that she was affected personally to that extent. It is things like that little story that are going to stay with me even longer than the bigger things that I was able to be involved in. As much as I enjoyed those bigger things, nothing can match the feeling that people genuinely do care about others.

I go back to the beginning of my reflections; that is, why I came here in the first place. I wanted people to feel that their government cared about them—whoever they are, wherever they are and whomever they voted for. In the end, it is that trust and confidence that forms the very basis of our principles of democracy. When people feel that their government is dishonest, that is bad; but it is even worse when people feel that their government is disinterested in them, because if we get to that point then our whole system is challenged.

My first speech here was made at a time when our rural areas were in deep recession. We had run-down infrastructure, we had a severely declining population, and nobody could see that we had much of a future. But it was also a speech that was full of my optimism that we could make fundamental changes to turn all of that around. I take great satisfaction that we achieved even some of those aims. By way of example, I was in the little eastern wheatbelt town of Dalwallinu not long ago. What I saw was a community, which, despite being thumped by the droughts over recent years, now has a thriving secondary industry structure; it has confidence and it has hope about the future. In 1992 Dalwallinu had dust and tumbleweeds blowing down the main street. It was a place going nowhere. The future of that town could be reflected in the future of towns like Mollerin, Wialki and Ballidu—towns that no longer exist; there is not even a sign to say where they were. It is enormously satisfying to me that, with good local leadership, the town of Dalwallinu picked itself up and took advantage of the things it was offered and moved on. To have been able to play some small role in that change is something that I am always going to be grateful for. It remains my ambition to continue to chase those dreams, albeit in different ways.

Finally, Mr President, can I say through you: thank you to the people of Western Australia for giving me this opportunity to serve them. I have done the job as well as I could, and I hope the people of Western Australia have been satisfied. Thank you.

**Several members:** Hear, hear!