

HON BOB THOMAS

Condolence Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [2.06 pm] — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Bob Thomas, a former member of the Legislative Council for the South West Region, and places on record its appreciation for his long public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to members of his family in their bereavement.

Madam President, I note that Bob's partner and family are in the President's gallery today. Bob's full name was Robert John Thomas, taking the middle name of his father, Francis John Thomas. He was born on 17 October 1954 and passed way in December 2016, not long after his sixty-second birthday. This was far too young. He died of mesothelioma, almost certainly attributable to the years spent as a child in Wittenoom in the late 1950s. It is a dreadful disease, and his last few years were difficult, but Bob was stoic and uncomplaining.

I want to touch on some of the biographical facts of Bob's life first and then talk a little bit about the man. He was born in Sydney in October 1954. The following year, in 1955, Bob and his parents moved to Western Australia. Bob was soon joined by six siblings—his sisters Anna and Maxine, and brothers David, Billy, Michael and Ken. The family spent the subsequent years in regional WA, including Wittenoom. In that time, Bob attended school in Wittenoom, Mt Magnet, Shackleton, Corrigin and Bruce Rock. When Bob was 11, his father left the family, moving back to New South Wales and Bob's mother, June, was left to bring up seven children. With Bob the eldest, I am sure that he felt the burden of responsibility that comes with a situation like that.

The family moved to York where Bob attended his sixth primary school and then graduated to York District High. At the end of year 10, Bob thought his future lay in acquiring a trade, so he left school and took up a fitting and turning apprenticeship. But to quote Bob in his inaugural speech to this place, "It was not long before I realised that I had no mechanical aptitude", so he gained a scholarship to enable him to complete high school at Collie Senior High School, after which he attended what is now Curtin University but was then the WA Institute of Technology, where he studied for and was successful in achieving a Bachelor of Arts in social sciences. It was during those years at the WA Institute of Technology that he first joined the Australian Labor Party in 1975, becoming the secretary of the WAIT branch of the ALP. It was at the beginning of his final year at WAIT in 1976 that he married his first wife, Carol, in Collie.

Bob had an interesting work history prior to coming to this place as a member for the South West Region. He spent time as a teller at the Commonwealth Bank between finishing year 12 and starting at WAIT, he worked as a Main Roads labourer, a clerk with the Department of Trade, a lunch bar owner and he also worked with the Commonwealth Employment Service in Kalgoorlie and Manjimup. It was while he was in Manjimup, and secretary of the Warren ALP branch, that two former members of this place, Hon Nick Griffiths and Hon Ed Dermer, persuaded Bob to run in third place for Labor on the South West ticket. It is a measure of Bob's humility that he said himself in his valedictory speech that he did not give himself much chance of winning preselection. But he did win preselection and went on to win a seat in this place in 1989, where he served the people of the south west for the next 12 years. He was 34 years old at the time of his election.

Bob moved to Albany with his family and became a strong advocate for Albany and the whole south west region. He was the Labor Party Whip from January 1997 until he retired from Parliament in 2001, and he received high praise as Whip when he retired. Bob was also active on a number of parliamentary committees, most notably as a member for almost 10 years of the then version of the Estimates and Financial Operations Committee and as a member of the Select Committee on the Spread of Dieback in National Parks and Conservation Reserves. This was a topic that he had touched on in his inaugural speech in 1989 and it was an issue that he cared deeply about, so he was a natural fit for that select committee.

The words used by others to describe Bob give an indication of the sort of person he was. He was more than the schools that he attended and the committees that he served on. Some phrases used to describe him from the newspaper notices of his death are, "friendship and generosity", "a loyal friend", "kind and gracious", "not only a gentleman but a gentle man". The member for Albany, Peter Watson, said that without Bob's support, encouragement and advice he would not have been elected to Parliament and that even in his last weeks Bob shared with Peter some of his precious time and energy to pass on his tremendous knowledge of and insight into all things political. At the time of his retirement from Parliament, many members he worked with put their thoughts and feelings for Bob on the record in the adjournment speeches for the end of 2000, just prior to the 2001 election. Hon Nick Griffiths said that Bob was "a person of great political judgment". He also called Bob, "the most successful ALP Whip in the history of the Legislative Council in Western Australia." He also made some predictions that came true. He said —

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Hon Bob Thomas will be remembered for many things—his work as Whip and his great advocacy of the south west region, not only in Albany, but also his role in Bunbury, Mitchell and Collie areas. Without being political, with a bit of luck the Australian Labor Party may have a lot to thank Hon Bob Thomas for next year.

Indeed, the next year Peter Watson in Albany, Mick Murray in Collie and Tony Dean in Bunbury were all elected.

Hon Norman Moore said —

Bob has always impressed me as the sort of person who sees his main role as making sure his constituents are getting the best representation they can from him.

He also said that Bob —

... spends most of his time in the House giving the government a serve because it is not looking after his constituents well enough.

Dr Chrissy Sharp, who was a Greens member for the South West Region, pointed out that Bob —

... made it his business, in his role as Whip and as an experienced member of this place ... to take Hon Giz Watson and I, as new members, under his wing. He made sure that we were functioning properly and were in the right place at the right time.

She said of Bob that he was “an excellent bloke whom I will miss”, as will all who knew him.

I am not sure that Bob saw himself as others saw him. Reading his inaugural and valedictory speeches his modesty is clear, despite him having come so far and having achieved so much. In his inaugural speech Bob acknowledged four very important women in his life to that point. They were his mother, June, of whom he said, “I owe more to her than most sons owe their mother”, and paid tribute to the sacrifices she had made to give her children the best opportunities she could; his first wife, Carol, who he said, “taught me to believe in myself”; Mary Carmichael, a schoolteacher in York who encouraged the young Bob to work hard despite his own self-professed self-doubt; and Margaret Ferguson, a vocational guidance officer who tried to talk him out of his choice of a fitting and turning apprenticeship. I have already told you, Madam President, of Bob’s judgement that he had no mechanical aptitude and so he cut that career choice short, but it was Margaret Ferguson who helped him get a scholarship to finish high school.

In his valedictory speech, Bob’s humility still showed in his words. He described himself as, “a pretty ordinary bloke of about average ability.” And he said of the people in the Parliament —

Almost everyone is more intelligent than me and has had far more interesting life experiences than me. I have really enjoyed working with those people, and feel I am a better person for my contact with them.

Bob showed his sense of humour during that speech at his own expense. He referred to his inaugural speech, which he had timed to be 15 minutes. He had been told at late notice that he would need to stretch it to 45 minutes. He talked about how nervous he was so across the top of each of the pages of his speech he wrote the words “slow down” in capital letters and throughout the speech he wrote reminders to himself such as “pause”, “breathe” and “have a drink of water”. He then finished the story by saying, “As it turned out I spoke for 15 minutes, but I am just as nervous today as I was then.”

As I said, Bob was respected for his political acumen and his support and encouragement of others. He also had, I think, a balanced view of the work of members of Parliament. One comment he made in his valedictory speech showed that he was conscious of the low opinion of parliamentary behaviour held by some members of the public but that he took a wider view and looked at the alternatives around the world. He said —

... I make no apologies for standing and arguing about issues in this place

...

It is my view that Parliament is the clearing house of political tension in Australia; we resolve our conflicts on the floor of the House rather than at gunpoint as they do in other countries.

I believe, Madam President, that despite his modesty Bob was proud of his service to the people of Western Australia in Parliament. But he was also strong enough to look outside himself and recognise and have regrets about the toll this service can take on our loved ones. In his valedictory speech Bob talked of the regrets he had for not carrying what he described as his share of the parenting duties while he was away and missing important milestones for his children such as school graduations.

I know that his partner, Jackie, his mother, June, his brothers and sisters, his ex-wife Carol, his children Megan and Bronwyn and his wider family already miss him deeply and will continue to miss him terribly over the

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coming years. Bob's past colleagues, his friends in the Labor Party and all who encountered him as their local member, will also miss him. It is hard to choose one term to sum up all the parts that made up the man who was Bob Thomas, so perhaps I will keep it simple and borrow Dr Chrissy Sharp's words: He was an excellent bloke.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [2.17 pm]: I stand on behalf of the Liberal Party to support the motion.

Robert John Thomas was born in Sydney and came to Western Australia as an infant in 1955, the eldest of seven children. His family clearly moved through several country towns, as he attended successive primary schools in Wittenoom, Mount Magnet, Shackleton, Corrigin and Bruce Rock.

In his first speech in this chamber Bob Thomas paid tribute to his mother, who secured a house in York and maintained seven children on a civilian widow's pension after his father left the family and returned to New South Wales when Bob was 11. Bob Thomas attended primary and high schools in York, deciding to seek training as a fitter and turner at the Army Apprentices School in Victoria in 1970. Realising that this was not the right career choice, with the encouragement of a dedicated vocational guidance officer in Margaret Ferguson, he returned to Collie High School and completed his secondary education.

Bob Thomas worked as a bank teller in 1973 before enrolling at the Western Australian Institute of Technology, where he graduated with a degree in social science in 1976, the same year that he married Carol Miller. He joined the Australian Labor Party in 1975 and was an office bearer in the WAIT, Queens Park and Warren branches of the Party, with service given to the Tangney and Kalgoorlie Electorate Councils and two years' membership of the state executive. For nine years he was a member of the Australian Administrative Clerical Officers' Association.

His occupations varied, from working with the Main Roads department, as a clerk with the Department of Trade, and as the proprietor of a lunch bar. However, in 1982 he commenced a career with the Commonwealth Employment Service for two years in Kalgoorlie followed by promotion to officer in charge of the Manjimup CES in 1985. Bob Thomas was active in the Manjimup community, a member of Manjimup Apex for four years, secretary of the Manjimup Child Care Committee, and a member of the local Bicentennial Committee and the Manjimup Golf Club.

When a regional cabinet meeting was held in Manjimup, Bob Thomas's friend, the late Ted Cunningham, together with members of the Legislative Council Ed Dermer and Nick Griffiths, encouraged him to nominate for selection for the South West Region of the Legislative Council for the 1989 election. This was the first election held under regional proportional representation, and he secured the third position on the Australian Labor Party ticket behind the two incumbent MLCs, who had been elected in 1986. After his election, Bob Thomas was in effect the only Labor member covering the far south west and the great southern, as the district of Warren was now held by the Liberal Party. He relocated to Albany, where he established his electorate office. In his maiden speech in September 1989 he stressed the importance of both expanded horticulture and day care to the Manjimup community, as women needed to take up new job opportunities. He stressed the importance of combating dieback in the native forests around Albany.

Bob Thomas's work as an effective local representative was acknowledged by his endorsement to lead the ALP Legislative Council tickets at the 1993 and 1996 elections. He did not confine himself to the Albany area; he operated a part-time office in Bunbury after 1997. From 1994 he was opposition spokesperson for the great southern and served as opposition and government Whip in the Legislative Council from 1997 to May 2001. Bob Thomas decided not to seek a fourth term in the South West Region and left Parliament at the early age of 46. In his valedictory speech in November 2000 he expressed his satisfaction at what he had achieved for Albany, particularly its foreshore development. He also noted his regret that parliamentary life had sometimes resulted in his absence from his family and such significant events as the school graduations of his two daughters, Megan and Bronwyn. To a greater extent than many others, Bob Thomas had to overcome challenges in his early life to build a career and enter Parliament in order to represent the regional communities that he well understood. We express our deep sympathy to his family.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the National Party) [2.22 pm]: I rise on behalf of the National Party today to express my condolences to the friends and family of Hon Robert John Thomas, who join us in the President's gallery today, and also to express our condolences to the Labor Party on the loss of a former member. Researching condolence motions is always a very interesting process, as is how we reflect on former members in reading their valedictory and maiden speeches. The valedictory and maiden speeches of Hon Bob Thomas were indeed very interesting to me as a regional member of Parliament. He was also a regional member of Parliament. Some of the struggles he had, in not being present at family events and missing important events on the family calendar, are things that all members of Parliament struggle with,

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particularly regional members, given the extensive travel that is necessary. I recognise some of those struggles that he had in representing the people of South West Region. However, he obviously did it with a great deal of passion and he was very proud of his achievements in the time that he served as a member of this chamber.

He was clearly a very humble person. He was committed to his beliefs on social justice and equality, and had a great sense of humour, which is an important characteristic in this game that we play. I note that all members have talked about the regard that he had for his family and for the people he represented. In his valedictory speech, he said —

All retiring members look back over their careers and think about their achievements and regrets. I have always believed that politics is about the people who come through the front door and about getting things done for people. I place great store in helping those who need my help ...

I think all members of Parliament would aspire to that belief, because we are all here representing our constituents to the best of our ability, and Hon Bob Thomas certainly did that.

The fact that Hon Bob Thomas lived in Wittenoom and died of mesothelioma is quite personal to me. My father was a truck driver and drove in and out of Wittenoom in his younger years, and loaded asbestos onto the back of a truck. To this day we still worry about whether he is susceptible to an asbestos-related disease such as mesothelioma. Most members of this house have either had a family member or have known someone who has been touched by this terrible illness. The history of mesothelioma and the struggle for people to have their rights recognised by companies transporting asbestos through the north west was something all Western Australians took on. More work needs to be done in the interests of people suffering from mesothelioma. Indeed you, Madam President, in the last Parliament, introduced an asbestos bill to protect people's rights in claiming compensation for this illness. We still have more work to do, but it is certainly recognised by members of this house, and the former Parliament. People who suffer from mesothelioma need to be heard.

I will conclude my contribution by saying that Hon Bob Thomas was a member committed to improving the lives of regional Western Australians, and the Nationals thank him for his commitment to the people of Western Australia, and the hard work he carried out during his time as a member.

HON DIANE EVERS (South West) [2.26 pm]: It is with great sadness that I speak today. It is never easy to lose a friend or to mourn their passing. I only knew Bob Thomas after he had retired from Parliament, so listening to other speeches is quite interesting. To me, he was just part of Albany. In 2001, when I first put my hand up to run for the Liberals for Forests to put an end to the destructive and unnecessary practice of old-growth forest logging, Bob strongly encouraged me to stand up for what I believed in, and he continued in his support as I found my true place with the Greens in later elections. In our interactions over the years, Bob was always kind, respectful and interested. His integrity was apparent in his manner. There is no reason to think that Bob could have ever garnered the negative reputation that many people often put on politicians. He did not come across as arrogant or self-serving; he did not seem deceitful or anything other than genuine. Bob Thomas gave me an image of someone I could aspire to emulate. He cared for people. He cared for social justice. He cared. I note from reading his valedictory speech, as have others in the house today, that his only regret with his political career was the lack of time to be with family and the lost opportunities to share in significant events. This is something we must all take note of. Time is valuable and is not to be wasted. Over the years, I saw Bob on a number of occasions and caught up on his significant life events—his divorce, which I could see was difficult for him, and then hearing of his cancer diagnosis. His last years were changed by knowing that he had an illness that was not likely to be defeated. When we spoke, he was most often able to speak with optimism. He did not complain or let his illness get him down. I do not know whether I could be as accepting if this were my situation. It must be very hard to know that death is knocking at the door. I would find it very difficult to speak for people in this situation. Bob is another one of those good people who passed away far too young. His loss is felt by many.

HON DARREN WEST (Agricultural — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.29 pm]: Just to reiterate the words of previous speakers, as a regional member of the Labor Party I met Bob Thomas very early in my career, and what a great guy Bob was. He was very encouraging to young members and very passionate about his regional communities. People will often forget what someone does or says, but will always remember the way that they made them feel, and that certainly applies to Bob. He always made us feel special and important as young members of the party.

Bob was instrumental in setting up Country Labor, which still works today as a group of regional parliamentary Labor caucus people. He certainly had an input in that. Bob's role was to help others—it was always to help others. As Peter Watson said, we owe Bob a great deal in that he was instrumental in getting Peter Watson into Parliament and winning and holding the seat of Albany for many years. The member for Albany has gone on to be the Speaker.

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Bob was suffering from mesothelioma and we are all touched by that. We all have someone—my Aunty Robyn is suffering terribly with mesothelioma—and we owe it to Bob and fellow sufferers to work harder to get full and real compensation for sufferers of mesothelioma. The last time I saw Bob was in Albany. I had a catch-up with the local branch people and in he came, staunch to the end. He was very passionate and committed to the Labor Party. My research officer, Donna Plummer, went into the Kalgoorlie Commonwealth Employment Service looking for work. Bob organised a job for Donna, working for Julian Grill. She has been involved with the Labor Party in various roles ever since. We also owe the recruitment of Donna Plummer to the Labor Party to Bob.

We owe him a lot. He was a great guy. It is great to have his family here today to be here to acknowledge Bob. We all thought he was wonderful as well. He made a great contribution to Western Australian politics and to this Parliament and he made a great contribution to people who needed him. Bob was always there for the little guy. There was always a person who needed help and a bit of a hand and Bob would always give his time freely and willingly to anyone who needed it. We have lost a really good servant of the community and a really good servant of Parliament. I wish his family and friends the very best.

HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [2.31 pm]: Members, I want to associate myself with this condolence motion in offering sympathies to Bob Thomas' family and friends. I did not know Bob Thomas very well and not in the way that a number of other speakers recall knowing him. No; our relationship was purely about being members in this house, although on different sides on the political divide. It might be of interest to members in this place to hear a little about that story. I hope it offers some comfort to Bob's family and friends as we as parliamentarians seek to assert his essential humanity in our official record and collective remembrances. I am going to talk to members for a couple of minutes in the demeanour that Bob and I used to adopt when we were dealing with each other, which I think he would appreciate, and I hope everyone here does as well, even if it is slightly flippant. I think, at the outset, that Bob would have seen the delicious irony in having his own condolence motion preceded by a practice fire drill and all that goes with it! I think that I am the only person who will be speaking today who Bob did not urge to be a Labor member standing in an election. We have heard a few who have been encouraged, though he never encouraged that of me. He sat over here at the end of the bench, as we then had, in the opposition Whip's place. I sat on the other side in my first term, which was his third term of office. Who knows, if members ever scan through old *Hansard* from the thirty-fifth Parliament and read Hon George Cash saying things such as, "Order! *Hansard* is trying to record this, and with members interrupting, talking and yelling across the chamber, they can't accurately record what is going on", he may or may not have been referring to yours truly and Hon Bob Thomas. But if it was yours truly and Hon Bob Thomas that he was referring to, I want everyone to know for the record that it was all in good spirit.

Bob and I first served together on the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, which has been mentioned before. We had many adventures there. We travelled to the Kimberley looking at public health issues and that committee produced three good results. In my first week in this place when I was just on the estimates committee, having served in a previous capacity in a law enforcement capacity, it was Bob who had to break the news to me during a particular hearing that, "No, Simon, the rules of evidence do not apply to our hearings." That is technically true, though awfully regrettable. Some of the estimates issues that we looked at on that committee were really quite interesting, and involved some remarkable issues of the day. I mention that on this occasion because it is those sorts of shared experiences that bring people from different backgrounds, political parties, or metropolitan and country, together. That is what it did for me and Hon Bob Thomas. Later, when he had left this place and we would catch up somewhere, perhaps in the passage down here or somewhere about town, we would always greet each other warmly and inquire how we were all going and that sort of thing, the way old acquaintances with shared experiences do. We both used to delight in raising eyebrows. When people would address him or me, we could respond with, "Oh, yes. We go back a fair way. We spent quite a bit of time in prison together." That raised eyebrows, though of course it related to an inquiry that we did here and overseas about prison systems.

The day finally came when, in response to my normal greeting of "How are you going?", he acquainted me with his diagnosis of mesothelioma. That then changed the demeanour of our conversation and we had a lengthier conversation. I will not go into any of that, but as had already been observed, Bob conducted himself stoically and with great character in dealing with that issue, which is, let us face it, not easy to deal with. I also want to point out that at that time I also had a regular source of information about Bob's progress via Hon Robyn McSweeney, a parliamentary colleague whom I shared an office with for many years. She was regularly following Bob's progress and was not infrequently in contact with him. Robyn has now moved on from Parliament, but I am sure that she would appreciate me reminding the house that she watched Bob's progress and then passing with great sadness. She would want to also be remembered to not only members, but also Bob's family and friends, and her condolences conveyed. I am delighted to at least be able to serve in that capacity. I thank Hon Bob Thomas for his friendship and for serving with me and others, and it is certainly a great privilege for me to support this motion.

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HON ADELE FARINA (South West) [2.38 pm]: I rise to speak to the condolence motion. Bob was a gentleman, and he also had a great sense of humour. He was very thoughtful and caring and everything he did was always very well considered and he genuinely cared for people. He was an unassuming person and always played down his achievements, as is evident if members read his valedictory speech. However, Bob's achievements were many. He had a strong commitment to equity and social justice and a strong desire to make Western Australia a fairer and more equitable society. He believed that people should be able to advance themselves based on their ability and willingness to do hard work, rather than rely on the affluence of their family. He was, in many ways, a true believer.

When I was chief of staff to the then minister Bob Pearce, Bob Thomas would often meet the minister about issues in his portfolio and I would sit in on those meetings. Bob frequently came to the minister requesting something that was needed in Albany. He would always make his pitch on the basis, "You know, minister, we could win Albany; Albany is there for Labor to take." He always made it very clear to the minister that if he only delivered on the ask that Bob was making at that time, Albany would definitely return to the hands of Labor. I am not too sure that we were ever convinced by Bob's pleas that Albany would one day be held by Labor. I am talking about the late 1980s and early 1990s. We were not overly convinced that Bob had it right, but he was very difficult to resist and often went away with his request being fulfilled at some level or another! In 2001 Peter Watson won Albany for Labor. It did take a little longer than Bob had intended, but ultimately Bob turned out to be right—Labor took the seat of Albany. It is very much a credit to Bob that that was achieved.

On Bob's resignation I was privileged to be preselected to his vacant position. It was not until I started moving through the electorate of the South West Region that I understood just how much work Bob had done throughout the region, how much he had achieved, and how big the shoes were that I had to fill. He worked tirelessly throughout the electorate—I think he was always on the road—and everyone I spoke to held him in very high regard, not only for the work he achieved but also for his friendly and approachable manner. I will always be grateful to Bob Thomas for the advice he gave me as I prepared to take over from him. In those early years I was always able to call on Bob for his advice and counsel whenever it was needed, and it helped me greatly. Hon Sue Ellery has already put on the record the views of the member for Albany. He also gave me his views and I want to again put on the record that Peter Watson very much recognises that his win of the seat of Albany in 2001 was very much thanks to the very hard work that Bob Thomas had done in that seat for many, many years. During his election campaign, Peter was able to build on the networks that Bob had developed throughout the community. He views Bob Thomas as his mentor. Over the years since 2001, Peter Watson was also always able to call on Bob Thomas whenever he needed advice and counsel, and Bob was always willing to give it. Bob is warmly remembered by many throughout the south west and by all in the ALP. We owe Bob a great debt of gratitude for his hard work and I personally owe him a great debt of gratitude too. I echo the views by others that he died far too young and I conclude by passing on my sincere condolences to Bob's family and friends.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [2.43 pm]: I rise to support this condolence motion. I first met Bob Thomas when I came to this place in 1993. We had something in common: at some part of our careers we had done a stint in the Commonwealth Employment Service. We had a bit in common and very soon became friends. Bob was an incredibly supportive human being. Bob was a seasoned second-termer by the time I arrived, so he was always very generous with his advice and would often give me severe political counsel. He was always incredibly supportive and encouraging, and really promoted everyone. He was someone who found something good in every person. He was no wimp in a debate and he was prepared to get in there. I was just looking back at some of our great old debates with Hon Eric Charlton, whom we used to consider part of the dark side in those days. Those debates included the privatisation of Westrail and the winding back of that organisation. Bob was someone who participated very, very fully in these debates. He brought those great Labor values that have been spoken about. I guess the thing that distinguished Bob from others was that for all the belief and strength of values in those debates there was never any rancour or element of personal attack. He was a bit like Hon Kim Chance, whom people spoke of in an earlier condolence motion. For that reason Bob was someone who had great friends on both sides of the house.

Bob's history has been set out very well today. Talking to his sisters today, Bob experienced a very challenging childhood. It was an itinerant childhood in a family whose father had abandoned them. Bob was the oldest child. At the age of nine, he really became a father to that family and took on responsibilities for his younger siblings. He was always working out how he could run a job. Whether he was riding a bike and putting grocery notices in letterboxes or something else, he was always trying to find a way to help. We saw then, from that very early age, the Bob Thomas who came to give such value to the community and to the Labor Party. He had a determination and a sense that he needed to be there to take responsibility and to help. He understood struggle so intimately and he understood the importance of rising above that and remaining resilient and positive—that one could create a great future in this state. As a number of our members have said here today, he was a perfect regional member, having spent so much time around the state. Indeed, it was while he was living with his

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grandmother during his final years of high school in Collie that he met some very seminal friends. It was also where he met his first wife, Carol.

After spending two years of his childhood in Wittenoom, some 40 years later Bob was diagnosed with mesothelioma—a reminder of the great tragedy that this whole experience of Wittenoom has been. I also learned today from Bob's sisters that their father also died from asbestosis. I hope Hon Jacqui Boydell's family will be spared that very great tragedy. After Bob's first round of treatment, he was in such a positive space. It was fantastic to run into him when I was down in Albany. He was in great spirits. He constantly made a great contribution. Bob was a great support to Peter Watson, as he always had been. I then learnt, with complete dismay, that secondary cancers had eventually taken over. Bob, very genuinely, put himself through many trial treatments. He took the view that even in this very tragic and personal circumstance he had to take responsibility. Bob wanted to be the person to trial new treatments. It was very uncertain whether these treatments would have any positive benefit, but as always he was prepared to put the community and other people before himself. In the last months of Bob's life, I had the opportunity to spend some time with him. Although he was clearly in a lot of pain and struggling physically, it was so life-affirming to see his essential optimism and good grace remain even with all of that. I saw his love and passion for politics and his desire that we work extremely hard to make sure that "Watto" got over the line again, and he wanted to hear every nuance of what was going on within the broader campaign. Bob also asked me whether we were serious about moving forward with the legislation concerning dying with dignity. He said that he was experiencing first-hand what it was like to be beyond the reaches of palliative care. It was not that he was complaining for himself, but saying that he thought we needed to make progress and seize the opportunity to give the members of our community in a similar situation to that which he was in the opportunity to make choices about when, and the circumstances in which, they would make their departure from this life. Even though we had not considered the legislation at that time, I said to Bob that I would certainly commit to making sure that we made every endeavour to try to introduce the legislation and give this option to Western Australians in the future. Notwithstanding the fact that that legislation was not in place, it is very true to say that Bob died with a great deal of dignity, just as he lived his life with dignity, grace, spirit and good humour. To his family, Jackie, Megan, Bronwyn, Anna, Maxine and all his extended family, you have so much to be proud of. The loss is great but you have such a great legacy to celebrate. Thank you for being with us.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Kate Doust): I also want to add a few words to this condolence motion for Hon Bob Thomas. First of all, I would like to acknowledge the members of his family in the President's gallery today. I want to pass my condolences to his former wife, Carol, his daughters Megan and Bronwyn, his partner, Jackie, his brothers and sisters and his extended family. This has been a particularly tough period for the Thomas family in losing not just Bobby, but also with the passing of June Thomas only a few weeks after Bob died. I say that because I fully appreciate the closeness of the relationship Bob had with his mother, so I think you have had a particularly difficult period.

I first met Hon Bob Thomas in the late 1980s. My Labor Party colleagues will appreciate that it was at one of the functions run by Ted Cunningham. Bobby had just been preselected and was full of enthusiasm. Members in this chamber have already talked about the work Bob did through the Parliament for his community and the party. Bob had an enormous amount of energy and he just kept on going. We should be very proud of the contribution he made in each of those elements, and certainly, the Labor Party should be eternally grateful for the work he did for us in achieving the wins in those seats leading up to and after he left Parliament. Even post his time in Parliament, he continued an ongoing engagement with those seats in the South West Region. We would run into each other on a regular basis when he stayed in Victoria Park with his mum. Quite often, it was when Bob was making a run to prepare a meal for somebody or his family. We would have great conversations. He would always talk about what the party needed to do to get us over the line or what it should be doing differently policy-wise. He always had an ongoing passion for those areas.

For me, Bob was always a great mate. He was a fellow who had incredible loyalty to his friends and a great sense of humour—sometimes, a wicked sense of humour. I can now share that there was the odd occasion when he was the Whip when I would receive phone calls when he was in the Whip's chair. On one occasion, I got a phone call and I had no idea who it was. I realised it was Bob and he was actually on the phone in the chamber. He thought I had participated in one of those late-night quiz shows, but I had not realised who it was. He started off by saying, "Are you Kate from Vic Park? You got that answer wrong!", and he rattled off the question. He berated me and I had to convince him that it was not me and that I was not Kate from Vic Park. It took some time and I kept asking, "How can you be calling me from the chamber? What else is happening in there?" He was very funny. He would drop into my office from time to time and we would discuss what was happening in the community and the party. Bob always had an eye to the future about what we could do better. Hon Kim Chance would tease us in here about Bob's sense of humour. My colleagues will remember the reference to the famous, or infamous, goat joke.

Hon Sue Ellery; Hon Peter Collier; Hon Jacqui Boydell; Hon Diane Evers; Hon Darren West; Hon Simon O'Brien; Hon Adele Farina; Hon Alannah MacTiernan; President

I cannot recall the joke but a couple of years ago, Bob deliberately came to see me in my office to share the full detail of it. I think he was quite amused that I could not —

Hon Martin Aldridge: Tell us!

The PRESIDENT: No, I cannot tell you. In fact, I think I ended up with my hands over my ears saying, “No, no! You can’t tell me this joke!” It was very funny. He not only leaves a solid legacy in his community and the South West, but also a fairly significant hole for his friends. Members have already talked about the words Peter Watson said about him but I know many other members had a great and close relationship with Bob. He had a warmth about him and he was somebody whom I certainly always looked forward to seeing because I knew that he would be good fun to be around. People could engage in conversation with him. Bob always seem to have very good relationships with women in the Labor Party and he treated everyone very well. It was sad the day he came to my electorate office and I had not seen him for a little while and I asked how he was. He said, “I’ve just been given six to eight months to live.” That was one of the hardest days I have had to deal with. The next day, Bob came back to the office because, as I said, he always had an eye to the future. He was trying to organise his life because he did not think he had that long to go. He brought in a number of items and told me I had to give them to a particular person when he died. He said, “That’s because I think that person needs support for the future and I want you to look after them.” Since Bob passed away, I have passed on those items to that individual because that is what he wanted. I was so pleased that Bob lived longer than the time he was initially given. I note Hon Alannah MacTiernan’s comments because I know that he was prepared to give all those medical opportunities a go to push out his time as far as possible. Having seen him at the Asbestos Diseases Society of Australia on a couple of occasions and having discussed his progress with people such as Dr Anna Nowak, people who knew Bob knew that he was prepared to give it a go.

It is an absolute tragedy that such a decent fellow has been taken from us so early. Bob regarded himself as being a fairly ordinary bloke, but picking up on the words of the Leader of the House, I think he underestimated both his capacity and his contribution to his community, Parliament and his party. His greatest contribution was certainly to his family and I know that he loved his family very much, and he loved his friends. This has probably been the hardest condolence I have had to deal with having known Bob for so long. I want to say to his family that we will miss him greatly as a friend.

I ask members to now rise and stand in their places to indicate their support for the motion and to observe one minute’s silence in memory of the late Bob Thomas, our esteemed former member of this Council.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.

The PRESIDENT: I advise that in accordance with our custom and practice, a copy of the *Hansard* transcript of this condolence motion will be sent to Hon Bob Thomas’s family.