



## PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### VALEDICTORY SPEECH



## **Hon Robin Chapple, MLC** **(Member for Mining and Pastoral Region)**

Legislative Council

Address-in-Reply

Wednesday, 12 May 2021

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## ADDRESS-IN-REPLY

### *Motion*

Resumed from 5 May on the following motion moved by Hon Pierre Yang —

That the following address be presented to His Excellency the Honourable Kim Beazley, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the Commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australia in Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

**HON ROBIN CHAPPLE (Mining and Pastoral)** [3.39 pm]: A valedictory speech expressing farewell usually occurs after graduation, so I basically hope that after 16 years in this place I can say that I have graduated. In no particular order I will endeavour to reflect, address the future and provide thanks to the many, including the unsung heroes.

A large number of members will be departing this chamber on 21 May, some due to preselection battles, some through genuine retirement and some as a result of the outstanding win by the Labor Party on the election night of 13 March. I also experienced in that time the pangs of being a defeated member, so to those of you leaving not of your own volition, I wish you well. For those of you leaving due to preselection defeats, I offer you my sympathy. Behind closed doors, politics can be a malevolent being. But to all members of this place, retiring or defeated, you have all become my colleagues over the last 20 years.

I had the privilege to work with many of you on many committees, including Hon Nick Goiran on the voluntary assisted dying committee, and others such as Hon Michael Mischin, Hon Jacqui Boydell, Hon Robin Scott and Hon Kyle McGinn on the Pinjin committee. We had some fun on that Pinjin committee. I think my driving skills are remembered by most of the committee, and I think the car cleaners in Kalgoorlie are pleased that I will never be using one of their hire cars ever again! I also made a fundamental mistake when going to Kalgoorlie. I live in the north west—I am used to a fairly hot environment—but when I got to Kalgoorlie I found that they have freezing nights, and I only had my classic bush shirt and a pair of thin trousers.

I want to thank Hon Jacqui Boydell, who gave me this marvellous scarf, which I now treasure and is one of my pride and joys. It kept me safe in Kalgoorlie and it has kept me safe ever since.

I want to also at this time talk about the various committees that I have been on. I have been on the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation from the very beginning. I had one moment in which I chucked a wobbly and quit the committee. I did so because this delegated legislation committee is the most benign bipartisan committee. It does not have a political view, yet a number of years ago the two major parties started caucusing in delegated legislation. We had to get the honourable—here we go, the name has gone again.

**Hon Martin Pritchard** interjected.

**Hon ROBIN CHAPPLE:** No, it was not him. He was a former President of this place.

Members: Barry House!

**Hon ROBIN CHAPPLE:** No, not Barry House. I forget the name, but I will come back to that in a minute. I will let you deal with that shortly.

We had to get an old member of Parliament to come back in and read the riot act to the delegated legislation committee to explain that it did not deal with politics, it just dealt with policy. It has been a great pleasure to be the deputy chairperson of that committee. George Cash! Sorry, that was who I was referring to. Of course, whilst its chairperson is in the Legislative Assembly, it does all its work in the Legislative Council, so that usually meant that I was forever on my feet disallowing motions. I want to thank my colleague Hon Martin Pritchard, who has worked very hard on that committee since I have been on there, and I think we have done pretty well in making sure that regulations, both by government and local government, actually achieve their intended purposes. Also, as I mentioned, I served on the Joint Select Committee on End of Life Choices, which was very passionate for me, but also quite eye-opening. Even though I was a supporter and proponent of voluntary assisted dying, I discovered things on that committee that I did not know about.

I also acknowledge the many ministerial advisers who I worked with collaboratively over the many years. The one way to get stuff done in this place is not by asking a parliamentary question or even addressing the minister, it is going to their ministerial adviser and having discussions with them. I think I have developed quite a few good friends in that way, and even after have I left Parliament, hopefully I can still contact them from time to time.

It has been an interesting journey so far. It really is a shame to see some of the effects on the democratic process conjured up by Glenn Druery. I say this not because of any sympathies for the losses of my colleagues, but as a bizarre aberration, nae, a manipulation of the electoral system by this vote whisperer. I do not decry the aspirations of a political organisation or individual wishing to enter the maelstrom of politics, but I am critical of the major parties that had before them the ability to stop this gentleman gaming the voting system during the last term of government and failed to do so. Unfortunately, for those entering the Legislative Council representing minor parties who garnered primary votes of less than four per cent, your time here, because of the ALP's absolute majority, will do nothing to further your individual causes, but I do wish you well for the next four years.

To my colleagues in this place, Hon Diane Evers, who I have shared a room with for the past few years; Hon Alison Xamon; and Hon Tim Clifford, I wish you well in the future. It has been an immense pleasure to have worked with you all. You have been and are the champions of progressive politics. A special shout out should also go to our parliamentary support in this place, Tonia. Thank you for your seemingly tireless work. We always knew what we were doing, which was amazing.

To my colleague Brad Pettitt, who is entering this place for the first time, I wish you well. You will be the sole representative of a party that looks to the future and not to the past. You carry a heavy burden. Jacques Cousteau often quoted the American First Nations proverb: we do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children. This should be your guiding light. You represent more than the people of South Metropolitan Region; you represent in this place a future of humanity. In reflecting on the task ahead for my colleague Brad Pettitt, he carries the weight of the world on his shoulders.

At my age one is surrounded by the repeated passing of many of my peers and friends, and we find ourselves mourning their passing, but in reflecting on all this, I am concerned that humanity has failed to grasp the enormity of the challenges facing future generations. Indeed, I believe we should be more focused on mourning the future. To my colleagues who I have worked with in this place—Lynn MacLaren, Diane Evers, Jim Scott, Chrissy Sharp, Dee Margetts, Giz Watson, Adele Carles, Alison Xamon and Tim Clifford—thank you for your sage words, support and dialogue.

Thank you to my old friend Tom Helm, who gave me his preferences in the March 2001 election, which enabled me to enter this place for the first time, and to my daughter, Sara, my then campaign manager who had nothing better to do.

In reference to the comments made by Hon Aaron Stonehouse in his valedictory speech, I want to touch on how I found out I had been elected. At that time, I was working within the Greens organisation and was doing the scrutineering at the central polling place. We were really concerned about whether Giz would be re-elected, so I had my head down and bum up, looking at all the votes and trying to maximise Giz's vote and doing all the things scrutineers do. A gentleman from the Electoral Commission came in to account for the North Metropolitan Region and said, "Mr Chapple, I think you need to come in to Mining and Pastoral. We're just going to pull the lever." I thought that I was never going to get elected, so I wanted to stay where I was. I think it was Justin Harbord, actually. He said, "No, no, you've got to come in." I said, "Why?" Eventually, I went in, and Dee Margetts accompanied me.

I was sitting there and we went through to number six, and number six was, "Robin Chapple gets elected." I did not want to be! I was more than happy being a backroom boy, so to speak. But, anyway, I got elected and found myself in here. I also learnt a lot from many of the people who were in here at that time. John Cowdell was one. He gave me a lot of support and advice at that time. Of course, I entered the Legislative Council as a member of the fabulous five, along with Giz Watson, Chrissy Sharp, Jim Scott and Dee Margetts, so we had quite a powerhouse then.

To all of you here, both members and staff, I will remember you all. Although I might remember you, I might not always be able to put a name to the face. I think that will be my legacy in this place: the man who could never remember who he was talking to by name.

At this moment, I would like to acknowledge that all the Presidents I have served under since John Cowdell have all used their appointment to be independent and bipartisan. This clearly extends to the current President, Hon Kate Doust, whom I count as a friend.

There are also those staff members who always provide us with exemplary guidance and assistance, and they deserve my thanks: Nigel Pratt; Paul Grant; Sam Hastings; John Seal-Pollard; Rebecca Burton; Grant Hitchcock; Peter Gale; Renae Jewell; Chris Hunt; Brian Conn, who doubled as the security service provider for those on the Pinjin committee; Lauren Levia; the inimitable Hayley Brown, wherever you are; and also a very, very special person, Deb Kapoor, without whom afternoon tea would be a disaster.

The Hansard team should not be forgotten. They are astounding. They turn our imperfect prose into readable offerings.

The Parliamentary Library team has served my office exceptionally well over the 20 years or so that I have had the pleasure of working in this place. They are phenomenal, and there is nothing they cannot do for you.

I want to quickly turn to a 1989 Senate inquiry that made the point that an active citizen is someone who not only believes in the concept of a democratic society but also is willing and able to translate that belief into action. Currently, young people under the age of 18 are not able to translate their belief in the concept of democracy into action as they are excluded from voting. Given that old fogies like me are making or failing to make decisions that affect their future, I find this unacceptable. Research undertaken by the Australian Council for Educational Research demonstrates that people as young as 14 have strong opinions on the performance and general characteristics of politicians. People under the age of 18 pay taxes, can marry, can live independently, are assumed to fully understand and be able to comprehend their actions in the criminal justice system, can legally leave school at 15, can make decisions about their health care from the age of 16 and can drive cars; yet, as a community, we do not let them vote. I find that appalling.

In her 2017 speech to this place, the then Governor introduced a few points about the environmental sector. I am not sure whether a couple of things were missed, not by the Governor but by the government. When giving her speech, the Governor rightly identified that —

Western Australia is blessed with some of the world's most beautiful and unique landscapes and biodiversity. A key priority for the Government is to balance the need to provide economically sustainable growth into the future for the next generation, while ensuring future generations will enjoy the same natural wonders as we do today.

Although successive governments have focused on economically sustainable growth, very little has been done to ensure that future generations will enjoy the same natural wonders as we do.

This is my second valedictory speech. In 2005, when I failed to retain the Mining and Pastoral Region seat, we placed a sign on the front door of 1074 Hay Street that read, “Out to lunch; back in 2009.” It was a pretty long lunch! There is no such sign this time. I am leaving for good. As members know, I have been diagnosed with asbestosis. My hearing has been diminishing for the last four years—quite clearly, the upside of that is I cannot hear interjections, which is great—and I now have three different pairs of glasses, so retirement was definitely the best option.

Little has changed since 29 May 2001, when I first addressed this house. The guard has changed but the rhetoric remains basically the same. No-one seems prepared to tackle the future crisis confronting the globe and this state. On Thursday, 4 June 2009, I stated in this place that our global commitment to climate change so far had been akin to setting out in response to the *Titanic*'s collision with an iceberg and individually polishing each of the *Titanic*'s deckchairs prior to attempting to rearrange them on the deck. We are still polishing those deckchairs; the only problem is we are doing it 3.5 kilometres under the surface of the ocean. Nothing has changed. As Abraham Lincoln said, you cannot escape the responsibility of tomorrow by evading it today.

In April 2010, as part of the Legislative Council time capsule proposal, I submitted a lengthy parliamentary question to be answered when the capsule is opened. It contains 25 questions dealing with social justice and environmental issues. Only two social justice issues have been addressed since that time. The first question was: on what date did marriage between two persons of the same gender receive full and equal recognition before Australian law? That occurred on 9 December 2017. The second question, on something very dear to my heart, was: on what date did voluntary euthanasia become lawful medical practice in WA? The assent date for that legislation was 19 December 2019. Unfortunately, none of the questions addressing the environment have been answered.

Aboriginal site destruction goes on unabated. I seriously hope that Divina D'Anna, MLA, and incoming MLC Rosetta Sahanna will be given the opportunity to ensure that the government guarantees that the protection of Aboriginal heritage will be in the hands of Aboriginal people and will not, as proposed, reside with ministers into the future, a situation that has continually led to unobstructed annihilation of thousands of sites in the mining provinces.

I now turn to a personal passion of mine, which is the land masses of Murujuga and Pijurru, referred to as the Burrup Peninsula. The state and the Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation have agreed on the nomination of this area for World Heritage listing. However, Burrup site 23323, which contains over two million petroglyphs, many dating back 40 000 years, and is probably the most important archaeological and cultural site in Australia, was deregistered by the Aboriginal Cultural Material Committee under the former Liberal government and still has not been reinstated. Notwithstanding the World Heritage nomination, the state and industry are still pursuing industrial development on this land mass in the form of Yara Australia's ammonium nitrate explosives plant and its proposed hydrogen plant, which will indirectly increase gas use by Yara; Perdaman's new urea plant; Woodside's gargantuan Burrup Hub expansion; and the Coogee Chemicals, Mitsubishi Corporation and Wesfarmers methanol and—I always get this word wrong—monoethylene glycol petrochemical plant.

As we know, rock art petroglyphs are already being impacted by acid rain, as predicted by Robert Bednarik, the convener of the International Federation of Rock Art Organisations, way back in 2002. From documents provided by Ian MacLeod, the pH on the rock surfaces is now 3.5, whereas the washing rocks pre-industrialisation had a pH of 6.8—a pH of seven is neutral. The pH on the rocks at the moment is like a good white wine; it is affecting the pattern and the microorganisms that make the carvings distinctive.

Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation chief executive, Peter Jeffries, told an inquiry into the destruction of the sacred Juukan Gorge site that the group had no commercial agreements with miners and relied on funding from industry partners. He stated —

“I would also like to put on notice that I stand here today ... that there is a real fear genuine fear that there will be financial repercussions for MAC ... despite our responsibility to manage Murujuga, our ability to do so is increasingly linked to the internal approval processes of our proponents ...

“We have funding applications in process that may become stalled as a result of what I’ll say here today —

That is, before the committee —

this is a single, small example of the power mining companies build over Aboriginal corporations.”

Murujuga, whilst having been my passion for many years, also provided me with the awesome opportunity to meet Susan Standen, whom I hold very dear.

I would like to thank Friends of Australian Rock Art, some members of whom are in the President’s gallery today, for its continued fight and for the work that it does in this space.

Lastly, I would like to thank the Greens WA for having continually allowed me to stand as its representative for the Mining and Pastoral Region. I thank all the people who have worked, volunteered and been interns over the last 20 years in our office. Clearly, there are too many to mention, but I am proud that some have gone on to work in this place—believe it or not—or become staffers in the federal arena and also become members of Parliament themselves.

And lastly to my current team—they are up in the President’s gallery waving at me; that is great—Emily Peters, Lewis Downs, Betty Richards and Tiffany Homewood, you have collegially served the team so well. You have been working tirelessly over the last months to extricate us of 20 years of accumulated data, personal effects and paintings et cetera out of the office that I will be leaving at the end of next week. I give you, genuinely, a deeply indebted thank you.

Thank you, Madam President, and thank you for your service to this chamber.

[Applause.]