



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON SHELLEY EATON, MLC
(Member for Mining and Pastoral Region)

Legislative Council

Valedictory Remarks — Motion

Tuesday, 19 May 2009

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HON SHELLEY EATON (Mining and Pastoral) [8.03 pm]: It has been an enormous privilege and pleasure to have served the community of Western Australia through the Mining and Pastoral Region, albeit for only the past eight months. I thank the Labor Party for its support and belief in me and for giving me this great opportunity.

As I leave the house this week, I take with me many treasured memories of the experience. It was mentioned earlier today that I was here as a babe in arms, but I was probably about 12 years of age when I started running around the corridors of Parliament. I do not know if my mum appreciates the age she has been given a couple of times today! Although I have worked in the building for a number of years, I do not think a person can truly appreciate the work of members of Parliament until one is sitting in this place. I also had no idea of the work involved with parliamentary committees prior to being here. Having served on the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation for the past few months with Hon Kim Chance, Hon Ray Halligan and Hon Barbara Scott, and our colleagues in the other house, it has been a very interesting time. I thank everyone for that opportunity.

Over the past eight months I have had the opportunity to travel a lot through the Mining and Pastoral Region. I have met a lot of community groups and organisations, and continue to hear the many issues associated with living and working in regional Western Australia. One of my greatest concerns is the need for short-term accommodation in the regional centres of Western Australia. Earlier this year I travelled to the Northern Territory to meet with the Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation to look at some of the projects it was doing in Darwin, particularly relating to homelessness in the city of Darwin. I had seen projects of Larrakia back in 2004 when I was in the NT for a local government conference. Larrakia coordinates an Indigenous resource centre in Darwin. It has three main purposes—it is looking at a “return to country” program, an identification program and crisis accommodation.

I believe the return to country program is absolutely critical for the north west of Western Australia. When Aboriginal people come into a town for whatever reasons—they could be going to a funeral, for health reasons or justice issues—often they get stuck in the town and cannot get back to their communities. The return to country program provides them with an avenue to get back to their communities. A person can book a flight or a bus trip. It is all done through Centrelink payments. It is a pay-back system, or a user-pays system. The program started with a very small pool of money. I am told it was about \$300 000, which is continually topped up. There is no cost to anybody but the users. It is something that I suggest people keep looking at. It works a treat in the Northern Territory.

The other program run in the Northern Territory is the identification program. A lot of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions do not have birth certificates and they do not have the knowledge of how to access them. The Larrakia Nation Aboriginal Corporation provides identification cards to people. It provides them with up to two identification cards because, inevitably, people lose them. When a person comes back for a third card, they get hit for another \$25. They are quite happy to do that. It is much easier than dealing with drivers’ licences, which they often do not have.

The third program is the short-term accommodation program. A number of hostels are run in Darwin—some have been successful; some have not. We desperately need to look at affordable short-term accommodation in our towns. There are too many people sleeping in the mangroves. There are too many people sleeping under buildings. When mums are seen coming out from under a building with babies in nappies, it is not an acceptable situation. We have got to do something about it.

During my brief time in the house there have been two major developments in the west Kimberley that have either been resolved or progressed—the native title issue in Broome and the decision that James Price Point be the site for the industrial hub to service the Browse Basin. It is certainly with a lot of relief that the global negotiations for native title in Broome appear to be finalised. As a shire councillor in Broome, I was only too aware of the planning difficulties that resulted from the fact that land could not be released in the town until this matter was resolved. It was an extremely complex situation involving major issues. It has certainly not been resolved in six months; it has been two and a half years of hard work by a large group of committed individuals, from traditional owners to government employees, the Broome Shire, former ministers and current ministers. It is the collective that has resolved that native title issue. To the traditional owners and all those on the negotiating team who have worked tirelessly to reach this outcome, I say congratulations.

In regard to James Price Point and the industrial hub, I still have some reservations. I know that agreement has been made with the traditional owners there, but I know there are still a lot of people who are very uncomfortable. The Shire of Broome still has an enormous number of concerns with the development, particularly with the social impacts that such a hub will have on the town. It will have some positive impacts on the town but there are social impacts that we also need to look at. We are going to need a huge amount of infrastructure in the town to support the hub. I will watch with interest as the negotiations continue and the social impact studies are completed and acted upon.

I acknowledge some other members in this house who also finish their term with me on Thursday. Firstly, Hon Kim Chance, whom I have had the pleasure of working with over a number of years—he has been a great contributor to the Labor Party as a leader in this place. His vast knowledge of legislation and experience will be truly missed by everybody. Hon Batong Pham, Hon Carolyn Burton and Hon Sheila Mills, whom I have known for a number of years—it has been a pleasure to work with them all during my short time in this house. I must mention Hon George Cash, because he seems to have gained a new, great interest in the cane toads in the Kimberley. All I say to Hon George Cash is, “Please keep up the fight; keep the cane toads out. Spend more time up there catching the cane toads!”

I say to the other members on the government side of the house—Hon Bruce Donaldson, Hon Ray Halligan and Hon Barbara Scott—and to Hon Anthony Fels and Hon Paul Llewellyn that I wish them all well in their retirements from this place. I say to Hon Shelley Archer that I know that she holds the Kimberley close to her heart and will continue to work hard for those members of our community whom we both care for so much.

Lastly, I thank the President, Hon Nick Griffiths, for his guidance and advice to me during my time in this house. On a personal note, I know that there is a small but committed group of workers in this building who will miss him very much and have appreciated his understanding and support in providing them with that small corner in the courtyard. I just hope that the incoming President is as understanding as Hon Nick Griffiths is.

I thank the many staff who work tirelessly around the Parliament: the Clerk, Malcolm Peacock; Chris Hunt; Nigel Lake and Donald Allison; the staff of the Legislative Council; the staff of the Legislative Council Committee Office; the Hansard staff; Cathy, Marilyn and Rosalie on the switch; the catering staff; the security staff; the library staff; and the IT staff. I thank them all for their support and friendship over the many years I have worked in and around the building. I particularly thank Di Welch and Em in the State Parliamentary Labor Party office. I thank very much my electorate staff, Stephanie and Mark, for being my best friends and supporters.

My family has seen very little of me and has sacrificed a great deal during this amazing period of my life. I thank them very much for their understanding.

As I said earlier, it has been a great pleasure and privilege to have served in this place as a member for the Mining and Pastoral Region. In my maiden speech I quoted a great Aboriginal leader from the Kimberley, Patrick Dodson. I thought I would pick up on what another great Indigenous leader from the Kimberley, Hon Ernie Bridge, said in his valedictory speech. He stated —

Never let go of the obligations we have to look after the interests of ordinary Australians because they make up Australia; they are Australians. Not only are they Australians, but also we are all Australians together.

My final plea to the members of this Parliament is never to lose sight of that reality and their obligation to fight for that cause.

In saying that, I hope those members of this house who will continue to represent the Mining and Pastoral Region—the Leader of the House, Hon Norman Moore; Hon Jon Ford; Hon Ken Baston; and, from Friday, Hon Wendy Duncan—and incoming members Robin Chapple and Helen Bullock will continue to stand up for the rights and needs of this great region of Western Australia. I will watch with interest as I start the next chapter of my life in the Northern Territory. Thank you.