



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON CHERYL DAVENPORT, MLC
(Member for South Metropolitan Region)

Legislative Council

Thursday, 23 November 2000

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ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

Special

HON CHERYL DAVENPORT (South Metropolitan) [12.34 pm]: I have the box of tissues, folks. I am notorious, I know; but what you see is what you get with me. Hon Bob Thomas mentioned a prompt to remind him to pause in his first speech in this place. I remember my first speech in this place, on 6 September 1989. All the way through that speech the words “breathe”, “pause” and “have a drink of water” were written. I thought, “God, I suppose I’ll be the same today.” Therefore, I apologise if I get a bit emotional.

When I leave in six months, I will not leave behind just 12 years of service in this place but almost three decades of service in the political system. As these valedictory speeches were to be given today, the past week or so has been a time for thinking about those three decades and my contribution to the political landscape of both the Australian Labor Party and the State of Western Australia. I will categorise my remarks into three areas, and leave my thanks to people in this place until the end. The three areas I want to cover are the community and the electorate; the political party and the highs and lows; and also the commitment within the parliamentary sphere.

Each term I have served in this place has been very different. I think seven or eight of us came into the House as part of the class of 1989. Hon Bob Thomas and I were the only new Labor members at that time. It is interesting that we have both chosen to leave this arena at the same time. I have been afforded a very big privilege by my political party and by the South Metropolitan Region in being able to serve the people of Western Australia in this place. In the past 24 hours I have gone back and read the speech I made in this place on 6 September 1989. I feel proud of myself, because I think I have achieved a number of the goals I set myself when I was elected.

In the whole spectrum of the political process, I have been one of those people who has been commonly referred to by the media as a party hack. There is no doubt that the success I have enjoyed in my career, which has been very much an evolutionary one, can be attributed to my knowledge and work within the Australian Labor Party. I was there when both the Tonkin and Whitlam Governments were in power; I was there when the Hawke-Keating Governments and the Burke-Dowding and Lawrence Governments came to office. I have seen the pendulum move across the political spectrum on a number of occasions. During that time I have also learnt a lot about life and politics. Nothing across the political spectrum surprises me any more, because I have seen it all before and I guess when I leave here I will see it again.

Like Hon Bob Thomas, I am a pretty simple person. I left school when I was 15 years of age. I did not have the opportunity that women in later times have had. I was very much a country high school girl. We were streamed very early. If one did not do well, one basically had a few options: One could go on to become a nurse by working one’s way through the system, or one could undertake secretarial studies, and that is what I did.

I came to Perth in 1963 when I graduated. That was a very big step in my life. It took me three bites of the cherry to settle in the metropolitan area because I got incredibly homesick. I am proof of the aphorism that “You can take the girl out of the country, but you can’t take the country out of the girl.” I remember my colleague to my left saying to me when he was contemplating coming into Parliament that I could go back to my roots. I replied, “I am already here and I’m not about to swap positions.”

I was one of the first members elected under the regional system that was introduced with proportional representation. I was “parachuted” into this place. I had done most of my political work in the community and for the party in the northern suburbs. The electoral changes introduced at the 1989 election meant there were not enough seats for sitting members. I was campaign director for Hon John Halden when he was elected in 1986 for the North Metropolitan Province. Like me, if he wanted a political career, he had to move to the South Metropolitan Province. That created ructions in the party. I am no novice when it comes to conflict in the party system.

Over the past three decades I have seen incredible changes in the Australian Labor Party. When I was first involved there was no formalised factional system, although there were always informal alliances across the party. That has not changed; in fact, over the past 15 years it has been formalised. I must take some responsibility for that - I was the inaugural coordinator of the left faction in Western Australia. I am very proud to say that I lean towards the left in ALP politics. I have worked very hard within that structure to push the boundaries, particularly to ensure that women are much more prominently featured in the political system. It is not about merit; it is about justice. Our population is 52 per cent female. I make no apology for the fact that I have pushed hard to ensure that women are more fairly

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represented in the political system. Once we get that critical mass, we will not be sitting in this Parliament until 3.30 am. There will be changes in the system. I am sorry there has not been enough of us here to ensure that that occurred before I left.

I was very pleased to second the 1993 motion to enshrine the 35 per cent affirmative action rule in the ALP in this State. The motion was moved by the then leader of the Parliamentary Labor Party in Western Australia, Ian Taylor. I am very proud that at the 2002 federal election the Labor Party will be only a couple of women short of achieving the 35 per cent preselection target in Australia. We have also reached that target for the coming state election, in both winnable and marginal seats. I will be very proud to welcome those new women into this Parliament after the next election. It will be a much better place for having a stronger component of women, who bring a very different point of view into Parliament. That does not take anything away from my male colleagues, but we need to even it up somewhat.

I will also touch briefly on an organisation called EMILY's List - an acronym for early money is like yeast; that is, it makes the money grow. It is only in its very formative years in Australia. I co-convene that organisation nationally with my very good friend, the former Premier of Victoria, Joan Kirner. We have worked very hard over the past four years. We do not get involved in pre-selection processes within the Australian Labor Party, but we do support, mentor and train women who are pre-selected for the Australian Labor Party and who subscribe to the principles of equity and justice, self-determination and full participation, are pro-choice and support child care, equal pay and diversity. One of the wonderful things that I take from the creation of EMILY's List in Australia is that, in the organisation's four short years of existence, it now has almost 2 000 members Australia-wide and has provided some \$260 000 to Australian Labor Party women who are standing for election around this nation. I am very proud of that fact and have been very involved in promoting and assisting women during those four years. I am looking forward to having a little more time to concentrate on that organisation and to further the work it does. One thing that has become very clear is that the only way we can assist in the election of more women is by providing them with support mechanisms and finance so they can compete on an equal footing.

I will also talk a little about some of the highs and lows that I have experienced in my years in the Labor Party, in particular within the parliamentary system. It has often been very tough. The year 1990 was a particularly difficult time for our Caucus when we changed Premiers. I also participated in the very difficult election post the release of the WA Inc Royal Commission report. They were very difficult times for us, and that summed up the first four years that I was here. Being a backbencher in government - as I am sure I do not have to remind my colleagues on the other side - is not an easy position to be in. I could probably count on the fingers of two hands the number of speeches I made in this place in those first four years. I had always found public speaking quite difficult, and to some extent that is what held me back from putting myself forward to be a parliamentary representative for so many years. I think I have overcome that in the last two terms. When we were unfortunately relegated to the opposition benches in 1993, I had to learn pretty quickly how to get up and talk about literally anything.

However, I have a recollection of the then Whip, Hon Tom Helm, asking me to speak for half an hour on a Bill. I refused and said I would not speak on an issue about which I knew nothing. I made it clear at the outset that I like to know what I am talking about. That is perhaps one of the reasons that when I do speak in this place - although they may not agree with my views - members take a bit of notice of what I have to say. I say to most members in this place that if they want to be taken seriously they must do some preparation and must know what they are talking about. Some members think they are contributing if they simply speak. However, it is far better to be prepared and to know what one is talking about than to talk about nothing.

I shall concentrate briefly on what were for me the parliamentary highs and lows. I am a bit sad that I have not achieved more. Obviously, the pinnacle for me was two years ago in May 1998 when I achieved the task I set myself to have the abortion law reform legislation passed through this place. I now look back at the four months that it took from the charging of two doctors to the passing of the Bill on 21 May - the ninth anniversary of my election to this place - and wonder how I survived the pressure of that time, with all the long nights and so forth that every member experienced. I was the proponent of that legislation, which, because it was not backed by any one political party, brought a new way of bringing legislation into this place. I do not necessarily agree with Hon Norm Kelly who said that we should observe more often our conscience. If we did, we would get very little done in this place if more legislation were debated on a conscience-vote basis.

I take this opportunity to say to the Leader of the House, Hon Norman Moore, that I appreciate very much the leadership he showed in this place at that time. I know we had a different philosophical perspective on the issue; however, the way in which he managed this place and the way in which you, Mr President, chaired the debate was for me very telling. When one reads the *Hansard* of some of the debates in the other place, I know where I would rather have been to debate the Bill; it was definitely in this place. Mr President, your charge of this House and the way you conducted us was very much a reflection of your ability to chair this place and I thank you very much for that. At times I thought you were a bit hard on me - you made sure I stuck to the issues. In the last evening of the debate, when three motions were moved and passed, you kept me very much on a narrow path; you did not let me stray off it. Although I endured difficult times during that debate - some of the scars may never heal - I was nevertheless proud of myself for not letting personalities get in the way in which I conducted myself in this House. It was very much an

example of how legislation can be made under difficult and trying circumstances, and I am pleased that I and the people who supported me in that process were able to achieve that. I can honestly say that I came into this place with an agenda and I achieved that agenda. As I said at the time, the legislation is not perfect but at least people know where they stand in this State and women can no longer be imprisoned for something that is very much an issue of social justice.

I will now speak about two more areas of legislation with which I was involved. In 1994 I was in charge, on behalf of the Australian Labor Party, of the adoption legislation that rewrote the Adoption of Children Act 1896. As members know, I subsequently introduced a private member's Bill based on the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Legislation. That period was a bit of a low for me because vetoes on information and contact between adoptees and relinquishing parents has not been removed. I know that the 1994 legislation has been reviewed and that new legislation is in the pipeline; I hoped that it might be introduced before I left, but that is not the case. I charge those members who were part of that legislation committee process to ensure that the unanimous position of that committee - which was coalition Government-dominated - is adopted.

I was also involved, over a period of eight years, with an attempt to reform the motor vehicle repair industry through licensing and registration of service outlets, and to create a decent mediation regime for people who have problems with accounts. My brother has worked in that industry for a long time. I spoke to him this morning and he said that that was one area of legislation in which I did not achieve the result I wanted. That was not through any fault of mine or either major political party. I served as chairman on the committee appointed by the then Minister for Consumer Affairs, Hon Yvonne Henderson, and was also a member of the committee reappointed under the then Minister for Fair Trading, Hon Peter Foss, which was chaired by the member for Geraldton. Those committees reported their findings. However, throughout the process there was incredible resistance by the Ministry of Fair Trading to the reforms that the committees wanted to introduce. The committee recommended a stand-alone co-regulation model to be supported by industry, government and the Ministry of Fair Trading. The Labor Party, and I am sure the Liberal Party, will take that policy through to the next election. I am hopeful that the legislation will get up in the next term of government. New South Wales is the only State in Australia that boasts that kind of legislation, and has had it for 20 years. Every incoming Government in that State - Labor or Liberal - experiences the same push by the fair trading departments to repeal or amend that legislation. I charge all members to ensure that that legislation is finally successful. They are a couple of things that I have not been able to achieve in my time in Parliament, but I will be watching that situation in the future.

I will now thank some people, and here I may become emotional again. My colleagues who sit on either side of me in this House both told me to leave the "Ross" word until last - so I will. For members of Parliament to do their job well, they must have good and loyal staff. In the almost 12 years that I have been a member, I have been blessed with reliable and loyal staff. Carol Treloar was my electorate officer for the first nine and a half years of my service to Parliament. She had worked for a previous member of Parliament. We went through some highs and lows together, but she was a wonderful supporter and a great person to work with. She job-shared for about six years of that time with Julie Kroeber, who remains with me today. Julie is also a trusted and loyal staff member. During that time Julie has had two lots of maternity leave and now has four wonderful children who keep her on her toes, but she works for me just one day a week now, and she is the best financial records keeper any member of Parliament could want to have. I thank both Carol and Julie for their service over the years. I have on my current staff Liz Vivian, who has been with me now for the best part of two years. Liz came to me from the office of Megan Anwyl, the member for Kalgoorlie, who had trained her very well. It was the first time Liz had worked as an electorate officer - she is a former nurse - and I was lucky when she decided to make the move to Perth. She has been tremendous. She has participated in the Seniors portfolio, for which I have been spokesperson for Labor over the past four years, and I know that in my retirement she will be snapped up by one of my colleagues because she is so talented and has been a great source of support over the past couple of years. Helen Mills has been a stalwart worker for members in the Australian Labor Party. Helen joined me about 15 months ago as my research officer. I say thank you to Helen; she is roughly the same age as I am, so we are of the same vintage and I guess we understand each other very well. She is tremendous to have around. I have been blessed and a lucky person to have had over the 12 years of my service only four staff members.

I also pay tribute to my friends. As a single woman with no partner, one of the things we rely on for emotional support and to sustain us is to have a very strong network of friends. I have some wonderful friends, particularly my friends in the Victoria Park area - a crowd of women we call the Victoria Park feminist precinct - and they have been the means of my keeping my feet on the ground. They will tell me when they disagree with things that are happening, and that is a great way to ensure that one keeps in touch with the community. It is easy to come into this place and lose contact with ordinary people and, because of my years of experience in the political system, I knew it was very important to ensure that I maintained those links with the community and I have done that through a great group of friends.

I also have a quarter of a century friendship with Val Ferguson, the former member for the East Metropolitan Region. I was very sad about the way Val left Parliament and the tough negotiations that went on in relation to her preselection at the time. I guess that has put some strain on our friendship, but that is mending and I am pleased to say that I can still look forward to many years of friendship with Val. I also thank Pat Tassell. I met Pat in the northern suburbs in

1983 and she went on to work for members of Parliament but now has her own employment and training business in the northern suburbs. Pat has been a great source of inspiration to me and certainly a very close friend.

I want to say a few words about special colleagues who have been mentors and friends within the Labor Party. I want to acknowledge my mentor, Pat Giles. I worked for her for eight years before I entered Parliament. She is an inspiration to me. She is now 72 years old and continues to provide incredible commitment to the community - not just at the local level where, in the past 12 months, she has also convened Womens Legal Services Inc (WA). She still has international connections. She is the President of the International Alliance of Women. She is also involved in the Global Women's Health Commission for the World Health Organisation. She is constantly an inspiration to me. If I can be half the contributor she is when I am her age I will be very proud.

I also want to thank the member for Fremantle, Jim McGinty. Jim and I go back a long way. When the left faction formalised in the Labor Party in this State, he and I were the convenor and coordinator of the faction. Jim helped me make the decision to put my name forward to contest the preselection for the South Metropolitan Region in 1988. It was a hard decision for me as I had a lot of self-doubt at the time. Jim knew my history and had faith in me. He continues to have faith in me and has offered me the hand of friendship over a long time. I admire him enormously for his decision to stand down as leader of the Labor Party in 1996. He knew the party was not performing well because of his leadership and that some very good Labor members were in jeopardy of losing their seats. He made the incredibly courageous decision to step down as leader. I admire him even more now for the contribution he continues to make to the Labor Party. Over the past four years he has demonstrated incredible dedication. His work will help ensure that the Labor party will become the new Government after the next election.

I also acknowledge the members for Maylands, Bassendean and Thornlie. They are all close friends. I wish them all well for the future and I hope that they will become ministers in the new Labor Government. I acknowledge the member for Kalgoorlie, Megan Anwyl. We have got to know each other well over the past four years since she was elected in a by-election. Megan and I share the same birthday but I have to say I wish I were her age! She is a fighter. It is not easy to represent a seat like Kalgoorlie. She is the first woman to have done so. She does her job very well. She is facing a tough battle in the election. One should not become too political at a time like this but I can understand the coalition strategy. I have been in politics for a long time and I know that, given the current political pendulum, the Government has to win seats to offset those it will lose. I can understand the rationale of targeting Megan. She has shown over the past few years that she fights for her constituency. She knows that her constituency wants good health care and good access to education services and to know that the community is safe and secure. I have seen her grow in her parliamentary career. I think it was a big ask to fill the shoes of the former Deputy Premier of the State, Ian Taylor. Megan Anwyl has done her job very well, and has been a credit to both the Australian Labor Party and women in political life. I wish her well in the next election. I know that she will be a minister in the next Labor Government. I look forward to the contribution that she will make in that role.

I turn now to this Chamber and to the many friends I have made during my service of almost 12 years. As people have said earlier - and Hon Christine Sharp mentioned this - it is true that we have very robust debate and some conflict in this place, but across all the parties some very strong friendships will endure. I have enjoyed my years of service with my colleagues on this side of the House, albeit in the past eight years in opposition. I have seen the pendulum swing a couple of times and it is now on the way back. I particularly acknowledge my colleagues on my left and right. I have known Hon John Cowdell for 25 years and I have known Hon Ken Travers for about 15 years. We are lefties! We have come through some pretty tough times in the party system. Over the past couple of years they have given me a lot of stick in this place, largely because I am the shadow spokesperson for Seniors, but they have tried to persuade me to stay. They have told me they will construct some ramps, and they have even promised a silver-plated Zimmer frame, if I stay! I must disappoint both of them. I am very comfortable about the fact that I am leaving this place. I thank them for their support and friendship, and look forward to seeing great things from both of them.

I also acknowledge Hon Kim Chance. Kim and I sat together on the government benches for a while. I was thinking last night during one of the divisions, that Hon Dexter Davies now occupies the seat I had when I first came into this place. If the Labor Party is on the other side of the House after the election next year, I would not mind once more occupying that seat until 21 May.

I acknowledge some of my mates in the coalition. I really do class people such as Hon Derrick Tomlinson and Hon Peter Foss as friends. They were also part of the class of 1989. We got to know one another quite early in the piece when we served on the inaugural Standing Committee on Legislation. We did some pretty good work on that committee. I enjoyed my time on that committee and getting to know them. Latterly, as a member of the Standing Committee on Public Administration, I got to know Hon Barry House and Hon Murray Criddle very well in that context. I also mention Hon Barbara Scott; there is no doubt that we have had our differences but I class Barbara as a friend and wish her well. I am pleased that she intends to serve another term. As a fellow member for the South Metropolitan Region, I am pleased that she will be leading that ticket.

One of my legacies to this place is that the Labor Party ticket for the South Metropolitan Region will be led by three women. Hon Jim Scott may see four women out of five candidates elected for the South Metropolitan Region. That is not beyond the realms of possibility, because I was elected from the No 3 position for the Labor Party when I came

into this place in 1989. I also acknowledge my friends in the Greens (WA) and the Australian Democrats. We have been through some tough times in the past few years, but I class them all as good friends. I was very moved by what Chrissie Sharp had to say this morning. Five women members were in this place when I was first elected in 1989. We now have seven women members, and after the next election I am sure there will be another influx, which will be to the betterment of this place.

Lastly, I thank the people who serve us very well in this Parliament. I particularly pay tribute to Marilyn David and Cathy Harrison on the switchboard. I give them credit for helping bring up my son in the early years. He was aged only 10 years when I was first elected, and Marilyn and Cathy found me whenever he needed me. I thank them. They are tremendous people and Parliament will be poorer when they leave. One of them has been here longer than I have, and we all owe them a great debt as they are tremendous and do a wonderful job serving Parliament.

I also thank the Hansard staff, who have been just incredible. I know when I first came in here I was a pretty awful speaker, and the reporters turned out some wonderful work with my speeches. I highlight one issue: I remember in 1994 the famous trouser debate in this place, and I take some credit for ensuring that, in the cold of winter, female Hansard staff are now allowed to wear trousers in this House. They are some of the little anecdotes from my time here.

I thank all the staff in the Chamber, particularly Laurie Marquet and Ian Allnutt. Ian and I have sons of a similar age, and we have compared notes over the past 12 years. Both our sons were pretty young when I arrived, and they are now grown young men. We can both be proud of them.

Also, I note the other people who serve the Chamber. I hope another woman will take Donna Artingstall's place as there are not enough women here. I wish Donna well in achieving motherhood, and I am sure she will delight in that position. I thank the education officers, the dining room staff and all the people who serve us here. It is a pretty daunting task at times and it is done very well.

Last, but not least, is my son, who has been an inspiration over the past 12 years. It has not been easy for him being an only child with a parent who has not been around most of the time. I tried to ensure that the time we spent together was quality time. I say to any parent who comes into this place, quality not quantity counts. I said in my first speech that he was my best friend - he continues to be. I am very proud of him. He is a wonderful young man who has a great contribution to make to the future. I wish him well. I hope he achieves his dream to play cricket for Western Australia; I will support him all the way. I thank Ross for making my life as rich as it is.

I turn now to the future. As somebody said, "Italy, here I come", although before I go I must spend a couple of years learning the language. I offer an invitation to any member who can help me pay for it to come with me. I have always loved Italy; perhaps it goes back to my childhood. I was there during summer a couple of years ago and found that it is very much like where I grew up. Something draws me to it and I look forward to going there and spending quality time soon.

I now refer to the debate on ageing. The community must acknowledge it and look at it more positively. The focus of the debate seems to be on care, which affects only about 15 per cent of the population. The other 85 per cent of people aged 60 plus are well aged and want to remain that way. Over the next 25 years the percentage of older people in this State will double to 25 per cent. One in four people will be aged 60 and over. We are faced with the challenge to ensure that older people come back into the mainstream political and social systems; currently they are marginalised. I intend to involve myself in the debate. The community can draw on much wisdom and experience from older people. I will be active in the community, worrying the politicians, to ensure their voices are heard.

I have always been clear about my time in this Parliament. In March 2001 I will have worked in salaried positions in the political system for 28 years - almost three decades. It is time for me to move on and do something different. I have always subscribed to the view that I wanted to choose my own time to leave, and I have done that, despite some people across this nation having urged me to stay. Members have a finite time to make a contribution. I have made mine and I have enjoyed it immensely. During the time of my service, particularly in Parliament, I have tried to the best of my ability to serve my electorate and my community. I believe I have done that pretty well. I have facilitated progressive law reform through this Parliament, and I have demonstrated my loyalty and worked hard for the Australian Labor Party. I am proud of my contribution. I look forward to the forthcoming election and I will work to ensure the election of a Labor Government, as I have done over the past three and a half decades. I look forward to that occurring early next year. I am sure Parliament will return prior to 21 May. If that is not to be, I wish all members well in whatever they choose to do in the future.

I noted what Hon Norman Moore said earlier about intending to be in Parliament for another 14 years. Much work needs to be done in the community. With the member's experience, he has a tremendous contribution to make to the ageing community. I urge members to think about that. I have been privileged to be in some focus groups over the past six months with people who have turned 60 and over. I was struck by the ill-prepared nature of men to contemplate retirement. That is another challenge for the community.

Hon N.F. Moore: Do not let this grey hair in any way affect your judgment; I am only 36 years old!

Hon CHERYL DAVENPORT: There are many challenges in the community and I look forward to them. I wish all members well. I have thoroughly enjoyed my years in this place.

[Applause.]
