



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON KEVIN MINSON, MLA
(Member for Greenough)

Legislative Assembly

Valedictory Remarks — Motion

Thursday, 23 November 2000

Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 23 November 2000

VALEDICTORY REMARKS

Motion

MR MINSON (Greenough) [12.35 pm]: When I first came into this House I thought that in my final speech I would get up and say all sorts of things. That time has come. I made some notes, but they look like an unconnected series of events. However, I will tackle the issues.

I have not read over my maiden speech, but I recall mentioning the issues of rural health, roads and the narrow base of industry in the area I represent. In a sober way I tried to make a judgment about whether anything had changed. I can say that there are some positives. Kalbarri and Dongara have the only two purpose-built multipurpose health centres in Western Australia. If they are not the only two, they were the first two. I was pleased to see them operating in my area. I understand that planning is under way for a new mid west regional hospital in Geraldton, and that will not be before time. A lot has been done in the area of roads, and transport is considerably better in the region.

The sad part, from my point of view, because I had a particular interest in this, is that not a lot has changed in respect of secondary industry. The problem with the area I represent is that it is heavily based on farming and fishing. That is terrific, except they are traditional occupations that are virtually closed industries. It is difficult to see much increase in employment in either fishing or agriculture, because we have run out of land, and machinery is getting larger and more efficient. If anything, fewer people will be employed in those areas.

Some members who have been in this place long enough will remember that I invited them to come to Geraldton and visit a sand patch about 20 or 30 kilometres north of Geraldton where I said there should be a greenfield industrial site. It was my dream that a deepwater port and the Oakajee industrial site would be built there. It was not my idea, but one that had been mooted in the late 1960s and early 1970s, and one I felt was desperately needed. We are much closer to achieving that. Unfortunately, I have not seen the commencement of such an industry. I sincerely hope that Kingstream Steel Ltd will be able to commence its steel mill there soon, and that the Government will take a long-term view of Oakajee and put in place permanently all the approvals that are required. This nonsense of giving approvals for two years for projects that will take many years to get up is silly. If an area is judged suitable for industry, deepwater ports and the like, it should be a matter of course, to enable proper planning, to mark the planning zone on a map, so that everybody knows the land use for the area, even if it takes 20 years to happen. In looking back at the reasons I came into this place, I can say that things have changed, and they have improved in some areas. However, it is my great regret that, largely due to the economic downturn in Asia a few years ago, we have not seen the two or three large industries that everything will hang off get started at Oakajee.

While I am talking about Oakajee, I will say that I am almost passionate about seeing the industrial base in Western Australia broadened. It seems to me that there could not be a better time than right now to do it. This State has all the raw materials and expertise, and the value of the dollar makes it extremely favourable for people to come in from outside, finance an industry, set it up and export from it to areas where the currency values are much higher. We have a reformed labour market. Since I was a child, it has been said that the strength of the union movement and the sometimes pig-headed approach to industrial relations of both unions and management meant that it was not a good idea to go to Australia to set up an industry because eventually one would be held to ransom. Australia is politically stable. I do not mean that Governments do not change; rather, we have managed to find a way to change Governments in an orderly fashion, without shooting each other. All those matters lead to the conclusion that if we really get aggressive about it, particularly given the current economic climate, meaningful industry can get started in this country, particularly in Western Australia. It is my view that it would not be too long before our dollar value will start to creep up.

In talking about those matters, I should say that there is a very unfortunate side effect of the WA Inc years; that is, Governments across Australia are now almost fearful of helping an industry for fear of being accused of making some sort of deal with the private sector. Most of our industries of note would not exist if government had not contributed in some way or another. The best way for government to contribute is to put in infrastructure. I shudder to think where Western Australia would be now if the public had not funded the Fremantle port and the Kalgoorlie pipeline. All the things that have hung off those two developments alone -

Mr Pental: It is the good side of public debt.

Mr MINSON: Of course. Both of those projects were completed before federation. When one looks at the fiddling with the finances since federation, one will probably see why Governments are a bit loath to commit to those sorts of projects. However, if we aggressively go about creating infrastructure - I am referring particularly to roads, ports, airline access, power and water - industry will follow. There is no question about it. However, we are living in a dream world if we expect an industry to come over the hill and spend \$1b establishing itself and, on top of that, spend another \$1b putting in power stations, ports, roads and so on, because I do not know of any other country that expects that to happen. I commend the Minister for Resources Development particularly for the work he is doing in that area. There are opportunities for Western Australia, especially since the value of the dollar has fallen. Now is the time to become very aggressive. Every other aspect of our commercial life has been reformed. Our dollar has been floated. If anything, the currency is slightly low. Our labour market has been reformed, as I said. This country is stable politically, and it is a nice place to live. It is the sort of place to which all people from the western world would like to come to live.

We have an opportunity to poach industry. The very successful agricultural machinery manufacturers at the moment are to be found mostly in North America. However, the sad fact is that Australian farmers will not be able to afford to buy any of their equipment shortly because, despite the fact that the falling dollar means they get more for their produce, it is a double whammy when they buy fertiliser and machinery. If the Government becomes proactive and talks to companies like John Deere Ltd and Massey-Ferguson (Australia) Ltd, it can begin to poach secondary industry from other countries. I have spoken with industry representatives overseas. They have a preference to come to Australia rather than go to Asia. Traditionally, they have gone to Asia because there they get help from Governments. However, they are operating in a foreign environment, and their executives do not necessarily want to live there. They have to finance their children's education outside of those countries. Opportunities exist in this country.

My experiences since coming to this place have been interesting. After I had been here for a short time, I remember Bob Pike asked me how I was settling in. I said that it was great. I told him that I gave a very hesitant maiden speech, with a quavering voice, and everybody listened intently and applauded at the end of it. I thought that was pretty good. The next time I got to my feet I nearly got ripped to bits, and I had not even opened my mouth. I said to Hon Bob Pike that every time I got to my feet, three or four people were in the Chamber, and after a couple of minutes they walked out. I said that it was not just me because it happened to everybody. He said, "Young man, what is this place called?" I said, "It is called Parliament." He said, "That means a place for speaking. If it was meant to be a place for listening, it would have been called something else." I think that explains many of the things that happen in this place.

Another thing I found was that as soon as I became a member of Parliament, people somehow expected me to have been dealt a double portion of the wisdom of the great monarch Solomon. Suddenly, I became a new species and was supposed to be able to do superhuman things, and the people wanted to call me to account if I was not able to deliver. I talked to Hon Clive Griffiths about this matter, and I said that I regretted that members of Parliament were held in low esteem - that was many years ago and things have not improved. Hon Clive Griffiths said something that was very insightful; that is, that Parliament is supposed to be a mirror of society, and society is made up of all sorts of people. He said, "If you look at Parliament, it is a mirror of society, and what is happening is that society is looking into the mirror and it does not like what it sees." Perhaps that also explains some of the things that happen here.

In my time in this place I have been up near the top, down near the bottom and back in the middle. I have enjoyed the process. I admit that I have had two major problems. One is that I am a bit slow on the uptake. Although I usually work something out correctly in the end, everybody else has moved on and does not notice. Another thing is that I am extremely naïve - I admit that. In fact, I confess to the House that I am so naïve that I became deputy leader and was then kicked out before I even knew who Noel Crichton-Browne was. Therefore, members will see that not too many people here are more naïve than I am.

When I came into this place, I must admit that I expected all the members on the other side of the House to have a pair of horns that stuck out and a spiky tail, and I was sure that either in the boot of their car or in their office they had one of those little sharp pitchforks. I thought they hid it pretty well because I could not see it. As time went by, I realised that some members had those attributes. However, I was also naïve enough to think that all those on this side of the House did not have those attributes. After a little while I realised that quite a few members on this side share those attributes.

One thing that has disappointed me, particularly on the part of members of the media - this has spilled out into the wider society - is the continual ascribing of ill intent to members of Parliament. In my time here, regardless of who has horns and pitchforks, most members have tried to do the right thing most of the time. We make some terrible mistakes, and occasionally the odd person does the wrong thing for the wrong reason. If society continues to tear down its leaders, we will reap a terrible reward. That is beginning now. Some of those under 25 years of age have no respect for the Parliament or the people in it. Part of that is our fault and part is the fault of other people.

I seek leave to continue my remarks at a later stage of the sitting.

[Leave granted for speech to be continued at a later stage.]

Debate thus adjourned.

MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT - VALEDICTORY SPEECHES

Motion

Resumed from an earlier stage of the sitting.

MR MINSON (Greenough) [3.49 pm]: Before I moved to adjourn earlier today, I was referring to the way that, in my opinion, we had begun to tear down the leaders in our society to such an extent that we were about to reap a whirlwind. In my view that has already started.

Young people, particularly those under 25 years of age, do not have the respect for this place and its members that I had when I was a young man. I regret that, and I do not believe it has anything to do with the quality of the people in this place, nor do I think that members in the past were that much better. The media have now become so invasive and cynical that they have lost sight of the fact that people who are elected to this place do not have special qualities - they are ordinary people who for the most part do their best. Although the media expect some sort of superhuman performance, that is unlikely to occur. It is time for the media to try to deal with members of Parliament and the operations of Parliament in a more balanced way. There is a glimmer of hope, which was pointed out to me by the member for South Perth. He found that, while people will say that members of Parliament in general are ratbags and that the process is no good, they always seem to have respect for their local member. Since the member for South Perth said that to me, I have noticed it myself. People will refer to various members of Parliament in disparaging terms, but approve of their local member. That is a glimmer of hope. Unfortunately we are now at the point at which the destructive cycle has begun, and I am desperately worried that it is about to become self-perpetuating. Members of Parliament must do the best they can, but they will not be able to turn the situation around unless they have some sort of balanced cooperation from the mass media. If we continue to tear down our leaders in the way that we have, we will reap the whirlwind.

I am proud of the things I have been associated with in my time in Parliament. I like especially to look back on my contribution as Minister for Disability Services. Disability services have been evolving in Western Australia for some time. They probably began, in the modern sense, in the early 1950s, with the formation of the Slow Learning Children's Group. Various organisations have sprung from that group, and some have amalgamated. When I became minister, it was represented to me that it was time the field came together under a single unifying force, and to take control of itself. The Government formed the Disability Services Commission. Many felt that body would not achieve its aim, that those with physical problems would suffer in some way, or would dominate, and those with developmental and learning problems would similarly either be ignored or take over. I like to think that the Disability Services Commission has been a success. The board has always been balanced, and I trust it will continue to be so. I look upon that period, and the formation of the Disability Services Commission, with some satisfaction. The problems certainly have not all been solved. With disability services, the more help that is put on the table, along with dollars, so the need increases, almost exponentially. That is what happened when the five-year plan was produced. We found the need was much greater than we thought, and the current minister has produced another five-year plan, which has brought more people out of the woodwork.

Mr Omodei: It is a great credit to the member for Greenough that the five-year business plan was developed when he was Minister for Disability Services.

Mr MINSON: I thank the member for Warren-Blackwood for that remark, but he knows as well as I do that I asked for the five-year plan because I could not get all the money in one lump! We had to have the money. A lot of other people were involved in developing that plan. To that end I thank Ray Young and Barry MacKinnon for their work. The use of local area coordinators in rural areas across the State has helped enormously to extend services to non-metropolitan areas. That is something in which I am very pleased to have been instrumental. A lot of people with a lot of knowledge have committed their lives to this area. They are the people with the ideas, and who work up the programs. Nevertheless, I recall with some satisfaction that I listened to them and took their requests to Cabinet. Similarly, the post-school options program, while very expensive, is necessary.

Before I left the Ministry of Justice, I started a program of restorative justice. The early fruit of that was the system of mobile work camps, which I started to work up as a policy in conjunction with Hon Peter Foss. It is a pity that so many people run private agendas on environment issues. It is an area that affects us all, but never have so many people told so many fibs to one minister. Since this is a valedictory speech, the less I say about that area and some of the people involved in it, the better.

Outside of the parliamentary sphere, but touching on it, I look back with some satisfaction at helping a few people form the parliamentary prayer group. This led to the Governor's prayer breakfast, which now has attendances of 500 to 600 people, and has become a significant event in the Western Australian calendar.

I will make some general comments about this Parliament. I say with some regret, that when I sit in here I often wonder what percentage of what is said in here is really for the benefit of Western Australia. The challenge is before us to try to raise the standard. Earlier it was said that the state of this House is such that it should be rebuilt. When it is rebuilt, I would like to see the structure of the Chamber completely changed. I once visited the Iowa Legislature, in Des Moines. In that Chamber, the seats faced the Chair, and members who wish to speak must walk out to the Table and address the assembly. The arrangement in this Chamber is silly. It is extremely adversarial - it cannot be anything else - and if any improvement in parliamentary behaviour is to occur, with speeches delivered without excessive interjection, the physical structure of the Parliament must be altered, as well as the standing orders.

I do not leave the Parliament with any regrets whatsoever. I have enjoyed my time here. In particular, I value the friendships I have made here. If we were truthful we would say that we make many acquaintances here, but not a lot of friends. I will keep in touch with a number of people here, and I value those friendships very much. I look back on the opportunity to serve in this Parliament with great fondness, and I thank members.

The honour that is bestowed upon a person chosen to represent people in the supreme Legislature of the State should never be underestimated. That is why it is such a shame that the standing of this place has become diminished of late. I look forward to future years, when perhaps we can see a change in that.

One of the things that I will not miss too much is question time. We had a pretty good example of that today. I will not particularly miss party meetings on Tuesday morning, although I know that people on both sides of the Chamber cannot understand why I hold that view. I will look forward to a more predictable life. Perhaps my hours will return to what they used to be, when I could go to bed and get up with the chooks, instead of going to bed at odd hours and getting up somewhere between 4.00 am and 7.00 am.

I promise that I will not become a member of "the older I get the better I was club". Some people come to this place at certain times for meals. As a new member I was asked to join them for lunch - no names! When I joined them for lunch I thought those guys must have been fantastic in their day, because I heard about all the things that they did. I then read some of their speeches in *Hansard*. I could not find any reference to one of those people, who was supposed to have done all these things, for a year. I labelled them after a bumper sticker that I read in Subiaco one day: The older I get the better I was. I undertake to the House that I will never become a member of that club.

I want to give thanks to all of the people who have worked with me over the years, particularly Kaye Marsh who was my electorate secretary for six or seven years and was the electorate secretary for Reg Tubby for about eight years before that. Following her, Margaret Rowe has been my electorate secretary. Having two electorate secretaries in 12 years indicates that I had two excellent people. I thank them for their dedication.

Like other members, I particularly want to thank my family - my wife Marg, and my children Judy, Suzy, Scott and Ben. Our families always bear the brunt of politics when it gets tough.

I thank the people of Greenough, because without their support I would not be here. I also thank the Liberal Party. I am conscious of the fact that, while one might disagree with some things that happen within a party, which is inevitable, I would not be afforded the privilege of being here had it not given me its patronage. People who belong to parties and arrived here through a party machine will concede that fact.

I thank those people who worked with me when I was a minister, in particular my principal private secretaries. Of all the people in the public sector, they probably work the hardest. Being a minister's principal private secretary or chief executive, as they are now known, means they are considered to be tainted, and when there is a change of government they have to go somewhere else in the Public Service. Those people make a sacrifice.

I did intend to do four terms here, which would have been 16 years. However, I had to be honest with myself and say that there was no point in staying. I have lost that fire in the belly, and it is time for someone else to occupy the seat of Greenough. I have enjoyed my time here. It has been a great privilege, and I wish everyone the best of luck.

[Applause.]