



PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



HON MURIEL PATTERSON, MLC
(Member for South West Region)

Legislative Council

Adjournment of the House — Motion

Thursday, 23 November 2000

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ADJOURNMENT OF THE HOUSE

Special

HON MURIEL PATTERSON (South West) [1.25 pm]: I thank all the people who said those very kind words about me. It is rather lovely to think that I did not have to die before they were said. I am very appreciative and very humble.

I will share with members the following words -

The real freedoms are to worship, to think, to speak, to choose, to be ambitious, to be independent, and to be industrious, to acquire skill, to seek reward. These are the real freedoms, for these are of the essence of the nature of man.

Those words of great wisdom and direction were spoken in 1949 by the founder of the Liberal Party, Robert Gordon Menzies.

I humbly thank members of the Liberal Party south west branches who have allowed me the privilege of representing them during the past 12 years. I have done this with great enthusiasm and worked to the very best of my ability. It has been the highlight of my life.

When I was asked whether I could contribute to politics, I replied that a vote for me would be a vote for commonsense and many of life's experiences. My mission has been always to place value on and to give guidance to families, to improve conditions for the rural and country sector and small business and to see a proud and vibrant Australia with all peoples occupying this land and putting Australia first while appreciating their past cultures. I said that in my maiden speech and today I encourage continuation of those goals because they are never fully achieved.

One of my most memorable achievements was to chair the ministerial task force for Western Australian families and to see the Government implement many of its recommendations. I have witnessed the Government's commitment to the rural sector in building new schools, police stations, health centres and sporting facilities and in funding an enormous amount of construction on country roads. Such measures give rural people the quality of life they deserve.

With the introduction of workplace agreements, the Government has provided small business with the most effective assistance ever. Many employers are recruiting staff knowing that they can adjust conditions and working hours to suit their circumstances. They are no longer wary of employing new staff. I suggest that this is a contributing factor to the lower unemployment levels.

Over the years we have seen and heard many lobbyists, delegations and protests. On one occasion while standing on the front steps of Parliament House with tears streaming down my face, I witnessed an amazing delegation when the disabilities lobby came to Parliament, not to protest, but to give thanks and recognition to the Premier and government members for all they do for the disabled and their carers. They presented the Premier with a large cane basket full of individual posies of flowers to which each person present had contributed. It is difficult for people to imagine the huge effort it took for both the disabled people and their carers to assemble there to make that wonderful gesture. This Government leads the nation in the provision of care to those who need it most. We are a caring government and conscious of our responsibilities.

I was recently speaking to Hon Barry MacKinnon, a previous Liberal leader, who I am happy to say is still chairman of the Disability Services Commission and actively engaged in helping others to enjoy a greater capacity for life. This brings me to a personal tragedy my family experienced when our eldest son, Warren, as a passenger in a car involved in an accident, suffered serious neurological damage. It was a difficult time for me, which I did not handle very well. I will be forever grateful to those in this House who showed me great kindness, support and understanding. It was like being part of an extended family. As a matter of fact, I always look forward to returning to this House to be with my fellow members because it has become a second home.

As I look around this House and see the faces of my colleagues I can assure them that each one has a story for me! Looking opposite brings back fond memories of the times I shared with Hon Tom Stephens, Hon Nick Griffiths and Hon Ed Dermer when we opposed the abortion Bill, as did Hon Barbara Scott, Hon Greg Smith, Hon Murray Nixon, Hon Murray Montgomery and, at times, Hon Norman Moore. Some say we lost our fight, but I do not consider that we did. The debate on the abortion Bill provided the opportunity to publicise and educate the public on this very important issue. People have the right to make their own decision, but it should be an educated one.

Sometimes the debates in this House are profound and important to our constituents and very educational to members. At other times, I wonder why we are here wasting so much time. However, I know this is not a unique situation. Recently, I read an early twentieth century English parliamentary debate on whether women's hair should be short or long. The House of Lords voted 3:1 in favour of long hair while the House of Commons was divided between 231 for long hair and 217 for short hair. Lord Amphthill said, "A woman with short hair was as unsightly as a woman in prison garb with her nose cut off". The Earl of Birkenhead said he was "too old to know anything about women's hair" and the Earl of Southampton diplomatically said that he liked them "all ways". Sir Ashton Pownall gave the ultimate politician's reply when he said, "At present, I have 25,000 women voters - I refuse to commit political suicide by commenting on a subject of such grave importance."

The committee system in this House is superior to committee systems in many Parliaments around the world. I have been privileged to sit on a number of committees, the longest being the Standing Committee on Estimates and Financial Operations, of which I was an inaugural member. At this stage, I thank the members of that committee, one of whom was Hon Bob Thomas, and who are now Hon Ed Dermer, Hon Simon O'Brien and Hon Ljiljana Ravlich. I give credit and thanks to Hon Mark Nevill for his friendship and chairmanship, which has been fair, intelligent, and of great interest to members. I believe the recommendations made by that committee are seriously worth considering by the ministers involved for the benefit of all Western Australians. I for one sincerely hope that Mark is returned to this House next year.

Often when debates are in progress, it strikes me that all members have the same goals, but see different philosophical ways of achieving them. I thank the Opposition Whip, Hon Bob Thomas, for his cooperation and honesty in keeping agreements on pairs.

As a member, I am gratified by the calibre of the Clerks of the Legislative Council. Mr Laurie Marquet, the Clerk of the Legislative Council, has vast knowledge and has always been willing to answer my queries with clear, concise explanations. I even enjoy the expositions. The Deputy Clerk, Mr Ian Allnutt, remains forever courteous and helpful, as have each of the attendants of this House, from Malcolm Peacock to other staff members who have come and gone from time to time. They have all made a contribution to our wellbeing. Of course, the silent heroes are the Hansard reporters who miraculously make sense of the words we impart.

Over recent years, Parliament House has been restored stage by stage, which work has been encouraged and guided by the President, Hon George Cash, and the Clerk, Laurie Marquet. This is appreciated by many people, as we see this beautiful old building regain some of its past glory. What a wonderful heritage we will leave to our next generation.

I give my heartfelt thanks to Teena Beale, the parliamentary secretary to the Leader of the House, for her efficiency, which she delivers in such a delightful manner, and I also thank Julie Holmes. Teena does the loveliest things. This morning, she came into my office and presented me with a little gardenia that she had picked from her garden and said, "I want you to wear this today, Muriel."

I mention also the committee staff; Cathy Harrison and the other staff in the post office; and the staff in all the other services - security, library and gardening - not forgetting, of course, ever, the catering staff, who have helped me keep so healthy. The staff of this Parliament are unique, and I do not believe we could ever wish for more obliging and kinder people. When we go into the Premier's office, there is Wendy Ireland, and when we go into the President's office, there is Lorraine Coogan, and it just gives us such a lovely feeling.

No man or woman is an island, and never more so than as a member of Parliament. I pay tribute to my Albany electorate officer, Sandra Scott, who has been a terrific help in my work. I have received credit on occasions, which I accepted at face value, but I passed the credit to Sandra when it was deserved. I have been part of a united south west team with Hon Barry House, our Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, and Hon Bill Stretch, our party secretary, and over the years we have worked and supported each other in representing South West Region. It has been my pleasure to enjoy their company and friendship, knowing that each one of us has something different to contribute; therefore, we are dependent on each other and are working for the same goal.

The south west is a wonderful part of this State, and I have met some fabulous people. We speak so much about the environment, but it behoves us to remember that people are part of the environment - the most important part - and we should never lose sight of that. We live in a glorious State and are the envy of most other countries, and it saddens me when I hear negative remarks about Western Australia. This State belongs to us all, and for this reason we must share its bounties. By this I mean we must give industries and people opportunities to work according to their capabilities. Other people view this in the same way. This is not just a Liberal philosophy. I refer to the book *Confessions of a Failed Finance Minister* that was written by Peter Walsh, a former Labor Senator for Western Australia and Minister for Minerals and Energy and Minister for Finance in the Hawke Federal Government. I am indebted to Peter Walsh, who understands where our wealth comes from and has a vast understanding of the nation's economy, for taking the time to expound this knowledge in the written word. He has written a very powerful book, and I urge members of all persuasions to read it.

At this stage I acknowledge Hon Barbara Scott, my only female colleague on this side of the House. It is gratifying to know that she was elected for her ability and not her gender. Barbara has made a great contribution.

Mr President, I had always aspired to the position of Whip and was appreciative of my colleagues for their vote of confidence in me in both the thirty-fourth and thirty-fifth Parliaments. No-one could have had a better team than this coalition team. Coalition members have remained courteous, cooperative and obliging to me at all times. As a matter of fact - I do not know whether I dare say it - I have a real affection for each of them, and I sincerely hope our friendship does not end with the closing of this Parliament.

I thank Hon Murray Criddle for his outstanding contribution to transport, in freight and roads, which has benefited people throughout the State. I think it is only people who are in industry or who travel a lot who appreciate what a terrific job he has done. I thank Hon Peter Foss for making our homes a safer place with his recent Bill, and for all he has contributed to our justice system. He introduced reforms in prisons and workable methods of rehabilitation. Some of those reforms have been visionary and very successful. When all is said and done, that is our ultimate aim.

I thank the Leader of the House, Hon Norman Moore, for his efforts to unite us as a team. He does a good job at that; he even invited us all to the Avon Descent this year. An event like that produces a lovely atmosphere and bonds us all. We all meet once a year for a night out, and it is a pleasant time. We thank him also for his vigorous fight to improve education and sport and recreation, particularly in country areas. We thank him for his fight for a fair deal in mining, our largest export industry. One day he will be recognised as the minister who led the State in the development of a successful convention centre. We thank him.

Mr President, you have been a leader in opposition, a leader in government, and now President. At all times you have gained our respect for your ability, fairness and friendship. We are grateful.

Life in politics is not all seriousness. The Liberal members of the Legislative Council meet at the end of each fiscal year for a few hours to have a fun time and recognise the work that has been done. Part of the evening includes the presentation of a Whip's award to a member who has made some contribution to the Parliament. This is expected to be presented with a humorous speech. However, I am not very good at humorous speeches, so I chose to put them in verse. I recite to the House the verses I wrote for the presentation of my first and my last awards. Members can work out who they refer to.

He came to us a loyal and trusted one
A country chap undoubtedly, Koorda's favourite son!
"I'm here for the good of all and not defined by borders"
That was fine before he spied our standing orders.

Never one to miss a chance, to gain the upper hand
Something he quickly learned while tilling Koorda land.
"These rules are old and out of date, let's get with the time,
I will not let it go" became his constant chime.

"Committees are the way to go you've got to give them range,
Before we can do that we have to make the change".
So up came copy number one and soon draft twenty four
George said "Get him out of here, before he dreams up any more".

God made heaven and earth and all therein, about a week
Without a copy or a draft just common sense, so to speak,
No one wants to change the plan we're more than satisfied
You could have knocked me down, when came his motion to be tried.

It really begs the question why a motion such as this
With all the changes to be made was this really his?
One does not doubt his sincerity was there just a tiny fudge?
Far from me to say but you may be the judge.

Amendments came in thick and fast, and tore the thing apart,
And to a lesser man, he would have lost all heart.
This man is made of sterner stuff and took it on the chin,
I've heard he's offering 10 to 1 these standing orders will stay in!

We know but little of what may come next
Nor can we follow all his detailed text
But now, we do know how to vote and when to pee
And thank goodness, he left us our afternoon tea.

The award of June 2000 was my last as Whip, and I presented it with the following verse -

As usual this award is couched in rhyme
This of course will be for the very last time

Reprinted from Hansard

As I pondered past times - the good, the bad, and some jolly
I confess to feeling somewhat melancholy

Many struggle to find the meaning of life
Where suggestions abound and solutions rife,
Searching in places like India, the Orient and Kathmandu
Well - I found it right here thanks to you.

One enters this place, to serve, and give their all
This we all know can be a very tough call
During the twelve years has been a huge learning curve
To wit survival comes - providing one has the nerve.

I know each one of you I'll surely miss
Perhaps I should just leave with a hug and a kiss
Great memories are mine to take as I depart
Memories, that always will have a place in my heart

How could I forget Pete's matching ties braces and socks
If I were a betting girl - I'd say they matched his jocks
And Max with his gift to untangle budgets taxes and tolls
And guessing if he'll show up in the Bentley or in the Rolls

And Barry's love of cricket and also his neighbour's wine,
and Bruce's Lotto knowledge he's always confident we're next in line.
There's Simon in moments like these there's a minty in the dish
And Derrick's demise would be the A double C's only wish

Of course Ray the reserved one - until his ire is raised,
And Murray who remains cool, calm and always unfazed
And Bill's passion for the land and at length will extol
And Greg's contempt for the Greens oh bless his soul!

Barbara's knowledge of health and childhood care
She's always ready for her members with time to share
And Norman - who spent time with the beautiful Elle
Were George's daily prayers for Norman maybe time will tell!

Now such a notion would never cross my mind -
For Norm's the most honourable chap one would find
I recall him once even being called a saint
Cos I believe it was he who caused Ljiljanna to faint.

George our President with understanding of - things - legal
With ecclesiastical demeanour and persona regal
Oh yes he's the one who confesses to speeding
And addiction to the share market is constantly feeding

With the Whip's award there is a tradition
Only one person to be named that's the position.
But what's to be done, when this I'm unable to do
Forget tradition and simply name two.

Now having faced the dilemma of no monthly cheque
That's no Moore Cash well what the heck -
I suppose I could find work as a gardener or storeman
and maybe I could get a reference from George and Norman

So you know the reason they receive this award
Be it anyone else is something I cannot afford.
Oh! There's also another reason why this award I bestow -
It's in appreciation to two great guys I'm privileged to know.

I acknowledge my husband Rol's contribution to my career. When the state president of the Liberal Party telephoned Rol one evening and asked him whether he was stopping me from nominating as a candidate for the South West Region, Rol said he knew nothing about it. Rol is not renowned for his tact. Rol asked whether they had approached me. I said they had been asking me for several years, but I had declined. He asked why, because he thought I would love to do it. I said I would, but that I did not think it would do our marriage much good as I would be continually away. Rol said that as our marriage had survived everything else, he was sure that it could cope with politics, and that

he would support me. Happily he has supported me, and our marriage has survived. We will celebrate our fiftieth wedding anniversary before I leave this Parliament.

I acknowledge my colleagues who are also retiring: Hon Cheryl Davenport - in a democracy we do not always have to agree, I accept that; Hon Bob Thomas and Hon Murray Montgomery - this will only be a farewell from Parliament as they both live in Albany; and Hon Max Evans, who is our most senior member, and, I suspect, one of the fittest. My friendship with Max goes back before politics as we both worked at senior levels in the Western Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry. I learned to respect him then and I respect him greatly now. To you all, my very best wishes for life after Parliament.

For those on this side of the House, whom I expect to remain here and return after the next election, I urge them to carry on with and recall regularly the mission statement of Sir Robert Menzies, and to support Premier Richard Court, who is an honourable man of strength, personal values, compassion and vision. He is worthy of your support.

In closing I wish each member of this House and their families a very very happy festive season.

[Applause.]
