



## PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

### VALEDICTORY SPEECH



**Ms Wendy Duncan, MLA**  
(Member for Kalgoorlie)

Legislative Assembly

Wednesday, 16 November 2016



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*Member for Kalgoorlie*

**MS W.M. DUNCAN (Kalgoorlie — Deputy Speaker)** [6.22 pm]: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for the opportunity to officially close this most exciting and rewarding chapter of my life. After nearly 14 years in the political arena, it is time to leave the ring and pursue my passion for regional Australia through other avenues.

My path to Parliament has taken some unexpected turns. In 2004, I was asked by someone I hardly knew, Eric Charlton, to take on the job of state president of the Nationals at the time when it was virtually insolvent. Why I said yes, I really do not understand to this day. It was decided that the only way to get our little party back onto its feet was to close the office, terminate the lease and take the administration back to our home in Esperance. There, with an ancient fax machine, a dodgy phone and mobile phone reception that only worked if I stood on a stack of brick pavers outside the farmhouse—thank goodness we never got round to laying those brick pavers!—I took on the arduous task of bringing our party back to relevance.

The one vote, one value legislation of 2005 gave us another serious knock, prompting one journalist to predict that the next election would see the party reduced to one seat. One mantra of my life and leadership has been that out of adversity there is always opportunity. What was the opportunity of the drastic reduction of regional seats we were about to witness? The opportunity was to campaign for the balance of power. With no money, our campaign for the 2008 election was long and based on individual effort. One particular campaign trip sticks in my memory. I drove from Esperance to Broome with my then 17-year-old daughter and her friend in their little Nissan Pulsar to start their gap year living and working in Broome. Not happy with them driving by themselves, I said I would go with them as long as we stopped at every local government on the way and talked about the Nationals and the balance of power. Strangely, the girls agreed! Elise is here in the chamber tonight.

So, in Kalgoorlie–Boulder I first met Ron Yuryevich and his councillors. He has often recounted that he wished me good luck, and I retorted, “There’s no such thing as luck. Luck is having a plan and seizing opportunity.” Leonora shire president Jeff Carter told me later that after I had given my pitch to his councillors and left, they rolled around laughing.

Wiluna was the best. With two gorgeous girls, we were pretty popular in the Paradise Hotel. While the girls fended off the mine workers, I was approached by a gappy toothed fellow with sun-hardened skin and dirt under his nails. He told me how he had lived in Sydney and worked in Newcastle, “But nothing beats living in Wiluna”, where he drove a grader for the shire. He said, “I’ve got a good job, people appreciate what I do and they thank me for it. I’ve got everything I need, except a good woman. Would you marry me, love?” I often recount this story and describe my suitor as a precious Australian. He loves where he lives, he is doing essential work for our nation, and he needs to be respected and valued. This is one of the lessons we should learn from the recent United States presidential election.

People ask me how I ended up in Parliament. I became a member for Agricultural Region specifically to head off a brawl between the old and new leaders of the Nationals, who after the redistribution both laid claim to the same seat, Central Wheatbelt. I was so proud that while the one vote, one value redistribution was tearing other political parties apart, we had a smooth transition. Murray Criddle retired, and I moved into ag region to babysit the seat for Max Trenorden at the next election so that the new boy could have Central Wheatbelt to himself. It was very clear that if the Nationals were to survive, we had to be more than just a farmers party and be willing to take risks to win new seats. With that in mind, I decided to lead by example as state president and run for Mining and Pastoral Region in 2008, which, much to my surprise, we won with 1.5 quotas. So I went from being the first female president of the Nationals to being the first female leader of the National Party in the Legislative Council.

If one suicide mission was not enough, I then agreed to stand for the seat of Kalgoorlie to support our push to win Legislative Assembly seats in the Mining and Pastoral Region. Some might call it luck that I survived in three different seats in Parliament, but I put it down to having a plan and seizing opportunity.

It was also not luck that as a member of Parliament I could do what many could not—and that is keep my promises. My key role in the development of the royalties for regions policy and its transition to becoming a key determinant of the Liberal–National alliance is something of which I will always be very proud. It enabled us to at last deliver on some of the things that had been long promised in regional areas. Much is said about the \$6.9 billion of

expenditure over eight years into 3 700 projects that have gone a very long way to address the shameful neglect of infrastructure and services in regional WA over successive governments. In my mind, the most important outcome of royalties for regions is the changing mindset of regional people from despair, hopelessness and even apathy to a new optimism, a new will to fight and new courage to dare to dream. Instead of fighting tooth and nail for basic services like health and education, we can now look to the future, innovate and try new things.

However, the expenditure of royalties for regions still needs some tweaking. On 18 June 2008, in my response to the budget in the other house, and in opposition at the time, I observed that to deliver services to the regions in a more equitable manner and more efficiently, we should follow the principle of subsidiarity. That means responsibility of service delivery should be as close as possible to the point of delivery. I do not think we are doing subsidiarity very well. This is particularly apparent in the decision-making and delivery of services around health, mental health, suicide, family services and juvenile justice. In remote places like Laverton, Leonora and especially the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, the use of fly in, fly out and drive in, drive out services has resulted in huge cost with little result and considerable waste. It is time to start delivering these services through people who are resident in these communities, even if they do not have the necessary degree or piece of paper, and then support them through training, professional development and mentoring. In Kalgoorlie–Boulder we have seen fully functioning, locally driven and managed organisations lose their contracts to big, bureaucratic, national non-government organisations that know how to write a good tender, but do not know how to deliver in a way that takes in the idiosyncrasies and unique issues of the delivery point.

This is a message that was delivered loud and clear by Aboriginal elder Kado Muir and the people of Leonora in response to a spate of suicides last year. Kado called for boots on the ground. He spoke of people in the community who had been put through a plethora of training courses but whose skills were not being used to help the community deal with the crisis and heal. The issue of subsidiarity was a key focus of the review of the Regional Development Commissions, which I chaired while I was a member of the other place and parliamentary secretary to the Minister for Regional Development. The report, “Review of Functions and Responsibilities of Regional Development Commissions”, contains references to achievements all over the world in delivering services remote from the centre of government, and there are many lessons to learn.

In my inaugural speech in the other house on 26 February 2008, I called for exploration incentives for mining companies. That became Nationals policy and the Exploration Incentive Scheme, delivered through royalties for regions, has brought huge benefits to the state, not only through expanded exploration and new discoveries, but also through the complete geophysical and aerial mapping of the state, as well as the development of world-leading online tenement management technology and pre-competitive data sharing. Analysis of the scheme by ACIL Allen Consulting has indicated a return of \$10 for every state dollar invested under the scheme, or up to \$24 if we count the economic impact of the discovery and commercialisation of new mines. I have enjoyed being a voice for the mining industry in Parliament, especially in the leadership role I took in successfully campaigning against any increase in the gold royalty, and helping prospectors and leaseholders get their concerns to government about amendments to the Mining Act, and anomalous increases in local government rates on mining leases.

Among the many other things, two matters stand out. The first was calling for and supporting an inquiry into the sandalwood industry, which resulted in amended legislation, a strong focus on illegal harvesting and a new harvesting contract system. The second was conducting an inquiry into the pastoral industry in the southern rangelands and the subsequent rangelands reform program. The latter was a more disappointing outcome; I believe that the opportunity to more productively use our rangelands has been squandered and that there is much to be gained from diversification and, in particular, capturing carbon credits. My father, who is here tonight, championed this cause through the Jennings review in 1979 and I sorely wanted to finish his work. Sadly, I will have to leave that to others to achieve.

Members, I must tell you, though, that my proudest moment of all was to be elected member for Kalgoorlie in this place. Kalgoorlie is where I was born. My family are up to their fifth generation in the pastoral industry in the region and the red dirt, the great western woodlands, the feisty people and the ancient Aboriginal culture and language fill my soul.

I came to the role with a long to-do list, much of which I have achieved. These include upgrades to the Goldfields Arts Centre, Great Eastern Highway, Kalgoorlie–Boulder Community High School and Goldfields Rehabilitation Services Inc. It also includes new seniors’ accommodation in Kalgoorlie–Boulder, the state-of-the-art Ray Finlayson Sporting Complex, and the buildings I am most proud of—the fabulous new accommodation blocks for the WA School of Mines, which were made possible only through \$20 million in royalties for regions funding.

It is wonderful to see funds go to arts, early childhood learning, healthy eating and support for government agencies in the Ngaanyatjarra lands. In Laverton I worked hard to see the store that had been closed for 18 months reopen, funding for a new hospital, and the upgrade of main street and community facilities. Leonora has enjoyed an upgrade of the bowling green and sporting facilities, a new multipurpose building for services coming to town and an upgraded wastewater and sewerage system. Menzies has been spruced up with a main street upgrade, expanded shire offices, and a very welcome water park and new youth centre.

There are myriad smaller projects and achievements that I have had the honour of supporting, and I will touch on a few that I believe have made a difference. When I was campaigning for the seat of Kalgoorlie in 2012 it was brought to my attention that the city would soon have only 23 doctors, when the optimum number was 40. People were waiting weeks to see a GP, or for hours to be attended to in the emergency department. I was asked to chair the Kalgoorlie–Boulder GP working group, and with the assistance of the wonderful crew at Rural Health West and with the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Western Australia, the Chamber of Minerals and Energy, City of Kalgoorlie–Boulder and the Goldfields–Esperance Development Commission around the table with other health agencies, we devised a unique strategy called Forward to Fellowship. This was to source international medical graduates and then to closely mentor and support them to gain their fellowship. It was an attractive proposition, and in two years we solved the doctor shortage and halved the number of patients attending the emergency department. This type of collaboration is a real example of resolving community challenges.

Another focus of mine has been mental health, so I was very honoured to accept the role of inaugural chair of headspace in Kalgoorlie–Boulder. This service is very important for people with mental illness, their families and carers, as is a subacute accommodation facility in the goldfields to complement the Kalgoorlie Health Campus mental health unit. We are all very disappointed that promised funding for this facility was removed from the budget this year and this is a fight that I know our Nationals candidate for Kalgoorlie, Tony Crook, will continue should the people of Kalgoorlie–Boulder elect him to replace me.

Having been raised as a child with a very close association with the Wongi people of the goldfields, I have a strong affinity with Aboriginal people and have dedicated much of my time as a member of Parliament to giving them a voice. It was an absolute honour to represent the Nationals on the Joint Select Committee on Aboriginal Constitutional Recognition and play a part in recommending legislation to bring that into effect.

I helped my friend and mentor, respected Aboriginal elder Bruce Smith, to bring together all the elders of the vast goldfields and central desert regions to form for the first time a council of Aboriginal elders. Two years ago, the town of Laverton was experiencing despair and rampant lawlessness, and I worked with local Aboriginal elders, the Shire of Laverton, police and other agencies to develop the Laverton community safety plan, which has seen juvenile justice issues virtually eliminated. We have had three successive school holidays that were juvenile crime free. I cannot praise the community development officer, Marty Seelander, the police officer in charge, Heath Soutar, the local elders and the Shire of Laverton highly enough for their commitment to collaboration and working together that has achieved this result. I also hope that my work and advocacy has put the Ngaanyatjarra lands on the radar so that government is aware of the amazing art, language and culture of the central desert people as well as their huge potential for sustainability given half a chance.

I must not forget my role as Deputy Speaker. It certainly was a great honour to have this role, if a little challenging going straight into the chair having been in the other place. I cannot thank you, Mr Speaker, and the Assembly staff enough for your support and helpfulness when needed—especially getting me into the chair with a broken leg. Of course, the staff of Parliament are an amazing group of people who make you feel so welcome, particularly those of us from the regions. We are away from home a lot, and they are like family—the people in the library, catering staff and the security staff.

So what have I learnt? I have learnt that we survive in this state in spite of government, not because of it. It was very frustrating as parliamentary secretary trying to get some progress through the bureaucracy. There are some fantastic people in our public service but I fear that it has been severely damaged, first by the mining boom when many flocked to the high wages and career prospects of the big mining companies, and then by the savage downsizing and recruitment freezes of more recent times. Recommended reading for future ministers on this issue is *Quarterly Essay* 60 by Laura Tingle, titled “Political Amnesia: How We Forgot How to Govern”. She warns of loss of memory in the public service and the predominance of “meretricious players who flit across the private ministerial advisory stage”, using a 1982 quote from then Treasury Secretary John Stone. She also quoted from a Spanish–American philosopher George Santayana who wrote, in 1905 —

Progress, far from consisting in change, depends on retentiveness ... Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.

In my inaugural speech in 2008 I referred to Lieutenant General John Sanderson’s warning that we are failing to recognise the perils of not nurturing the whole continent. His opinion was that terra nullius is being created in Australia again today. How far have we come since those words of John Sanderson in 2007? I am afraid to say, not far. When regional cabinet met in Kalgoorlie–Boulder in 2015, I was forced to ask why it was that anyone over level 7 had to have an ocean view. Why is it that we disown and reject our inland? This is where the nation’s riches lie and where, with positive reinforcement, Australians would discover it is a great place to live, as did my friendly Wiluna grader driver.

A valedictory speech is not complete without acknowledgement of the people who helped along the way. Electorate staff are critical to the success of an MP and in spite of often being called “secretary” or “receptionist” are highly skilled people who need to have a huge knowledge of the community, how government works and how to

problem-solve. They deal with people who range from those in the highest office to those with the lowest standards of behaviour and respect. They all deserve a medal. I must particularly thank Victoria Young, who is in the gallery tonight. She joined me when I was first elected and had no computer, no office and no phone. Her sense of humour and flexibility were invaluable. Along the way I have also had the services of Sarah Downe, Dorothy Henderson, Margie Thomas-Close, Beth Richardson, Mandy Reidy and Kerrie Stones, who all brought their own special skills and experience to the job. I count them all as true friends.

Much loved by not only my staff but also my colleagues' staff is Frances Archer in Broome. Her capacity for work, knowledge of the system, memory of who's who and persuasion skills are beyond amazing. Frances knows me as though she was me and her guidance, advice and pre-emptive action, when necessary, leave me forever in her debt and I will treasure our lasting friendship.

I also thank my friends and supporters in the Nationals, including "Mr Grumpy" Allan Marshall, and his offsider and my first vice president, Allan Holmes—a formidable pair—Jocelyn Bowey, Marg Agnew, Sheryl and Greg Liddicoat, Terry Fleeton and Bryce Greatorex, and my steadfast Kalgoorlie branch. John Bowler is a wonderful friend and supporter who talked me into standing for the seat of Kalgoorlie. I am forever grateful to my confidantes, fierce supporters and sounding boards, Jane Coole and Louise Paterson, who were always on my side and ready to brainstorm whenever I hit a brick wall. I would not have survived without you two.

Of course, family means everything. My parents, John and Maxine Tonkin, are here tonight and were an inspiration. Both have an Order of Australia for their services to the state. When I was proud, they were bursting at the seams. When I was hurt, they were wounded. They are forever following my progress and giving me feedback. I love you, mum and dad. To my four beautiful kids—Kat, Anna, Elise and James—and to my granddaughter, Ashlee, you have weathered this well and made me so proud. Thank you for your support and care. And, finally, to my rock, Ian—your love, support, wisdom and devotion are the only reason I have been able to do this. You went absolutely above and beyond and I will devote the rest of my life to returning the favour.

My final comments, if I can have your indulgence, Mr Speaker, will be around endeavouring to improve our record of women in Parliament and achieving senior roles. The challenge for many women is that they do not see their way clear to enter politics until they have their family responsibilities largely off their hands. That was the case for me. Having done my best, along with working and studying, to support my four wonderful kids in their formative years, I was 49 before I became engaged in politics. Imagine my surprise when, in 2013 at the state election, one of my opponents told their booth workers to say "Don't vote for Granny Duncan" when I had not even turned 60. A year later, Hilary Silbert reminded me that our first woman parliamentarian, Edith Cowan, was elected at that age, and she strongly encouraged me to seek higher office. I also received advice from my dear friend Professor Lenore Layman, who helped me edit the history of the National Party on its centenary in 2014. She said that I should not let my hair go grey while I was a member of Parliament. I thought she was joking, but I think she was probably right.

Given that women live longer than men, it is bemusing to me that ageism seems to strike earlier for women. I really got the message when I received an email from the electorate officer of one of my National Party colleagues congratulating me on my achievements and decision to retire and finishing off with an observation that it is good when people realise they have reached their use-by date! I can assure you that I have not reached my use-by date and I have plenty of passion to continue to serve my country and the people of the inland for a fair while yet. However, I have reached the end of my usefulness in this place.

[Applause.]

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