



Legislative Assembly

VALEDICTORY SPEECH



Hon ALANNAH MacTIERNAN, MLA
(Member for Armadale)

PREMIER'S STATEMENT

Thursday, 24 June 2010

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Consideration

MS A.J.G. MacTIERNAN (Armadale) []: Mr Speaker, thank you very much for that protection; although I have always enjoyed a little of the argy bargy and I know that the member for Albany will be particularly disappointed because he has told me that he was wanting to get stuck in during this last opportunity! However, I appreciate the sentiment, Mr Speaker. I hope that there has not been too much expectation about this presentation; it will not be War and Peace, nor will it be a great philosophical piece. I very much appreciate members in this house providing me with this opportunity to mark the end of my 17 years in Parliament, and for giving me the opportunity to pontificate a little on what I have learnt here and to thank some of the many people who have helped me to survive and even, occasionally, thrive in this extraordinary task.

At the outset, I want to thank the people of Armadale for the honour they paid me in electing me as their representative in this place. I have always been very, very determined that whatever the broader role I played in Parliament or in government, I had a very special obligation to ensure that the people of Armadale enjoy a fair share of the state's wealth and opportunities. I am pleased that I have had the chance to deliver in many ways for my community. However, there is much more to be done, and I am very pleased that the Labor Party has chosen Tony Buti as our candidate in the forthcoming by-election. I know that Tony will bring passion, energy and ability to the job of representing Armadale. I use this also as an opportunity to acknowledge my great friend and colleague, and predecessor, Kay Hallahan, who continues to offer me and many other people in the party and the community of Armadale, the most tremendous support.

Geoff Gallop used to say that being a member of Parliament should be considered a vocation and not a job. I agree with that. This is really a way of life. To be done properly—I think most members will appreciate this—this task needs to be viewed almost as a sacred duty. Unfortunately, members often have to short-change family and friends to fulfil the role of representing the interests of all our community. I must say that I often feel very, very guilty about this, and that I have not always been able to provide the attention and support my family and friends deserve. Indeed, my children threaten always to write the *Mommie Dearest* book. They claim that every night I would ring to say, “I am sorry; I will be late home; you'd better get the frozen lasagne out of the freezer.” They have totally forgotten all the wonderful home-cooked meals that I made—and the beautiful birthday parties! However, I really do want to recognise the forbearance of so many who continued to support me, notwithstanding my shortcomings in attending to their needs.

I want to make some philosophical reflections; although I guess some people might think it a bit “fringe”. We so often think about dysfunction and the times in society when people break the law or do not do the right thing. However, when I walk out on the street, I always find it extraordinary to see all the people who are doing the right thing. They are not knocking off their grandmas and putting them in Sulo bins; they are obeying the laws. I think it is just extraordinary that we have these massive aggregations of society and yet it more or less works. Billions of people around the world evolved from herd animals. In our early evolution as hominids we travelled in bands of 15 or 20 and were able to establish a way of interacting and caring and supporting each other that looked after our collective interests. That we have been able to do that, in aggregations of billions of people, is really an extraordinary thing. However, it is not something that we can take lightly. If we look at failed states, we see communities where it has not worked, where it has broken down, and we realise that we should never underestimate the challenge of keeping our society together. Just keeping the show on the road requires an amazing accumulation of knowledge and skill in government, in Parliament, in civil society, in business and in academia. I think

that is an important reflection. What we do is a tough but very, very important task. It is an extraordinary thing that, as a species, we have been able to achieve.

However, many others here, of course, want to do more than just keep the show on the road. We have come here with aspirations of how we can make our society better. On my side of politics, that “better” is seen in terms of creating greater equality of opportunity for each and every individual to create a life that provides meaning for them. I know that on both sides of the house we have the same overwhelming desire to make our society better. However, we need to understand that our job is not just about making laws. We need to understand that people do not engage in law-abiding behaviour because of a law. The vast majority of people refrain from murder, not because we have laws about murder, but because they have a commitment to our society; a commitment that many of us would describe as a basic morality. Therefore, we must understand that a key part of our task is to ensure that as many members of our community as possible see that they have a stake in this joint enterprise; that we develop policies and allocate resources and structure our laws so that everyone has an opportunity to make good and to do what gives value to their lives. If I can reflect on one contemporary political issue, it is that mining companies should appreciate the value that social stability provides to their business. There are undoubtedly other continents that will provide cheaper access to ore, but what is the value, I ask, of operating in a society whose members are educated and can safely take on high-risk tasks, whose officials are paid enough not to demand bribes, where community members feel they are being justly compensated so they do not seek vengeance by wrecking minesites or kidnapping company officials—countries where people embrace the rule of law because they have an interest in society. As they say, there is no such thing as a free lunch. We need to invest in our community to get outcomes that provide that very beneficial operating environment. We need money to make that investment.

Having said that, I want to acknowledge the role that every one of us plays. We all play a role in keeping our community together and balancing those competing interests and voices. I say, as I leave this place, that I wish each and every one of you the very best in your part in that role.

I have had a great opportunity in this place to take on the position of minister. I want to thank my caucus colleagues and the Australian Labor Party for giving me the opportunity to serve as the Minister for Planning and Infrastructure for seven and a half years, even though, for the first four years of that, as we built the Mandurah rail line, I have to say that it was like being on the Somme! I would arrive home to see faxes of reports from *The West Australian*. At the end, the project was a great success. I thank all people, inside and outside Parliament, community members, who, during really tough times, came up to give support to that project by saying, “Keep going; we’re with you.” I say to people that politicians are made of the same clay. We are just like everyone else. We need to know that there is support out there for us to continue the battle to fight for positive outcomes even when the going is tough.

There are so many people here; so many of my colleagues whom I would love to name that have been so fantastic. They know who they are, and they know my extraordinarily high regard for them. I would like to acknowledge Premiers Geoff Gallop and Alan Carpenter who gave me enormous backing and support. That was always appreciated. They always shared the positive agenda that we had for the state.

I have been counselled to list some of the things we have achieved, notwithstanding the fact that we were very coy at the last election about what we had done. We decided we were not going to tell anyone! We did plenty of great things. We did a whole heap of great things, not that I can claim responsibility for them. We were the first state to recognise that we were in climate change, not a drought, and built a desalination plant. In terms of education, we raised the school leaving age. That was in recognition of what had to be done to become a twenty-first century economy.

I had great opportunities. We did an enormous amount of work. Not only was there the Mandurah rail line, there was New MetroRail which basically doubled the size of the rail network. We did more than that. We really put a big effort into enhancing the public realm—a great number of town centre revitalisations; new stations in places like Bassendean, Gosnells, Armadale and Kelmscott; and we reshaped the Mid West. It was a tough battle to get approval to deepen the Geraldton harbour. We constructed the southern rail corridor and we revitalised the foreshore that connected and enabled the fledgling iron ore industry to restart, which helped the town of Geraldton reconnect to its waterfront.

We undertook massive road projects, many that we had to really fight for, such as Gubinge Road, Roe Highway stages 4 to 7, the Tonkin Highway extension, the Perth–Bunbury Highway, Tom Price –

Karratha Road—I remember being there with the member for North West celebrating opening its second stage—and the Mt Magnet – Leinster Road. We also invested massively. We managed government during a time of great growth. Although that presented extraordinary challenges, it also presented us with real opportunities to expand and improve our infrastructure; namely, to develop strong quality in the public realm to put some focus on ensuring that the places we built had quality and that we were adding to the urban environment.

I had of course special satisfaction in reshaping and revitalising the Armadale town centre, reversing its depressed state after private and public capital had fled. I also saw investment come back, local jobs created and the community pride that developed as a result of that activity. I oversaw projects that perhaps are not yet as well known as they should be, like the wonderful Champion Lakes International Regatta Centre. The Leader of the Opposition will recall many conundrums about that project! At the end of the day, it has become a great asset not only to the people of Armadale and that region but to the rowing, canoeing and dragon boating community as well.

I want to reflect on some of the things we tried to do differently. We extensively experimented with deliberative democracy. There were even some members on the other side who got involved in the deliberative exercises. They went on from the road train summits to dialogue with the city. The road train summits were a particularly interesting experience. We brought together truckies, greenies, pastoralists, graziers, producers, local government and community members. There was a bit of grief in the lead-up to it. Statements were put out that we were trying to get road trains off our roads. There were lots of tears on the day with some very frank discussions going on, but in the end we came up with an accommodation that everyone could live with. The process took 18 months. I remember making the announcement. There were representatives of everyone there when we came out to do a press release. A journalist said, “So everyone agrees?” I said, “Yeah; everyone has agreed!” After years of battles, everyone had agreed. The journalist replied, “That’s not a story!” That illustrates some of the challenges that government has.

The demands of the younger generation are going to be for a more active engagement in the decision-making process. I think this is an area where we have to do more. We have to find more imaginative ways to engage people, to allow them to have informed input into the decision-making process, and to work to establish common ground.

We took on some very serious battles. Do members remember the guy with the gun on the front of *The West Australian* who was going to shoot me after the great spread titled “Alannah’s land grab”? It concerned about seven different projects, all of which, I have to say to my colleagues, were commenced under the previous government. Nevertheless, it was “Alannah’s land grab” and I was going to be shot! We are still here; obviously it was not much of a gun!

The skipper’s ticket was controversial. People actually seriously argued that it was unreasonable that we require someone operating a high-speed boat to know something about the basic rules of waterways and basic safety. Anyhow, those are the sorts of little struggles we dealt with. Perry Lakes was another one. My colleague John Kobelke was involved in this one with me. We could not get the majority of the Cambridge council on side. We were locked in battle. We tried to accommodate them. In the end, we resumed the land. We were called every name under the sun, and now this Minister for Sport and Recreation has opened magnificent sporting facilities out there.

I want to make a special mention of one of my very favourite groups; that is, the pastoralists. We held pastoral forums. We used to have weekends once a year during which pastoralists could tell me all the things they needed or did not like about what we were doing. I used to say to them: the first session has to be called “I’ve got a lovely bunch of coconuts”, during which we will get up and vent spleen for a couple of hours and then, having done that, we will get on a more constructive path.

[Member’s time extended.]

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: I am sorry; I suppose I should be talking not so seriously today, but there are a couple of things that I really, really want to say. One of the primary reasons I have decided to put my hand up and have a go for the federal seat is the fact that I recognise we really do have to do something about climate change. We have to do something far more significant than the little, tokenistic pieces that we have been doing to date. We are leaving a future generation with a great mess to clean up, and that is just completely and utterly unacceptable. One of the problems is the language that we use

around climate change. People talk about it being two degrees hotter. Most people say, “Two degrees hotter; what is that? I’ll just turn up the air con.” Of course, we know now that it is not likely to be two degrees; it is more likely to be four degrees hotter. That is an average temperature. I think it was Clive Hamilton in his book who wrote that it is a bit like having one’s head in the oven and one’s feet in the fridge. Talk of an average temperature does not actually give us any sense of the enormity of what is going to happen and of the change to our climate systems. I put it to my colleagues that if the northern monsoon fails, which is one of the most likely early outcomes of this severe climate change, and we see one billion people on the Gangetic Plain without food and water resources to feed themselves, they are not going to sit there and die. They will be doing what we would do: they will get in boats and they will come to Australia. Do not any of us think that we are isolated from this problem and that somehow or other we will be able to manage, because we will not. If we do not deal with this, it is not just those people who are going to suffer; it is going to be a world full of chaos that we are leaving to our children and our grandchildren.

My other hobbyhorse, as it has been described in this place, which really urges me to stay on in political life and do something about it, is the issue of early childhood development and education. The most amazing science has been done. We now actually understand very deeply so much of the dysfunction and underachievement that we see that creates the inequality in our society. The answers are actually not all that hard. It is not one of those intractable problems, but something that we can directly and easily deal with. I urge all members of this house to really keep the focus on this and to say, “Let us be imaginative. Let us always keep our minds open. Let us be looking for what the science is telling us about how we should do things differently. Where can we most wisely invest the community resources?”

I have finished being on my soapbox, but I really did want to get those in because I do believe that they are two of the most crucial issues that we as a community in Australia generally and in Western Australia need to deal with.

I want to reflect a little bit on some people. I need to thank so many people. We have so many memories of this place. The member for Pilbara and I were in the upper house together during my first four years in Parliament. They were extraordinary times. I do not know; sometimes it may be that we are new to Parliament, but it was different. We frequently had all-night sittings. There was a high intensity and combativeness to the whole process that we do not quite see today. There were the great landmark battles around native title and industrial relations. It was a most extraordinary time, but in amongst all that—maybe this stuff still goes on but I just do not see it—there was the personal interaction with the other staff of Parliament House, such as the Hansard mob and the dining room mob. People used to actually socialise together. Maybe it has just passed me by, and it may well be that the pressure of this job has become such that there is less time for that sort of engagement, but they were brilliant days.

There are so many staff of Parliament House that I really want to thank. There are so many people, but can I just pick out a few. Vince La-Galia, what an amazing man, who always makes one feel so good because he is so full of flattery and gives such wonderful service. Helen Steven from Hansard—my God, she has been around during my whole time here. I am not very computer literate, and Helen is always printing out the *Hansard*. How fantastic, Helen, you have been over my whole time here. Helen is a fantastic person to work with. The wonderful women on the switchboard; how do we get people like that? Are they not the most fantastic people? They are always unfailingly pleasant and professional. But they did much more than that. When we are in Parliament and we have got kids, they take on a role in managing our children, such as when Jake rang up and said, “Oh, God; I’ve got to cook a turkey. How long should I put it in for? Do I need to defrost it?” I was in Parliament and the switchboard would be giving advice. Antoinette had a problem with the police because she had nicked my phone and someone had made a bomb threat to Mercedes College. She rang the switchboard for advice. Jake found what he thought was a friend of mine in the house—a person with a great face tattoo and a very large ghetto blaster. He rang the switchboard and said, “Has mum got anyone staying here?” They were always extremely helpful. I want to thank all the staff whom I have worked with. You have been fantastic and you make the job of the members so much easier.

The staff I have had in my electorate office started off with the wonderful Veronica, whom we met one night outside the Westfield Shopping Centre. She was at a tender age in her early 20s. We have been great friends ever since. I got two for the price of one! With Veronica I got her mother, Roma, who I am

so pleased is here today. Roma has worked as a volunteer in my office every day for 16 years. Is that not absolutely amazing.

[Applause.]

Ms A.J.G. MacTIERNAN: She is fantastic! I have had many other brilliant staff, but I want to particularly mention two who are here today and who have been with me for the past 10 years—Tina White and Judith Lewis. They know that there is absolutely no way I could do my job without them. We are a team and I love these ladies to bits. I also want to particularly thank Linda as well, who has come into work with us over the past few months.

What great people were my ministerial staff. I think they were wonderful. Many members have said to me that they were a fantastic team. I cannot name them all. I just want perhaps to mention Richard Farrell and Steve Keogh, because these guys have been with me in my political journeys—Steve from 1976 and Richard from 1981. They have been outstanding friends and colleagues and support. To all my ministerial staff and all the people who worked for me, thank you so much for what you did. I had to name one person, and that is of course “Perfect Peter” as he has been known in our family—Peter Allen, the best ever ministerial driver, a guy who just ends up running all the show. Peter, thank you very much. You have been so much appreciated by me. You made my job so much easier. I want of course to thank all the wonderful people from the Armadale branch of the Labor Party. They are beautiful people. We have got a great, very vigorous, dynamic branch with a wide range of people. We have a great time together. They have been wonderful, wonderful support to us.

As perhaps one final comment, I want to thank all those people with whom I have worked on committees. The committees have been a great experience. The first one was the Constitutional Affairs Committee. Although it was called constitutional affairs, we had investigations into things like gillnet fishing and the commercial uses of hemp—anything that was a little out there. There was the Public Accounts Committee. I see Max Trenorden. Max, we had some pretty amazing times on that well-travelled Public Accounts Committee. Of course, more recently, with the member for Pilbara, the member for Joondalup, the member for Morley and the member for Ocean Reef, we have done some great work together. The committees are an extraordinary opportunity for us, from time to time, across the necessarily adversarial notions and structure of this place, to work collaboratively. I believe that committee work makes the whole functionality and dynamic of this place much improved.

So many members in here have been very kind and generous to me during my time here. What we do is a very, very tough job. As I say, stick with it because we can do extraordinary things to make our society a better and stronger place. At the end of the day, we all have an obligation to make that contribution. Thank you very much.

[Applause.]
