



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

**VALEDICTORY SPEECH**



**MS DIANA WARNOCK, MLA**  
**(Member for Perth)**

**Legislative Assembly**

**Thursday, 23 November 2000**



# Legislative Assembly

Thursday, 23 November 2000

---

## MEMBERS OF PARLIAMENT — VALEDICTORY SPEECHES

### *Motion*

**MS WARNOCK** (Perth) [4.04 pm]: I take this final opportunity in this place today to make some remarks about my time here, and about the fact that those eight years have been in opposition. Necessarily, because those years have been in opposition, my perspective is somewhat different from those who have had the opportunity to be in government.

I recently re-read my first speech. I have a fair few copies left if members would like me to send them one! I re-read the rather inappropriately named "maiden speech" - in my case certainly - just to see whether I had managed to achieve any of the aims that I set myself in 1993. As I said, my career in politics has been somewhat coloured by the fact that it has all been in opposition. However, when I look at those aims: To vigorously represent the people in the Perth electorate; to support the advancement of the rights of women and minorities; to fight racism and all forms of discrimination; and to foster the lively development of the inner city of Perth, among other things, I see that I at least spent a lot of time and energy on those issues.

Mr Trenorden: You got a tick on all four.

Ms WARNOCK: I thank the member for Avon; I appreciate that. I hope I can be here for the member's final speech, so I can do the same thing.

Mr Trenorden: You made me an honorary feminist.

Ms Warnock: I did, absolutely. "Real men do eat quiche", and I want the member for Avon to remember that!

I spoke often about racism and the republic, about the status and rights of women and the gay and lesbian community, about affordable housing for the homeless, about crime and safety in the city, about the condition of the older schools in the Perth electorate, and about the problems of those Northbridge and near-city residents and businesses affected by the tunnel construction. I spoke enthusiastically about City Farm and preserving old-growth forests, and about the Labor Government-instigated East Perth redevelopment - just to remind members opposite about that. I also spoke frequently about the importance of safety on our roads. British child migrants - that other group of "stolen children" - claimed my attention, as did the problems of the mentally ill, the problems of Aborigines in the city, the need for an Asian police squad, and those new prostitution laws.

Recent newspaper and television coverage shows that the present Government, despite a great deal of tough talk before the last two elections, still has not succeeded in making serious inroads into inner city street crime, drug addiction among the young, and antisocial behaviour on our train system. These are all subjects which I have canvassed in this Parliament, along with a lot of other people. We still have a big problem with housing the homeless, and there is not nearly enough affordable housing for lower income people in the inner city. Women in this State are not yet sufficiently represented on high profile boards and in Parliament. Many still suffer from domestic violence, and despite the efforts of the minister today to convince us otherwise, it is still true that Western Australian women are the worst paid in Australia. The gender wage gap is 18.5 per cent here as opposed to 10.5 per cent in the rest of Australia. I call on what I hope will be a future Labor Government under the present opposition leader, my friend and colleague, to take up the baton on those issues.

When I first came to this place I spoke of joining the Australian Labor Party because I was interested in reform and social justice. The party's long history of working to improve the conditions for ordinary men and women in our community was my inspiration for becoming first an activist and eventually a member of Parliament. However, since finding myself in opposition I discovered that progress was pretty slow on the "wrong" side of the Chamber. Ironically, one of the few advances I was able to effect was not supported by every member of the Opposition. I speak of the abortion legislation in 1998 which gave Western Australian women the right to safe, legal termination. The passing of that hotly debated and controversial legislation gave me a great deal of satisfaction - a relatively rare occurrence in Parliament if one is in opposition. That debate also gave me an unusual opportunity, which I know many of my colleagues have shared, since it was a conscience vote, to work closely with the members of the Government who shared the same views. It was a rewarding and interesting experience which caused me a great deal of respect for some government members for their integrity and moral courage in a pretty hostile and unpleasant environment. I do not think anybody outside Parliament could possibly understand the personal stress placed on all members by that very emotional debate. As my colleague the member for Greenough said, he would like to see more respect for members of Parliament, as indeed I would. I believe that it is because most people do not understand very

much about the nature of the work we do that perhaps people have so little respect for members of Parliament - a fact that I regret a great deal and that I would like very much to see changed.

Like many members, I came here hoping to be an instigator of reform and change. As I have said, I found that relatively difficult from the opposition benches. For example, despite the Labor Party's efforts in 1996, and subsequent attempts by the Australian Democrats with Labor and the Greens (WA), to change anti-gay laws, Western Australia still has the worst laws dealing with homosexuality in Australia. People should not be able to discriminate against others because of their sexuality any more than they should be able to discriminate because of a person's race, sex, age or disability. These changes will have to wait for a more sympathetic Government, and I hope that will be soon.

On the subject of reform and how difficult that can be, I will quote from a publication on the history of England written by Paul Johnson - an interesting person perhaps for someone on this side of the House to quote. Paul Johnson was once editor of the *New Statesman*, and, like Paddy McGuinness, he crossed the divide and now 30 years later is a stalwart of the extreme right in Britain. Johnson's 1972 book *The Offshore Islanders* details how shockingly long it took to abolish the abuse of children as chimneysweeps in Britain, telling the remarkable story of the Earl of Shaftesbury, a reformer who spent his long parliamentary career trying to change people's conditions for the better. The book details how it took 102 years - I repeat, 102 years - to get legislation forbidding the abuse of children as chimneysweeps. That must have been extremely disappointing for the Earl of Shaftesbury. I will quote briefly from Johnson's book. It is a fascinating and well-written history. It states -

. . . Shaftesbury succeeded in placing on the statute book an astonishing variety of progressive laws, from his great Factory Act to the Act for the Protection of Merchant Seamen. But he died almost in despair: 'I cannot bear to leave the world,' he wrote at 84, 'with all the misery in it.'

The book then details the extraordinary collection of people who turned up at his funeral, including the Anti-Vivisection Society, the Association of Bradford Factory Workers, London Flower Girls, Unemployed Cab Drivers, Unemancipated Slaves, Poor Curates, Sons of Poor Clergymen, and so it goes on. He was extraordinarily well respected for his efforts.

I will briefly detail the story of the infant chimneysweeps, or climbing boys as they were called, as an extraordinary example of how long change can sometimes take. Johnson says -

These boys formed a small group, perhaps never more than 10,000, but they were typical of many forgotten and brutalised classes, too weak to organise themselves, and therefore wholly dependent on philanthropic champions.

The Earl of Shaftesbury was one of those champions. It continues -

They were recruited from workhouses, from the age of four up, . . . they could be imprisoned, and flogged, . . .

Of course, it must be remembered that children not only swept the chimneys but also were used to put out fires. Often they were forced up by the use of long sticks and by applying wisps of flaming straw to their feet.

As far back as 1760, two Sunday school teachers tried to get this changed. Someone published a detailed account of it. An Act was passed in 1788, but it was totally ineffective. Subsequently, in 1804, 1807, 1808 and 1809, Bills came in and were thrown out, and so it went on for almost the rest of that entire century. The book continues -

In 1875, following the death of a boy aged 14, Shaftesbury at last secured a conviction for manslaughter against a master sweep. The sentence was only six months, but the case caught the eye of *The Times*, and in the ensuing agitation Shaftesbury finally carried a draconian bill through what he called a 'very inattentive' Parliament. It had taken precisely 102 years to secure this elementary act of justice to defenceless children.

I thought it was worth relaying that to the House to indicate how very long it can sometimes take to change things. When people approach a member, as lobbyists do all the time about any number of subjects under the sun, to ask when he or she will do something about such and such, it is as well to remember that sometimes it takes a long time to change things. One sometimes must convince one's own party; one sometimes must convince one's fellow parliamentarians; and one sometimes must also convince the community. It is well worth remembering that it took 100 years for America to give the vote to women, and that was about as long as it took to abolish slavery there as well.

I turn now to mention those people to whom I owe thanks for my being here in this House, because, as is the situation with the rest of my colleagues, a great many people contributed to my ability to be here. My first thanks are due to the people of Perth, who have twice voted for me as their representative in this State Parliament. I regard this as an enormous honour and privilege, and I thank the people for it. They will certainly have first call on my time right up to 12 midnight on election day - I used to say six o'clock on election day, but I have found that it is 12 midnight on election day. Therefore, those people have absolute first call on my time until then, whenever that may be.

Secondly, I must thank all those good people from a wide variety of backgrounds - some old friends, some new - who helped me to get here. I thank them most sincerely for their hard work on my behalf. I thank particularly some people

who made a special contribution to my ability to be here. The late Jack Marks was one of them. He was a union stalwart, wit, rabblrouser and first Mayor of Vincent, who, with John Cowdell - he is one of my colleagues here in the Parliament now - first approached me about standing for the seat of Perth. I thank the late Ron Barry, journalist, speech writer and adviser to many Labor politicians. He was a good friend and wise counsel. I thank the late Dick Keegan, a long-time Labor supporter who worked tirelessly in all weather, as I recall very vividly, for my first, very tough campaign.

Any campaign team, particularly one in a marginal seat, has a great many people on board. Some, by reason of their business or public positions, would not appreciate being mentioned in a political context. I am sorry about that, because I would like to mention a large number of people. I can say that I owe a great deal to the advice and support of Stephen Smith, my federal colleague and long-time adviser and supporter in the political field, and to Mark Cuomo, who managed my first campaign and who was as relieved as I was when I found out five days after the election that I had succeeded in getting across the line by 106 votes, redefining the meaning of marginal. I also owe something to Tony Henry, who I believe is out of the country these days, in Ireland. I remember the part he played. He was one of the toughest number crunchers anybody could meet. I owe a great deal to Michael Beahan, and to the member for Eyre and his wife, Lesley, who hosted early support functions for me. I owe a great deal to Joe Berinson, a former member whose first successful campaign for the federal seat of Perth I worked on in 1969. I thank Fred Ward, Ross Callaway, Pam Sazonov, the Li Castro family, Bill and Gaye Van Der Helm, Di Green, Karen Davidson, Thelma Loudon, Dean Elek-Roser, Terry Maller, Ruth Greble, Margaret Clements, Barbara Buick, Queenie Fogarty, the Mayor of the Town of Vincent, John Hyde, who I hope will be my successor in the seat of Perth, and Wendy and Ian Silver. They are among many people from whom I have had support and whom I thank here today.

I have had very strong support from the gay and lesbian community, in particular Gavin McGuren, Samantha Dowling, Holly Wood and Ivan King, and all those involved in the "Diana Doorknocks" in the recent Pride Parade. I thank them all. Not all of them got their hair right, and they wore white shoes, but never mind about that. It was wonderful. I enjoyed that tribute a great deal, and I thank them very much for their continuing support.

Having been an activist for women for most of my adult life, I have also had strong and continuing support from countless women activists, both young and old. Being on the barricades together has a way of bonding people for life, and I thank you, sisters.

I have also greatly appreciated the warmth and support of many members of the Jewish, Greek, Chinese, Vietnamese, Italian, Macedonian and French communities.

I must also thank my present Labor colleagues who elected me as Opposition Deputy Whip even before the results were confirmed in February 1993, and later as Whip and President of the State Parliamentary Labor Party. I must also thank former state and federal members Wendy Fatin, Judyth Watson, Kay Hallahan, Yvonne Henderson and Pat Giles for their advice and support.

I also thank the many and interestingly diverse Labor Party branches in Perth for their support. It has been an interesting ride. Notwithstanding the fact that I share one branch with the member for Midland, I have always greatly appreciated the warmth of those members. I am still waiting for one of the branches to invite me to a meeting, but one can always hope for change. I have a great number of branches in my electorate!

It was a great privilege indeed to serve on committees such as the Select Committee on Road Safety and as Acting Speaker.

My only real regret is not to have been in government - obviously every politician has that aim - and also not to have had the chance to contest a ballot and perhaps to become the first woman Speaker in this place. Those disappointments are tempered by the rich and varied experience provided as a member of Parliament. The lives that one is able to change for the better and even those adrenalin-charged pleasures of life as a candidate are part and parcel of the rich tapestry of this arena. I am sure no member will disagree that a preselection contest is an experience one never forgets, even if one would never seek to repeat it!

I thank you, Mr Acting Speaker (Mr Masters), and the Speaker for the fairness and judgment that has been displayed. I thank the very wise Clerks for their excellent advice.

I thank the skilled Hansard reporters for their remarkable ability to reconstruct one's failing grammar. More than one member has had good reason to thank the Hansard reporters for their amazing ability to discern what we really wanted to say as opposed to what we did say.

I thank the education officers for their great skill and the wonderful job they do with young and elderly people visiting this place. They play an important role in acquainting the younger generation with the whys and wherefores of politics. I missed that as a young person; there was no civics education when I was at school. It is a very valuable service, and we hope to see many of those young people in this place as members.

I thank the switchboard operators for the marvellous, diligent job they do. I also thank the library staff; the security staff for keeping us safe; the chamber staff for the marvellous work they do and for making this such a pleasant place

in which to work; and, of course, the catering staff for their hard work and unfailing good humour. Despite the exigencies of the lack of airconditioning in this place, it has been an extraordinarily pleasant place in which to work.

Finally, I thank some people who have been especially important to my work as a politician. My electorate officer, June Belton, is in the gallery today - as she was on day one. I think she was almost as relieved as I was when I managed to scrape over the line. I also thank my researcher Ross Belton. No-one could have been more loyal and hardworking than those two people. I believe I owe the increase in my majority from zero to 7 per cent largely to them. I will always be grateful for their remarkable work for me and for the constituents of Perth.

My final thanks go to the person who encouraged and supported me from the first moment I entered the gladiatorial arena of politics. When he attended his first party meeting - a preselection meeting - that was his first impression. Of course, I am speaking about my husband, Bill Warnock. He is my bodyguard, my driver, my constant companion, my co-campaigner, my good adviser, and all the other things one's partner might be. He has always been there for me. I thank him for that strength and constancy. It is always appreciated. Here with my husband today is a very good, longstanding friend, Terry Owen. Like many of my close friends, she has been part of my support team for the past nine years.

Mr Acting Speaker, I wish you and all members and staff in this place a very happy festive season and very good health in the year 2001, whatever else that year might bring to all of us in this Chamber. I thank everyone.

[Applause.]

---