

Valedictory Speech

Senator Andrew Murray (Western Australia)

Tuesday 24th June 2008

I want to commence my valedictory, nearly my last speech here, with a phrase I have often used: I thank the Senate. I thank the Senate for allowing my valedictory tonight. I set this date some time back, believing it to be the date that the Senate would do valedictories and because it suited the travel arrangements for my family—and then the Senate changed its dates. So thank you for understanding and accommodating my needs tonight.

I thank the Senate for what it has done for me and for what it has meant to Pam and me—for the opportunities and privileges it has afforded me; and for the friendships, the passion, the laughs, the drama, the great deeds and the humanity of it all. I thank the parliament—its members, senators and ministers, committee chairs and members—for the courtesies and consideration shown to me, my wife and staff. I thank the many very professional, sometimes amazingly insightful, politicians and people. I thank the wonderful Senate and committee staff, the superb Parliamentary Library, security officers, cleaners, caterers and attendants—all the friendly, helpful and able souls everywhere. In particular, I want to recognise the Clerk of the Senate and his deputy: we owe Harry and Rosemary a great deal—and you sit big in our hearts.

I am grateful that we have a free press. The best of you are clever, thorough, insightful, fair, learned and original, and those journalists do Australia proud. I was not one for doorknocking or schmoosing the gallery much, but I did do my share of pestering to be heard. I will try to drop a note to those who found my policy and politics occasionally of interest. I particularly thank those journalists from my state who were interested in my doings.

I thank the Australian Democrats for all they have done for me. I thank the WA members and senators, who have shown me such consideration. I leave of my own volition, but I do leave with regret—not at my decision but because I came to love the place and the people, and I will miss it and them.

It was a slow start for me. I loathed the ugly, intrusive, personal side of politics. I was horrified whenever my privacy was invaded. I never accepted anyone thinking I was now their servant. I could not understand the sneering, carping cynicism directed at those in public life. I was astonished by the haters. Those with good hearts and motives lifted me up, and I tapped into the rich vein of the Australian character. Many do give you credit for doing your best—and a little more credit, if you do it well. I was born to a conscience and a conscience vote. Outside politics, by which I mean the business of being a politician, never appealed that much to me. I am not good at gladhanding. I did think of just giving it all away and being a one-termer. In contrast, inside politics appealed vastly—the issues, the negotiations, the bright intensity of the lobbyists and advocates, the quality input from the public sector, the best of the media minds, the best of the political minds, the committee work and helping those who really did need a hand.

I cannot escape the historic nature of this valedictory. This speech of mine is one-quarter of the Senate valedictory for the Australian Democrats themselves. Each of the four Democrat senators is very conscious that we are the last of 26 Australian Democrat senators that have served the Senate continuously over the last three decades. I suspect that history will judge the 26 well and not just for remarkable policy and advocacy consistency and constancy but because, as parliamentarians and legislators, we have left a much bigger mark than is presently believed to be the case on the political history of our Commonwealth—in the conventions and culture of the Senate, in legislation and not least in having so many of our causes eventually accepted as good policy, such as in the accountability, environmental and social justice fields.

Several journalists have asked me, 'Is this the end of the Democrats?' and I have answered, 'I don't know'—and in the same breath, answering their own question, they have asked, 'Why did you die?' There may be other Senate Democrats in the future; who can tell? But in this Senate it is the end for us four. For those who think it cannot or will not happen to them: nothing and no-one is immortal. If you know anything about history, you know that political death will come to the other political parties in Australia sooner or later too, when it is their time.

Political parties are vehicles that may cease running, but the great streams of human aspiration and philosophy within them do not die. The philosophy goes on, even if the party fails. With respect to both the media and the voters—who led who, I have never worked out—we Democrats lost their interest and were no longer valued enough. That is political life. Either you are in or you are out. I will leave it to the political and academic commentariat to do the post mortem. The Democrats lasted three decades in the Senate because they had substance and some powerful party and political minds and personalities. They were also the carriers of one of the three strongest political philosophies in the Western world: liberalism—the other two being conservatism and socialism.

Among other things, we Democrats have held true to a reasoned argument; to individual rights, property rights and natural rights; to the protection of civil liberties; to accountability, responsibility and good governance; to constitutional and parliamentary limitations and restraint; to republican ideals; to the rule of law; to the virtues of a civil society; to free but fair markets; and to public goods and the public interest. I suspect that, if the conservatives and Labor socialists in Australia cover the majority of Australians, a fifth to a third of Australians broadly ascribe to what is known as a liberal or small 'l' philosophy. Yet even the great Janine Haines could not get us Democrats higher than 12.6 per cent in the lower House, and our maximum at any one time was nine senators. So the Australian Democrats, the political party, never realised its full potential, if you speak about the small 'l' liberal philosophy. We never won all the votes of our natural constituency. Not everyone who voted for us was a small 'l' liberal, but most small 'l' liberals voted elsewhere anyway.

So what has or is to become of those who did vote for us? They still need a home. Sooner or later one will need to be made for them, because people, Australian people, who hold to the great centuries-old Western liberal tradition are not conservatives; they are not socialists; they are not Greens—even though, like me, they find attractions in all those movements at times—they are liberals.

If a first speech is about where you have been, who you are, why you are here and where you are trying to go, a last speech might include where you want to go next, who you have become, and why you no longer want to be here. What next? I honestly do not know. I am not retiring, even though I am old enough to. I have at least another good 10 years in me yet. I am just ending this Canberra stint and will be doing other things from my Perth base. First will be a bit of relaxation and more time with my family, particularly the grandies. I will get bored though. We will see!

Next: who have I become? Self-perception and others' perception are not the same, and people make their own judgements. When you ask, 'What was he like?' the sum of a man can be found in a word, a phrase or a sentence. Of my public self you be the judge. I will say this is a place that gives you experience you would never get elsewhere; it tempers you. You do not leave the same person who came in.

Of my private self: some of you know my work on institutionalised children and my own personal discoveries as a result, and they have changed me forever. The meaning of life is getting to know and understand your inner being. As a result of my Senate and electorate work on children harmed in care, I have been scarred by their stories and uplifted by their humanity but have also, personally, discovered much that makes me as I am. In an almost contrary way, I am therefore more settled than I have ever been.

Why do I think it is time for me to leave the Senate? I never came for a job; I came for a calling. WA Inc. had incensed me; I felt the country was losing its way, so I entered federal politics. Since then I have done what I could, as best I could. It is time for me to do something else and let someone else have a go. It is time for me to be in Perth more, to be at home more, to be with my family more.

When I gave my first speech I spoke of Pam, my wife, but not of my children, Ashleigh and Paul. That was deliberate. I wanted to keep them private. They had not entered politics; I had. They had not walked onto the public stage; I had. I was determined that they should not be, and should not feel that they were, political handbags. But they were always in my mind. Politics is a pressured, opinionated business, and I knew they felt the heat when I did, even if they were standing back a bit. Their support never wavered, they kept the home fires burning, they phoned and emailed often, they kept me in their lives, and they made me very proud. Then they married Graham and Kati—two more to love—and the four of them then produced Daniel and Julius, which gladdens my heart. So these are the people who matter to me: Pam, Ashleigh, Paul, my immediate family; Norah and Morgie back home, and my dear friends too—although dear little Bengy is now gone. Then there is a small diaspora of family all over the world, including sisters Rosemary and Jane, brothers John and Bill, and

seeming legions of nephews, nieces, great-nephews and great-nieces. That is the other thing about getting older: you get more emotional. It will come to you all.

I have been politically engaged since my early teens but I think I finally came into formal politics, into parliament, at the right age and stage. For me, politics is best with grown children, so you do not have to worry too much about them when you are away as much as I have been, and you can have your wife with you as much as possible. Pam was in Canberra for my first speech and she is in the gallery for my last. Today is our 36th wedding anniversary, so I will dedicate this speech to her. I and many others owe her a great debt. I feel for the pollies from far away—North Queensland, the Northern Territory or Western Australia. Frankly I would not have done this job without Pam being here as much as she has been; I would have given it away.

It is important to keep proper perspective when you think about your own contribution. There have been 519 senators since 1901, and I am just one of those—equa1 455th with the nine that came in with me on 1 July 2006, 12 years ago, or just one of the 1,534 from both houses who have served in parliament. Politicians, like cricketers, keep score. Our whip's clerk gave me my performance statistics. I am not going to bore you with those, but what I did want to lead on to was power versus influence.

I think the biggest job a parliamentarian has is to try and influence outcomes—to persuade others. Many would disagree with me, but I find influence more satisfying than power, because it involves the acceptance over time of your position. You have to win votes through argument. You do not exercise raw power—you have to win those votes. I have tried to exert influence, and I thank all those who had to put up with my private and public entreaties, all my suggestions and input into reports and legislation, all the corridor, office and committee advocacy, and all the endless rabbiting around in policy matters.

There were some moments when we had the call. When we Democrats held the balance of Senate power it did mean that, over the years, we—in my portfolios certainly—had the call on policy and money, including tens of consequent billions. It was a big call. I had a couple of accountability wins. One which I enjoyed became known as the Murray motion—the continuing Senate order whereby departments and agencies must publish on the internet lists of their contracts to the value of \$100,000 or more. I have had 305 individual and 178 joint amendments pass the Senate in my 12 years, out of over 1,300 moved. Probably some of you will be thinking, 'Only that few!' I suppose it is not that many when you are in the balance of power role for so many years. In my defence, I do know hundreds of government amendments were those we negotiated.

You do need endurance here. I remember the Senate punch-bag times, such as the A New Tax System debate, which was the third longest debate in the history of the Senate at nearly 69 hours. I also had carriage for my party of two other bills in the top-10 all-time longest-ever debates—the 1996 and 2005 workplace relations legislation debates at 48 hours and 32 hours respectively.

This world of politics is a hard, competitive world, and for all of us, unless you happen to be a celebrity politician or hold a vital role at a vital time, it is often hard to get heard outside, no matter how hard you work. Even if you are not suited to it, you have to get heard outside because media and getting noticed matter in gathering votes. That is why some of us have to step outside our personalities and act in a way which gathers those votes. It matters less in getting somewhere in policy. Inside parliament it is a different matter. Long, consistent, principled advocacy often does pay off in here, because parliamentarians in the chamber, in committees, in corridors, will absorb repeated messages that have merit.

If you think that is not so, think of all the Democrat causes that were once marginal and are now mainstream—for instance, on the environment and climate change; on women's, Indigenous and gay rights; and on accountability and good governance.

When journalists ask me what my biggest achievements are, as they do when you are leaving, I answer that it is up to them to judge, but I do tell them what has meant the most to me. That is my work, particularly helped by Marilyn and Pam, on children who were institutionalised last century. I fought for years to get the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's 2001 child migrants and 2004 'Forgotten Australians' inquiries up. The unanimous reports from those inquiries revealed that more than 500,000 Australians were either raised or spent time in institutional or other forms of out-of-home care last century.

Although there is so much more to be done, I have helped bring their cause onto the public stage, and I am very glad to have done so. I want to acknowledge Margaret, Joanna and Leonie among the many warriors in

this cause. I want to recognise Leonie Sheedy and a number of the forgotten Australians who are in the gallery. And let me single out for the highest praise my adviser Dr Marilyn Rock, whose work on the child migrants and 'Forgotten Australians' issues has been above and beyond the call of duty.

Before I leave this topic, know this. I lay the parliamentary burden of this cause on all those continuing in federal politics, but especially Jason Clare, Richard Marles and Jenny Macklin in the House; and Gary Humphries, Claire Moore, Jan McLucas and Steve Hutchins in the Senate. Do not let me or them down.

My achievements and efforts have had terrific backing from the selfless and self-sacrificing members and supporters of the Australian Democrats, past and present, particularly in WA, who have stood for me and by me. I am not all that easy to know or understand but they have forgiven me my shortcomings and rewarded me with their loyalty and support. I salute them, past and present. In particular I honour the durable, loyal, wise and supportive Jack Evans. I thank him and Margaret for so much.

To the voters of WA, I have done my very best for you and I thank you for giving me the opportunity of this rich and fulfilling parliamentary experience. To my electorate staff and advisers over the 12 years—I have already mentioned Pam, Marilyn and Jack—I want to pick out for special mention smart Emma and Damen and the very talented Jeff; loyal Julie and Mary; the clever Eli and Tim; fabulous Ainslie; and volunteers like Bill and dear Ellen Cook. I will mention just some of my portfolio advisers—the simply amazing John Cherry; clever Kellie; Lee, Victor and Karen—but my sincere thanks go to the others, especially Schuie and long-serving Jene, Sam and Stephen.

To my Democrat colleagues past and present, I salute you—cumulatively and individually people of great talent, ability, humanity, application, hard work and diligence. We have been through a great deal together, and I thank you. I shall say more about you tomorrow.

To the Labor, Liberal, National and Green senators who leave on 30 June, very good luck and thank you for being good company—some of you excellent and naughty company! I have discovered I have many more friends here, in the House and abroad than I realised. Thank you for your recent messages of thanks and respect—they have buoyed me enormously. I will mention only two senators by name tonight, though. Blessings to you, Alan and Lyn.

I will conclude with the wonderful TS Eliot, from *The Love Song of J Alfred Prufrock*. Some of it will remind you of political life. I will just quote the first quarter but, if you like it, you can ask that the rest of it be incorporated at the end because I do have it here. It goes like this:

LET us go then, you and I,

When the evening is spread out against the sky

Like a patient etherised upon a table;

Let us go, through certain half-deserted streets,

The muttering retreats

Of restless nights in one-night cheap hotels

And sawdust restaurants with oyster-shells:

Streets that follow like a tedious argument

Of insidious intent

To lead you to an overwhelming question ...

Oh, do not ask, "What is it?"

Let us go and make our visit.

In the room the women come and go

Talking of Michelangelo.

The yellow fog that rubs its back upon the window-panes,

The yellow smoke that rubs its muzzle on the window-panes

Licked its tongue into the corners of the evening,

Lingered upon the pools that stand in drains,

Let fall upon its back the soot that falls from chimneys,

Slipped by the terrace, made a sudden leap,

And seeing that it was a soft October night,

Curled once about the house, and fell asleep.

And indeed there will be time

For the yellow smoke that slides along the street,

Rubbing its back upon the window-panes;

There will be time, there will be time

To prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet;

There will be time to murder and create,

And time for all the works and days of hands

That lift and drop a question on your plate,

Time for you and time for me,

And time yet for a hundred indecisions,

And for a hundred visions and revisions,

Before the taking of a toast and tea.

... ..

I thank the Senate.