

Janet Holmes a Court Speech - Sambell Oration
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It is a great honour to address you this evening. I have never been asked to give an oration before. It's a frightfully grand term. I have given occasional addresses, which really should be called 'rare addresses' because you don't get to give them very often. I prefer to think I am going to have a chat with you. But, out of respect for Geoffrey Sam bell we will call it an oration.

I am probably one of the few people in this room who is from Perth. Geoffrey Sam bell made a huge impact on the people of Western Australia, regardless of whether they attended his church or not. He was a significant man about town during the time in which he served the Anglican Church so I feel deeply honoured to have been invited to give this address.

I am however, in a rather difficult position. I made a commitment to myself at the beginning of 1999 that if the opportunity to speak arose; I would only speak about the Republic. My secretary had many conversations with the Brotherhood. She explained my topic would be the formation of an Australian Republic. However, when I received the invitation I saw that I was speaking about 'achieving social goals in a time of economic and technological change'.

I am therefore going to deliver a three-part address. Firstly, I want to outline some challenges I see as we approach the new millennium; some questions - I don't have the answers I just want to pose some of the questions. The second thing is to give some examples of companies who are taking a role and improving their communities. And thirdly, why I think we should have a Head of State who is one of us.

Achieving Social Goals In A Time Of Economic And Technological Change

As we approach the new millennium I see quite a few things happening which I neither like nor believe are helpful for our survival. Those of us with jobs are working too hard and too long, and yet many others don't have any work to do because they are unemployed. I sometimes say 'there are too few doing too much and too many doing nothing'. I would like to quote Adam Smith who said, 'There is one sort of labour which adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed, and there is another which has no such effect'. One is productive and one is unproductive. Smith puts management in the unproductive category.

Firstly, I see we are all working too hard if we are lucky enough to have a job.

Secondly, more and more people are in jobs in this unproductive category. The technological management elite, the lawyers, the consultants, the accountants, the merchant bankers and so on, has to exist. However, I sometimes wonder how many of these our society can support and how much do they really add. My belief is that many of these people exist because managers have, to some extent, lost faith in their own ability. They are frightened of making decisions because they have seen so many other managers lose their jobs.

The third worrying thing I see is that governments are running economies. They are not managing for their people. They run the economy.

These three things are a backdrop to many other ills - unemployment, drug abuse, packed prisons and ever widening gaps in our society. The result of these is that people around the world are starting to question the direction the world is taking in social, economic and ecological terms. Up until now people assumed that if they were better off financially, they would have a better quality of life. Now I think people are realising that not only are these two not closely correlated in a positive way, but they may not be correlated at all, or in fact they may be negatively correlated.

As a result of this I think more and more people see the need to talk and to act in order to create a sustainably better quality of life, not only for us but also for our children and our grandchildren. I am constantly talking to people now who are asking not, 'How do we meet our material needs?' but rather, 'How do we arrange our activities so that our quality of life improves, rather than just our material wealth?'

I think the world is moving towards a new set of social, political and economic realities and I think we need to be much better prepared to face this radically different future. We have to shift our emphasis from economic efficiency and materialism, towards a sustainable quality of life and to a healing of our society, of our people and our ecological systems.

I don't enjoy seeing my aging mother, locking and alarming herself into various sections of her home for fear of invasion. I don't relish the thought of comforting my friends after the funerals of their children, dead after drug overdoses.

But, being a Sagittarius I am an optimist. I feel quietly confident that we will make this shift in emphasis, not because anyone seems to have the answers, but because at last people are starting to ask the questions.

Over the last few years my depression about these trends has been lifted slightly by the fact that I am now making up a shelf in my library where people are addressing these questions. Robert Theobald, John Ralston Saul, Will Hutton, Charles Handy, Richard Sennett to name just a few. My shelf is getting bigger and bigger and a great addition to it recently was a book called, 'Three Dollars' by Melbourne writer Elliot Perlman. The reason I found this so fantastic, and I can see people nodding, is because we expect Will Hutton and Charles Handy, Robert Theobald and John Ralston Saul to write books about these things - that's their job. But Elliot Perlman is a novelist. He's a lawyer but he's a novelist, and he's actually written a novel about some of these issues and some of the problems which people face when they live in a society like ours which is focusing a bit too much on that bottom line.

I think when novelists start to question this we are into some good thinking, and hopefully some good solutions. I think it is really important to note that the questioning of the way we are going now is not entirely party political. It's not just coming from those like me who are regarded as left wing loonies. It is coming from all areas - including George Soros who has questioned the model on which we are operating. Jenny Hooks said to me, 'Economic rationalism has got a bad name Janet' - well a great idol of mine is Bernie Fraser and when I said - 'Oh, this economic rationalism is driving me mad', Bernie said, 'Well Janet, we don't want economic irrationalism. But, economically rational politics and policies do have to be modified and put into context so we can have caring and compassionate country as well as a clever and competent one'.

The challenge for business in this time of economic and technological change is to deliver I believe, on all three bottom lines. I'am a chemist by training. I was then a teacher, and then a law clerk. I then became a businessperson. I realised the greatest asset we had in all the companies we owned were people. But there was no line in the balance sheet which recognised this. There was no line which said this year twenty-five of our people expanded their knowledge by doing a course here and there - or - we employed a whole lot more people with different skills - and so on.

Eventually I believe we are going to find a way of having three bottom lines. One giving the financial count, one the social count and one an environmental count. The challenge for business is to recognise its obligations to the community and its obligations to the community in my view come in those three forms; financial, social and environmental.

Companies Who Are Taking A Role And Improving Their Communities

I would like to give you a few examples of how some companies are increasing their returns to shareholders by linking themselves into the community.

I was once asked if I thought that corporations had obligations to the process of community building. Naturally my response was, 'they can't afford not to'. It would seem to be a question many people don't answer in the affirmative. No, they say our responsibility in business is simply to make money, as much as we possibly can, for the shareholders. What happens in the community is irrelevant. I put the question to my mother with her 84 years of wisdom. She answered, 'If you don't have a healthy community you won't have a business at all'. To her it was obvious.

In two of our enterprises; Heytesbury Beef and John Holland Constructions; the business units are actually communities in themselves. For example, at Victoria River Downs Station, we have about 40 people employed. The Manager is like the mayor of a small town. He has to provide schooling, health care, staff training, shopping facilities, recreation activities, music and art classes. As well as food, lodging, discipline and leadership, he often provides marriage guidance. He has to create a community.

In Western Australia we recently completed a large project for BHP in Port Hedland. There were 1800 people on the site. Port Hedland is a relatively small country town. To add 1800 people is totally disruptive unless attention is paid to the community into which those people are placed. Unless we have balance in the lives of our people and unless we have a viable community we won't have a happy workforce and we won't have a business.

I want to give you some examples of how companies other than mine, much bigger companies, have linked themselves into the community building process. A great example to us all is Lend Lease, which for many years has been regarded as a fine example of a family friendly company. They realised that some tasks are pretty repetitive and boring, but their employees will get through them if they have outside interests and if they lead balanced lives. So all their employees are encouraged to work with community groups and give of their time.

It broadens their experience and it broadens and widens their horizons. Their managers learn what others are thinking and saying and they can better target markets and respond to community and client demands. You don't get too many creative or new ideas talking to the same people all the time.

Alcoa have a number of large operations in Western Australia and if they hadn't been good citizens they could have disrupted the towns of Mandurah and Pinjarra in the same way we could have disrupted Port Hedland. Alcoa linked up with local businesses to set up an after school Child Care Centre - not very hard but obviously quite a sensible thing to do. The tension between work and family was relieved for their workforce and a resultant spin off was increased productivity for the company.

In the United States of America whole cities and suburban communities are breaking down. Many businesses in what then become different environments move out. They would in fact be far better off 'staying put' and trying to fix things. I think it is the duty of corporations to have responsible input into the communities in which their employees live. However, when the suggestion is made, there is often a knee jerk reaction which says 'It is not our responsibility' or 'How much will it cost?'

Now firstly, businesses won't survive in a community which is not viable. And secondly, it actually doesn't have to cost businesses all that much. A company doesn't have to solve all the problems in a community on its own. The company is part of a community, and there are other organisations; federal, state and local governments for example; who should be providing services such as child care, transport and schooling. Companies do not have to provide everything, but they can use their political clout to ensure that other providers do respond to community needs.

In Mandurah there have been a lot of examples of this. Employees whose children are taking drugs don't concentrate on their jobs as much as those whose children are not. Companies have lobbied for better provision, of youth services, recreational facilities, rehabilitation programs and so on. There is plenty of Australian research to show absenteeism drops when the company is supportive and plays the game as a responsible corporate citizen. Alcoa discovered that a some of their workforce were occasionally taking a day off because they were worried about how their elderly mums and dads were coping with shopping. The company's response was to work with local community groups and provide a bus to take elderly mums and dads shopping one day a week. Their workers felt far more relaxed being at work and on the factory floor knowing their parents were being looked after.

Being in the construction industry has taught me much. One of the most important areas is safety in the workplace. In fact, we use John Holland safety officers and programs in all our other enterprises.

There is a direct connection between workers not paying attention and accidents in the workplace. If you are worried about your children and what they are doing after school, or how you old mum will get her shopping done, you are more likely to have an accident at work. Alcoa ran a safety campaign, not just occupational health and safety, but a safety campaign for the whole community, in homes and in schools. The heightened awareness of risk taking and dangerous practices in the whole community resulted in an immediate decrease in accidents in the workplace. Of course, a far more safety conscious community was created.

A different type of approach has been taken in Wangaratta and Shepparton in Victoria. In the Wangaratta Knitting Mills most of their thousand employees are over fifty. In a few years the company faces the departure of its entire skilled workforce. The young people have left the town. The Mill management is working with local bodies to make this a town that is pleasant to live in. There are activities for everyone, not just the aged. They are helping to solve youth unemployment there. The question for federal, state and local government is how can viable businesses be sustained in Wangaratta. They won't if people don't start trying.

Shepparton, the heart of the food growing region in Victoria is experiencing the same situation. The perception is that this is a boring country town, but various business leaders have met with the local council and are working to change the image. They are working to push for cheaper housing and have committees to welcome new people who have come to work in the town. These communities are helping to make the businesses more viable in Shepparton.

Australia Post has also done some simple things. In Adelaide late night workers had a problem with food outlets, child care and coffee shops. Australia Post simply negotiated with local businesses to extend opening hours and they bought places in child care centres. The result is a happier workforce. I guess what I am talking about here is not drawing boundaries between work and family, between the life of the mind and the life of the body.

As Chairman of the Black Swan Theatre Company and the Western Australian Symphony Orchestra I can't let this opportunity pass to make a couple of points about corporate sponsorship for the arts. Employees are much more creative, they are happier and more rounded

if they have some exposure to theatre, music, opera, dance and galleries. Governments are demanding that arts companies supplement decreasing grants with corporate sponsorship. This does not have to cost enormous amounts of money and it does not have to be one way.

I am sad to admit that on our cattle stations, located in the Kimberley and the Northern Territory of Australia there are instances where relationships between our staff and local Aboriginal communities are tense. There is a mixture of reasons for this and it is not all one way. But in an effort to try to bring those two groups together, Heytesbury has a sponsorship with Black Swan Theatre Company. Part of the deal is that each year the Company sends a mixed group of Aboriginal and European Australian performers to our cattle station to provide entertainment. This is an opportunity for some of our Managers and Staff to understand a little more about Aboriginal culture. Arts organisations offer opportunities for wonderful reciprocal deals like this one.

No company exists in isolation. It exists in a community and it can't afford to simply focus on itself. Malcolm Fraser said a little while ago that he believed the party which would win the next election would be that which governs for the community, as opposed to running the economy. I think the companies which will shine in the future will be those which think not just about the bottom line but about how people are living in the communities in which they operate.

I guess Geoffrey Sambell would have said many times in his life, 'here endeth the first lesson'.

The Republican Issue

I have promised myself I would speak wherever possible about why I believe that Australia should have a Head of State who lives here, who is exclusively ours, who is one of us and who fully and unequivocally stands for and symbolises our Nation. I think possibly we can almost stop this address now, or that little part of the speech, after Sir William Deane's performance in Switzerland. The response I have had to that has been extraordinary with people saying 'only an Australian can speak for us in that way'.

I would like to remind you that it was just 350 years ago that Britain was a Republic for a very, very short time. The chief advocate, the Solicitor General John Cook, was subsequently hanged. Fortunately no such fate awaits Malcolm Turnbull or any of us who are advocating a Republic today!

I mention this to bring Britain up front, particularly in this most English of Australian cities. As I travel around the country I find there are some people who are concerned that in some way we may be offending Britain and the Queen if we vote yes in November.

My own associations with Britain are very strong. My maternal grandfather went to work in a rope works when he was aged seven, in Bridport, England. Later he moved to Australia because he didn't want his children to start work at age seven. My father's family came to the Colony of Western Australia from Britain to establish the first tannery. My husband's family were British. My first grandchild was born in the Borough of Westminster and she will have a British passport for as long as dual passports are permitted.

The history I learnt at school was about the Kings and one or two Queens of England. Our history teacher, quite frankly, forgot completely to teach us any Australian history. Certainly geography was totally Eurocentric and British. Everything we learnt was about the other side of the planet. Culture, language, history, all very much connected with Great Britain. Even in sport, I have to boast that my daughter has a full blue and two half blues from Oxford and I have lived part of my life in England for the past 20 years. I love being there and I feel at home there.

I tell people this because I think it is important that we realise that being a Republican doesn't mean being anti-British. It means being pro-Australian and I can assure you that we won't offend Queen Elizabeth II. She has actually stated that this is a matter for the Australian people and we certainly won't offend the British people, many of whom are staggered to find that the Queen is our Head of State. They say to me quietly, 'Janet, I am actually a Republican here'.

I am completely a product of Britain, in birth, culture, history and language but I have a gigantic elastic if you like - I feel a bit like a bungee jumper. No matter where I am on the planet I come bouncing back to the smell of eucalyptus and the dry wind and the dust of Australia.

The question of whether Australia becomes a Republic is a question of national maturity, national identity and national freedom. It is not an act of rejection and it shouldn't be seen as such. It is an act of recognition. It is to recognise that our greatest respect is for our Australian heritage, our greatest affection is for Australia, and our greatest responsibility is to Australia's future. But most of all I think it is a matter of freedom. We place a very high value on freedom in this country and it is cherished by many of our immigrants and many Australians who have come here from countries where they have experienced a serious denial of basic freedom. John Howard obviously thought so when he put freedom at the centre of his preamble. I was actually the person at the convention who said 'when we are finished working out what we want in the preamble, could we

please give it to some of our great writers or poets to insert the smell of eucalyptus'. I confess I didn't have Les Murray and John Howard in mind. Nonetheless that is what happened.

In this preamble the Prime Minister has written 'Australians are free to be proud of their country and heritage, free to realise themselves as individuals, and free to pursue their hopes and ideals'. Surely the ultimate freedom would be that any Australian should be free, if asked, to be Australia's Head of State. To deny that freedom is very un-Australian. We don't choose people for tasks in this country because they were born in a certain corner in London, of a certain genetic makeup and of a certain religion. We choose them because they are the most suitable person for that task. We have long had merit as the criteria for position and I certainly find it pretty hard to imagine Australian people seeing Charles and Camilla as relevant.

I feel pretty passionate about this issue and I make no apologies for it. I believe with a passion that we need a Head of State who is one of us and I will say again, I think Sir William Deane illustrated this so beautifully the other day.

We have to win technical and legal debates and we have to point out how flimsy the arguments and the scare tactics of the Monarchists are but we have to feel the desire to change in here, in our hearts, and we need to have lots of people feeling that way.

The method for selecting the President that will be put to the Australian people in November is as follows:

- All Australians will be asked to nominate suitable candidates
- A committee made up of Australians from all walks of life will select five or six people
- The Prime Minister will be asked to make a selection from those
- He (or she) will confer with the Leader of the Opposition and then the selection will be put to a joint sitting of the two Houses of Parliament
- Providing two thirds of those people approve the choice, that person will become our President

I support this model because it represents minimal change and in Australia that is how we do things. We don't have revolutions here, thank goodness. We make changes step by small step. Since Federation we have been taking tiny steps to tweak our Constitution. For example, we no longer have to have our laws, our Acts of Parliament ratified by the House of Commons. We no longer have to have retired British Army Officers as our Governors General. We no longer have the Privy Council as our highest court, we have our own High Court. We no longer have someone else's national anthem, we have our own.

The Australian people will have a big say in this process. They will be the ones who nominate Australians they believe will be suitable for this position. I want to quote Daryl Williams who was in charge of drafting the Bill. In Parliament earlier this year, Daryl said this, 'It is important to be quite clear about what the Bill would not do.

It would not alter the day to day operation of the Commonwealth Parliament. It would not alter the current Federal balance between the Commonwealth and the States. It would not give the President different powers from those of the Governor General. It would not create an office of President that is more grand or expensive than the office of the Governor General. Contrary to some rather colourful predictions, it would not authorise the construction of a Presidential Palace. It would not alter the Australian flag or the national anthem. It would not mark a break with our tradition of stable parliamentary democracy.

In fact, it is not unreasonable to suggest that the Bill is of less practical significance than the Australia Acts passed in 1985 by the Commonwealth and United Kingdom Parliaments at the request of all the States and passed in the absence of a referendum. Already those Acts have terminated the power of the United Kingdom Parliament to legislate for Australia.

It should be clear the Republic Bill would not greatly change the basic governmental arrangements that have served Australia so well. Nor would it graft another country's republic model onto those arrangements.

It is a change which would not make a huge difference to the running of our country, but I believe it would make a really big difference here in our hearts if we know that every child, every human being in this great nation can aspire to being our Head of State.

I don't support popular election and I will tell you why. If we have popular election, the President will be the only figure or element in the Government structure in Australia directly elected by the people as a whole. No one else is. Premier Jeffrey Kennett is not, Richard Court isn't, Peter Beatty isn't, John Howard isn't. Approximately 40,000 Australians voted for John Howard and because of the position he holds within the Liberal Party he became our Prime Minister. If we had popular election, it is possible that a very popular candidate could get eight million votes - nine, ten, eleven million votes. Now, in dispute, how powerful is someone with eight million votes,

even one million votes going to feel compared to a Prime Minister with 40,000 votes. A very big change in emphasis for our Nation if we suddenly have a popularly elected figure.

I would not like to see direct election. Most Australians have said they do not want the Head of State to be a politician. If we have direct election the Head of State will be a politician. I will explain why. It is so simple, but it is counter-intuitive. People will think 'Oh we don't want to let the politicians choose the President or we will get a politician'. In actual fact, if we have direct election, we will get a politician.

Occasionally I ask people, 'Who do you think has the ability to run an election campaign?' It's amazing I always get the same three answers - the ALP, the Liberal Party and Kerry Packer. They never say Rupert Murdoch. They always say Kerry Packer. Well you can actually forget Kerry Packer. When Ross Perrot was the richest man in America he stood for President and he could not beat the machinery of the Democrats or the Republicans. ~

If we had a visitation now from Her Majesty to say 'I resign, I don't want to be your Head of State anymore. Would five of you offer to stand for election to be President of Australia?' Immediately those five left the room, the ALP would be there and they would say to one of them - we are going to back you. The Liberals would be around the other corner and they would say - we are going to back you. You would suddenly have a political campaign. Even if none of the five had ever had anything to do with politics in their lives and were not politicians, they surely would be by the time the election was over. I would not like to see that happen.

Melbourne is not quite as small a city as Perth and not quite as parochial, but in the event of a popular election it would be very hard for anyone from the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Western Australia or Tasmania to have any hope of being the President. The smaller States would be totally marginalised. Now that might not worry people in Melbourne or Sydney, but I suspect it does worry people in Hobart.

I think it is a great shame that the direct electionists and those who want more changes are acting as spoilers in this.

Much has also been said recently about Australia's record in referenda and how cautiously Australians have responded in the past. But I want to remind you of two fantastic and glowing examples where we were pretty strong on our attention and response to referenda.

In 1951 the Prime Minister, Robert Menzies, wished to declare the Communist Party illegal. The Australian citizens responded in the spirit of fair play and said, 'No way. We are not going to restrict our right to political freedom. 1951, I will remind you, was at the height of the Cold War. There were 'reds under the bed'. My father was a member of the Communist Party, so I remember it well. We received phone calls from his comrades saying, 'They are on their way' and we would have to hide his books under the back seat of his car. It was a very scary time. But even with the pressure from a Prime Minister who was obsessed with anti-communism, Australians said, 'No way, we are not going to have our fellow citizens' right to choose restricted'.

Similarly in 1967 Australians unhesitatingly granted civil rights to Aboriginal people, albeit a little bit late.

I think the time is right for another referendum. It is right to decide we want a Head of State who is one of us. I think it is the right time to vote resoundingly 'yes' for a Republic.

I want you to ponder on how excruciatingly embarrassing it is going to be if we wake up on the 7th of November and we have voted 'No'. If we tell the rest of the world that we don't think there is one person here who is capable of being our Head of State. I can see the British newspapers now as I am sure Fr Nic Frances can. They will love it.

I have digressed from the topic on which you asked me to speak, but there are some similarities. It is all about us feeling fantastic about ourselves.

I spoke to a group of women a couple of weeks ago in a little country town in Western Australia called Dalwallinu, on 'Women in Agriculture'. The woman who spoke both before me and after me is a futurist working quite closely with Robert Theobald. She has chosen to live in Perth for the last thirty years. She was telling a story of how she was speaking to another large group, a couple of hundred businessmen, about the new trade block being established in Asia. She was explaining how the countries of Asia decided that the country they should have to lead them in this was India. So, they went to India and India said, 'Thanks very much, we are highly flattered but we actually think Australia is the best country to lead this trade block'. And she said, two well known, well respected and successful businessmen in Perth, sitting in the front row turned to each other and she heard them saying, 'Oh no, oh no, I don't think Australia can do that, no, no, we wouldn't be able to do that'.

I actually think we have the opportunity to lead the way here in lots of things. We have lead the way in giving women the vote. There are all sorts of things where Australia has lead the way when we have the courage to do it. I think we are at that time in our history.

Cameron Macintosh, the producer of Phantom of the Opera and Les Miserables, is a great friend of mine. He said to me a little while ago, 'Janet, it is as if a grey blanket has been thrown over Australia. Everybody seems so down in the dumps'.

Sir William Deane, Governor General is usefully promoting Australia when he travels abroad - but he is not our Head of State. When the Queen, who is, travels abroad promoting trade I can assure you she is not promoting my wheat or VisyBoard, or anything that is made in Melbourne or Sydney. She's promoting Britain - British products.

I think it gives us boost if we say we can do this, we can do this on our own! I think some of the social issues and improvements will follow. I really believe we have the ability in this country to do anything we want, but we need the will, the self-esteem and self-respect to do it.

I want to finish this oration by reading to you from a book by Tim Winton, another Western Australian of whom I am immensely proud. This is actually paraphrased and I like to finish every time with it because it 'sums up' for me, what I feel about our Nation at this time.

"We feel our nationhood, we recognise ourselves whole and human. We know our story for just that long. Long enough to see how we've come and how we've battled in the same corridor that time makes for us. And then we burst into the moon, the sun and stars of who we really are. Being Australians, perfectly, always, every place, us!"

Thanks very much.