

## **Department of Premier and Cabinet**

### **Opening of Bob Hawke College**

#### **Address by the Honourable Kim Beazley AC Governor of Western Australia**

**Sunday, 2<sup>nd</sup> February 2020**

I would firstly like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet – the Whadjuk Noongar people – and pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I cannot think of a more appropriate memorial to Bob Hawke than this new school. Nor can I think of any memorial of which he would be more proud. It is situated in the epicentre of the life of the young Bob Hawke and his formal education. He grew up one kilometre from here on Tate St, West Leederville. Almost all his education, till his time as a Rhodes Scholar at Oxford, took place in the four kilometres between West Leederville primary, Perth Modern and UWA. Great men and women are memorialised in many ways in many locations. It is rare that this happens at precisely the right place, with precisely the right instrument.

There is a cold utility in naming roads, bridges and public buildings. Monumental natural edifices like mountains and hills. Valuable parts of nature like rivers, beaches, streams or managed ecologies like parks all are satisfying to those who loved or revered the persons memorialised by their names.

Nothing beats your youthful heartland. Nothing beats a school. The buildings are named but the school's occupants are the soul. From within these walls our community, State and nation will be built. This will soon grow to 1500 souls. In these walls their dreams, opportunities will develop, evolve, be embellished and channelled through a multiplicity of intellectual disciplines. They will learn both individualism and collectivity from their physical opportunities here.

Above all, their values, work ethic, attitudes to their peers, willingness to lead and the character of their social interactions will be formed. What a privilege to have your name memorialised over such a powerful institution.

Bob was pretty self-reflective. The great thing about cigars is they take a long time to smoke. It is not easy to get a busy political leader to go into ruminative mode for an hour or more. Over the years in snippets and anecdotes, self-analysis would flow from a long conversation. He was clear that what made him a brilliant policy deviser, community engager and narrative provider for a self-reliant Australia, was his experience with the ACTU and five years on the Reserve Bank Board.

But his core values were formulated here in the streets and suburbs around us. He was clear on this. They started with his very strong and supportive parents whom he deeply loved and who encouraged every effort he made to project himself and engage from a very young age. His pastor father Clem had one phrase which Bob used to repeat to me frequently: *"If you believe in the fatherhood of God you must believe in the brotherhood of man."* While he was here in this place he fully inculcated the totality of that perception. He was a heavily engaged Christian. His faith diminished but he never abandoned the brotherhood component.

It was his schooling and his study at university which provided the foundational components of his governing worth ethic. Scholarship did not come naturally to him. He fought to create his intellectual base and the teachers at Mod and UWA were deadly serious in inculcating in their students those foundational capacities. He was a very good sportsman and student leader. The stories of his often monumental social excess are so vivid and so repeated through his life that they have dominated his image. Culminating with his drinking record at Oxford the build up to that achievement developed here. But so did his love of people and his determination to learn from his peers and his elders.

One part of him was his blokeyness. His love of sport. His very successful, well-studied engagement with the racing industry and the casino. In many ways the public trusted him because they knew his type and that it was not contrived. Frankly he is the only political leader I have known where none of this is confected. It was embedded in his personality with both its dark and light side. The light side meant he absorbed the views of the average Australian he met. He incorporated the hopes he learned from them into the structure of policy and its delivery. That aspect of his character in its rudiments was formed here, in his schooling and at University. Just as his mind was being developed by the rigorous inculcation of his broad education and his legal studies. His character evolved with subsequent experience it was not revolutionised by it. The one possible exception was his temporary abandonment of alcohol while in public office and his total abandonment of excess for the rest of his life. That was a reflection of the profound patriotism he developed early.

Personally, I have somewhat resented public focus on his endearing larrikinism. It belied what I saw of him in government. What I saw was the diligent, creative work ethic he developed here. What I saw was his comprehension that he would rise if others rose. He led a brilliant government because he let them be. He was a brilliant chairman, fully briefed, corralling not dominating a disputatious group of barons who would fight over the issues of the day around the cabinet table. He also valued his public service. Nothing would be delivered without their expertise and he made use of them.

He was the master of the narrative. He created a self-reliant Australia that punched above its weight regionally and globally. He alone led a government that in the 1980s freed up the sclerotic regulation that constrained all sectors of the Australian economy and our outward engagement. But at the same time recognised that large numbers of his fellow Australians could be hurt by the changes. He introduced the concept of the 'social wage'. This relieved through the tax system, superannuation, industrial relations changes and universal health care burdens on middle Australia. He was 19<sup>th</sup> century theoretician Walter Bagehot's classic great Prime Minister, a man "*of commonplace opinions and uncommon administrative abilities*". Less commonplace in many ways but commonplace in sharing values and in building trust.

One facet of his opinions, not so commonplace but an important part of his conversation with fellow Australians, was his abhorrence of racism. Internationally it was critical in his advocacy of change in South Africa's apartheid regime. Domestically it was a facet of his immigration policy. And most importantly his approaches to policy toward our first Australians. He would be delighted with the school uniform.

From his foundational experience here, in his youth, come his placing of education and research at the heart of his social wage. Massive increase in targeted outlays in all sectors of education.

Finally I think one quote sums all of his attitude up:

*“The essence of power is the knowledge that what you do is going to have an effect, not just immediate but perhaps a lifelong effect, on the happiness and well-being of millions of people, and so I think the essence of power is to be conscious of what it can mean for others.”*

That concept came straight from the triangle of his youth of which this school is now the epicentre.