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STATEMENTS

Valedictory

SPEECH

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Speaker Albanese, Anthony, MP	Question No.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (12:27): I am pleased to be able to make a contribution to the valedictories of the 2015 sitting of the parliament. Of course, they are earlier and longer than the normal valedictories because this is a government that has literally run out of business—there is no legislation before this chamber. Today's speakers list is a one-pager—with a Christmas tree taking up half the page!

I will begin by thanking, firstly, my personal staff, led by my chief of staff, Damian O'Connor, and my electorate staff, led by Kris Cruden in the Marrickville office. Staff of parliamentarians work incredibly long hours, and for remuneration that is certainly not what they deserve. They—across the board, it must be said—do it out of commitment: a commitment to making a contribution to their nation. That is so, similarly, for the staff of the parliament: the Clerks; the library staff, who are particularly important when you are in opposition; the drivers; the cleaners; the attendants—the people who look after us on a day-to-day basis.

I thank the new Speaker of the parliament, who I must say has performed his job admirably and is lifting the standards of the parliament through his actions.

I thank my parliamentary colleagues, particularly the Leader of the Australian Labor Party, Bill Shorten, and his team, and my friend the Manager of Opposition Business, Tony Burke. He is, in my view, the second best Manager of Opposition Business there has been over recent years! He is certainly fulfilling his task with diligence and taking a strategic approach. The fact that we end 2015 with a different leader of the government than we began 2015 is, in my view, in no small part due to the fact that the parliamentary tactics of the opposition have put the government under extreme pressure by drawing out the unfairness of their approach and the fact that they really do not have a positive agenda for this nation.

It has indeed been a year of difficulty on the government side with its bruising change of leadership and the retirement of the former Treasurer, but I thank the former Prime Minister, the member for Warringah, for his service. I believe that the position of Prime Minister is one which must be respected. It brings with it onerous responsibilities and I pay tribute to his service and that of the former Treasurer, Mr Hockey, who I enjoyed a good relationship with over many years.

I thank my counterparts on the other side, particularly the Deputy Prime Minister, Warren Truss. I have a positive relationship with him and his office in particular. I have a view that, where we can get agreement, that should be done. Many issues, including the second Sydney airport and the Moorebank intermodal terminal, require bipartisan support and are particularly important to advance. I hope that extends to projects in the future like high-speed rail down the east coast of Australia, because I believe that is a very important component of Australia's economic future.

I thank the member for Sturt. I spend much more time than is comfortable with the member for Sturt. Indeed, we get to see each other very early every Friday morning. He undertakes his duty as Leader of the House with good spirit. I believe that he has developed a good relationship with the Manager of Opposition Business, and that is important to the functioning of this parliament, which we all have an interest in.

In my own portfolio area of infrastructure and transport it has been an interesting year, with Qantas returning to profit and a government-led recovery in the helicopter charter industry. We have also seen the retirement of Sydney Airport Corporation boss Max Moore-Wilton—good! We have seen the opening of the highly successful Regional Rail Link project in Melbourne—the single largest ever Commonwealth investment in public transport.

Tomorrow I will be inspecting the Moreton Bay Rail Link, which was funded by the Commonwealth Labor government, the Queensland Labor government and the Moreton Bay Regional Council. Of course, we know that on the day it was announced, as the Deputy Prime Minister can confirm, the then candidate for the seat of Petrie went on Brisbane radio and opposed the project. They later on changed their mind about that and announced that

they would not oppose the project. But I think it is a tragedy that all funding for public transport projects that were not under construction had their funding withdrawn by the incoming government.

There is an element of concern for the Deputy Prime Minister, because he has shown a great deal of stamina in his magical infrastructure re-announcement tour, which has gone on from the beginning of the change of government. Right around the country, government ministers and local members have pretended that old projects were somehow newly funded. In some cases they have changed the names of projects in order to pretend that they were new—the F3 to M2 became the NorthConnex project in Sydney. I am expressing my concern that this magical infrastructure re-announcement tour is approaching Leonard Cohen tour lengths.

The government said there would be cranes in the sky and bulldozers on the ground. Instead, there are choppers in the sky and prime ministers in the ground. That is my concern—the only hole that was dug, of course, was the one that they placed their own former Prime Minister in. They did dig a hole in Palmerston for the hospital site but they filled it in the following day—the very next day. It was dug for a photo opportunity. I think it was a highlight for the government in terms of its approach to nation building.

I will conclude with a sad thought, which is that this year is the year that I lost my mentor and friend Tom Uren on Australia Day. Tom Uren taught me a lot about politics and a lot about parliament. Indeed, when I worked for Tom in the old parliament, he was in charge of the construction of this very building. I used to come to it when it was a building site. Tom Uren leaves an extraordinary legacy which my generation, and those to come, cannot even comprehend. They cannot comprehend the hardship of those people who went through the Depression and fought for their nation in the Second World War—in Tom's case, as a former Japanese prisoner of war for four years. Then, he went on to serve his nation in this parliament without any element of bitterness towards his fellow human beings, including being a promoter of reconciliation with the Japanese. I think it is a great example for all of us of the approach we should bring to public life. I pay tribute to Tom. Next Australia Day I will certainly be thinking of him.

We had a very successful launch here just weeks ago of the Tom Uren Foundation, which has been created to raise funds, essentially in his name, for the cause of ICAN, the international organisation that campaigns for nuclear disarmament. Tom witnessed the dropping of the second atomic bomb, the one on Nagasaki, and became a campaigner for nuclear disarmament for the whole of his parliamentary and post-parliamentary political career. I can think of nothing better than being here with his widow, Christine Logan, and his son, Michael Uren, who were able to be in attendance on that day.

I conclude by wishing everyone a Merry Christmas and, with my shadow transport hat on, I remind people that Christmas, unfortunately, every year sees a jump in the number of road fatalities and accidents on our roads. It is a time when we should take that into account and make sure that we get to our destination, even if it is a little bit slower than we would want. I certainly hope that everyone has a safe, peaceful and restful Christmas with their families and their friends.