Ms BURKE (Chisholm) (11:51): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for being in the chair during this speech. It will come as no great surprise that I will probably not be talking to the address-in-reply—sad but true.

I have been thinking long and hard about this speech today and have actually put words on paper, something I rarely do nowadays for a speech. I could not quite fathom what one says when one gets the chance to say goodbye, thanks and, 'I loves you all.' Most people leave this place not at a time of their choosing, so when you get that privilege you need to show it some respect. All of us here are constantly asked, 'Why? What drove you to a political career?' I often feel like the contestant at a beauty pageant getting the sash, when I answer, 'World peace.' But I do not resile from that. I genuinely wanted world peace when I joined the Labor Party in 1987, at Greg Sword's house in Ashwood, and I want it more today. I joined the party because I wanted to be part of something. We had been through a tremendous time during the International Year of Peace, when my elder sister, Nina, had been very involved in a program that, sadly, ended not in a peace communique to the UN but in a police riot. The paddy vans arrived and The Age the next morning read 'Youth peace forum ends in riot'. I was sick of this. I was sick of all the armchair experts willing to throw rocks but not willing to actually do something to create a better world and a better community. Barack Obama put it well when he said:

Change will not come if we wait for some other person or if we wait for some other time. We are the ones we've been waiting for. We are the change that we seek.

I never thought I would be a member of parliament. I often describe myself as the accidental member for Chisholm. I got asked to nominate in 1997 as we needed a candidate. I told Steve, my long-suffering bloke, who has been on this journey with me the whole way, 'It's okay, I can't win.' We were renovating a house. I was in the midst of an intensive EBA negotiation with ANZ bank for 22,000 staff Australia-wide, with six state secretaries and one national union secretary to keep on side. We led bank staff to their first ever industrial action, and Steve and I were thinking of starting a family. So it was not the time to think of running for parliament—so, yes, of course that is what I did. I never got to live in my fully renovated house. I have never used my ILVE oven. I dream of my ILVE oven I have never got to use! The FSU did triumph and got a great deal that, sadly, stood there for nine years because of the Howard government, but it was a great deal and they deserved it. After my first 12 months in parliament, I gave birth to my daughter, Maddie.

Labor won the seat in Chisholm in 1998 through hard work and a bit of good luck. I am grateful to Michael Wooldridge for seeing sense and swapping seats! The first campaign was fun. We had nothing to lose and almost nothing to work with but drive and enthusiasm. I lost a stack of weight and had a ball.

Five more elections to one of the most marginal seats in the country and the fact that I get to decide when I leave are testament to a great team around me. I thought I was gone on more than one occasion. I had a phone call from my last Liberal opponent, John Nguyen, just the other day, wishing me well. He did everything in his power to unseat me at the last election; he gave it his all.

I did not think I would ever get here, let alone last almost 18 years. I did not have my maiden speech written when I was three years old, like I suspect Kevin Rudd did! I finished mine at three in the morning before I gave it. Mum said it was not quite the greatest. So I am trying to make amends for that today, as she is here today, as was the extended Burke clan back in 1998. Nina, my eldest sister, has made it today, and I know the rest of the clan is listening in. Those of you who know us know that my mother has never quite worked out what she did right or wrong, because at one stage, of her five children, four of us were working for trade unions and my little brother was at Slater and Gordon. I think it goes to my parents' drive and determination to make the world a better place—to show us, through their Catholic faith, a struggle for social justice.
My children, Maddie and John, are here with me today but of course were not in 1998 because they 'were not'. I can mark my election success by the growth of my children. They are no longer young—and I hope I have not sacrificed my time with them by being a member of parliament. Yes, I have missed things, but I have also had the opportunity to be there. I skipped a leadership challenge to go to Madeline's first day of school. Heck, at that stage, we had had so many leadership challenges, what was another one! A lot of people said to me, 'Everyone'll know you're not there. It'll be a big issue. Maddie won't mind you didn't come.' But I would have minded that I did not go to Madeleine's first day of school, so I did. I have to be honest, and I apologise to the electorate: I did nick out of a few question times to make it home to the yearly school concert. I have tried to be at most of my children's parent-teacher interviews. I even had to fly home once to discuss turning off my father's life support system. He managed to live for another 10 weeks, though. I thought that was grossly unfair of him at the time! But it was difficult. My father, for all his challenges, was one of my greatest supporters and fans, and also my harshest critic, and we still miss him.

I took my kids to everything. I breastfed them—very discreetly—in front of an enormous array of people. One Army major sitting in my office was a bit mortified one day when there was a squeak from the corner of my office: 'What's that?' I said: 'It's a baby.' He said, 'What do you mean, it's a baby?' 'It's a baby!' 'What are you going to do?' I said: 'What do you think the baby wants to do now!' 'We'll leave.' I said: 'Fine. If you want to leave or you want to stay, it makes no difference to us. She's going to get what she wants.' I fed her in front of a year 12 politics class, and the teacher did go a bit white. The Greek and Chinese ladies in my community still ask me why John is not at events with me. When I explain that he is 14 now, they say, 'How did that happen?' And sometimes I wonder: how did it happen?

I did tuckshop duty and baked cakes for school fetes. I love our local 24-hour K-mart. Thank God for 24-hour K-mart—for those forgotten presents, oranges and snakes, so many things. I did of course leave my children at child care and got the apocryphal phone call: 'Are you coming to get them?' And, yes, I have regularly been late. But it has made the adventure all that more fun.

While sitting in the Speaker's chair, I had texts saying, 'Where are my hockey socks,' to which I replied, 'I'm in Canberra. I suspect they're in your sister's drawer.' 'Oh yeah' would be the reply. I had people ring me, when I was in the Speaker's chair, asking, 'Are you going to be picking the children up tonight?' 'I don't think so; I'm in Canberra.' But we have managed it all, just as every other working family in the country does.

Steve has been there the whole way, giving up work and going part-time—but only after he actually threatened to go to the industrial relations commission when his employer informed him that part-time work was only for women. We have changed that. Many of the things in this place that we describe as women's issues are not; they are family issues. They are issues for our community; they are issues for our society. Steve has retrained. He has on occasion accepted being called 'Mr Burke'. He has cooked. He has cleaned. He has driven everyone to where they needed to be and felt all my frustrations and triumphs along the way. I could not have done it without him.

We all trot out the line that it has been an honour and a privilege to serve—because it has been. Since Federation, there have been 1,665 members in this place and, of those, only 165 have been women. Those of us sitting on these green chairs belong to a very small collective, but many more have tried to get into this place. To have had this honour bestowed by us those in our electorates, and for successive elections, is something to say thank you for. Thank you for putting your faith in me to take genuinely the role of being your representative and to serve in this august institution. It has been a blast and often times incredibly frustrating but, above all, it has been an honour.

My motto in politics has always been to be active and approachable, and I think I and my staff have lived up to that creed. I like the line by Trollope on which I based my honours thesis: 'It's dogged as does it.' That is what life in politics has been for me. Sadly, the quote ends: 'It ain't thinking about it.' But I have thought about it—all of it—and that has made it sometimes much harder. I still believe it is the narrative, the vision, the light on the hill to which the electorate is drawn and craves—a vision that will drive action for a better world. Sometimes it does not feel like that to us here or to the electorate, but I think that is why we all come to this place. Thomas Jefferson, the founding father and the principal author of the Declaration of Independence, said:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.
On the flip side, one of Australia's own founding fathers asked the people to vote for the lofty aim of Federation with the words:

We shall found a great nation, and there will be cheaper meat.

We do have a great nation, one that every day I have served and marvelled at—but, sadly, there is no cheap meat.

What I have enjoyed most is being in my community, working with hundreds of great community groups, schools, kinders, service organisations, universities, research institutions, businesses big and small, hospitals and individuals who all work to the benefit of the whole community. As members of parliament, we get to step into their lives for a small moment to see them at their best and worst, to be there for the triumphs and the tears. It is amazing the things you get to see and do in this job that you could easily never know existed. I remember being at the 100th birthday of Phyllis Winifred Smith, who had organised her own messages and party and said that I could come because I was a nice girl, even if I wasn’t a Liberal. There was the celebration of the 61st wedding anniversary of Ron and Margaret Snell that was held in my office. They did not want to make a fuss at their 60th, but we thought we needed to make amends on their 61st. There was the opening of the Translational Medical Centre at Monash Medical Centre.

On another occasion I can recall standing with the workers at the closure of Arnott’s factory and seeing the loss of 500-plus jobs and then, sadly, the factory. Its site has now become housing. There was the visit to the Ashwood School, which is a disability service in my electorate, where one day we applauded a child who has learnt to tie their laces and the next day that child is off to the swimming trials for the Paralympics. There was the celebration of the successful transitioning of auto parts manufacturer, Bosch, who will survive beyond the auto industry shutdown. There was the celebration of the 61st wedding anniversary of Ron and Margaret Snell that was held in my office. They did not want to make a fuss at their 60th, but we thought we needed to make amends on their 61st. There was the opening of the Translational Medical Centre at Monash Medical Centre.

There was the help we gave to countless individuals with migration matters such as helping Rosewinda’s daughter Ruwimbo get a permanent child visa to come to Australia, because, sadly, she had been left behind when her mother, who was facing persecution in Zimbabwe, had to flee. We received one of the nicest bottles of red—I do not think we deserved it. It was wonderful to see them reunited. There was the cutting of pig on numerous occasions to welcome in Chinese New Year, listening to the fire crackers going off and being at the dusk to dawn ceremony at Box Hill, with over 80,000 Chinese people. I remember marvelling at the Italian men wanting to dance passionately with their wives after 50 years of marriage, and applauding the Tamil community, who strive to keep their language and dance traditions alive in the next generation.

I remember watching the pride of the Jewish community in the academic excellence of their students and in their culture. Although they do not live in my electorate, they have the largest school in my electorate. And then there was applauding students at Kingswood for winning vocational training awards; watching the solar car fly at Box Hill High and the rebirth of Ashwood High School; being at countless grade 6 graduations and marvelling at the ability of adolescents to walk in ridiculously high shoes; watching as a 3D printed jet engine came to life at the additive manufacturing plant at Monash University; buying my first Big Issue from Craig; having Alexis and Opal in my office, as no one else will give this highly intelligent disabled woman and her assistance dog the break she deserves; and working to undo complex Centrelink matters and resolve intractable housing disputes.

We were reminiscing, and one of my staff, Jason, who has been there almost from the beginning, said, ‘I do remember in the first few months when I started with you in Box Hill how we helped a woman who was a victim of domestic violence out the back door of the office as she was fleeing from her partner and was terrified he would be loitering out the front.’ He said that has always stayed with him.

I remember attending the funerals of too many branch members and community leaders, most recently the magnificent Robyn Fenton, the most vibrant special education teacher you could ever know. It did not look like she had died, because they painted her coffin a bright pink. She was too young, and we all miss her.

I remember being at the Box Hill Vietnam veterans' black tie dinner and their dawn service at Oakleigh RSL, as we marched down the street, and Clayton RSL—where the World War II veterans have finally taken to the Jeep—as we marched from the club to the cenotaph. Sadly, I have seen many of them pass away, too.

I remember watching the pride the Indian senior citizens take in the work of their community, and eating my way through too many Kariatides ladies lunches; in my electorate I have eaten my way through every ethnic
cuisine known to man! And I have never satisfied them—I have never eaten enough—and I apologise. And then there was helping sell Box Hill Lions cakes and sell sausages for MASH Rotary; being the butt of the tail twister at Waverley Lions and understanding that our community does not work without the great work of all these amazing service organisations; attending the Christmas barbecue of the Damper Creek volunteers, who have turned a barren creek into a calm forest oasis in the suburbs; standing with the community over rotten planning decisions; cheering the Box Hill Hawks—at least one of my footy teams has to win some time!—and watching Waverley Hockey take on Camberwell, and remembering I have to cheer for the blue and not the tangerine side.

I remember seeing the joy and hugs at Eastern Gymnastics as some small child completes a beam routine without falling off; knowing Christmas has arrived by being at Carols at the Grove; supporting the dedication and drive of the members of the Asian Business Association of Whitehorse as they achieve great things for business in our community; watching the joy and sorrow of recognition at Cabrini nursing home as the choir, led by the 105-year-old pianist, sing in tune—kind of; handing out the award each year at Waverley Guides; and being at the annual Amaroo Neighbourhood House Art Show and marvelling at people's creative talent and dedication to our community.

Sometimes this was just a week in my life in the electorate of Chisholm, and of course there was so much more, summed up in an incredibly touching email from a constituent:

Hi Anna

As you prepare to depart parliament, I would like to thank you for your commitment over the last 18 years. You have been a great local member who has done much for our community. From visiting to my children's schools, to speaking with them when they visited Canberra, to your response to emails and to your willingness to chat with people on the street, you have made yourself very available. Poor Stefanie has large shoes to fill.

Being a politician is a tough life, enjoy not being a politician. Thank you

Christine

I have championed many causes in this place, but one close to my heart is anaphylaxis. Meeting parents of children who have died from an anaphylactic shock is a sobering experience. Speaking to the Baptists about the hole left by Alexis' death and the Tates' loss of Louis has left me to wonder: why? Why do more children have to die before we see common-sense legislation that will literally save lives? One in ten children will be diagnosed with life-threatening anaphylaxis—not a rash or tummy ache. So we need to raise awareness about allergic disease and fund research. But in the interim we need to work on prevention and training in how to use an EpiPen in situations where you literally can save a life. So I was absolutely rapt to be with Catherine King last week at the Monash Medical Centre when we announced that a Shorten Labor government will commit $1.1 million to better manage allergic diseases and their associated health risks. I thank her greatly for that.

I am proud I am leaving behind the Do Not Call Register, an initiative I championed and introduced from opposition. I am taking credit; I do not care what anyone else says!

An opposition member: You should!

Ms BURKE: I think I should! I did it and I think I should. Issues of consumer affairs are often ignored by many of us, but they impact on everybody's life. I think we have done something great by returning your home to being your castle and not a telemarketing paradise.

I have said enough on asylum seekers here and everywhere. You know what I think. You know I think what we are doing is wrong, but I am not going to run away from the issue. Tim Winton, who spoke at the Palm Sunday peace rally in Perth last year, summed it up well:

To those in power who say the means will justify the end, I say I've heard that nonsense before. It's the tyrant's lie. Don't you dare utter it in my name.

If current refugee policy is common sense, then I refuse to accept it. I dissent. And many of my countrymen and women dissent alongside me. I don't pretend to have a geopolitical answer to the worldwide problem of asylum seekers. Fifty million people are currently displaced by war and famine and persecution. I don't envy those who
make the decisions in these matters, those who've sought and gained the power to make decisions in this matter. I'm no expert, no politician. But I know when something's wrong. And what my country is doing is wrong.

We're losing our way. We have hardened our hearts. I fear we have devalued the currency of mercy. Children have asked for bread and we gave them stones. So turn back. I beg you. For the children's sake. For the sake of this nation's spirit. Raise us back up to our best selves. Turn back while there's still time.

I echo Tim Winton: let us 'turn back while there is still time'. Let us show we are a nation not of small hearts. But, in my own words, I say to everyone listening: Labor is not the current government. It is incumbent on the Turnbull government to resolve this issue now, and to deal with these human beings as humans, not political footballs. These are people so traumatised that some of them are setting themselves on fire at Nauru. A High Court ruling has said that the asylum seekers have to be removed from Manus Island. These are not illegals, these are not criminals; these are refugees. Something needs to be done. I know we can do better and I know the public is asking us to.

I would like to talk also about climate change, foreign aid, and higher education research, but I have gone on too long already. But I do know that I am part of the first generation to leave the next generation worse off, and I despair of that. I think we need to do great work in that space, particularly in climate change. Again, I applaud what this side of parliament has done and has always done. I was proud to be elected in 2007 and to see us introduce great legislation then. I want to know that we will be re-elected as a Labor government to do some genuine action in that space.

You do not get here without a lot of help, and I am going to read a lot of names, because I owe it to them. I want to thank the following party members: Peter Chandler; Sue Hopgood; Jan and Cyril Kennedy, who got to think that I was not a right-wing, nasty person but an okay girl—they kind of like me now; Howard and Marie Hodgens; Gary and Jan Dircks; Graham Hill; Peter Rennie; Dan Hill; Wendy Dickerson, who keeps me alive with her many emails; Helen Buckingham; Barbara Dwyer; Tony Monogal; Lorie and David Werner; Gonzollo; Brenton Ward; the marvellous Manfred Xavier; Sam Lin; Halinda Strnad, a holocaust survivor who has done so much for our party; David Schulz; Raff Ciccone; Josh Beggs; Christine Barcham; Margret Oldfield; Bob and Ravel Kirkwood; Kathleen Brasher; Tom Huxom; Mark Coffey and Susan Berkeley; Dimity Paul; Malcolm McDonald; Chris Wilkes; Michael Watson; the entire Chiron family; Robert Chong; Sharon Ellis; Alan and Margret Clausen; and some great supporters who are not party members: Norm and Toppsy Gibbs, and Margaret Taylor.

I do not have too many local Labor members of parliament. I am in a seat of 'Liberaldom' in my neck of the woods. So, for the support I have had over the years from Shaun Leane, Steve Dimopolous, Burwood Bob, Maxine Moran and Jacinta Collins, I thank them dearly—for everything. In the early days there was an amazing guy called Bert Stephens, who just rocked up on my door and offered me help. I am eternally grateful.

Thank you to my amazing staff, who have been there from the beginning. Some of them have lasted the whole distance. A couple of them have been made redundant and have come back again, which I think is pretty remarkable of them. At the beginning, it was the inevitable Rachel Davoren who made it all possible. Rachel was a star. People love her or hate her, but she could campaign till the cows come home. She was incredible. Matthew Merry and Kerryn Buckney were there at the beginning. Kerryn came along and set up me up like she had served Robert Ray, and I have had barely anything go wrong in respect of entitlements because of it. Janet Chiron, Mathew Cooper, Fuye Dapiran, David Di, Joe Fennessy, Ainslie Gowan, Alastair Gowing, Karen Heidtmann, Jason Lebisch, Rick Prakhoff, Louise Roche, Jehane Sharah, Liana Staffa, Peter Stephens and Gayle Vermont were all in my electorate office. They have all done amazing things. They have all served my community so well. Jason, Rick and Janet have been the backbone of the office for so long, and I thank them dearly.

When I was Speaker and Deputy Speaker I had phenomenal staff. We need phenomenal staff in that office. It was actually my time as Deputy Speaker that was probably more trying. I know most of you will find that hard to believe, but it was the day of the cardboard cut-out of Kevin Rudd that will be forever etched in my memory. I had been Deputy Speaker for a week. I had never done it before. We were sitting in this chamber. Bernard was sitting in the clerk's chair. We were all sitting here: 'What does one do with a life-sized cardboard cut-out of the Prime Minister? Especially when we've agreed under the standing orders that I can't throw anyone out.' It was horrendous. You can YouTube it. I survived that. So did Lindy. Lindy was amazing during that time. She lost her job. She came back again. She served me well, and I say thank you to her. Thank you to all those staff, particularly the ones who we affectionately refer to as 'the get me re-elected people'.
Thank you to my amazing family, to my mother and father—to my mum, Joan, who is with us today, who brought up five children on the smell of an oily rag, put us through private school and then all on to university, at the same time going and graduating herself as a mature student. It has been an amazing effort, and we could not have done it without you. Thank you to my father, Bernie, who is gone; to my endearing brothers and sisters, their partners and their children: Tony, Liana, Sara, Emma and Chris; Nina, Gerard, Julian, Tim, Matt and Sinead; my sister Sophie; Paul, Melinda, Thomas and Alice, and to my fantastic in-laws. I have amazing in-laws and they have been, again, the backbone of how I have managed to do this—John, Maureen, who sadly is no longer with us, Jenny, Dermot, Lily, Greg, Elise, Leo, Hazel, Katy, Emmett and Henry: thank you all.

Thank you to the staff in this place who look after us so well and who I got to know amazingly well in my time as Deputy and as Speaker. Thank you to the attendants, particularly Luch, who looked after me so well. To the security guards in this place: you are amazing. To Hansard, the cleaners, the people in stores, the people in the shuttle, the Table Office, the PLO, IPRO, the sergeant's office and the gym staff: thank you. I like going to the gym, as some of you may know. To Comcar, DPS, DoFA, the Aussie's people who make my coffee every day without my even saying what I want, all the people in the Library but most importantly the clerks, who are the backbone, the corporate knowledge, of this place, I say thank you. To David, to Bernard, to Claressa and to all of you I say an enormous 'thank you'.

It was not an easy time in the hung parliament. I used to watch as Bernard scrawled in his hand the changes to Reps Practice that he was making on a daily basis as we changed precedent literally before our eyes. On occasion Bernard and I both sat there and said: 'Well, what do we do now? Actually, nobody knows; we've never done it before.' It was an amazing period. I also think it demonstrated that we belong to an amazing institution, an institution that does us proud. People can go on and say that the hung parliament was bad. I don't think it was. I think it was an amazing period in our democracy. It demonstrated that this parliament works. Legislation was passed—actually, more than has been passed in this majority parliament—committee meetings happened; committee reports were done; private members business took place; private members business actually became law. It was an amazing time and, I think, upon reflection, people will understand how truly wonderful it was. But without the clerks, without the institution, it would not have happened. As we go into an election, I think we in Australia, who take our democracy for granted, need to reflect on how grateful we should be to the institutions we have.

I wish Stephanie Perri, the Labor candidate for Chisholm, well. She is a phenomenal human being, a great person. I have known her for a long time. I know it is going to be a struggle. We never take for granted that we will win the seat of Chisholm, but she will be able to do it.

Frustrations were many over the years. Being in opposition was always a frustration—not being able to get things done. I personally am frustrated I never got to speak from the dispatch box. I think I had more to give, and I was disappointed I never got the chance. There were very dark days in 2010 and again in 2013. Being told by the Prime Minister that she thought I would be happy being the chair of a committee really did leave me a bit speechless. When I asked her if she thought she would like to be chair of a committee, seeing as we had both been elected in 1998, I just got a blank look. I was not in a good place at those times. Through it all, my family were phenomenal. At home that was easy; I could ignore this joint. It really hurt here, though. So I need to put on the record my absolute appreciation for my long-suffering roommate, Catherine King. She has put up with a lot. I know I would not have made it without her, and I am eternally grateful.

I have had many friendships in this place. There are Tanya and the girls of 1998, Nicola, Kirsten and Michelle—they were all there. We all then went on and had children. It was a rather remarkable group. There is Jenny Macklin, who has been there too. More recently, there have been Maria, Melissa, and Andrew Giles. In the fun days in Red Corner, Albo and Griffin tried to lead me astray with the 'fun faction', but, as I was very soon pregnant, that did not work out either! But they were a hoot—

Mr Albanese: Which was totally unrelated!

Ms Burke: to be around. Totally unrelated! Steve is here. Look at my children: they look very much like me and my husband.

On my last walk up Red Hill, I reflected on Caroline Chisholm, the amazing woman whom my seat is named after. She said:
I promise to know neither country nor creed, but to serve all justly and impartially …

The world has benefited from the remarkable life of Caroline Chisholm. She had a dream of a better life for those less fortunate. She was stymied and vilified by the establishment of the day, but she triumphed, through her dogged persistence to her cause, and achieved respect and support for her endeavours because she had a vision. I hope I have emulated in a small way that dogged determination to make the world a better place and to achieve the great objective of 'the light on the hill'. The last word, though, goes to Trollope again:

It has been the great fault of our politicians that they have all wanted to do something.