

**ADDRESS-IN-REPLY**

*Motion*

**HON SALLY TALBOT (South West)** [3.39 pm]: I move —

That the following address be presented to Her Excellency the Honourable Kerry Sanderson, Companion of the Order of Australia, Governor in and over the state of Western Australia and its dependencies in the commonwealth of Australia —

May it please Your Excellency: We, the members of the Legislative Council of the Parliament of Western Australian Parliament assembled, beg to express our loyalty to our most gracious sovereign and thank Your Excellency for the speech you have been pleased to deliver to Parliament.

Mr President, as you know, I have been a member of Parliament for close to 12 years. It may surprise you to know that that is a bit more than 4 300 days, of which I can say that some have been better than others. I am not going to dwell on the bad days at this moment. For all of us, there is a sameness about the bad days; they are the days when the people who come to see us seem to have difficulties that are insurmountable. They are the days when the system feels like an immovable object against which the force we can exert makes no impression. Sometimes they are the days when the sadness of the stories people bring to us seems unending. The good days have invariably been the ones when I felt I was able to do something, or be part of something, that made things a bit better for the people I care about and the people I represent. In that category I would put the day in 2015 when we as a Parliament recognised Aboriginal people in our Constitution. I served on the select committee that made the unanimous recommendation to support the private member's bill brought into the Parliament by the member for Kimberley, Josie Farrer. To make that political journey as a friend and a comrade with Josie was a joy as well as a privilege, and I look forward to our next four years together in this Parliament.

What were the other good days? Somewhat perversely, I did enjoy our marathon debate in November 2009 on the waste avoidance and resource recovery bills. I see Hon Donna Faragher smiling. I know it is a little perverse to name that debate but I am proud of the fact that I played a not inconsiderable part in making sure that we left no stone unturned in pointing out to the government why it was wrong to change the excellent legislation that I had taken through this place as a parliamentary secretary. I would also cite as a good day the moment we tabled in this place the legislation committee report that ended the conservatives' move to introduce stop-and-search legislation. And I would cite as a good day the day my close friends Stephen Dawson and Alanna Clohesy became MPs. I know that now as a minister and a parliamentary secretary, they will continue to do a fine job of bringing the Labor government's plans to fruition.

But when it comes to good days, this day, today, when we are marking the opening of the fortieth Parliament, is undoubtedly going to be remembered by all of us—by members of Parliament, by the guests who have shared this opening day with us, by the journalists who will have a lot to say about the ambience that we have established today, and by the wider community who will in some way or another note what has taken place today. All of us will mark today as one of the most exceptionally good days in our state's history. Today is a day to remember not only the personal sense in which many of us will reflect on our contributions to the public life of this state, but also the historical moments on which our culture is built.

Because of the nature of today's formal proceedings, I cannot take anything like the amount of time I would both like and need to analyse in detail the content of the speech by the Governor to which we have just listened. I do want to raise a celebratory flag about a particular first—that is a first with a capital F—that we have just witnessed: the first time in WA's history that the Governor's speech has been delivered by a woman. I know that we all celebrated the appointment of Her Excellency Hon Kerry Sanderson, AC, when she took up her position as the thirty-second Governor of Western Australia in October 2014. This moment that we have just witnessed, in which she assumed one of the most solemn and historically significant aspects of her ceremonial and constitutional role as the representative of Queen Elizabeth II, Queen of Australia, is a moment to reflect on the significance of this Western Australian first.

Today in Australia there is as much disagreement as ever about what it means to be a feminist. My preferred definition, which, incidentally, I also regard as one of the least controversial, is the one offered by the British writer Rebecca West. Her view was: "I myself have never been able to find out precisely what feminism is; I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from a doormat ..."

Just by way of an aside, I once heard a great account of feminist ambition by Gro Harlem Brundtland, the Norwegian Prime Minister three times over in the 1980s and 90s. She said that she was often asked why she chose politics as a career. Her answer was that when she was a small girl, her father asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up. "A sea captain" was her response, at which her father gently but firmly explained that girls could not be sea captains. Prime Minister was always her second choice.

I make my comments about the significance of Her Excellency's presence in this chamber in the full understanding that we, as women, have as many diverse experiences as we have characteristics in common. Indeed, I would go further to say that the assumption that we can correctly and clearly determine what is expected of men as opposed to women or what properly constitutes male as opposed to female traits and preferences is a false assumption and one that continues to blight the discussion about ways to promote gender equality. That assumption has also historically led to what I think are some fairly misleading platitudes about the difference gender equality would make to our common good. For example, the suggestion that having more women in Parliament would make our politics kinder and gentler has always seemed to me to be based on a rather dubious grasp of our political process as well as an inaccurate recollection about how passionately women have, in the past, gone into battle to fight for progressive social change.

What women do have in common is that we have all—every single one of us—been born into a world in which gender inequality is rife. For men and women—even in 2017—this is not an equal world. The fact is that if one is born a girl: they are statistically more likely as an adult to be poor; they are statistically more likely as an adult to experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner; they are statistically more likely throughout their life to be repeatedly exposed to the feeling of being invisible; they are statistically less likely as a child to be praised for being clever as opposed to being pretty; they are statistically less likely as an adult to serve on a board or as the chief executive officer of a major company; they are statistically less likely as an adult to hold high office in the public sector; and they are statistically less likely to be a highly paid sportsperson.

If we canvassed views in this Parliament today I have no doubt that, although nobody would find this situation acceptable, we would find a great many different and even contradictory views about how we should change things so that poverty, violence and invisibility cease to be experiences that are marked as, amongst other things, gendered. I certainly do not have time to examine all these views, or go into the complexities that surround the question of how to generate a policy agenda to address gender inequality. I want to say, however, that one of most effective and radical ways to bring about the theoretical and practical changes that will make the world fairer for both men and women is to lead by example.

Most people these days know that girls can do maths and science, that women can be influential and powerful in the corporate world, and that women can be the leaders of social and political change in the world of education and community service. In the past, this knowledge—that women can do all the things men can do, and can do them at least as well and have at least as much fun doing them as men have—has often tended to be aspirational. Now, more than at any previous time, we are moving from the aspirational to a concrete reality where women are actually out there doing these things. The career of our esteemed Governor—as I am certain anyone who knows about the life experience and achievements of Her Excellency Hon Kerry Sanderson, AC, will agree—is a shining example of how the lives of women in our community have already changed to a significant degree, and of how they might change in generations to come for girls and young women in our community. Her Excellency studied mathematics, amongst other things, at tertiary level. She has had a very successful and productive career in the private and public sectors. She has made a distinguished contribution to discussion about Western Australia's place in the global community through her work as co-chair of Murdoch University's First Murdoch Commission, where she helped steer what has been hailed as a groundbreaking inquiry into the key issues and challenges confronting WA and the Asian region. On behalf of honourable members, I pay my deepest respects to Her Excellency and thank her for the service she is giving to Western Australia by playing this very public role as a model for a world that is marked by the fairness that gender equality signifies.

On this same celebratory note, I want to draw the attention of the house to a second notable point about today's ceremony. In 2008, Hon Sue Ellery, MLC, became the first woman to lead the opposition in the Legislative Council. Today, she becomes the first woman to take the position of Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council. Like Her Excellency the Governor, Hon Sue Ellery has shown by example that a woman can be strong, courageous and determined in both the personal and political worlds. She was a fine Minister for Community Services in the previous Labor government, an extremely effective shadow Minister for Education and Training during our time in opposition and she will, I am certain, go on to make her mark on education and training in this state for the next decade or so. Again I say that a world in which our Governor and our Leader of the Government in the Legislative Council are women, showing by example that women can be effective leaders and drive change in our community, is a better world because it is a world marked by fairness and equality. A world in which women like Hon Sue Ellery and Hon Kerry Sanderson are leaders lays the ground for girls and women, as well as boys and men, to live in a better world, because equity and fairness are values that work for a common good that benefits us all.

I turn now directly to the content of Her Excellency's speech. In 2013 I put on the public record my concerns about the public's perception of the Labor Party. Specifically, I identified as an urgent task the need to rebuild our relationships with those people in our community who share Labor's central values. Those are the values of fairness, justice and equality. With those values guiding our actions, Labor stands up for working people and Labor stands up for the disadvantaged. My judgement in 2013 was that, as a former party official, as a former

party president and as a lifelong member of the Labor Party, I could play a stronger part in rebuilding the Labor Party as a backbencher. The fact that I am now speaking from this, the government side of the chamber, shows how successfully Labor has rebuilt those relationships in the last three years.

I am proud to have played my part in that rebuilding, but I pay wholehearted tribute to those alongside whom I have worked to build the foundations for Labor's victory. There are simply too many for me to name this afternoon in the time available to me, but I know that many of my colleagues in the McGowan Labor government will join me in wanting to express our particular admiration, our regard and, indeed, our affection for Lenda Oshalem, who drove our statewide plan to rebuild with unstinting energy and unfailing enthusiasm over a period of many years to bring about the Labor victory on 11 March this year. Lenda, for many of us, has come to represent what Labor does when it is at its best.

What we have built is a party full of true activists, hungry for change and tireless in our efforts to tell the Labor story. We believe that working people and disadvantaged people suffer when Labor is not in government. What we have just heard in Her Excellency's speech is a detailed account of just how effectively the expression of Labor values translates into a legislative program that will transform the future of Western Australia. This is a legislative program built on the support and trust of a community that expects us to make sure that that transformation will always be guided by the values of fairness, justice and equality.

What Her Excellency's speech shows is that this government, led by Mark McGowan, will never be content to be elected because we are a least worst option. My prediction in 2013 was that the Liberal–National government would not be re-elected in 2017. I said that not only because I wanted it to be true, but also because having won a second term it sat back and assumed it was enough to play the stern parent, being clear only about what was not going to happen. What it did not do even once during that second term was give people a sense that government was on their side, that people had a voice, and that what they had to say mattered.

The Labor members of Parliament who will carry out the day-to-day political task of listening to people's voices, nurturing people's ambitions for themselves and their families, and making sure that Labor values inform each and every part of implementing the program outlined by Her Excellency for this government are outstanding people. As a member for the South West Region, I particularly acknowledge Robyn Clarke, the new member for Murray–Wellington, and Don Punch, the new member for Bunbury. As my comrade Mick Murray—now the member for the very safe Labor seat of Collie–Preston—said on election night, we can now drive from Bunbury to Perth without leaving Labor territory. Along with David Templeman, Hon Adele Farina and Peter Watson, Mick Murray and I now have the best team possible for repaying the trust put in Labor by people in the south west. My promise to our community is to work with that team to ensure the full and timely delivery of Labor's plans for secure jobs, for decent health care and for an education system that helps every child to be capable and confident.

On behalf of honourable members, I thank Her Excellency for her speech, and I look forward with a great sense of optimism to the next four years of Labor in government.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Hon Alyssa Hayden**.