

**GENDER DIVERSITY — PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR BOARDS**

*Motion*

**HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan)** [10.26 am] — without notice: I move —

That this Council recognises the social and economic benefits that are gained by encouraging greater gender diversity on public and private sector boards and in senior decision-making positions and calls on the Barnett government to be more proactive in this area.

I am very pleased to move this motion because, surely, one of the measures of a good government is what it does, or in this case what it does not do, in relation to ensuring equal participation in society in every facet of life. There is no doubt that women's participation in public life has come a long way since Labor's Ruby Hutchison stood in this place nearly 50 years ago as the first woman elected to the Legislative Council in Western Australia. In fact, the irony is not lost on me that there is a direct correlation between Hon Ruby Hutchison's first brave step into this Council and me standing in this place today moving this motion, particularly as I look around and see the proportion of women on this side of the house compared with the proportion of women on the government side of the house.

Let us look at some of the measures Western Australians are looking at, because the level of women's political participation is one measure of gender equality in society. We will expand on that later, of course, and I have no doubt we will debate it in great detail. Another measure of gender equality is the number and level of women in senior decision-making positions, particularly the number of women on boards. Despite some achievements, women remain way behind men when it comes to workforce participation, what women earn in the workforce and the number of women in senior levels of the workforce. Women's underrepresentation in these areas is costing Western Australia millions of dollars in economic growth and denying women full economic participation and independence. As these figures get worse, the government must act now to halt the decline and act in the best interests of all Western Australians, not just a few.

Let us look at some of the measures of what Western Australians are missing out on. The boardroom diversity index is a measure of women's participation on boards of directors in various sectors across the Australian economy. The BDI is a comprehensive set of data that is publicly available, for the first time, which indicates the priority of this area. That is collated and analysed by an organisation called Women on Boards. As the organisation points out, the scarcity of women directors is a key aspect of the wider economic disadvantage experienced by women in the Australian workforce. Each year it produces the boardroom diversity index, and in 2010 it was found that the number of ASX 200 companies hovered around eight per cent of board positions held by women. That figure had been the average for quite a few years. In June 2010 the number crept up to 9.2 per cent, with the introduction of the new ASX corporate governance guidelines, which required the reporting on gender from 1 January 2011 on the Australian Stock Exchange's top 200 companies. That had a significant and important impact almost immediately. Only two years later in 2013, at a national level, 15.8 per cent of board positions were held by women and 23.5 per cent, or 47 companies, had met the Women on Boards target of 25 per cent female directors.

They are national figures, but let us look at Western Australia because it is a different story here. For the first time, Women on Boards analysed data at a state level, and we saw that companies in New South Wales, for example, had about 18.5 per cent female directors on boards. Western Australia has the outstanding record of being the worst performing state, with just 7.7 per cent of female directors on the 39 companies listed in the ASX 200. It gets worse if we look across a broader number of companies. The 2012 Australian census of women in leadership conducted by the federal Workplace Gender Equality Agency highlighted just how far behind Western Australia is. Western Australia is the headquarters for more than a quarter of all ASX 500 companies, but across those companies, women hold only 3.5 per cent of directorships in the state. That is compared with the national statistic, which shows that women hold approximately 9.2 per cent of directorships across the ASX 500. In Western Australia there are approximately 772 company directors. How many of those are women? Only 27. Western Australia has the lowest proportion of women in executive management of any state—quite dramatically fewer than half the average.

We already know that the mining boom has passed tens of thousands of Western Australians by, particularly those most disadvantaged in our state; we see it every day. We see people looking for housing, people not able to access jobs, and we see women's refuges full to overflowing. On any measure, we can see that the mining boom has passed tens of thousands of Western Australians by, but it is also important to point out that women in general have also been passed by. Women have missed out at board director levels, in executive ranks and in jobs throughout the workforce. Mining, for example, makes up more than one quarter of all companies in the ASX 500, so we would expect to see women directors holding a significant number of positions across that

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sector, yet directors who are women make up only 5.2 per cent of directors of ASX 500 companies in the minerals sector. If we look right across the sectors in the ASX 500, more than two-thirds of companies have no female executives.

To expand on the mining example, this morning the Australian Mines and Metals Association indicated that it was quite concerned about the participation rates of women in that industry, and not only at executive or senior levels. In fact, this morning on ABC Radio's *AM* program, the association indicated that it wanted to see women's participation rates in the mining industry increase to 20 per cent by 2020. What it is asking, therefore, is for some target rates to be set. The Australian Mines and Metals Association also hopes to highlight, through its activities today and ongoing, recruiting and training processes, and to look at the way that women, in particular, can be better included in that workforce, such as by giving primary carers a three per cent bonus each quarter once they return to work, and to have that stay in place until the child's second birthday. The intention of that payment is to offset the additional costs that parents experience in going to work. That is an example of one company trying to do something about gender diversity in the workforce.

That association, and companies such as Caltex Australia, understand that there is a strong business case for gender diversity. They understand that it is not only women who are missing out here; it is also our economy and our society. Particularly, the companies themselves understand that without gender diversity they are also missing out. There is lots of data to show that gender diversity in the workplace and at management levels delivers many benefits. Let us look at organisational performance, for example. Promoting gender equality in the workplace, including at senior levels, can enhance the performance of organisations. This has been demonstrated in research globally time and again. For example, companies with at least one woman director have better financial outcomes than companies where there are no women directors.

Gender diversity strategies also have the benefit of giving companies greater access to talent and a competitive advantage which, for those companies, can lead to greater productivity, better community engagement and, most of all, an enhanced reputation that translates into an improved capacity to operate. I will come back to that example soon and talk about what the French are doing.

Companies are doing it; some companies are making better attempts than others, and should be commended for their efforts, but the shocking WA figures are a strong argument for the need for government action in this area. What is this government doing? What is the Barnett government doing to encourage the participation of more women on boards and at senior executive levels? There is a website that is navigable from the Department of the Premier and Cabinet's website; it is about five clicks away from the main page, which in real world experience is the equivalent of sending someone down the corridor to door 97, up five flights of stairs, turn around three times, and we might accept their resume. That is what the government is doing, but what the government needs to do is to act now. That government has to act now to redress this imbalance because there will be a time lag between initiating programs and implementing policies to ensure that a real difference can be made.

As I mentioned earlier, it is not only at the higher levels of the workforce and on boards where women are underrepresented and underpaid; gender inequality extends right throughout the workforce. The gender pay gap compares women's and men's average pay earnings, and the difference between the two is referred to as the gender pay gap. The Workplace Gender Equality Agency says that when it calculates the gender pay gap, it does not take into account part-time workers' earnings, which, in itself, is an issue for women's economic status. Because part-time earnings are not taken into account, the gender pay gap is a very sound and important tool that compares like with like. The gender pay gap is another indicator of gender inequality or social and economic status.

What is the problem in Western Australia? Western Australia has another first, but it is not one that we can or should be proud of. Western Australia is the most unequal state in Australia for the difference in earnings between women and men. In May 2013, the difference between women's and men's earnings, or the gender pay gap, was 17.5 per cent nationally. In May 2013, the gender pay gap in Western Australia was a shocking 26.9 per cent. In dollar figures, that means that a full-time female employee earns 73.1c to a male's \$1. Let us compare that across other states. Tasmania's gender pay gap as at May 2013 was only nine per cent, whereas Western Australia's was 26.9 per cent. Why is that a problem? Firstly, obviously, the gender pay gap is growing in Western Australia. In May 2012, the gender pay gap in Western Australia was 25.6 per cent. That is an increase of 1.3 per cent in just 12 months, at a time when we were told the economy was growing and we were experiencing skill shortages and labour shortages. That means that this government did not take into account that women's skills could contribute to Western Australia's productivity. It ignored half the potential workforce.

The gender pay gap is not just a result of women being paid less than men and participating less in the workforce, as is commonly suggested. It is also because women are doing work that has been historically undervalued in society, and I will talk more about that later. The health care and social assistance industry is

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growing and has a predominantly female workforce. We need those skilled workers to make their long-term careers in this industry, but that will not happen if we continue to undervalue the work that these people do in this industry.

Women are also absent from senior roles in public and private organisations for a variety of reasons, including the lack of flexible working arrangements for managers. There are a number of reasons why women do not participate equally in the workforce, but it is not just about money. Some people say that it can be because of mining wages. Do mining wages disproportionately affect women? It is not just about money. As I have said, it is about the lack of flexible working conditions and secure jobs for women and men. That is a big part of the story of why gaps in earnings persist over working lifetimes. Only around seven per cent of workers in Western Australia are employed in the mining industry, so it is a very small proportion of the economy. The services sector is growing at a much faster rate and is, of course, much bigger. Why would we not be seeking to decrease the gender pay gap in those sectors?

What is the government doing in this area? There is the pay equity unit, which the government indicated during estimates hearings would receive a reduction from one full-time staff member in 2012–13 to 0.84 of a full-time staff member in 2013–14. The government has not prioritised dealing with the gender pay gap. In fact, it has decreased it; it has cut it. It is another cut to an area that is badly in need of attention. What can the government do? Firstly, of course, it needs political will. The government must dedicate itself to a policy goal of increasing gender pay. The government needs a detailed plan and a way of using every mechanism available to address this critical imbalance. Of course, the government could also close the gender pay gap in its own public sector workforce, because the gender pay gap in the WA public sector increased from 16.9 per cent in 2011 to 17.3 per cent in 2012. They are the Department of Commerce's own figures. When we drill down and look at that, we can see that the gender pay gap for fixed-term, full-time employees was 19.7 per cent in 2008, but that rose to 22.9 per cent by June 2012. The gender pay gap for fixed-term, part-time employees went from 18.7 per cent to 24 per cent. That is from a government that wants to see more, not fewer, staff on fixed-term contracts. The only benefit I can see from that would be to fix its budget bottom line woes, which have arisen from its wrong decisions and wrong choices. It also seems in the WA public sector that the older people are, the larger the gender pay gap. The gender pay gap for employees aged 30 to 49 years in June 2012 was 18.8 per cent, and for employees aged 50 years or older, it was 21.2 per cent. We know already that women's retirement savings are significantly lower than men's for a variety of reasons, all linked to gender. What is this government doing about it? There is not a whisper. The government could be conducting reviews into the lag between women's and men's pay. The government could be insisting on equity plans and outcomes for the private sector. The government could be trying to achieve pay equity through making it a condition when signing state agreements with companies seeking access to Western Australian resources. There is a range of things the government could be doing. What is missing is the political will to address this imbalance.

**HON HELEN MORTON (East Metropolitan — Minister for Mental Health)** [10.46 am]: To be honest, the government supports most of the motion. We support, and have supported all along, the part that states that the Council recognises the social and economic benefits that are gained by encouraging greater gender diversity on public and private sector boards and in senior decision-making positions. I would amend the last part of the motion if we were ever to vote on it, but given that we will not, I will mention that the last part of the motion should read "and acknowledges the success of the Barnett government in this area". I will outline some of the successes that we have had.

Several members interjected.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** We have listened in silence to the comments of members opposite. I will give members some information.

Several members interjected.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** The difference between the two sides of this house is in the process of how to get there. The one thing that we will never, ever consider is a quota system. We need only look at the previous Prime Minister of Australia to see the problems that are created when somebody is put in a position not necessarily on merit. We have an amazing, intelligent, articulate and well-groomed person there, but she is not the federal Leader of the Opposition; she is the deputy leader. Who do we have instead? We have some kind of faceless man. Once again, an amazingly astute lady —

Several members interjected.

**The PRESIDENT:** Order! Just bring down the temperature.

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**Hon HELEN MORTON:** As I was saying, this amazingly astute lady, Tanya Plibersek, has been relegated to second place because the faceless man, as is usual in the Labor Party, took over the leadership. It is a terrible situation when members on the other side of the house try to talk about diversity and encouraging and supporting women in leadership when that kind of situation occurs at a federal level.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Hon Stephen Dawson wants to make a contribution.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** I am sure he will in a few minutes.

I want to talk about something that really inspired me recently. I was invited to attend the Royal Agricultural Society's cocktail party at Parliament House, at which Hon Ken Baston, the Minister for Agriculture and Food, introduced the 2013 Cattle Council of Australia rising beef industry champion. I do not know what I was expecting, but when that young lady, Stephanie Coombs, stood up, I was pleasantly surprised to see a woman of her calibre taking on that role as champion of the cattle industry.

**Hon Sue Ellery:** Why were you surprised?

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** The surprise came because she does not actually have a country background. Along with graduating with first-class honours from the University of Western Australia, Stephanie has completed a certificate in agriculture and is an accredited stockman. It is interesting that that title is still used! She is an accredited stockman in the livestock export industry and is originally from suburban Perth; she had not had any country experience to take that on. Stephanie has worked on cattle stations, feedlots, studs, farms, abattoirs and livestock export vessels in Australia and overseas. I thought to myself that this is how we can get women into senior positions; if we give them the opportunity to take on those sorts of roles, they will work their way through, as Stephanie has done. I again congratulate Stephanie for that; it was one of the most pleasant acknowledgements that I have listened to for a while.

I certainly believe that this is a whole-of-community issue. I will outline some of the work the government has done in that respect. The government does not do this alone. I will just mention an example of my own. When I was the general manager of Armadale Health Service, we undertook a major redevelopment and then organised an open day for the community. As I was welcoming people as they came through the door, a gentleman came up to me and asked me who I was. I said that I was Helen Morton and he said, "Well, where's Mr Morton?" I said he was up in the country somewhere, on our farm. The open day was held on a weekend and the man said, "What? So he's gone to the farm and left you to do this!" He was not recognising, I guess, that women can be general managers of services. That is a community attitude that needs to change. That is the sort of attitude I am talking about. This is about more than just what the government can do; it is also what communities as a whole can do to change that sort of attitude.

I will tell members about some of the fantastic work that the government is doing. The government strongly supports gender diversity and recognises the range of evidence of the benefits that can be obtained by having greater representation of women on government boards and in senior executive positions. Some outstanding women have obtained such positions on merit. Marion Faulkner, Rosanna Capolingua, Erica Smyth and Kerry Sanderson hold key positions on government boards and committees. The continuing contribution of such high-quality women has seen the representation of women on government boards and committees increase from 35.5 per cent in 2011 to 41.7 per cent in 2013.

**Hon Peter Collier:** Audrey Jackson, chair of the Teacher Registration Board of Western Australia.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Exactly; Audrey Jackson is another example. The area that government can directly influence is the appointment of women to government boards. We have seen an increase from 35.5 per cent to 41.7 per cent from 2011 to 2013. That is why I am saying that the government needs to be acknowledged for this sort of improvement. The Women on Boards boardroom diversity index identifies longer-term gender diversity performance. The government is delighted that WA features among the best performers, together with the commonwealth and New South Wales, with our representation of women exceeding the target of a minimum of 40 per cent women on Australian government boards by 2015. The overall percentage of women on the boards of the 82 government-owned corporations included in the 2013 BDI has improved by three per cent since 2012, with the majority of the gain coming from Western Australia, which jumped by six points to 29 per cent, as shown in a table that I have in front of me. It is not an accurate reflection on the government's effort to not acknowledge those increases and improvements.

In the 2013 annual report of the Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, the acting director recognised positive progress in diversity outcomes, with an upward trend of representation of women in the senior executive service from 19.1 per cent in 2000 to 29.2 per cent in 2013. The statistics are even more pleasing for women in tier 2 and tier 3 management positions in public sector entities, at 35.4 per cent and 42 per cent respectively. Members opposite cannot ignore these figures, as much as they would like to. But more can

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always be done. With that in mind, the government is pleased to support a recent initiative of the Public Sector Commission to examine the motivations, beliefs, goals, internal conflicts and values of senior women in the public sector in relation to work. The project will identify what could encourage and support more women to take on leadership roles in the public sector and will be an important contribution to achieving greater gender diversity. With women now representing 71.1 per cent of the public sector workforce, the government has every confidence that gender diversity will continue to be achieved in key decision-making areas.

I will now talk a little about the women's interests portfolio, in which significant progress has been made since 2008. Women in leadership, including their representation on boards and committees, as I have already identified, is a priority area within the state government and is supported through the "Department for Communities: Women's Interests Strategic Directions 2011–2014". Significant work has been undertaken to equip women for board roles, including the provision of scholarships for women to undertake the company directors course through the Australian Institute of Company Directors; the production of research into organisational strategies to implement change; the production of the "Women in Leadership: Strategies for Change" document; and publication and promotion of the Interested Persons Register, which is maintained by the Department of the Premier and Cabinet. I will leave some points for Hon Liz Behjat—I am not going to waste my time by talking about areas that I know she will cover. More than a dozen scholarships have been awarded for women to attend the company directors course at the Australian Institute of Company Directors to improve their board readiness. The state government is also partnering with the Committee for Perth's "Filling the Pool" two-year research project, which I know Hon Liz Behjat will cover. The economic independence of women is being encouraged through programs that give women the impetus to consider entrepreneurial pathways and non-traditional careers. Since 2012, nine women have been offered scholarships to attend Curtin University of Technology to undertake the Ignition program, which is based on a program developed by the University of Cambridge's Centre for Entrepreneurial Learning. This course provides access to mentoring, networking and business advice, enabling participants to prepare ideas for the business world. All in all, I think there is plenty of evidence that the state government is active and being proactive in this area and is achieving good results. The other area I will mention is the research that was commissioned from and published and distributed by the Maureen Bickley Centre for Women in Leadership titled "Women in Leadership: Strategies for Change" and corollary seminars. This work has again been undertaken by Women's Interests.

One area of particular interest to me is the number of women that is actually needed in a place like Parliament before we get the kind of cultural change that people believe would better reflect the diversity of the community. I did some research on this when I was the shadow Minister for Women's Interests. Of course, the figure ended up being 30 per cent; that is, we need 30 per cent of people in an organisation or a Parliament to be women to create the cultural change that is necessary. I am really pleased that we have achieved that in this chamber, particularly across the East Metropolitan Region—an outstanding region—which has 100 per cent representation by women. The East Metropolitan Region is going ahead in leaps and bounds because of the sterling representation of that region.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** It is not diverse though.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** It is very good representation.

**Hon Nick Goiran:** There needs to be more gender diversity there.

**Hon HELEN MORTON:** Probably, member. During the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, I met with the Rwandan Minister of Agriculture and Animal Resources. Rwanda is a country that was beset by tragedy and difficulty in the not-too-distant past. The minister, who is a woman, was telling me that they specifically encourage and support women to take on leadership roles across the Rwandan Parliament and areas of government within Rwanda. She explained that when women were elected to the Parliament and members were elected as the government of the day, the Prime Minister equivalent—I do not know whether the role is called Prime Minister in Rwanda—made a decision to change the portfolio responsibilities, so the men took on positions such as community services and child protection, while the women took on industry and agriculture. That made a significant difference in changing both the culture and the economic benefits for the community. That is an example of how big decisions made at a very high level can change cultures within those areas. We on this side of the house recognise and support the first part of the motion, but I think it is not accurate to ignore the benefits and progress that the Barnett government has made in this area.

**HON SAMANTHA ROWE (East Metropolitan) [11.02 am]:** I rise to support the motion that the Legislative Council recognises the social and economic benefits that are gained by encouraging greater gender diversity on both public and private sector boards and in senior decision-making positions, and calls on the Barnett government to be more proactive in this area.

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In Australia, women comprise just over half of the population at 51 per cent, yet we are not equally represented in senior positions in society. I will touch on some of the important issues around having women on boards and the flow-on social and economic benefits that come from this. A 2008 study by Renée Adams and Daniel Ferreira, titled “Women in the boardroom and their impact on governance and performance”, found that female directors lift the performance of corporate boards and are more likely to attend meetings. The study found that participation in board meetings increased when there were women on the board with more decision making, tougher monitoring of the chief executive and more alignment with the interests of the shareholders. This research can no longer be ignored; it cannot go unnoticed continually. We have a responsibility, particularly here in Parliament, to do more to promote women on boards and in senior level executive positions.

I thank the minister for her contributions and yes, government has been doing certain things to promote women on boards, but we still have a long way to go. I urge everyone in this place to take that on board. I refer now to an article by Rosemary Sayer in *The West Australian* on 6 May 2013, titled “We need to promote more women to serve on boards”. She states —

There is now a global body of research that shows companies with gender-diverse boards (boards comprising at least one-third women) have a higher level of organisational effectiveness and financial performance than male-dominated boards. Companies with gender-diverse boards in many different studies from around the world have consistently delivered an average return on equity over 10 years significantly higher than those without women directors.

Companies can no longer ignore the fact that there need to be women on boards. At the moment there is only a 15 per cent representation of women on boards across Australia, yet 51 per cent of the population is female. That does not add up. In 2012, the then federal Labor government introduced a policy of having a 40:40:20 gender balance for its boards and committees by 2015. Claire Braund, the executive director of Women on Boards, worked with the government to reach these targets across all portfolios. I hope that the new Liberal–National federal government continues that work. In Australia, we do not have quotas for women on boards or in senior executive roles. However, there are some, including Ita Buttrose, who believe that a quota system is required to achieve gender diversity on boards. According to a 12 September online article written by Jenny Rogers —

Ita Buttrose has renewed her call for a quota system to have more women on boards, branding women’s progress in the boardroom “pathetic”.

The current Australian of the Year called for legislation similar to that in Norway which requires public companies to have a least 40 per cent female board representation within two years.

Ms Buttrose said corporate Australia had to stop treating boards as a “retirement plan for the old boys’ network”.

Ms Buttrose makes some good points. The article goes on to state —

Ms Buttrose said successful companies could not continue to ignore the impact of women in business.

“Women provide 70 per cent of the buying power, they make up 46 per cent of the Australian labour force, 51 per cent of professionals and more than 55 per cent of university graduates,” she said.

This makes it hard to argue that we cannot promote enough women because there are not enough to choose from. Maybe we are not looking far enough and we need to expand the search. These statistics show that there are more than enough women out there with the capabilities to be promoted to senior level executive positions.

Women need to have equal representation in all senior level decision-making areas, whether that is in company boardrooms, in the community sector or here in Parliament. It is worthwhile looking back at measures that have been taken to assist in achieving greater gender diversity in our Parliaments. I refer to a 2011 article from *The Drum* website that highlights some very interesting points. It states —

History shows that when you change the rules, and don’t just rely on the passage of time or goodwill, only then do you get change. The Australian Labor Party’s adoption of the Affirmative Action (AA) quota in 1994 demonstrates this to be the case for women’s representation in the Federal Parliament.

The federal Labor shadow cabinet is made up of five female shadow ministers—the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Tanya Plibersek; Penny Wong; Kate Ellis; Catherine King and Jenny Macklin—as opposed to the Abbott Liberal–National government which only has one cabinet minister, the very lonely Julie Bishop. This means that we cannot expect progressive public policy to be formulated and designed within our parties if we do not have female members of Parliament and female cabinet ministers making those final decisions and representing well over half of the population.

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At the current rate, it will take the federal Parliament 25 years to achieve 50 per cent equal representation and gender diversity. That is far too long to have to wait for gender diversity and equal representation. I call on the Barnett Liberal government to lead by example; it is time to pick up its game to ensure that we can celebrate true equal representation, true gender diversity, sooner rather than later.

**HON LIZ BEHJAT (North Metropolitan)** [11.10 am]: I am happy to speak on this motion today. As Hon Helen Morton said in part, I agree with the sentiment behind the motion brought by Hon Alanna Clohesy. Last week, on behalf of the Minister for Women's Interests, Hon Liza Harvey, I attended a Women in Mining Western Australia seminar, hosted by the law firm Gilbert and Tobin, and spoke on the subject of gender inequality in a number of areas, particularly in mining. Over 150 women attended that seminar. The Women in Mining group is an interesting networking group that started in 2003 with the idea of being proactive in supporting women to not only enter but also stay in the mining industry. The problem of gender inequality in companies and government departments is not getting women into jobs, but maintaining them in those jobs and promoting them. However, at the same time, I have to say that women are sometimes their own worst enemies in these matters, because we sometimes do not promote ourselves as well as we should. That is one area that needs to be addressed: how do we make it easier for women to get in there and compete on a level playing field? We all know that gaps in employment usually happen generally for women, but there is a growing gap for men at times, especially when women take time off to have and look after the children and then come back into the workforce. There are issues that surround that. We need to make it easier for men to be able to take those breaks and get back into work also. We can start talking about equality when we talk about the evenness of the playing field in those areas.

The Women in Mining networking group started in 2003 with a very small number of people. Ten years later, the group has 1 000 women on its database. Obviously it is doing something right, and women find that they benefit from being involved in these informal forums. We are very happy to support that. Although it is true that women make up the majority of university graduates, the figures show that the gender pay gap between male and female university graduates increased last year from \$2 000 to \$5 000 per annum. They are the statistics and we cannot go past them. However, once again we should look at how women present themselves. I am chairman of the board of Ashdale Secondary College and I often speak to the women at that college.

**Hon Peter Collier:** And you're a woman!

**Hon LIZ BEHJAT:** Yes, I am a woman and I am the chairman of the board at that school. I often speak to the female teachers and students at that college about the opportunities they should take in their lives. One of the tools I use when I speak to them is a book by Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, who was poached from Google by Mark Zuckerberg, entitled *Lean In: Women, Work, and the Will to Lead*. I recommend everyone read this book as it is a great guide and gives great examples of how women have become involved in boards and management and how they need to lean in, keep their hands up, stay at the table and ask questions. There are some statistics contained in that book, especially concerning the Master of Business Administration graduates at Carnegie Mellon University. The progress of those graduates was tracked to find out what happened when they got their MBAs and were looking for their first jobs. The statistics referred to in the book address the gender pay gap in relation to university graduates. Of the graduates from that course, 57 per cent of the men who graduated negotiated their first starting salary, whereas only seven per cent of the women negotiated their starting salaries. The women, it would seem, were happy that they could get a job and were willing to take what was on offer at the first instance, whereas the men appeared to say, "Well, great I would not mind coming to work for your company, but I think I am worth more than what you are offering." I think that women need to do that. If women are to get to a point where they can be forthright and compete in this playing field against men, attitudes towards women need to change.

Men and women do think differently. We know that men attribute success to themselves, whereas women tend to attribute their success to others. That is something we need to start to address. When men are ambitious, people consider that a good attribute. They say, "That is great! He is such an ambitious man! He will go a long way." When a woman is described as ambitious, she is derided and called all sort of names, including, "You are just trying to be a bloke." This is where the issues arise. This attitude needs to change before we can see real change in companies and on boards.

Professor Deborah Gruenfeld, the professor of leadership and organisational behaviour at Stanford University, has this to say on this issue —

Our entrenched cultural ideas associate men with leadership qualities and women with nurturing qualities and put women in a double bind. We believe not only that women are nurturing, but they should be nurturing above all else. When a woman does anything that signals she might not be nice first and foremost, it creates a negative impression and makes us uncomfortable.

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That is certainly true. These are issues we need to address. However, when it comes to criticism of this government for not promoting women onto boards—we have gone through the statistics on the ASX 200 companies and the lack of women in board positions there—I reiterate that women make up 41 per cent of Western Australian government boards and committees, with 29 per cent of chair positions held by women. I think the government is certainly going a long way to address those issues.

Through the Office of Women's Interests in the Department of Local Government and Communities the government is also promoting the equality of women by developing and supporting projects that highlight and strengthen women's economic, political and social accomplishments. The Minister for Women's Interests Women's Advisory Council is currently developing a board readiness tool kit, designed to provide women with the information necessary so that when they decide to go on a board they are fully equipped to do so, to know the challenges that may lie ahead and overcome some of the pitfalls along the way. As always, this government prefers to do things in collaboration with private enterprise rather than doing things on its own. The Department of Local Government and Communities, in conjunction with the Committee for Perth, is supporting a new initiative called Filling the Pool, a 18-month to 24-month research project that aims to produce a clear understanding of Perth's corporate landscape of middle to senior level women. This project will be undertaken, and the outcome of it will be that we will have some very good statistics available about women in the workplace. It will be able to provide additional ideas for women and the companies to assist them to achieve improved work-life balance, which I think is a very important thing for all of us here—not just the women. I think there are men around the chamber who need to be able to gain that balance as well.

All in all, I think it is a good motion for us to be discussing. We need to get more women to participate in all levels of politics and business and on government boards, but I think the Barnett government is doing a great job doing just that.

**HON AMBER-JADE SANDERSON (East Metropolitan)** [11.20 am]: I rise to speak in support of both aspects of this motion. I say at the outset that I do not think this government has been doing nothing about female representation; I just feel strongly that we all need to do more. This motion was borne out of a report in *The West Australian* yesterday, I think. It was an opinion piece by Andrea Burns, which stated that the Australian Institute of Company Directors report had found that the number of women on boards was up to 16.4 per cent. Andrea Burns, the journalist who wrote the op-ed piece, describes this as disgraceful. I would go further and say that, frankly, it is disgraceful and shameful that we find only 16.4 per cent are women and that the people selecting women to go on boards think that only 16.4 per cent are capable of taking on those roles.

There are a number of barriers to women taking on leadership roles, and there are consequences across the workforce of the low representation of women in leadership roles. While it has an impact at the top of an organisation, it also has an impact on the whole organisation. One of the major barriers for women in the workforce is having a family—working mothers. Career choices can seem incredibly limited for women when they have a family, particularly when it is a young family. Some women return to work part-time after they have had a child—that is if they are lucky enough to have that option. Although legally they are supposed to be given that option, it is not necessarily the case, and a whole lot of codes are given and messages sent to women about whether they can or cannot return to work. I have some real-life experiences of that.

In a lot of ways, returning to work part-time after having a child is presenting itself as the new glass ceiling for women. If a woman has a young baby and is fortunate enough to be allowed to return to work for, say, three days a week, more often than not she will return to work and do her whole job in three days a week for less pay. On top of that, she will often be offered fewer progression opportunities and fewer travel opportunities—just generally fewer opportunities. It is very difficult—I have done it—to say, “Can we not have that meeting on that day? I don't work on that day”, when the reality was that I worked every day. The situation is similar for a woman who works school hours. If a woman has school-age children, she will want to be able to engage with her kids, particularly younger ones in kindergarten or preprimary school, and pick them up from school. She will work from 9.00 am to 3.00 pm. There will be a quiet raising of the eyebrows and people will say, “Oh, you're just popping off early.” Frankly, sometimes I would have rather stayed at work, but it is not as though women go home and do not do any work. They go home and do more work. Their phone does not stop ringing and they also have their caring and family responsibilities. Part-time work in itself can be limiting. I think the members who talked about attitude change are absolutely right. I believe women are incredibly productive, and the fact that we can do our job in three days a week goes to demonstrate just that, even at senior levels.

I was fortunate to be at a senior level in my last role and was able to, I suppose, create my own hours, but many, many women do not have the opportunity to do that. I was very fortunate to be able to do that. When I had my daughter, I did what a lot of women do and joined a mothers group. That is just basically local women who get

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together. They have never had a baby before and it is a bit of a frightening experience. It gets them out of the house, organised and into some sort of routine. I think four out of the six women in my mothers group went from full-time work to having a baby. I think one of the other women was already caring for a young child and the other one worked from home, so she had some flexibility. I was the only one of those four women who was able to go back to work part-time. I was the only one who was able to negotiate with my employer and say, “These are the hours that I want to work. This is what I want to do”, and that was acceptable. The other three were all lawyers—all professional women. They were all told —

**The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Hon Adele Farina):** Order, members! A number of private conversations are happening around the chamber that are making it difficult for Hansard to hear the speaker. I ask that you conduct those conversations outside the chamber if they are absolutely necessary to be conducted at this time.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** They were all told in no uncertain terms that if they did not return to work full-time, there was not a job for them. Legally, an employer is not allowed to do that, but what options is a woman left with? If she takes on her employer, she marks herself as someone who is obviously not working with the employer; otherwise she puts her baby into full-time child care and goes back to work full-time. That is an incredibly hard thing to do.

**Hon Simon O'Brien:** Have you experienced that?

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Not personally, no, but I am saying that three of the four women who were working when they had their children all had that experience. I was the only one who was fortunate enough to be able to negotiate part-time work. I still did a full-time job in three days a week, but —

**Hon Liz Behjat:** I was made redundant when I was on maternity leave.

**Hon AMBER-JADE SANDERSON:** Yes, and that happens very often. In my previous role I represented a number of women who worked in child care of all things, and they were made redundant when they were pregnant. That happens also. Part-time work and flexible hours are part of the solution, but attitude change is also. That has to go with it, rather than the attitude that it is part-time work and it is an easy option. It is not an easy option. I think one of the biggest challenges I have ever faced is managing my work with my family.

Certainly, a lot of the women with children at my daughter’s school to whom I speak and with whom I am friends have taken one of two paths. They worked part-time for a number of years, and they got to a point in their careers at which they either went full-time, so that they could progress and keep going, or stopped working for a while, because the frustration became too great as a result of being passed over and over. I have seen both those examples in my immediate circle. Stopping work has a huge impact on a woman’s ability to re-enter the workforce and progress. It has an impact financially on her own personal economic security, as well as her superannuation.

Affordable quality child care after school and, obviously, during school hours is another significant barrier for women entering the workforce at every level. When I entered Parliament I knew that my hours would be long and that it would be a huge challenge to manage my family responsibilities. I made a personal commitment that I would always try to pick my daughter up from school—she is only six years old—when we are not sitting in Parliament. Frankly, I have had to argue and fight that case very often since I have been here, and that is only a few months. I had never experienced that before. That does not mean that I am not doing anything for those hours; it just means that that is my commitment at that time of the day. I still work in the evenings and I still work for the rest of the day. A huge attitude change is required here.

A lot has been made of the pay gap and representation of women in senior roles, but women in low-paid work face huge challenges as well. They often have access to only minimum employment conditions and they do not have any generous paid maternity schemes. They are highly casualised, so they have less economic security and less security of hours, and they do not have access to paid holidays to be able to care for their children during school holidays or when they are sick. Often employers are just not willing to be flexible at all.

I support the second part of the motion because governments have to lead by example on this; the market is absolutely not going to correct this inequity. If we wait, as Hon Samantha Rowe said, it could take 25 years to achieve that kind of representation. The market is not going to correct this inequity; governments have to lead by example and legislate to enforce minimum quotas to ensure better representation of women on boards and better pay and conditions for low-paid women as well, so that we can address that pay gap. I want to see better leadership from all governments, particularly the federal government, but the state government as well. The state government has gone some way to doing some work, but there is much, much more to do.

**HON SIMON O'BRIEN (South Metropolitan) [11.30 am]:** I would like to compliment Hon Alanna Clohesy on this motion. It is a very useful debate to have—indeed, it is almost a discussion. I have no problems at all in

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associating myself with the sentiments contained in the motion; regretfully I have only two minutes to contribute, but I wanted to get that on the record. I also want to acknowledge the remarks of not only the mover but the other speakers thus far, because all too often women who try to show leadership in this issue find themselves not being listened to or discounted. It is worthy of note that members on all sides and of both genders have listened with respect to the contributions that have been made this morning.

Society's values are evolving slowly. I do not say that as a sop to those advancing the sentiments contained in the motion. It is no comfort to be reminded that we are moving in the right direction, but we still have some way to go. Nonetheless, it shows that some significant progress has been made.

There was an allusion earlier to Hon Ruby Hutchison, who caused quite a stir simply by being elected to this place as a woman! How dare she! Obviously we have come a long way. I notice that of the 11 members of Her Majesty's loyal opposition present in this chamber, three are blokes and the other eight are women. Perhaps it is simply by weight of numbers that none of the blokes got the opportunity to participate fully in the debate, and I am sure there are no tensions about that.

I want to offer another perspective. When members refer to members on all sides, and the last speaker made an attempt to be as nonpartisan as she could in saying that the Barnett government ought to do something about this, I agree. But I can tell members that the Barnett government has tried and continues to do something. I can also recall a prominent woman in the Liberal Party, when asked how she combines all her responsibilities with a young family, simply stating, "The way thousands of other women do it!" That woman was Dixie Marshall.

Debate adjourned, pursuant to standing orders.