

WOMEN — ECONOMIC STANDING

Grievance

MS L.L. BAKER (Maylands) [9.38 am]: This morning my grievance is to the Minister for Women's Interests. I hope that this information will support the minister in her arguments on behalf of women in the cabinet. I speak from the perspective of somebody who has worked under the title of international expert on gender and development for two United Nations organisations throughout Asia and the Pacific and contributed to the global platform for women of the UN in that capacity. This is an area that I know like my second skin. It is something with which I am very, very familiar. I want to talk to the minister about the portfolio of women's interests. The minister knows, as I am sure the Liberal Party knows, that women in Western Australia are not doing well economically at the moment. They have not been doing well for some years and it is getting worse. I know the *Women's Report Card* is due out soon and I look forward to seeing that.

I listened to the minister's announcements on International Women's Day, and I waited with interest to hear about the extra resources that she has managed to convince her government to commit to stop women sliding any further backward in their economic standing. I understand that she made two commitments, but I am sure she will correct me if there are others. The first was to fund some scholarships in the non-traditional areas for girls and women into TAFE courses. That is fantastic and well done; it should have been done at least two years ago but we have it now so do more of that.

The second commitment was that the minister had held a consultation—I think it was the week before last—on women's economic independence. What is missing is any follow-up, so neither I nor the women's community know what strategies the minister is intending to put in place around the dreadful state of women's participation, particularly the gender pay gap. I followed the Minister for Women's Interests to several functions during International Women's Day—I hope the minister does not think I was stalking her! She invited me to the first one. I was interested to see and hear the reaction of the women who attended those events. I have not made a habit of going to many women-specific functions over the last couple of years, but when I did at IWD last Friday, I found that many of the women who were involved have been involved since my day. Indeed, I think many of the people the minister spoke to have worked on gender issues for longer than she has been alive. They said to me that there are no new ideas and funds have been cut. That was the feedback provided to me. I understand that people know who I am and they give me comments they think I want to hear sometimes, but it is a salutary point and I want the minister to hear it.

In May 2014, the Australian Bureau of Statistics data showed that Western Australian women are paid \$452 a week less than men for full-time work. That is a gap of 24.5 per cent; I know that the minister is aware of the figures. The gender pay gap is the most formidable barrier facing women's economic security in this state. It has much longer, broader consequences, including locking women out of financial independence, superannuation and good savings. Women are more likely than men to manage family costs in the home, including Medicare payments and school fees. The minister, who has held the reins for seven years now, must admit that the cost of living is very high now compared with what it was before then.

The government is planning to stop penalty rates for workers in the industries that predominantly employ females, such as hospitality, retail, aged care and cleaning et cetera. The Sunday trading issue will have major ramifications for women in this state because that is where they work; that is where they are clustered, and the minister knows that. Women have the highest rates of part-time, casual, low-paid and vulnerable work. This policy will directly impact on them and it is counterintuitive to the focus on women's economic independence. To clarify what I said yesterday, the number of females in WA Police, sworn and unsworn, is the lowest participation rate in Australia at 29.5 per cent. Under the minister's watch, working aged single women today are more exposed to the double perils of income and asset poverty than ever before. WA women are under-represented on boards and in business leadership roles. I know the minister has a strategy in place for that, but women in management are paid up to 45 per cent less than men in the same role. It is outrageous that women who work in administrative and support services have a gender pay gap of 44.7 per cent. Women working in art and recreation services have a pay gap of 35.1 per cent and women managers in health care experience a 25.5 per cent pay gap.

In 2010—the last figures I could find were in 2010—a single female household in the top quartile of the wealth distribution achieved on average a net worth of \$814 900, while men in that same top wealthy quartile achieved \$1 million. This is a phenomenon that is focused on not only the poorest and most vulnerable women; it covers the whole scale. For those who are interested, it also affects women in business leadership roles in many places. WA companies were very slow to sign on to "Daughter Water", the national campaign run by the Workforce Gender Equality Agency that is based on international research that found pay disparity shrinks when a boss has a daughter. Finally, just before the program was launched, 32 out of 600 businesses in WA who were invited managed to fess up. At the G20 summit held in Australia in 2014, the world's economic heavyweights,

the heavy hitters: the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, the International Labour Organization, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund argued that economic growth and welfare are fostered by increased female participation in the labour force. The G20 was also very clear that the elimination of gender inequality in economic power requires action, not just talk, to address discriminatory gender pay gaps. Minister, I have only 30 seconds left and I have not even touched on the issue of violence against women. There have been 156 deaths in the last 10 years and there are some other horrific statistics around this.

In 2008, there were at least 17 full-time equivalent staff in the women's policy office, in 2011 there were 6.7 FTE and now in 2015 the office has three FTE. I fear that the minister will erode that figure even more. What is the Minister for Women's Interest's policy on this?

MRS L.M. HARVEY (Scarborough — Minister for Women's Interests) [9.45 am]: I thank the member for Maylands for this grievance; it is a rare opportunity for me to receive a grievance or a question on the portfolio of women's interests. The Liberal-National government recognises that women face gender disparity. That needs to be highlighted and we are addressing that through some of our policies and programs. Since 2008, significant progress has been made in the women's interests portfolio. Since 2009, we have had two editions of the "Women's Report Card" and the 2015 report card will be released midyear. For members on this side of the house who may not be aware, that will provide a statistical snapshot of the lives of women, and an evidence base to inform government and the private sector of where we are, where we have come and where we need to get to.

The "Women in Leadership: Strategies for Change" report examines the current leadership culture and offers a range of resources for organisations to improve their gender profile. All these reports are available online for members, if they are interested in advancing the interests of Western Australian women. In March 2014, I launched the publication "Being Board Ready: A Guide for Women", which gives ambitious women information on how to network and build their curriculum vitae and experience base to enable them to move into senior executive and board positions. That resource is available online at the Department of Local Government and Communities website. The government knows that we need to build our pool of qualified and ambitious women and welcomes all women to access that site and the information available there to allow women to step forward into important leadership roles. Additionally, more than a dozen scholarships have been awarded for women to attend the Australian Institute of Company Directors' company directors course, to improve their board-readiness. There are over 20 scholarships for women who have been involved in the mentoring programs. The Liberal-National government has put additional support behind Women in Technology Western Australia, we have partnered with the Committee for Perth's Filling the Pool research project. That will give us a far better understanding of how Perth businesses are operating and what they can do to increase the number of female leaders. That report will be very interesting; it will be released in June this year and has some fairly confronting preliminary findings on the attitudes towards women that exist in some of our companies, particularly our ASX-listed companies.

In the past two years, 25 women were offered scholarships to attend the Ignition program at Curtin University's Curtin Centre for Entrepreneurship, and that program will continue this year. This week I was pleased to announce the training scholarships for women in non-traditional industries and trades scholarship program, which we committed to at the 2013 election. That is a \$1.2 million program over four years that has been coordinated by the Department of Training and Workforce Development. That will enable 400 women over four years to develop skills and gain qualifications in highly sought after trade and industry areas, including aviation, engineering, telecommunications and construction—a range of areas in which the participation rate of women traditionally has been lower than 25 per cent. The state government held the very first women's consultative forum with the Premier on 3 March 2015. The forum brought together a range of people from science and technology; science, technology, engineering and maths are the areas that we need to put the effort of all Western Australians into the future, but there is a low participation rate for women in particular.

We know that, in the past 10 years, the proportion of women in the public sector has increased from 63.8 per cent to 71.7 per cent compared with the proportion of women in the broader workforce in Western Australia, which is 43.6 per cent. We are attracting more high-calibre women to critical positions and senior levels in the public sector. The proportion of women in senior executive positions in the public sector has increased from 19.1 per cent in 2000 to 31 per cent currently. The representation of women on government boards and committees has increased from 35.5 per cent in 2011 to 41.7 per cent in 2013. This remains stable at around 42 per cent and it exceeds the national women on boards target, which was a minimum of 40 per cent of women on Australian government boards by 2015. We have beaten every other state in achieving that target and I am really proud of that. The number of women on the boards of the 14 WA government-owned corporations jumped by six percentage points between 2012 and 2013, and it is at 29.1 per cent now. The government continues to require every public sector agency under the Equal Opportunity Act to complete an equal employment opportunity management plan to ensure that employment programs and practices recognise and

include strategies to achieve diversity outcomes. That is not just for women; it is also for people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Progress is being made in these very important areas. There is still work to be done. I will continue in my role as Minister for Women's Interests to advance the interests of women, and I will do that through effective engagement with industry and with government.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen!

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Thank you, member for Girrawheen! I call you to order for the first time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The member for Girrawheen does not understand that these strategies are designed to address the gender pay gap.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, I call you to order for the second time.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Girrawheen, I call you to order for the third time.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: The gender pay gap —

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Member for Girrawheen, the gender pay gap exists because women are in occupations that have a lower earning capacity than those for men.

Ms M.M. Quirk interjected.

The SPEAKER: You are on three calls. If you want to have a rest, go ahead.

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: I have only 30 seconds left. All the strategies that I have been talking about are designed around channelling women, young women and women returning to the workforce into areas in which their earning capacity is greater. When a woman graduates from an electrical apprenticeship and walks into an \$80 000 job, as opposed to walking into the human services area, in which the maximum she could earn is \$50 000, that addresses the gender pay gap. That is a \$30 000 difference. I know that the sums of the member for Girrawheen are not very good; she cannot add and subtract, but we on this side of the house can.