

HON LYLA DAPHNE ELLIOTT

Condolence Motion

HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House) [1.01 pm] — without notice: I move —

That this house expresses its deep regret at the death of Hon Lyla Elliott, a former member of the Legislative Council for the North East Metropolitan Province, and places on record its appreciation for her long public service, and tenders its profound sympathy to members of her family in their bereavement.

As I begin, I acknowledge in the President's gallery and in the public gallery today members of Hon Lyla Elliott's family, former members of Parliament and colleagues, a number of party members, and friends and supporters.

Madam President, Lyla Daphne Elliott was born on 2 July 1934 and she passed away in February this year after a very aggressive form of breast cancer. Lyla Elliott was 83 years old and some might think that was not a bad innings, but she went far too soon. She had packed an awful lot into those 83 years, including 15 years of service in this place. It is fair to say her whole adult life was devoted to two things: her husband, Jack, and the Australian Labor Party. She was the second woman ever, after Ruby Hutchison, a long-term member for the same electorate, to be elected to the Legislative Council in Western Australia and the fifth woman to be elected to either house of Parliament in Western Australia. After having been elected in 1971, Lyla was also the only woman in the twenty-seventh Parliament for the next three years, until 1974. I know, Madam President, that Lyla would have been very pleased to see you in this place as the first female President, and I know she was pleased that I would be the first woman to lead the house if we were successful at the election.

Lyla was born in Geraldton. She left there when she was around four years of age to live and start school in Reedy, a small town in the goldfields. Four years later, her family moved to Waroona where she finished her schooling. Her family was not well off, but because there was no government high school in Waroona at that time and they could not afford to send her away to high school in Perth or Bunbury, they found the 9s a week out of their small weekly budget of £5 to send her to the local Catholic school for her secondary education. As many people did in those days, she left school at 15, in 1949, and she worked briefly at Wesfarmers and then got a job at the Nestle factory in Waroona. Like any young person new to a job she was nervous, but even more so because one of her jobs was to answer the telephone, an instrument she had never used before because her family was not affluent enough to have a telephone in the house. Like most of the challenges she faced, she mastered that one. In the early 1950s, the family moved to Perth and she got a job at the Perth office of Broome Freezing and Chilling Works. This was to be a short-term position as the office closed in late 1952, and that is when she got her first job with the Australian Labor Party.

She started work in the office of the party's general secretary, Joe Chamberlain, first as an assistant to his secretary and then as his secretary. For students of Labor history, and Lyla became one herself, Joe Chamberlain looms large in the WA Australian Labor Party. As his secretary, I have no doubt that Lyla would have known all the secrets—remember this was the time immediately after the split in the Labor Party—but whatever secrets she did know, she kept them close to her chest and she took them with her. Within a few weeks of starting work, she was part of the small team that had to organise that year's state conference, so she was thrown in at the deep end. For the next 18 years, apart from a short break when she worked for the British Labour Party, Lyla worked for the ALP in the basement office of the old trades hall building on Beaufort Street. She described those offices as “the dungeon”. The office had windows looking up to Beaufort Street so that when she looked out her view was of the feet of people who were walking past. In an interview that she gave after leaving Parliament, she described how one day she heard the sound of running water. She looked up to the window to find a young boy answering the call of nature right outside. Needless to say, he got quite a shock to see a young woman looking up at him from the dungeon of trades hall.

In 1955, Lyla turned 21 and her birthday celebration, we are told, was a relatively simple one involving a family dinner at the Savoy Hotel, followed by a Jerry Lewis movie. That year saw a number of firsts for Lyla: her first trip overseas, a sea trip to Singapore; she first joined the Labor Party; and she made her first public speech to the Mount Lawley branch of the Australian Labor Party to respond to her acceptance as a new member. That experience was so nerve-racking for Lyla that she vowed, and told others, she would never make another speech in her life. Apparently, this was a vow she would make a number of times in her early life. Even after 15 years in Parliament and many public speeches on the floor of the house, public speaking was not something that she enjoyed. Reflecting on her career, she said she loved meeting people individually or in small groups and the constituent contact but, in her own words, “hated addressing meetings”. She said she was always worried about saying or doing the wrong thing publicly. She also said, “I think if you're laid back and don't let it worry you, life is much easier as a member of Parliament.” There were no speeches to be made by her in her work as secretary to Joe Chamberlain.

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After 13 years with the ALP, she decided she needed a break and she travelled to the United Kingdom, her intention being to get away from politics for a while. She left in 1966 by ship, passing through the Suez Canal on the way. After a time holidaying in the UK, she decided to seek work, and briefly taking a position in a medical practice found that she did miss politics after all because it was the middle of the 1966 general election in the UK. She consequently joined the South Kensington branch of the British Labour Party and then got a job with the party's overseas branch, which was responsible for researching world issues. During her time there, she met Prime Ministers Harold Wilson, Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Golda Meir of Israel, as well as many other prominent political figures of the time. She was also, again, to come up against her least favourite activity. A prominent figure was unable to fulfil a speaking engagement at the Central London Fabian Society, so Lyla was asked to fill in as a guest speaker and talk about her experiences in the Australian Labor Party. She was apparently so nervous that a friend took her to the pub over the road and reinforced her nerve with a couple of double scotches. Lyla said that when she entered the hall, "My nerves were gone, but so had my memory." She struggled through 20 minutes and then gave up, but luckily the question-and-answer session dragged the engagement out to a respectable one and a half hours. Once again she vowed never to make another public speech as long she lived.

She left London in 1967 and, as luck would have it, staff changes at trades hall meant she was able to take up work where she had left off and she stayed as Joe Chamberlain's secretary until she entered Parliament in 1971 as part of the Tonkin Labor government. Ruby Hutchison, long-term member for the North East Metropolitan Province, was planning on retiring, and approached Lyla some time in 1967 or 1968 to put herself forward as a candidate for preselection for that seat at the 1971 election. Lyla said that she was initially reluctant; the dreaded spectre of public speaking figured large in her reluctance. She agreed, for the 1968 election, to run as the Labor candidate for Floreat, a safe Liberal seat. To her surprise, she found doorknocking and meeting the public not too frightening, so, in the lead-up to the next election, she agreed to put her name forward to replace Ruby Hutchison. She was one of seven nominees—two women and five men—and she won preselection. When asked what her ambition was when she entered Parliament, Lyla said, "I don't remember entering Parliament with a burning ambition to change the world; that came later." There was much about the world that Lyla did her very best to change for the better.

She was elected on 20 February 1971 but, of course, was not sworn in to the Legislative Council until 22 May that year. It was a regret of Lyla's that her father did not live to see this great achievement; he had died just a few months earlier, in December 1970. However, her mother, who had become a staunch Labor supporter over the years, was justifiably proud of Lyla. When the new Legislative Council convened, Lyla was given the honour of moving the Address-in-Reply motion and delivering the first speech. She was conscious of the honour, but we can imagine the mixed feelings—a person who dreaded public speaking addressing a chamber full of members, many of them very experienced; she was the only woman in the whole Parliament. There was a packed public gallery, and she was not allowed to read her speech. In those days there were no microphones in the chamber. However, anyone reading her wonderful inaugural speech will see that she appears to have carried off that challenge very well. After thanking the electors and making special mention of Ruby Hutchison's long service as the first woman member of the Legislative Council, Lyla briefly touched on the unbalanced value of electors' votes, with the widely varying numbers of electors in each electorate. Some things never change. The bulk of her speech was taken up with a thoughtful consideration of the challenges facing Aboriginal people in Western Australia.

After that start, Lyla went on to make many more speeches, coping with the stress of public speaking by being very prepared, undertaking detailed research and having copious notes to refer to. She came into the Parliament as the only woman, and into a government that had spent the previous 12 years in opposition. At first she felt she was not taken seriously, but she soon convinced her colleagues of her intellect and her work ethic. Researching, writing and typing her own speeches, her own correspondence and other documents, she worked hard. At that time, members did not have an electorate secretary or electorate officer. Members shared the services of two typists, who could type letters and other documents for them. Members also worked from Parliament House; they did not have electorate offices. Parliamentary research facilities were also less than they are now; it was not until 1975 that Parliament had its first fully qualified librarian to assist members to find primary source documents.

Despite the challenges, Lyla represented her electorate well and championed a wide range of issues. Sound, well thought out and well researched policy was her strength. She enjoyed the intellectual rigour of the policy process, and genuinely pursued it. The issues she worked on included abortion legislation; child care—she was founding chair of a day care scheme that in later years was named in her honour; family planning; family and domestic violence; child welfare; children's employment and exploitation; improved job opportunities for women, especially an increased range of apprenticeships; housing; aged care; mental health patient care; animal welfare, which she became famous for; nuclear disarmament; and the rights of people with disabilities. In her community, Lyla also initiated the Lockridge Community Health Centre, the Lockridge Senior Citizens Steering Committee and the Swan Community Youth Support Scheme. One issue that frustrated Lyla while in Parliament was the weighted voting system that meant Labor governments did not get a majority in the upper house, no matter how convincing the election win, and this sometimes led to government legislation being rejected in the Legislative

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Council. Lyla felt that an enlarged Legislative Assembly with a greatly increased committee system could provide the legislative review process required.

Lyla married Jack in 1976 while still a member of this house, and she recognised the challenge he faced of being married to a busy member of Parliament. She said that Jack was a man who was very understanding and who never complained about her being away from home for long periods. Many people feel that Lyla retired too early from Parliament and that she missed her chance to become a minister. With a redistribution of boundaries, Lyla was given a half term of three years from 1983. She was disappointed, but decided not to appeal the decision and did not renominate for a position for the 1986 election. Lyla always approached her work in Parliament as a member of a team, but also as a person elected to represent her electorate. She balanced both of those roles and used the full range of parliamentary tools in her efforts to make our society fairer—parliamentary questions, motions, speaking on government bills and introducing private members' bills. As many members in opposition find, private members' bills are rarely successful. However, one in which Lyla had great success was her bill to amend the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals Act 1920 to make it an offence to dump any animal—her so-called cat bill. Previously the law had referred only to dogs.

Lyla's retirement from Parliament gave her more time with Jack, but she continued, and even extended, her involvement in various community organisations and local committees. As well as the organisations already mentioned, her community involvement included chairing the 1985 domestic violence task force; chairing the Home and Community Care Advisory Committee between 1986 and 1988; chairing the Consultative Committee on Residential Child Care; being a member of the WA Community and Family Committee; being a member of the Nulsen Haven Board of Management; chairing the TAFE Performance Appraisal Panel; chairing the Department of Employment, Vocational Education and Training Promotion by Merit Board of Review; being a member of the state Animal Welfare Advisory Committee; serving as a member of the RSPCA Animal Ethics Committee; serving on the Midland Workmen's Health Care Place Board of Management, and becoming a life member; and acting as patron of the Swan View and Districts Agricultural and Arts Society. Lyla was a member of at least a dozen other organisations. Of course she also held many positions within the Labor Party, such as member of the state executive; first woman chair of the state Parliamentary Labor Party; and an active member until her last days of Perth Labor Women, many of whom are here in the public gallery today. She was also chair of the party's health and social welfare committee.

Lyla also took the opportunity to further her education, and in 2001, at 67 years of age, she graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honours from Edith Cowan University, specialising in history. She wrote her honours thesis on the Midland railway workshops. In amongst all this community activism and adult education, Lyla continued to help out at every election. She was a prolific—I think that is understating it—writer of letters and provider of support to many women in the Labor Party, including this one. She offered her advice and wisdom to all who sought it, and occasionally to some state secretaries who did not seek it. She had plenty of advice to offer party officials on campaign tactics. She was an active volunteer. I first remember coming into contact with her after she had left Parliament, in the lead-up to the 2001 election. She and I were staffing phones in the party office, as people were ringing in to ask where they could cast a postal vote, et cetera. I was very animatedly describing with my hands—which was pretty useless because I was on the phone—where a person living in the Karrinyup area could go to cast a vote. This woman, whom I knew was a former member but I did not know very well, turned around in her chair and was staring at me as I gesticulated to this person on the phone about where they should go to vote. After that, we became firm friends, although I think she thought I was a bit crazy.

Lyla publicly criticised the privatisation of the Commonwealth Bank, which she saw as a very backward step. More recently, she was most disappointed with the vilification of Australia's first woman Prime Minister, saying that it was outrageous that people of the right in prominent positions in the media and politics feel it is acceptable to advocate physical harm to a person holding this high office. One would hope that this is a passing phase. Lyla continued to offer me support and advice. She did old-school research; she would cut clippings out of the newspaper and drop them in or send them to me. In recent years, she wound back some of her activities to take greater care of her beloved Jack and was always fiercely protective of his privacy and his dignity.

Lyla was very active in Perth Labor Women; many of those people are here today. Lyla took seriously her obligation to be a mentor to the next generation of Labor women and continued to be actively engaged with party members until she became too ill to do so. When she entered Parliament she joked about not having a burning ambition to change the world, but she did change the world here in Western Australia. It is true that some of the issues she campaigned on still need to be addressed; however, more women are active in Labor politics in Western Australia than when she entered Parliament, for which she should take credit and it is part of her legacy. She changed the world just by her example, which is why we now have many more women in Parliament than when she was first elected. She changed the world personally for everyone who encountered her dignity, her intellect and her wisdom. Her history is a matter of public record. Her example to others and her list of achievements will live on.

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Although she will be deeply missed, she will continue to change the world for many years to come. On behalf of the Australian Labor Party, I send my deepest condolences to Lyla's family and friends.

HON PETER COLLIER (North Metropolitan — Leader of the Opposition) [1.22 pm]: I rise to speak to the condolence motion on behalf of the Liberal Party.

Lyla Elliott was born in Geraldton in July 1934, the daughter of a fitter and turner. She was educated in Waroona at the local primary school and at St Joseph's Convent, graduating with a junior certificate. Like so many young people in the postwar era, Lyla moved straight into the workforce, as a clerical worker in Waroona from 1949 and in Perth after 1952. It was in 1952 that Lyla Elliott commenced employment as a secretary working for the state executive of the Australian Labor Party. From 1956 she was the personal secretary to F.E. Chamberlain, who served as the influential state secretary of the party from 1949 until 1974; also serving as federal secretary from 1961 to 1963. Working with "Joe" Chamberlain for 15 years would have been a valuable political apprenticeship, which included secretarial work for federal executives and for conferences from 1959 to 1963. Joining the Australian Labor Party in 1955, Lyla became a member of the WA state executive in her own right. In 1966 she attended the Socialist International Conference in Stockholm as an observer.

At the age of 33, Lyla Elliott was the Australian Labor Party candidate for the new district of Floreat for the 1968 state election. Female candidates seldom represented the major political parties, and those who did tended to be older women. Floreat was, of course, a strong Liberal seat won by the late Andrew Mensaros, but she polled a substantial 3 474 votes, and gained 34 per cent of the vote after a partial distribution of preferences. Subsequently, she was selected to contest the North East Metropolitan Province of the Legislative Council at the 1971 election. Lyla Elliott was chosen as the successor to the first woman elected to the Legislative Council, Hon Ruby Hutchison, who had been originally elected in 1954 at the age of 62. The North East Metropolitan Province had been created in 1965 and consisted of the Legislative Assembly seats of Ascot, Belmont, Maylands, Swan and Mirrabooka, with nearly 77 000 electors. In 1971, the Liberal Party did not stand candidates in a number of safe Labor seats and Lyla Elliott's only opponent was a candidate of the Democratic Labor Party. She had a prominent role in Labor's campaign, delivering one of its ABC television broadcast segments. On February 1971, she was elected with a majority of 22 026, or 66.8 per cent of the vote; the largest numerical majority gained by any candidate in that election. All five Legislative Assembly seats were won by Labor, including Mirrabooka; the capture of which from the Liberal Party gave the Tonkin government its majority.

Lyla Elliott was only the second female member of the Legislative Council and the fifth female member of the Western Australian Parliament. She was also the only woman among 81 members of the 1971–74 Parliament. This was to change in 1974 with the election of Hon Grace Vaughan and Hon Margaret McAleer in the Legislative Council, and the election of June Craig in the Legislative Assembly. In 1974 Lyla Elliott became the first woman to serve as Deputy Chair of Committees and, after 1978, was the first female chair of the Parliamentary Labor Party. She has been remembered for well-delivered and intelligent contributions to debate. She was, however, less comfortable with interjections and the rough and tumble of the chamber, which for some is a negative aspect of Parliament.

At the 1977 election, the North East Metropolitan Province comprised 82 863 electors in the seats of Swan, Morley, Dianella, Maylands and Mount Lawley, and the political climate favoured the comfortable re-election of the Court coalition government. Nevertheless, Lyla Elliott held a majority of 6 000 votes against the Liberal Party and 54.2 per cent of the vote. Within her electorate she initiated organisations such as the Lockridge Community Health Centre and was chair of the Swan Community Youth Support Scheme from 1976 to 1983.

Prior to the 1983 state election, a redistribution increased the size of the Legislative Council from 32 members to 34 members, with a significant rearrangement of the metropolitan provinces. The adjacent East Metropolitan Province was abolished and two new provinces were created. Three incumbent Labor members from the Legislative Council moved to new provinces: Hon Joe Berinson, the other MLC for North East Metropolitan, transferred to the new North Central Metropolitan Province; East Metropolitan MLC, Hon Fred McKenzie, contested the six-year vacancy for the North East Metropolitan Province; and Lyla Elliott stood aside and contested the simultaneous by-election that was held for the other North East Metropolitan seat for a three-year term. The province had shifted east and south and consisted of the seats of Maylands, Ascot, Morley–Swan, Helena and Welshpool, with 85 900 electors enrolled. In another straight fight with the Liberal Party, she won 67.6 per cent of the vote and a majority of 25 714 votes. She did not seek preselection for the 1986 election and left Parliament at the age of 51. It is worth noting that by 1986 there were nine women members of the Western Australian Parliament.

Lyla Elliott was very active in the community after leaving Parliament. From 1986 to 1989 she was a member of the Nulsen Haven board of management, and chaired the Home and Community Care Advisory Committee. She undertook chair and committee roles in the fields of vocational training, women's health, and animal welfare. She

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completed a Bachelor of Arts honours degree in 2001 and was a member of numerous organisations including Amnesty International, the Women’s Electoral Lobby and several historical societies, contributing to significant publications of local history.

Lyla Elliott articulated her strong political principles with firmness but without stridency, gaining the respect of political opponents. Not since May Holman, MLA, had a woman under the age of 40 sat in the Parliament of Western Australia. It is regrettable that the media has ignored the passing of a lady who made such a significant contribution to Parliament, to a major political party and to many community organisations. We extend our sympathy to her family and her many friends.

HON JACQUI BOYDELL (Mining and Pastoral — Deputy Leader of the National Party) [1.28 pm]: I rise on behalf of the National Party to contribute to and support the condolence motion honouring the memory of Hon Lyla Elliott. First, I would like to express sincere condolences to her family, who I am very glad could join us in the gallery today. Some of her former colleagues are also in the public gallery. I express to the Labor Party our sympathies on the loss of an obviously very active and engaged former member. We all love those long-term members of our parties, for sure.

In reading some of the history of Hon Lyla Elliott, it was interesting to note that over her 15 years of service to this house, she also engaged in community service and service to the Labor Party and that passion she had continued throughout her whole life. I think having the energy to do that throughout her whole life and really seeking to bring issues to the forefront through the Labor Party and through being involved in the community is really a great testament to her and is definitely something I am sure that her family is very proud of.

I also noted a couple of things that really struck her when she entered the house as a member. Her reflections and memories of that time are issues that we still deal with as a house today. It highlighted to me not only how far we have come on a number of those issues, but also that there is still work to do. She was really passionate about a couple of things that members in this house still talk about today—being a woman and being a representative in the Parliament. This is exceptionally still a big issue in our house as the Parliament tries to find ways in which to play a mentor role and encourage women to enter public life as a member of Parliament, because there is much for women to offer in that role. Other issues were the fairness of the electoral system—something that still has currency today—and the lack of member facilities during her time. Luckily, current members have an amazing suite of services available to assist us to do our job. It is the effort of members like Hon Lyla Elliott back then who raised those issues that benefits us as members today. She also questioned at that time the effectiveness of long sitting hours and the impact that had on the capacity of members to do their job. Without people like Hon Lyla Elliott raising those issues in her time as a member, members would still be struggling at the coalface with those issues today.

I find that condolence motions are a good time to reflect on how members found themselves in here and how they utilised their time. I will read out some of Hon Lyla Elliott’s comments and reflections from a document titled, “Making a Difference — A Frontier of Firsts” —

When entering Parliament, my perception of my role as a member was not one of an individual, but rather as a member of a team endorsed by a political party with a platform of reform aimed at achieving a fairer society. However, I always regarded as extremely important my responsibilities to the people and organisations in my electorate and enjoyed my contact with them. It was here that I gained great satisfaction. Many of the issues raised by me in the Parliament came out of these contacts.

I took advantage of all the usual ways to introduce matters of concern to me and the community. These included parliamentary questions, motions, speaking during debate on government Bills and procedural motions, and by way of introducing private members’ Bills. The subjects ranged over a very wide area, but some of the more important ones dealt with the care of the aged, problems of Aboriginal people, protection of children, women’s issues, consumer affairs, the environment, workers’ industrial conditions, animal welfare and the dangers associated with the uranium industry and nuclear technology.

If members read any of the history of Hon Lyla Elliott, they will find that those issues were at the forefront of her mind during her parliamentary career. She was a champion for those issues and indeed a champion of social issues throughout her whole life. She regarded her membership of the Labor Party as a vehicle to put those issues to the forefront of people’s minds. I also note, as the Leader of the House did, Hon Lyla Elliott’s concerns in later life about the treatment received by Australia’s first female Prime Minister. Certainly, I personally think that that was an ugly period in federal Parliament. I know that in the former Parliament other members of the house spoke about the way in which former Prime Minister Julia Gillard was treated by the media and the political process at the time. Those issues need to be continually highlighted by former members of Parliament, as Hon Lyla Elliott did, because we can use our profile to pursue those issues that need to be discussed.

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Lyla achieved some remarkable heights during her time in public life. She was the second woman to enter the Legislative Council and the only female member in either chamber in her first three years. I can only imagine how isolating that may have been at that time. She was the first female chairperson of the Parliamentary Labor Party and the first female Deputy Chairman of Committees. She was also a key figure in shaping the Parliament's committee structure that all members of the house work with today, and it is an effective system. In doing all these things she elevated the status, profile and representation of women in the Parliament. It is an incredible legacy of which I am a grateful beneficiary. Her membership of particular committees also gives a great insight into her character and what was important to her, and it is important for us to reflect on what was important to former members of this house. She was chairperson of the family day care scheme, which was later named after her, as the Leader of the House has already indicated. She was chairperson of the domestic violence task force, chairman of the Home and Community Care Advisory Committee, a member of the RSPCA's Animal Ethics Committee and the state Animal Welfare Advisory Board, and a member of the Midland Women's Health Care Place board to name a few; she was certainly a very engaged member of her community. Hon Lyla Elliott was a passionate champion for issues of social justice, and during her time as a member of Parliament she raised the profile of the many challenges faced by women and the broader community.

I conclude my contribution here today and support the condolence motion by saying that Hon Lyla Elliott leaves a powerful legacy in this place of which her family and friends should be very proud.

HON ALISON XAMON (North Metropolitan) [1.36 pm]: I rise on behalf of the Greens to indicate our support for the motion recognising the life of Hon Lyla Elliott. I draw the attention of members to the fact that on entering this chamber from the President's corridor, members can see a photo of Hon Lyla Elliott. I have noted this every time I have walked past for many years because Hon Lyla Elliott is surrounded by the photos of many men's faces. So it is with great pleasure that I am happy to stand in this place and reflect on her life.

Hon Lyla Elliott was clearly an incredibly hard worker and displayed substantial fortitude. Her service to the Labor Party in particular is notable. Hon Lyla Elliott became a Labor Party member in 1955 and played instrumental roles in the party for the rest of her life. She was the second woman ever to be elected to the Legislative Council. When she was first elected in 1971, she was the only female member in the entire Parliament until 1974 when June Craig was elected to the Legislative Assembly. I agree with the comments made previously that being the only female parliamentarian in this entire place would have been a particularly interesting experience.

During her time in Parliament, she was the Deputy Chairman of Committees from 1974 to 1977 and 1983 to 1986, and a member of several parliamentary committees including the Honorary Royal Commission Appointed to Inquire into and Report upon the Treatment of Alcohol and Drug Dependents and the Select Committee on Sport and Recreational Activities in Western Australia. Of course, she was also the chairperson of the Parliamentary Labor Party. When researching and reflecting on Hon Lyla Elliott's many accomplishments, I cannot help but feel a certain affinity with many of her views and priorities. As has already been mentioned, much of what she stood for is still very relevant today. In particular, I note her advocacy for electoral reform, a more democratic system for greater transparency in government, the rights of working people, equal opportunity, family planning legislation, a better deal for people with disabilities and improved care for the aged and also mental health patients. I note that this was at a time when a lot of people were not really thinking about the issues concerning people with mental health problems.

I note that Lyla was also a fierce opponent, as I am, of nuclear technology and called for the rapid research into and support for the use of non-polluting renewable energy resources.

After an impressive 15 years in the Legislative Council, Lyla chose to retire from politics and did not contest the 1986 election. I note that that was much to the disappointment of many people. Her retirement from politics, however, as has been said, did not signal a retirement from service to the community. Lyla Elliott was named chairperson of a number of government bodies, including the Home and Community Care Advisory Committee, the Consultative Committee on Residential Child Care, the TAFE Performance Appraisal Panel and the Department of Employment, Vocational Education and Training Promotion by Merit Board of Review. Lyla Elliott was a member of many women's organisations. She became a life member of the Midland Women's Health Care Place board of management and the Lyla Elliott Family Day Care Scheme. I note that she also studied history at Edith Cowan University, became active in many historical organisations and authored publications on the history of the Perth hills.

Hon Lyla Elliott dedicated her life to service. Her contribution to public life across many areas is noteworthy. Western Australia has benefited enormously from the life of Lyla and we are a better state because of her contributions. I extend my sincere condolences to those members of the ALP who knew her and who were inspired

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by her and who miss her, and also my sincere condolences to the family and friends of Hon Lyla Elliott, who must miss her deeply.

HON Dr SALLY TALBOT (South West) [1.42 pm]: Thank you, Madam President. Lyla would have been proud and delighted to hear people standing in this place and saying, “Thank you, ‘Madam’ President.” Of course, she would also have wildly celebrated the fact that we have a woman leading the house in Hon Sue Ellery, and of course a few weeks ago we had the first female Governor of this state opening this Parliament. I just wish that Lyla had lasted a few more months so that she could have celebrated those really magnificent moments in the life of the state of Western Australia. They mark a cause for which Lyla campaigned tirelessly during her whole life.

Lyla was a dedicated parliamentarian. Whenever I think of Lyla’s contribution to the Labor Party and to this Parliament, I go back to something that was said during my induction to this place in 2005 when the late lamented Laurie Marquet, who was the Clerk of this place, came to the lectern at the front of the chamber with all his robes flying behind him and reminded us that “the other place has the politicians; I have the parliamentarians”! Lyla embodied that; she was truly a dedicated parliamentarian. She was also a fine woman, and that is a pretty powerful combination. I think we can see the mark of her contribution both as a parliamentarian and as a human being in two particular ways this afternoon. The first is when we look at the esteemed guests we have with us today. It is really a mark of the woman that Lyla Elliott was that, in effect, the female royalty of our party have come to this place this afternoon to share with us in paying tribute to her. The second way is the contributions to this debate. I am sure that Lyla’s family and friends will be very appreciative of the contribution that Hon Sue Ellery made to this debate, which I think was very moving. I also want to particularly note the fact that Hon Jacqui Boydell and Hon Alison Xamon, who would not have known Lyla in the way that many of us knew her, also made speeches that show the effect that she has had on the way we operate in this place. She was one of our most significant figures in the history of this state. I really thank both members, on behalf of Lyla’s family and friends, for their heartfelt comments this afternoon. Hon Jacqui Boydell described her as active and engaged. I think that is an understatement. Lyla was an object lesson to us all with the level of activity and engagement that she sustained through her entire life.

When we are advising new members about their inaugural speech, comments are often made about whether they should put much work into it and what they should aim to cover. I know that it was pointed out recently in the induction sessions to new members in the other place that their inaugural speech is very important because it often provides the main source material for their vale in this place. I am very happy to say that that is not the case with Lyla. Lyla’s whole life was her contribution. She was not one of the members for whom the only real reference material of any substance was her inaugural speech. She contributed consistently at a level that makes many of us in this place feel quite fatigued just reading the list of things that she did both while she was a member and after she retired, albeit reluctantly, from this place.

I must share with honourable members and our guests this afternoon the note that I got from my office a couple of months ago, after Lyla had died, when we knew that this condolence motion was going to be moved. I asked my office to give me a list of all the organisations that she was actively engaged in. The note came back from my office saying, “It seems there wasn’t a community organisation that Lyla wasn’t a member of, so I can give you the list if you want.” I think we have covered it pretty well this afternoon, so I will let that particular part of Lyla’s record stand. It has already been referred to.

The members speaking before me commented on the fact that Lyla was a first. Can members imagine what it must have been like to be the only woman in this place? We know the stories about Dame Dorothy having to pop home to go to the toilet because there were no loos in this place. Lyla was here not long after that. It must have been a lonely life. I particularly like the comment that she put on the record in that wonderful document that David Black and Harry Phillips put together, “Making a Difference—A Frontier of Firsts: Women in the Western Australian Parliament 1921–2012”. In her reminiscences that are published there, Lyla says, particularly when she was the only woman in this place, that she would ring organisations and government departments making representations on behalf of her constituents and herself, and she would give her name as Lyla Elliott, MLC, and people would assume that she worked for Methodist Ladies’ College! She had to explain to them that she was a parliamentarian. Nowadays I suppose they would think she worked for a life insurance company. She made that point, and it was the point that I made when I led the Address-in-Reply to the Governor’s opening speech in this Parliament, that by doing it as a woman you actually lead the way for other women to come along and take for granted some of those things that were fought for. I join my voice to other people in this place who have observed that Lyla was the trailblazer here and she has made it easier for us to follow her.

An issue that Lyla campaigned on without ceasing for her whole political life was Aboriginal disadvantage. I will take this opportunity to refer to something that she said in her inaugural speech. I think it was very poetically expressed but she did it in a way that signifies the fight in her—the fight that she was prepared to put in on behalf of disadvantaged people in this state. There is nothing of a concession about this observation. She stated —

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... the Indigenous people who inhabited this country at the dawn of its history were a proud, self supporting race, rich in culture and religion. ... They belonged to the land; they loved it; they were part of it, and it was part of them. Once it was taken from them the fabric of their society was destroyed.

She was one of the first and consistent pioneers in our party to work very actively on restoring some of that fabric that had been destroyed by colonisation. I think she would have found it particularly celebratory that Josie Farrer has been returned to this Parliament as the member for Kimberley. She also made her feelings known about the move that was made by this Parliament a couple of years ago to recognise Aboriginal people in the Western Australian Constitution.

Lyla adopted a position that is not always fashionable in that she was a fierce champion of the Parliament itself. I have often observed that members of Parliament do not do enough to explain what we do day after day to make the lives of ordinary people in Western Australia slightly better than it might otherwise be. Lyla took on the task of trying to make the institution of Parliament more responsive to some of those demands. For example, as Hon Jacqui Boydell has said, Lyla campaigned vociferously to end the gerrymander in this place, on the basis that members of Parliament need to be able to focus on their electorates, and that cannot happen if there is under representation in highly populous areas.

Another reason for the support that is being shown for Lyla today, as demonstrated by the number of guests in the President's gallery, is that she championed the work that is done by electorate officers. Lyla was a superb administrator. She knew that in order to keep the party machine running effectively in terms of policy and activist agendas, members of Parliament need to have a good filing system. When Lyla came into this Parliament, she found that all the men who were running the show were surrounded by stacks of paper and were given very little assistance. She therefore started to talk about the importance of professionalising what we do in this place. It was largely due to the campaigns that Lyla ran that the position of electorate officer was raised to the level of a profession. We provide training and support for our electorate officers, and people are very proud to be an electorate officer. I can tell members that Lyla was one of the first to recognise that without that support, members of Parliament would do a much poorer job.

The third issue on which Lyla campaigned tirelessly was the rights of women and the inequalities that are inbuilt in our system. I know that for many young women today it would come as a surprise to hear that women like Lyla had to campaign on abortion rights, on contraception, for goodness sake, and on domestic violence. Young women today regard access to safe and efficient contraception as one of life's basic rights. It is because of the work of women like Lyla that young women today accept contraception as a basic right that cannot be taken away from them. Sadly, of course, that is not the case with domestic violence. We have not got there yet. We are trying; everybody is trying. However, the level of intimate partner violence that women experience is still far beyond what is acceptable in our community.

That leads me to the point on which I want to conclude. We can take three basic lessons from Lyla's life. Even though Lyla has died, she lives on in the hearts of all of us. The first lesson that I take from Lyla is the importance of building relationships. Lyla understood that above and beyond anything else, politics is about the quality of the relationships that we build. That is why Lyla constantly cut articles out of newspapers and mailed them to us. That is why she bailed us up at the end of every meeting and said, "We haven't had a chance to talk about this; when can we do it?" It is because she knew that the relationships that she built with members on both sides of politics would establish the grounds for fundamental change. Lyla was tireless in building, cultivating and sustaining those relationships, and that continued until very shortly before she became so ill and died.

The second lesson that I take from Lyla is that it is okay to maintain an attitude. We do not need to have everybody like us, even some of the time. We need to stick up for what we believe in. I love the way in which Hon Sue Ellery recounted this aspect of Lyla's personality. Lyla was not a show pony. She did not like the limelight. She was like most of us. She got shaky before she stood up to speak. She would quite happily pass her public appearances to the next person in the queue. What I saw in Lyla was the little motto that goes through my mind sometimes—feel the fear, and do it anyway. That is what Lyla showed us in her life. That is a valuable lesson. It is a great way of encouraging our own activism as we move through life.

The third lesson that I take from Lyla is that we should never, ever give up. Lyla fought until the day she died for the things that she believed in. I am convinced that although Lyla has died, death will not stop her. I am sure that as the decades go by, we will hear Lyla's voice come through in the voices of our young women and young parliamentarians. Lyla was such a strong personality, such a fine woman and such a dedicated parliamentarian that it will take a lot more than death to stop her.

HON ALANNAH MacTIERNAN (North Metropolitan — Minister for Regional Development) [1.55 pm]: I am very proud to be in this place and add my voice to what I believe is a celebration of the public life of Lyla Elliott. I must

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say that the synopsis presented to us in the three key points that were made by Hon Dr Sally Talbot sums up beautifully the essence that was the public Lyla Elliott.

I want to acknowledge in particular the contributions of Hon Jacqui Boydell and Hon Alison Xamon. It is reaffirming to see that across the parliamentary spectrum, women who perhaps did not know Lyla personally absolutely understand the strength of her contribution to this state. Members have referred to the fact that Lyla was the only woman in Parliament at the time she was elected. We have talked about how difficult that would be. I remember that when I came into the Legislative Council in 1993, there were only four female members in this place. There were a few blokes in Parliament who did not think women should be here. That was more than 20 years after Lyla came into this Parliament. She was the only women in not only this chamber but the entire Parliament. Lyla has talked about how she had to put up with a certain amount of condescension. It was not that people were nasty and unpleasant to her, but there was a sense in which she was not taken seriously. However she persisted.

It is also important to dwell on not just people's shortcomings but also their strengths. It is a bit like David and Goliath. We always presume that Goliath had the upper hand. However, David had certain strengths that Goliath did not have, such as more modern slingshot technology. This was touched on in part by Hon Dr Sally Talbot. Lyla came into this place with a bunch of skills that other members of Parliament at the time did not have. She knew how to type. She knew how to file papers. She knew how to be organised. At a time when only two persons were provided to give secretarial assistance to back bench members of Parliament, members had an enormous advantage if they knew how to organise themselves. Whenever we—all of us—look at these things, we should look not only at the disadvantage but also at the advantage and note that she obviously had great personal communication skills and the ability to talk right across the spectrum of voters, as is witnessed by the fact that she received a record vote when she was first elected. I first met Lyla in the late 1970s when I was a member of the Perth electorate council. I was very surprised during Hon Sue Ellery's contribution when she said that Lyla was fearful of public speaking. That was something I never realised in all my years of knowing Lyla, because I always saw her as such a strong, forceful figure; a person who took no step backwards on the positions she held. It is interesting to know that she had that reluctance but in all the dealings I had with her, she always presented as someone who had an incredible commitment, drive and determination to use every possible opportunity she had to advance those very, very many causes that she believed in.

We have had so much presentation here today of people honouring the great work she did. I had to check when she retired from Parliament because we never had the sense that there had been any change in Lyla's contribution. She was as omnipresent and as forceful throughout the 1990s and 2000s as she had been during those years in Parliament. She certainly was a figure who was ever present at Australian Labor Party conferences and around the traps of Parliament and engaged on a huge array of issues.

Right up until I was the federal member for Perth, I remember getting regular calls and letters from Lyla wanting to talk about contemporary federal issues. I think it is a rare thing to see, although I want to acknowledge Kay Hallahan in the gallery today as someone who, I guess, was like Lyla in that respect, whose commitment and involvement seemed to well and truly transcend her period in Parliament. I acknowledge a little bit of continuity here in my very excellent ministerial liaison officer, Shelley Court, former electorate officer to Tom Stephens, the daughter of Pat Chamberlain, who was a very efficient and effective electorate officer for Lyla. I do not have my glasses on but I believe Pat is also here in the gallery. To all her friends among Perth Labor Women, in the Labor Party more generally and in the community, Lyla is a great loss but, gosh, we have so much to celebrate in this life.

HON ALANNA CLOHESY (East Metropolitan — Parliamentary Secretary) [2.03 pm]: I would like to commence my contribution to this important motion by acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we are meeting on today and pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging. It is important that I start with that acknowledgement not only because it recognises Indigenous people as the first Australians and it is a formal acknowledgement of Aboriginal people's ongoing connection to the land, particularly today, but also because for Lyla, Aboriginal people's rights—their citizenship and native title rights—were very close to her heart. She pursued that area of work throughout her whole working life, whether in a paid or unpaid capacity. We know that, because in her inaugural speech to Parliament, Lyla advocated for Aboriginal people in a very strong way, when she said —

The indigenous people who inhabited this country at the dawn of its history were a proud, self-supporting race, rich in culture and religion... They belonged to the land: they lived it; they were part of it, and it was part of them. Once it was taken from them, the fabric of their society was destroyed.

Lyla went on to advocate in many different ways for the rights of Aboriginal people.

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Another area of work, of course, that was much mentioned here was her work around women's rights. Not for the first time, I stand here recognising that I am standing on the shoulders of many great women, including Lyla. The support she gave to women like me first entering the Labor movement generally and the Labor Party specifically, was given freely, confidently and often. I appreciated it in all its forms, sometimes completely out of the blue but always very welcome.

Lyla recognised not only how difficult it was for her but she also passed on her energy and enthusiasm to other women forging their way through Parliament and women who were members of branches, who were working quietly away in the back room. She did that with great insight into all the roles that women play in the party. She understood all those roles because she had held all those roles. She had done all those things. In her role and time in Parliament as the only woman, she said this —

I believe I was regarded as something of a novelty. I was not treated in an offensively discriminatory way. However, I do not think I was taken seriously as a member of Parliament elected to perform the same duties as the male members nor as a person with a worthwhile contribution to make.

I find it very sad that she did not think she was taken seriously because certainly the work she did in this place was extremely serious and important and led the way for many great reforms in Western Australia, particularly in the areas of sexual assault and rape, domestic violence, equal opportunity and sex discrimination. The list goes on and members before me have done a great job listing the range of reforms that Lyla was at the forefront of.

In my experience, Lyla was a very humble person. I first met Lyla when, as a young post-graduate researcher, I wanted to interview her about her life and work in this place and, frustratingly, she deflected my requests for a number of months. She eventually agreed to my request for an interview. However, she did not think she had made a significant contribution in the Western Australian Parliament on women's rights or on a range of other issues. She saw her role as supporting others to have made those first reforms. One of the reasons we loved Lyla was because she did not think she was the first person to play a particular role; she just got on and did it. However, it makes me understand that I stand here as a woman in this place on the strength of the work that she did. She had three great passions. One was her husband, Jack, and her family, particularly her beloved brother Lance. I extend my sympathy to them and her extended family, some of whom are able to be with us today. Another of her great passions was the Australian Labor Party. Not many people know that Lyla was, in fact, a poet as well. Some 45 years ago, she put pen to paper about her beloved Australian Labor Party. I thank Hazel Butorac, who is with us in the President's gallery today, for finding this poem and for reading it in the eulogy that she delivered at Lyla's funeral some months ago. Hazel herself is, of course, another of the great Labor stalwarts—another Labor woman who has played every single role there is to play in the party, and who continues to make a huge contribution. Thank you, Hazel. This is Lyla's poem about her great love of the Australian Labor Party, written 45 years ago, and taken from the eulogy delivered by Hazel Butorac. It is simply called "The Australian Labor Party" and reads —

In the 1890s or thereabouts
When things were pretty tough
The working man put down his foot
And said "I've had enough!"
For far too long my mates and I
Have slaved from dawn to dark.
The pay is small, conditions bad,
The future's pretty stark.

This country's run by men of wealth
Of selfishness and greed.
We'll have a party of our own
So all men shall be freed
From exploitation, fear of want
And hatred of their neighbour.
The party to achieve all this
Is hereby christened "Labor".

And so was lit, in those dark days
A light upon the hill.
That light to better all mankind
Is brightly burning still.
The Labor Party has endured
Through good times and through bad.

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Its governments have proved to be
The best this country's had.
It's made mistakes; it's had its splits
And problems down through history
But that it has survived all this
Is really no great mystery.

The Labor Party represents
Australians as a whole
Particularly the little man and woman
The children and the old.
It remedies injustices
Wherever they are found.
Its policies have usually proved
Progressive, fair and sound.
And so, all my good Labor friends
Let's give a cheer that's hearty
For the greatest movement in the land
The Australian Labor Party.

Thank you, Lyla.

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Kate Doust): I would also like to add a few words to the condolence motion for former member, Hon Lyla Elliott. Firstly, I would like to acknowledge those members of her family who are in the President's gallery today. There are also former federal and state members of Parliament in the gallery, and many friends of Lyla Elliott are present here today. I think the fact that we have such a significant group here today to listen to this condolence motion is testament to the amount of respect and affection in which Lyla Elliott was held.

Having listened to each of the speakers today, I will not repeat all the amazing things that Lyla was involved in. I think her life could be broken into three parts and we would find that any one of those parts would be a full and active life in itself that any one of us could be proud to have led. Looking at her life before she came into Parliament in the early stage of working for the Labor Party, she worked for Joe Chamberlain. Those of us on the Labor side know it would have been a very interesting and colourful period of the party's history. She would have had to be quite an internally tough woman to sustain such long employment in that area. She probably would have had to become highly skilled to survive those first few years here alone as the only woman in this place. For some people, that part of her life, being engaged politically at both a state level and then in the United Kingdom, would have been enough. But it was obviously not enough for Lyla. She then had a very full 15-year period in this place. Again, that is more than some MPs get. We listened to all her achievements in this place. Regardless of your gender here, I think we can all be grateful for those changes. I think she was a great change agent. We now have electorate officers to assist us and a good committee system in place and her part in those areas should be acknowledged. After she finished her time here, Lyla did not just retire and have a quiet life, as some people do. She went on to become fully engaged in the community and had an extensive involvement across a wide range of community groups that would be exhausting for anyone. She not only did that, but also obtained a degree at university and became not just a poet but also a published author who won Premier's prizes. She was a pretty amazing woman and an absolute trailblazer. For many of us, we should hold her in high regard.

In my dealings with Lyla, I always found her to be extremely decent. She was very graceful and gracious. It was always a pleasure, particularly in the last few years, if she contacted my office to bring community groups in for meetings. It was always a very positive experience to engage with her. Having heard all the discussion today about Lyla, we should acknowledge her very significant, lifelong contribution to her party, her extensive engagement and what would have been, at times, probably a difficult time at Parliament. She was obviously very internally confident to be able to persevere and work through any difficulties. We should also acknowledge her ongoing post-parliamentary life in the community because she certainly made significant changes that impacted in such a great way across such a broad spectrum of our community. I think her family and friends should be very proud of their relationship with her and her positive contribution to the state, the Parliament, the community and her party. As Hon Alannah MacTiernan noted, it is a great celebration of an amazing life and we are very proud of her.

I ask members to now rise and stand in their places to indicate their support for the motion and to observe one minute's silence in memory of Hon Lyla Elliott, our esteemed former member of this Council.

Question passed; members and officers standing as a mark of respect.

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The PRESIDENT: Thank you, members. I advise that in accordance with our custom and practice, a copy of the *Hansard* transcript of this condolence motion will be sent to Hon Lyla Elliott's family.