

**BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MONTH —  
GLOBAL ILLUMINATION TOUCH OF PINK BREAKFAST —  
DEBORAH WALSH — MEMORIAL SERVICE**

*Statement*

**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [9.48 pm]: This morning I had an interesting morning. I began the day with Hon Donna Faragher and others at the Touch of Pink Global Illumination Breakfast to mark the end of Breast Cancer Awareness Month. It was a fabulous breakfast, as ever, organised by Jenny Rogers and her team, noting that Jenny has been through a difficult time in the last couple of months, yet managed to pull off another sensational event with her team. Professor Christobel Saunders spoke at the event and made the point that these days with the research, some of which is funded by functions such as the breakfast we attended this morning, 92 per cent of Western Australian women who are diagnosed with breast cancer will survive. These figures have not been published, but I believe everything Christobel says; I have no reason to doubt her. One in eight Australian women are diagnosed with breast cancer and about eight per cent die.

I left the breakfast and went to the memorial service for Deborah Walsh, who died of breast cancer at 54 years of age. Deb's family made the point in several of the beautiful presentations they made about her that she did not want to be defined by her death and I do not want to define her by her death either. I note, Madam President, that you were also at the memorial service. Deb and I became friends in the 1980s when we were both involved in Labor Party politics. At that point, Madam President, you will recall, as will others, factions formally began to form in the Labor Party. Deb and I were in different factions. We started our own cross-factional red-headed women's caucus. There were two members—Deb and I—and occasionally we would let her sister Anne join. Anne was kind of strawberry blonde. Occasionally, we would let our friends Kate and Lois join; they were blondes. Very occasionally we would let a brunette into the group.

Deb Walsh was most certainly a person in her own right. Some may know her as Peter Walsh's daughter or Gary Gray's wife. She was so much more than both of those things. Part of who she was was on show today in her three beautiful boys aged between 16, and I think Darcy is in his early 20s. The shocking thing about what has happened to Deb and Gary and the boys in the last two years is this: she was diagnosed in 2016, about the same time that Gary announced he was leaving federal Parliament. What was meant to be the beginning of a new life took a very different turn. In August this year, Deb could not shake off a cough. Blood tests revealed that despite the round of treatment she had undergone for breast cancer, the cancer had re-emerged in her brain, liver, bones and bone marrow. She died within eight weeks of getting those test results. But Deb being Deb, she was pragmatic and politically active to the end. She planned everything. She planned to make a submission to the parliamentary inquiry into end-of-life decisions. She planned and did politically get involved in the yes campaign for marriage equality. But probably the most important thing that Deb did in her life was produce her three boys, who spoke today. I think her eldest son, Darcy, gave the most heartbreakingly beautiful expression that I have ever heard from a young man speaking about his mother. One of the points that he made was that as a family unit, a unit of five, they really had only been together for 16 short years because Toby, the youngest, is only 16. Darcy said he would give anything to take those extra four years that he had on his brothers' time with their mother and break it up to give his two younger brothers more time with their mother. The other two boys spoke absolutely beautifully as well. I know that Deb's greatest gift to the rest of us was her three boys. She would have been enormously proud of their contribution today.

Deb would probably have been a little shocked at the range of people who turned up to her memorial today. She certainly would have been shocked at the number of people who turned up at the State Reception Centre at Kings Park. She would have been surprised by that, but it was a testament to her character. I bumped into Cheryl Edwardes when we were leaving, who said that Deb had done the catering for a number of Cheryl's events over the years. Deb was an absolutely fabulous cook and an absolutely fabulous entertainer. She was also a serious drinker of serious red wine. When we were in our 20s she definitely could drink me under the table! That was no small feat back then. She was an outstanding woman and a fabulous mother. Her death is a loss to us all. In the booklet that was circulated to people, there was a note asking us to donate. I have no doubt Deb had a hand in that booklet. She organised in advance every single bit of her death and every single bit of her funeral.

The number of women who die from breast cancer is going down. As Christobel told us at breakfast early this morning, a breast cancer diagnosis has gone from being guaranteed to be terminal to being eight per cent. Someone has to be in that eight per cent. I wish it was not Deb at 54, but it was. If we are to learn something from Deb's death, it is that we need to fund and encourage more research so that people like Christobel Saunders can keep doing the work that they are doing and find the solutions to achieve their aim, which is zero deaths from breast cancer by 2030.