

ABORTION LEGISLATION REFORM BILL 2023

Second Reading

Resumed from 9 August.

MR S.N. AUBREY (Scarborough) [10.23 am]: As members know, my speech was cut short yesterday, so I would like to wind back a little bit for context. I had explained the key reasons why I support the Abortion Legislation Reform Bill 2023, which is the clinical expert support and the overwhelming public support from the Western Australian community. The part that I did not get to was my personal reasons for why I fundamentally support these reforms. For me, as a gay man, I am further removed than most from having a true understanding of the physical, emotional and mental exertion, and the challenges of women who go through the experience, especially as I will never have a partner who will go through it. I rely on the knowledge, wisdom and experience of the women in my life to assist in guiding my beliefs and values about women's equality and the rights of women. I have been fortunate to be surrounded by kind, strong, courageous, dedicated and empathetic women for my entire life. Just as it was reported in the local paper in the week of my election to this place, "Mum's the word." Like I am sure it is for most of us, my mother has been a guiding influence on my life in many ways, and also on my views of women. I will quote some of the lines that I provided for the article back in 2021. It states —

"My mother Chris means the world to me; she has been my guide, my protector, my biggest supporter and my biggest teacher in life," ...

My mother instilled in me —

... the values of compassion, fairness, equality and integrity.

...

"Those values guided me to be a good person that works hard to improve the lives of others and they are what drove me to join the WA Labor party.

"I will always be grateful to my mother for setting me on the path to where I am today and I am proud to be her son."

My words in that article are a minor reflection of my endless appreciation of my mum and her positive influence on me. As a child, I looked to her as someone who could accomplish anything that she put her mind to. When I grew in age and maturity, I was disheartened when I came to the realisation that she was not afforded the same opportunities as the men of her generation and even my generation.

I cherish the time I had with her growing up and the sacrifices she made to give me the best opportunities in life, and do not wish to take that away from her. But I recognise and honour every day, both the willing and unwilling sacrifices she has made for me. All my achievements in life are her achievements; I am an extension of her. I love you, mum.

I am the youngest of three, the eldest being my sister, Rhian. Being five years apart, we naturally tormented each other growing up and, to be fair, we still do a little to this day. I could definitely be a much better brother to her and a much better uncle to my nieces and nephew, but our bond is strong. She is one of the kindest, toughest and most empathetic humans I know, and I trust in her advice more than most. She is the person I go to when I have really stuffed up and do not want to freak out mum and need some help or advice. She was the first in my family to know my sexuality and she, at my request, told my parents, when I could not find the strength. I do not tell her enough, but I love her dearly. I admire her strength, her resilience, her kindness and her altruistic nature. After mum there is no woman who has influenced the man I am more than she has.

In 2020, a woman came into my life eager to support my campaign in Scarborough. I met Donna Leckie over a coffee at the Wild Fig Cafe in Scarborough. We became fast friends, feeding off each other's enthusiasm and passion to make a difference in this world. A descendant of May Holman, the first Labor female member of Parliament in the country, Donna exemplifies the values of the Labor Party. My life has been truly enriched by having both Donna and her gorgeous partner, Dani Laidley, as a big part of it. Donna shared with me a powerful story that will not be done its full justice in a short quote. I quote —

I am a fortunate woman having grown up surrounded by strong women who helped shape me throughout life. As a child I fought for equal rights, wearing the 'boys' uniform to school in the hope to change outdated rules, hoping that girls could wear shorts and trousers. I was subsequently suspended and had the full support of my Mother who then went on a quest to change policy regarding uniforms.

This was in the 1980s, some years later the school did change the uniform policy and I remember thinking how empowering it was to be permitted to wear a pair of shorts! This was my introduction to social justice. I believed that girls could do whatever they chose to do, with career, sport, lifestyle and most importantly their bodies.

I soon came to realise that this was not the case and my opportunities as a female were restricted, especially when it came to picking subjects in senior school for career pathways. Hairdressing, nursing, secretary, beautician, schoolteacher.

The conversation from career advisors always had a huge influence toward gender specific roles.

I remember thinking how disempowering it was, for myself and all the other girls. It felt like white males were making decisions about what we could wear, what we studied and what our careers would look like as a woman!

As I grew into a young woman, I was horrified that young men could gain a great reputation if they were promiscuous, and the women were spoken about as if they had no worth.

If a woman was able to access an abortion the fear that someone would find out was soul destroying, shameful and she would be shunned by society. Many of us in that era were frightened to speak about how to access a safe place if needing an abortion, how we could afford to pay, who would help us and how do we keep it a secret because if this secret got out, people would never look at us the same way again.

All the while I couldn't understand why there was such disparity between males and females.

Now in 2023, although we have made some progress, until we reach women having 100% control over our bodies and the stigma around women seeking an abortion still exists, then there will always be more work to be done.

For me, for my children and my grandchildren I want to see a time where women have 100% control over our bodies and our ability to access safe medical treatment.

This is by my friend Donna Leckie, Scarborough, WA.

In my opinion, one of the greatest strengths of the 2021 Parliament is its diversity—teachers, lecturers, lawyers, diplomats, tradies, social workers and many more; male and female, straight and gay, young and, well, experienced.

With the swearing-in of Magenta Marshall, the member for Rockingham, this house gains a passionate, hardworking advocate for the seat of Rockingham and Western Australia. I would like to congratulate the member for Rockingham on her emphatic victory and election to this place, and for claiming the title of “baby of the house”, the youngest member of Parliament in Western Australia, taking the title off the previous titleholder—me. Although I am a little gutted to lose the title, it is a very small price to pay to have another young and passionate local advocate in this house. For my colleagues who have enjoyed reminding me that I am no longer the youngest one in this place, I look forward to reminding my well-experienced colleagues that when you make obscure political references from your earlier years, I was either not born or I was an infant at the time.

But I digress. A more important milestone that the member for Rockingham's election brings is the 50 per cent representation of women in the lower house of Western Australia for the first time in history. Diversity is a strength, and the diversity of our Parliament should reflect the diversity of our state. It is a proud moment for our state. When I show guests through this Parliament, especially the Edith Cowan Foyer, I proudly celebrate Western Australia's leadership when it comes to female representation in this country. Many of my guests are astonished to learn that WA has been a leader when it comes to female representation. We elected the first female member of Parliament in the country in Edith Cowan, the first female Labor MP in the country in May Holman, the first female cabinet minister in the country in Dame Florence Cardell-Oliver, the first female Premier in the country in Carmen Lawrence, and the first female Indigenous member of any Australian Parliament in Carol Martin.

There is another woman in this Parliament I am incredibly proud of. She sits in this chamber and she is a colleague and friend whom I often turn to for advice on women's and social issues. I trust her advice and guidance implicitly. She holds four degrees, she is a doctor of social work, and she is the first female Labor member of Parliament to represent the seat of Nedlands. We come from vastly different backgrounds, different sexes, different generations, different sexual orientations and from fairly different electorates but we share common values and a strong drive for social justice and for making a difference in this state, country and the world. For those who had the privilege to hear her speech on this bill, they would have heard Katrina deliver a powerful, personal and passionate speech that left little doubt in my mind that these reforms are essential. I was so incredibly proud to have been her colleague that day, and every day. If members did not hear her speech, I recommend they watch it.

I asked her for a quote, despite the fact she would be speaking on this bill, and she proudly gave me one. She said —

This legislation is for the women who came before us and those to come. The women who endured abortions that were at the worst unsafe, or who at best overcame barriers, inequities and delays to access abortion care. The advocates, legislators and health care providers who have created change to make abortion more accessible. The doctors, midwives and social workers who have provided compassionate and professional

care and we are here now to make change for the women ahead of us who will be able to make decisions about their own health care, to enact their reproductive rights, and to do so with privacy and dignity.

Dr Katrina Stratton, MLA, member for Nedlands, my friend and colleague.

These women have shown me time and again that our ability to accomplish any task or feat we put our minds to is not limited or enhanced by our sex. My mum taught me so much, including the basics of using tools and building, how to shape and mould things in our little workshop tucked away in the carport. But she also shaped much of the human I am today. My sister has been my rock, who will always be there with love and empathy in tough times. My friends Donna Leckie and Dani Laidley are examples of the strength and happiness that comes from being true to who we are. My colleague and friend Dr Katrina Stratton proves that no matter our differences, far more unites us than divides us and our diversity is our greatest strength.

The Minister for Health, Amber-Jade Sanderson, has shown true conviction, leadership and dedication in developing and delivering these reforms. The reason many of us enter politics and this place is to make a difference in our world, and these reforms do just that. You should be so proud.

The women I have mentioned and so many more have shaped and continue to shape the world and people around them. If I did nothing else in this place but support the advancement of legislation that gives them greater rights and control over their bodies, my time in this place would be worth every second. It is with great pride that as the member for Scarborough, on behalf of my community, as a son, a brother, a grandson, a nephew, a friend, a colleague and, most importantly, an ally, I commend this bill to the house with my utmost support.

Debate adjourned, on motion by **Mr D.A. Templeman**.