

Mr Marlborough: Talk about one-vote-one-value and see how courageous you are then.

Mr TRENORDEN: I will not worry about comments by the member for Peel. The truth is that nothing he says ever matters. He has no credibility whatsoever. There are no words he can utter that will make a dent on me. His words are no more than breaking wind in the wind.

Mr Marlborough interjected.

The SPEAKER: Order! The interjections by the member for Peel are incessant and I formally call him to order for the second time.

Mr TRENORDEN: I will draw this to an end because the last thing we need is a performance by the member for Peel. Now that the ALP vote has been so seriously eroded in the country it will have great difficulty retrieving it. Its method of making an impact on the declining vote is to attack the Leader of the National Party tonight. The ALP is off the mark. Its words are no threat.

Mrs Roberts: Once bitten, twice shy. You are irrelevant.

Mr TRENORDEN: The words are no threat. I agree that the member opposite is irrelevant. If this is the best the ALP can do in opposition on the first day of this Thirty-fifth Parliament, members opposite are in for a desperate four years. Given that that was also the first amendment to the Address-in-Reply, the National Party should thank the ALP.

Amendment put and a division taken with the following result -

Ayes (16)

Ms Anwyl	Mr Kobelke	Mr Riebeling
Mr Brown	Ms MacTiernan	Mrs Roberts
Mr Carpenter	Mr Marlborough	Ms Warnock
Dr Edwards	Mr McGinty	Mr Cunningham
Dr Gallop	Mr McGowan	(Teller)
Mr Grill	Ms McHale	

Noes (29)

Mr Ainsworth	Mr House	Mr Pental
Mr Barnett	Mr Kierath	Mr Shave
Mr Board	Mr MacLean	Mr Sweetman
Dr Constable	Mr Marshall	Mr Trenorden
Mr Court	Mr Masters	Mr Tubby
Mr Cowan	Mr McNee	Dr Turnbull
Mr Day	Mr Nicholls	Mrs van de Klashorst
Mrs Edwardes	Mr Omodei	Mr Wiese
Mrs Hodson-Thomas	Mr Osborne	Mr Bloffwitch (Teller)
Mrs Holmes	Mrs Parker	

Pairs

Mr Graham	Mr Sullivan
Mr Thomas	Mr Bradshaw
Mr Ripper	Mr Johnson

Question thus negatived.

Debate (on motion) Resumed

MS McHALE (Thornlie) [8.43 pm]: It is with considerable honour and profound gratitude to the electorate of Thornlie that I stand to deliver my inaugural speech. At the outset I would like to congratulate you, Mr Speaker, on your election to the high and honourable office of Speaker and I look forward to your fair and responsible management of the House. My congratulations also to my Labor colleagues, the members for Rockingham and Willagee, and, of course, to the member for Armadale for her transit from the upper House to this House.

I recognise the privilege accorded to members of Parliament in our role as representatives. It is not the associated privileges and trappings of office to which I refer; it is the privilege of working for and assisting ordinary community members who for many reasons feel disadvantaged, dissatisfied or disempowered by our social and bureaucratic systems. It is also the privilege and principle of being accountable to our community that I hold dear.

My victory in the new seat of Thornlie, which comprises the suburbs of Thornlie, Langford, Lynwood, most of Ferndale and parts of Kenwick, Maddington and Canning Vale, was built on months of working with the community and talking to thousands of residents on their doorsteps about their concerns and needs, about their views of government and about politics and politicians. Their viewpoints therefore deserve further attention, and I will return to that issue.

Having been elected by the people of Thornlie to be their representative in this House, I place on public record my dedication to them and I will strive at all times to help them and represent their interests as best I can.

While as every member knows we are the public face of our victory, it is only through the hard work, help and sacrifice of our families, friends and the many volunteers that we are here. To the members of the union movement who supported me, to my friends at St John of God Hospital, whose vision and values for a just society coexisted with and encouraged mine, my sincere thanks are due. The strength and friendship of the Gosnells-Thornlie sub-branch of the Australian Labor Party must also be recorded. There are many who worked tirelessly and selflessly to help me get elected. In particular, I pay tribute to Roger Cook, my campaign manager, and to two special people - Eve Omacini and Les Beech - whose humour, support, hard work and encouragement were outstanding.

To my family for their encouragement, confidence and support; to my mother for encouraging independence and my brother and sister-in-law for the roast dinners nearly every Sunday after weekends of campaigning, my gratitude is due. My unconditional love goes to my 12 year old son, Keir Ralph, who constantly keeps me grounded in reality - he knows what is important in his life. I thank him for his tolerance and insight. Without him my life would be the poorer.

As an aside, I would like to explain Keir's name. He is named after Keir Hardie, who was born in 1856 and died in 1915. He was an eminent British Labour Party politician who was instrumental in establishing the British Labour Party and was the first candidate to enter Parliament in 1892. He founded and edited the *Labour Leader* and was also a strong pacifist. He made his maiden speech over 100 years ago and, like the member for Armadale, in his inaugural speech he talked primarily about unemployment.

I am sure members of Parliament know all of that social and political history, but I recounted it for the benefit of the House so that members will understand the significance of the Labor Party to me.

Hon Yvonne Henderson's decision to retire from political life afforded me the opportunity to be preselected for the Australian Labor Party and ultimately to win the seat. I therefore express my gratitude to her for placing her trust in me and for fully awakening in me the desire to represent our community through the political process. Close to 14 years ago Yvonne made her inaugural speech and her contribution to the community since then has been significant. During her ministerial career she had responsibility for six portfolios and was respected as a tenacious, thorough and dedicated Minister of the Crown. In her first speech she signalled the Labor Government's intention to introduce anti-discrimination legislation. It was fitting therefore that Yvonne introduced and guided the Equal Opportunity Act through the Legislative Assembly. It was also fitting that one of her last efforts at social reform was to introduce amendments to the same Act to include the ground of sexual preference.

As a Labor member entering Parliament a mere three years away from the twenty-first century, my task is to adopt an approach to my parliamentary responsibilities which will reassure the community that there still exists a high order of ethical standards among our members of Parliament. To come back therefore to the viewpoint of the people who elected me, they told me on their doorsteps that what they want in their members of Parliament are the qualities of integrity, hard work and accountability. Those same sentiments were expressed by the Commission on Government in its report No 3 of August 1996 which reinforced the importance of ethical government and principles of conduct and values.

It is interesting and useful to the debate on ethics and values in the political process to look at the types of organisations which are likely to succeed in the future - a future which is experiencing an unprecedented period of change. The model of a successful organisation is now one which is seen as flexible, which is value driven, quality oriented and customer or client focused. I assert that a parallel can be drawn between this model and our responsibilities and behaviour as members of Parliament. The values adopted by customer or client orientated organisations could be applicable to us in managing our electorates. That model is one where we have excellent communication, and knowing what people want, delivering and offering a service.

How can all this be translated into practical effect and what can I do to play my part? If we look at the needs of my electorate, I have already indicated my commitment to my constituents. Thornlie is essentially a residential electorate. The residents want a quality public health system and an accessible education system for their children. Some are desperate for employment for themselves or members of their families. Others, particularly in Langford, need urgent maintenance on their Homeswest properties. Others want to live in a community which appreciates and

acknowledges their cultural diversity. There is an ageing population in parts of my electorate and for them the prospect of growing old with dignity is more at the forefront of their needs. Quality aged care and support for carers will be an ever increasing issue and one for which I want to advocate strongly. I recently had a phone call from the distraught daughter of a constituent who was desperately seeking quality nursing home care for her father. She was understandably angry when she was told she faced a two year waiting list. That is not good enough for a so called caring society. As members will understand, these needs are not typical only of Thornlie. Nevertheless, I shall play my part by listening and advocating on behalf of the Thornlie electorate and by using my skills and knowledge to address their needs whenever I can. I shall take every opportunity to put forward the views of my constituents.

Following on my theme of needing to listen to our constituents or our clients, it is important that we recognise our responsibilities to encourage more women to enter this House. At this stage I would like to acknowledge and welcome the new women members on the government side. On our side of politics, we lost three excellent long serving contributors to Parliament - Yvonne Henderson, whom I have already mentioned, Kay Hallahan and Judyth Watson, all of whom were excellent role models to women considering a political career. We as women must strengthen our presence at the next election so that we do not lose the ground gained during the 1980s and 1990s. Women represent 50 per cent of the population, yet only 21 per cent of this House across all parties are women. That is not good enough for our community and it is not good enough for us. For my part, like many women with dual careers - that is, management of family and full time employment - I am no stranger to hard work, long hours and juggling many responsibilities at once. I have been asked on numerous occasions whether I am tough enough to put up with political life. I honestly do not think toughness is particularly relevant if it means thick skinned. As with most women who make it to Parliament, the quality of strength is most important - the strength to be focused on task and principle, to be flexible and yet resilient, and to have a vision and deliver it. I do not see myself as tough but I do see myself as strong. That strength will be channelled into my parliamentary and electorate responsibilities.

For the remaining part of my speech, I turn my attention to a social problem which has concerned me for some time. It has been referred to in recent months as an epidemic and a black hole in society and by the Australian Medical Association as an Australian public health crisis. I refer to youth suicide. This social issue has been causing many in the social justice field a great deal of concern. In regard to my reference to accountability, the issue is a strong indicator of how well or badly Governments have delivered to our youth in recent years. World Health Organisation statistics reveal that Australia has overtaken most of the world's developed nations in having one of the highest youth suicide rates. Suicides among young males outnumber those of young females by over 6:1. Suicide as a proportion of all male youth deaths between the ages of 15 and 24 years increased from 18 per cent in 1985 to 27 per cent in 1994. The statistics on youth suicide vary, in part due to the difficulties in reporting. However, a recent article in the February 1997 *Australian Nursing Journal* states -

. . .with more than 16 in every 100,000 young Australians committing suicide each year, this meant that Australian youth are taking their own lives at a rate of one per day.

That article and others suggest that the rate could be much higher because of under reporting. Cultural and religious taboos, denial by family and even the requirements of insurance companies have sometimes resulted in suicides being reported as accidental deaths, not as suicides. This social issue is by no means new: Concern has been expressed for some time. In September 1988, the Labor Minister for Health commissioned a youth suicide working party to investigate the nature and extent of suicide among young people in Western Australia. The following year it set about implementing the recommendations. The work undertaken in Western Australia to date has been within a broadly based public health framework.

To some extent there has been a positive impact as a result of that work. In 1988 the rate of youth suicide in our State exceeded the national average by 30 per cent. Since then, according to Lilburn and Zubrick, the national rate for the 15 to 19 year old range has levelled off, while the rate in this State has declined to some extent. However, they assert that the situation for the 20 to 24 year old age group remains of much greater concern. A recent Western Australian child health survey, called Education, Health and Competence, makes the comment that Australian society has been slow to confront the tragedy of youth suicide. The report argues that this is in part due to the fact that suicide is a perplexing and troubling problem that our society generally avoids discussing. Many adults find it difficult to accept and understand that so many of our youths move into adolescence from childhood feeling sadness, hopelessness and despair that can lead to suicide.

Although the number of youth suicides is low, what is particularly distressing to me is the increase in suicidal behaviour manifested in deliberate self-harm and serious suicidal thoughts. The Western Australian child health survey found that over 15 per cent of adolescent students reported having had suicidal thoughts during the six months prior to the survey. Approximately 30 per cent of those students reporting suicidal thoughts had also tried to deliberately harm or kill themselves. Of huge concern is the reported number of children aged between 12 and 16 years who had deliberately harmed themselves. They are barely out of childhood at the age of 12 and 13 years. Can

you imagine, Mr Speaker, that more than 8 000 of our young adolescents are reported as having deliberately harmed themselves? They, as young adolescents, have such a depressed outlook on their lives, their self-esteem and their future - the future that we are supposed to be providing - that they have considered taking their lives or harming themselves.

At a national level, Professor Pierre Baume, the Director of the Australian Institute of Suicide Research and Prevention, claims that there are up to 250 000 attempted suicides each year. He argues that suicide prevention is a complex social problem which requires an integrated response from a wide range of government services. It is generally recognised that the factors linked to youth suicide are numerous and complex. Research in the area has not been comprehensive, and unravelling causal factors is extremely difficult. Current thinking suggests that individual predisposition and risk factors together determine vulnerability.

Popular opinion among lay and professional people favours the view that adolescents today are under more and different types of stress compared with young people from earlier generations. It is important to remember that because we each have different views about stress. Some of the stresses include: Increased pressures of modern society and technological change; high youth unemployment; denial of educational opportunities; increased social and family disruption; and the isolation of the family unit. Even the culture of violence in the media has been identified as one of the pressures.

The Director of the Victorian Jesuit Social Services made an excellent contribution to the recent debate on youth suicide in January when, in commenting on the Victorian Government's formation of a task force to tackle suicide, he said that the effects of high unemployment as well as education, health and welfare cutbacks must feature prominently.

Another commentator, Dr Jean Lennane, a Sydney psychiatrist, argues along similar lines. She says that youth suicide has been trebling in parallel with profound and rapid changes in our social, economic and political systems, health policies and technology. She believes many of these changes are likely to have had an adverse effect on our young people's outlook.

Economic growth may be up 6.4 per cent; investments may have increased by 11.7 per cent; and authoritative commentators may well predict a bright economic future. However, the environment for many young people is not that of economic boom and abundance. It is more likely to be characterised by the collapse of the teenage job market, and the erosion of the adult job market.

While Governments are anxious to be seen to be addressing youth suicide or the youth issue in general, the reality is that any attempts to do so are shadowed by cutbacks in resources that directly affect the quality of life for young people and their future life opportunities. The youth of our community have experienced in recent years less concern for economic redistribution or compassion, and more concern for the deregulation of the labour market, privatisation of public services, and profitability rather than social need. The responses of our young people to their individual circumstances in society and their lack of power and respect obviously vary considerably. However, I make the point that suicide is the ultimate and most extreme opting out strategy they can think of, with devastating consequences for those left behind.

In my inaugural speech tonight I make a plea for greater consideration, respect and tolerance for our young people. More importantly, I make a plea to Government to refocus on our youth by ensuring that future policies address the alienation of our youth. If unemployment is a factor, I expect the Government to lobby the Federal Government to reintroduce meaningful labour market programs. Work must be done within the education system to strengthen the efforts already in the curriculum which focus on self-esteem and empowerment.

If I understand correctly, the Government has already set up a task force to examine youth suicide. I expect the Government to commit to a comprehensive, fully integrated approach to tackle the real causes of youth disaffection and the multiple causes of youth suicide. Furthermore, if the Government is serious, it will take note of the fact that a disproportionately high number of male youth suicides are gay related. This aspect must be dealt with sensitively, and it will require a considered assessment of support structures and mechanisms for this group of adolescents. In this way we may prevent some of our youth using the ultimate opting out strategy and we may feel that we can be accountable to our young people and our community.

I have also tried tonight to give some insight into the way in which I intend to fulfil my parliamentary responsibilities and duties. I summarise my view of those responsibilities: To represent the community of Thornlie as a Labor member; to act responsibly and professionally as opposition spokesperson for the Arts and Heritage to enhance our cultural, natural, aesthetic and built heritage; and to ensure that the Government is accountable to the community.

In conclusion I assure you, Mr Speaker, that I look forward to the challenges of my honourable position with vigour, humour and a great deal of passion. I conclude with the words of May Holman who, as members will know, was the

first Labor woman to be elected to any Australian Parliament. She said before the 1939 state election "I think you will find women as successful in Parliament as men. But the women are judged by harder standards".

[Applause.]