



**MAKING A DIFFERENCE—A FRONTIER
OF FIRSTS**

**WOMEN IN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
PARLIAMENT 1921–2012**

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BERYL LILLIAN JONES



MLC Lower West Province 22 May 1986–21 May 1989; South West Region 22 May 1989–21 May 1993 (ALP). Member Joint House Committee 1987–1989; Standing Committee on Government Agencies 1986–1989; Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation 1991–1993. Chairman Select Committee on Charitable Collections 1987–1988; Select Committee on De Facto Relationships 1989–1990.

Beryl Jones entered the Legislative Council in May 1986 after winning one of the Lower West Province seats for Labor from the Liberal Party by 102 votes after preferences. Until her success on this occasion, the Liberals had held both Lower West Province seats continuously since their creation for the 1965 election. With the revamping of the Legislative Council seats in time for the 1989 election, Beryl was returned on the Australian Labor Party ticket for the South West Region and remained in Parliament until the expiration of her term in May 1993. During her seven years in the upper House she served on a number of standing committees and chaired both the inquiry into charitable collections in 1987 and 1988 and into de facto relationships in 1989 and 1990.

Beryl was born in Bootle in England on 30 July 1932. Her father, Robert Davies, was a machinist at an electric cable works and then a proofreader, and Beryl worked as a nurse before migrating to Western Australia in 1955 with her husband and two children. She was employed as a salesperson before graduating from Nedlands College of Advanced Education with a Diploma of Teaching. She taught firstly at Lockridge Senior High School in 1977 and then for seven years at Gosnells Senior High School while studying for the Bachelor of Education course from which she obtained a deferral following her election to Armadale Town Council in 1981; she remained a member until her election to Parliament. Left a widow in 1985 with the death of her second husband, Paul Jones, by whom she had one child, she married Jeffrey Mackin in 1987 and has taken the name Beryl Mackin. During her years as a schoolteacher, she had been a branch vice-president and president in the teachers' union, as well as playing a very active role over the years in Women's Refuge, Senior Citizens, Job Link and Youth Affairs. Within the Labor Party, Beryl had been both a branch and electorate council president and delegate to the State Electorate Council.

In her Inaugural Speech in 1986, Beryl devoted much of her time to issues and problems affecting the various centres in her rural electorate but she also placed considerable emphasis ‘as a former educator’ on:

... the plight of our youngsters, many of whom have been denied the right to employment and its corresponding feeling of self worth. I have witnessed the humiliation often felt by young people who have been labelled ‘dole bludgers’ and I have seen the negative effects that adverse publicity has had upon them when they have been lumped together as ‘no-hopers’... Youth needs encouragement and a goal to strive for. It needs to be helped to take responsibility and to have the opportunity to take part in decision-making.¹

Similar concerns were a centrepiece of her Address-in-Reply debate speech a year later in which she gave particular attention to adolescent health services.² Again, in her 1992 speech she focused on the causes of juvenile crime including the impact of job restructuring, the social mobility of parents, unemployment straddling more than one generation within the family, and feelings of negativity and low self-esteem.³

Two of the undoubted highlights of her parliamentary career were the two select committees she chaired. The major concern of the charitable collections committee was with finding means to reassure the public that all but a small proportion of the moneys raised would find their way to the charities concerned. In the case of the de facto relationships inquiry, the committee endeavoured to come to terms with and find means of resolving disputes involving the distribution of property between de facto partners whose relationship had broken up.

Looking back on her parliamentary career in the course of a speech on the appropriation Bill in December 1992, Beryl suggested that the seven years which she spent as a member of the Legislative Council had probably been ‘amongst the most traumatic in this Parliament’.⁴ From her perspective she believed that she had ‘gained enormously’ from her experience of parliamentary life but:

... politics has also done something else to me; it has made me very cynical... There is a well known cliché that politics is a dirty business. However, it is people and members of Parliament who make politics a dirty business... The perceptions that the public have of us are not undeserved in some cases, because we, as politicians, have brought that upon ourselves by our own behaviour.

If politicians want to achieve respect again she suggested they need to:

... hone in again on their goals, have a look at what the party stands for and have a look at what they can achieve in their country if they can all work together’.⁵

¹ *WAPD(LC)*, 25 June 1986, p. 800.

² *WAPD(LC)*, 27 April 1987, pp. 755–756.

³ *WAPD(LC)*, 7 April 1992, pp. 801ff.

⁴ *WAPD(LC)*, 3 December 1992, p. 8119.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 8120.

Reflections by the Member on Her Parliamentary Career

When I entered Parliament, it was more by accident than design. In 1982 I had been invited to nominate for a seat for the election prior to the one I eventually won, but at that time I was still enjoying my profession as a high school teacher and had not contemplated the prospect of becoming a member of Parliament.

When campaigning for the 1986 state election began, I was again invited to nominate for a seat. This time I was more receptive to the idea. However, whereas the previous opportunity was to stand for what was considered a winnable seat, this time there was none available within the area where I lived or worked. I therefore nominated for an Upper House seat that had always been held by the Liberal Party and which neither I nor the Labor Party had any realistic expectations of winning. I entered the campaign to gain experience and a better understanding of the political process.

Running for a supposedly unwinnable seat was hard work and expensive as there were no party funds available. It took a few years to pay off a loan raised to cover minimal advertising costs and it is to the credit of my excellent campaign manager, Kay Hallahan (q.v.), and a loyal band of helpers, who worked with me door knocking every weekend in appalling heat, that I finally won the seat, though even then the result was not declared until two weeks after polling day.

I had been interested in politics and social justice from an early age and had always been involved with occupations which served the community—that is, nursing, teaching and as an elected member of the local council—so, in some ways, it was a natural progression to enter Parliament. That I won the election which took me to the Legislative Council was as much a surprise to me as it was to my party, and it must be said that I entered Parliament as a real novice to parliamentary procedure, having had neither previous experience of electorate offices nor any inside knowledge of the workings of Parliament.

In my opinion, not enough guidance is given to new members or advice as to what is expected of them or how best to serve their electorates. This could have been very valuable information from experienced members. However, I eventually found my own style and my greatest joy during my time in office was in helping to resolve problems and in being a voice in government to represent my constituents. One of the difficulties, however, is when one's own beliefs conflict with the interests of the community, or when a community's interests conflict with the state as a whole.

From a woman's perspective, I found Parliament was still very much a 'boys' club' and some male members were both patronising and obstructive. For example, when it was suggested that I chair a select committee, an opposition member of that committee tried to persuade me against taking the chair as he said that due to his previous experience he was more suited. He pointed out that I would have to write the report myself and that it would bear my name. Although I in turn pointed out that we all had to begin with our first committee and felt that I was equal to the task, he resigned from the committee rather than serve with a woman as its head. Happily, I found the other members of the committee were generally very helpful. This leads me to one of my greatest disappointments whilst in Parliament. Having chaired two select committees and reported on the terms of reference, I did not have the satisfaction of seeing my recommendations translated into changes to legislation. Time during the life of the Parliament simply ran out and, with a change in government, essential reform was lost.

I found being involved with party standing committees chaired by the relevant minister interesting because I was better able to understand proposed legislation and could put forward my own suggestions or point out any drawbacks affecting my own constituency.

Many MPs, from all sides of the House, were both helpful and welcoming and, contrary to popular belief, despite the somewhat heated verbal exchanges which pass across the floor, in most cases it must be said that members really do have the best interests of the state in mind—there is just a difference of perception as to what constitutes those best interests.

Another disappointment, probably in common with other MPs whose party is in government, was that my best speeches were never heard. Often members were told to have speeches ready, but time for debate was usually curtailed due to the time taken by opposition members in responding to proposed legislation. This was frequently frustrating as I may have taken weeks researching and writing a speech which I thought made valid comments or points of view and which I considered needed airing, but those opportunities were lost.

I owe a debt of gratitude to both my party and Parliament as a whole for providing me with the opportunity to become involved in what is required of good government and the difficulties which face a government given that you cannot please all of the people all of the time and when unpopular decisions have to be made for the good of the state.

I would like to pay a special tribute to the three electorate officers who worked with me during my time in Parliament. In particular, I would like to thank Margaret Duff, my right-hand person and chief supporter, who was with me for the last three and a half years of my term. She was worth her weight in gold.

It is regrettable that at times I was reluctant to admit to being an MP, such has become the poor reputation of politicians. In my experience, their standing in the community has been lowered by a minority who are perceived to be power hungry and out of touch with the people. The reality is that most are hardworking and genuinely try to do their best for their constituency and the state. Members of Parliament must take responsibility for their public image and work to restore confidence in them as leaders and demonstrate that they are to be trusted.

In retrospect, my time in Parliament has given me the opportunity to meet people, travel and confront the difficulties people from all walks of life have to deal with on a daily basis and hopefully, in some small way, I have made a difference.