



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

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

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## **ALYSSA KATHLEEN HAYDEN**



MLC East Metropolitan Region from 22 May 2009 (Lib), Member Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation from 2009; Joint Committee on the Racing and Wagering Western Australian Acts 2009–2010.

When Alyssa Hayden delivered her Inaugural Speech on 17 June 2009, after having won her seat some 10 months earlier at the 8 September 2008 state election, she was able to say:

Today I stand here as a member of the east metropolitan team, as the third Liberal member, and as one of the five female members elected by the people of the East Metropolitan Region.<sup>1</sup>

The only male member of ‘this petticoat junction’ was Jock Ferguson who sadly died in February 2009 with another woman Linda Savage gaining the casual vacancy. The resultant female ratio of the Legislative Council of 47 per cent was believed to be an Australian high. As Alyssa Hayden had observed:

... obviously the people of the East Metropolitan Region know that if they want something done right the first time, get a woman.<sup>2</sup>

It was also notable that Alyssa Hayden felt closely bound to the ‘unique and diverse district’ of the East Metropolitan Region, an area where she had grown up and worked for the majority of her life. She was born in Perth as Alyssa Wallis on 7 June 1970 to Arthur Wallis and Sandra Wallis (nee Davis), who both had extensive small business histories. Her father had been a commercial used car proprietor and a luxury furniture hirer, with additional business experience in tyre retailing and fitting, telemarketing and sales, security sales and installation, while her mother had been the chief executive officer of the Swan Chamber of Commerce for over 20 years. She was able to speak of the ‘love and support of a very strong family’ who reared her ‘on the values of respect, discipline, hard work and belief in yourself’. Her mum

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<sup>1</sup> WAPD(LC), 17 June 2009, p. 5122.

<sup>2</sup> WAPD(LC), 17 June 2009, p. 5122.

was described as her 'best friend, [who] has shown me strength, professionalism and diplomacy' which is something she thought she still had to master. On the other hand, her dad was said to have taught her 'independence, determination and how important it is to stop and listen'.<sup>3</sup> Then in her Inaugural Speech she amusingly commented that she had not forgotten her husband Terry, who was described 'as the love of her life'. When they had married on 3 December 1994, Terry's daughter Kelly-Ann was only eight years of age, and she was now a 28-year-old making her way in the music industry in Melbourne. As such, Alyssa was provided with the 'challenging, yet rewarding experiences of raising a daughter'.<sup>4</sup> With a comprehension to what was politically ahead, it was hoped that Terry has 'a lot of humour stored up ... I think we are going to need it'.<sup>5</sup>

As for Alyssa herself, she started her schooling at Helena College and then Darlington Primary School, before moving to Mount Helena Primary School and then onto Eastern Hills Senior High School. She recalls how her 'loving parents ... wanted a safe, caring and adventurous environment for their two children, and the hills provided exactly that'.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, she remembers how her teachers taught during the day and then coached sport on the weekend. Alyssa herself grew up playing sports in the local area and became a ballroom dancer after taking lessons in the community hall. This led to her joining the Marloo Theatre company with her own business career starting as early as 19 years of age.<sup>7</sup> Just prior to her entry into Parliament she even took up an offer from a business operator, Heather Jones from Success Transport in Hazelmere, to gain an understanding of her industry's experiences by setting off in what is otherwise known as the 'ladies truck'. It was a five-day experience delivering and installing an oversized load in Tom Price. One outcome was an appeal 'for our community to respect and understand the importance of our truck industry' and to 'take seriously the many issues that need addressing in her industry'.<sup>8</sup> The account of the trucking experience must have left an impression, as Alyssa Hayden was asked to speak to the 2011 state conference of Liberal Party delegates about her recollections of the demands of the trip.

Experience as a small business proprietor for Alyssa Hayden has been extensive, regularly employing more than two dozen staff. She recalls negotiating the administrative changes required by both the introduction of compulsory employees' superannuation and the goods and services tax. Indeed she understands 'the heartache and the struggle that business operators face each and every day'. She feels that Governments and public service departments need to appreciate that decisions made by these arms of Government have a huge impact on the business community. Significantly, the latter sector is constantly attempting to keep abreast of government legislation, licenses, regulations, insurance and taxation changes. Commendation was afforded to the Government's Red Tape Reduction Group accompanied by a commitment to offer her small business experience to ensure that business is enhanced by Government and not restricted. Then when a motion was being debated on the Barnett Government's small business policy, MLC Alyssa Hayden spoke of the evil of red tape 'that hinders, strangles and prevents many businesses from growing and continuing'.<sup>9</sup> In the same

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., pp. 5124–5125.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 5125.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 5122.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> *WAPD(LC)*, 10 November 2010, p. 8423.

speech she said ‘one of the major killers for business is payroll tax. I am glad that this government has listened and acted’.<sup>10</sup>

One policy domain of keen interest to Alyssa Hayden has been tourism. In her view it is heartening to know that she was not alone in her ‘passion’ for people to holiday at home. More holiday time in our state not only enhances the tourism industry, but also generates a healthy economy. Understandably, she was supportive of the Minister for Tourism launching a ‘Holiday at Home Campaign’ which was linked to the increased bookings experienced in Broome, on Rottnest and in the mid-west. In her view, ‘we need to create smart, simple but effective ways to advertise our state to our local community as a desired destination, be it a one-day visit, an extended weekend or the annual holiday’.<sup>11</sup> It goes without saying that she would be in agreement with the Rottnest Island Authority Chairman, Laurie O’Meara, describing as ‘a worrying trend’ a headline newspaper article indicating how ‘WA’s love affair with Bali keeps smashing records, with the number of holiday makers from Perth quadrupling in the past five years’.<sup>12</sup>

Meanwhile, Alyssa Hayden has closely monitored business developments, particularly in the Midland and Armadale electorates of the East Metropolitan Region. On the basis of her long experience, she noted that ‘although Midland is only 17 kilometres east of Perth’s CBD, it has always been treated as the poor distant cousin ... a disjointed town.’<sup>13</sup> However, the creation of the Midland Redevelopment Authority in 2000 has meant the vital town centre is now unrecognisable. ‘Midland Gate Shopping Centre is now a hive of activity, with small businesses ranging from hairdressers, clothing boutiques and restaurants to professional services, of which my office located in Keane Street is one’.<sup>14</sup> There were a range of associated developments which persuaded Alyssa Hayden to be supportive of the legislation to create the Metropolitan Development Authority if it could be ‘half as effective as the Midland Development Authority’.<sup>15</sup>

On another occasion, when speaking to the Higher Education Bill 2009, she again had an eye on her beloved Midland. The Bill was to implement a revised set of national protocols to bring Western Australia in line with the rest of the country to permit organisations to make application for a university. It was a further step to gain approval or permission for a university development. Always conscious of the interests of Midland she remarked how:

The East Metropolitan Region has been starved for far too long of an educational institution. The hunger for such an institution in this region is enormous.<sup>16</sup>

What could promisingly be reported:

... were discussions with members of a Singapore-based organisation, the Raffles Education Corporation, which has a strong desire to invest its money into developing a university at the old workshops site in Midland.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 8424.

<sup>11</sup> WAPD(LC), 17 June 2009, p. 5123.

<sup>12</sup> Geoffrey Thomas, ‘Record numbers holiday in Bali’, *West Australian*, 27 December 2011, p. 1.

<sup>13</sup> WAPD(LC), 20 September 2011, p. 7177.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> WAPD(LC), 25 November 2009, p. 9709.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

On the vexed issue of shopping hours, Alyssa Hayden has been a strong advocate of more flexible arrangements. As she has indicated, 'I have spoken to more people on this issue than any other within my region'.<sup>18</sup> However, it should not be interpreted that as an MLC Alyssa has solely been a business-oriented and Midland advocate. For instance, she spoke with high praise in the adjournment debate in October 2009 of several fundraising initiatives for breast cancer research under the auspices of the National Breast Cancer Foundation. Having attended a fundraising function, she interestingly informed the Legislative Council that the first statement of breast cancer therapy dates back to 2600 BC. At that time, an ancient Egyptian oncologist knew how to recognise the disease, but concluded that breast cancer was 'an ailment with which one could not contend'.<sup>19</sup> One in nine women is expected to be diagnosed with breast cancer in her lifetime, with most of us knowing someone who is affected personally. Alyssa also reminded the House that breast cancer is not gender specific with some 100 men in Australia being diagnosed with breast cancer per annum.<sup>20</sup>

Alyssa Hayden came to office recognising that parliamentarians have an important social role in the community, regularly attending a range of constituency functions. Before becoming an MLC, she had experience working for a former federal member of Parliament, Stuart Henry (the Liberal Party member for Hasluck) followed by Judith Adams, a Western Australian Liberal Senator. After working with the latter, it was not surprising that she said 'One of the roles a member plays in the Legislative Council is to review and scrutinise legislation'.<sup>21</sup> In fact, she thanked the Senators for their having been the source of her learning about the federal system.<sup>22</sup> A specific review role was also undertaken with Alyssa Hayden's membership of the Joint Standing Committee on the Review of the Racing and Wagering Western Australian Acts which took place from late September 2009 to June 2010.

An even more exacting review role has been her membership of the Joint Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation to which she was assigned at the commencement of her parliamentary career. Quite frequently she has reported upon its important, but often technical, reports. One instance where her work in that committee could be utilised in general debate was for the 2011 Cat Bill.<sup>23</sup> The joint standing committee had spoken to a number of local government authorities that had gazetted local laws to try to deal within their communities with the control of cats. In her judgement, a statewide approach was necessary. Only five local government bodies did not believe that it was necessary to pass the legislation. As there was wide support for microchipping, registration and sterilisation and considerable consultation had taken place with the various stakeholders, she was delighted that the Minister had seen fit to introduce the Bill and put statewide legislation in place.<sup>24</sup>

Alyssa Hayden had been a member of the Liberal Party since 2003 and had been President of the Pearce Liberal Party Women's Division in 2008 and 2009 as well as treasurer of the Ellenbrook branch from 2008. She had answered the call for more women in politics. Her

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<sup>18</sup> *WAPD(LC)*, 16 September 2010, p. 6762.

<sup>19</sup> *WAPD(LC)*, 14 October 2009, p. 8012.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> *WAPD(LC)*, 17 June 2009, p. 5124.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *WAPD(LC)*, 29 September 2011, pp. 7978–7979.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 7979.

extensive family and personal business background differed from many other parliamentary bound women who had tertiary qualifications in education and occasionally in law or other disciplines. As Alyssa Hayden had indicated in her Inaugural Speech:

I am a person who has real life experiences. Everything I have learned has been from the school of hard knocks. I have street smarts. I can relate to and understand the people of the East Metropolitan Region.<sup>25</sup>

*Reflections by the Member on Her Parliamentary Career*

I am very proud to be one of the six women representing the East Metropolitan Region in the Legislative Council of Western Australian Parliament.

I also feel privileged to share a Parliament with another 27 women.

During my first year as a member, I represented Western Australia at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference held in London, where representatives assembled from 52 Commonwealth countries.

One of the topics discussed at this conference was ‘What are the current topics in the run-up to the general election likely to be’, with compulsory voting being a major discussion point. I was surprised to learn Australia was one of the only countries in the Commonwealth that required all its citizens to vote. How to increase the turnout of voters on election day was the most obvious issue for those countries that decided not to enforce compulsory voting. In particular, the English Government representative explained that the Government was experiencing disconnection and indifference from its population and was working on ways to try to re-engage the community.

As I have developed in my role, I have made a conscious decision to engage with individuals to remind them how hard we Australians in a Commonwealth country have worked to enjoy a democracy. I remind them that it has been a challenge for women in Australia to be seen as equals and to be given the right to vote. I also remind them that there are millions of people around the world who do not, but strongly wish to, share the same privileges that we enjoy.

Being a member of a very strong and supportive family, I grew up with the attitude that ‘the sky is the limit’ to achieve my dreams and desires. I was encouraged to push boundaries and to get out of my comfort zone to achieve my goals. When reflecting on my short time in Parliament, I must confess it was a surprise to discover that many within my community do not share the same sense of self-determination.

Over the past three years, it has disappointed me how apathetic we are as a community in regard to our right to vote. Maybe it is because we live in a country of privilege that we have forgotten the true value of our vote.

My husband, Terry, was born in Zimbabwe and has relayed to me the horror that occurred to those who spoke out against their Government; unimaginable tales for most Australians. This enlightenment reminded me just how lucky we are.

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<sup>25</sup> WAPD(LC), 17 June 2009, p. 5125.

There are still many injustices around the world and I am saddened when I meet individuals who do not hold any value in their right to vote. I struggle even more so when I meet women who look to their husbands for their political point of view. If we women wish to be treated as equals, surely we must first value ourselves and value the need to think independently.

As a new member, I am often asked to speak about my success in a male-dominated environment. I must confess I struggle with this concept. I do not see Parliament as a male-dominant environment, even though it is by numbers. I have experienced nothing but respect and acceptance from all my colleagues.

From my experience as a female parliamentarian, I believe the barriers that still exist for women are not in the workplace, but, rather, they have remained in the home. Women who hold demanding full-time positions do not appear to enjoy the same free pass at home. They are still often required to go home at the end of a working day to take off their working hat in order to tie on an apron.

The home role undertaken by women over the centuries, in my experience, still occurs in the majority of families, even though there is a high number holding full-time employment. However, I have started to see the generation following mine sharing more of an equal role in the home, and I have faith that this will be embraced and advanced by generations to come.

In closing, I again note that I am one of the 28 women who serve their electorates in State Parliament. All of these women have demonstrated that they are more than capable and devoted to represent the many views and concerns of their community.

Although the numbers are far from equal in representation of gender balance, I will always argue against a quota system in any forum. Merit is and should be all that counts when selecting or electing the right person for the job. The people of Western Australia deserve to have the best of the best representing them and not be limited by gender, race or religion.

I wish to reassure readers that the female voices, empathy and intellect are being heard loud and clear in the thirty-eighth Western Australian Parliament.