

PUBLIC SECTOR — UNPAID PARENTAL LEAVE — SUPERANNUATION PAYMENTS

120. Ms C.M. TONKIN to the Minister for Industrial Relations:

I refer to the extension of superannuation payments on unpaid parental leave up to 24 weeks for all Western Australian public sector employees.

- (1) Can the minister outline to the house how this \$46.1 million investment by the Cook Labor government will help to close the gap in superannuation for women working in the public sector?
- (2) Can the minister advise the house how this initiative will improve women's economic security in retirement?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) I thank the member for this question and the lifelong commitment she has had to gender equality and improving outcomes for women. Of course, we have just come out of International Women's Day on 8 March. I do not think anyone in this house or publicly would disagree that we need better outcomes for women and girls in our community. We want to improve gender equality. But it is one thing to talk about that and say that is what we want; it is another thing to do something about it. That is why I am so pleased and proud to be part of a government that has worked very hard since 2017 to improve gender equality for women and girls in our community. The joint announcement that the member referred to is a very good example of that. I thank the Treasurer for this announcement, made in conjunction with the Premier, the Minister for Women's Interests and myself as the Minister for Industrial Relations to pay superannuation on unpaid parental leave up to 24 weeks. This entitlement will be paid from 1 July this year. This condition has applied to some workers in the public sector, but by no means all. This announcement is a \$46.1 million commitment—a significant commitment—to pay superannuation on unpaid parental leave up to 24 weeks.

The gender pay gap on women's retirement incomes has been too wide for too long. We need practical measures to narrow that retirement pay gap, and that is exactly what this announcement will do, for what is obviously a big employer of women in Western Australia. The state government is the largest employer of women in Western Australia, and I think just over 70 per cent of employees across our public sector are women, so this is a significant investment and move. It is important for a number of reasons. It is a practical measure that will make a difference to real working families—not just women, but families who are working in the public sector. It will pay superannuation on unpaid parental leave. Also, as a big employer, it sends a message to the private sector—all those employers out there who are not paying superannuation on unpaid parental leave—that they really need to step up. Parental leave is like any other entitlement and superannuation should be paid on that entitlement. It sends a message to private sector employers as well. It also sends a message to young families that the public sector is a modern employer, and we want people to come and work with us. We should be an employer of choice; we want people to stay here and we value their contribution, including when they have children. This measure does all those things, and I am really proud of it.

As I said, we all know International Women's Day. We wear purple; we go out and champion the work that is being done. It is one thing to talk about that; it is another thing to actually do something about it. Since we have been in government, we have done just that. We have improved the number of women on government boards and committees; we committed to have 50 per cent women and we have achieved that target. Of course, we are doing the heavy lifting here in Parliament to achieve gender equality here in this chamber, with the appointment of the Speaker and now 50 per cent women in this chamber. We are doing all that work here in government as a Labor Party, and I am very proud of that work. We are improving the number of women in senior executive positions across government. We are doing all that work.

I want members to think about the eight and a half years that the Liberal Party and Nationals WA were in government before 2017 and name one thing that they did while they were in government to improve the position for women in our state. I want members to name one policy initiative that they put in place. I cannot think of one. It is Labor that improves the outcomes for women in our community, and I am very proud to be part of a Cook Labor government that is continuing to do just that.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition with the last question.