

ELECTION OF SENATOR

THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy) [12.02 pm]: Honourable members, this joint sitting has been called to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator Rachel Siewert, notification of which has been reported to this Parliament by His Excellency the Governor, Hon Kim Beazley, AC. I now call for nominations to fill the vacancy.

MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier) [12.03 pm]: I propose that Dorinda Cox of 14 Harwood Close, Canning Vale, Western Australia, being a person who is eligible to be chosen pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, as amended, be chosen to hold the vacant place in the Senate of the Parliament of the Commonwealth created by the resignation of Senator Rachel Siewert.

I advise that I have Ms Cox's assurance that if chosen, she is willing to act.

The PRESIDENT: Premier, would you like to make some comments?

Mr M. McGOWAN: Thank you, President, and Madam Speaker. I acknowledge the Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today. I pay my respect to their elders past, present and emerging.

I start by thanking you and the parliamentary staff for arranging today's joint sitting of Parliament. Very rarely do both houses of Parliament have a joint sitting; that said, this is the second joint sitting of the Western Australian Parliament for a Senate vacancy in less than a year.

This Senate vacancy has been created by the resignation of Senator Rachel Siewert. Rachel was first elected to the Australian Senate in 2004 and was re-elected in 2010 and 2016. During her time in the Senate, Rachel has been an advocate for issues that are important to many Western Australians. Most recently, as the Greens spokesperson for health, mental health, family, ageing and community services and gambling, Rachel's contributions have been many and varied. I would like to thank Rachel for her contributions and public service to Western Australia in her 16 years in the Senate. If she is here today, I am sure we all pass on our regards.

Earlier this month, the Greens WA nominated Dorinda Cox as its replacement candidate in the Senate for Western Australia. Dorinda has a strong knowledge of Western Australia. Dorinda is a Noongar woman with strong links to the south west of Western Australia. She was born in Kojonup. She is a former police officer and served on Western Australia's front line, commencing as a police cadet at age 17. Dorinda moved into further public service following a decade in Western Australia Police working as a public policy officer.

As a strong advocate for Aboriginal businesses and women, Dorinda has over 20 years of experience working at local, state and federal level in both the government and non-government sectors. Dorinda is an anti-domestic violence campaigner and was previously a board director of Our Watch, a national leader in the primary prevention of violence against women. Dorinda has also been a member of the WA Ombudsman's advisory committee on child death reviews and family violence homicides, the University of Western Australia Aboriginal and community justice centre advisory group, the expert Indigenous women's working group on the global treaty on preventing violence against women in the "Everywoman Everywhere" campaign, a practitioner engagement group member for Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety Ltd, and a member of the victims of crime advisory group to the Western Australian Attorney General. Dorinda's knowledge, passion and firsthand experience across a wide range of areas will be a welcome addition in the Senate and to political debate across Australia. There are big national conversations underway around these issues, and more firsthand experience amongst the participants in the Senate can only serve to improve them.

The Senate is a very important Australian institution. It is the state's house, existing to represent the interests of all Western Australians. It is an important, enduring legacy of the agreement of the self-governing colonies to join the Federation over a century ago. A senator's electorate is the entire state, from Denmark to Derby and everywhere in between, so no matter where someone is in Western Australia, they will be equally represented.

I congratulate Ms Cox on her nomination by the WA Greens as its Senate candidate. I wish Dorinda all the best in her endeavours in the Australian Senate. The life of a Western Australian federal politician is a very difficult one, I can assure members. Not only is their electorate one of the largest in the world, but the regular travel to Canberra always takes its toll. I am sure that Dorinda is ready for that. Nevertheless, I am sure that Dorinda will rise to the challenge, serve the people of Western Australia and represent their interests in Canberra with distinction.

Congratulations, Senator Cox, to you, your family and supporters.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: I give the call to the Leader of the Opposition.

MS M.J. DAVIES (Central Wheatbelt — Leader of the Opposition) [12.08 pm]: Thank you, President. I rise to speak on behalf of the opposition and to second the nomination put forward by the Premier. I acknowledge the

Whadjuk people of the Noongar nation, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and pay my respects to leaders past, present and future.

I congratulate Ms Dorinda Cox on her impending ascension to the Senate as a representative for all Western Australians. Irrespective of political persuasion, the role of a senator is significant. Senators go forth with the weight of expectation of representing our whole state in a Parliament that has some significant challenges to navigate in the midst of a global pandemic.

Before going any further, I pause to acknowledge the 16 years of service of Senator Rachel Siewert, who is vacating the role, since taking it on in 2004. Rachel leaves the Parliament with a reputation of being a hard worker. She is fierce and diligent and has been dedicated to the people and causes she has fought for over this period. We wish Ms Siewert the very best for the next stage of her career and life.

Ms Cox will now step into the role, bringing with her her experience as a former police officer, anti-domestic violence advocate, small business woman and experienced board member of organisations that champion the critical issues of Aboriginal justice and women's safety. Each of the 2.67 million Western Australians look to our senators to advocate for these and other issues that will set our state and nation on track for a strong, compassionate and prosperous future. I note that Ms Cox joined Western Australia Police as a cadet at the age of 17 years and spent much of her career in Kalgoorlie. I have no doubt this will have equipped her well for the robust nature of federal Parliament and the task ahead, noting it is important to remain connected to the people one seeks to represent even in the distant halls of Canberra, which is now more important than ever. It is, indeed, an auspicious day, as you take your place as a female Aboriginal senator and a welcome addition to our nation's Parliament. It is one step forward toward greater diversity, reflecting the people and cultures that make up our great nation in this decision-making body. On behalf of the state's opposition, we endorse this nomination and second the motion put by Parliament. We wish Ms Cox the very best as she steps into the federal Parliament to represent our great state of Western Australia.

[Applause.]

HON DR BRAD PETTITT (South Metropolitan) [12.11 pm]: First and foremost, I would also like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on Whadjuk Noongar boodja and pay my respects to elders past and present. I am pleased that both houses start each day with an acknowledgement of country, but today feels like a particularly important time to remind ourselves that we live and work on land that was stolen and that First Nations people have cared for this place for tens of thousands of years.

Today I am so proud and honoured to be speaking in support of my friend and colleague Dorinda Cox, a Yamatji Noongar woman, who will become the first Aboriginal woman from Western Australia to hold a seat in the Australian Senate.

Dorinda has some very big shoes to fill, after Rachel Siewert's impressive 16 years in the Senate. I thank both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition for their acknowledgement of Senator Siewert. She cannot be here today because she is in quarantine, but I am sure she is watching and would have appreciated your comments. I have no doubt Dorinda will carry on the legacy of Rachel's work as well as bringing her own expertise to the Australian Parliament. Both the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition covered really well the extraordinary experience that Ms Cox has, so I will not repeat it, other than to say that I think we can all agree that Dorinda has a very impressive list of achievements and has made significant contributions to both state and federal policy through her work as a domestic violence, child protection and Aboriginal justice campaigner.

To cut a long story short, Dorinda is a passionate social justice advocate who has worked tirelessly for many, many years to bring community voices to the foreground of decision-making. Today is a historic moment for Western Australia and a historic moment for the Greens, as the party has long fought for First Nations' issues and centred First Nations' voices at the heart of our movement. In fact, back in 1990, the Greens was the first party to have an Aboriginal woman on its Senate ticket—that was Gladys Yarran, who ran alongside Jo Valentine and Christabel Chamarette. I note that they are both here today as well. Now, a bit over 30 years later, I am pleased to see that we will have the first Aboriginal woman from WA in the Senate.

My Greens colleague and former member in this place Alison Xamon is a long-time friend and supporter of Dorinda and asked me to share some of her thoughts in the chamber today —

It is with enormous delight that today I get to witness the beginning of the parliamentary contribution of my dear friend and colleague Dorinda Cox.

Much is going to be made about the importance, and the significance of having the first Aboriginal woman Senator from WA finally join the Federal Parliament. And it is significant. And long overdue.

Dorinda will be bringing the essential First Nations perspective to our Parliament and I know that means a lot for a great many people and in particular our First Nations people who have remained under-represented within our parliaments for far too long.

For the Greens, having Dorinda join Victorian Senator Lydia Thorpe is a source of great joy and with that a hope that we will be continuing to journey together as Australians towards reconciliation and treaty. But I also want to ensure that it is recognised that in addition Dorinda brings a significant and impressive degree of life experiences, knowledge and credibility to her new role as Senator for Western Australia.

Those who have had the privilege of undertaking parliamentary representation are all too familiar with the importance of having both a broad experience of life and a broad understanding of the complexities of people's lives within the communities we are called to serve.

Dorinda has this necessary breadth of experience and understanding, with a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of some of the most vulnerable within our community. Dorinda understands the impacts of homelessness, and the impacts that trauma and poverty play on matters of mental health.

The overrepresentation of First Nations people in our prison systems, the challenges within our justice system. These are some of the complex issues for our time, and today we bring someone to our Federal Parliament with a deep understanding of these issues and the sectors that attempt to address them.

Dorinda will also prove to be a powerful voice for the protection of country. As a First Nations woman Dorinda's connection with land ensures that protection of our environment will be at the forefront of her advocacy. And the urgent need to address those global threats to our world such as the impacts of climate change. The protection of culture, of our aboriginal sacred sites will receive the attention it deserves.

Dorinda is aware that she is stepping into big shoes, those of Senator Rachel Siewert. But it is so fitting that following years of attempting to receive justice for First Nations people, that Rachel's successor is now, herself, an aboriginal woman.

Dorinda my friend, I am so proud of you for putting your name forward to represent the people of Western Australia, to ensure that there is a voice for justice and for the earth. I know you will do a wonderful job and I am enormously proud of you.

Thank you, Alison, for sharing those words.

The reality, as Alison said, is that we still have so much work to do to address the systems that continue to fail First Nations people and deepen inequalities in Western Australia and at a federal level. Having Dorinda as a strong voice in the Senate puts Australia on the right pathway to ensuring that truth-telling and treaty processes are set up to reflect what First Nations people want. In order to create a future that works for all of us and does not leave anyone behind, it is critical that our Parliaments reflect the communities they are meant to represent. Today is a tremendously important move in the right direction.

Before closing, I would just like to add some personal reflections. Dorinda, I have had in the last few years the joy of getting to know you and I have been deeply impressed by not only your incredible work ethic, but also the calm professionalism and inclusiveness that you have brought to the role. I know you have worked a long time for this day, sacrificing time with your loved ones as you travelled around this state, country and, in fact, around the world searching for better outcomes for other people. I thank you for that. Today is an important acknowledgement of that sacrifice and a celebration of what you have achieved and will achieve as you lead in furthering the many changes that this nation needs. I look forward to working with you in your new role.

In closing, I am so proud to bear witness to this moment and to be a part of the Greens movement that will make history as we send the first Aboriginal woman from WA to the Australian Senate. Thank you.

[Applause.]

The PRESIDENT: Are there any further nominations? There being no other nominations, I declare Dorinda Cox of 14 Harwood Close, Canning Vale, Western Australia, the person chosen to hold the place vacated by Senator Siewert. Members, please join me in congratulating Senator-elect Dorinda Cox, who is present in the President's gallery today with her family, friends and guests.

[Applause.]

The Joint Sitting concluded at 12.18 pm
