



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2024

JOINT SITTING  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
AND  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday, 1 February 2024



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**SENATE VACANCY**

In accordance with the standing orders passed by both houses of Parliament and approved by Executive Council, the members of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly met in joint sitting in the Legislative Council chamber to fill the vacancy in the representation of Western Australia in the Senate of the federal Parliament caused by the resignation of Senator Hon Patrick Dodson.

The President of the Legislative Council (Hon Alanna Clohesy), in accordance with the standing orders, took the chair at 11.00 am. She was accompanied by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Mrs M.H. Roberts).

**ELECTION OF SENATOR**

**THE PRESIDENT (Hon Alanna Clohesy)** [11.00 am]: 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 former Senator Patrick Dodson, notification of which has been reported to this Parliament by His Excellency the Governor, Christopher John Dawson, AC, APM. I advise that I have approved the presence of photographers in the gallery. I now call for nominations to fill the vacancy.

**MR R.H. COOK (Kwinana — Premier)** [11.01 am]: I propose that Varun Nagarajan Ghosh of 158 Nicholson Road, Subiaco, Western Australia, being a person who is eligible to be chosen pursuant to section 15, as amended, of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia be chosen to hold the vacant place in the Senate of the Parliament of the commonwealth created by the resignation of Senator Patrick Dodson. I am advised that I have Mr Ghosh's assurance that if chosen, he is willing to act. I forced that out of him!

President and Madam Speaker, in recalling Parliament to make this proposal, I would like to put on the record some brief remarks. Firstly, may I extend my gratitude to you, President and Madam Speaker, and the parliamentary staff for arranging today's joint sitting of Parliament.

The Senate vacancy has been created by the resignation of former Senator Patrick Dodson. As many members would know, Senator Dodson recently underwent treatment for cancer. Although his health is improving, he no longer feels physically able to meet the high standard he set for representing Western Australia in the Australian Senate. He announced his resignation in November last year, which took effect from 26 January 2024.

He was first elected to the Senate in 2016. However, his long list of achievements date back much further. His appointment to the Senate also prompted a joint sitting of Parliament, and I was one of several members to add my support at the time. My admiration for Mr Dodson has only grown since that time. I am one of the few members who have had the privilege of working alongside him outside of politics. In the early 2000s, I spent some time working with Patrick as the policy coordinator for the WA Aboriginal Native Title Working Group. Having witnessed his work up close, it is clear that his moniker as the "Father of Reconciliation" is one that is hard earned. He overcame so much and always acted with the utmost grace, even in the face of extraordinary prejudice.

I have great admiration and respect for Mr Dodson. It was a privilege to work with him day in, day out, pushing forward and making progress in the face of extraordinary adversity and personal loss—yet, as I just said, he conducted himself with the most amazing grace. I think we have all been very privileged to be with him during this time. He is a giant of our generation and I am sure that his departure from the Senate will be greatly missed.

However, now we are here to welcome a new Western Australian senator to fill the large boots of Mr Dodson. Varun Ghosh will take on that role ably. He brings to the Senate a background rich in experience. His parents, who are here in the President's gallery today, migrated from India to Australia in the 1980s, eventually settling in Perth. May I commend them on their choice of state in which to live! Mr Ghosh excelled at school, including as a keen participant in debating, which eventually saw him selected as a captain of the Australian schools debating team in 2002. Mr Ghosh is highly qualified, highly educated and highly regarded in his community—but, most importantly, he is a person of great character and he is humble, generous, kind, loyal, extremely hardworking and dedicated to his community. He is close to the community as well. He has volunteered, participated and fostered great friendships playing in various cricket and hockey teams in Perth. His temperament is perfectly suited to this new vocation of politics. He is balanced and very considerate.

Varun became a member of the Labor Party as a 17-year-old. I remember those days. He was young, committed, ambitious and extremely capable, and he was committed to our values of fairness and equality. They are values that he has pursued in his profession to date as a barrister, both here and abroad. May I make the observation that he is another graduate of the development program founded and run by former Senator Chris Evans, whom I acknowledge in the gallery today, along with other members of the federal Parliament.

Varun graduated in law and arts at the University of Western Australia before attaining his Master of Law at the University of Cambridge. He has been admitted to the bar in Western Australia and New York and throughout his career he has worked in commercial and administrative law as well as industrial relations and employment law.

Speaker and President, this may all sound very impressive, but actually it is par for the course for the Ghosh family. In fact, one might say that he is potentially the underachiever of the family. His mother and father, Lakshmi and Soumya, are both neurologists and his brother, Gaurav, is an endocrinologist—so we wish Varun all the very best!

As someone who has also fairly recently taken on a change in a substantial new role, I say to you, Varun: congratulations. The number of people in the gallery today is testament to just how pleased we are that you will be joining the ranks of senators in the commonwealth Parliament. I wish you all the very best of luck, while also knowing that your skill set and character will carry you much further than luck ever will. I know that you will do an incredible job representing Western Australians and our state's interests in the Senate.

As I said, President and Speaker, I remember Varun when he first joined the Labor Party at 17 years of age. There is nothing—nothing—that makes you feel older than seeing young people like this achieving and moving through the ranks, but it is also a point of immense pride.

I want to place on the record my sincere congratulations to you, Varun. Well done!

[Applause.]

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Leader of the Opposition)** [11.09 am]: I second the motion moved by the Premier. In rising to second the motion for the appointment of Varun Ghosh to the Senate in the commonwealth Parliament, I point out that this comes at a time when our great state of Western Australia is navigating some of the most complex and challenging times in recent history. As we know, the Senate is the states' house in the federal Parliament. Western Australia is the engine room of the Australian economy, and ensuring the continued success of our state surely must be the primary concern of our senators.

I wish to take a moment to, along with the Premier, acknowledge the retirement of Senator Pat Dodson, a greatly respected Yawuru elder from Broome and a tireless advocate for Indigenous rights and reconciliation. His departure marks the end of a significant chapter in representing the unique perspectives and needs of regional and remote Western Australia, particularly in advocating for Indigenous communities. Former Senator Dodson's commitment to public service and his influential role in promoting Aboriginal voices and rights will have a lasting impact. His dedication to representing Western Australians, especially our Indigenous communities, at the national level is a legacy that will no doubt endure, and I wish him all the very best into the future.

The responsibilities entrusted upon Mr Ghosh are significant, especially in light of the issues that are reflected in our relationship with Canberra. There are complexities in things like approvals and issues around the live export of sheep—issues that will ultimately affect the lives and livelihoods of all Western Australians. Those Western Australians expect strong advocacy in the federal Parliament, and it is crucial that Mr Ghosh represents the needs of our state with commitment and vigour.

Opposition members extend our best wishes to him in his endeavours and we trust that he will be a resolute and inclusive voice for all Western Australians. I am sure that he will be able to put his strong background in the legal profession to good use. This state, renowned for its vibrant communities and dynamic economy, deserves nothing less than strong and effective representation. I look forward to his contribution to this state and to the Senate.

[Applause.]

**DR A.D. BUTI (Armadale — Minister for Education)** [11.12 am]: It is with great pleasure that I rise to make some brief comments endorsing the appointment of Varun Ghosh as Senator Ghosh to replace the father of reconciliation in Australia, former Senator Patrick Dodson. Thank you, Patrick, for your significant contributions to enhancing dialogue on reconciliation and First Nations issues in the commonwealth Parliament.

I am delighted and excited that Varun Ghosh is soon to become Senator Varun Ghosh. Varun is a man of outstanding intellect and integrity, with a strong moral compass and a passion for public policy development, law reform and community service. Varun is a first-generation Australian; his parents, as already stated by the Premier, emigrated from India. Varun was born in Canberra but has overcome that burden to be raised here in Western Australia! I had the pleasure of teaching at the University of Western Australia Law School at the time that Varun was a student, and what an outstanding student he was. He studied a Bachelor of Laws and a Bachelor of Arts majoring in political science and international relations, graduating with first-class honours in both—an outstanding achievement.

His honours dissertation in arts was titled “The Politics of Ending Impunity: The International Criminal Court and the Enforcement of International Humanitarian Law”. Say that when you have had a few drinks! That thesis was ranked second in political science and international relations at UWA in 2006. The thesis compared the efficacy of the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda and the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia with the efficacy of the International Criminal Court. Varun concluded that the history, structure and political support for the International Criminal Court meant that it was likely to be more effective than the ad hoc tribunals at enforcing international humanitarian law.

Varun’s honours thesis in law, titled “Boilermakers Reconsidered—A New Separation of Powers Doctrine”, won the prize for best law honours dissertation at the UWA Law School in 2008. It is an outstanding work of legal research, writing and analysis. The thesis explored the history and application of the boilermakers’ principle, its declining or diminishing status, and the emergence of a new separation of powers doctrine in Australia’s constitutional jurisprudence.

During his academic studies at UWA, Varun won a number of prizes, including the Patrick O’Brien Prize in Political Science and International Relations for best public policy essay in 2005 and the Conflict of Laws Prize in 2008, and he was also a member of the *University of Western Australia Law Review* editorial board. As a sign of future involvement in politics, Varun was actively involved in the UWA Student Guild and was elected chair of the guild council in 2004 and secretary of the guild in 2005. He was also president of the UWA Labor Club in 2005 and president of WA Young Labor in 2006. In the same year, he worked on Ben Wyatt’s by-election campaign and, a year later, he worked on the by-election campaign of the current member for Warnbro. You have a lot to answer for, Varun!

After spending nearly two years working on the Terrace for Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Varun studied for a Master of Law degree in the United Kingdom at that other university—no, not the London School of Economics and Political Science, but, rather, the University of Cambridge—on a Frank Downing law scholarship. As was mentioned by the Premier, he then worked as a lawyer in New York and Washington, DC, before returning to Perth to rejoin King & Wood Mallesons, before moving to the bar in 2018, where he specialised in commercial, construction, industrial, administrative and constitutional law. His legal talents have been recognised by being listed in Best Lawyers in Australia for 2022 and 2023 for litigation. Last year, he was also listed in Doyle’s Guide as a leading insolvency junior.

Varun is a keen hockey and cricket player. I am told that he has scored a century for the mighty Tuart Hill Cricket Club—home of the member for Balcatta! He is also a very avid reader and a published opinion writer and book reviewer. His list of book reviews is eclectic, with my favourite being his review of *Born to Run* by Bruce Springsteen, published in the *Australian Book Review* in 2017.

The Western Australian branch of the Australian Labor Party has chosen wisely in nominating Varun Ghosh to be our next senator. I am sure that members of this Parliament, whichever side of politics they sit on, will agree that Varun comes to this new position with outstanding credentials. For those of you who have not had the pleasure of meeting Varun, when you do, I am sure you will be impressed. He is not only highly intelligent with a great work ethic, but also extremely likeable, very humble and very modest. Can I offer Varun a bit of advice? It is best not to be that modest in politics, because those around you are not as modest!

Varun Ghosh, I wish you all the best as you embark on your senatorial career. Go forth and show Canberra and the rest of Australia your talents. We, as Western Australians, are fortunate to have you representing us in Canberra, and I look forward to some day addressing you as “Minister Ghosh”.

[Applause.]

**HON KATE DOUST (South Metropolitan)** [11.18 am]: It is with great pride today that I take this opportunity to support the recommendation for Varun Ghosh to take the vacant Senate space, and I want to say a few words about that.

Firstly, I want to echo the words of earlier speakers, the Premier, the Leader of the Opposition and my colleague Minister Buti, in supporting and acknowledging the significant role that Senator Pat Dodson has played both as a senator representing Western Australia and in other roles throughout his life. He is a significant Western Australian, and it is unfortunate that due to ill health, his time in the Senate has been cut short. I know that we all wish him well for his ongoing time in retirement. Personally, it was a great privilege over the last couple of years to have worked closely with him on the national Labor Party’s rapid antigen test committee and establish that policy for the party. That was a wonderful opportunity to learn and work with him. However, with his retirement we are dealing with a generational change.

We are now seeing, as we have already heard, a wonderful individual in Varun Ghosh who will be stepping forward to replace Senator Dodson. I have been fortunate to have known Varun since he first joined the party, as a young child, really! My colleagues have already outlined his working life and his academic life. My kids often say, “Cs are passes, Mum”, but not for Varun. Every single thing that he has done has been a high achievement and a significant

achievement. As you look through each part of his academic process, it can be seen he has had either a top award, a scholarship, a prize or a pathway to another opportunity in another place. He has demonstrated the capacity to seize those opportunities and enhance his knowledge, skills and awareness of what is happening in the world. I think that puts him in good stead for the opportunities that are before him in the Senate. I think that both the party, the state and this Parliament are choosing wisely by putting him into the Senate to represent us. I know that he will be a very strong voice and a very strong advocate for every Western Australian.

I always enjoyed the time I worked with Varun on a number of those campaigns that Minister Buti alluded to— Ben Wyatt’s campaign, Paul Papalia’s campaign, Hannah Beazley’s campaign and Tim Hammond’s campaign twice, I think. The one thing Varun has consistently said to me and my husband, Bill Johnston, over time is, “What more can I do to assist the party?” He has taken advice and stepped up and engaged more and more, and we have been the beneficiary of his great work. That has come about in not only his campaigning, but also his legal support for the party and his activities in policy development. He has been quite outstanding. I know that Varun often jokes that he is a disappointment to his mum and dad, Lakshmi and Soumya, because he did not go into the family business of medicine, but I also know that their hearts beat with great pride today, and they certainly will next week when he is sworn in as he steps up into the Senate. You are an outstanding individual, Varun, and I know that your parents are madly, madly happy about your opportunities.

You will note that not only has Varun participated in academia both as a student and by providing academic support to students at early phases and even lately in a range of academic portfolios, but also he has been a significant writer. If we were in the entertainment business, we would call Varun a triple threat. Thankfully, I do not know whether he sings, dances or acts, and my advice to him, as a member of Parliament, is to not do those things because he would be done for in social media. In terms of politics, we would say that he is indeed a triple threat. He is an academic, a lawyer and a writer. I forgive him his love of cricket but endorse his love of hockey. All the experience that he has garnered over the last 20 years will be of great value to him in the Senate. Varun understands the role of the house of review. Each of those elements of his work and his life that he brings with him will be of value to him and the work he will do in the Senate, be it his community engagement, his review of legislation or his work on committees. He understands the value of, and the work required in, going into the minutia, and he understands the language and intent of the work that we do in any house of review.

Given the number of people who are here in support of Varun today—from the community, his family, his work arrangements and the universities—I know that he has built strong relationships. That will bode well for him into the future. I think we have chosen wisely. I know that he is really enthusiastic about this great opportunity before him. We hope that he has a great future. He will be there for a long time, not a short time. He will grow into that role and become highly skilled. He really understands that there are people who cannot speak for themselves and need a voice. He will step up for those people. He has demonstrated that over an extended time in his work as a lawyer and as an advocate. He has a strong understanding of, and links to, working people through his connections to the trade union movement and his work in other communities. I am really proud that we are able to put a young man like Varun Ghosh into the Senate. I know that he will work to his utmost best to represent this state. People who have the opportunity to see his CV will know that he does not do anything half-baked. I do not think he will take to his role as a Senator in a halfway manner. He will give it his full commitment and work hard. Sometimes people come into the role as a member of Parliament and they like the idea of being a member of Parliament, but they do not necessarily have a plan once they take on that role or know what they will do as they step it out. I know that Varun has a plan. He has long-term ambitions for people in this state and he will, step by step, work to progress those changes and bring about positive outcomes for the people of Western Australia.

Varun, I wish you well. Bill and I are immensely proud of your achievement and we look forward to your success, not just as a Senator on a personal level, but for all of us as Western Australians because we know that you will be an amazing voice for us. We look forward to working with you and seeing how you progress with this amazing new opportunity. We thank you for stepping up on our behalf.

[Applause.]

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West — Leader of the Opposition)** [11.26 am]: I will be brief because other business is pressing. I also congratulate Mr Ghosh on his ascension to the Senate. I am sure that I speak on behalf of every member of the Parliament of Western Australia in wishing him the absolute best in his political career. It appears to be the first political career that was launched by having to win a family preselection before the Labor Party preselection! Congratulations on that. It looks like that was probably more competitive than the next one. Well done on that. These are interesting times.

I also wanted to add this: the words “giant” and “legend” are thrown around perhaps a little bit too frequently in Australia, but it is hard to go past the legacy of retiring Senator Patrick Dodson, who genuinely deserves those titles. It is hard to underestimate his influence not just on the federal Parliament and not just on politics in this state and across the country, but also in the community of Western Australia. He leaves a massive legacy, the likes of which we will probably struggle to see again. Obviously, again, I am sure that I speak on behalf of every member of both houses of Parliament when I wish him the absolute best on the things that are to come. He is someone who

demands enormous respect no matter what side of politics one sits on. Hopefully, that recognition from, potentially, his political opponents as well as his political allies will leave him under no illusion that he was held in enormous esteem by all of us on all sides of politics from every political party. His influence on this state will be remembered for a very long time to come. We obviously wish him very well going forward.

[Applause.]

**The PRESIDENT:** There being no further members wishing to speak to the nomination, I now ask: are there any further nominations? No. There being no other nominations, I declare Varun Nagarajan Ghosh of 158 Nicholson Road, Subiaco, Western Australia, the person chosen to hold the place vacated by former Senator Patrick Dodson.

Members, please join me in congratulating Senator-elect Varun Ghosh, who is present.

[Applause.]

*The Joint Sitting concluded at 11.30 am*

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