

**WOMEN'S ISSUES — PROGRESSIVE INITIATIVES**

*Motion*

**HON LORNA HARPER (East Metropolitan)** [11.45 am] — without notice: I move —

That this house acknowledges the progressive initiatives that the McGowan government has implemented to advance women's issues in Western Australia.

I am very proud to have moved my motion that the Legislative Council acknowledge the progressive initiatives that the McGowan government has implemented to advance women's issues in WA. I am very proud to stand here today as a member of the McGowan Labor government; I am very proud to be one of the 115 women who have been elected to this Parliament in the last 102 years; and I am very proud to be one of the 43 women elected at the 2021 election. I am especially proud to say that 91 per cent of the women in Parliament today are members of the McGowan Labor government. That is just extraordinary—91 per cent.

WA Labor has been a leader on women's issues for a long time. It was a Labor government that introduced a Minister for Women's Interests 40 years ago. Unfortunately, though, the first two Ministers for Women's Interests were men! However, since then the role has been continuously occupied by women, with Hon Sue Ellery becoming the eleventh Minister for Women's Interests. What I will be speaking about today will be the culmination of the work of the current Minister for Women's Interests and the previous Minister for Women's Interests, Hon Simone McGurk, who, members will agree, are formidable women.

The McGowan Labor government does not just talk about the importance of women's issues—it acts. In March 2020, the McGowan Labor government launched *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality*. This 10-year plan sets out a long-term coordinated approach to address gender inequality in Western Australia. The Premier's message in the plan states —

I am very proud to present Stronger Together: WA's Plan for Gender Equality, a long-term coordinated approach to addressing gender inequality in Western Australia. It provides a road map not just for Government, but for businesses, communities and individuals.

The data tells us that women in Western Australia are still at considerable risk of violence and abuse, and we continue to have a significant gender pay gap. This is unacceptable and our State risks being left behind if we don't take action.

The plan has four priorities. The first priority is health and wellbeing, with the goal that women are healthy, active and lead fulfilled lives. The second priority is safety and justice, with the goal that women live safely and have appropriate access to adequate legal protections. The third priority is economic independence, with the goal that women are financially independent across all life stages. The fourth priority is leadership, with the goal being that women's skills, achievements and strengths are valued, enabling them to participate equally in the community, including at leadership levels. My colleagues will go into the report in more detail because the topic of women's issues and interests is so vast, and the government is doing so much in this area, that I could not possibly tell members everything that is going on in 15 minutes. We know it is going to take a long time. We know that this attitude towards women continues. People still do not value women in society.

This plan relates to a lot of our other plans, policies and strategies, including Our Priorities: Sharing Prosperity, the WA strategy to reduce family and domestic violence and the workforce diversification strategy. Under the safety and justice priority area it states —

Women in Western Australia are far more likely than men to experience physical or sexual violence during their lives ... One in five women in Western Australia report having experienced partner violence since the age of 15, and more than one-third of those women reported that the violence occurred during pregnancy.

One in five women! That means that we are sitting in this chamber with a woman who has experienced some form of violence in their life. There is no doubt about that. There is probably not a woman in this Parliament who has not been sexually abused in some form since a young age, whether verbally, physically, socially or even via the internet or email—there is not one. We have seen in recent newspaper reports that women's fear of violence is real, but women are told on a regular basis that they are responsible for their own safety and that they have to modify their behaviour because of this. I have spoken about this before. The responsibility lives with all of us. We are responsible as a society to teach men how to treat women better. We are responsible as a society to teach children to treat everybody with respect. It is not up to women to modify their behaviour; it is up to the whole of society. We need to continue down that path.

In looking at this motion, I picked up the *Second action plan 2021–2025*, the progress report for *Stronger together*. We are moving forward. We are currently implementing the second action plan; work is being undertaken by the government. One of the focus areas is COVID-19 women's recovery. As we all know, we have had issues coming

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out of COVID. I was speaking to a young woman last night about the fact that she went through year 12 as a COVID student, and we spoke about the impact of that on some young people. It has been extraordinary talking to her, my daughter and other women of that age. As a young woman, I would say, “I’m a feminist! We’re moving forward. No children for me. I want a career”, and all that stuff. We now have a whole society of young women who are going inwards and saying, “No, I want to be a mother at a young age. I want to be married with children.” It is a very weird and unconventional step backwards for women’s lib. They are still powerful young women, but what I am picking up is that they have a sense of insecurity in society that makes them want to retreat into traditional roles. That is quite sad. We should be building up and empowering these young women.

Excuse me; I have a bit of a sore throat today. Being a woman, I talk loud; I always have. Members are used to it; they can probably hear me halfway down the corridor!

The action plan also looks at safe workplaces. We had an absolutely amazing but very sad inquiry into women in the mining industry and what has been happening to a lot of women when they go into male-dominated industries. As a woman who came from the union movement, I understand. I have been there, sitting in a room with 30 big smelly men who, when I stood up, were still taller than me. We were negotiating agreements. These men, coming from a traditional men’s union, tried to say, “Sit down, lassie.” Again, me being me, I did not take that; I stood up and very proudly said, “No, we are here together, working in solidarity. I am a woman, but, firstly, I am a member of this union.” All the women out there, whether they work as a police officer, as a paramedic, as a firefighter, in the mines, driving a bus or as a member of Parliament, are work colleagues and they should be treated with respect. Members are polite and professional to each other. Sometimes we are more friendly. It does not matter what side of politics one sits on, we are courteous and polite to each other. That is what we should model to people out there, and we should continue to move forward.

Another aspect of the plan that was brought in is the drink-spiking test kit. On the rare occasions I go out, I have seen young women carry their glasses onto the dance floor. Being the mum I am, I would say, “What’re you doing? You can’t do that.” It took me a while to realise that they do it for their own safety. It is ridiculous that young women cannot go out and get up on the dance floor and dance without having to hold their hands over the top of their drinks. They are not holding them at the side; they are covering the tops of their drinks so that nobody can put anything in their drink as they walk past them. When I was a young woman, we left everything sitting there. It did not matter whether we were in Edinburgh, Glasgow or the small town I came from, we did not think about that. We were not worried about somebody spiking our drinks. Now, every young woman who goes out has that concern, and a lot of young men as well, to be honest. What on earth are we doing as a society? It really boggles my mind at times.

Another great thing is that period products are now available in schools. This is sensational. Every woman will remember going through the first flush of puberty and becoming a woman and getting their period. They will remember sitting in a classroom and going, “Oh my God; I’ve got my period”, and being so embarrassed by it as there was nothing there to help them, or the boys making fun of them because they had supplies in their bag or they pulled them out at the shops or something. It has happened to every one of us. But by having these products available and talking openly about periods, we take away the myth. Women have periods, by the way. We are taking away the myth about this. Females around the world get their periods. To have access to these products when in school is amazing.

The *Path to safety* report, which is connected to *Stronger together*, states —

To stop family and domestic violence before it escalates, people need to be able to recognise controlling behaviours.

That comment from Simone McGurk is in the foreword to *Path to safety: Western Australia’s strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030*. She also said —

Fundamentally, this work is about respect and valuing women and girls as equal partners.

If people look through all the literature and programs that the Minister for Women’s Interests and her office are doing, they will see that every single one is about respect for women, empowering women to step forward and empowering women to take on non-traditional roles in the workplace. They are about empowering women in the community to make sure that their voices are heard on a regular basis, and empowering young women in society. I have a young woman who works part-time in my office. She is an extraordinary young woman—hey, Ebony; you are pretty remarkable. She is at university studying a business degree with marketing on the side, as well as all the other things she does. I see my role as an older woman as being to mentor and empower Ebony to be the best that she can be. I see my role as a member of Parliament as being to make sure that every other young woman who comes from a working class background like me, who did not come through the university ranks because they chose a different pathway in life, who were not handed everything in life and who have had to work hard and long hours to get where they are, knows that they can do it. I want every female who is a single parent out there to know that they can actually come here and do it. The Stronger Together plan for the future is one of the ways that we can do it.

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Women in here, sisters, we should continue to work together to ensure that respect is shown to all. We should continue to work together to support each other and to build each other up, and we should continue to be proud to be members of the McGowan Labor government. It is the one government in WA that is actually going forward and putting its plan into place to ensure that the future of WA will be strongly female. Next time, we want to see more than 43 female MPs; we want to see 50 per cent at least.

**HON SANDRA CARR (Agricultural)** [12 noon]: I rise in support of the motion brought forward by Hon Lorna Harper and thank her for raising the motion and providing us with an opportunity to discuss some important issues about women in both Parliament and the WA community.

Last year I had the opportunity to attend the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association conference in Halifax, Canada, and the conference theme was “Inclusive, accessible, accountable and strong Parliaments: The cornerstone of democracy and essential for development”. It is difficult for a community to truly call itself a democracy if it excludes or underrepresents groups proportionate to the population. I am incredibly proud to say that I discovered at the conference that WA Labor and the McGowan government are, in fact, world leaders among Commonwealth countries. Women hold only 26 per cent of seats in Parliament around the world, yet we are around 49 or 50 per cent of the global population. Only 25.5 per cent of all national parliamentarians are women, and we are only 19.5 per cent in Commonwealth countries, but WA Labor is edging very close to 50 per cent women MPs, and that is something we can be incredibly proud of. It is something that has been achieved by active effort, initiatives and policy within WA Labor, and setting the standard is something that the McGowan government should be incredibly proud of. It includes the first woman to hold a seat in my electorate, the Agricultural Region, Lara Dalton, which is something that we are incredibly proud of. The fantastic synchronicity of that happening was that it was very close to the birthplace of Edith Cowan and 100 years since Edith Cowan was elected; I think that is highly symbolic of how far we have come. Moreover, in the last state election, we achieved some great diversity. Just in the Legislative Council, we have the examples of the first Sudanese person elected to Parliament, Hon Ayor Makur Chuot; the first Indigenous woman elected to the Legislative Council, Hon Rosie Sahanna; and the first Serbian-born person elected, Hon Klara Andric.

It is also important to address why that is so important. Why is it so important that we have women in Parliament? I would like to make the argument that we operate and form policy on data. If we look at data globally and we explore how data operates, it operates from a default male setting, and that results in some key structural outcomes, even in how buildings, furniture, equipment and machinery are designed. They are all designed to suit the physiology of men because the designs are based on the data of men, data that has been collected around male experience. An example is the commonwealth Parliament building not having toilets for women when the first women were elected to federal Parliament. It also results in things like the temperature in the chamber being set to a temperature that best suits men in suits, and men have a naturally higher body temperature than women. The default setting is male; it is a one-size-fits-male default setting, and it has an impact on women’s lives and safety. Another example is that crash test dummies in cars represent the male physiology, which means that if women are involved in an accident, they are far more likely to not achieve the full benefit of safety mechanisms in vehicles because they were not designed for the female physiology. Data impacts policy, and data bias impacts policy. It is so important to have female voices contributing to policy, and it is important to have data.

Today, the Workplace Gender Equality Amendment (Closing the Gender Pay Gap) Bill 2023 passed in the federal Parliament, which I am very excited to note. The bill will ensure that companies with more than 100 employees will be required to publish their gender pay gap data. It is an important policy reform. If we look at the gender pay gap in Australia, it still sits around 13.3 per cent.

Undervaluing the importance of representation of women in politics does not just form structural inequalities; undervaluing women begins at home. It results in proprietary rights and in outcomes like family and domestic violence. I am really pleased that the McGowan government appointed the first Minister for Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence and put significant work into the development of Minister McGurk’s *Path to safety: Western Australia’s strategy to reduce family and domestic violence 2020–2030*. It represented a significant paradigm shift. Most importantly, it looked at the prevention of violence against women and children. The survey looked at national community attitudes towards violence against women, and it showed us that the understanding of what constitutes violence against women is declining, particularly in the 16-year-old to 24-year-old age group. That is a very worrying statistic, and it has never been more important that we continue to have the representation of women in Parliament. It also signals to us our collective responsibility—we cannot continue to fail our young men because the harm that will cause them in their future lives will be significant.

The prevention programs that the McGowan government is implementing are particularly important. It is investing over \$7 million to prevent family and domestic violence, including our respectful relationship teaching support programs, which are particularly important in schools. It has invested over \$1 million to expand those programs through schools; they continue to expand and will be expanded into sporting and recreational clubs as well. They

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are important. The programs also work to educate some of the teaching staff, and that is particularly important. I can give members a very concrete example of when I was teaching; I saw a young man behave in a way that was aggressive and worryingly disrespectful of a young woman. We had a pastoral care system in which homeroom teachers addressed behavioural issues with their students, and I explained to the male homeroom teacher the situation, what I had seen and heard, and how that was a form of aggression and violence against the young woman. His response to me was “Yeah, I think he likes her. I think he has a bit of a thing for her.” That is not an example of understanding respectful relationships or understanding the significant underlying issue of how violence against women happens. It continues to be perpetuated unless we are all taking personal responsibility, stepping in and calling it out. That is why I emphasise the importance of the McGowan government’s commitment to those respectful relationships programs and the way they are operating within schools.

Another really fantastic example is one we just saw in this sitting of Parliament, and that is the offensive advertising bill we passed earlier. I think that collectively we can all be proud of that. Things like offensive slogans on vans, things that normalise or create humour around violence against other people and misogynistic or racist attitudes towards others are other ways in which we endorse unhealthy attitudes. They are ways that we quietly and subtly perpetuate violence throughout society, so I am incredibly proud to be a part of the McGowan government, which brought this bill to Parliament and recently passed it. It is a fantastic reform and one that also started a really important dialogue about the impact of that kind of advertising.

Some really important legislation has also been passed on the new specific criminal offence of suffocation and strangulation. It is particularly important legislation because the research tells us that victims of strangulation are seven times more likely to be the victims of homicide. That legislation is potentially life-saving. It is important to note that those kinds of events need to be spoken about. We need people to comment and communicate about those kind of things, because if we are not talking about those kind of things because it is uncomfortable or we do not like to think that they are happening, they continue to happen. Again, I talk about our collective responsibility and part of the role of women in Parliament is to continue to raise these points and carry those conversations forward so that we can address those things and prevent that kind of violence and proprietary rights over women and elevate their status in the community. That is something I am proud to say that the McGowan government has been working towards.

I am going to run out of time. We have also spent more than \$7 million on a new restraining order system, which is something to be particularly proud of.

**HON KLARA ANDRIC (South Metropolitan) [12.10 pm]:** I did that with such enthusiasm! Thank you, Acting President.

I begin by thanking Hon Lorna Harper for bringing this motion to the house with her fantastic contribution, and also Hon Sandra Carr’s. According to the latest data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics from June 2021, women make up 50 per cent of the Australian population, would you believe it? But equality stops at the statistics as there are several challenges and issues as we all know that are unique to women throughout all facets of our society. These include much higher rates of domestic violence, pay inequality and a lack of workplace opportunities, to name a few. I am so pleased to see that this government in particular, as an Australian first, created a new offence for non-fatal strangulation. As we all know, whilst we must do more to protect victims of domestic violence with steps like this—I wanted to mention this particular step first-off—introducing serial family violence offender declarations are really important for unfortunately too many women.

I would like to use my time today to speak on some of the challenges that we face, and include the initiatives and achievements of the McGowan government towards closing the gap in several of these areas. Firstly, I would like to observe the trends for women in roles of leadership, and say that they are looking quite positive, with a few examples being the McGowan government’s 2017 election commitment of having 50 per cent women on government boards and committees being achieved by October 2022. That is an incredible achievement. Women now make up 52.9 per cent of government boards and committees. This is an increase of 32 per cent from 2015. Women now make up 50 per cent of senior executive service contracts in the public sector, which is an increase of 33 per cent. Women occupy almost 30 per cent of the Public Transport Authority, which is an increase of 50 per cent since 2017. Women now make up 46 per cent of WA Parliament, which is an incredible increase from 31 per cent in the previous term, and something I am so incredibly proud to see. It is no doubt that this is in fact mainly thanks to the McGowan government, with 52 per cent of the McGowan Labor government caucus being made up of female members of Parliament. In this house, 60 per cent of MPs in the Legislative Council are women. These are the kinds of track records of our government that I am really proud to see. Unfortunately, and I do not want to use this opportunity to make a dig at the other side —

**Hon Donna Faragher:** Yes, but you will.

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**Hon KLARA ANDRIC:** I will, I am sorry, Hon Donna Faragher, but it is something that I hope that she, being the only female sitting on that side, will listen to because I am sure she understands that until the other side's representation of women reflects the community, which, as I said when I first started speaking today, is 50 per cent, it will struggle. It is a fact, because without that understanding, without women being representatives in Parliament, which is a reflection of the community, I do not believe that good governments can be formed.

One of the several initiatives put in place by the McGowan government is *Stronger together: WA's plan for gender equality*. Members talked about this earlier. The stronger together plan is the first of its kind in WA that provides a framework for coordinated action by not only the government, but also businesses, organisations and individuals, with practical steps aiming at advancing gender equality. The plan was launched in 2020 and it is now in its third year. It will be delivered through four action plans spanning a 10-year period from 2020 to 2030. I am pleased to know that the plan was drafted by an extensive consultation process with a wide range of people from all age groups, diverse backgrounds, different abilities and diverse sexual identities across Western Australia who provided their thoughts and their ideas. Stronger together has now entered its second action plan with focuses across four priority areas, including safety and justice, health and wellbeing, leadership, and economic independence.

I move on to the stronger together plan's action area of economic independence relating to pay inequality in Western Australia. The gender pay gap of WA is the highest of all states, not a record that we like, but it is a fact. We are currently sitting at 22.1 per cent, which is higher than the national average. Several factors contribute to the gender pay gap, including the lack of female representation in leadership positions and the undervaluation of occupations predominantly held by women, such as child care. Although I am pleased to hear that women's workforce participation rate currently sits at 64.5 per cent, which is an all-time high, we all know that there is still room for improvement. Additional studies indicate that gender bias in recruitment and promotion practices is a significant factor that contributes to the pay gap between genders. The ideas of stereotypical gender roles in the workforce are in fact learnt in childhood and reinforced through a woman's formative years and further. I talked about this last week when we spoke about education and women in STEM. This has a significant influence on what careers women tend to go for, including the fields that attract higher wages and higher pay. This, as I said, includes STEM roles. I believe that in order to engage more women in STEM, we need to encourage women to take up these career paths.

We have done this through McGowan Labor government policies. I talked in detail last week about the "Future jobs, future skills" strategy. This strategy aims to meet the government's Our Priorities target of 85 per cent of year 12 students completing two or more STEM skills by 2024. As we know, the key objective in this strategy is to address the lack of gender diversity in STEM education and careers. However, as we know, STEM is not the only career path that is highly dominated by men and attracts some of WA's highest-paid jobs. The mining and construction sector also sees higher wages and shares the same problem when it comes to gender inequality. As I have repeatedly said in this house, education is once again the key to opening pathways to more lucrative roles, and I am pleased to see positive statistics coming from TAFE schools and across our state. Thanks to the McGowan government's lower fees, more women are enrolled in traditionally male-occupied roles.

There was so much that I wanted to talk about in this area, but once again I have run out of time. I have to get better at summarising what I want to say more efficiently. I want to say that this government knows that if we can close the gender pay gap, every Western Australian will share in the economic and social results.

**HON DONNA FARAGHER (East Metropolitan) [12.20 pm]:** I also rise to make a few comments on the motion on women's issues. I indicate that I will not take the bait from Hon Klara Andric, because I think that, so far, this has been a good and positive motion in terms of the issues being raised.

I come to this debate with a very clear view. I have always taken the view that background and circumstance should never define someone's ability to lead or make a difference within the community, and neither should gender. But it is quite clear and understood that there continues to be disadvantage, inequity and challenges for women in a range of areas. My response to that, and I think it is shared by, and in line with, the comments of the other speakers so far, is that we all have a role to play whether we are female or male in advancing the status of women and promoting equality of opportunity for girls and women and identifying areas that require change and action.

Empowering women is critical to supporting economic prosperity and growth. It is critical to reducing poverty. We know not just here in Australia but around the globe that education absolutely is the key to opportunity and that educating women across all ages leads to better health and wellbeing opportunities, as well as a range of other areas such as better child nutrition, improved financial literacy and so forth. Having support mechanisms for women—I think Hon Lorna Harper talked about this when she mentioned her electorate officer in this context—and encouraging more female role models and mentors who can inspire girls from a very young age is incredibly important. Equally, it is imperative that for women we have continued identification, encouragement and support for leadership opportunities; pre-employment and further education programs; a greater involvement and partnership between industry and school or government and school or a combination of all three; and identified, promoted and

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supported career opportunities, particularly in fields—I think Hon Klara Andric raised this—that might not be seen as “traditional”.

A couple of weeks ago, I was at the Women’s Wall of Fame ceremony with the Leader of the House, and the Leader of the House talked specifically about that, and I absolutely support what she was saying. I will always give support to initiatives and actions that promote those career opportunities—to ensure that women know that they can achieve in whatever field they have an interest in. In saying that, though, it is quite clear, as I said at the beginning, that in terms of equality of opportunity there continues to be challenges and disadvantages across a range of areas, and a number of those areas have already been identified.

I will say that although this is somewhat of a self-congratulatory motion, which we have become used to on a Thursday morning and which is fine—that is the government’s prerogative—I think it is also important that we recognise that there are many, many organisations, non-government organisations and individuals right across our community who each and every day support women across a range of areas. I do not think we should ever underestimate the value that they play.

In preparation for today, I looked at the *2022 Women’s report card: An indicator report of Western Australian women’s progress*. I will reference the executive summary. It states —

... through lockdowns and working from home arrangements, the COVID-19 pandemic has created an environment where women’s exposure to family and domestic violence may have been heightened. Working from home arrangements coupled with lockdowns have implied lower levels of traditional modes of social connection, with the potential to lead to feelings of isolation and poorer mental and physical health.

For many women, access to health services such as cancer screening and face-to-face mental health treatments also changed.

The report card identified a number of priority areas and the overlay across all of them was the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. In the context of mental health and wellbeing, the report quite clearly identifies the need that we ensure that women can continue to have access to critical health screening and support during both state and national crises. Members know that on numerous occasions last year I raised questions in this place about my concerns on the restrictions, which I think were too long, of face-to-face appointments for mothers accessing child health nurses. I think those restrictions went on for far too long. I raise that in an area that does not get talked about a lot, and I appreciate that I have only three minutes, but I will take this opportunity now, given we are heading closer to a May budget, to ask the government to consider the issue of mental health support, particularly perinatal mental health support for women.

Many community-based organisations and programs support new parents, families and their children. It is an area that does not get talked about a lot, but it needs to be talked about because change will not happen in this area if we do not do something about it. We have specialist programs through the mother baby units that are offered at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women as well as Fiona Stanley Hospital. They provide specialist care for mothers who are under significant mental health stress. Equally, Ngala provides a residential parenting service, which is really important because it is a preventive measure, in the hope that by supporting mum and bub early, it will reduce the likelihood of those more intensive treatments. There is, however, a gap for a number of women right now in the state who do not have private health insurance. We have those women who can afford the residential support and another group of women who are provided support through a contract of services between the Department of Communities and Ngala. It has been in place for some time. It is for at-risk families and it is a really important service. But there is a large group of women in the middle who miss out because of financial and other circumstances. When those mums miss out, it can not only lead to a further decline in their mental health and wellbeing, but also have a significant impact on their child and their entire family. Someone said to me, and I think it is a pretty good line, that a universal service focusing on prevention and early intervention should be a service that 100 per cent of mums and families can access. That is a very clear statement. I hope that the government looks into this issue. It is an issue that I am particularly passionate about because there is a group of women who are missing out on a really important health service.

In the last minute I have, I will also say—with my hat on as the shadow Minister for Seniors and Ageing—that one of the biggest issues that continues to be raised with me is about older women’s financial security and their need for secure housing. There was a recent report on these issues by the Council on the Ageing. I have spoken with COTA, as well as Anglicare and others on this particular issue. Women represent the fastest growing cohort of older people seeking access to homelessness services. The COTA report also identified a number of other areas that disproportionately affect older women. There are issues in and around elder abuse; financial security and financial literacy; digital literacy, which impacts their ability to navigate services; as well as inclusion and connectedness. I would like to say more, but I am running out of time.

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**HON SUE ELLERY (South Metropolitan — Leader of the House)** [12.30 pm]: I thank Hon Lorna Harper for moving the motion. Before I get into my comments on behalf of the government, I acknowledge a former member of this place in the President's gallery, Rick Mazza—is he still honourable? It is nice to see him back to visit.

I will get into the substance of the motion before us today. I am delighted to be standing here in one of the roles that I now have. I have a sense of *deja vu* because I was the Minister for Women's Interests for 17 months when Labor was last in government—not that I am bitter about how long I was a minister in that government. It is delightful to be back in this portfolio. So much has changed since I was last in the portfolio, and yet there is still more to do. I have been active in the women's movement for my whole adult life; it started in high school. When I heard officers from Treasury talking about the place of women in our economy as a point for national debate, I could not believe it. I did not think I would live to hear child care finally being identified in a policy sense as a major driver in how we shift our economy, even though some of us have been saying that for a long time. I am glad that things have moved as far as they have. However, there is still more to be done.

I want to talk a little bit about the things that I see will have an impact on women in Western Australia going forward. Hon Donna Faragher mentioned the range of stakeholders and community organisations that are actively pursuing policies on behalf of women. I have been delighted to catch up with those, meet new ones and meet some of the people I worked with before. Whether it is Circle Green Community Legal, which has funds allocated to assist women in employment matters; CEOs for Gender Equity; the Country Women's Association of WA, which I was delighted to have a really constructive meeting with; or Women in Sport, I have had meetings with all those stakeholders. I also met with the Centre for Women's Safety and Wellbeing, which has grown into one of the leading organisations in Western Australia looking at the breadth and depth of women's safety and health. I was delighted to catch up with those organisations and hear from them the things that they want me to prioritise in my role.

I said that I want to concentrate on what is still ahead of us in this term. We have done a lot of work already, particularly in the area of law reform, whether that is around revenge porn legislation or supporting women's right to seek a safe and private abortion through the Public Health Amendment (Safe Access Zones) Act. Later this year, we will introduce legislation to modernise our laws around abortion. That will be treated as a conscience vote. I accept that people in this place will have a different point of view on that. They will be able to exercise that. However, it is the case that the vast majority of women in Western Australia want our abortion laws updated. We are going to deliver on that.

Another area in which we have been doing an enormous amount of work is around family and domestic violence. The Law Reform Commission is currently undertaking a piece of work reviewing sexual offences and examining the issue of affirmative consent. This is a really interesting piece of work. It is looking at whether we should make laws to mandate that people make sure that their sexual partner gives consent. New South Wales has already done this and the Australian Capital Territory and Victoria have committed to doing it. The Law Reform Commission will give that report to the government sometime later this year. I think it will be a really important piece of work. We have also completed consultation on coercive control and creating better measures to address that kind of behaviour.

Our work on family and domestic violence has been really wide and broad. I want to obviously acknowledge the work of my predecessor—the previous minister, Simone McGurk—in this area. We have invested in more community-based services, including two new women's refuges. We have also established WA's family and domestic violence one-stop hubs. One is in Mirrabooka and the other is in Kalgoorlie. They make it easier for women experiencing violence to come forward and seek help. We are rolling out two more, in Armadale and Broome. We increased the capacity of systems to better identify and respond to family and domestic violence, including training frontline police and paramedics, and introducing antenatal screening for family and domestic violence in public hospitals. I think that is a really important piece of work. We have prioritised raising awareness of the drivers of violence so that we can stop it before it starts. My colleague Hon Sandra Carr talked about the respectful relationships program in schools. We are also developing a respectful relationships pilot for sporting organisations.

The 16 Days in WA campaign, which was created to draw attention to violence against women, is a key time to shine a light and focus on what we have done and need to do further to keep women safe in their homes and within their families. We have allocated \$3 million in family and domestic violence primary prevention grants to 17 WA organisations to help stop family and domestic violence before it starts. We have funded practical supports to victim-survivors, such as \$930 000 to support Healing Smiles through to October 2025. Healing Smiles helps women who have experienced dental injuries from family and domestic violence to get their teeth fixed. It is something that is simple and practical. For many women experiencing family and domestic violence that is an area that will never get fixed because it is so expensive.

One of the reasons women have given in the past for not wanting to leave violent situations is their concern for their pets, and that they will become, if not already, a victim to violence in a family and domestic violence situation. We funded the Pets in Crisis program and expanded the program so that people who need to leave home because of family and domestic violence can have their pets cared for. We are developing two new specialist youth family

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and domestic violence counselling services to better support young people affected by family and domestic violence. The service in Rockingham commenced earlier this month. We are also developing a family and domestic violence forensics service to give law enforcement the best chance of successfully prosecuting perpetrators. We are funding a rapid rehousing pilot to assist women exiting refuges to find accommodation. A contract has been awarded to Zonta House. A shout-out to Zonta; it is located in my electorate. It does amazing work. I love that organisation. We have also expanded the Safe at Home program to provide things like security upgrades for women who stay in their house when the perpetrator leaves.

I want to again thank Hon Lorna Harper for moving this motion. We have achieved a lot. The McGowan government has a lot to be proud of about women's social, economic and community status in Western Australia. There is always more to be done, and I am pleased to be able to lead part of that work.

**HON SOPHIA MOERMOND (South West)** [12.40 pm]: I rise to speak in favour of this motion and thank Hon Lorna Harper for bringing this up. I suspect that many Labor women in both places have worked hard at creating awareness and driving change in policy and leading initiatives. I was very pleased to see that period products will be made available to girls in high school. This is such a simple strategy to support the wellbeing and participation of girls in school.

One area I would like to see more work done is increasing the understanding of the risk that violent men pose to women and children. The news regularly reports on violence perpetrated by men with a history of violence, possibly even whilst out on bail for violent crimes, including those of a sexual nature. We deserve protection from those men and leniency in the laws that allow this need to be addressed. Compassion must be reserved for the victims. I have noticed this leniency in sexual crimes against children, too, when having a hard drive with sexual abuse material is dismissed as victimless. This is simply not true. Whilst a jail sentence is often primarily seen as a punishment, it is also there to keep us safe. Lenient and out-of-touch sentencing satisfies neither goal.

A recent study by Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety—ANROWS—showed that although there was a better understanding of violence against women, certain attitudes still persist, specifically around victim blaming. Although statistics show that one in five women and girls experienced sexual violence, many are still not believed. One of the contributing factors that I see is the continued sexual objectification and commodification of women and girls. It is increasingly normalised in the fashion and entertainment industries. Our suffering has become the entertainment of the masses. We see this in movies, television shows, video games and in porn. This normalisation minimises our suffering, reduces empathy and perpetuates the cycle of violence. To fix this, a massive cultural change is needed and I applaud any government brave enough to tackle that. I thank Hon Lorna Harper for bringing forward this motion and hope to see more women-centred initiatives in the near future. Thank you also to the other honourable members for speaking.

**HON ROSIE SAHANNA (Mining and Pastoral)** [12.42 pm]: I rise to speak to the motion my colleague Hon Lorna Harper presented, and support the incredible and ongoing work the McGowan government has undertaken to implement solutions and strategies that support the empowerment of women in Western Australia. Last year, the McGowan government supported community initiatives that focus on women by presenting grants to 12 organisations to fund programs designed to address the priorities of women's economic independence, safety and justice. The funded programs were developed to support and empower women to reach their potential in all stages of life, including at school, in the workplace, in retirement homes and within their communities.

Earlier this month, in recognition of International Women's Day, the McGowan government delivered a significant increase in grant funding to women through the Strong Futures program. Fourteen community organisations received grants of up to \$100 000 each to help tackle gender inequality in Western Australia. One of the ventures that received this funding was an intergenerational project in Roebourne in the Pilbara in which Aboriginal women worked alongside elders, female artists and mentors to build skills as leaders in the community. I am proud that the McGowan government recognises the importance of having female leaders in our community. It is very important.

A common elephant in the room, which my colleagues have mentioned, is the gender pay gap. Women are still not always being paid as much as men for doing the exact same jobs. Companies and organisations around Australia are committed to closing the gender pay gap but inequality still exists. In recognition of this absurd gap, the McGowan government committed to a 10-year gender equality road map in 2020 to tackle inequality in Western Australia. At the time of its implementation, women in Western Australia faced Australia's largest gender pay gap of 22.1 per cent. There have been results from the McGowan government's plan for gender equality. One example is that at the end of last year, the Water Corporation reported a narrowing of its gender pay gap from 11.2 per cent in 2015 to 4.7 per cent in 2022. This is a great result.

I am a sporting fanatic, so I would like to talk about equality in women's sports, where women continue to fight for equal salaries and recognition. There have been gradual advances in this sector, too. The FIFA World Cup will be held here later this year.



**Extract from *Hansard***

[COUNCIL — Thursday, 30 March 2023]

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Motion lapsed, pursuant to standing orders.