

PAT GILES — TRIBUTE

Statement by Minister for Women's Interests

MS S.F. MCGURK (Fremantle — Minister for Women's Interests) [9.05 am]: I rise today to pay tribute to former Western Australian Labor senator and women's activist Patricia Giles, who passed away yesterday. Pat, as she was known to so many, was born in South Australia in 1928 and arrived in Western Australia in 1951, where she topped the midwifery class at King Edward Memorial Hospital for Women. She briefly returned to Adelaide where she was certified as a nurse, before finally settling in Bassendean with her husband, Mick, a Western Australian doctor. She immediately became involved in her local community, volunteering her time for many causes, including delivering meals on wheels and supporting patients at a local health facility.

Pat's passion for public education led her to get involved with her local P&C and later the Western Australian Council of State School Organisations. After unsuccessfully running in both federal and state elections for the Council for the Defence of Government Schools, she found her political home with the Labor Party in the early 1970s. As a founding member of the women's liberation movement and the women's electoral lobby, Pat was perfectly suited to an appointment by the Whitlam government to the male-dominated Western Australian Committee on Discrimination in Employment and Occupation, which she described as "the beginning of a giddy rise to fame for me—I can't tell you what that did for my self-perception." We now know that this self-perception was perfectly justified, given the many roles she played in fighting for women's rights within both the labour movement and the wider community. She became a senator for Western Australia in 1981 and served for the following 12 years.

Pat described the Affirmative Action (Equal Opportunity for Women) Bill as one of her most crowning achievements, which she said reflected the fine record of the Hawke government's commitment to women's rights. She later became a special adviser to the government on violence against women, so it is only fitting that The Patricia Giles Centre, a women's refuge in the northern suburbs in which she was active, was named in her honour.

As the first Minister for the Prevention of Family and Domestic Violence, as well as the Minister for Women's Interests, I pass on my sincere condolences to Pat's family and acknowledge Pat's enduring contribution to women's rights in Western Australia. She was an important mentor for many women and her legacy will live on.