

GOVERNMENT BOARDS AND COMMITTEES — REPRESENTATION

151. Ms J.M. FREEMAN to the Minister for Women’s Interests:

I refer to the McGowan Labor government’s commitment to equal representation on government boards and committees and its ongoing efforts to ensure that women are supported to achieve positions of leadership.

- (1) Can the minister update the house on what progress has been made in achieving this goal?
- (2) Can the minister advise whether she is aware of any instances in which women are struggling to be given the same opportunities as men?

Ms S.F. McGURK replied:

- (1)–(2) I am really pleased to have an opportunity to address this issue before the house, particularly coming off the International Women’s Day events that were held last week. There was a range of events at which we had an opportunity to acknowledge the significant achievements of women around the state. There is no area of endeavour around the state in which we are not short of women in leadership and we can celebrate their achievements. However, by international standards, we still have a long way to go as a state. Many people in WA and also across the country were dismayed to hear analysis that said that on the current trajectory, it will take us 200 years to reach gender equity in Australia. That is an absurd proposition and it means that we need to redouble our efforts, which the McGowan government is determined to do. We made a commitment before the election that we would appoint 50 per cent women to government boards and committees, and we have set about a determined program of action to achieve that. The business case for gender diversity is clear. It is indisputable. Business analysts across the world acknowledge that the more diversity we have in decision-making roles, the better the deliberations for the organisation. We need that strength on Western Australian government boards and committees.

Of course, in September last year we launched the OnBoardWA website, where anyone can download their CV and express an interest to sit on a government board or committee. We have had more than 700 registrations and two-thirds of those have come from women. The government has made some significant appointments to boards, including appointing two women, Denise Goldsworthy and Eva Skira, to the Western Power board, which now comprises 50 per cent women. I am very proud of that on behalf of the government. Hannah Fitzhardinge has been appointed to the Rottneest Island Authority; Pat Creevey, OAM, has been appointed to the Peel Development Commission; and Rebecca Tomkinson has been appointed to the Wheatbelt Development Commission; not to mention the many outstanding women who have been appointed to the judiciary in recent months by the Attorney General. There is also yesterday’s announcement that the state’s first female Auditor General, Caroline Spencer, has just been appointed, which is something we should be particularly proud of, as I quipped on social media at #AuditThat. Since March 2017, the overall representation of women on government boards has increased to 44.89 per cent. I was very pleased, along with the Premier, to accept an invitation from Her Excellency the Governor to attend a meeting with chief executive women at Government House to discuss strategies to continue to increase the number of women at senior levels in government. One of those women said quite succinctly, “You need to understand the maths—that in order to achieve parity, you will need to appoint more women than men to our boards in order to achieve this goal.” It is pretty simple. That is what we are doing. Since we have come to office, 57.36 per cent of appointments have been women. That is for those positions that we have control over. What is frustrating is that we do not have control over all the appointments. So development assessment panels, for instance, and local government appointments —

Mr S.K. L’Estrange interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: Mr Speaker, the member for Churchlands is very good at interjecting, and to make up sometimes for the substance of what he says, he turns the volume up. He would do well to listen to what we are talking about, as would other members of the Liberal Party.

Mr S.K. L’Estrange interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member, please!

Ms S.F. McGURK: That is right; case in point.

The SPEAKER: I am sure the minister is coming to the end.

Ms S.F. McGURK: The development assessment panels and other appointments that we rely on from local government are lacking in the number of women appointments. I would urge local governments in particular, as I would urge the Liberal Party, to increase the number of women

Point of Order

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Mr Speaker, you have been calling the opposition to account with respect to our interjections at question time. The minister has been on her feet for three and a half minutes. Between her and the

Minister for Police, who basically regurgitated her second reading speech, they have taken up 17 and a half per cent of question time already.

The SPEAKER: What point of order is it?

Mrs L.M. HARVEY: Time wasting on answers, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Sit down or I will call you to order.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Several members interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I can understand the Liberal Party not wanting to talk about its record on women representation. I can understand the Liberal Party not wanting to talk about the number of women in its party, because there are so few, as you yourself said, member for Scarborough.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: All I can hear is the male voices on this side.

Ms S.F. McGURK: As you yourself said, member for Scarborough, you have more female siblings than you have female colleagues in the Liberal caucus. The Leader of the Opposition himself would do well to take a leaf out of our book. When a woman constituent —

Point of Order

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Mr Speaker, under standing order 157, the minister appears to be quoting from an official document, and I ask her to table it.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am reading from my notes, Mr Speaker.

Questions without Notice Resumed

Ms S.F. McGURK: Of course they make these interjections because they do not want me to make the point —

Several members interjected.

Ms S.F. McGURK: — that when a constituent in the electorate of Cottesloe complained that she would like the Liberal Party to have chosen —

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Members, please! I want to hear the end of this answer. But I want to hear it quickly, minister.

Ms S.F. McGURK: I am trying, Mr Speaker. When a constituent in Cottesloe, a former Liberal voter, said that she would like to have had an opportunity —

Mr A. Krsticevic interjected.

The SPEAKER: Member for Carine, I call you to order for the first time.

Ms S.F. McGURK: — to vote for a woman and that she would have many women of merit to choose from, the Leader of the Opposition told her to vote Green! That is the respect you have for women in your party!

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I will not have any of our members being bullied in this house.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: I suggest you get a tape of what has been said and the attitude toward the minister in the last five minutes and have a —

Dr M.D. Nahan interjected.

The SPEAKER: I beg your pardon, Leader of the Opposition? You asked me a question? Throw you out, did you say?

Dr M.D. Nahan: No, I did not say that.

The SPEAKER: You did say that.

Dr M.D. Nahan: I did not.

The SPEAKER: What did you say?

Dr M.D. Nahan: I said towards us—the bullying was towards us.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Next question.

Point of Order

Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP: Mr Speaker, just to clarify my point of order originally under standing order 157, I understand that if I make that point of order, you are to inspect the documents after the minister has finished her speech.

Extract from *Hansard*

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Ms Janine Freeman; Ms Simone McGurk; Mrs Liza Harvey; Mr Zak Kirkup

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: Excuse me! Minister, is that an official document or private notes?

Ms S.F. McGURK: No, it is notes.

The SPEAKER: Just give it to the attendant, please. It is just notes.

Several members interjected.

The SPEAKER: That is the end of question time.