

BIOLOGICAL SEX AND GENDER IDENTITY

Statement

HON WILSON TUCKER (Mining and Pastoral) [6.30 pm]: I did not get a chance to put my thoughts on the record regarding the motion brought on this morning. It was obviously very popular, maybe for the wrong reasons. Be that as it may, I would like to do that now as a member's statement. Originally, I wrestled with the idea of weighing into the debate on someone's gender identity because it is a very complex issue and it is not something I have had to wrestle with myself. I do not have any firsthand experience so I did not really feel qualified to try to unpack this very complex topic. However, as a member of Parliament, we do not have that luxury too often. I think we sign up for this role so have to get into the trenches occasionally, so I thought I would. As I do in most topics, all I can do is draw upon my life experience and try to explain my rationale. I will tend to do that when we talk about gender identity.

Given the recent allegiances by the member who brought the motion, my take reading this motion was that it was an attack on the perceived woke agenda of gender fluidity, trying to go back to more traditional and potentially outdated views of gender identity. In a recent lesson, I became aware that my words and actions relate to somebody's nationality, sexual orientation or how they view themselves and could have negative effects on others. I took this to heart when I moved to a very left-leaning, woke or progressive city. I was working in the tech sector at the time and I would come into meetings and address everyone as "Hi, guys" or "How're you going, guys?" Quite quickly, I was pulled up for using that terminology because it is not gender neutral. About the same time there was a push within the team I was working in to modernise or make our code base a little more PC. There were certain legacy terms and phrases we would use that could potentially cause offence to others. Examples are whitelist and blacklist—whitelist is good, blacklist is bad—and master-slave. It extended beyond the definitions of this code base to the lexicon used around the office as well. Tribal knowledge is another one that came up. Obviously, there are connotations in America when we talk about Indians. We changed that to "institutional knowledge".

Hon Kyle McGinn: It is Native Americans.

Hon WILSON TUCKER: I thank the honourable member for the correction. At the time, I found myself rallying against this feedback. My kneejerk reaction was, "I don't understand the connotations of these terms. I meant nothing by them and I didn't mean to cause offence. These are words, phrases and terms I have been using for many years. Why should I change?" I did a little bit more thinking about this and I came to the realisation that, for me, it was simple to change this terminology I was using and change my language. The impact of these marginalising words, which could resonate with them, can mean a lot for others in terms of how they feel. For me, it was a very little change but for others it could have a very big impact. With a little bit more soul-searching, I came to the realisation that I fundamentally do not want to marginalise people. I want to bring people along for the ride. I want to make people feel comfortable and included. I decided to make a conscious decision to accept what people were telling me about these words and how they potentially made them feel. I decided to change my actions and my vocabulary as a result. As a society, we should be questioning social norms—how we engage with other members of society and how our actions and words make other people feel. Obviously, society is an evolving and complex beast and it happens over time but I think it is important to take these milestone steps and be conscious of a point in time around our language, words and actions, and try to become a more inclusive place as opposed to a more marginalised place.

I believe this lesson of not wanting to marginalise people also extends to the topic of gender identity. I acknowledge that I am in a privileged position as a white male, and certainly as a member of Parliament, standing before you all tonight. When we talk about equality, we touched on this in debate quite recently during the Voice referendum. I believe Hon Sandra Carr put this quite eloquently. I am not going to do it justice but when we talk about equality, she said society is not equal so we occasionally have to give people a leg up and make some concessions in that direction to try to get to a level playing field. I think that is also what we have to do when we talk about the LGBTIQI community. It has been marginalised for decades. As privileged people, we should be making concessions in that direction to try to become a more equitable society, certainly here in Western Australia.

Fundamentally with this motion, as well as previously, I came to the realisation that being in this privileged position, who am I to tell people how they should be feeling and really tell them that how they are feeling is wrong? Considering I am in this privileged position, I have not been through that experience of having to wrestle with gender identity. At the end of the day, with this previous example and with the topic of gender identity, it does not affect me very much to recognise that people feel differently about their sexual orientation and it can potentially change over time. It does not take much to have a little empathy in that direction, but it can have a very big impact for the people who are going through that experience. On a personal level, I am happy to recognise that some people feel they change their sexual orientation over time. Really with this quite lofty aspirational goal of trying to build a more equitable and inclusive place, I feel the motion that was raised today is trying to marginalise people and tear us further apart. For that reason, I cannot support the motion.