



**PARLIAMENT OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA**

## **INAUGURAL SPEECH**



**Hon Laine McDonald, MLC**  
(Member for North Metropolitan Region)

**Legislative Council**

**Loan Bill 2016**

**Tuesday, 18 October 2016**



# Legislative Council

Tuesday, 18 October 2016

---

## LOAN BILL 2016

### *Second Reading*

**HON LAINE McDONALD (North Metropolitan)** [7.32 pm]: Thank you, Mr President. As I rise to make my inaugural speech, I recognise the Noongar people, the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, and I pay my deepest respects to their elders, both past and present. It is a great honour and privilege that I take a seat in this chamber in the thirty-ninth Parliament. I am proud to have this opportunity to introduce myself to the house and put on the public record a number of policy matters that are of particular importance to me. I will also ask for the chamber's indulgence to allow me to take the time to thank the people who have supported me along the way.

First and foremost, I must acknowledge my predecessor, the former member for North Metropolitan Region, Hon Ken Travers. Ken is truly a giant of Western Australian politics and I have big shoes to fill. With gusto and passion, Ken served state Parliament for 19 years. His contributions were significant and varied, but undoubtedly his most lasting legacy will be his contribution to the transport policy area. He was one of the architects of Labor's visionary Metronet policy and was an ardent advocate of extending the rail line to Yanchep. Regrettably, the issue of congestion remains a huge burden for those living in our northern suburbs. Just last week it was reported that one in two commuters living in Joondalup face at least 45 minutes stuck in traffic on the way to work each day. This equates to 10 days lost a year stuck on a clogged freeway—time which could be much better spent at home with loved ones. I intend to take up the mantle that Ken left and will be a champion of the Yanchep railway line and of creating local jobs in the northern corridor.

Turning now to my upbringing and background, I am a proud Western Australian who was born in and grew up in Perth. I am the youngest daughter to Maxine and Clyde. I am also the sister to Carter and doting aunt to my gorgeous niece, Lucy. I pause to remember my brother-in-law, Gary, who was taken from us too soon but who is always in our hearts. I am partner to Patrick and mother to daughter Matilda. Since meeting Patrick, I have been warmly welcomed into the Ashforth family by Michael, Ileana, George, Katie and Mark. My parents got together as teenagers and have always been able to tell a good yarn about their ragtag exploits growing up in the Melville and Fremantle areas. The story which always captivated my attention was that of my mum going to the Perth Royal Show in the late 1960s and hanging out with the long-haired lead singer of The Valentines. The long-haired larrikin was, of course, the late and great Bon Scott, who went on to take the world by storm with his band AC/DC.

Although my parents separated when I was very young, they remain on good terms and are both here in the President's gallery tonight. My mum, Maxine, raised my sister Carter and me—we were only three and six at the time—as a single parent. Not only did she face the challenge of raising and supporting two young kids alone, but at the same time she studied diligently, sat her tertiary entrance exam and gained a place to study youth work at the WA College of Advanced Education in Claremont, which is now known as Edith Cowan University. Her hard work and persistence paid off. She was able to earn her degree and forge a successful career in youth work, community development and academia. However, money was extremely tight for our

family during her four years of study and, as a single parent, mum had to scrimp and save every penny to make ends meet. The tough financial times we faced has helped me to understand the plight of low-income earners and how the high cost of living and cuts to services most unduly burdens those who have the least. That is why I am proud to be a member of the Labor Party, a party of working people and a party that understands the needs of working families. I am proud to be a member of a party that will not privatise Western Power and understands that everyday families cannot afford more power bill increases.

My mum's work as a youth worker and her commitment to social justice meant that she took me to many protests as a child. Although I did not appreciate this at the time, I can now look back and see that this fostered a growing understanding of the importance of activism, collective action and social justice. My mum's unwavering commitment to pursuing a degree to seek a better life for her girls instilled in me at an early age the importance of education. All of my education has been at public schools, and I recognise the importance of having well-resourced state schools to ensure that all children have the opportunity to receive a quality education, regardless of their background or their family's wealth. We need to invest in our public schools, including in the areas of innovation and new technologies, to prepare kids for jobs of the future.

An interest in aviation and a strong desire to be an astronaut saw me gaining a scholarship in aeronautics and attending Kent Street Senior High School. Notwithstanding me not fulfilling the goal of becoming an astronaut, I nevertheless received a good education at Kent Street and made lifelong friendships with people I still consider my best friends today. In fact, the grandma of my best friend Ali Vaughan was the late Hon Grace Vaughan, who sat in this house as the member for the South-East Metropolitan Province, as it was known back then. Grace was a social worker and a renowned agitator for social change. When preparing for tonight's speech, I read Grace's first speech from 1974, in which she urged —

As legislators we should be, with vision and optimism, and with much energy, attacking the problems we find in the social environment.

These words still ring true today.

While at high school in the late 1990s, my interest in politics and political institutions was forming; 1999 was the year of the republic referendum. Although I was too young to vote in the referendum, I was a keen republican and had a strong interest in systems of government and constitutional design. It was also in the late 1990s that I participated in the YMCA Youth Parliament, which is a youth advocacy program which allows young people to formulate, debate, amend and, ultimately, pass bills. Taking part in the program involved researching issues and drafting bills, culminating in a week-long mock Parliament debate which was held in this very chamber. The hands-on experience not only engaged young people in the political process in a positive way, but also gave me a head start on standing orders and parliamentary etiquette, which came in handy last week in my first week in the chamber.

At Youth Parliament I also met my other best friend Craig Comrie. Since this time, Craig has gone on to be a leading advocate for young people and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual and intersex community in Western Australia. More recently, he moved to Melbourne to continue his important work. I thank Craig for flying over from Melbourne to be here tonight. He is truly an amazing friend.

After high school I went on to study law and arts at the University of Western Australia, where a brand-new world of opportunity opened up to me. It was in my university days that I joined the Labor Party and became active in Australian Young Labor and the UWA Labor club. It was at the time Geoff Gallop was Premier and I was drawn to Labor's progressive and positive policies, which included gay and lesbian law reform and stopping old-growth forest logging.

Thankfully, while I was studying at university, a member of Parliament decided to take a chance on me and hired me as her part-time research officer. She became my boss and mentor. That person is Hon Sue Ellery. Since being sworn in to Parliament, I have asked a number of colleagues for their advice, counsel and words of wisdom to assist me in my new role. Each has told me the same thing, which is to do as Sue tells you to do! It seems like nothing has changed in 12 years.

Since graduating from UWA with a law and politics degree, I have endeavoured to devote my professional life to helping others and acting as an advocate for those in need. After completing my articles at Dwyer Durack, I moved to Phnom Penh, Cambodia, and worked for non-government agencies, assisting those at risk of and victims of human trafficking. Unfortunately, Cambodia is a source, transit and destination country for men, women and children subjected to forced labour and sex trafficking. The legacy of civil war and genocide in Cambodia has resulted in a country that faces many challenges, including poverty, corruption and lack of basic infrastructure such as clean drinking water. Living and working in Phnom Penh for two years, I saw these challenges firsthand and, unfortunately, witnessed the darkest side of human rights violations. Upon returning to Perth, I am appreciative of the adherence to the rule of law and the stability of our political institutions and grateful for free and fair elections in which, even when all sides of politics do not agree, we see transition of government peacefully.

Living in Cambodia also showed me the tenacity and resilience of the Cambodian people in the face of adversity. I was humbled by the generosity afforded me by the Cambodian people, who welcomed me as a foreigner to their country. Residents of the smallest villages in the poorest of provinces would welcome me into their homes and afford me gracious hospitality. I am reminded that we in Australia are extremely fortunate and that we should reach out our hands of generosity and inclusion to those who travel across the seas to become part of our wonderful country.

Upon returning to Perth in 2008, I worked as a lawyer, first, at the now Department for Child Protection and Family Support and, for the last five years, at Slater and Gordon Lawyers as an asbestos litigation lawyer. In that role, I acted on behalf of asbestos disease sufferers in their legal claims for compensation. The deadly legacy of blue asbestos mining in Wittenoom still haunts the people of Western Australia and the Wittenoom tragedy remains one of Australia's largest industrial disasters. Not only was the lethal blue asbestos mined and processed at the mill, but asbestos tailings were spread all round Wittenoom town to build backyards, driveways, footpaths and even playgrounds. Blue asbestos was transported in hessian bags to Port Samson, then to Fremantle, where bags would easily tear apart when being handled. It was not only the miners and mill workers who were exposed to these deadly fibres, but also the women who washed the clothes, the children who played in the dirt and the wharfies who unloaded the deadly cargo. Asbestos cement products were also manufactured at the two James Hardie factories in Rivervale and Welshpool and used widely in the building industry until the late 1980s.

Mesothelioma is a particularly insidious cancer that strikes generally 30 to 40 years after exposure. It is a deadly cancer for which there is no cure. The average life expectancy prognosis of a mesothelioma sufferer is only nine to 12 months. I have witnessed the devastation this aggressive cancer has on sufferers and their families, from the grandmother who had worked with asbestos for only a relatively short period, holding asbestos sheets for her husband, to the person who lived in Wittenoom as a child and who has already lost their entire family to this deadly disease. Although some asbestos disease sufferers are able to pursue compensation in the courts, the fight for justice for mesothelioma sufferers is far from over. Reform is needed in two important areas of law to achieve greater justice for these sufferers—that is, in the area of provisional damages and in *Sullivan v Gordon* damages. I applaud and commend Hon Kate Doust

for introducing the Asbestos Diseases Compensation Bill 2013 into this chamber to rectify deficiencies in the law. However, I am dismayed that the bill has not yet passed despite being introduced three years ago.

The plight of Wittenoom workers has been immortalised in the classic Midnight Oil song *Blue Sky Mine*. The lyrics of the song still remain chillingly relevant today and state —

And if the blue sky mining company won't come to my rescue  
If the sugar refining company won't save me  
Who's gonna save me?

I sincerely hope that my fellow colleagues from all sides of the chamber will listen to this classic song and take the time to carefully consider the plight of asbestos disease sufferers and pass legislation to help to achieve greater justice for these people. My time in this Parliament will be only short; therefore, my priority will be to work to advocate for this law reform to seek greater justice for the sick and dying.

I also use this opportunity in my inaugural speech to encourage people to be engaged with, active in and connected to their local communities. My love for my local community led me to run for and be elected to the City of Vincent as a councillor in October 2013. In that role I represented the inner-city areas of Highgate, Leederville, Mt Lawley, West Perth, North Perth and Perth. Although it was with regret that I had to resign from the council as a consequence of entering state Parliament, I am proud of what Vincent council achieved in the past three years.

At the time of being elected, Vincent was facing very uncertain times and the government's proposed local government reform threatened the very existence of the whole of the City of Vincent. People power pushed back and, through a sustained, community-driven campaign, thankfully the community's will prevailed. Instead, we as the Vincent council pushed our own reforms that focused on good governance. We instituted a developers' contact register, a councillors' gift register and banned councillor travel. We focused on sustainability and greening measures, on increasing our green canopies by planting more trees and invested millions in bike infrastructure. We encouraged residents to turn their verges into lush native gardens through the Adopt a Verge program. We built a terrific nature playground at Braithwaite Park, created public space at the Mary Street Piazza on Beaufort Street and built an area for kids, teenagers and office workers alike at the Oxford Street Reserve in Leederville.

It is humbling that our efforts did not go unnoticed and the City of Vincent is now rated the number one local government among 25 Western Australian councils as both a place to live and as a governing organisation. Vincent is a cohesive, progressive and workable inner-city council and is a shining illustration of local government at its best. Although my fellow councillors came from differing political persuasions and, of course, we did not always agree, we debated issues on the merits and always did so with the best interests of the community at the front of our minds. Of course, all of the achievements I have highlighted were only made possible by the dynamic, energetic and steadfast leadership provided by Mayor John Carey. I thank John Carey for his leadership and I am very hopeful that he will make a terrific state member for Perth come March next year.

That brings me to my newest and most life-changing role prior to entering Parliament, and that was becoming a mother when my baby daughter, Matilda, was born earlier this year. She is the sunshine of my life and has brought so much happiness and joy in just a few short months. I was on maternity leave and the primary carer for then five-month-old Matilda when I found out I would be entering state Parliament to fill the casual vacancy created by Hon Ken Travers' departure. At the time I was breastfeeding her exclusively and the thought of returning to work full time, with the long parliamentary sitting hours involved, seemed daunting. Being a mother entering Parliament has presented a particular set of challenges, which include the need for child

care, the need for facilities to express and store milk, and options to breastfeed. These are the same challenges many women face when trying to juggle family life and work. I am more fortunate than most to have the support of close family, access to child care and a good wage, which has made my admission to Parliament possible. Patrick and I now have a small village helping to raise our little daughter. Thank you to my mum, Maxine, to Ileana and to Katie for helping with Matilda—and I recognise all the grandparents, the early childhood educators and other carers out there assisting with childminding for working parents. Your efforts are truly appreciated.

It is important that further inroads are made to ensure that the Western Australian Parliament is inclusive and more diverse. No longer is it tolerable that women be under-represented in Parliament and in leadership roles. A real and tangible way forward in this regard is to modernise the standing orders to allow for nursing mothers to bring their infants into the chamber. Other jurisdictions in Australia have amended their standing orders to provide for admission to the floor of the house of an infant being cared for by a mother or a member. The equivalent standing order in the WA Legislative Council is standing order 97. This order deals with the manner in which strangers may be admitted to the floor of the Council, and the requirement for strangers to withdraw from the chamber during a division or when ordered by the President. In 2016, the time has come to change antiquated rules and have a truly family-friendly Parliament. Parliamentarians who care for small infants should be allowed to breast or bottle-feed their babies in the chamber. In particular, women who choose to breastfeed in Parliament should not be subject to criticism or ridicule, as we have seen overseas. There is no sensible or just reason to retain outdated rules that make life as a parliamentarian more difficult for women.

Just last week it was the four-year anniversary of Julia Gillard's infamous misogyny speech. This speech received global attention as it shone a light on the sexism our first female Prime Minister faced every day. It should be recognised that many women in public life face extra scrutiny and this is an additional barrier to women seeking public office. With the rise of social media, short media cycles and increasing editorial comment, this scrutiny on women appears, unfortunately, to be growing. "Don't be too old but don't be too young. Don't be too timid but don't be too outspoken. Don't be a mother but also don't not be a mother", are all too common themes we hear time and time again. That is why I am very proud to stand in this chamber today as a member of the Labor party, a progressive party and one that supports women. We are a party that has affirmative action and supports women getting into leadership roles. Just looking around this chamber, I am delighted to see that eight of the 11 Labor members are women and of all the state Labor MPs, 47 per cent are now women. This truly is a telling figure.

However, our path to gender equality is far from over. In 2016, men in Australia are still paid on average about 20 per cent more than women are paid. The number of women on Australian Securities Exchange 200 boards is only 23 per cent. There are still 20 ASX 200 boards that have no women at all and another 60 that have just one female board member. Recent studies have shown that girls receive less pocket money than boys and almost 40 per cent of single women will retire into poverty. Those who have gone before me in this chamber have also spoken about the gender pay gap and gender equality and it is incumbent on us to continue to do so until gender equality is achieved.

Colleagues, we need to comprehend what barriers limit female participation in order for us to shatter these barriers. We need greater access to flexible work options, better access to paid maternity leave, including superannuation, and greater access to flexible, affordable child care, including after-school and vacation care. We also need to recognise the value of the caring industries and strive to increase the pay of our lowest paid workers, including early childhood

educators. One of the most widespread barriers we need to address is unequal distribution of unpaid care and domestic roles in both the home and community. The reality is that many men have the luxury of having partners who work part time, or not at all, to take care of the home front and, in most cases, women do not. Often cited as the “second shift” or “double burden”, in male–female couples when both partners have paid jobs, overwhelmingly women on average spend significantly more time than men do on household chores and caring work. Women are returning home from work to do more tidying, more planning, more remembering, more making of lists, more picking up of toys, more closing of cupboards and more tucking in of children than their male partners do. The good news is that these attitudes to these outdated gender divisions are slowly changing and in particular there is a great deal of support for men being as involved in parenting as women are. One practical way we can make a move closer in this direction is to ensure that baby change facilities are available in male restrooms.

Before I end, I have some final thank-yous: Thank you to my staff Emily, Alex and Marcus. Thank you to the President of this house, the Clerk and all the staff here at Parliament who have made me welcome in my first weeks in Parliament. Thank you to Patrick, my partner, an amazing dad and the love of my life. I am so happy that we can share the joy of our little family together and I thank you for all the support and encouragement you provide. Patrick, I love you, and happy birthday for tomorrow.

In wrapping up, let me say once again that it is an absolute honour and privilege that I take a seat in this house as a representative of the North Metropolitan Region and as a member of the Labor Party. I am looking forward to representing the people of the North Metropolitan Region in this Parliament over the coming weeks, and when this chamber resumes next year, I very much hope to be taking a seat in a Mark McGowan Labor government.

[Applause.]

---