



**MAKING A DIFFERENCE—A FRONTIER
OF FIRSTS**

**WOMEN IN THE WESTERN AUSTRALIAN
PARLIAMENT 1921–2012**

David Black
and
Harry Phillips

**Parliamentary History Project
Parliament of Western Australia
2012**

LIZA MARY HARVEY



MLA Scarborough from 6 September 2008 (Lib). Acting Speaker November 2008–February 2011. Parliamentary Secretary 2008–2012. Minister of State from 7 July 2012. Member Economics and Industry Standing Committee 2008–2012.

When Liza Harvey gave her Inaugural Speech on 28 November 2008, she quickly thanked the people of her electorate of Scarborough, which she reminded members had been partly formed out of the electoral districts of Churchlands and Carine. She indicated these districts ‘were commendably served in the recent past by committed and dedicated female politicians, Dr Elizabeth Constable and Katie Hodson-Thomas [qq.v.], whose fine examples have set me an inspirational standard’.¹ Liza, who had been a resident and business owner in Scarborough for 16 years, expressed some relief that the existing electoral boundaries incorporated a better sense of community, a criterion for drawing districts, than the previous Scarborough boundaries. She thought the activist Scarborough electorate had ‘been blessed with a strong-willed community who participate in often fiery and emotional debate over contentious issues’.² Coming, too, from a small business background she indicated she ‘was thrilled also to have the busy and vibrant Osborne Park and Herdsman industrial estates within the boundaries of [her] electorate’.³

Liza Harvey was born on 25 October 1966 at Manjimup. Her father, Eugene Browne, was a surveyor, who also lectured in surveying at Curtin University, and mother Jill (nee Randell) was a teacher’s assistant for children with special needs. Liza was conscious of her parents’ example of community service and their outstanding work ethic helping to provide a solid foundation for their children. As she told the Parliament, being part of her family with a brother and four sisters had been ‘a fantastic experience and, indeed, a great training ground for this debating chamber’.⁴ In terms of formal education, she attended Sacred Heart Primary

¹ *WAPD(LA)*, 25 November 2008, p. 432.

² *Ibid.*, p. 433.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 434.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 435.

School in Thornlie, St Cecilia's Primary School in Port Hedland and Mercedes College at Victoria Square in Perth before undertaking science studies at the University of Western Australia between 1984 and 1986. On 8 September 1996, she married Hal Harvey at Scarborough and has one daughter, Elizabeth, one son, Jack, and one stepdaughter, Sarah.

As a proud fifth generation Western Australian, Liza was able to inform the Legislative Assembly that she was a descendant of George Randell, who represented the seat of Moore in the Legislative Assembly from the granting of responsible government in 1890 and was Leader of the Opposition from September 1894 to July 1895, later also serving in the Legislative Council. Previously, Randell had been a member of the Legislative Council during the colonial period of representative government, having landed on *Sophie* as early as 1850. From a formidable political, commercial, educational and community record, Liza chose some of the highlights to recount to the chamber. Significantly, she was impressed by his ideological outlook in which she observed how:

... his inspiring life was epitomised by his belief that diligence and integrity find their own natural reward and that he never leaned supinely on a paternal government to provide him with an easier path toward the reward of industry ... He was a true Liberal, believing in the real conservation of human achievements and not the drastic forcing of social evolution.⁵

As George Randell's record included standing up for the property rights of married women and the right of women to vote, Liza considered he would be pleased to know that one of his descendants should one day stand in this place to follow in his footsteps. Although not confining her appreciation for election to women, she made special mention of two members of the Stirling Women's Committee, Anne Johnson and Marie Grout. In addition she said, '[w]ithout their support and the support of the Liberal Party, the Liberal Women's Council, and the Stirling and Curtin divisions, achieving a seat in this place would not have been possible'.⁶

One consistent theme in Liza's role as a representative has been her constant commitment to small business. She felt indebted to her husband Hal Harvey, whose family had founded the original Scarborough Newsagency as far back as 1932. She thought her husband's family were typical of small business owners being 'hardworking, industrious and committed to their customers and employees, while striving to provide for a self sufficient future'.⁷ She linked this to the duty of government:

... to continue to foster the entrepreneurial spirit...We must reduce bureaucratic interference and needless compliance. Government needs to keep its nose out of the business of small business, thereby encouraging prosperity in their enterprises'.⁸

Before her entry to Parliament, Liza had served as vice-president of the Scarborough Branch of the Liberal Party, and acquired a wide range of business experience. She had held positions at Qantas Airways as a customer services officer and the Qantas Club, and from 1992 had an important role as a business proprietor of Bluewater Tackle World, comprising retail tackle stores. Liza became a member of the Stirling Business Association and had been a member of

⁵ Ibid., p. 434.

⁶ Ibid., p. 435.

⁷ Ibid., p. 434.

⁸ Ibid.

the WA retailers' association. In Parliament, she was quickly appointed to the Legislative Assembly Economics and Industry Standing Committee and from December 2010, she became a Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance, Commerce and Small Business.

When Liza asked a question without notice to Premier Barnett about extended retail trading hours for the state, and especially Scarborough, she prefaced the question with a statement of the chief executive officer of the Tourism Council that 'Perth needs extended shopping hours to shake off its Dullsville image'. In response, Barnett saw Scarborough and Cottesloe as prime beachfront areas which by implication were important business nodes. He quoted retail spending research which indicated that tourists to Perth spend much less than in the eastern capitals and even Hobart, because the shops are not open.⁹

An important quest for Liza has been the beachfront area in Scarborough, which she believes 'deserves to be revitalised to a world-class standard with our own Western Australian style'. She contended that the commercial precinct unfortunately 'has languished for long enough in a planning haze'.¹⁰ When speaking against an opposition motion directed at the continued decline of the Western Australian tourism industry, she took the opportunity to criticise the previous Labor Government for its failure to get to the heart of problems in tourism. In fact, she claimed there was virtually nowhere to stay in Scarborough during the National Surf Lifesaving Championships held in 2006 to 2009 as 'nothing got developed for eight years on the previous Labor government's watch'. In her view, it would be possible 'to show ... all the land that has not been developed because we missed the boom because the previous government could not get its act together in planning in time to allow to allow the developments to proceed'.¹¹

Reading Liza's contributions to parliamentary debates creates an impression of a vital, action-oriented member. She was very pleased to be part of the first Western Australian Government to appoint a Minister for Mental Health. While it was salutary to observe that the community's attitudes to mental health had shifted from the asylum days, it was probable, she suggested, that the suicide rate in Australia may still be under-reported by 30 per cent with statistics suggesting that one in four women and one in eight men will experience some form of depression during their lifetime. She believed it was necessary to adopt a similar approach to that of the public health campaigns targeting smoking and 'form the view that every suicide is a failure of our society to prevent that death'.¹² On the subject of health, Liza contended there was much to be done in the area of Aboriginal health and living standards. Unfortunately, it is recognised that 'our Indigenous health record is nothing short of shameful,' which in her view is readily borne out by statistics such as infant mortality rates, Aboriginal overrepresentation in the prison system and the higher rate of emotional disturbance than other sectors of the community.¹³

Since she was first sworn in as a member, Liza's services have been utilised across the range of parliamentary procedures as a representative, to not only defend the performance of the 'Alliance' Government, but also highlight events in her electorate. Being Acting Speaker on several occasions has obviously facilitated her command of the Standing Orders. She has

⁹ *WAPD(LA)*, 20 August 2009, p. 6331.

¹⁰ *WAPD(LA)*, 25 November 2008, p. 433.

¹¹ *WAPD(LA)*, 11 August 2010, p. 5391.

¹² *WAPD(LA)*, 25 November 2008, p. 435.

¹³ *Ibid.*

frequently utilised the 90-second statement procedure as a vehicle to highlight activities within Scarborough such as the many schools and sporting clubs with the district. Other illustrations of district affairs included reports about the Innaloo Sportsmen's Club's Cancer Council morning tea, Torch for Legacy, Scarborough Sportsmen's Club, Stirling Natural Environment Coastcare, inter-nations bowling tournament and the Scarborough Clock Tower. Apart from making many speeches across a wide range of subject areas, Liza soon became adept at asking questions without notice on contentious issues and also adopted the practice of asking Ministers how particular policies would impact upon her own electorate. Mention has already been made about her approach to the shopping hours issue, but another instance in which she used this strategy was with the Prostitution Bill 2011. In this instance, Liza asked, 'Will the Attorney General [Christian Porter] advise the house on what this bill will mean for my constituents in Scarborough?', to which the Attorney General responded:

There is an expectation by the people of Western Australia that brothels will not be permitted and that proper law enforcement and a proper bill will prevent brothels operating in suburban areas.¹⁴

Being appointed as a Parliamentary Secretary only a little over two years since her election meant that Liza had been given rapid promotion. She had made 'a flying start'. Given that the only Legislative Assembly woman member in the 'Alliance' Cabinet led by Colin Barnett was Dr Elizabeth Constable, an Independent, the ideal of gender balance in the Cabinet provided Liza, and other women, with a better prospect of ministerial office than women elected in earlier Parliaments. As it eventuated, on 29 June 2012 in a significant pre-election ministerial reshuffle, she was appointed as the Minister for Police and Road Safety. Liza's first term in Parliament certainly featured rapid promotion and wide-ranging activity.

Reflections by the Member on Her Parliamentary Career

(These Reflections were written in 2012 before Liza's appointment as a Minister of State.)

Being elected as a member of Parliament is a great honour and a privilege. Every day is different and every day brings a reminder of the many and varied challenges facing a wide range of people, both from the local electorate and across this great state of Western Australia.

When reflecting on the long history of women's suffrage and in reviewing the first edition of this publication, it has become clear to me that I enjoy the benefits of the efforts of the many determined and forward thinking women and men who campaigned for women's rights and female representation over many years.

Women of my generation enjoy equality of opportunity in employment, the freedom to work in the profession of our choosing and the enjoyment of a workplace in which it is the law to be treated with equality and respect. Many of us also enjoy an equal partnership with our husbands in the financial and social management of our households and, most importantly, the care of our children.

¹⁴ WAPD(LA), 3 November 2011, p. 8954.

Families have come a long way in WA since women were first given the vote in 1899 and since Edith Cowan was elected in 1921 as our first Western Australian female member of Parliament.

It is important that we take the time to acknowledge that the freedoms and, indeed, expectations of women in the modern workplace were not granted easily. Many came at considerable personal cost to some of the trailblazers, particularly in the suffragette movement. I was thrilled to discover that I was a descendant of Hon George Randell who, as a member of the Parliament of Western Australia, is on record as one of those pioneers in equality, supporting the right of women to vote and the property rights of women.

I also pay homage to the marvellous inventors of modern technology. We now wash our dishes and clothes with the press of a button, pay our bills and order groceries, clothing and other purchases via the internet—at any time of day or night that suits us. Although the political fight for women’s rights was essential, the advances in technology have freed up our time to allow both parents to contribute equally to our families, both financially and socially.

My first few years as the Member for Scarborough have been rewarding and fulfilling. Living in my electorate ensures that otherwise short trips to the local deli become informal constituent meetings, requiring that I carry a notepad to jot down issues that are raised; however, I wouldn’t have things any other way.

I have relished the opportunity to delve into the issues affecting small businesses as part of my role as Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business, and have enjoyed the intensive focus on various issues as a member of the Economics and Industry Standing Committee. Both roles have involved travelling the length and breadth of our amazing state to consult with small business proprietors and with witnesses to the various inquiries of the committee. It has been a privilege to meet with various people, companies and industry groups covering aspects of pastoral leases, tourism businesses, caravan parks and camping ground managers and owners and proponents of our domestic gas industry, from large international companies involved in the LNG industry right through to individual retirees contributing their experiences of caravanning in Western Australia.

I encourage all women and men who feel that they would like to make a difference to their communities and the development of our state to consider coming forward and becoming part of our democratic process. Although some days it seems that progress is slow on issues that mean a great deal to someone I am advocating for, when we achieve a result that helps to improve the lives of a family or individual within my community, I feel as though it is all worthwhile and that as members of Parliament we really can make a difference.

In conclusion, I have observed that much is made by some sectors of the community, about the relative numbers of females to males within Parliament. I find this focus both distracting and demeaning. On the one hand, there is the argument I subscribe to, that all representatives should be selected based on the merit of their credentials, and then there is the other argument that parties should allocate a percentage of seats to female representatives based on an arbitrary formula and the belief that gender is an intrinsic component for effective representation.

I don't believe that gender is a prerequisite for, nor an impediment to, the ability of elected persons to be good parliamentarians and reflect the wishes of their communities. As a woman, I believe that I can honestly and effectively represent the views and interests of both male and female constituents and I have similar faith that my male colleagues are equally able.