



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Main Committee

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Initiatives Supporting Working Women

SPEECH

Monday, 21 June 2010

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Broadbent, Russell, MP

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Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (7.47 pm)—That was a not very veiled attack on the Leader of the Opposition. The member for Throsby has a great record in her activity on behalf of women. She talked about workers' rights and women's rights. In her former career she ended up as the head of the ACTU, which is the highest role that you can have within the union movement—therefore, she is a woman in that place in this country at this time. Whether or not there has been an attack on an individual, the opposition leader of today, I would say to the member for Throsby that any politician who takes on the role of leader of a party has to be flexible enough to be able to listen to people and to be able to change his mind. If he has said these things in the past it does not mean that he cannot think through the issues today and go to the Australian people with the reasonable expectation of being heard.

Embryonic stem cell research was a very difficult issue for me in a previous parliament, and I was the beneficiary of people around me who were prepared to look at the issue outside the box that I had put myself into at the time. Instead of taking one tack on that very delicate issue I listened to their view of the issue, and that became my view. After educating myself, looking at the issue and listening to the arguments that were put forward from both sides, I came to a position that I did not have at the start of my consideration of the issue and I gave an address in the parliament that nobody expected me to give—and I stand by every word I said in that address. The stance I took surprised both my side of the House and the other side of the House, but it was a very important stance for me to take at that time. I am just making the point that you can change your mind. I like to think that I give leaders of my party what I hope they will give me—that is, every opportunity—if they come up with ideas that they would like to put before the Australian people.

I say this to the member for Throsby: when it comes to paid parental leave or the minimum wage, which I would like to talk about in a minute, all of these ideas are eventually tested by the Australian people. In a few months time, every man and woman out there will get a chance to make a decision on the government and on the opposition leader and the team behind the opposition leader. That is the great beauty of this nation and its government. The people of Australia at the last election made a decision, without rancour. They made a decision to change their government. One of the great treasures we have in this country is our stable government. There are people around the world who cannot get up and have this argument. They cannot get up and put forward what Ms George put forward tonight to this parliament.

I would say that my role is to let my leader give it his very best shot. If he has to change his views on some things to accord with the community and adopt views that he did not hold before, all strength to his arm if he is brave enough to change those things. We are all responsible for the things we said in the past. There are a few things that have gone out of this mouth that I would love to draw back in and throw away, because I was a different person when I came here in 1990. I was not aware of the issues. We parliamentarians get faced with issues that we have to make decisions on. Outside this profession, in the lives we came from, we would never be faced with these issues in our daily lives—issues that, as you would know, Deputy Speaker, we never thought we would have to face.

I want to say something about the minimum wage in regard to anybody, male or female. I would love to have the time, also, to talk about Menzies and the Liberal Party and how he saw the role of women as so important to his party. He set up a structure where women had equal place right through the whole structure of the party. If you introduce a minimum wage and you keep raising that minimum wage, the first people to miss out on a job are those at the bottom level. I would love to see the best brains in this country—male or female—work out a way in which we can have those with the least ability in the workforce fully participating in life through work.