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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**Equal Opportunity for Women in  
the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 29 May 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Neumann, Shayne, MP

**Source** House  
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**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (12:26): I speak in support of the Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Amendment Bill 2012. I listened to the member for Farrer and saw the list of who was speaking on this bill today and found that the coalition were so concerned about equal opportunity for women that they did not even have a bloke on the list to speak—not a man on the list—on this bill! We have men and women speaking in relation to this bill.

**Ms Ley:** We don't have quotas.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Ms AE Burke ): Order! The member for Farrer was heard in silence.

**Mr NEUMANN:** So it is interesting that they are so concerned about that. Perhaps that is indicative of the attitude of their LNP colleagues in Queensland, where only about 18 per cent of their caucus are women. The member for Farrer was quite critical of quotas and quite critical of the steps taken by the Australian Labor Party, but I note that the party in Queensland is led by a woman; that the Premier, when Labor were in government in Queensland, was a woman; and that the Prime Minister is a woman. We have actually taken steps in our conferences and our party units, as well as in this government, to advance the role of women, because we know that gender inequality is a huge disincentive to participation of women in the workforce.

The member for Farrer was critical of us, and particularly of the minister, in relation to this legislation. But what she did not say at all was that the development of this legislation was underpinned by extensive consultation. She was critical of the trade union movement. It is always in the DNA of those opposite to criticise the trade union movement. They can never get over this. Demonising someone is always what the Tories do in this country. But let's have a look at the consultation. There was a consultation process undertaken in relation to this. Members of the advisory group included, amongst others, the following: ACCI, the Chamber of Commerce and Industry, who are not affiliated with the Australian Labor Party; the ACTU; the Australian Industry Group; ASX Ltd; the University of Sydney; and the Fair Work Ombudsman. If they want to know the full membership of the advisory committee, I am sure we can provide it to them. But it was not just the ACTU that we consulted on this.

I think what we are hearing today is actually part of a strategy, because I noticed that the LNP Premier of Queensland, Campbell Newman, said similar things to what the member for Farrer said in a letter to Tim Watling, the Committee Secretary of the Senate Standing Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, who recommended that we pass this legislation. In a letter dated 23 April 2012, Campbell Newman said:

The Bill's proposed amendments to the current reporting framework give rise to concerns regarding the likely impact on employers. My Government is also committed to changing the culture in government, from one that promotes red tape to one that reduces red tape. I am concerned the Bill may impose an additional regulatory burden on Queensland businesses.

These are similar to the words we heard from the member for Farrer in relation to this. It is interesting because last parliament I was a member of the House of Representatives Committee on Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, then chaired by the former member for Hasluck, and I seem to recall overwhelming amounts of evidence that it did not matter whether women were cleaners or shop assistants or nurses or even barristers. I remember that the Law Institute of Victoria gave us evidence that women who came from law school in their first year were earning on average \$8,000 less than men in their first year, even though they had the same qualifications. That particular committee recommended reporting provisions similar to what is in this legislation. I recall sitting in that committee and I recall looking around and saying, 'Hello, there are members of the Liberal Party on the committee.' In a bipartisan way they recommended what we are doing here in this legislation. They were supporting us, but all of a sudden, somehow and not in a benevolent way, those opposite have changed their

minds. They have had a false or bad epiphany in relation to this legislation. Perhaps they are taking instructions from their LNP colleagues in Queensland.

I hope as she goes around the countryside as the shadow minister for child care the member for Farrer makes the point—she waxed on about superannuation—that she and her caucus colleagues voted against superannuation increases for women from nine to 12 per cent over the next decade. I hope she tells them that. It means that a 30-year-old woman will get over \$100,000 more because of this government and would have got \$100,000 less if they had been in government. The coalition continues to vote against superannuation. Because she talked a lot about child care, I hope she also tells the people as she goes around that one of the first acts of the coalition government after 1996 was to rip a billion dollars out of the childcare sector.

I hope she also tells them that she left women in a position where they were getting by way of childcare rebate up to \$4,354 per child and that we increased it by 73 per cent to \$7,500 per child. I hope she also says that we have assisted over 900,000 Australian families with the increased costs of child care. I hope she also tells them that we have put a record amount of money into child care—\$22.4 billion over four years, including \$19.9 billion for the CCR and CCB. I hope she also says that a woman in a family earning \$75,000 a year with one child in long-day care is only paying 7.5 per cent of their disposable income in childcare costs. It was 13 per cent in 2004, when her side of politics was in power.

Let us not hear platitudes from those opposite that they are supportive of equality in the workplace and that they are supportive of the sort of assistance that women need, because we are the ones who brought in the Paid Parental Leave scheme. Those opposite, in power for nearly 12 years, failed to do it. When they come up with a scheme, they come up with one that favours millionaires. That is what they do. The legislation here is important, because women are in a position where they are not participating in the workforce as much as men. In fact Australia ranks 45th in the World Economic Forum's 2011 Global Gender Gap Report when it comes to labour force participation. About 43 per cent of women participating in the workforce are working part time. We concede that casual and part-time work suits many women, but it also means that they earn far less, have lower superannuation and their employment arrangements are far less secure.

The gender pay gap starts early, as I have already pointed out. Men and women have different experiences of the workplace. I will show why this is important. One of my constituents, Dr Terrance Fitzsimmons, a post-doctoral research fellow from the University of Queensland, did his thesis on this point. He said that despite the fact that women represented 55 per cent of degree qualified work entrants in the past 20 years, only three per cent of Australia's ASX-listed companies have female CEOs. If we look at the market capitalisation, however, women control less than one per cent, if you take Gail Kelly out of the mix. This situation has remained static over the past decade. Dr Fitzsimmons makes the point that this is a major social issue. It is a massive economic problem. We simply have far too few women at senior levels in most organisations and there needs to be momentum to drive the cultural change and norms in society which act strongly against women being able to rise to the top of the corporate sector.

It does not matter whether they are part-time cleaners or they are in fact CEOs, women find themselves disadvantaged in the workplace for a variety of different reasons. Dr Fitzsimmons puts forward in his thesis a number of things that we can do. This legislation focuses on gender equality. It is about making sure that we establish the agency—and changing its title—and making sure that the agency's advice and assistance functions extend to all employers, but only relevant employers with a hundred or more employees are subject to the reporting requirements in the legislation, a new reporting framework, and they report against gender equality indicators. That is going to commence from 1 April 2013. We are going to make sure that reporting is simple; we are going to make sure it is useful; we are going to make sure there are industry based benchmarks; and we are going to consult industry. We are going to check compliance by requiring a relevant employer to give the agency the necessary information about the employer's compliance with the act. This is important also because we think that industry needs to understand that this is a serious issue as far as society is concerned. Contemporaneously, we believe that women can do anything and we think they should be able to do everything they want to do—that their skills, talents and abilities should be fostered and there should be no obstacles in the workplace, in politics and in the community to stop them. There should be no barriers; there should be no glass ceiling.

I mentioned before the extensive consultation which the coalition has railed against. In 2011 the government convened an implementation advisory group to assist. I know that the Minister for the Status of Women, Julie Collins, has addressed that group recently. She addressed a number of conferences around the country in relation

to that, directly engaging with those people who are stakeholders in business and organisations around Australia. This is part of a commitment that we made when we went to the 2010 election. We made a commitment that we would retain and improve the quality of opportunity for women in the workplace.

It is important to note that there has been a long legislative history in relation to these issues going back to the Affirmative Action (Equal Employment Opportunity for Women) Act 1986, another great initiative of a Labor government under Bob Hawke. That has been part of our legislative framework to remove obstacles for women since that time. The Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Act 1999 has served us well but now it is simply not good enough. We need to make significant reforms to bring into a contemporary setting our approach to gender equality.

I have two daughters and they are both at university. I want to make sure that they grow up in an environment and a world where they have no barriers to whatever they want to do. Sadly, we know that across all professions, even today—and not just the legal profession I mentioned before—the median full-time salary for a male graduate from university is \$52,000 compared to \$50,000 for female graduates. It gets worse as you go higher in different professions. Sadly, the average superannuation balance for Australian women is 40 per cent below that of men and the average payout is about half of that of men. We that know women make up about 70 per cent of single age pensioners. That is why our reforms in relation to superannuation and our reforms in relation to the pension—the historic rises in 2009-10—have made such a difference.

But there is more to be done. We are addressing inequalities that stop women achieving all they want. We are increasing workforce participation. That is crystal clear in our legislative framework and what we are doing. We are not just helping individual women; we are helping whole communities. We are helping them to achieve their potential to rejoin the workforce with extra funding, whether they are suffering from a physical disability or the disability from not having the education that they wished in the earlier parts of their lives.

Closing the gap between workforce participation for men and women would boost our gross domestic product by about 13 per cent. Those opposite talk about being friends of business, friends of small business, friends of economics. Even if you adopted a really economically rational approach, if you said you were going to end the inequality between men's and women's participation in the workforce, to increase our gross domestic product by 13 per cent is an extraordinary way to boost our \$1.5 trillion economy. That is why it is important. It is important not just for decency, compassion and humanity, and giving 50 per cent of our population a fairer go; it is also about making sure the economy is stronger.

This legislation should be seen as part of a whole package. I commend the minister for the great work she has done. It seems to me to be pitiful that those opposite would pose as the friend of women when you look at their record. The fact that they have opposed this legislation says volumes about what would happen if they got on this side of the Treasury benches.