



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Domestic Violence

SPEECH

Thursday, 26 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Hawke, Alex, MP

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Mr HAWKE (Mitchell) (12:25): I also rise to raise the issue of domestic violence, ironically enough. I want to say to the member for McEwen: it is beneath him to politicise this issue of domestic violence. While those cuts may be significant, and he may want to raise that issue, we are together as one with this scourge in our community. The Abbott Liberal government is doing everything it can to ensure this issue is addressed, as it should be, by our whole society, and by our whole parliament, working together.

I would like to speak about the Lisa Harnum Foundation, which has been established by a resident of my electorate, Aileen Mountfield. Aileen is a member of the Hills Domestic Violence Support Group. The Lisa Harnum Foundation is named, of course, after a very prominent case that gripped Sydney and gripped Australia: the very tragic case of Lisa Harnum who was murdered by her fiancé. She was 30 years old when she died tragically as a result of her then fiancé, Simon Gittany, throwing her from the 15th floor balcony of their apartment in the City of Sydney. Lisa's mother has agreed for the foundation to use Lisa's name. The foundation will offer residents from across Sydney and across Australia a place for women to come and visit, and access a range of services. It will have information, counselling and recovery groups.

I want to point to the dynamism of the approach that is being taken by the Lisa Harnum Foundation, which will directly address the needs of women with domestic violence issues in new and modern ways, including through the use of apps and other technology. This will address some of the very great difficulties that we hear, from police and from all of our services for domestic violence, that women have when they are engaged in these abusive and violent relationships. We know that just under 500,000 Australian women reported that they had experienced physical or sexual violence or sexual assault in the past year. More than one million women have experienced physical or sexual assault since the age of 15, by a perpetrator who was their current or previous male partner. Almost 40 per cent have experienced physical assault in the 12 months before the survey, which was from the Australian Bureau of Statistics. These rates are absolutely unacceptable in our modern society, and they require the action of government, both state and federal.

That is why it was so pleasing that the government announced that Australian of the Year, Rosie Batty, would advise state and federal governments on the new control order system to prevent domestic violence. We are so excited about the fact that Rosie has put domestic violence on the national agenda this year. There are alarming statistics and developments in this space. These show us that under-reporting is still a massive problem; that the hidden domestic violence, of those who are not able to come forward, or cannot be identified, is just as bad as the data that we already know about and the problems that we already have. Rosie and her incredible strength and her selfless efforts are so important in this area. The Lisa Harnum Foundation, established last year, and the efforts of its founder and Executive Director, Aileen Mountfield, are also going to be so important in this vital area, allowing for greater reporting, greater identification, and greater assistance in what are very difficult circumstances. They are to be commended. The foundation will provide for a circuit-breaker in Sydney, where these very tragic circumstances captured our entire city. There will be free-call phone number services; there will be specialised services in relation to domestic violence: services in the form of information, support, counselling, financial counselling, education, and group work; and group activities for women who have experienced some form of abuse. These groups are non-confronting, leading women into rebuilding their self-esteem, self-worth and self-confidence. As I have described, the use of new technologies, and the use of new methods of allowing women to be able to seek help from inside abusive relationships, and from inside abusive paradigms from which they cannot escape, is going to be, I think, a shift in paradigm and very vital to the ongoing effort. Announced on White Ribbon Day, the app will be a great revolution in this space, and will allow for very important leaps forward for women in abusive and dangerous situations.

If people are in unsafe or threatening situations, they can access these clever technologies without fear of getting caught. I am not going to go into too much detail about them because they are primarily for women in domestic violence situations and part of their success will be in the secrecy about them. I think this is a real step forward. I am going to be very pleased to be at the launch of the Lisa Harnum Foundation. I think this will make a great

contribution to the effort against domestic violence. I will be proud to speak at the opening and I commend Aileen Mountfield and everybody involved in the step forward that we are making in this space.