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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**ADJOURNMENT**

**International Women's Day**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 1 March 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Page** 2600  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Brodtmann, Gai, MP

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**Ms BRODTMANN** (Canberra) (12:46): Today I would like to take the opportunity to speak about International Women's Day, which is coming up next week, on 8 March. International Women's Day is a global day, celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women in the past and present, and celebrating their futures. This day always reminds me of the many sacrifices women have made throughout history, particularly when it comes to family. It gives me time to reflect on my own family.

I come from what I call a working-class matriarchy. My great-grandmother and my grandmother were both domestics, and my mother, as a result of my father leaving, did it tough as well. Those women were really strong, intelligent and tenacious women, but they were all denied the opportunity of education, which is why I am such a very strong advocate of education and access to education for all, no matter what your postcode. What they instilled in me as a result of the disadvantage they suffered through the fact that they did not have an education was the need for women to get an education, to be financially independent and to control their fertility so that they could do all of the above. They were great role models for me; my mother is still a great role model for me. They were strong working-class women, and days like International Women's Day allow me to pause and reflect on their tenacity and their achievements.

International Women's Day is a day when women are recognised for those achievements regardless of divisions, whether national, ethnic, linguistic, cultural, economic or political. It is an occasion for looking back on past struggles and accomplishments and, more importantly, for looking ahead to the untapped potential and opportunities that await future generations of women. This year the theme for the day is supporting women's economic empowerment, something I feel very strongly about and strongly support. It is about celebrating the vital role women play in enhancing economic prosperity in their families, communities and countries, while recognising that significant barriers to achieving women's economic security and equality continue to exist. I think there are many different ways we can look at this issue, which makes it such fitting theme for this year.

Economic empowerment recognises an increase in women's access to quality education, meaningful employment and land and other resources, and contributes positively to gender inclusion, sustainable development and growth in prosperity. Across the globe, 70 per cent of the world's poor are women. Women earn less than 10 per cent of the world's wages, but women do more than two-thirds of the world's work. On average, women reinvest 90 per cent of their income into their families, while men only invest 30 to 40 per cent. I am a strong supporter of Kiva, and in the investments that I make into those microbusinesses I always give to women. I know that they always repay their loans on time and that the money is going to their kids' education. In Australia alone, closing the gap between female and male employment will boost Australia's GDP by 11 per cent. Last year I spoke at the National Foundation for Australian Women forum about finance as a feminist issue. I am a passionate believer that women need to take charge and have the financial literacy to plan for their retirement.

As the member for Canberra I speak each week to women, many of whom have retired, who are doing it tough living on the pension and being in social housing, or doing it tough living on the pension and being in the private rental market—that is pretty tough! I am worried that too many women have not planned for their future beyond work and I am worried that too many women have not planned for their retirement. This year I am organising a series of seminars for women—also for the broader community—on how to read superannuation statements so that people can see, 'I've got this amount of money in my super statement and I need to get this amount if I am to retire comfortably. How much do I need to put in each week for that to happen and how does that factor in my work-life choices?' Unlike men, women often have disrupted working careers. They take time out to have children and are more inclined to participate in the workforce on a part-time basis. We know that the average super payout for women is a lot less than for men. What is even more disturbing is that around 60 per cent of women will retire with no super at all.

There are many barriers for women when it comes to finance in terms of workforce participation, pay equity, financial independence, access to land and an unequal share of childcare responsibilities. I encourage all women,

their families and friends to support International Women's Day this year by making a donation, buying a purple ribbon, hosting a fund-raising event or attending one of the International Women's Day events across Australia. It is an important issue for all women and one we all need to support wholeheartedly.