



Speech by

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**EMILY'S LIST; WOMEN IN POLITICS**

**Ms NELSON-CARR** (Mundingburra—ALP) (11.57 a.m.): I rise today to speak about Emily's List and women in politics. Last weekend marked the third annual general meeting of Emily's List Australia. Emily's List is a national political network which was formed in 1996 to increase the number of women Labor parliamentarians. This organisation has made a significant impact on the Australian political landscape since it was launched at Parliament House in Canberra by co-convenor and former Victorian Premier, Joan Kirner, Federal MP and former Western Australian Premier, Dr Carmen Lawrence, and Senator Kate Lundy.

Emily's List provides campaign support for women contesting Federal, State and Territory seats, and since 1996 Emily's List has helped 39 new women MPs to be elected into Parliaments around Australia. It has contributed \$250,000 to Labor women's campaigns. It has provided mentoring, training, media support and strategic campaign advice to candidates during elections, and it has commissioned gender gap research into ways Government can serve the needs of women.

Emily's List is national, with action groups in each State and Territory, and it is non-factional. As a member of Emily's List, I am proud to reflect on the years between 1996 and the year 2000. Emily is an acronym for Early Money is Like Yeast: it makes the dough rise. This early campaign money is often the most important support a candidate can have when heading into an election.

Why is it so important that we have more women in Parliament? Well, as Dr Carmen Lawrence says, one of the most obvious and fundamental flaws in the developing democracies everywhere has been the exclusion of women. Any debate on democracy has proceeded as if women have not been there. She goes on to say that the omission of women in the call for freedom, equality and the rights of man was not just a scandalous oversight but an indication of the relentless privileging of men. But it is not just unfinished business; it affects the very foundations of democracy. Democracy in this view has to be remodelled to accommodate the female half of the population. It is pure and simple justice that women should vote, and they also should be eligible to be elected to Parliaments, simply on the premise that they are entitled to equal rights as citizens.

Our democracy has evolved without any significant contribution to women. Our constitution, our Parliaments and our political parties have all been designed by men to suit their preoccupations and convenience. As Dr Lawrence says, it follows that the full participation of women might well require and/or result in significant changes to the structures and processes of our political system.

We all agree that progress towards equal representation has been alarmingly slow. Even today, only 22% of members and senators are women. When I look over to the other side of the House and see the sad situation of our Opposition, it is no wonder that its women look pretty glum—two representatives from the National Party, one Liberal and two Independents. The Labor Government has a number of female Ministers and backbenchers.

Many would argue that the suffrage and women's movements have advanced, but I would argue that they have not advanced as much as they should have. Is 22% a true democratic representation? I fear not. Yet, according to the latest census, women make up between 50% and 52% of the population. We have an increasing female participation in the work force. We see strong female representation in professional and associate professional occupations. We know that women are every

bit as qualified as men. Our universities have a fifty-fifty ratio of men and women, but when we look at the number of women standing for election, we find it extremely disappointing.

It would be no news to my parliamentary colleagues sitting in this Chamber that the most intelligent and educated women of working age do a number of things at the same time. They run a family and a home, they are in highly paid positions in industries such as finance and they are able to organise working hours—full or part-time—to suit their needs.

But if a woman was to enter politics, she would find that it would involve long and irregular hours, a lot of reading, meeting preparation, media debates and constituency issues, as well as attending lectures, receptions and gatherings that take place during the evening and on weekends. Furthermore, there are no child care facilities in our Parliament building.

I believe that many women are not attracted to politics in the same vein as men because it is such a paternalistic working environment. We also do not have the paternalistic boys network, which is something that must be overcome, and must be overcome quickly. It is a male oriented environment and it is all pervasive. Any woman even half-heartedly considering a life in politics would be more than concerned about the fact that the key decision-making positions are given and held by male politicians. There have been some small improvements, but certainly not enough.

Women today believe that they have to fight not only in terms of political debate but for their rights as well. Women, even in political positions, still feel frustrated at their powerlessness. They often feel defeated before they start. Women, I believe, should recognise the politics in their lives which involves the legal, social, environmental, medical, labour and familial systems with which we interact. Having said that, political oppression of women by men continues regardless of race, creed, religious beliefs, nationality or age. Just consider a woman walking alone at night. How does this woman feel? Do women in other places feel differently? Do men feel the fear that women feel? I think not.

Emily's List is an organisation which encourages women to believe that they have the potential for a broader consciousness of politics and that their lives are more varied and less circumscribed. They are able to do more things at any one time. Many of the barriers which have inhibited equal participation have been overcome, but the social barriers that are imposed by male practices and are perpetuated by suitably brainwashed females does continue to stand in the way.

When it comes to making decisions in Parliament, a handful of women is no more than a token acknowledgment of their right to be there. The voice of Government is still a man's voice—and I look at the Opposition in dismay. As one of my New Zealand parliamentary colleagues has pointed out in a recent article—

"Power is a commodity that we as women lack. Primarily we are denied it and subsequently have not used what little we have as fully as we might. As feminists we recognise our lack of that kind of power but fly away from honestly using or desiring it. We do want power, but not power over people—not power that kills bodies or spirits—but power to use with and for women—power to do things—power to make our own decisions. Not the power of ownership and control."

She goes on to say that women have been viewed as being concerned only with caring and nurturing and that we do not understand a great deal about other issues. What absolute nonsense! Women have strong opinions on expenditure, on armaments instead of education, on the upgrading of rural roads, on the petrol price debacle, on adequate suburban bus transport, on taxation matters, on priorities of development and so on and so on. But we do expect to be consulted. She says that legislation is passed only when men have assessed that whatever they are giving us will not threaten or jeopardise the continuation of their system. Men do not have to think to be politically aware because the system is what they are—male. They do not even have to work at it.

There is not one agency or avenue that is not wide open for women's political activity. There have always been practical and logistical impediments, but there is also a lack of understanding of how oppressed women are and a fear of using power in case they abuse it. Women have been socialised to care, to nurture, to compromise and to put themselves second. This is where Emily's List comes to the fore with such a positive force. Emily's List tells us to start looking at our own lives and to see who has the power where and when. Emily's List insists that we must study how it is used and start using it ourselves. It is the only way that women are going to be able to gain those things that are their right.

Politics for a male leader is more likely to be a vehicle for personal and career advancement. For women it is likely to be a labour of love. Women are not in politics to capture positions for themselves, but for others. Last week in Parliament, the Minister for the Office of Women's Policy made a number of statements with respect to the first State Government Women's Policy Unit. Thankfully, this Labor Government has made a commitment to women by having a Ministry. Minister Spence says that at the start of 1990, just weeks after the National Party departed the Treasury benches, Queensland had no women judges, no women magistrates, no women heads of State Government departments, no State

anti-discrimination legislation, no State funding for women's health centres and no State-funded women's sexual assault programs. We have certainly come a long way since those days. Indeed, the Premier of Queensland recognises the importance of affirmative action, the importance of Emily's List and the importance of women in Parliament. The proof is in our numbers and representation. But one State Government is not enough if we are to change the face of democracy.

Ms Spence went on to say that some Queenslanders observed the improvements and asked whether we still need an Office of Women's Policy. I agree with the Minister—we are such a long way from becoming equal participants in the democratic system. We are still under-represented in senior positions, we still earn less than men, we are still more likely to be employed as casuals and part-time workers in low paying industries and we are still more likely to be subject to domestic violence, sexual harassment and workplace discrimination. As the Minister says, it is worth while celebrating victories, but in the meantime we must keep working to improve the lives of women and girls in our State.

I commend the work of Emily's List and its co-founders in the tireless work they continue to do across Australia to attract women into politics so that finally we will have equal representation and be able to have a real voice in the democratic process.

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