



Speech by

Fiona Simpson

MEMBER FOR MAROOCHYDORE

Hansard Thursday, 8 March 2007

MOTION: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Miss SIMPSON (Maroochydore—NPA) (Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (11.54 am): I rise to second the amendment moved by my colleague, the member for Burdekin, and also join with her in my concerns that this motion, which usually has bipartisan support, has been hijacked for an industrial relations campaign of the Labor Party. I certainly hope that the Labor Party is not also using the Office for Women in this state as part of its campaign tool to progress its own Labor Party agenda, because this office should be there for all women of Queensland regardless of their political background.

Al Gore's movie about global warming has had a significant role in changing public perceptions about that very important issue. It has catapulted it high on the agenda of policy makers and in media debate. It has moved it from the margins to the front line. Unfortunately, there are many other issues which languish on the fringes of public attention, not because they are frivolous or unimportant but because no-one has yet made a movie to grab people's hearts and minds. Nonetheless, there are heroes who speak out trying to raise public awareness and who respond to great human need and suffering even though it comes at great personal risk.

One such woman who today I wish to pay tribute to on International Women's Day is Bronwen Healy. As a former drug-addicted prostitute who has broken out of her hell, she now reaches back to help other women, whether from the sex industry or domestic violence or homelessness, to find a way to hope, healing and health. Together with her husband Jason, she has founded the Hope Foundation which they formally launched last week. This not-for-profit organisation plans to set up an inner-city drop-in centre for addicts and prostitutes. Ms Healy said that she would use her own story to demonstrate that there is a way out of addiction, no matter how consuming.

The Hope Foundation intends to assist men, women and children who are seeking shelter from and want to be rehabilitated from alcohol and drug addiction or to exit the sex industry. This target group has been identified to provide relief for those suffering and those in distress. Bronwen and Jason Healy say there are currently no organisations in Brisbane or in many other places in Australia that provide the same assistance to people within this target group. The aim of the foundation is to offer practical help by filling individuals with hope and directing them to healing. The foundation exists to give people who are suffering and in distress the opportunity to have a better way of life by helping them renew their minds and offering them true freedom through specialised programs and follow-up care. The foundation has been established to benefit society by assisting those who are currently a cost to society and retraining and reteaching them skills in how to live, thrive and flourish. In turn it is anticipated that each person can become a contributing part of the community. Bronwen is one gutsy woman and it is appropriate to honour and acknowledge her today.

As a female parliamentarian I know the verbal abuse one can face in this parliament just for raising concerns about the impact of the legal and illegal sex industry on women's physical and mental health and the need to do more to prevent women being dragged into this destructive workplace and the need to help them successfully exit the industry. But I am not the victim. I only cop verbal abuse in this place. There are people on the front line helping these women who potentially face a lot more than that. What I do hope is that as women of this parliament we never forget those women in our society who still pay with their dignity

and their health due to the powerful commercial interests in the sex industry, which treats women like chattels from a medieval age. I hope we also never forget those women who are facing domestic violence and homelessness in our society. We should never tolerate any of these problems by saying that it is a fact of life that has to be accepted. More importantly, we as female parliamentarians should support those on the front line, such as Bronwen Healy, who pour out their lives for others in a selfless way.

I direct members to her web site at www.hopefoundation.org.au which outlines a very impressive vision. I have the deepest of admiration for Bronwen and her mission. Not everyone who has suffered the pain of circumstances which crush their spirit and threatens their physical and mental health has a social movement to champion their cause. This lady is truly worthy of our praise.