



Speech by

Jann Stuckey

MEMBER FOR CURRUMBIN

Hansard Thursday, 19 April 2007

VACANCY IN SENATE OF COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA: NOMINATION OF SK BOYCE

Mrs STUCKEY (Currumbin—Lib) (12.07 pm): It is an absolute delight to support the motion moved by the Premier in this House today to endorse the nomination of Suzanne Kay Boyce as the new Queensland senator to fill the recently created Senate vacancy. As members heard, Sue beat off an impressive field of candidates—all male, I might add—to clearly win this highly sought office in the Howard Liberal government. Joining Sue today in the gallery are many friends, including her daughter, who is with her in the chamber here, and members of the Liberal Women's Council Executive, including the new Acting President, Melina Morgan, who, I might say, has enormous shoes to fill, and the immediate past president, Rae Watkins.

To date, Sue Boyce's life has embraced motherhood—and I mean embraced motherhood—producing three now adult children. She has had a busy career as chair of the family company, Everhard Industries Pty Ltd—a business established in 1926—and numerous positions on disability advocacy group committees. Prior to Sue's involvement in the family company, which has its headquarters at Geebung, as members have heard Sue worked as a newspaper journalist in Queensland, Victoria, Papua New Guinea and the United Kingdom for a period stretching over 20 years. Some of this time was spent as a political journalist, which will no doubt assist her to navigate the media contingents in Canberra.

Some members may not realise that Everhard makes products used in the water industry—a very topical issue—including laundry units, waste water treatment systems and rainwater tanks. In her preselection speech last weekend Sue's vibrant personality saw her make the most of the opportunity to promote her tanks to a large audience. After telling preselectors that she had planned to step back from her role as chairman of the company, Sue invited anyone needing a rainwater tank 'to come and see me later'.

As a fellow female Liberal and also a good friend, I believe I am in a position to reveal what some of her aims, inspirations and motivations are. First and foremost are her family—her three adult children. Bede is an electrician, Gina is an intensive care nurse and Joanna, the youngest, is a bakery assistant and student. Joanna has Down syndrome and is a remarkable, independent 23-year-old woman with dreams and aspirations like each and every one of us. Joanna is a gold medal winning Special Olympian, and I felt honoured to share in Sue's joy and pride as we watched her special girl compete in gymnastics on the Gold Coast last year.

Like many mums, though, with a newborn with a disability, Sue admits she saw her baby's differences—and I quote Sue with her permission—'as a disaster, as that's how everyone in our community, including medical staff, frame the birth of a child with a disability'. She said, 'It took me some time to realise that what I had was a happy, healthy little girl, and I'll always regret the time I wasted getting to that point.'

It is no great surprise then to understand Sue's passion and involvement as an advocate for people with a disability. Adopting the slogan 'Nothing about us without us', Sue knows that people with a disability want empathy, not sympathy. Since Joanna's birth 23 years ago, Sue has fought for the real inclusion—

and I repeat for the real inclusion—of people with a disability in all aspects of life and decision making. Urging us all to see the person first not the disability, Sue concurs that the main problem for this group is the community's attitude to disability, not the disability itself.

As a past president of the Down Syndrome Association of Queensland and current management committee member of recently formed Lifeways, Sue has projected a strong and reasoned voice on behalf of people with a disability and their families. Lifeways is a new organisation in Queensland to assist ageing carers to decide what happens when they can no longer care for their son or daughter with a disability. No wonder then when you read a list of Sue's goals and interests, right up there with promoting Queensland family businesses is developing a framework for ageing parents to enable long-term planning for adult children with a disability and employment, housing opportunities and advocacy for people with a disability.

Also on her list is a desire to improve the participation rates of women in leadership roles in business and in politics. For the past 2½ years Sue has worked energetically as the President of the Liberal Party's Women's Council. As a former Women's Council patron, I admire enormously her ability to bounce back from defeat and her total commitment to fostering and encouraging women to put themselves forward both as candidates and for senior positions within the party. Sue's helping hand and wisdom has touched me and many other women in the Liberal Party.

Sue has an amazing capacity to pick herself up and throw herself straight back into the fray, and I have to say that her loyalty to the Liberal Party has been unquestionable under some difficult circumstances. Perhaps it is her philosophy—and that is that every decision is improved by having a variety of perspectives, and one of the most critical of these is having views from both men and women—that has inspired many women, including myself, to higher office.

Sue has been involved in the Australian Institute of Management's Women on Board program, which takes groups of women who aspire to be directors to the workplace of successful women directors. In her own company, Sue encouraged Everhard's female staff to participate in women in leadership courses, as she observed that in a male dominated industry it often takes a level of confidence for women to even put their hand up, and confidence in women is not necessarily innate. In many cases it needs to be learnt.

Another piece of advice she gave me which is absolutely classic, and I want to share it with the House, is: always ask the apparently obvious question. Perhaps we should do that in question time. If you do not know, you can guarantee that more than half the people in the room do not know the answer either but are too embarrassed to ask.

Sue, in your own words, you have put your heart and soul into two Liberal Senate campaigns thus far. You are a seasoned campaigner who is ready to go the full 15 rounds, or however many, to secure another win for the Howard government. Today in this House—and I am sure you can feel my pride—I feel immensely honoured to be standing here and welcoming you to your new role. I convey my sincere wishes as a close friend and mentor. I speak on behalf of the Liberal Party but in particular on behalf of the Queensland Women's Council. The considerable skills you bring to this position will serve Australia, and particularly those with disabilities, well. Long may you be in the Senate.