




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR ASPLEY

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ADJOURNMENT

Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum

 **Ms DAVIS** (Aspley—LNP) (2.47 am): It was my enormous privilege to have been selected as the Queensland representative to attend the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum, which was held in Apia, Samoa, from 4 to 7 April. The Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Forum is an annual event which is coordinated by the Australian parliament and funded by the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Project and financially supported by Australian aid. The core objective of the forum is building and sustaining networks of women in parliament in the Pacific region and to gain momentum in highlighting the role of women as key decision-makers in their respective parliaments. It is a terrific way to connect with our sister parliamentarians in the Pacific, and what a fantastic group of women they are. I think I can safely say that our time together broadened our perspectives of the challenges that women face in each of our countries and I look forward to staying connected with them.

This year's forum focused attention on women's economic empowerment. It is a sad reality that economic opportunities for women in the Pacific are amongst the worst in the world, and with the exception of Australia and New Zealand there is no Pacific country where economic opportunities for women rise above the global average.

There were many things that I learned at this forum: most significantly, that the women parliamentarians who attended, some of them only newly elected, have enormous resolve to increase opportunities for all women in the Pacific region. Possibly my greatest education was around informal economies and the heavy reliance on the informal economy for women's economic participation. Women dominate the informal economy. Indeed, women's private sector activity is mostly in the informal economy and their workplace is often the street, the marketplace or the home. What I learned is that there is a real reticence to move to the formal economy. There are a number of reasons for this, and, whilst many of the parliamentarians in attendance were businesswomen in the formal economy, encouraging more women to move into the formal economy continues to have challenges.

It is very clear that in order to give women economic empowerment there needs to be a focus on improving women's financial literacy and access to banking services. I am convinced that making these services more available and suited to women's needs will increase income in women's hands. It became evidence that in the Pacific nations it is particularly important that priority be placed on legislative protections for women, recognising that women's economic empowerment and gender equity go hand in hand. It was a very great privilege to have been asked to address the forum and share my own personal journey in small business and the challenges I encountered in an industry that has always been the domain of men. Attending this forum was a wonderful experience and I am grateful for the opportunity to have connected with so many inspiring women.