




Speech By
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MEMBER FOR IPSWICH

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ADJOURNMENT

Hayden Oration

 **Ms HOWARD** (Ipswich—ALP) (7.16 pm): Each year I have the great pleasure of hosting the Hayden Oration—an event in honour of former member for Oxley and governor-general, Bill Hayden AC, and the incredible work he and our former Labor parliamentarians have done to reform and shape our nation for the better. At our fourth Hayden Oration two weeks ago, I was honoured to present as our special guest speaker the former Hawke cabinet minister and senator, and former age discrimination commissioner, Susan Ryan AO.

Susan Ryan is a trailblazing reformer in Australian politics who pioneered landmark legislation such as the Sex Discrimination Act. However, as Susan reminded us all in her oration that night, the path towards equal opportunity reform in this country is long and hard. Conservatives are quick to attack any reform that addresses disadvantage and inequality. Older generations of women remember a time when they were forced out of work if they got married, they remember a time when single women were forced to give up their babies for adoption, and they remember a time of the blokey male dominated workplaces where sexual harassment was norm.

The election of the Hawke government in 1983 provided the space for Susan Ryan to pursue legislation that would expand opportunities and rights for women. The Sex Discrimination Act, passed in 1984, was a landmark achievement that only happened through the persistence and hard work of Susan and made possible by the expansive reformist agenda of the Hawke Labor government—but, as Susan described in her speech, this reform was not achieved without a fight. At the time she was roundly attacked by right-wing conservatives who tried to scare Australians into maintaining the status quo. Susan described talkback radio at the time as being in ‘constant outrage mode’. I am not sure that that has changed.

Conservative groups took out full-page ads against her and made over-the-top claims that men would be sacked and replaced by incompetent women, children would be abandoned and companies forced into ruin. Of course none of that happened, but this sort of hysteria is not surprising in the least when we consider the conservative fear campaign that our government faced only just last year when the Termination of Pregnancy Bill was coming through parliament.

Thankfully, the Sex Discrimination Act, which Susan fought so hard for 35 years ago, has never been repealed, and the horrors envisioned by the conservatives have never come to pass. What the act did though was produce immediate and lasting benefits to all Australian women.

There is still more work to be done. Women’s incomes are still lower than men’s on average. Our super savings are lower. Women still shoulder most of the housework and undertake primary care of children and elderly relatives. Violence against women is also still a massive problem in Australia, killing dozens of women each year.

I want to place on the record my deep thanks to thank Susan Ryan for coming to Ipswich to speak at our annual Hayden Oration. It was such a pleasure to meet her. It really was a good reminder to all of us that the road to reform is long and hard. I also want to thank the Ipswich Girls' Grammar School who gave us their venue for the evening. It was a fantastic venue.