




Speech By
Leanne Linard

MEMBER FOR NUDGE

Record of Proceedings, 17 September 2019

MATTER OF PUBLIC INTEREST

Gender Sensitive Scrutiny

 **Ms LINARD** (Nudgee—ALP) (2.20 pm): I rise to speak about gender sensitive scrutiny. It is a term that I think it is fair to say is not routinely used in Australia, where terms such as ‘gender parity’ and ‘gender equity’ are preferred. Recently I was asked to travel to Westminster to represent our parliament at the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Conference on Gender Sensitive Scrutiny. I attended the conference along with Labor, conservative and independent parliamentarians from across Australia and the Commonwealth nations. While, sadly, the location and topic of the conference were used recently to score cheap political points, this is a topic on which our Commonwealth nations should continue to convene because it continues to be a live and significant issue.

What is gender sensitive scrutiny? While most government policies appear gender neutral, in reality government policy can and often does impact on women and men differently in respect of the distribution of benefits and burdens of taxation and spending. Gender sensitive scrutiny is the process of applying a lens to government policy, budgets and programs to ensure such differences are understood. All government policies, whether in respect of early childhood development, workforce participation, investing in particular industry sectors or caring for the aged or those living with disability, have gender implications.

From 1983 to 2013, Australia was said to be a pioneer in analysing how budget measures affected women. During this time, the federal government produced a women’s budget statement. State and territory governments were also among the first in the world to scrutinise annual budgets for their impact on women and girls. I do not think anyone on this side of the House would be surprised to learn that the former Abbott-Hockey federal government has the unenviable legacy of having ceased the practice.

In recent years at the Commonwealth level Australia has fallen behind in regard to gender analysis. Currently, there is no systematic process to assess the impact on women and men of taxing, spending or government programs either before or after the government enacts legislation, institutes policies or appropriates funding. At a state level, in 2016 our government introduced Queensland’s first women’s budget statement in almost 20 years. At the time, then minister for women Shannon Fentiman said—

Despite positive steps forward, Queensland women continue to face gender inequality that prevents them from participating fully in society and the economy

...

No society can achieve its full economic potential without the full engagement of women—not just in political life, but across the community sector, in business and industry.

Truer words were never spoken, so the question is: where are we in 2019? In response to the 2019-20 federal budget statement released in May, the National Foundation for Australian Women said in its annual gender lens report—

The overall trends in policy on superannuation, housing, education and other areas continue to see a diminution of spending on young Australians contrasted with the increasing relative generosity towards older generations.

There is no clear over-arching vision for the future of Australian society, let alone a strategy for the advancement of Australia's women, young or old.

...

The 2019 budget continues a pattern of underfunding social housing and housing assistance and overfunding tax breaks for investors. This business as usual approach to housing in the face of a chronic affordable housing shortage, which sees almost half a million women in housing stress, continues to undermine all other efforts towards women's safety and economic security.

This is a sobering assessment of where we as a country find ourselves. As a state Labor government, we are keenly aware of these challenges and will continue to stay the course by investing in programs such as Skilling Queenslanders for Work to assist disadvantaged Queenslanders into employment, with 52 per cent of program participants being women. We will continue to implement the recommendations of the *Not now, not ever* report to put an end to domestic and family violence in Queensland; to invest in vital family support services including counselling, pregnancy and parenting support services; to deliver maternal, parenting and child health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women; to deliver safe housing and specialist homelessness services; and to complete the delivery of improved female sport and recreation facilities to remove barriers to participation—amongst many other tailored initiatives—for Queensland women.

In recent decades, women have made significant strides in improving access, respect and treatment between men and women in the workforce and community. At universities, in workplaces, in boardrooms and in government, a growing number of women have taken on leadership roles, forging pathways for other women and girls to follow, our own Premier lead among them.

Principally, it is for the many other women across our society whose struggle continues that I direct this statement: equality does not mean that women and men are the same but that their enjoyment of rights, opportunities and life chances are not governed or limited by whether they were born female or male.

A women's budget statement is not a panacea for gender equality but is an honest and frank assessment of where we are and on what we place our value as a society. It is time for such a statement and, more importantly, a commitment to what it represents to be reinstated at a Commonwealth level as it has here in Queensland.