



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

ADJOURNMENT

Women in Public Office

PROCEDURAL TEXT

Monday, 30 May 2011

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Ms ROWLAND (Greenway) (21:35): Tonight I pay tribute to women in local government and specifically mention the 2011 Australian Local Government Womens Association Conference of New South Wales, which was hosted over the weekend in Blacktown City. This was the ALGWA diamond jubilee conference, celebrating a momentous 60 years of activity promoting women in public office and women with careers in local government.

The theme of the 2011 conference was SWIFT: the acronym for 'strong women influencing future trends'. As attested by the diverse range of participants, drawn from urban, regional and rural councils and shires, from all political and indeed apolitical persuasions, now is the time for women in local government or women who aspire to be in local government to take control of their respective agendas.

Research compiled by the Local Government and Shires Association of New South Wales illustrates a female participation rate in local public office positions which has unfortunately remained largely stagnant over the past three local government elections since 1999, at around 26 per cent. This is not good enough. I was fortunate to arrive at this place with the benefit of experience in both the private sector and as a council representative. I firmly believe that all women in public office have an obligation to identify and encourage the participation of other women. Throughout the conference there was ample opportunity for women to share their respective experiences and motivations for seeking election to local government. Almost to a person, delegates recounted how it was due to the inspiration or support of other women, not necessarily women of their own political ilk or in their geographic area, who ignited their own desire to put their hand up to represent their local communities.

With just over 12 months until the next local government elections in NSW, I take up the obligation to enhance the reality of one of the tenets of the NSW Local Government Women's Charter:

Local governments are in a unique position to work with the community to increase the numbers and

participation of women in public life, so that decision-making more clearly represents and reflects the interests and demography of communities.

It was a great honour for me to deliver the official opening address at the weekend's conference, and in doing so I singled out a policy area that I feel very strongly about—the constitutional recognition of local government. This is a campaign that has been driven for decades by local government across Australia, and indeed across the political divide. One of the measures in this year's budget included funding to implement this government's specific policy commitment for the constitutional recognition of local government. The need for such recognition was sharpened following the 2009 High Court decision in *Pape v Commissioner of Taxation*. The prevalence of federally funded projects for local government in areas such as roads and community infrastructure, project managed and delivered by locals, demands that their validity be placed beyond doubt.

As history tells us, the success of referenda depends on cross-party support. It is therefore disappointing that, while those opposite once supported constitutional recognition of local government, late last month we saw another rift in the coalition ranks. The shadow minister, Senator Joyce, as late as February this year told the parliament the coalition was supportive of constitutional recognition of local government. It has now emerged that the Leader of the Opposition has reduced this quite unequivocal position to in-principle support. No-one in local government wants a repeat of the 1974 and 1988 referenda on constitutional recognition, which were opposed by the Liberal Party. I hope for the sake of local government and all Australians that those opposite get their act together and unite behind sound policy.

I finally want to acknowledge the hard work by the team at Blacktown City Council who brought the conference together: Allyson Bradford, Bree Gilmour, Argyro Ballas, Tanya Bigeni, Nadine Nesovic and Nicole Winram. I also want to mention the events team at Blacktown City Council, including Peter Filmer and Kevin Poilly, who did so much for the conference as well as staging the final week of the Blacktown Fiesta, culminating in the hugely successful Streets Alive parade on Saturday. This was surely one of the biggest parades ever, a beautiful day hosting so many residents

of Blacktown and beyond, including representatives from Blacktown's sister cities, Porirua in New Zealand and our country sister city, Liverpool Plains. Last of all, a special congratulation to Councillor Julie Griffiths of Blacktown City Council, who was elected the new ALGWA president at the conference.