

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

The Hon. PENNY SHARPE (Parliamentary Secretary) [Wed 11 March, 4.43 p.m.]: I too support the motion supporting International Women's Day, the theme of which this year is "Empowering women to end poverty by 2015"—a truly worthwhile goal as women continue to find themselves as unequal partners in our global communities. I commence my contribution by congratulating all the women around the State who have been involved in organising International Women's Day events. Importantly, I note that the New South Wales Government has provided seed funding to over 152 councils across the State to run many of these events. That small amount of money will go a long way to reaching out to women across the State. I congratulate all who have been involved.

I congratulate also the International Women's Day Collective, who organised the display of banners around this great city. Members may have seen the purple and green banners that adorn Martin Place. This display was organised as a result of donations from women volunteers, particularly those involved in the Women's Electoral Lobby. I thank them for their continued work on the march and the banners, which ensure that International Women's Day is visible on our streets and stays in our minds. The march in Sydney last Saturday focused on equal pay for women. This is especially important, given the current campaign of the Australian Services Union to instigate an equal pay case for community workers across Australia. This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to get wage justice for social workers. I wish the Australian Services Union well in its endeavours. I congratulate also the Federal Government, particularly Deputy Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, who has supported this case.

Another focus for this year's march was to bring to the attention of people in Australia, many of whom would not be aware, of the terrible situation that exists in Juarez, a city in Mexico. Since 1993 in Juarez over 400 women have been raped, murdered and mutilated. Many more are missing. These women are mostly poorly paid factory workers on the United States-Mexico border. Typically, victims are reported missing and their bodies are found days or months later abandoned in vacant lots or in the surrounding desert. In most cases their bodies show signs of sexual violence, abuse, torture and mutilation. Very few perpetrators of these crimes have been brought to justice. Mothers of the victims have taken the lead in searching what they call "the killing fields" for their daughters by denouncing the violence and seeking justice, and urging the Mexican Government to take this issue more seriously. As we reflect on the successes for women on International Women's Day we must always reach out to those who need our support. The women, mothers and daughters of Juarez need our support. I encourage members to make themselves more aware of what is happening in that area.

I focus now on what women in Australia have achieved to overcome inequality. A recent article by University of Sydney academics Rae Cooper and Marion Baird examined how Australian women are faring 40 years after Germaine Greer published her seminal work, *The Female Eunuch*. They highlighted four critical areas where change is still desperately needed before women in Australia will truly be equal in all spheres, including at home, at work and in the broader society. I shall draw heavily on that work in my comments. Of course, the first issue is women and

violence. I welcome the fact that this House has spent considerable time on this topic in recent years. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, one in three, or 33 per cent of women aged over 15 years experience physical violence at some stage, and one in five women, or 19 per cent, experience sexual violence.

Much of this violence is perpetrated by family members and most often by male intimate partners. Just over one-third of women who had ever had an intimate partner reported experiencing at least one form of violence from that partner during their lifetime. Intimate partner homicide accounts for about one in five homicides nationally. Living free from conflict, violence and abuse is fundamental to women's equality of health opportunity and social participation. As women are the primary carers, children also continue to feel the impact of violence against their mothers. The House has spent quite a lot of time dealing with this issue also. Substantial changes have been made to our domestic violence laws in recent decades, and funding has been increased significantly in that regard. However, violence against women remains a scourge on our society, and we can and must always do more to eradicate that scourge.

Women in Australia today are better educated than they ever have been, and this is in contrast to many international places where girls routinely are denied the opportunity of an education simply because they are girls. Rae Cooper and Marion Baird note that two significant issues are the increasing participation of women in school and post-education, and the educational attainment of females. The news on those fronts is pretty good, but they note ominously that while participation in higher education is associated with better outcomes for the individual regarding employment prospects and salaries, unhappily employment prospects are the bleakest and salaries are the lowest in areas where women are most predominant. In 2007 full-time employment prospects were least favourable for graduates in study fields with a high concentration of female graduates—teaching, nursing, and in the visual and performing arts. In 2007 the median starting salary for female graduates was \$42,000, which is 93.3 per cent of male graduate earnings—and so began the gender gap.

After Australian women complete their education they find themselves with the gender pay gap that undermines their workforce participation and their earnings across their entire life cycle. The gender pay gap is persistent and has remained at approximately 16 per cent since 1992, although there are some differences between States and industry sectors. Rae Cooper and Marion Baird noted that in 1992 they began teaching young women and men who were embarking on university studies. They remain dismayed that there has been such little progress on women's pay equity since those children, who are now adults, were born.

The gender gap in reward for work is not limited to pay. It appears that a significant gap in benefits and entitlements also exists in Australia. By this I mean that there is a significant difference between non-wage benefits—such as superannuation, long service leave, paid annual leave and sick leave—enjoyed by males and those enjoyed by female employees. This week we have witnessed an explosion of the debate across Australia over paid parental leave. I welcome the debate. It is time Australian women had access to paid parental leave. I will leave the remainder of the debate to the Senate, but urge Federal crossbenchers to ensure that paid parental

leave is not blocked as part of political argy-bargy.

Many members have referred in this debate to women in parliaments. I will not repeat the numbers, but simply will say that until 50 per cent of our parliaments are constituted by women, we do ourselves a great deal of democratic disservice by not sharing power equally across Australia. Comment was made also about women being members of boards. This week I attended the Women in Local Government Awards and was disappointed by some of the statistics that I faced there. The State Parliament is way ahead of local government. At the last local government election, only 33 per cent of candidates were women. Of those 33 per cent, only 27 per cent were elected as councillors. If we examine staffing in local government across approximately 160 councils, we see that only three women are general managers. Local government has a long, long way to go.

I acknowledge the work of members of the Australian Local Government Women's Association, who keep this issue front and centre and who perform fantastic work in an effort to increase the level of participation of women in local government. Local government is a vital level of government because it makes a real difference within our communities. The local government awards honoured two women who are mayors in local government, both of whom are inspirations—Mayor Jenny Dowell from Lismore and Mayor Jean Hay from Manly. They have both held the office of mayor for significant periods in their communities. The list of their achievements it is far too long for me to even begin to place on the record. Suffice it to say that one of the key defining issues of both women has been their encouragement of other women and their efforts to ensure that women nominate for election on their ticket in the belief that they can win. I encourage all members of Parliament who are involved in local government elections to look around for women who have the ability to make a contribution to their local community.

In conclusion, I thank members of the House for the opportunity to discuss this issue today. The role and position of women in New South Wales is incredibly important. I know that everyone in this Chamber cares about that. The opportunity to discuss some of the issues facing women in New South Wales has been time well spent. Happy International Women's Day!