

“Feminist Insult”

Judy Maddigan

Judy Maddigan, former Speaker of the Victorian Parliament and Member for Essendon for 14 years.

The day after I was elected the first woman Speaker in February 2003, the following letter appeared in both Victorian daily newspapers (HeraldSun & The Age 26 February 2003).

Feminist Insult

The election or rather majority appointment of Judy Maddigan as the Speaker of Victoria’s Legislative Assembly is an insult to the people of Victoria and the tradition of one of our nation’s oldest political houses.

In appointing Maddigan, a self-proclaimed feminist radical, Steve Bracks has again bowed to his socialist superiors.

Maddigan, who refuses to be addressed as Madam Speaker and has snubbed the centuries-old dress of her office, is bad news for the Parliament and bad news for the people of Victoria.

It was signed by a man from Beaumaris, of whom I had never heard, but I assumed he was not a great supporter of the Labor Party. I copied the letter and hung it in my office during my term as Speaker, and it provided many of the visitors to my office with a good laugh on the way in.

I was elected Speaker in 2002 and at the same time Ms Monica Gould was elected President of the Legislative Council. As far as I can determine Victoria is the only bi-cameral Australian Parliament to have ever had two women presiding officers at the same time.

People often ask me about gender problems with being the first women Speaker in Victoria and I have to say that I never really noticed any. Perhaps Members of Parliament (MPs) are particularly sensitive to claims of sexism, but whatever the reason I found all members generally supportive.

No one ever called me a ‘witch’ or if they did I did not hear them, and I never noticed any anti-women sentiments expressed by MPs on either side of the House. Although the parliamentary staff did tell me that the Treasurer at the time I was Speaker, had threatened to kill me when I forced him to conclude an answer at Question Time. He was joking, I think, and his annoyance related to my ruling as Speaker not as a woman.

Women in Victorian Politics: Some History

Source: Melbourne Punch February 1908: 298.

(Note: the man in the picture is the Premier, Sir Thomas Bent. The notation read: “Giving helpful advice for women to convince the premier that they should have the right to vote.”)

Victoria was the last State in Australia to give women the vote and the last to allow women to stand for Parliament. Eighteen bills had to be presented to give women the vote before one finally passed (Adult Suffrage Act 1909). The comments of the male Members of Parliament strike us today as humorous, but would certainly have been incredibly frustrating for women at the time. The following are examples from the debates leading to the granting of voting rights:

...although he [Mr Francis] entertained great respect and regard for the female sex, he considered that the qualifications of the ladies was already sufficiently charming without adding to their influence in society by conferring upon them the right to vote for members of the legislature. He believed that not only the happiness of families but accord at elections would be seriously interfered with if ladies could rush to the polls in an excited state, or intervene at all in matters of the kind (Francis 1873: 656).

Unfortunately he does not explain why women would rush to the polling booths, perhaps he thought they might interfere with men voting. Another member tried to link democratic shortcomings to those of women. As he explained: The faults of democracy, if it has any faults – and even the sun has spots- are specially, I take it, volubility, fickleness, and an entire want of the sense of justice. Now, whether fairly or not, those very faults are the faults which are attributed by poets and philosophers to the feminine sex; in fact, the faults of democracy are mainly feminine faults (Smith 1899: 764).

The right for women to stand as one of the people's representatives was not even considered until after World War 1. A bill allowing women to contest elections passed in 1924, again after several attempts (Parliamentary Elections (Women Candidates) Bill 1923).

The views of many male politicians had unfortunately not changed a great deal by 1923 when the right to stand was being debated. For example, as one MP expounded; When we consider how woman is constituted, we know that the excitement of political struggles would be a very great strain on her nervous system....I doubt if feminine nature is capable of standing up to such a strenuous life (Robinson 1921: 703).

The battle by women to be able to stand as candidates was hard fought. It was, of course, very different for women seeking the right to stand for Parliament in earlier times. The Labor Party claims that it strongly supported the legislation but perhaps it is significant that the only woman to stand for the ALP (or any other Party) in 1924 was Mrs K. Clarey in the unwinnable seat of Barwon. This was despite the fact that she lived in Carlton, which was a winnable seat. In 1927, Florence Johnstone stood unsuccessfully for the seat of St Kilda. However, she was not endorsed as the Labor candidate until after she had been defeated. Apparently the Australian Labor Party (ALP) had done some kind of deal with the Conservatives and it was only after considerable pressure from ALP Branch members in the local St Kilda area that she received endorsement by Labor's Central Executive.

Source: Melbourne Punch 14 April 1887: 169. Courtesy of the Parliament of Victoria Library.

But not all male MP's contributions to the debate were critical or patronising to women. As we commemorate 100 years since WW1, it is worth recalling the words of Merritt, MLC Melbourne West, who along with a number of male parliamentarians supported women being able to stand as candidates because of their work during the war. As he explained During the Great War women performed wonders. I do not know if we should have won the war but for the women (Merritt 1921: 705).

Women were finally permitted to stand for parliament in 1924 but were slow to gain success.

The first woman MP, Lady Millie Peacock, was elected following the death of her husband (Sir Alexander Peacock) whilst he was still in office. She stood as a Conservative candidate for Allendale at the by-election in 1933. Interestingly, she did not make any public speeches during the election campaign as she was in mourning for her husband. Lady Peacock did not seek re-election. However, while the member for Allendale, she was a tireless worker in her constituency, as she had been when her husband was the MP.

Interestingly, the first elected female Labor member in Victoria, Mrs. Fanny Brownbill, was elected to the seat of Geelong also at a by-election, which, like Lady Peacock, followed the death of her husband William Brownbill who held the Geelong seat from 1920–1932 and 1935–38.

Ivy Weber, a strong Temperance candidate, was the first woman elected at a general election for the seat of Nunawading. She was elected to the Legislative Assembly in 1937, some 13 years after women had won the right to stand for Parliament. In those early years, the road women had to walk to gain acceptance by political parties was long, winding and arduous.

Source: The Bulletin. October 1937 (highlighting the campaign for women's rights)

Forty-two years later, in 1979, the first women to be elected to the Legislative Council were Gracia Baylor (Liberal, Boronia Province) and Joan Coxsedg (Labor, Melbourne West).

Between 1948 and 1967 there were no female members in the Victorian Parliament. The Parliament believes "this followed the general trend of women resuming traditional gender roles after the end of the Second World War, as men returned from service." (www.parliament.vic.gov.au – history of women, 2014). I have some concerns about this explanation as by 1967 society had changed dramatically. The equal pay campaign, permanency for women in the Commonwealth Public Service, and many other reforms for women, including changes to divorce laws had changed (if slowly) the role of women in society.

However, despite the inroads made by the Feminist movement in the early 1970s, which resulted in more enlightened thinking about women's role in society, only five women were elected to the Victorian Parliament during the 1970s. The reality is that none of the major political parties were keen to encourage women to stand as their candidates.

The lack of female participation certainly caused some unrest in parts of the Australian Labor Party. After some considerable agitation in 1994, the ALP National Conference passed an Affirmative Action rule which stated that by 2002 a minimum of 35% of winnable seats were to be allocated to women, and 35% to men, (and the rest could be argued for!). Despite this rule, at the next Federal election in 1996 the number of women pre-selected for winnable seats declined. This led to the formation of an organisation called EMILY's List, which took its name from a similar organisation in the USA (www.emilylist.org.au 2014). In 1966 a number of Labor women including the former Premier of Victoria, Joan Kirner, decided to adopt this model in Australia. By 2004 EMILY's List Australia had raised \$500,000 and assisted 130 women to be elected to parliament across Australia (www.emilylist.org.au-Our History 2014).

In 2002 the 35% policy was changed to 40% women, 40% men and 20% to either gender. Whilst this was a major step forward for women's representation, the ALP has frequently

struggled to reach these targets. This is partly due to the on-going factional agreements which make scrutiny of pre-selection difficult. Also the tendency for the ALP National Executive to override local pre-selection has made it difficult to achieve the desired results, as the agreements reached are factional ones and the power figures in the factions still tend to be men. Following the 2013 Federal election it was reported that the Labor Party's Victorian representation increased by 5% for women but only because the ALP lost so many seats. According to Andrew Crook writing for Crikey (www.crikey.com.au 7 November 2013) an internal affirmative action election post-mortem presented at last week's meeting of the party's powerful administrative committee shows that 19 of Victorian Federal Labor MP's are women in the current reporting year. (37% compared with 32% in the previous year).

In 1996 the National Executive also established the National Labor Women's Network, the peak women's organisation within the Australian Labor Party. For the women who stood, as I did in the 1990s, life was much easier. Although it is interesting to note that currently in the Victorian Parliament only 42 of the current 128 members are women, yet over 50% of Victoria's voters are women. Progress can sometimes be slow.

1992 and the seat of Essendon.

My pre selection and election to the seat of Essendon in 1992, came before the significant reforms, referred to above, were put in place. However, they were being vigorously championed for some years before the quota rule was adopted by the ALP National Executive, and I have no doubt that this did make it easier for women to be preselected as candidates, but not necessarily in winnable seats.

I wish I could claim that I was selected as the ALP candidate for Essendon because I was recognised as a person who would be an outstanding Labor MP, but nothing could be further from the truth!

Originally I was asked to stand as an Independent in 1992 to support the then sitting Labor MP. As I had been a Councillor for six years with the City of Essendon as a Labor member, it seemed an odd request to put it mildly. I refused. When the member for Essendon chose to transfer to another state seat, I was offered Essendon, mainly because the Labor Party considered it an unwinnable seat. Due to the closeness of the election other Labor members who might have stood for the seat were given one day to nominate, so it is perhaps not surprising there were no other candidates. This occurred about six weeks before the election and the Essendon campaign funds were, at that time, about \$200. Little assistance was given by the ALP, although the local branch members were extremely supportive, even donating reams of paper to keep the campaign going.

Given the unwinnable nature of the seat, the short time period, and the limited resources available, it is not surprising that I was unsuccessful. However, despite these circumstances, I was defeated by only about 500 votes. This was as far as I intended to go in State politics, and having done my duty for the Labor Party I happily returned to my job as a Librarian at the Footscray Public Library.

However, I was motivated to reconsider my decision when the Kennett Government made a number of legislative changes that I (and many Victorians) found offensive. Towards the end of 1995, a local branch member asked me if I would stand again and I agreed to do so.

Accordingly, I nominated for Essendon- I was the only nominee and I became the Labor candidate. This was not so much a glowing endorsement of me by the ALP, but once again a

belief that the party could not win the seat. However, because of my Council career, many people in the area knew of my work and hence knew who I was and the issues I supported.

Once again little assistance was given by the ALP, the fate of many (so-called) unwinnable seats. Again, the local ALP members got to work and assisted in what was really a grass roots campaign. The most that was ever spent on an election campaign in Essendon in the 5 times I contested the seat was \$15000, which was much less than in many electorates. My campaign was largely funded by money raised at picture nights, raffles, trivia nights, St Patricks Day dinners, and anything else we could think of to raise funds.

In the 1996 campaign the ALP did offer to distribute a leaflet to the Essendon electorate, which had been prepared by Head Office for that electorate and they did send some union volunteers to distribute the leaflet. Unfortunately only about five unionists turned up for half a day and one insisted I pay his taxi fare home (to the other side of the city). The support was not a riotous success. I think it is fair to say, that the less than satisfactory support from my political party was because of the unwinnable nature of the seat rather than the fact that I was a woman. All political parties direct their energies and their money to marginal seats; either seats they are trying to retain, or seats they are trying to win from the other party.

Much to the surprise of the ALP I won the seat, one of three seats that the ALP won from the Liberal Party in the 1996 election – the other seats being Ivanhoe (Craig Langdon) and Bendigo West (Bob Cameron). Despite gains in these electorates, the party was about 15 seats short of claiming victory.

When the 1999 election was called, the polls and political commentators were predicting a Liberal party win. This time I felt confident that the seat of Essendon would get some real support from the ALP but paradoxically I was told that I had won the seat by too many votes in 1996 so could not be considered a marginal seat. So back it was to the picture nights, raffles, sausage sizzles and so on.

The Parliament of Victoria

For me the Victorian Parliament was not a sexist or difficult place to be a female Member of Parliament. A few women had already broken through the main barriers, Joan Kirner had been Premier from 1990–1992, there had been women Ministers in Governments (Pauline Toner was the first woman Minister in 1982). There were also quite a few women on the ALP side of the House as well as in the Liberal Party. However, there had never been a woman Deputy Speaker or Speaker. Because of my strong interest in the operations of Parliament, I decide to stand for the position of Deputy Speaker in the ALP Party room. There was an election, one man stood, a vote was held and I won easily. There was certainly no suggestion that having a woman in the position would pose any difficulties.

My success at being appointed to the position of Deputy Speaker is partly explained by my being in the right place at the right time. The newly elected Labor government wanted to show it was different to the former Liberal-National Party Government. Alex Andrianopolous was elected as the Speaker (the first Greek-born Speaker) and I was nominated as the first woman Deputy Speaker. Neither appointment was challenged by the Liberal Party, and we took up our positions in 1999.

As the first woman Deputy Speaker I had to consider the form of address that I would like members to use. “Madam” is not a term I like, so I asked to be called simply Deputy Speaker. I thought this might be challenging for some members but it did not take long for all MPs to

feel comfortable with this form of address. No one ever complained about it – or if they did it was not to me. The parliamentary staff were more than happy to have a woman as second in charge of the Legislative Assembly, as around this time the Parliament began to employ more women. No doubt my experience would have been different if I had stood 30 years earlier and I think it is fair to say that I would not have been elected Deputy Speaker. By 1996 and 1999 there was a large turnover of MPs and so many were younger and were used to working with women. Indeed the Liberal-National Coalition had the huge majority in 1996 and the Labor Party by 2002, so there was a significant turnover of members in a short period of time, and an increase in the number of women members.

At the 2002 election the Labor Party was successful and I was their nominee for the position of Speaker. Neither the Liberal nor National Party opposed my nomination.

Despite the excitement of being Victoria's first female Speaker after a couple of days, I began to wonder about the wisdom of taking up the position. A new Member of Parliament had recently had a baby. I had previously had some discussions with the member about how I could assist her to look after the baby while she fulfilled her parliamentary role. I arranged an area for her outside the Legislative Assembly chamber to enable her to attend to the needs of her baby while the parliament was sitting. However, without consulting me as Speaker, but taking the advice of another member (male!) she brought the baby into the Chamber at Question Time. Some might query the effect on a tiny baby of having to experience first-hand Question Time in the Victorian Parliament. I had to call the member into my office and explain that Parliament Standing Orders prohibited anyone but a MP or the chamber staff from entering the Chamber whilst the House was sitting.

The media, of course, delighted in the story (see for example Mark Knight's cartoon in the HeraldSun, 1 March 2003: 17), but the poor woman parliamentarian was subject to a considerable amount of abuse. I called a meeting of the political parties to resolve the issue and as a result, but rather unwillingly, they agreed to allow babies into the Chamber. No baby has, however, been brought into the Chamber since that day.

The following day (26 February 2003), Victoria's HeraldSun newspaper ran their daily poll on the issue, receiving the highest number of responses they had ever had to one of their polls; 11,792 people said babies should be banned from the House and 2800 believed babies should be allowed. So, day one as Speaker was interesting and challenging. I was optimistic that day two would be less so.

I was mistaken, as in the middle of day two, when the Chamber was debating a bill, all the lights went out. This plunged the Chamber into total darkness. I had to call a halt to proceedings whilst the staff located the problem; a possum had electrocuted itself by falling into some electrical equipment. The member who was addressing the Parliament at the time kept speaking even though he could not be seen and would not stop, until I assured the member that the speech could be continued when the lights came on. Eventually power was restored and Parliament resumed. I was feeling a bit anxious when Parliament resumed on day three of my Speakership but this passed off without controversial or electrical issues arising.

Like any job there are unexpected matters that confront MPs, including its first female Speaker. Fortunately, the Victorian Parliament has excellent and very helpful staff, so there is always someone willing to assist and/or give advice when and as required.

Victoria's First Female Speaker

I found the role of Speaker a fascinating one. Whilst the general view of a Speaker may be of some poor soul trying to control over-enthusiastic Members of Parliament, that is only a very small part of the job.

The Speaker's role, in association with the President of the Upper House, is to oversee the running of Parliament. At the time when I was Speaker this meant about 400 staff and a budget of about a \$45million. Democracy is an expensive form of Government.

When I took up the role of Speaker, Parliament had a very traditional management structure. It consisted of five departments that tended to operate independently of each other. According to staff, in the 150 years of the Victorian Parliament a general staff meeting had never been held, so I promptly organised the inaugural staff meeting. At the commencement of the meeting I asked staff to turn around and introduce themselves to a person behind them. Afterwards a staff member told me that he introduced himself to someone whom he did not know, only to discover that they had both worked at Parliament House for over 14 years! An extensive training programme was introduced for all staff, as well as inter-departmental staff management meetings. While many staff embraced the changes, some felt threatened by them. However, we got there eventually. Service awards for staff were also introduced following the South Australian Parliament model.

Another attempt at modernisation was made to the Standing Orders which had not had a total overhaul since 1894. This project was started by the previous Speaker Alex Andrianopolous, and completed in my term as Speaker. As late as 2002 the Standing Orders still used archaic language, which members, students and visitors in the public galleries could hardly understand. Importantly, the language was made gender neutral for the first time with this update.

A number of procedures were also overhauled and facilities for staff and members improved by updating the gym, the kitchen and introducing a baby feeding room for parents.

One of the more time consuming duties of the Speaker is protocol-visits from Ambassadors and Consul-Generals that are newly appointed to Australia and Victoria. Under some traditional rules they are required to make formal visits to the Premier, Leader of the Opposition and the Presiding Officers of the Parliament. This normally took the form of an afternoon tea where conversation was required for half an hour. For some of these visitors the Westminster system of democracy, where the Speaker does not take a political role was a challenge. Explaining that visitors wishing to influence the Government's decisions would have to speak to the Premier or a Minister was a foreign concept for many.

Under the Labor Party tradition when you are elected to the position of Speaker you cut your normal ties with the party, in that you do not attend party meetings or other party activities. This can be a bit isolating, but in my view is necessary to retain independence in the Chair. This much needed requirement may not encourage members to seek to hold the position of Speaker for a long period of time. Although, I should mention that the first Speaker of the Victorian Parliament, Sir Francis Murphy, was Speaker for the entire 15 years he was in the Legislative Assembly. It is claimed however that one of his colleagues once described him as a 'plugless word spout', so perhaps other members thought it was in their own best interests to keep him in the Speaker's Chair.

The Speaker's role is similar to that of any other umpire, in that, you cannot always please everyone. If I gave a decision against the Labor Government, some members the Government would be annoyed thinking that as a member of the same political party I should give them special privileges. If on the other hand I gave a decision favouring the Government, the Opposition would claim I was biased in favour of the political party of which I was a member. Regardless of these criticisms, I always attempted to be as even handed as possible because if the Speaker loses the respect of the House, the Parliament does not function well. To keep the House in order requires many meetings with members, and with the media who sometimes haunt Parliament like displaced ghosts, causing annoyance to Members and more particularly to the staff of parliament.

All of the issues that arose for me as Speaker were, I believe, the same ones that would have arisen for a male Speaker. Of course, my approach to the modernising of parliament and parliamentary procedures would have been influenced to a degree by my world-view as a woman, but I think that it relates to approach rather than something more fundamental. It is for others to judge if having a woman as Speaker was advantageous to the reform process and its acceptance by the members and the staff of the Parliament.

Women in Parliament in the 21st Century

Is it easier to be a woman candidate and parliamentarian now than it was in 1996? In some ways it is and in some ways it is not. The growth of 'gender politics' could have, I believe, a negative effect for women's equality. Certainly in my discussions with people in my old electorate there have been some very strong views expressed that women cannot expect to be treated differently to men, otherwise it is sexual discrimination in reverse. Gender politics, and some of the abuse of MPs that has accompanied it, particularly on sites like Facebook and Twitter have, in my view, done a great deal of harm to politics and would dis-encourage young women (and possibly young men) from entering politics. It is one thing to disagree on political issues but that is not an excuse for abuse or derogatory comments. I think to use gender as a political argument or defence can have long term negative effects. All MPs should be treated with respect by other MPs regardless of gender, but if we want to have equality between the sexes, MPs should concentrate on real issues rather than perceived, or media focussed issues. Media often appears to be focussed on personal issues rather than political ones.

What is the message we are giving younger women? I think that by stressing gender issues we are creating a view in the broader community that a parliamentary career is only for those who can cop abuse, which is not the way I would wish young women to view such a career. This is far from the reality of being a parliamentarian. However, issues used for quick media releases or media grabs often encourage the view that Parliaments are only for the thick-skinned. Men and women who concentrate on the issues and behave in a honourable and honest way will gain the respect of other MPs (from both sides of politics) and will succeed accordingly. It is not necessary for MPs to be aggressive or openly hostile to the other side of politics on any issue, including gender-related matters.

Since the 19th century the women's movement has fought for equality with men, and unfortunately perhaps, if women want to be equal they have to accept criticism, even when it is personal or based on untrue speculation. I recall some badges once that said "My Mum says John Howard is a Pommy Bastard!" In my experience people laughed rather than expressing outrage. Recently, when one of our newest woman Senators made a sexist comment about men, once again people just laughed or were scornful. This letter, which appeared in The Age looks at the issue from a male point of view:

End Gender Wars

...many other recent and current ads stereotype men as idiot dads/partners, dorky, emotionally challenged, socially awkward and less smart than women. Imagine the outcry if the tables were turned with women customarily depicted that way. In the case of Senator Jacqui Lambie, many commentators have waved off her comments as emanating from a novice politician instead of calling them for what they are – sexist. If we made a gender a non-issue, we would end the mother of all wars. Oops. (The Age July 25th 2014: 17).

Ellen Whinnett, a journalist with Victoria's HeraldSun has a similar view:

In fact, [Senator] Lambie's comments were sexist, demeaning, ill-advised, and just plain rude. And they've highlighted the great hypocrisy that exists in how we judge our politicians. Because imagine what would have happened if a male politician had said that (Herald Sun July 25th 2014: 34).

There were a number of people who did not support these views, but it is difficult to sustain the argument that if a male politician had said he wanted a woman with big boobs, the media and other people would have been outraged. I am not saying that some comments made about women in a political context are appropriate, they are not. Many are, to be polite, bad-mannered and ill advised, but both genders are inappropriately abused from time to time, and that type of behaviour is not confined to politics. "Gender Wars" in politics however assist no-one.

Coming back to sexism in the Victorian Parliament, I never saw much evidence of it. Members were invariably polite- possibly they did not want to be ejected from the Chamber. I did pull a Labor member up who accused the Liberal Party of 'behaving like girls', but that is the only occasion that I can recall that a gendered comment was made by a member in the Chamber.

Finally, how do you get to be a female ALP Member of Parliament? It is different for everyone. I came to politics later in life. I am very much a creature of my time however, and whilst becoming more interested in politics when working in the Federal Public Service, like many others, I joined the Labor Party when the Governor General sacked the Prime Minister, Gough Whitlam.

I certainly had no intention of standing for Parliament. That came much later.

Interestingly it is rare for a Deputy Speaker to become Speaker, and yet I was not challenged at all for the position in the House or in the Party Room, and I think this does show that some women, prior to my gaining these positions, had already broken through previous barriers. Male parliamentarians no longer see their colleagues as women first and colleagues second, but rather as colleagues.

Encouraging more women to stand for Parliament

In my career as a parliamentarian, I visited many schools, especially all girl schools. When speaking to students I found little interest in politics or a career as a Member of Parliament.

To many young (and older) women the Parliament of Victoria is a rather uninviting building at the top of Bourke Street. Whilst the Parliament does have Open Days and tours for the public and school children, there are many who have never set foot in the Parliament, which

is after all an institution that exists to represent the views of all Victorians. When I was Speaker, the Parliament did place a sign out the front of the building inviting the public to enter but alas too few came. The number of overseas visitors is often greater than locals. Unfortunately, for many locals it is still a place of mystery. We need to find ways of encouraging more young people to visit our parliament, and not just on a school excursion. If we want more women to stand for election, then perhaps we need to actively encourage more females to come and find out exactly what Parliament does and how by being a member of parliament you can make a positive difference to society.

Unfortunately the common view of Parliament is that it is in a constant state of conflict with members continually abusing each other. This image may be off putting for most women (and men). Whilst this is often the impression, particularly in an election year, it is not the normal state of affairs. Over 90% of the Acts passed by Parliament are supported by all parties, yet this rarely receives anything like the level of media coverage devoted to the 10% of contested areas.

Political parties have a role to play in encouraging and supporting women candidates. But how active are political parties in actively encouraging women to stand for Parliament. Has any Party ever published a leaflet saying “WANTED:MORE WOMEN IN PARLIAMENT”?

Certainly women Members visit schools to talk about being an MP but how often are they invited to work places, to unions, to political courses at schools and universities to encourage women to stand for Parliament?

Have political parties actively encouraged women to stand for Parliament?

It is difficult to sustain an argument that political parties have done all they could to increase the number of women in Parliament. But that does not mean that they cannot in the future. I think the Parliament should increase its education role. The Parliament also should have more staff to outline an education programme in which both staff and members can be more engaged. Certainly the Parliamentary staff are happy to engage with schools and many schools do book Question Time for students to attend. However, it is often difficult for schools to get a booking as the public gallery is small. Whilst Question Time can now be viewed on the Internet I have never seen any promotion of this to the general population as well as schools. Also as Question Time in the Legislative Assembly is at 2.00pm in the afternoon, it limits the number of people who can watch it even if they want to.

Whilst some of the above suggestions may help to encourage more women to stand for Parliament a concerted effort is needed to emphasise that politics is a great career for women, and a great way of changing the community’s attitudes to gender equality and women’s role in society. Men and women, partly because of traditional roles of males and females, often bring different perspectives to the legislation brought before the Parliament. Having strong representation from both genders therefore provides better legislation for the community.

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