

DR MARISA PATERSON MLA SPEECH

24 June 2021

Women in Leadership

Thank you, Madame Speaker.

Last week I hosted a Year 10 work experience student from Stromlo High School in my office. I asked that student, June Jamieson, to do some research into the challenges and barriers of female leadership in politics. My speech today is written by June, as part of her work.

“The importance of female leadership and having women in political positions is immeasurable.

There has been much recent discourse about women’s safety – whether that be in relation to sexual activity, workplace culture or daily life.

It is clear, now more than ever, that we need more women to play pivotal roles in leadership and politics.

In Canberra, we are fortunate to have a legislative body with substantial female representation relative to our population. Unfortunately, this is not the case for many other parts of the country; let alone our federal parliament.

Under-representation of females in politics and leadership positions, stemming from systemic and socio-cultural barriers, often results in poorer decision making on all levels of governance, and poorer outcomes for our community.

Several studies show the enhanced effectiveness and success of female leadership. So why does underwhelming representation continue to be a problem?

There are a range of factors.

Even in our modern world, women often bear much of the domestic workload, which can prevent or dissuade women from taking on external opportunities – especially those as demanding as political work.

Furthermore, female politicians often come under greater scrutiny and criticism than their male counterparts.

However, research from the Harvard Business Review reveals that women outperform in 17 of 19 leadership skills; and it has been argued that this is due to their inclination toward transformative leadership.

In their approaches to policy, female leaders globally have debunked deeply patriarchal standards and demonstrated the benefits of female leadership without the need to emulate men's qualities.

The Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the disparities between the ways in which female and male state leaders react to crisis, and how their unique attributes manifest differently.

Many of the countries that are most often praised for their triumphant efforts in preventing the spread of the virus share one common denominator: they are led by women.

The competence, humility and empathy exhibited by these leaders is what allowed them to successfully coordinate preventative measures and keep their citizens safe.

There is no denying that women are more than capable of being great leaders. We bring to the role our own styles and attributes to engage and to understand the important issues that matter most to our community. Decision-making processes need to reflect diverse input from leaders across all intersections of identity and experience, including female.

By engaging our diverse community in leadership positions, we foster a legislative system and community that utilises the unique qualities and aspects that distinguish us from each other.

We all have different ideas and qualities based on our own lived experience. It is more important than ever that we engage these differences to bring about meaningful, systemic, and lasting change.

Encouraging political engagement and participation requires a grassroots effort that should ultimately provide females within our community with the tools and confidence they need to actively participate.

While gender quotas can compensate for inherent biases, it is just as important to recognise and condemn the behaviours that make such regulations required in the first place.

Encouraging women's participation and garnering the ambition that is required to engage in community and political endeavours is a crucial step in improving the perception of female leadership and opportunities for women in our community".