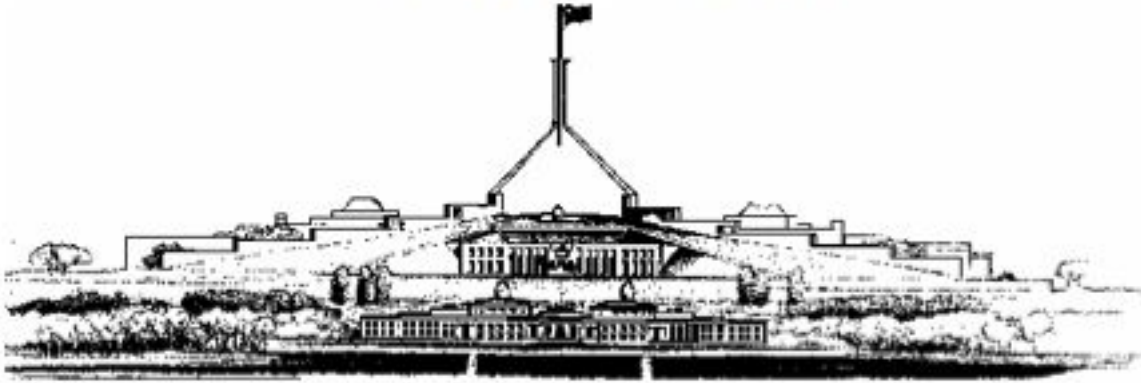




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**  
**FIRST SPEECH**  
**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 12 June 2007**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

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**Senator BOYCE** (Queensland) (4.56 pm)—It is 60 years since the first Queensland Liberal woman senator, my great predecessor the late Annabelle Rankin, made her first speech in this place. Senator Rankin, later Dame Annabelle, noted that she felt a blend of both pride and humility in rising to make that speech and I can do no better than to say, ‘I feel just the same.’

I feel immense pride in having been chosen by the preselectors of the Liberal Party in Queensland from a strong field of 10 contenders. I feel immense pride in having broken the woman drought for the Queensland Liberals. There have been only two other women senators chosen by our state party. I feel immense pride in having the opportunity to make this speech not just in front of my Senate colleagues but in front of so many of my friends, company colleagues and, especially, most of my family. And I feel humble for exactly the same reasons.

My two senatorial predecessors, Dame Annabelle and Kathy Martin Sullivan AO, have set a very high bar in terms of their abilities and their long and dedicated public service on behalf of the people of Queensland and of Australia. My constituents deserve nothing less than passionate, skilful and honest representation and I will be doing my utmost to provide this. I will be using all my background experience as a journalist, a sales and marketing manager, a family business woman, a company director, a disability advocate and as a mother, a sister, a daughter and a friend to assist me to represent those constituents.

I must note that, despite being the third Liberal woman senator from Queensland, I can claim one small first. I am the first mother chosen as a senator by the Queensland Liberals. I do not raise this to cause a fertility debate. I do not think that procreation or lack of it has any effect on an individual’s ability to contribute to sound decision making and policymaking. But any group will make superior decisions if its members bring a wide variety of experiences to the task. Better decisions, better policy debates will come when men and women from a wide range of ages and backgrounds are engaged in the process. If we want our national decision making to be as good as it can possibly be, we need to ask how we can make politics and being a politician more family friendly. As in virtually every aspect of life in the early 21st century, it

continues to be more difficult for women than it is for men to reach the top in politics.

For the vast majority of women, choosing to have children will mean a trade-off in terms of career—a trade-off that is not a consideration for the majority of men. For the majority of women politicians, this means coming to politics young and childless or waiting until children are comparatively independent and running the risk of missing your chance. I know a number of good, capable younger mothers who have chosen not to pursue careers in politics because of the effect that those careers would have on their families.

Politics as we currently practise it at both state and federal levels is not a family-friendly career for women or for men, and the further your electorate is from the relevant capital city the less friendly it is. So we can either accept that, with a few notable exceptions, our women politicians must fit this mould or work on changing the mould. I would like to see a national discussion on ways that we can make politics more attractive to women and men at all stages of life. I certainly do not have the answers for this, but it seems interesting to me that the way in which we go about parliament basically has not changed in more than 100 years.

Politicians spend large slabs of their time away from the constituents they represent and in an environment very unlike that experienced by their constituents. I do not know what a more modern parliament might look like, but let us have a conversation as to how we might make governing more family friendly, given the communication options that we now have. Let us also look at how we might accommodate the growing demand amongst Australians for more flexible hours and for part-time work in that new model. According to a 2006 survey by the Institute of Chartered Accountants, 63 per cent of women considered flexible hours a priority and 36 per cent of men wanted variable work hours. Based on these figures, 63 per cent of women would never, ever consider becoming a politician. We are, in fact, looking at a politician pool for women of only 37 per cent of the population in the first place. Again, I do not know what a parliamentary system designed to give flexibility would look like, but let us start a conversation about improving diversity and improving functionality.

In her first speech, Dame Annabelle made an offer to the only other woman in this chamber—Labor Senator Tangney, later Dame Dorothy Tangney. She said:

There are things that transcend party politics, and Senator Tangney may be sure that in anything designed to help the women of Australia, or the children who are in their care, she can count upon my ready and sincere interest.

Happily, there are many more women senators now and many men who share an interest in so-called women's issues; nevertheless, I would like to renew the offer to sincerely and seriously assess issues of importance to women raised by any senator.

In 1947, when Dame Annabelle made her first speech, Queensland had a population of 1.1 million people. Today it is almost quadruple that. I grew up in a Brisbane not that different from that of Dame Annabelle—a frangipani-scented country town that David Malouf evoked so well in his early books. That Brisbane had murderously neat and treeless yards, except for the obligatory banana and pawpaw trees down the back, near the outhouse—an earth closet with a pan collected weekly by the sanitary man.

In the early sixties, our family company began making and delivering septic tanks into many of those Brisbane backyards—a technical first for Queensland. And so began my lifelong association with water, wastewater, its disposal and re-use. People with family businesses will understand why I am amused when I am asked how long I have worked in our family company. The company is over 80 years old. My grandfather, my uncle, my father and my brother worked for the company. At times, my mother, my cousins, my son and one of my daughters worked for the company. I can date the times that I was on the payroll, but I cannot remember a time when I was not involved in the family company. Even when I lived and worked overseas and interstate, I maintained a strong interest in and a sense of belonging to that company.

My parents, Beryl and Selwyn Davis, whom I am delighted to have here today, are practical, unassuming and fiercely individualistic people. They grew up in the Depression and with the rationing of World War II. They abhorred waste and ostentation and, despite their success and our company's success, they still do. I can remember my mother bringing me back to reality when she felt that I was being an uppity teenager with: 'Just you remember, my girl, your bread and butter is in septic tanks.' It worked very well.

From my father, I also learnt an abhorrence of unnecessary government regulation and red tape. Like most business owners everywhere, he is convinced that the role of government is to support business and to interfere as little as possible in the practice of running companies. He had no trouble working 16 hours or more a day on his business and he had no problems

in meeting necessary tax and regulatory requirements, but he resented every second and every cent spent on agonisingly slow approvals and seemingly unproductive form filling and box ticking from any level of government. Like me, he is delighted by our government's establishment of the Office of Best Practice Regulation within the Productivity Commission and the ongoing program to subject legislation to regulatory impact analysis. Like most business owners, he believes that red tape reduction cannot happen fast enough, and I will be doing my best to assist in ensuring that legislative initiatives in this area benefit from practical, experienced assessment.

The greatest gift my parents gave me was the ability to think, discuss and dream anything I chose. My childhood memory of family meals, particularly in the evenings, is of one long debate on current issues, on politics, on religion, on culture and on other contemporary values and morals. All this practice debate had two very positive outcomes. Provided I was prepared to back it up with rational argument, I could test any proposition I liked for its validity. I believe that it also turned childhood development into a two-way street—parents help children to shape their adult values and, in turn, the parents' own values are reshaped by the child's propositions.

My own values and ideas continue to be shaped by my children Bede, Gina and Joanna, whom I am honoured to have here today, along with Bede's partner, Briony. Thank you, Bede, for keeping me thinking outside the square. Thank you, Gina, for continuing to set an example of true caring for others and of the benefits of being properly organised. And thank you, Jo, for teaching me that, if I do not succeed the first time, I should just try again and then maybe again.

Joanna has Down syndrome, and since she was born 23 years ago I have been involved in the disability community—or should I say 'communities', because there are a number of strands of thinking about disability. I am not of the 'disability as a burden' strand, and I hope that in my time here I can gradually articulate the way that I believe most of the people with a disability that I know, and their families, would like to be viewed and treated.

For me, and for many in the disability sector, the biggest burden is the attitude of others in the community towards disability. Can I just say here that people do not 'suffer' from Down syndrome; they 'have' Down syndrome. It is not a disease; there is no pain or chronic ill health. So people have Down syndrome; they do not suffer from it.

People with a disability do not want sympathy, but they do need support. People with a disability do not want to live together just because they have a disability, but they do want secure homes. People with a disability do not want to play 'tourist' or 'visitor' in their local communities, moving around and recreating in

large congregated groups as though they all share exactly the same interests. But they do want to be part of their local community, to be genuinely included.

Parents of people with a disability do not want to feel that they should have to be suitably grateful because their child was 'allowed' to attend the local school or playgroup, or given access to local recreation, but those parents do want the same rights for their child to use local facilities. On the door of my office I have a quote from a Norwegian disability campaigner which, for me, aptly sums up the current social dichotomy. The quote says:

When a child goes to a special school, it is not because the child has an intellectual impairment, but because the (local) community school does not welcome children with an intellectual impairment.

When a man in a wheelchair cannot enter the bus, it is not because he uses a wheelchair, but because the bus is inaccessible.

In other words, the handicaps of disability are created by society's attitudes. The Film Finance Corporation's decision, announced by the minister today, making captioning mandatory on all federally funded films is a great example of the standards that must be embedded in a properly inclusive society. Young Australians with a disability want exactly what virtually every other Australian wants and expects: a society that enables individuals to use their unique capacities to freely choose the shape of their own lives.

In general, people with a disability and their families will require support to achieve this, and the types of support required will be as individual as each family and each disabled person. There is an awful temptation at government level to believe that support is most efficiently provided by funding large, professionally managed organisations. In the past, this has led to one-size-fits-all programs where large amounts of money were spent on services that never quite suited the needs of those 'lucky' enough to have any support at all.

I applaud recent moves, certainly at federal level, away from looking at the needs of service organisations and towards putting the individual with a disability and their families at the centre of our thinking about support and support services. But as a parliament we must continue to be vigilant. Anytime we allow people with a disability to be treated as 'special people' who should live or learn or work or spend their leisure time in 'special places' doing 'special activities', no matter how enticing, safe and efficient that program sounds, we are shutting people with a disability out of the mainstream. And that makes vulnerable people more vulnerable to abuse and exploitation.

In general, we have closed down the large institutions. We must always remember why and never look

to re-open them or to replace large institutions with small institutions. People with disabilities belong in the community. If that requires a degree of government and community effort, so be it. Even if it makes some of us in the community uncomfortable, we are the ones who need to change.

My special interests—business, in particular, manufacturing, disability, and equality of opportunity for women—have been shaped by my life experiences, and they are not as disparate as they might at first appear. For a start, people with a disability and their families are just as averse to unproductive form filling and box ticking as anyone in the business community. FaCSIA's red tape reduction program in 2006 was much welcomed by the disability community, and I have encouraged individuals, families and service providers to keep bringing forward to us questionable examples of forms and boxes that need ticking. As well, most business owners, people with a disability and women want lean government that minimises interference in our daily lives. They want government that maximises individual initiative. They want government that nurtures and encourages its citizens through incentive rather than putting limits on people. They want equality of opportunity for all Australians.

And, yes, all these beliefs and quotes about the role of government are direct quotes from 'Our Beliefs' on the website of the Liberal Party of Australia. For me, the Liberal Party is the natural philosophical home for all those who believe government should establish a functional, supportive operating environment, and then get out of the way and let individuals shape their own lives. I believe in the Liberal Party and its philosophies and I do feel very proud and humble that the party has shown a belief in me and my abilities.

Finally, I am honoured to have the federal president of the Liberal Party, Chris McDiven, and a number of Queensland and other party members in the gallery today. I would especially like to thank members of the Liberal Women's Council in Queensland and of other women's councils who are here. Without their friendship, wisdom, encouragement, support and example I would not be here today. I hope that, in turn, my election and my ongoing support can help our Queensland council to grow even larger and stronger and to establish a ready supply of future women candidates from a marvellous array of backgrounds. In short, in every aspect of my representation, I will be trying to work fairly and firmly to improve diversity, transparency and accountability.

**Honourable senators—Hear, hear!**