



International Womens' Day 2011

Main Committee of the House of Representatives

23 March 2011

Sharon Grierson MP

Ms GRIERSON (Newcastle) (9.57 am)—On 8 March, the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day was celebrated around the world, and I would like to share three very different Newcastle events in which I had the privilege to participate. The first was a visit to the residents of the Warabrook hostel for the aged to deliver an address. I spoke to them about some significant Novocastrian women and reminded them of the special achievements of Joy Cummings, the first female Lord Mayor of Newcastle and indeed the first female Lord Mayor in Australia. She is also remembered, though, for having our national anthem changed from Australian 'sons' to Australians 'all'. Joy was a wonderful Labor Lord Mayor and a wonderful woman, and was also the first leader in Australia to have the Aboriginal flag flown from a civic building. To share International Women's Day with the women of the hostel—two of whom have actually lived the entire 100 years—was very rewarding, for it is those women who have been part of the daily struggle to bring about the many positive changes to women's lives, particularly those experienced over recent decades. I acknowledge their contribution and thank Warabrook hostel for their kind invitation.

That week, though, I also had the privilege of attending the 10th anniversary of the DALE Young Mothers Program at St Phillip's Christian College. It is always a wonderful experience to visit the very young mothers at DALE, who are being assisted to have their babies with them on-site whilst they complete their secondary school education. Although the support they are given at DALE is praiseworthy, there is no denying that this is a tough gig for these very young mums. So, to hear them talking about being able to follow their dreams and achieve their goals, a family, a career, a TAFE or a university qualification, was indeed heart-warming. The management, staff and participants in the DALE program over the last 10 years have my continuing admiration and support.

Finally, I attended an International Women's Day dinner organised by the Union of Australian Women in Newcastle at which Catherine Henry, a progressive woman and an accomplished lawyer in her own successful practice, outlined the challenges for women in the legal profession. Her statistics on the minute number of female barristers practising in Newcastle compared with the many male barristers was a salient reminder that women still have a way to go in their quest for equal opportunity. It is a reminder to the Attorney-General that a Federal Court in

Newcastle will one day be an important incentive to grow the capacity of the female legal profession in Newcastle; but we cannot wait forever.

Finally, I take this opportunity to acknowledge the many women who have inspired me in my life. To all of them, I am grateful for their example. To the wonderful women who work in my office and indeed in this parliament and to all women: go girls!