

Work still needed to close country's gender gap

by Cordelia Lockett

Women may hold the four highest constitutional positions, but this doesn't reflect their role in society, says Attorney-General Margaret Wilson.

There is still significant work to be done to achieve gender equity, Ms Wilson told about 300 people gathered to celebrate the 110th anniversary of women's suffrage in September. She also cautioned against complacency.

"Much is made of the fact that women hold the country's top four constitutional roles: Governor-General, Prime Minister, Attorney-General and Chief Justice. Why? Do we exercise the powers of our offices unconstitutionally? There is no evidence of that, despite the reckless comments of some politicians and journalists."

Ms Wilson outlined the changes for New Zealand women since the first United Women's Convention, held 30 years ago at Auckland's YMCA Stadium.

As a young law lecturer, Ms Wilson was speaker at the 1973 convention.

Ms Wilson said the convention was the beginning of a period of intensive legislative and social progress in women's equality, but 30 years on further reform was necessary.

She said the period following the 1973 convention was an "outpouring of energy" and gave examples of legislative reforms in human rights, contraception, abortion, maternity leave, employment, marriage law and domestic purposes benefits.

"There is no question we have made significant progress since 1973. Often we assess change in terms of the

positions women now hold. This is important because it enables the experience of women to be included in decisions that affect other women."

In 1973 there were only four female MPs. Now there are 35, with one in three of those in Cabinet.

Ms Wilson said that while the role of women had changed in 30 years, it was unclear how much.

"There are more of us in paid employment, more in tertiary education, more in the professions, in the judiciary, in Parliament, in business and in community organisations.

In 1973 there were only four female MPs. Now there are 35, with one in three of those in Cabinet.

"But to take one example I know well, there are more women studying law at both undergraduate and graduate level than ever before, yet women still only represent 30% of the legal profession. A more disturbing figure is that only 15% of partners in law firms are women."

New Zealand women earn 84% of men's average earnings.

She outlined two main contributors to the gender pay gap: the time women take out of paid employment to raise children and the lower levels of pay for the caring and education professions where women are more likely to work.

"But this is not the whole story. The gap exists not just when women reach the age of having children, but

right from the beginning of their careers. University graduate surveys show male commerce graduates start out in their careers earning on average close to \$5000 a year more than women of the same age with the same qualifications."

As Minister for Labour, Ms Wilson has set up a taskforce to examine the factors contributing to pay and employment inequity.

Women's Health Action director Jo Fitzpatrick, who organised the anniversary event, says while it was important to celebrate the achievements, women's choices were limited.

"It is sobering that 100 years ago the National Council of Women was lobbying for better pay and conditions of work, and these are still issues for women.

"We have economic inequality at a fundamental level. The issues are the same, but the face has changed. Now Maori, Pacific and immigrant and refugee women are the most economically disadvantaged."

Ms Fitzpatrick says while pay and employment equity were not problems for all women, the issue of how to negotiate a balance between work and home was still an issue for most.

She says work-life balance affects men and women and has become more important as women enter the workforce in increasing numbers, while still juggling family responsibility.

"Feminism was supposed to be about choice and that hasn't really been achieved. We may have more occupational options than 30 years ago, but real economic liberty is still elusive."



PHOTO: GIL HANLY

ATTORNEY-GENERAL: Margaret Wilson says the role of women in New Zealand is changing.

West Auckland MP says local issues are top priority

by Gordon Gillan

West Auckland MP David Cunliffe insists local issues remain his priority, despite taking on more ministerial responsibilities in May.

The Labour member for New Lynn is now Minister of State, as well as Associate Minister of Finance, Revenue, Communications and Information Technology.

"My electorate area always comes first. It is essential that it does, as it is my base of support," says Mr Cunliffe.

"It is important to be smarter in achieving that as I take on more responsibilities."

His role as an associate minister is to assist the relevant ministers, like Michael Cullen in finance and Paul Swain in communications and information technology.

Ministers identify certain projects for him to focus on to lighten their load.

Before entering Parliament as MP for Titirangi in 1999, Mr Cunliffe worked as a business economist with the Boston Consulting Group.

He has always had an interest in public policy.

"I want to make my community a better place. I feel I have an obligation to assist those who don't have resources. It is good for everyone to contribute in any society," he says.

Mr Cunliffe has been involved in a number of local issues. For example, he helped Waitakere Mayor Bob Harvey in opening up a debate on conservation proposals for Auckland's west coast.

Since then, the West Coast Working Group has proposed the establishment of a marine park in the area, which has met with some opposition from other environment groups.

Although no firm decision on a proposal is likely to be made until next year, Mr Cunliffe urges the environment groups involved to continue open consultation with the public.



DAVID CUNLIFFE

"The West Coast Working Group is not a government body, so as a private body any proposal from them will be stronger if they show they have broad public input."

Mayor Bob Harvey says Mr Cunliffe is the best person to represent the west for Labour since Martyn Finlay.

"He is an intelligent man with a terrific background and he was underestimated and overlooked in his first term as an MP.

"He has achieved the cohesion of the west and the political vision of Labour in his support for transport, housing, job creation and the Whenuapai Airport project.

"He is certainly not a fence-sitter, which gets him offside with some groups. I believe he will continue to be re-elected as long as he does not drift away from his electorate in the new work he does."

The controversial campaign against painted apple moth spraying is one high profile issue that Mr Cunliffe has had to contend with.

Helen Wiseman-Dare is chairperson of the West Aucklanders Against Aerial Spraying group. She says Mr Cunliffe should have done more for the community.

"Our group feels Mr Cunliffe does not have the interest of constituents at heart and feels he has done very little to stop aerial spraying.

"People have approached him for help during spray times, and he does little to help.

Information technology is another area that is currently taking up a lot of

Mr Cunliffe's time.

He has been delegated the job of developing an IT growth strategy for the next three to five years.

"It is an area that has kept the Government busy over the last four years with the establishment of various groups," he says.

The Government has set up an e-commerce action group and an information and communication technology task force.

The task force produced a report last year with the goal of creating 100 IT companies valued at \$100 million within 10 years.

The e-commerce action group was set up to advance the Government's strategy in this area and to promote the adoption of e-commerce within the private sector.

Mr Cunliffe says a great deal of work has already been done and now there is the capacity to think about the next period.

"The key is to help the New Zealand IT community, which includes domestic providers and off-shoot companies of international information technology companies, and take them onto the next level.

"In short we have to attract and develop IT. We need to be smart and aim to make New Zealand a little IT hot-house."

Mr Cunliffe will be going out to the industry in the next month, and the Government will engage with various companies through workshops.

A conference next November will set out New Zealand's IT plan for the following two years.

Internet Safety Group director Liz Butterfield met Mr Cunliffe at July's Netsafe conference and is impressed with his start in the IT sector.

"He has made it clear that legislation has a role, but that the education of the business and communication sectors, as well as the education of children, is also important."

TVNZ axes gay kiss

by Amanda Kyne

A TVNZ decision to remove same-gender kissing from a music video is another attempt to keep gay people in the closet, says Young Labour Party youth councillor Tony Milne.

Mr Milne, who complained to the Broadcasting Standards Authority in April after TVNZ cut the kissing scene from Christina Aguilera's music video Beautiful, says the video has a good message for young New Zealanders.

"There are so few examples for gay teenagers. Being able to see positive messages on television that show people similar to you is important," Mr Milne says.

Helping gays and lesbians is one of the key issues on Mr Milne's agenda.

"I don't think it is fair that homosexuals do not have access to other laws such as marriage," he says.

Mr Milne (22) is finishing an Honours degree in Political Science at Canterbury University. He joined New Zealand Young Labour four years ago after the 1999 election.

"I was always interested in politics and agreed with what Labour stood for on most things," he says.

"In the world things aren't as they should be. I hate to see unfairness. So for me, it's about trying to make a difference."

Mr Milne believes Young Labour is making a difference on issues like homosexual rights. In his complaint to TVNZ he argued that the removal of gay scenes discriminated against a minority group.

He says the video was a good song and had a good message for young New Zealanders.

"It talks about being beautiful, no matter who you are — race, gender, gay or lesbian."

The BSA declined to uphold the complaint in August, saying the edited music videos did not discriminate against homosexual people.

TVNZ said they removed certain scenes because the kissing between two men had involved the intertwining of tongues. The channel deemed it inappropriate as the TV2 programme the video had screened on runs from 10am to noon on Sundays, when children watch television.

Mr Milne says he saw the Christina Aguilera video on television during the week, pleased such a good message was being portrayed internationally. But on the next Sunday morning he noticed they had deleted certain scenes.

Curious, Mr Milne did his own detailed frame-by-frame analysis of the cut and the uncut versions of the music video.

"Only two of the seven scenes showed same-gender kissing, yet TVNZ deleted all of them," he says.

"The song was number one in the charts for eight weeks. When we made the complaint, we hoped they

would fix it and have the uncut version back on TV so young people who were questioning their sexuality could see the message of the song."

Mr Milne is frustrated by the BSA's decision, but says it would cost too much to appeal. His party will take the matter to the Human Rights Commission.

"We have kept the commission informed through the whole process and they are quite interested.

"We would like to see an apology to the homosexual community and a reassurance that it won't happen again."

Human Rights Commission spokesperson Carolyne Jurriaans says they will assess the case on the grounds of sexual orientation discrimination.

If it comes within their jurisdiction, they will offer a mediation process between Young Labour and TVNZ that could lead to an apology.

"Being able to see positive messages on television that show people similar to you is important."