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**MEDIA MONITORING TRANSCRIPT**

**PROGRAM:** ABC STATEWIDE - 8.50 AM

**DATE:** 31 MAY 2022

**TITLE:** PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEE

**PRESENTER:** MEL BUSH

**SPEAKER:** RUTH FORREST (MLC for Murchison)

**TYPED BY:** SK **CHECKED BY:** DJ

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**BUSH:** Ruth Forrest is the Upper House Member for Murchison and she is pushing for a Joint Parliamentary Committee on Gender and Inequality that's looking where the current policies and legislation are failing to even balance the books. It would contain four members from the Lower House, four from the Legislative Council. One area that she wants the committee to look at is the over-representation of men in suicide statistics - a very important one indeed - and the lack of Aboriginal representation in state parliament. Ruth Forrest, thanks so much for your time this morning.

**FORREST:** Good morning.

**BUSH:** Ruth why is this committee needed?

**FORREST:** I think the committee is titled Gender and Equality - not inequality. But there is other jurisdictions around the world and in the ACT and Australia that have similar committees. Victoria has done a lot of work. They have a commission looking at these matters. But the purpose of a

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Gender and Equality Committee - particularly a Joint House Committee - is to engage the parliament in inquiring into and looking at matters where gender may be disproportionately affected one way or another in a piece of policy, or an area of government service delivery, or even in a piece of legislation, and also to look at areas where inequality may be present that may not be immediately obvious or that a committee could inquire into to provide further information and perhaps recommendations to government to address. And, as you mentioned, we know that the rate of suicide amongst men, particularly young men, is higher than it is women, and we need to be sure, for example, that our mental health strategies and our mental health programs around suicide prevention do address that difference and different tools may be needed to address that very real gendered imbalance.

**BUSH:** So this is potentially a very, very broad look at policy legislation.

**FORREST:** Yes, it is not unlike other committees the parliament has where we can look at various aspects of government policy, government service delivery. Like, we have got our government administrative committees in the Legislative Council, and they are divided along portfolio lines. At the moment, one of them - the committee I chair - is looking at rural health services, and so we drill down into the delivery of rural health services, talk to people engaged in that space, talk to patients or people who live in rural areas as patients, often, and their experiences so you can bring back to the government a report that has done a lot of work in community engagement, in talking to key

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stakeholders, in talking to experts in the field, and say, well, these are the problems, these are the challenges that we have got in providing services to Tasmanians in our rural area in terms of health and these are some possible solutions and we recommend the government look at this, this and this. That will happen later on this year when that committee reports. But this Joint House Committee is not really different. Its purpose is to look at any area that is identified by a member of the community, or a member of parliament. Or even a community member could say, I am really concerned about, as you mentioned, too, like the lack of Aboriginal members in our parliament. This is something that you could look at in terms of whether it is Aboriginal members, whether it is members with a disability, whether it is members from non-English speaking backgrounds. In our parliament, in Tasmania, we are all pretty much white Caucasians. And I think that doesn't reflect our society broadly. And so are there barriers to people from different ethnic groups? From Aboriginal people? We have got the gender balance right in parliament. Just around 50 per cent. Slightly over, female membership now. But we don't have people with mobility disabilities. We don't have people with vision disability. So there's a -

**BUSH:** Local government is often that pathway, is it not? And so I guess the problem probably starts there. Would that be a reasonable summation?

**FORREST:** Well, it may do. But not everyone, myself included, comes through local government. But I think when we look around our local government, again, we don't see a lot of

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diversity. We see some more diversity in our local government in terms of different ethnic backgrounds and that sort of thing than we do in the state parliament, I think. But there are a lot more members of local government, obviously, in the state than there are members of parliament. But, yes, the committee could also look at, well, what are the barriers? If the barriers are entry into local government then, as local government is a creature of the state, the committee could actually look at that as well as look at barriers that may be present in our society, real or perceived, that may prevent people from Aboriginal backgrounds or people with a disability or members of the LGBTIQ community actually putting their hands up and so that will then help increase the diversity.

**BUSH:** So what is the process there? If community are very welcome and you are hoping the committee will engage, what is the process for community to engage with the committee?

**FORREST:** In the first instance, it needs to be established, that will take a little while because it has got to be debated in the Legislative Council, and it has got to be debated in the House of Assembly. And because we've got the winter break coming up, that will probably - assuming it is supported in the Legislative Council - it will take a little while for that process to unfold. But once the committee is established, it may be that either House of Parliament may refer a matter to the committee to inquire into. The committee can make the decision of its own motion - or one of the members could put forward a motion to look at, say, the rate of male suicide, for example, and then the committee would establish an

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inquiry, we would publicise that, as we do with other committee inquiries in the local newspapers and on our website and then - this is assuming it all goes ahead - it is not a done deal yet - and then, as with all our other committees, members of the community can put in submissions, they can appear before the committee and engage as with any other parliamentary committee. It is no different. You might remember a little while ago there was a Joint Parliamentary Committee that involved members of both Houses looking at the gaming industry. We have had a number over the years. There is probably less, because we have our Legislative Council and the House of Assembly have their own committee structures, and we tend to do most of the work in those, but I think because this is such a broad and important area that affects the whole parliament that a Joint House Committee is the most appropriate step so that you do have people from both areas.

**BUSH:** Ruth Forrest is the Upper House Member for Murchison and looking to establish a parliamentary committee looking at gender and equality. Both Houses are sitting this week. What is on the Legislative Council agenda?

**FORREST:** This week, as it is part of the budget session, is all government business and it takes priority during the budget session. So all members of the Legislative Council will have an opportunity, and I am sure will take that opportunity, to reply to the budget, and that's an opportunity to raise matters that we wish to raise in relation to the actual budget itself but also commitments and needs within our own electorates. Then, in addition to that, I hope to get to this motion later down the track. And, if we don't get to

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that, it will be later in the week in perhaps two weeks' time. But it is predominantly government business. We do have a piece of legislation we didn't quite complete last week, and we will try to get to that as well. I am sure the government is keen to do that. But predominantly, it is budget reply is the main focus this week.

**BUSH:** Very briefly, you may have heard earlier our conversation with Opposition leader, Rebecca White, around the question of John Tucker's sponsorship of a petition that is questioning the mask and vaccine effectiveness or mandates. What are your thoughts on that, Ruth Forrest?

**FORREST:** Two months ago - it may be last year - I can't quite remember the timing, but I did actually sponsor a petition around the cable car, and it wasn't something I personally agreed with, but I do believe that members of our community have a right to have their voices heard in parliament and petitions are a very important part of that. I understand the - I haven't actually looked at the content of that petition, but I share Rebecca White's concern about the content of it being quite contrary to the government position on that and also on my position on that. So, if I was approached to present a petition, or sponsor a petition like that, I would try and encourage the members who are wanting to put it forward to reconsider their language that they use in it. Ask if they can possibly find someone else who would be willing to. Because there is an ethical place for me that I think everyone has a right to have their voice heard. And so we should always permit petitions. They are very important. They are an important part of the democratic process that enables

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people's voices to be heard. Even if I don't agree with them, that's okay. I don't have to support something they might be asking for, but they have a right to have their voice heard. So I can see why John Tucker would have perhaps decided to sponsor this petition. But I would hope he would make it clear his view on the matters raised in this. Because I made it clear about my views on the one I support.

**BUSH:** Ruth Forrest, we are going to have to leave it there. We are coming up to News time. I do apologise for interrupting you. But thank you so much for your time. Ruth Forrest there. Independent MLC for Murchison.

**END**