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**Title:**

Speech at opening of Housewives Association conference

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SPEECH BY THE PREMIER, THE HON. DON DUNSTAN, AT OPENING OF HOUSEWIVES ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE - 28/9/76

Mrs. Hausler, My Lady Mayoress, My Parliamentary Colleague Molly Byrne, Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen:

Thank you for asking me to open the Biennial Conference of the Federated Association of Australian Housewives, and may I welcome our interstate visitors to South Australia.

It is always a pleasure to have a Convention in Adelaide because it allows us to skite a little about our city and the areas, such as the Barossa Valley and the Southern Vales, which are so close. By the time our visitors leave us I hope you think we have been modest in our self-priase.

I was very pleased to accept your invitation because the Housewives Association is very much a part of South Australian life. It has been 50 years since it was formed, and in that time it has played a most important role in representing women primarily, though of course not always, in their role as a housewife. Over the years your organisation has achieved a great deal, and on behalf of the Government I'd like to extend our congratulations to the South Australian Branch on its 50th anniversary.

Women's role in society has changed very greatly in that time. In fact it would be quite bewildering for the people who started your organisation to come back and see the changes, both in physical terms and in terms of society's attitude.

If we just take one area - that of women in the workforce - we can see thegreat shifts that have occurred. Before the war there were very few women at work. Most married women were only housewives, and that is in no sense meant to be critical of the work they did. There were many factors which kept women out of the workforce, one of the main being that society's attitude, particularly as reflected by the education system, was that women's task in life was to stay at home and look after children and house. The post-war years saw the change really begin..

In 1947, 5% of the workforce were women; by last year that had risen to 36%. Inevitably, the proportion of women in the work force will continue to rise, despite fluctuations in particular years. As more women continue to go out to work there will be greater pressures on society to change its attitude to the role of women.

If we go back to the instance of our education system there have been very great improvements over a fairly short time. Our schools and high schools no longer concentrate heavily on domestic skills for girls, and we have a situation where the whole education process is now coming around to reflect more accurately the need for equality of opportunity

for both women and men in vocational and intellectual training.

Just as the opportunities for women have widened - and we are by no means at a stage where women are completely free of discrimination - so the Government's role has changed, and it gives me great personal pride that one of the leaders in setting out to improve conditions for women has been my own Government.

We have introduced a very wide range of measures which either directly or indirectly benefit women in South Australia. Some of these have been misunderstood initially, but after they have been in operation and the benefits seen to be worthwhile, people have wondered what all the fuss was about.

I am sure a similar change will occur as the new Sex Discrimination Act is enforced. This Act has been misrepresented either intentionally or accidentally in really some of the silliest ways possible. So much media time and energy were spent discussing whether or not separate public toilets for men and women would be illegal (obviously they won't) that the benefits which women in a very large number of situations will receive have been obscured.

If we take, for example, the situation of a woman trying to buy her own home. Banks traditionally were very loathe to part with their money because, they argued, women were not as capable as men in entering into mortgage arrangements or other financial arrangements. The banks felt that their security was not as great, and that women's long term earning abilities were not sufficient to allow them to make those commitments. Now, when you look at the very large number of women who are successful professionals or self-employed businesswomen, it seems very strange that such a prejudice should continue.

The same is true of life insurance where self-employed women, to take one group, were consistently charged higher premiums than self-employed men in the same profession or salary range.

Practices like these are now illegal in South Australia because of the Sex Discrimination Act and it's issues such as these which affect the ability of women to be financially independent if they so choose and to take entrepreneurial decisions if they wish, that should be discussed in relation to the Sex Discrimination Act. It is one of the most important pieces of legislation to have gone through the South Australian Parliament for many years, and it will greatly improve the status and future of South Australian women.

Another area in which we have helped women very greatly is in the field of consumer protection. We did not set out to help women as such - we

set out to help consumers and the fact is that the great majority of consumers also happen to be women. Between 1965 and 1968 and again from 1970, the Government gave consumers the right to fair treatment and to reasonable value for money for a whole range of transactions. Whether it was buying something at a shop, getting a tradesman to do a small job or in cooling off provisions for door to door salesmen and other purchases, we have given the consumer very clear rights and, with equal clarity, we have spelt out responsibilities of the vendor.

But more than that we have given the consumer the means of redress. If someone complains to the Commissioner of Prices and Consumer Affairs, their complaint is investigated, and if it is justified the Commissioner can try to settle the matter in a conciliatory way. If the vendor will not settle amicably, the Commissioner can then go to Court with the consumer's permission and, at Government expense, get redress for the consumer.

We have given protection in many areas but, more importantly, we have ensured that those protections are available to the entire community and that the cost of seeking redress does not put our reforms beyond the reach of the ordinary person.

Another important way in which the Government has acted for consumers is perhaps not so readily known or appreciated. The Government very strongly believes that a fair market place benefits the whole community through more effective selling and better competition. To this end we give businesses in this State very many forms of assistance to help them expand, to help them with their marketing, to help them give better service to the public. Through the various Government agencies we can build factories, we can provide industrial design and industrial research facilities and we can provide low interest loans, deferred interest loans or equity capital. One area of business of particular interest to your Association is small business, for it is the small store or factory which provide a very large number of the goods and services which families need. Small businesses are under considerable pressure as a result of inflation, and we have already announced measures such as relief in payroll tax and land tax, which will provide substantial assistance.

Often, however, problems for small businesses are caused by lack of expertise, by lack of access to the latest information or techniques and often by lack of time to even find out where things are going wrong. This lack of quick advice is a serious deficiency and the Government has now set up a Small Businesses Advisory Unit which will provide a wide range of services, including counselling, management advice and financial expertise.

This Unit, in the Development Division of my Department, is staffed by people who are skilled in business and management techniques, and who have first hand experience of working in business. It will also be able to employ specialised consultants, who will be paid by the Government from a special fund of \$500,000.

It is in everyone's interest that our business sectors work efficiently and the Government does not want to see small businesses penalised simply because they are small and therefore do not have access to the resources of their larger competitors.

This new Unit will be able to sit down with a businessman who has asked for help, look at how his company is operating, how it could operate better, and also refer him to the specialists in particular management areas.

The Unit will advise firms on sources of finance, including Government financial assistance, and will give on the spot advice on a wide range of matters such as State and local government regulations, transport, materials handling, marketing and many other factors which affect commercial operations.

As well, the Unit will work closely with industry and trade associations and education bodies, so that special courses can be provided to help operators of small business identify potential difficulties and avoid them.

We want to help firms work their way out of any problems they may face by giving them quick, specialised help which would normally be beyond them financially.

The Unit will give small business a great boost, and is an example of how Government assists an area of the economy, not only because we want to keep people in business and people in jobs, but also because we believe that the consumer is best served by having as wide a choice as possible and by having firms run as competitively as possible.

This new Unit is in addition to the way in which the State Industries Assistance Corporation and other Government organisations such as the Housing Trust, can already help business in South Australia. In short, we now have an even more comprehensive range of assistance available to business and it is an excellent example of how the whole community benefits by Government's playing an active role and not just relying on the myth that private enterprise is perfect and the Government should never do anything in the market place.

My Government has always taken the attitude that where there is a job to

be done it should be done as effectively as possible. That approach has enabled us to introduce a very large number of reforms and has enabled us to implement our conviction that a Government's task is to help all the community, not just particular groups.

Whether that assistance is by providing help or incentives or by removing discrimination and obstacles, we are still seeking to improve the life of the whole community.

Much remains to be done and organisations such as yours are most important in helping Governments. I am very appreciative of the co-operation and advice we have received from the Housewives Association of South Australia, and I am very grateful for the opportunity to talk to you this morning and to open your Convention.

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