



Trish Doyle MP

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New South Wales Parliament Legislative Assembly

Women's Reproductive Rights

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I take this opportunity to address recent comments made by the new Minister for Women, Tanya Davies, upon her elevation to the Berejiklian Government's ministry.

For many years I have been fighting for women's reproductive rights and autonomy. I do not raise this issue today in the interests of any short-term political point scoring but as a person whose political life has been steeped in the feminist movement and as a member of this Parliament who has been fighting for women's equality and autonomy, including reproductive rights, her whole life.

I have reflected in this place in the past on my early political activism at university. One of the first issues I was active in was organised by the Women's Abortion Action Campaign [WAAC].

Established in 1972, the objectives of the WAAC were to establish abortion as a woman's right to choose; the repeal of all abortion laws; free, safe abortions; free, safe contraception; and no forced sterilisations.

I believe the woman herself is best placed to decide what is best for her: she knows the circumstances of the pregnancy and understands what she needs; she is the one who best knows her own capacity to parent at a particular time and her personal circumstances. Of course, that does not make it an easy decision, and many women in that situation will need a lot of support to make the best decision for themselves.

So I am pro-choice, I am a feminist and I am here in this Parliament to advance the cause of women.

Having posted on social media about this issue in recent weeks, and having highlighted the comments of the new Minister for Women that she is "personally pro-life", I have been contacted by a couple of women who have said that they are simultaneously pro-life and pro-choice and that they believe my criticism of the new Minister's comments was unfair.

I take this opportunity to clarify and explain that criticism for the benefit of my constituents and members of this Parliament. It is commonly understood in women's politics that the pro-life label is shorthand for "anti-choice". Long ago, fundamentalist Christian organisations co-opted the pro-life label and they are very well known for being steadfastly anti-abortion and anti-choice in all circumstances. I strongly believe that people

should be very careful about using the term "pro-life" because its meaning is immediately interpreted to be a description of someone who believes they have the right to make other people's choices for them.

Hence, my concern with the Minister for Women's statement.

Mr Stephen Bromhead: Point of order: My point of order relates to the content of private members' statements. There have been previous rulings by Speakers that private members' statements are not to be used to attack other members of Parliament and that the substance of the private member's statement must relate to the member's own electorate. To attack the Minister for Women in relation to being pro-life or not should not be the subject of a private member's statement. The member for Blue Mountains should be asked to address issues within her electorate, as required under the standing orders.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! I may seek advice from the Clerk. However, I listened to the member for Blue Mountains, who referred to comments made by women in response to a social media post and I felt that there was an explanation on her behalf in relation to those comments. That is my ruling.

Ms TRISH DOYLE: I reiterate that I am here to clarify, for the benefit of my Blue Mountains constituents and members of this Parliament, my concern with the Minister's statement.

If someone holds a ministerial portfolio with responsibility for women's issues and says in their first statement as a Minister that they are personally pro-life, it indicates to me, and to many, many others, that their personal view will impact their decision-making in a way that goes against the views of the majority of women.

Right now, somewhere near a clinic where women are seeking medical advice or a termination, which is never an easy decision, a loud and invasive group of people will be waving placards and hurling abuse, all the while describing themselves as being pro life. However, they are being anti-choice and judgemental.

Likewise, the workers who provide those support services and medical advice are constantly attacked, harassed, stalked and interfered with by anti-choice activists. This is unacceptable and their actions should be made unlawful.

I note and applaud the efforts of my former parliamentary colleague in the other place, MLC Helen Westwood. Her work is continued by the Hon. Penny Sharpe, MLC. They both deserve accolades and support.

I thank the women who work in women's health and those activating for women's reproductive rights.

In the feedback to me after my criticism of Minister Davies, it was pointed out that the Minister would hopefully govern in the interests of all women. Politicians are not public servants. We are supposed to be people of conviction who advance our beliefs through legislation in Parliament with the support of those who vote for us at each election.

I do not expect Minister Davies to do anything else than govern in line with her own beliefs. That is her job and she sought political power in order to achieve that.

I believe the women of New South Wales are poorly served by those beliefs.

Again, I invite Premier Berejiklian, who is a progressive left-leaning feminist within her own party, to work with Labor in advancing abortion law reform in this place.