

TRANSCRIPT

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS AND ESTIMATES COMMITTEE

Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting

Melbourne—Monday, 17 February 2020

Members

Ms Lizzie Blandthorn—Chair

Mr Richard Riordan—Deputy Chair

Mr Sam Hibbins

Mr Gary Maas

Mr Danny O'Brien

Ms Pauline Richards

Mr Tim Richardson

Ms Ingrid Stitt

Ms Bridget Vallence

WITNESS

Ms Angela Jackson, Senior Consultant, Equity Economics.

The CHAIR: Welcome to the public hearings for the Public Accounts and Estimate Committee's Inquiry into Gender Responsive Budgeting. Welcome, Angela Jackson; thank you for coming today. Can I just ask that all mobiles be turned off or to silent. All evidence taken by this Committee is protected by parliamentary privilege, and therefore you are protected against any action for what you say here today, but if you go outside and repeat the same things, including on social media, those comments may not be protected by this privilege.

Angela, you will be provided with a proof version of the transcript for you to check. Verified transcripts, PowerPoint presentations and handouts will be placed on the committee's website as soon as possible. If we have any media present in the gallery today, we remind you that cameras must remain focused only on the person speaking. Operators must not pan the public gallery, the Committee or witnesses, and filming and recording must cease immediately at the completion of the hearing. Broadcasting or recording of this hearing by anyone other than the accredited media is not permitted.

It was remiss of me in my opening remarks not to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we meet and pay my respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

Thank you, Angela, for coming along today. We invite you to make a 15-minute presentation to the committee.

Ms JACKSON: I am not sure I will quite go for 15 minutes. I would like to first of all acknowledge my co-author Dr Leonora Risse, who is currently at Harvard, so she could not be with us today, but she has made a big contribution, and if you read through the paper, you will see that. I would also like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet, their elders past, present, future and emerging.

Look, I think the thing to really start with is what is gender responsive budgeting and why are we interested in it. At its best it should ensure that the full force of government policy and spending is working towards gender equity. Now, this is important because it is a good social objective, and I think it is one that we as feminists around the room would all share—that men and women are equal, and in society we want government policy and government spending to be working towards that aim. But it is also important economically, as an economic objective in its own right. We know that more equal societies are more productive societies. So as part of a budget process, which is generally the government's most important economic statement of a year, we want to make sure that the spending and the policies in that budget are fulfilling that objective as well.

We did a bit of a review of international best practice, and the short answer is that there are a lot of different approaches to this around the world. Different governments and different societies will take different approaches that will meet their needs and their systems of government and how it operates. But there are some things that we can draw from that international practice. One is that you need a legislative framework, that to really embed gender responsive budgeting into your systems and into your processes it needs to have that legislative basis. Otherwise it can change; it can be abolished, as we saw happen at the federal level in 2014. So that legislative framework is important.

The second is that the ministry of finance itself, the Treasury, needs to lead this. It cannot be seen as a side issue, it cannot be seen as a women's issue; it must be at the core of your economic policy and of your decision-making, and that ultimately occurs through a budget process in your Treasury or your finance department. It does need to involve a broader coalition, so you want it to involve the broader society, the other government departments, but that leadership role remains. It should align with your broader gender plans and goals. So you need to have targets. You need to have an idea of what you are trying to achieve, and gender responsive budgeting needs to respond to that and feed into that process. All levels of government, if you like, have a role to play.

So in an Australian context it is federal, it is state, it is local government; everyone has a role in this process. I think for Victoria one thing to keep in mind is that it is more than a women's budget statement. It is more than just collecting together the things and the good things we are doing for women. Yes, that is important, and it is important that we can see it and it is transparent, but the reality is that all government policies are impacting

women, and we need to understand how that is occurring, when and where. It is not always going to be particularly obvious.

I worked on seven Commonwealth budgets. I worked on policies from the baby bonus through to paid maternity leave. I understood what the impact on women of those policies was. But when I came to help the National Foundation of Australian Women do their gender lens—I do the health component of that every year—for the first thing I really struggled. It was like, ‘Okay, cervical cancer: tick—women. But how, for example, does the GP co-payment impact women? And just having that lens of, ‘This is not a policy aimed at women; this is a policy that affects everybody the same, surely’. But it does not, because women go to the GP more often. Women are poorer, so the impacts and the gender impacts of those policies are greater for women. That is what we are really trying to get to with gender responsive budgeting, understanding that any policy can have gender impacts. What are they? Is everything that government is doing impacting men and women equally? Is it trying to achieve the goals of gender equity?

So that is my opening statement, and I am happy to take questions on the submission or anything I have said or anything more broadly.

The CHAIR: Thanks very much. I will open it up for questions. Richard, did you have a question to kick us off?

Mr RIORDAN: In your analysis of trying to get systems to think not, as you said, about whether it is good for women or bad for women but about everything we do regardless of that lens, as we go forward in our community and society, as we are developing systems and processes that try to exclude gender altogether so we are looking at gender-neutral approaches to things, how does that affect gender budgeting for the growing cohort of people or structures or groups that do not wish to have gender identified in the way they think about their life or services government should provide? How does that fit with that concept?

Ms JACKSON: I think it fits perfectly within it. I think a comprehensive view of gender responsive budgeting would look at gender, but it would also look at other groups—so how gender interacts with whether you are from an LGBTIQ community or whether you are from a non-English-speaking-background community or a low socio-economic one. So it would look at those intersectional issues, and you would definitely want to bring out the fact that, yes, this policy may have an impact on somebody who does not have a gender that they identify with or who identifies with a different gender to what they were born with. That would be part of gender responsive budgeting as I would see it, very much.

Mr HIBBINS: Can you go into a bit more detail in terms of what this legislative framework might look like that you talked about and what would be the key aspects of that?

Ms JACKSON: Well, I think what you would do is set something out a bit like how at the federal level you have the *Charter of Budget Honesty Act*, for example, which sets out some pretty clear frameworks about things that need to get done, including the intergenerational report. So you would have a framework that would say, ‘The Government needs to consider these things when it’s considering policies’, and then maybe every year—or if that is too resource intensive you might make it every four or five years—you would have an assessment of how the budget is doing in terms of meeting the goals that are set out.

Mr MAAS: In terms of adopting best practice, you said there were several examples and several different approaches. You also mentioned the importance of Treasury as well.

Ms JACKSON: Yes.

Mr MAAS: What sort of role would you see Treasury playing in Victoria?

Ms JACKSON: For me anyway, I think Treasury would need to lead the process. It leads the budget process. The first part as I would see it would be that new budget proposals that are coming through have to have a gender impact assessment done as part of the budget process. Obviously Treasury running the budget process has an important role in advising departments whether they have met the requirements of that and gatekeeping that role. Then the second part would be looking at how we are doing and our current spending—

are we doing a good job or a bad job? That is quite specialised distributional analysis. I think for me, if Treasury led that, as it does the IGR at the federal level, you would get the top economists in your Government doing that work. It would embed within Treasury the importance of it, and I think if they take that leadership role, you will see, I guess, quicker adaptation also at the departmental level, because they will see it as more important, whereas if it is off to the side it can often get forgotten. It is not always in the room as well. I think my issue probably with the Office for Women doing it and taking that leadership role is they are not in the room for every decision, whereas Treasury is always in the room. So, yes, that would be why I would say that.

Mr MAAS: And is that what we are seeing at a federal level happening?

Ms JACKSON: No. I think if you go internationally, people are always still talking about Australia and the Hawke-Keating Government, which they do in economic reform in Australia as well, but they are still talking about 1983–84. So they introduced the women's budget statement, and it was distributional analysis and it was world leading. It really petered out, and so by the time it was abolished in 2013 it was again a glossy of the budget, it was a list of measures and that distributional analysis had gone. So that capacity is not within the Treasury federally either. There is a question of whether that is something that happens in the future.

Certainly internationally, if you look at Canada, if you look at what the IMF is pushing for, this is where it is at in terms of what budgets should be doing, and Australia really has dropped the ball, if you like. Now, Victoria I think is starting to lead the way in Australia in really looking at this issue and looking at how it can better do gender responsive budgeting, but in terms of internationally Australia is no longer the leader it was.

Ms STITT: I found that fascinating, what you said about 'Treasury is always in the room', because a number of organisations have made submissions around the Office for Women having a role, but I think the evidence you have just given is pretty strong—being 'in the room'. How can you ensure that we do not just have a tick-and-flick kind of response to this issue and how do we actually take it from monitoring to outcomes for women?

Ms JACKSON: Sorry, I should say I think the Office for Women has a very important role to play; it is not that they do not. It is just in terms of, 'Where does that expertise and skill come in and where does the decision-making come in?'. And that is, I think, about proper resourcing. It is about giving it status within the department of Treasury so that it is seen as something that is a good thing to do. I think if you can get those things right and you have the legislative framework, then good people will go there, it will be elevated politically as an issue and you will get that. But it comes down to political will; it comes down to who is making the decisions and wanting to see the quality of that information. But, yes, I would say resources and making sure that it has the status within Treasury are important.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I just go back to the definition of 'gender responsive budgeting'? Is it only about women and how it impacts on women?

Ms JACKSON: Well, that is an interesting question because, no, it is not, because some policies can have a differential impact; you can think about, for example, suicide rates—

Mr D O'BRIEN: That is exactly where I was going to go.

Ms JACKSON: where men are three times more likely to suicide. So you can certainly have approaches which go, 'Well, this will impact here and there'. It does not necessarily just have to be about your gender targets; you can look at policies through the gender lens and see that, 'We have this differential. This policy will help in this circumstance and these men in this particular circumstance'. I see it as being, yes, more than just about women versus men as to say, 'We must always lift women up, and a policy can't help men more'.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Yes, because obviously the work that you do for the national foundation of women is—

Ms JACKSON: Yes, that is right; it is.

Mr D O'BRIEN: It is a women's lens over the budget.

Ms JACKSON: Yes.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Is there any value, though, in there being any focus on how a budget impacts men? Like you said, suicide, workplace injury, a whole range of things—

Ms JACKSON: Incarceration rates.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Incarceration rates—exactly.

Ms JACKSON: Yes. And I think if you look at the Canadian example, they certainly look at where differentials can go either way. The focus is because the reality is that most of the inequality in society is women's, but there are certainly policy areas where men have a greater burden, suicide being a less—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Obvious.

Ms JACKSON: obvious example.

Mr D O'BRIEN: Can I just ask too: so how long ago were you in Treasury?

Ms JACKSON: I have never been at Treasury, so I started my career—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Sorry, at PM and C.

Ms JACKSON: Yes, PM and C. So it is almost 10 years since I worked for the Minister for Finance—

Mr D O'BRIEN: Okay, so this is sort of a question following up Gary's question. If we were to go to Treasury in Canberra, would we find anyone giving us any value on this topic?

Ms JACKSON: From my experience, they will have the capabilities to do the distributional analysis. There is no doubt they have those skills. Are they doing it? Probably not, other than for very specific policies, I would assume, but certainly not systematically, no.

Ms RICHARDS: Actually, a good segue from Danny's question—you have spoken about having some experience working in the federal system. Are there other jurisdictions in Australia that we also should be looking at working in partnership with some of our gender responsive budgeting? I am thinking about things like dental and vaccinations—all sorts of areas where there are partnership agreements that we have with the Commonwealth, but also where there are interesting approaches that are taken in other states. Are there any other places where you think we should be working in partnership?

Ms JACKSON: Not that I am aware. I think there is not a lot going on, and I could be wrong about this, but my understanding is that it was done across Australia, and it has really just sort of faded away. That is my understanding, but I could be wrong about that. It could be that, I am not sure, Western Australia—but certainly not New South Wales and not in South Australia.

Mr RIORDAN: With the gender budget lens that you put over a budget increasingly we are seeing, depending on what the political situation of the day is, as we put other lenses over—so we might have an Indigenous lens or a CALD lens or whatever lens is in the news of the day to put over—I am wondering about your response on whether, sometimes if we end up with too many lenses, we can get dragged away from the greater good of a purpose. So for an example, rather than looking at the population and the people in the community as Victorians, as Australians, as the case may be, and just wanting to help everybody, we can end up microing down and losing focus on what we are trying to do. Is there any risk in these types of analyses of getting too far down a rabbit hole to solve a problem, whereas if we took a step back and looked at it more broadly and looked at people rather than whether they are women, men, born in Australia, not born in Australia, of a small community, in the suburbs—breaking it down? Is there any risk of that happening when we put these lenses over rather than viewing them as the population or the community or the electorate we are wanting to look after?

Ms JACKSON: I think when you have got embedded inequality, so you have got two groups of people who were treated differently systematically, by policy and by historical fact, it is important to acknowledge—and like I said you are accepting that you think gender equity is an important objective as a society but also as an

economy—that it is an important objective, and so you approach it with that, that unless you look at things and look at what their impact is, then you can be inadvertently making that issue worse not better, because there are systematic biases that we all carry. We may see things and go, ‘Well, this is equal’, but actually it is not at all, because it is impacting one group more than another, and unless we do that analysis we do not know. So we can just inadvertently make an issue or a problem worse for either Indigenous Australians or for women. Usually gender responsive budgeting will look at that intersectionality, so it will look at, ‘Does this particularly impact Indigenous women or other groups as well?’. So it is not just looking at women versus men. It would be looking at some of those subgroups as well.

Ms VALLENCE: Thanks very much for your time today. I will pick up on one of the areas that my colleagues have touched on—and that is Treasury and how you see Treasury’s involvement is key to this. You mentioned before about resourcing. What do you in your experience working and being a veteran of budgets—

Ms JACKSON: Too many, yes.

Ms VALLENCE: I am not sure who wrote that one, but I would take that as a compliment if I were you. In terms of that, the resourcing that you mentioned—resourcing it properly if you wanted to do this—can you take us a little bit through how you see that and what sort of additional cost it would be on a Treasury department and therefore the Government’s budget to expedite what you see as the proper gender responsive budgeting process?

Ms JACKSON: To be honest it is one of those situations where putting a figure on it is always difficult. You have to go through a proper costing process. We would not be talking about something that would be more than probably half a million dollars a year, I would imagine, but I do not want to be held to that. You would need it resourced with one senior person probably and a couple of more junior people on an ongoing basis. That might need to ramp up if a big report was coming out. It would mainly be a facilitating role to help departments, I think, know what they needed to do for the budget process and ensuring that as budget bids come through that that proper analysis is being done. And then if it was going to produce reports, sort of like the IGR—

I am sure there must be resourcing in the budget for the IGR—I cannot remember what it is—the intergenerational report. You know, you might ramp that up every four or five years so that they have the resources they need.

Ms VALLENCE: Thanks for that. So that is in terms of the public service side of things and costing that to expedite this. Has there been any analysis done, or what is your experience in relation to government having a greater focus or a legislative focus on gender responsive budgeting—how that might impact in some communities that may be more isolated communities, that have smaller businesses, less ability to be fully gender diverse? I do not know if you know what I am getting at.

Ms JACKSON: I think you are probably going towards government procurement maybe or government services more generally. I mean, I think ultimately the whole economy will benefit if it is more equal, so I think that is something to always keep in mind, and that if government policies are promoting that, then that is only a good thing for society and for the economy more broadly.

In terms of, I guess, the legislative requirements, I would not see gender responsive budgeting per se putting an impetus on the private sector. It could impact obviously non-profits or people contracting with government if there are mitigating policies to maybe counterbalance. If there is seen to be, for example, a construction project that ‘This will benefit men more than women’, and so we are going to say, ‘You need to hire so many women’, for smaller businesses that could have an impact. But then equally it may be advantageous, because we know that having more women in the workplace is a good thing in the long run, or having more women around the board table if that is another requirement—that we will only contract with people who meet gender targets, for example—but that will benefit a business in the long run. I think the evidence is pretty clear—or not even pretty clear, very clear—that greater equity between men and women is good for the economy, which is going to be good for all businesses.

Ms VALLENCE: So notwithstanding that aspiration to have gender equality and more opportunities to enable women to participate and so forth, in the short term do you think that there would be any impacts? Say a construction project, for example, that you referred to, that might be in a rural community where the

opportunity, one might say, would be to give local rural businesses the opportunity to do that work of providing services to the government, but they may not meet targets and therefore another player that might be from Melbourne, for example, will get that opportunity first. Is that something that you have looked into?

Ms JACKSON: Look, no, it is not. I mean, I think there are always hypotheticals where you can sort of go, ‘This would occur’. I guess any procurement process is weighing up a lot of different factors, and gender targets would just be one of those factors at play. I assume that if the government was looking at two bids and one was for more jobs in the regions, that is a difficult counterbalance. But it is good that they know there is that trade-off as well. So really gender responsive budgeting would not necessarily say, ‘Well, you just choose the one that is always best for women’. But it gives you an idea of what your trade-off is. Because if you do not even have that analysis or that lens, you do not even know what you are deciding.

Mr RICHARDSON: Thank you, Angela, for your time today. Two-pronged question on this I guess policy area and frame. This can be a very politically charged area, particularly nationally we see the gender debate. But I think your point about economics is really important, and how it being more equal, more inclusive leads to better economic outcomes. How do you get to a point where agreed norms are in place, whether that is across the Parliament or in legislation, to ensure that the whittling away that you talked about at a federal level does not permeate future legislation or parliamentary ambition?

Ms JACKSON: Well, I think to start with a legislative framework is helpful, because it is much harder to amend legislation than it is to just make administrative changes. That is why I think the legislative framework is important. How do you get everyone to agree forever? If you find the answer, let me know. It is about proving that it works. It is about embedding it in everything that we do, but ultimately the Parliament is supreme and each Parliament will make their own decisions. So you need to weigh that up. But I think getting it right, doing it comprehensively and showing that it can work and that Victoria is a leader—I think that Victoria has shown over the last 30 years that it is a leader across a number of different fields—will help. But legislative framework I think would be the number one thing.

Mr RICHARDSON: So if, for argument’s sake, we have an example where human rights are infringed upon, we have a charter of human rights. It probably goes to Bridget’s point about where there are difficulties with, say, the hypotheticals that Bridget talked about, where there could be a reporting mechanism that squares it away if that is a minister or a Treasurer that puts that forward. Are there any international jurisdictions you can refer to or that you have knowledge of that follow that path, to I guess reconcile some of those tensions? What lead would the Victorian Parliament be looking to take from other jurisdictions?

Ms JACKSON: In terms of accountability?

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes, and even just the justification of where rights or ambitions may be infringed.

Ms JACKSON: Through gender responsive budgeting?

Mr RICHARDSON: Yes.

Ms JACKSON: As far as I am aware there is nowhere where something would incur a legal penalty from gender responsive budgeting. It is more a framework that sets out what the government will do. So I do not really see it maybe in the same way as human rights; I would see it as quite a different sort of framework. I am not sure—maybe I am not really quite understanding where you are coming from.

Mr RICHARDSON: I think if you are putting forward a budget with those accountabilities, obviously you have got a measurable and an ambition that you are trying to set. So if that has been described in, say, an annex to a budget document that we all scrutinise each year, what does that look like in terms of its impact and its utility?

Ms JACKSON: If you look at the Canadian example, I think that is probably the best example. I do not know if you have seen that or you have had a look at it as a Committee, but it is excellent in terms of what it does. It sets out what the targets are, what the progress against those targets is and what the initiatives have been, and it is really clear to see where things are going well and where things are not. That is the

accountability, if you like. I guess I am just thinking more about the human rights charter as being a more legalistic document whereas this is more about public accountability, so it is making it transparent and clear.

The CHAIR: Any further questions? No. Thank you very much, Angela, for your time today and for your evidence. As we said, you will be provided with a proof of the transcript to check for accuracy, and then it will be available on the website. But we thank you for your time and your presentation and your very insightful contribution. Thank you.

Ms JACKSON: Okay. Thanks, Lizzie.

The CHAIR: As we only have one witness today, that closes our public hearing for today, so thank you.

Committee adjourned.