



# Parliamentary Debates

(HANSARD)

FORTIETH PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION  
2020

JOINT SITTING  
OF THE  
LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL  
AND  
LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday, 25 November 2020

Uncorrected Proof

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**SENATE VACANCY**

In accordance with the standing orders passed by both houses of Parliament and approved by Executive Council, the members of the Legislative Council and the Legislative Assembly met in joint sitting in the Legislative Council chamber to fill the vacancy in the representation of Western Australia in the Senate of the federal Parliament caused by the resignation of Senator Hon Mathias Cormann.

The President of the Legislative Council (Hon Kate Doust), in accordance with the standing orders, took the chair at 11.30 am. She was accompanied by the Speaker of the Legislative Assembly (Mr P.B. Watson).

**ELECTION OF SENATOR**

**THE PRESIDENT (Hon Kate Doust)** [11.31 am]: Good morning. Members, this joint sitting has been called to choose a person to hold the place in the Senate of the Commonwealth of Australia rendered vacant by the resignation of Senator Hon Mathias Cormann, notification of which has been reported to this Parliament by His Excellency the Governor, Hon Kim Beazley, AC. I now call for nominations to fill the vacancy.

**MR M. McGOWAN (Rockingham — Premier)** [11.31 am]: I propose that Benjamin John Small of 2/94 Mackie Street, Victoria Park, Western Australia, being a person who is eligible to be chosen pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia, as amended, be chosen to hold the vacant place in the Senate of the Parliament of the Commonwealth created by the resignation of Hon Mathias Cormann.

I advise that I have Mr Small's assurance that if chosen, he is willing to act.

**The PRESIDENT:** Premier, would you like to make some comments?

**Mr M. McGOWAN:** Thank you, Madam President and Mr Speaker. I start by thanking yourselves and the parliamentary staff for arranging the joint sitting of Parliament here today. It is a rare pleasure for us to all sit jointly with our colleagues from the other place, one that I am sure we are all enjoying! This is just the twenty-second time that the Western Australian Parliament has had a joint sitting to appoint a new senator to fill a casual vacancy. My staff assured me that it is a rarity, but I thought that 22 sounded like quite a lot. The first I attended was to appoint Senator Ross Lightfoot to a senatorial position in 1997. We promise that unlike the unpleasant business last time we met to fill a Senate vacancy, members of the Assembly will behave themselves today.

This Senate vacancy has been caused by the retirement of federal Minister for Finance Mathias Cormann. Mathias served his state in the Senate from 2007 and in the federal cabinet since 2013, across three Prime Ministers during his time in cabinet. In fact, he was the only minister to hold the same portfolio in cabinet since the election of the current government in 2013. Aside from a few spats around the border, I found Mathias great to work with. He had a great desire to work collaboratively, to solve problems and to ensure that Western Australia kept moving forward. Mathias assisted the state government greatly with funding for Metronet projects around the city. He recognised our mandate, and that was an excellent example of his pragmatism. He also assisted me and the Minister for Transport greatly with funding road projects in the city and all over regional Western Australia. We worked together on city deals, which I suppose was his last major achievement for Western Australia, and we will see that come to fruition over coming years.

I also thank Mathias for his work on the campaign to get a better outcome on the goods and services tax, for which we were very successful. I note that Mathias is currently travelling around Europe as part of his Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development campaign. I see him on Facebook regularly meeting with heads of state and important people across Europe. I understand he is going to travel around the world doing the same thing, seeking the presidency of the OECD.

Mathias Cormann's story is a great one. He became a citizen of Australia only 20 years ago and he spent 13 of those years as an Australian citizen serving the nation in the Senate. That is a remarkable Australian story. I wish him all the

best in his future endeavours and all the best on his campaign in the OECD, and all the best to his family, as I am sure we all do.

Earlier this month the Liberal Party of Western Australia convened to select a replacement for Mathias and it selected Benjamin John Small. Ben has had a pretty full Western Australian experience. He has lived and worked in regional Western Australia. He has worked in the marine sector of our state's oil and gas industry—he advised me just a moment ago that it was for Woodside. He has volunteered as an ambulance driver for 10 years and he is the co-owner of Small's Bar, a small bar in Eaton. Ben, 14 years ago under a former government I introduced legislation for small bars, which was passed. I did not know anyone would take the name "small bar" so literally!

At just 32 years of age it is quite an achievement to be selected to become a senator. In the United States senators often occupy their roles until they are 100 years of age, so Ben has 68 years ahead of him! The Senate is an important institution to the nation. I note that Ben Small has had a long interest in the Senate and in public life and the means by which people are elected.

We wish Benjamin Small well in his future endeavours in Canberra. I am sure he will rise to the demands of public service well and I am sure he will never forget his responsibility to the great state of Western Australia. Ben, all the very best.

**The PRESIDENT:** Members, is there a seconder for the motion?

**MR Z.R.F. KIRKUP: (Dawesville — Leader of the Opposition)** [11.37 am]: Thank you very much, Madam President. I rise on behalf of the opposition to second the nomination put forward by the Premier to send Benjamin John Small to the Senate in the commonwealth Parliament. It is a pleasure to join Legislative Council members here today. I assure them that the Assembly members will be out of here as quickly as possible and we will leave the chamber in a relatively tidy fashion if we can.

The Premier very comprehensively went through the history and service of former Senator Mathias Cormann. On behalf of the Liberal Party, I would like to advise the chamber a little more about Ben Small. Ben has had an impressive career as an executive with a major resource industry while co-creating a highly successful small business. He has practical knowledge of both the North West Shelf and the south west region. He has an impressive record of continuous community service, starting from his days at school. Ben's father was a mine manager and his mother, Heather—a very good person who resides in my district—comes from a south west farming family. Ben grew up in the goldfields and later in Bunbury. He graduated from Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School in 2005 with a TER of 99.75, a general merit and citizenship award from his school and the commonwealth Australian students certificate of excellence. In 2005, he was the City of Bunbury's Young Citizen of the Year and won the Western Australian Young Citizen of the Year active achievement award. In 2009, he graduated from the University of Tasmania, Australian Maritime College with an Advanced Diploma of Applied Science (Nautical Science), followed up in 2012 with a Bachelor of Applied Science in marine operations. For both degrees he was dux of his class with citations to the University of Tasmania, Australian Maritime College roll of excellence, winning prizes for the best overall performance and for the highest academic achievement for an undergraduate student.

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A qualified master mariner, Ben served from 2013 to 2017 as chief officer and operations manager of Farstad shipping before working with Woodside Energy Ltd successfully as marine operations superintendent, marine operations manager and marine manager. He has held responsibility for the safe and reliable support of Woodside's offshore petroleum assets and marketing and export activities, heading a team of 24 FTEs. Ben has worked offshore for seven years for an essential Western Australian resource industry.

As the Premier said, Ben has been the owner of a small bar since 2017. He is the co-founder and joint owner of Small's Bar in Eaton that showcases local produce and employs 35 people, some of whom come from very diverse backgrounds. It has been a highly successful and innovative business. Small's Bar is cashless. Customers pay by tap and go and no tip is required because the owners of Small's Bar believes that people already receive good service when they go to such a fine establishment as their bar.

**Hon Michael Mischin:** You're on a commission here.

**Mr Z.R.F. KIRKUP:** I have been there a number of times. As the Premier said, Ben has given back to the south west community since 2009 as a volunteer ambulance driver, a volunteer development officer with St John Ambulance at Australind and, more recently, he was based out of east Bunbury with an overseas development mission as well to Timor-Leste.

From 2005 until 2015, Ben was a skipper, trainee officer and committee member of Bunbury Sea Rescue, playing a major role in training and fundraising for Bunbury's \$600 000 primary response vessel. From 2015 until 2017, he was the inaugural secretary for a not-for-profit networking organisation called the South West Young Professionals. For the last eight years, Ben Small has been a most active member of the Liberal Party in Western Australia as a campaigner,

a booth captain, a fundraiser and a community forum participant. He was president of the Bunbury branch from 2015 to 2017 and he has been president of the Forrest division since 2017.

The fact that we are now nominating a 32-year-old to the Senate, on behalf of the state of Western Australia, it gives me great honour to second the nomination via the President. It is not lost on me as a 33-year-old, and I call Ben my friend, that we are seeing a new generation of participants within the elected offices of the Liberal Party in Western Australia go on to serve not only their communities, but also the state more broadly. I have known Ben for some time. His nickname is “Captain” because of his extensive maritime experience. All who know him know that he is a good support, a good friend and someone who we can always rely on. Whenever we have a concern or we need any support or friendship, we can rely on him and call him our friend and our captain. He comes to us today with his rich personal experience that I think reflects the south west, the Liberal Party and a new generation. Ben, you are my friend. I know you will stand up for us as mates and I know that you will stand up for the great state of Western Australia. It gives me great pleasure to second Ben’s nomination to the Senate.

**HON DR STEVE THOMAS (South West)** [11.42 am]: Thank you, Madam President, for the opportunity to make a few remarks on behalf of the South West Region of Western Australia, the region where Benjamin John Small, or Ben, as we know him, or occasionally “Captain” or a few other names, took his start in life. His academic record has been relived. What failed to be mentioned was that he started his life as dux much earlier in the Adam Road Primary School. He showed potential through his primary school days all the way through to where he is today. As members said, he moved on to Bunbury Cathedral Grammar School. I believe he was also Bunbury young citizen of the year for his contribution to the community, particularly in the sea rescue area in Bunbury.

It is a difficult process to get young people interested in politics today. Ben Small was introduced to the Liberal Party in the south west on the recommendation of a businessman and adopted by a couple of the great characters of the Liberal Party in the south west. I give particular reference here to Findlay Osborn, the champion of the Liberal Party in Bunbury, who introduced Ben to us at a time when I think I had started being the Forrest division president, a role that Ben took over after me. He has done a magnificent job. He has learnt much in politics and he brings much to the political sphere. He has been a champion for the south west. He will be a champion for Western Australia and that is what we need in the Senate going forward. He will look after the regions because the regions are in his blood, and we will make sure that that happens. He has volunteered his time. He cares about the community. There is much that we might say about our history, of course, but it is a bit like fight club: what goes on on long trips, stays on long trips, but Ben will be a champion for this state. I am pleased that we got him involved in the Liberal Party. From the perspective of the south west and the Forrest division, I am pleased that he will be in the Senate. Might I say that the south west would be a lovely place to have a senatorial office; we will see how we go.

I thank the members of the other place for rising to the occasion and joining us in the upper house. I had great plans for Ben Small. I had hoped that he would play a great role in politics, perhaps by even becoming a member of the Legislative Council, but I guess we will have to make do with the Senate, Ben.

**MR R.S. LOVE (Moore — Deputy Leader of the Nationals WA)** [11.45 am]: I do not want to detain members for very long. On behalf of the Nationals WA, I wish to thank retiring Senator Mathias Cormann for his work for the state of Western Australia and for the nation more broadly. I congratulate Ben Small on his imminent appointment to the Senate. I wish him all the very best into the future and I look forward to him representing Western Australia with a certain degree of gusto.

**The PRESIDENT:** Members, are there any further nominations? There being no other nominations, I declare Benjamin John Small of 2/94 Mackie Street, Victoria Park, Western Australia the person chosen to hold the place vacated by Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann. Members, please join me in congratulating Senator-elect Benjamin Small, who is present in the President’s gallery today with his family, friends and guests.

Question put and passed.

[Applause.]

*The Joint Sitting concluded at 11.47 am*

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