

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE4235

Lavarch, Linda Denise

(1958 -)

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| Born | 19581127, Brisbane Queensland Australia |
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| Occupation | Attorney General, Lawyer, Parliamentarian, Solicitor |
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Summary

Linda Lavarch was the first female lawyer elected to the Parliament of Queensland, Australia. In July 2005 she was appointed Minister for Justice and Attorney-General – the first woman to be Attorney-General in Queensland. As Attorney-General she oversaw the introduction of permanent drug courts in Queensland and the creation of the offence of identity theft. Retiring from state politics in 2009, Lavarch became involved in medical research and the not-for-profit sector, chairing the Not-For-Profit Sector Reform Council. Lavarch stood as the Labor candidate for the Queensland seat of Dickson in the 2016 Australian federal election.

Linda Lavarch was interviewed by Kim Rubenstein for the Trailblazing Women and the Law Oral History Project. For details of the interview see the National Library of Australia [CATALOGUE RECORD](#).

Details

Linda Lavarch was born in 1958 in Brisbane, Queensland. After completing her secondary schooling at Miami High School on the Gold Coast, she attended Queensland University of Technology where she obtained a Bachelor of Laws. She has credited the Whitlam Government reforms which abolished up-front university fees and introduced a living allowance for students with giving her the opportunity to receive a tertiary education [JSchool]. Lavarch's political awareness developed early; she joined the Australian Labor Party in 1982 and while at university was involved in protests against the Bjelke-Petersen government [JSchool]. In 1984 she married her (now former) husband Michael Lavarch, who became Federal Attorney-General in the Keating Government (1993-1996). Together they have two children.

After graduating, Lavarch practised as a solicitor in Strathpine, Caboolture and Redcliffe; she also volunteered at the Petrie Community Legal Centre (now the Pine Rivers Community Legal Service) [Linda Lavarch]. In the early 1990s she worked with Legal Aid, chairing family conferences and working to resolve family disputes. In 1993, Lavarch became advisor to State Attorney-General Dean Wells on Legal Aid and Community Legal Centres [Proctor]. She entered state politics in 1997 as the successful Labor candidate for the seat of Kurwongbah. In doing so, she became the first female lawyer elected to the Queensland Parliament. From 2001 to 2004 Lavarch was chair of the Fishing Industry Development Council and deputy chair of the Small Business Advisory Council.

Lavarch was Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for State Development and Innovation in 2004; in 2005 she served as Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Energy and Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy. In July 2005 Lavarch was also appointed Minister for Justice and Attorney-General – the first woman to be Attorney-General in Queensland. She would also assume responsibility for the portfolio of Minister for Women. Coincidentally, Lavarch became Attorney-General in the year marking the centenary of the Legal Practitioners Act 1905, which allowed women to practise as barristers and solicitors in Queensland for the first time [Proctor].

Upon her appointment as Attorney-General, Lavarch noted about herself that she possessed “a strong interest in ensuring public confidence in our legal system, and also in enhancing access to justice” [Cole]. As Attorney-General, Lavarch concentrated on community justice initiatives and the treatment of vulnerable people in the criminal justice system. She was responsible for the establishment of permanent drug courts in Queensland and for creating the specific offence of identity theft [FindLaw; Innisfail Advocate]. Suffering ill-health, Lavarch resigned as Attorney-General in 2006.

Remaining a backbencher in the Queensland Parliament, Lavarch turned her attentions to medical research and sporting initiatives. From 2007 to 2009 she was Director of the Princess Alexandra Foundation, assisting in raising funds and awarding research grants to support scientists whose budding work has directly led to break-throughs in the areas of transplantation, cancer, diabetes, melanoma and Parkinson's disease. In 2007 Lavarch was the Director of Hockey Queensland, chaired the Legal, Planning and Facilities Committee, and also headed the Hockey Judiciary [Company Directors].

Lavarch retired from state politics in 2009 and returned to private practice as a solicitor at Michael Hefford Solicitors. In 2010 Lavarch was appointed a Research Fellow with the Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Non-profit Studies at Queensland University of Technology; here she was involved in developing model laws for the legal structures of, and activities undertaken by, charities and non-profit organisations. In 2014 she was appointed a Member of the Advisory Board [Pro Bono].

Lavarch's involvement in the not-for-profit sector continued between 2010 and 2013, and included a role as chair of the Coast2Bay Housing Company, which provides affordable housing on the Sunshine Coast and in the Moreton Bay region of Queensland. She was Chair of the Not-For-Profit (NFP) Sector Reform Council, established by the Federal Government in 2010 to provide high-level sector advice on proposed reforms to improve the regulatory environment for the NFP sector in Australia. In 2012 Lavarch chaired and delivered a final report for the Not-For-Profit Tax Concessions Working Group, established to consider ideas for better delivery of the support provided through tax concessions to the NFP sector [Sydney Morning Herald].

Lavarch is currently the Director of Member & Specialist Services for the Queensland Nurses Union, a position she has held since January 2015. She is also Deputy Chair and a Director of the Australian Cervical Cancer Foundation. She stood as the Labor candidate for the Queensland seat of Dickson in the Australian federal election held on 2 July 2016 [Linda Lavarch].

Across legal, parliamentary and board roles, Lavarch has promoted and contributed to access to justice, medical research and reforms to maximise the impact of the philanthropic sector in Australia.

Published resources

Book Section

Elizabeth Hamilton Hart, Doherty, Siobhan and Whitton, Laura, 2005

Book

Matter of privilege referred by the Speaker on 9 October 2008 relating to an alleged deliberate misleading of the house by a member, Queensland. Legislative Assembly. Members' Ethics and Parliamentary Privileges Committee, 2008

Resource

Trove, National Library of Australia, 2009

Site Exhibition

Australian Women Lawyers as Active Citizens, Trailblazing Women Lawyers Project Team, 2016,
<http://www.womenaustralia.info/lawyers>

Archival resources

National Library of Australia, Oral History and Folklore Collection

Linda Lavarch interviewed by Kim Rubenstein in the Trailblazing women and the law oral history project

Author Details

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Digital resources



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