UNIVERSITY OF TASMANIA
PATHWAYS TO POLITICS FOR WOMEN PROGRAM 2026
PRESENTATION CEREMONY
REMARKS BY
HER EXCELLENCY THE HONOURABLE CAROLINE WELLS
GOVERNOR OF TASMANIA
GOVERNMENT HOUSE, TUESDAY 27 OCTOBER 2026

Good evening, everyone. I am delighted to welcome you here to Government House as we celebrate graduates in the 2026 Pathways to Politics for Women Tasmanian program.

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Palawa people as the First Peoples of Lutruwita/Tasmania and the Traditional Custodians of the land we're gathered on today.

For countless generations, they have cared for this island, its landscapes, its waterways and its communities, and I'm grateful to be able to live here.

I pay my respects to Elders past and present, and to any Aboriginal people with us today. Your continuing contribution to the cultural, social and spiritual life of our State is deeply valued.

This evening we gather to celebrate those who are putting themselves forward to participate in Australian public life and service. However, we are also coming together at a time when the impacts of doing so have never been more in focus.

Following the terrible attack on Independent Federal MP Helen Haines in Wangaratta last week, we have heard from public figures around the country about the increasing levels of abuse and threats they receive whilst going about their work.

We have particularly heard from women in politics about the chilling effect that targeted online abuse and gendered harassment can have on their desire to participate in our political system.

Indeed, in August this year, a survey of 110 Australian women, across all levels of Government, revealed that nearly 90 per cent had experienced online abuse or intimidation linked to their political participation[1].

These figures are deeply concerning. They serve not only as a reminder that we all must work to foster greater civility in public discourse, but also as a call for us to redouble our efforts to encourage and in particular support female representation in our political system.

After all, women make up just over half of our population, but if they remain underrepresented in government, the diversity of perspectives in our decision-making processes is limited.

Our community must be accurately reflected at all levels of political life. This helps shape inclusive policy and ensures we enjoy a robust and truly representative democracy.

That is why the Pathways to Politics for Women program is so important.

It is only in relatively recent times that we are seeing more female representation and in fact, Rob's mother, Shirley was the first female Senator for Tasmania in 1975, which really was not that long ago.

[1] Women for Election: New Survey Reveals Nearly Nine in Ten Australian Women in Public Office Face Online Abuse, accessed 12 October 2026

For more than ten years now, Pathways to Politics for Women has helped hundreds of Australian women, from all backgrounds, to run for office. In Tasmania the program has been shaping future leaders since 2024, and tonight we recognise its third group of outstanding graduates.

As we celebrate here at Government House, polls have just closed and ballots will soon be counted in local government elections right around our State. I'm pleased to say that several of our 2026 graduates are among those standing in this year's local government elections. I'm sure they're feeling some extra nerves tonight as they prepare to hopefully take that next step.

Thanks to initiatives such as Pathways to Politics, despite fluctuations over the years, overall, more women are putting their names forward for election. It is interesting though, that whilst currently 43% of Tasmanian councillors are women, only 34% of those standing for election this year are female.

Congratulations to all candidates for putting yourselves forward to serve your communities. May I also thank everyone involved in the program for the important role you play in Tasmanian public life.

I commend the Trawalla Foundation, Women's Leadership Institute Australia and the University of Melbourne for founding this initiative in 2015, and the University of Tasmania for bringing the program here to our State.

I acknowledge the generous funding support of philanthropic and university partners and acknowledge the work of the Steering and Advisory Committees, the Program Team and all the politicians, advisors, speechwriters and media trainers who have provided their insights to participants.

Finally, and most importantly, to this evening's graduates: I commend you on taking the first steps on your own Pathways to Politics. By taking part in the 2026 program, you have demonstrated your commitment to making a meaningful contribution to Tasmania.

You have gained practical insights from experienced politicians and advisers while building the knowledge and connections you need to help shape our State's democratic future.

You are a wonderfully diverse group, bringing with you a wealth of experiences, insights and perspectives from communities across Tasmania. While each of you has your own story, values and aspirations, you share a commitment to public service and a desire to make a positive difference for all Tasmanians.

I will shortly present you with your Pathways to Politics pin, which has been designed with the artist Allona Gorren. Its design is deliberate, and when you look closely you will see that among the pillars of democracy, one stands forward, bolder than the rest.

This pillar represents your own political future, and the ambition of the Pathways to Politics Program and its alumni to change the face of Australian leadership.

Finally, congratulations once again on completing the course and thank you for your commitment to driving change through political leadership.

I wish you all the very best for the journey ahead. Take care of yourselves, take care of each other, and I look forward to seeing the difference that I'm sure you will make, not only to our Tasmanian but also to our Australian democracy.

Thank you.

[OS calls forward graduates]