

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person

Entry ID: AWE24081465

Orr, Suzanne Patricia

(1982 -)

Born 6 February, 1982, Canberra Australian Capital Territory Australia

Occupation Parliamentarian, Town planner

Summary

Suzanne Orr was first elected to the ACT Legislative Assembly in 2016, representing Labor in the electorate of Yerrabi. She was re-elected in October 2020. Following her secondary schooling, Orr worked for a decade in the hospitality and tourism sector. Having gained degrees from the Australian National University and the University of Canberra, she worked as an urban planner before election to the Assembly.

Details

Suzanne Orr was born in Canberra in 1982, the child of Beverley (nee Pratt) and David Orr who were both public servants. Orr grew up in the suburb of Giralang and, in her inaugural speech to the ACT Legislative Assembly, cited the joys of neighbourhood cricket and attending Brownies. She completed her primary schooling at Scullin (which became Southern Cross) Primary and Lyneham Primary and her high schooling at Lyneham High. The connection to place and community which infused her inaugural speech had deep family roots with Orr paying tribute to both her grandfathers for their strong contributions to their communities. She acknowledges the formative role played by her grandmothers, particularly in the development of her values. Orr's maternal grandparents lived in Canberra, and she admired her grandmother who, although paralysed, lived her life to the fullest. Orr has noted that over the course of her life her family fostered more than 200 children. Her mother, Beverley Orr, has been recognised in the ACT and nationally for her work as an advocate for marginalised and vulnerable children. Orr has observed that the care of her grandmother and sharing her life with other children taught her that 'we can do a lot to help each other, but sometimes we can't solve all the problems ourselves' and that 'government has a big role to play in helping when people need extra support'.

Following schooling, Orr embarked on a decade long career in hospitality and tourism in Canberra. Her first job, in the town centre of Belconnen was with Sizzler with later jobs including cafes and restaurants in the suburb of Manuka and in the retail travel industry.

Given a strong wish to stay in Canberra and sensing limited opportunities in hospitality and tourism, Orr began her tertiary studies in her twenties. She gained a Bachelor of Arts degree from the Australian National University, a Graduate Certificate in Public Administration from the University of Canberra and a Master of Urban and Regional Planning, also from the University of Canberra. She worked as an urban planner in the Australian Public Service for almost four years preceding her election to the Legislative Assembly.

Having briefly been a member of Young Labor while at university, Orr joined the Labor Party in 2013 when the policy area in which she worked was dismantled following a federal change of government. She was soon involved in organising the ACT Branch to work with 350.org campaigning to persuade the ACT Government to divest from companies involved with fossil fuels. The success of this sparked an interest in representing her community and a broader involvement in political life.

Entering the ACT Legislative Assembly in October 2016 and then re-elected in October 2020, Orr has served as Government Whip (October 2020 –), ALP Parliamentary Caucus Secretary (September 2018 – 2019) and Assistant Speaker (September 2018 – September 2019). Between August 2019 and October 2020, she held the ministerial portfolios of Community Services and Facilities, Disability, Employment and Workplace Safety, and Government Services and Procurement. Her service on standing and select committees has included those on Economy and Gender Economic Equality, Environment and Transport and City Services, Estimates, and Planning and Urban Renewal.

Unsurprisingly, given her training as an urban planner, Orr has been particularly interested in the strategic development of Canberra, in improving active travel and public transport and in preserving and nurturing the Territory's natural environment. There are three pieces of legislation, all private members bills, about which Orr is particularly proud both professionally and personally: the Carers Recognition Act 2021 formally recognised and promoted the role of unpaid carers; the Period Products and Facilities (Access) Act 2023 made the ACT the first Australian jurisdiction to ensure period products are freely available in schools, libraries and other suitable locations across Canberra to reduce period stigma; and the introduction of the Disability Inclusion Bill 2024 which will promote the inclusion of people with disability in the ACT community.

Private by nature, it is only recently that Orr has used the platform provided by her public role to advocate for awareness and change on issues vitally important to her. She identifies as part of the LGBTIQ community and, in the lead up to the 2017 plebiscite on same-sex marriage, campaigned door-to-door to raise awareness of the issues at stake and seeking support for the 'yes' vote. In 2022, twelve years after being diagnosed with and treated for the autoimmune disorder, Immune Thrombocytopenia, Orr spoke publicly about her condition to raise awareness of it and of the paucity of information available to those suffering autoimmune disorders.

Her recreational interests include cooking, movies, balcony gardening, upcycling furniture, swimming, and yoga. She has also been responsible for the celebrity status achieved by her cat, Portia.

While never setting out to be a role model, Orr accepts that she may have become one by default and is determined to use her public role to focus on what needs doing and doing it well. She is pleased to have contributed to the ACT but considers that her major achievements on its behalf lie ahead.

Published resources

Orr, Suzanne: Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory website,
<https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/members/ninth-assembly-members/yerrabi/orr-suzanne>

Suzanne Orr: My autoimmune diagnosis was a relief that changed my life, Twyford, Lottie, 25 March 2022,
<https://the-riotact.com/suzanne-orr-my-autoimmune-diagnosis-was-a-relief-that-changed-my-life/543266>

It's not just a survey, it's personal, Orr, Suzanne, 9 October 2017,
<https://hercanberra.com.au/life/not-just-survey-personal>

Suzanne Orr Wikipedia entry,
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suzanne_Orr

Author Details

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