



The Greens (WA)
30th Anniversary History Project
[1990-2020]

An interview with:

Hon ALISON XAMON, MLC



10th July 2020 at her office in West Leederville

The Greens (WA) acknowledge that First Nations peoples, as the original inhabitants of this country, have a special cultural and spiritual connection with the land and water. We believe that their rights and responsibilities as owners and custodians must be respected.

We hold that First Nations peoples have a right to self-determination and political representation, and must be partners in the development and implementation of public policies, programs and services that affect them.

This interview was recorded on Noongar land and the Greens (WA) acknowledge that these lands were stolen and sovereignty was never ceded. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

© The Greens (WA) 2021

INTERVIEWER

David Worth, Greens (WA) History Project Working Group.

TRANSCRIBER

Chilla Bulbeck, Emerita Professor, The University of Adelaide, Greens (WA) History Project Working Group.

NOTES TO READERS

FULL CAPITALS in the text indicate a word or words emphasised by the interviewee.

Square brackets [] are used for insertions not in the original recording.

INTERVIEW DISCLAIMER

This is a near verbatim interview, meaning that the transcript follows natural speech patterns. Readers should be aware that how we speak may differ greatly from how we would write and that the evolution of everyday language and speech patterns also provides valuable insight into the culture and history of a place.

INTERVIEWEE RIGHTS AND RESEARCHER ACCESS

The Interviewee has granted The Greens (WA) non-exclusive copyright to use, record, copy, edit, exhibit, distribute and make accessible, this transcript, in whole or in part, in any form or media.

To publish, display or use any part of this interview for commercial purposes, please contact The Greens (WA) at office@wa.greens.org.au.

INTRODUCTION

Ms Alison Xamon was the Member of the Legislative Council for the North Metropolitan Region in the Western Australian Parliament at the time of this interview, as well as the Parliamentary Leader of the Greens (WA). Something like Alison's bid for re-election in the 2021 State election campaign was unsuccessful, despite winning over 27,000 votes.

Alison was a foundation member of the Greens (WA), joining in January 1990, and has been a member ever since. Over that time Alison has been a candidate for the Greens (WA) on 10 occasions, first elected to Parliament in 2008 as Member for the East Metropolitan Region, and second as the MLC for North Metro in 2017. In her two terms, Alison has introduced 10 Private Member's Bills and asked over 1,300 questions of the Liberal and ALP Governments.

Alison has also worked for a number of unions and has extensive experience in the mental health sector. After her election loss in the 2013 election, the Barnett Liberal Government appointed her to two key statutory roles in this sector.

In her interview, Alison acknowledges the impact on her family of the long hours spent on her Parliamentary and Party work, and the support they have given her during her three-decades membership of the Greens.

TRANSCRIPT SUMMARY

| Time | Topic | Page Number |
|----------------|--|-------------|
| 0 mins | Start of Interview | 5 |
| 5 mins | Studying at John Curtin High School | 7 |
| 10 mins | Joining the Greens (WA) | 9 |
| 15 mins | Active on Curtin Uni Student Guild | 11 |
| 20 mins | Debate over joining Australian Greens | 12 |
| 25 mins | Active in social movements | 14 |
| 30 mins | Studying at Murdoch Uni | 15 |
| 35 mins | Working at the ETU | 17 |
| 40 mins | Establishing special interest groups | 18 |
| 45 mins | 2008- Nominating for East Metro | 20 |
| 50 mins | Standing in other elections | 22 |
| 55 mins | 2017- Nominating for North Metro | 24 |
| 60 mins | Working in the mental health sector | 25 |
| 1 hour 5 mins | New to Parliament | 27 |
| 1 hour 10 mins | Parliamentary leader | 28 |
| 1 hour 15 mins | Bills tabled | 30 |
| 1 hour 20 mins | Parliamentary questions | 33 |
| 1 hour 25 mins | Joint parliamentary committee overseeing Corruption and Crime Commission | 35 |

| | | |
|----------------|-------------------------|----|
| 1 hour 30 mins | Committed staff | 36 |
| 1 hour 35 mins | Changing technology | 38 |
| 1 hour 40 mins | Changes to the party | 40 |
| 1 hour 45 mins | Impact on family | 41 |
| 1 hour 47 mins | Conclusion of Interview | 42 |

TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:01] DW: I'm David Worth. I'm here on Friday afternoon, the 10th of July, with Alison Xamon in her office in West Leederville. Thank you very much, Alison, for giving me your time.

XAMON: I'm happy to do that.

DW: We're starting off our interview with you back in the early days. Can you tell me when you were born and where?

XAMON: I was born in 1969 in Mundaring, to a minister of religion and to a mother who was a teacher at the time and yes, grew up in the church.

DW: And your father's name?

XAMON: Alan Miller. The Reverend Alan Miller¹.

DW: And your mother moved to Mundaring. Did you live there for long, after you were born?

XAMON: No, we lived in Mundaring for a very short period of time, we moved about a year later to Merredin and lived in Merredin for a couple of years while my father did the Merredin and Districts church circuit. And then we moved to East Vic Park [East Victoria Park]. Then we moved to Belmont. And then we moved to Duncraig.

DW: So you're there in certain parishes for two or three years, and then moved on?

XAMON: The norm was to be in congregations for maybe a few years and then move around. So as a child, I have always lived in Western Australia and the only time I haven't lived in Perth was when we lived in Merredin. But other than that, yeah, I've always moved, I've moved around A LOT in Perth.

DW: Did you find that a bit unsettling, how was –

XAMON: Deeply unsettling and not terrific to always have to pull out from congregations where you had made good and special friends, as well as at school, but that was just the life that we undertook. It meant that when I had my three kids, I was determined to make sure that they had a huge amount of stability, and they did.

DW: Did your mother find it hard to get positions in a new parish, when you moved?

XAMON: Well, that's part of the deal of being the minister's wife. I think that she would have preferred to have had some deeper roots, but that's just part of what it meant to be part of the Methodist Church, now the Uniting Church, is that you moved around a lot.

DW: And did you have siblings?

¹ Father was Alan Crysford Miller, a minister of religion, who passed away in 1980, and mother Kay Diane Middleton, a schoolteacher and psychologist. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/13fe043ca6d5c54dc82574580020e9ff/e80e1c4081d51fa24825791f0008f856/\\$FILE/Chapter%2076.%20Alison%20Xamon%20Making%20a%20Difference.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/13fe043ca6d5c54dc82574580020e9ff/e80e1c4081d51fa24825791f0008f856/$FILE/Chapter%2076.%20Alison%20Xamon%20Making%20a%20Difference.pdf)

XAMON: Yes, I've got a younger brother. He was born when we were at Merredin.

DW: Is he a lot younger?

XAMON: No, he's only 20 months younger. Another member of the Greens, actually.

DW: Fantastic

XAMON: Yes. As is my mother. In fact, both of them have been candidates for the Greens in the past.

DW: A family affair. [There are] a few Greens members I've found like that where everyone pitches in.

XAMON: Yes. Although I was the first one to join the Party and they subsequently joined and like I say have been active and taken a role. I think that I should not downplay at all the significance of growing up in the church and my faith, in terms of being integral to the values that drew me to the party in the first place.

DW: So your faith is still very strong?

XAMON: Oh, very much so, yes.

DW: Yes. And I would imagine that would be a common thread over dinner as you talk with your parents about issues like that and how it might impact on -

XAMON: Oh, I remember growing up that my Mum and Dad were Labor voters because, of course it was the '70s. And I distinctly remember how outraged my father was when [then-ALP Prime Minister] Gough Whitlam was sacked. But I think that really our issue was less about politics and more about political issues, if that makes sense. So it was a very values driven family and a values driven dialogue.

DW: And was it about politics of the local parish as well?

XAMON: No, I don't recall anything like that. I was just a kid. No, the normal stuff. I was more interested in what was happening with [pop group] ABBA.

DW: Did we get what year you were born in?

XAMON: 1969.

DW: So Gough Whitlam- like you're only six years old.

XAMON: Yeah, but I remember that. I've got a VERY good memory. So I have very many, many distinct memories of my childhood.

DW: Mundaring and Merredin I would imagine in the early '70s weren't as populous as they are now?

XAMON: I don't remember Mundaring, I was a baby, but my first memory is actually of being in Merredin. So I do remember that. But yes, obviously those areas were fairly remote at the time. And I've got pictures of when my parents were the young minister, the

young ministry team out at Merredin actually clearing the land next to the church for church purposes. So, yes.

DW: And a nice rural environment to grow up in terms of going to school?

XAMON: I don't remember that. By the time that I was going to school, I was at Belmont.

DW: So back in a –

XAMON: So, very much, so very much suburban areas, quite working class.

DW: And can you remember what school you went to?

XAMON: I went to Belmay Primary School, and then I went to Duncraig Primary School. And then after my Father died, I went to Mount Pleasant Primary School.

DW: So once again, a bit of an interrupted education, I suppose?

[00:05:08] **XAMON:** Oh yeah, I went to two different high schools as well. There you go, good times.

DW: What ones were they?

XAMON: I went to John Curtin Senior High School, and then I went to Applecross High.

DW: Did you have any hobbies or interests as you were growing up that might have impacted on your interests now?

XAMON: No, there were only two things. There were only two things that really interested me in any meaningful way. One was my dog and my pets. I was always, always big on animals. And the second thing is that I always took quite an interest in political issues as well. Although I will say I did love music, still do.

DW: Playing or listening?

XAMON: Listening.

DW: When you were at high school. Sorry. What year did your father pass?

XAMON: My father died in 1980.

DW: 1990?

XAMON: 1980.

DW: So you were ...

XAMON: I was 11 years-old.

DW: ... in terms of – it must have been very terrible being so young. But I'm just thinking about your ideas about post-high school. Did you talk with your Mum about going to university? Was that always on the plan?

XAMON: I always wanted to go to university. I had two parents who themselves had gone to university. My father was the first person on his whole side of the family to not only have gone to university, but indeed to have gone past year 10. And indeed, like myself and now my daughter are still the only ones on that side of the family that have ever gone to university. So very working class background. But education was valued very highly by both of my parents. And so I just always presumed that I would be pursuing some sort of path around higher education as well.

DW: And you said your mother had been to university?

XAMON: My mother. Well, my mother had at that point, she was a teacher. She'd been to university. That's where my Mum and Dad actually met. She later on went on to get another degree in psychology, and in fact, has just completed her doctorate.

DW: Amazing, that's fantastic. Loved as you say, loved the idea of education.

XAMON: It's been ... never ending. [chuckles] Yes.

DW: So you're talking about ... it was always on the cards to go to university?

XAMON: Oh, I always hoped to. But yeah.

DW: But it was around politics, your interests like an arts degree or...?

XAMON: Look, I didn't know what I wanted to do. I think at one point I contemplated being a vet. At one point I contemplated doing journalism. I always wanted to do law, but just thought it was completely out of reach for me. Look, after my father died, my childhood, my home life was rather disrupted. But I don't want to talk about it for the purpose of this interview. So it wasn't an ideal home life. And, so I didn't have options available to me that I think I would have liked to have had.

DW: Mmm.

XAMON: So I actually went on to go to TAFE.

DW: First after high school?

XAMON: Well, originally I went on to TAFE. I tried to do a degree, but it was too difficult to be able to do because I had no financial support. So I did journalism at Curtin University, which is also around the time I first joined the [Greens] party. But that's another story. But I didn't last as a journalism student because I found that it was not possible for me to be impartial in my views. I had quite strong views and I would very quickly form a view about whatever the story was that I was doing. I wish that a number of journalists that are currently working in the media could do the same and actually recognize their own bias and stand aside.

DW: It's quite common now for journalists to make their points -

XAMON: Yes. Yes. I think far too many of our journalists would rather be commentators, I think, rather than journalists. But for myself, I recognized straight up that I wasn't someone

who was able to sit back and just simply observe and report, that I had strong views about stuff. And so I actually ended up changing degrees.

DW: So if I get this right, after high school you went to TAFE and then to Curtin?

XAMON: No, after high school I went to Curtin and I started my degree. But I wasn't able to complete that because of the circumstances of what was happening from my life at the time. I then went to TAFE and I became qualified in Human Services Cert 4. And after that, I transferred over to Murdoch University and I completed my Bachelor of Arts. And while doing that, I also made a decision that I wanted to go on to finally do the Bachelor of Laws, which is what I'd always wanted to do, and that's what I did.

DW: And was that at Murdoch as well?

XAMON: Yes.

DW: A fine university.

XAMON: Yes. Well, I was the Guild President there as well during that whole time. It's also where I met my husband. He was also studying at the time.

DW: And your husband's name is?

[00:10:07] **XAMON:** Luke Edmonds, and he's been a member of the Greens since 1999. We started seeing each other in 1998. There is a direct correlation there.

DW: Okay. And when did you join the Greens?

XAMON: I'm a founding member. I joined in 1990. My name was then Alison Miller-Bridge. It wasn't Alison Xamon. And I was very enthusiastic about this new political party that had been formed. I was someone who was already deeply inspired, or should I say a bit star struck, by Senator Jo Vallentine. I had been quite across a lot of what she was doing when I was a teenager.

Of course, it was height of the Cold War. And that was very present in the '80s. The concerns around, you know, the fear about [US President] Ronald Reagan and [President of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics] Gorbachev and all of the things that were going on at the time. And because I was at John Curtin [High School], I was always surrounded by quite a progressive, politically active group of students, many of whom also, had parents who were involved, particularly in the Nuclear Disarmament Party [NDP]².

So I developed a keen interest in what was happening around the NDP. And I remember, even as a teenager, feeling quite strong about the importance of what was happening with the NDP. So by the time that the Greens formed in 1990, I was already the Environment Officer at the Curtin University Student Guild. And it seemed to me to be logical to take all the interests that I was involved with, I was very active in the Campaign to Save Native Forests and quite inspired by the [Oxfam] One World campaigns and these sorts of things, and just join. And so I did. I joined the Greens in 1990 and I've been in the Greens ever since.

² An Australian political party formed in June 1984. Jo Vallentine was elected as a NDP Senator for WA at the December 1984 election. The 1990 Federal election was the last at which the party ran a serious campaign. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nuclear_Disarmament_Party

DW: What attracted you to Jo's campaigns? Was it the nuclear disarmament issues? Because she was also very strong on uranium mining, nuclear power?

XAMON: No.

DW: Did she also surround herself with strong women?

XAMON: No, I was too young to actually be aware of any of that. I can tell you that the thing, the main thing that resonated in me with Jo Vallentine was the issue of nuclear disarmament itself and the threat of the Cold War. And she seemed to be one of the few people in the Parliament, in fact, she probably was the only person in Parliament who was actually speaking out about this.

As a teenager, of course, this is the time when we've got bands like *Frankie Goes to Hollywood*³ and all this sort of thing. So there was a very strong narrative coming through for teenagers. And particularly if you had some degree of political awareness, which is what I did, then that resonated very strongly. So, yes, I was absolutely amazed by Jo Vallentine.

I remember when I was a journalism student at Curtin she was kind enough to grant me an interview for when I was writing for the university paper. And I was SO excited to be talking to her. I just remember I was BESIDE myself with excitement talking to her. I felt like I was talking to a rock star. And of course, now, as a Member of Parliament I get asked to give interviews to people. And sometimes with students, you know, sometimes you sort of go 'urhh!'

She was very generous with her time with me and just typical, gorgeous and gracious, and just lovely humored. And I remember that when I got to know her and she became a friend several years later, feeling very privileged. She really was an integral part of my political ...

DW: Development?

XAMON: Development, yeah. She is incredible.

DW: It would be really interested, interesting to get a copy of that article.

XAMON: Oh, no!

DW: It would have aged a bit.

XAMON: No, it'd be silly. I honestly... I remember I asked her questions about what was her favorite music and that sort of thing. I remember her saying that she liked a lot of classical music and then she mentioned that she liked *Midnight Oil*. So, no, it was an interview of a starstruck young woman. So I don't think there was anything particularly valuable in the article, to be perfectly honest.

DW: The Greens (WA) were formed in January 1990 out of four other groups. Were you a member of any of them?

³ A British group that had a number one hit with the song *Two Tribes* in June 1984, which was about the nuclear arms race between the US and USSR. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Tribes

[00:14:56] **XAMON:** No, I was not a member, I was just peripherally involved and the Greens were the first political party I ever joined.

DW: And you never joined any other?

XAMON: No, I've never been a member of any other political party.

DW: Can you remember back to 1990 whether there was a strong environmental interest in university students at Curtin?

XAMON: Well, no, but I had a group of people around me that were very strong. We had a number of clubs. So, like I say, I actually formed and ran the first incarnation of the Environment Department of the Curtin University Student Guild. I was the Environment Officer. I threw myself into that for a couple of years, really loved it and learned a lot. But also we ran clubs on campus as well. I was also running animal liberation clubs on the campus at the same time.

I spent far more time doing my activist work than I ever did on my study, but that was where my interests lay. At that point, it was interesting because there was this emerging consciousness around environmental issues. And I remember, the University themselves, wanting to do work with the Student Guild Environment Department as well, to try, to green up their image even as far back as then.

DW: When you joined in 1990, did you become part of a regional group and go to Reps [Council]?

XAMON: No. Quite the opposite, actually. I remember now when I joined back in 1990, I would have been a member of the Swan Regional Group. And I was already really quite active, as I said. I had multiple jobs trying to support myself because I was living out of home and I was trying to be a full-time student. And I was Environment Officer. And I was running these clubs and I was involved with CSNF [Campaign to Save Native Forests] and all these other things.

I had much on my plate and, I remember that I would get these phone calls every month going, 'You have to come to a Greens meeting, you have to come to a Greens meeting'. I actually really turned me off. I didn't like it at all. I kept trying to say to the guy that kept ringing me, 'Look, I'm actually really busy. I don't want to do so. I just want to be a member'. But it really turned me off from wanting to be particularly active.

So I've taken that experience and really that's influenced how I've chosen to engage, particularly with new members since. Because I know that people join for all sorts of reasons. Sometimes people join and they want to immerse themselves. Sometimes people join and they just want to support, and sometimes depending on where you're at with your life, it can be a mixture of the two.

And at that point, I just wanted to feel like I was part of something bigger. Of course, I handed out how to votes on polling day because I'm not a monster – you get that's the bare minimum you can do. And I strongly believe every member should. Really, what is your reason ever for not doing that? But, apart from that, I just didn't want to get involved at that point. And it wasn't until several years later that I got very involved in the party.

DW: And I have heard from people involved in those meetings in the early 1990s that there were some terrible meetings, so it probably was a good idea you didn't go to them?

XAMON: Absolutely. And certainly I started to get very involved in 1994 and have been very involved with the party ever since. But by the time that I was involved, it was still pretty raggedy. It was still pretty ugly. And so certainly I had all the horror stories of those early years still very much there. And the reality is you're peripherally exposed to all that, even as a member, even if you're not a particularly active member. So certainly the early days of the party were very difficult, but they were also difficult from 1994, when I started to get very active.

DW: in 1992, there was a ballot for whether the Greens (WA) should join the national Greens ...

XAMON: In 2002, not 1992.

DW: No there were three ballots.

XAMON: I don't I remember, I distinctly remember being deeply involved with the other ones, but I don't remember necessarily the '92 ballot.

DW: No it lost, and there was one in '97 or '98.

XAMON: Yeah, I remember that one too. And I certainly remember the 2002 one.

DW: And then in those two later ones, did you support the proposal?

XAMON: I didn't support the first two. And I stand by that decision. I think we weren't ready to be able to join the Australian Greens, and the Australian Greens also weren't ready to have WA. But by 2002, enough of the groundwork had been done and culturally I think we were ready to be able to make that leap. And I supported it in 2002.

DW: What was the main development in the relationship between WA and the national Greens that allowed you to change your vote at the last ...?

[00:19:49] **XAMON:** Well, I mean, the Australian Greens at that point and they were themselves quite new, were very dominated by States that had a particular top-down approach to the way that they undertook a lot of their activities and it was particularly volatile between New South Wales, still is, and, and other States. The Greens (WA), had a very, very different culture. Our culture was a lot flatter, a deeper commitment to consensus. And just culturally, we were not aligned with the deeply pragmatic, quite hierarchical structure that the Australian Greens were at that point.

The other thing is that I have to stress that it was very dominated by the personality of Bob Brown, who also took a particular approach. And we were very conscious of not wanting to have the unique and precious and important culture of what we were about usurped by the Australian Greens at that point. And so what we really needed to do was to be involved in such a way that we felt that we were able to have more influence over the Australian Greens and not lose the core nature of what we were about. So that's really where I saw a lot of shift. And also, we needed to work through the constitutional stuff that needed to occur in order to be able to effect that.

DW: I would imagine the debates would have been quite intense about - .

XAMON: Well, they were pretty fractious. And there were obviously people... there were people who were involved with wanting us to join the Australian Greens. I can think of one guy in particular who took it... seemed to take it very personally if anyone had objections to that. So they were pretty ...they could be pretty hostile meetings, actually. And also, I remember the Australian Greens particularly, this is going back to the second time we went to the ballot. I remember some of the people there getting very angry with the Greens (WA), and in actual fact, talking about wanting to set up an alternative Greens party in Western Australia, too, which only further served to entrench the sense from Greens (WA) of a lack of commitment to genuinely being able to work together. So, you know, yes, it was pretty fractious.

DW: And I'd imagine you wouldn't be able to get on with much other work if you were focused on that one topic and it had such importance -

XAMON: Oh, look, it was A topic. I don't think it's fair to say that it absolutely dominated the party. It dominated the party at particular points. But other than that, no, we were still busy just doing our job and getting people elected. And building our own party.

DW: You umm... one of the big differences in political parties is the Greens have this intense attachment to consensus decision making. Take it very importantly. How did you find that joining up to a political party and having that process -

XAMON: Loved it.

DW: It is something you were used to?

XAMON: Yes, loved it. And I found that it served really well. It isn't just something that I've learned within the Greens. Simultaneously I've been involved with a lot of peace groups and environment groups that also practise deep consensus as well. And in my church, it also operates the same way, we talk about consensus. But we also talk about the importance of discernment.

So it's been the skill of actually understanding what consensus means and what it actually looks like, has been really valuable to everything that I do. It has also served me well, even in Parliament, in terms of my capacity to be able to work across other political groups and try to achieve outcomes. Look, if I think about something that happened even recently. I chaired the Parliamentary Select Committee Inquiry into Alternative Approaches to Dealing with Illicit Drug Use [and its Effects on the Community]⁴.

And that had representatives from five different political parties right across the political spectrum. And we ended up with a fully-consensus report on some highly controversial issues. And that was not easy to navigate. But I've got to say, I think that the consensus processes and understanding of that has served me well. Likewise, I saw my former parliamentary colleague Giz Watson, who I was in the Parliament with me for the 38th Parliament, use her processes and understanding of consensus, particularly in the Finance and Estimates Committee, to great effect. And people still talk about how valuable

⁴ For the final report of this Committee see

[https://parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/76DC63572B331E7F482584BE00219B5F/\\$file/id.alt.191111.rpf.final.xx%20web.pdf](https://parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/76DC63572B331E7F482584BE00219B5F/$file/id.alt.191111.rpf.final.xx%20web.pdf)

that was as well. So it's not simply about how we work and do things differently within the Greens. It's actually a skill base that serves you well right across all of - everything, really.

DW: You mentioned your membership of the Campaign to Save Native Forests and Animal Liberation, as well as the Greens?

[00:25:00] **XAMON:** Yes. Oh, and many, many other things. I was involved with so much, LOTS of activist activity, like over a RANGE of issues. Very active in Friends of East Timor [FoET] for a very long time, which is, of course, where I met Brad Pettitt⁵. And we've been friends since 1993. Very involved with the feminist movement... tried to get myself arrested unsuccessfully with the forestry movement, and I was involved with education campaigns. A lot of stuff around student activism, just a whole range of issues.

The peace movement... I was one of the founders of the Peace House and very involved with that. So lots and lots of activist activity. I think one of the things that I'm a little bit sad about, if I reflect on where a lot of the members in the Greens are now, is at the time, it was very important to do activist activity as well as being politically active. And I see a lot of people now only politically active. And I don't think that gives you the best grounding in terms of being able to work within the community. You know, if you're not part of other external groups as well.

DW: I was just wondering what you hoped to get out of membership of those groups versus membership of a political party. Were you hoping to get different things?

XAMON: Absolutely. So I've always been really clear, and I'm still clear now, that I think that the role of the Greens is to serve as the parliamentary arm of the left. I've noticed that there's an emerging narrative talking about the Greens as THE movement. I've never seen it that way. I'm always quite clear that I think parliamentary democracy and intervention within parliamentary democracy is a really critical part of achieving change, and it is only ONE part of achieving change.

And I think that it's also REALLY important to be working with unions and to work with churches: as long as they're aligned. And to work with activist groups and to work with community groups, and to suggest that any one entity on their own can achieve change I think is arrogant, but also mistaken. So I've always been very clear that I think the Greens play a critical and important role in terms of that intervention into Parliament. But we are just one part of that broad movement for change.

DW: You know, you're a bit unusual in that you've had to two first speeches [in Parliament]. In one of them you mentioned that in your early-20s you became a play leader and worked with children.

XAMON: Yes.

DW: That was one of the jobs that you did while you were at University ...

XAMON: Well, I was at TAFE, actually. Yes.

DW: ...helping you get through there. And you also mentioned, I think, in the second speech that you had worked for a number of unions, both black and white collar -

⁵ In 2020 Brad was the Mayor of Fremantle and was elected to the Upper House South Metropolitan seat for the Greens at the 2021 State election. See <https://greens.org.au/wa/person/brad-pettitt>

XAMON: Yeah. I've gotta say, my second speech was not... my second speech was not, as you said, an inaugural speech. It was just the opportunity for me to get up and have a spray. And I actually had virtually no notes for my second speech. I just got up and did a bit of a rant... a stream of consciousness. And at that point, of course, I'd worked for four years in the mental health and suicide prevention space. And so I really had a lot to say about that and wanted to make sure I got that off my chest. So, yes, the first speech was I think your more conventional inaugural speech.

DW: But, it in that, it sounds like you had a very diverse employment history?

XAMON: I do. Yes.

DW: In terms of working with children, working with unions and so on. That was after your law degree?

[00:28:41] **XAMON:** Yes. But it actually ... it actually flows and makes sense. So my first professional job if you like. I mean I had many jobs, let's be clear, as a young person that obviously needed to eat and pay the rent. But my first professional job was working as a play leader. So I was working in community development and working with children at risk and working in, sometimes out-of-school settings as well. I actually was the supervisor. And so I'd been doing that for quite some time. And particularly the community development work piqued my interest around issues of family and domestic violence. And, also there were ... I had personal issues in that.

So I made a decision at that point that I was going to go back to uni. And that's when I did, I transferred over to Murdoch and I decided that I wanted to do women's studies at Murdoch University because I'd been told that that would actually be quite useful in order to be able to advance potential interests around working in women's refuges. So actually that's how I came about to go back to uni to try to get that first degree.

Now, what happened while I was at uni is that of course, I got involved with student politics because why wouldn't I get involved with student politics? OF COURSE I'd be involved with student politics. Interestingly, in 1994 at Murdoch University is where I also met my friend Adam Bandt, now the leader of the [Australian] Greens. And we were both involved with the same student faction, which was called Left Alliance, which was a national faction. It's also where I met my husband, who was also a member of that faction.

So I got involved with student politics from there. But between I also fell pregnant with my first child. And my daughter, Miette, who is also a member of the Greens, by the way. And I was part-time at uni. I was a sole parent. And I was raising my child and still continuing on at uni, still doing activist work, but also doing the student politics. And in 1998 I was elected as the Education Vice President at Murdoch's Student Guild. And the following year I was elected as the Guild President.

And through the course of doing that, while I was still studying, of course, I started working really closely with the NTEU [National Tertiary Education Union]⁶ and also the CPSU,

⁶ An Australian trade union for higher education and university employees. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Tertiary_Education_Union

[Community and Public Sector Union]⁷ where there was a lot of industrial activity happening at Murdoch University in those days, at that point, and in those days and quite frankly, I attracted the attention of people in the union movement. And I found that when I finished as Guild President, I got offered a couple of jobs with the union movement.

So I took up one of those jobs, which was at the ANF [Australian Nurses Federation], which also coincided with my graduation from my first degree and me commencing my studies in law. And from the ANF, I went to the State School Teachers Union. And from the State School Teachers Union [SSTU], I went to the CEPU [Communications, Electrical and Plumbing Union of Australia], which is otherwise known as the ETU [Electrical Trades Union], which is the plumbers and sparkies.

And over that period of time, I also got married and had two more children. So, I was still active in the party, VERY active in the party, actually VERY, VERY active in the party. But I was also working full-time as a union official and I had my three kids and I was finishing my law degree and doing a lot of activist work. A lot of the work I was doing at that point was also in the community legal sector. So I was a Chair of a board and on a number of other boards and those sorts of things. So, yes, I was working at the ETU when I got elected to go to Parliament. And at that point also had been admitted as a practitioner of law to the Supreme Court. So I was a lawyer by that point.

DW: In terms of the union activity ...

XAMON: Yes.

DW: ...three very different unions. I mean the ANF isn't part of the Trades and Labour [Council], Unions WA, whereas the other two are ...

XAMON: Yes.

DW: ... more left type unions.

XAMON: Yes. I was an industrial officer.

DW: Right. What attracted you to that type of activity? Is it like a helping, helping the members?

XAMON: Advocacy. Yeah. I'm good at it. I love it, and I also love the law. And so advocacy and organizing, really keen. Terrific grounding for an MP, by the way, because you deal with such a wide range of people and because it also meant that I got to immerse myself in sectors that I otherwise wouldn't know. So working at the ANF, means actually understanding the way the health sector works and understanding nurses. Working for the SSTU means I actually understand the way the education sector works and what happens ... what life is like for teachers. Same even with working with sparkies and plumbers, you know, you get a really strong grounding in occupational health and safety and a whole range of things. So it's a terrific background for a Member of Parliament. I understand why the ALP likes it as a pathway.

DW: Certainly the first two unions, the ANF and the Teachers' Union, a lot of women ...

⁷ The CPSU represents the State public sector employees, some former public sector employees, and university professional staff as well as Commonwealth government employees. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Community_and_Public_Sector_Union

XAMON: A lot of women.

DW: ... a lot of women members, whereas the ETU are blokes in overalls.

XAMON: Blokes, and I was the only female official as well.

DW: And you didn't find that uncomfortable?

[00:34:22] **XAMON:** Best place I've ever worked. Absolutely fantastic. No, the blokes there were... they were gorgeous. And a lot of them I still count as good friends. Always treated me with the utmost respect. I didn't get treated differently as a woman. The only time I felt ... the only thing I noticed was that the blokes would all go into each other's offices and fart, and then leave. [DW laughs] And they never did that to me. But in fairness, I never did it to them either. So I, [DW laughs again] so that was about the only time I ever noticed that I was being treated differently, and I'm ... I was actually quite comfortable with that. There were no windows in those offices. So that would have been ... it was pretty funny, but it would have been deeply unpleasant.

DW: Very male humour. I think some branches of the ETU have actually given donations to the Greens?

XAMON: Yes, they have. Yeah.

DW: It's probably a supportive environment?

XAMON: Oh, they're very left leaning. And I've got to say when I was running as the lead candidate for East Metropolitan, my boss was highly supportive of me running for the Greens, highly, highly supportive. Yes, could not have been more supportive, actually.

DW: I'm also thinking in terms of the work you did at the Guild in '98 at Murdoch [University] because I think around then they were looking at merging, Murdoch and Curtin Uni?

XAMON: No that wasn't at round that time. No, that was all ... there was lots of other disputes on campus. There was course cuts and ridiculous rationalization.

DW: I was just thinking about the union activities, conflict, a lot of conflict that you seem to be happy being immersed in conflict?

XAMON: Yeah, yes. Look, I actually don't have a problem with conflict at all unless it's personal. Personal conflict is horrible for everybody. How can anyone enjoy that? But those ... that's not personal conflict. I don't mind. Oh, no, I'm very, very comfortable with working my way through conflict and the cut and thrust of conflict and try ... I like the fact that you can find solutions and that intrigues me. And yes, I'm fine with it. Very, very comfortable with it. Which is also the law ... the law is adversarial as well. And I'm comfortable in that space. Debate in Parliament is adversarial and I'm very comfortable with it.

DW: That was what I was thinking, it was a good preparation.

XAMON: All of that is absolutely fine, I love debating. Like I say, the only thing I don't like is if it becomes personalized. But can I be clear, that in general, certainly in Parliament, I don't personally attack people. And, until recently, I hadn't been personally ... people don't generally personally attack me either. So, you know, there's a degree to which, you know, if you dish it out, you're gonna get it back. I choose not to dish it out. I don't make it personal. It needs to be a battle of ideas, not a battle of people. Having said that, some people are obviously appalling. But even then, what's the point of targeting them, that just makes you ... it doesn't achieve anything. So, no.

DW: In '98, Guild President at Murdoch Uni, you said you got married? Heading towards marriage?

XAMON: Yeah. Luke and I got engaged in 2001 and married in 2002 and had our first son in 2003. And then our second son in 2006.

DW: I'm just thinking, because it seems like you also then get involved in an administrative fashion in the Greens in terms of being the Women's Caucus Working Group Convenor?

XAMON: Yeah, you know, there was a lot of stuff. So there's been three special interest groups that have been established in the history of the Party, and I've been responsible for establishing all three. [chuckles] So the first one was, of course, the Women's Caucus, and the Women's Caucus actually came about because we had an increase in what I would term to be highly inappropriate, masculinist conduct by a group of members who had joined the party who basically liked to throw their weight around. And so the Women's Caucus in some way was at that time, which I formed -which I established and which for the life that it served was actually really helpful, offered a space for women to sit down and challenge that conduct and to talk about that conduct and how we needed to do things differently.

I've got to say, it was very grounded in the sort of philosophies that had formed the Greens in the first place. I could not see the Women's Caucus operating now, but at the time it served a very important purpose, I think, because we were seeing increasingly aggressive conduct by mem-, so many of whom had joined from Labor and had brought that combative and quite aggressive 'take no prisoners' approach to the deliberations internally within the party. So that's really what it was about. It was about trying to create a space that was actually going to proactively interrogate that and push back against that and create a safe space for women. And it was good. It was good at the time. Yes.

DW: What were the other two special interest groups?

[00:40:13] **XAMON:** The other two special interest groups that I subsequently formed was ... I ended up in 2001 in forming the first incarnation of the Refugee Action Group. If people would, of course, remember that was the year of Tampa⁸ and we had an influx of members who wanted to join the Greens because of what was happening around refugees. I was no different in terms of feeling deeply, deeply impacted by that. So we formed the Refugee Action Group so that we could actually undertake activist work within the party.

⁸ In late August 2001, the Federal Liberal Government of Australia refused permission for the Norwegian freighter MV Tampa, carrying 433 rescued refugees (predominantly Hazaras of Afghanistan from a distressed fishing vessel in international waters) and 5 crew, to enter Australian waters. This triggered a political controversy in the lead up to the 2001 Federal election and a diplomatic dispute between Australia and Norway. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tampa_affair

The second one we formed was the [Greens] Unions Special Interest Group⁹, of course, as myself and my husband, who was then, and still is a union official, and a number of other people who were active within their unions and we would meet. Oh, it was a terrific group. Loved it, actually. And we would meet every single month. And what we would do is we would compare notes about what was happening across our unions and also what was happening in terms of their relationships, good or otherwise with the Labor Party.

We proactively sought to ensure that we had green representation on the UnionsWA¹⁰ Council, and just ... it was actually quite a deliberate intervention and also a support because you know what? It's really hard being a union official when you are very publicly, a Green. And so a lot of it was us just providing support for each other because we passionately believed in the work we were doing, but because we weren't members of the ALP and had no intention of joining the ALP, that certainly created issues for us.

DW: What year did you set up that Special Interest Group?

XAMON: Look, I can't even remember. I know it was in the 2000s. But what I can tell you is that I remember we used to have meetings at the AMWU [Australian Manufacturing Workers Union]¹¹ when my husband was working at the AMWU. So that tells me it was the early 2000's.

DW: I can't find anything on our records about that [special interest group] ...

XAMON: Really? That's interesting.

DW: Yes, and the Refugee Action Group.

XAMON: Yeah, there's two ... there were two incarnations of that. So it was 2001 and then it sort of died off a little bit after a while, and then I reinvigorated it again. But that's again, it's sort of died off a little bit. I can't keep groups going if I'm a member of parliament. So, yes sometimes that's what happens. You get one individual who's particularly keen to make it happen. But then ...

DW: What's interesting is at that time, WA didn't have a [Greens] Senator. So was that another outlet for getting the refugee issue in the media, into the public?

XAMON: At the time there was a lot of movements happening around the refugees ... there was a lot of rallies and all that sort of thing. And I think that the Greens just wanted to feel like there was a way to channel their energy. I think ... so yes. But I mean, it's a long time ago. I'm talking ... we're talking almost 20 years ago now. Yes. We used to meet at Giz Watson's [electorate] office in Leederville.

DW: Right. Also, you were the Convenor of the Perth Regional Group. '99. You did two stints, a bit later in 2005-08.

XAMON: Oh, I've done more than that. So I was the Convenor, but I was also previously the Treasurer and Secretary.

⁹ Recently re-launched as the Unions and Industrial Relations Working Group. See p43, <https://greens.org.au/sites/default/files/2018-06/GWA%20Annual%20Report%202016-2017.pdf>

¹⁰ UnionsWA is the peak trade union body in Western Australia. See <https://www.unionswa.com.au/>

¹¹ The AMWU is one of the most powerful unions in the Left faction of the Australian Labor Party. During the 2010 Federal election the CFMEU and AMWU donated a total of \$60,000 to the Australian Greens. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Australian_Manufacturing_Workers_Union

DW: Membership Officer?

XAMON: We didn't have a Membership Officer in those days. So, yes, I've held all of those roles within the, oh, and I was the Permanent Rep for Perth for years. So ...

DW: Do you remember the years?

XAMON: Nope, but I ... but many, many years. But I got very involved with Reps in the '90s and it just went right through.

DW: Because that would've taken a lot of your time as well? In terms of going to meetings, making sure all the minutes were okay?

XAMON: It did.

DW: And you've got a young family, doing all these other ...

XAMON: Yep I did.

DW: ... so you're very good at time management?

XAMON: I am good at time management to a point. There does come a point where I've got too much on. But, no, it was really important to me as well. So, and I do need to stress it's very important to me, but it was also important to my husband. So that's like ... I'm not just doing that as an island. And the other thing is that, you know, particularly in those days, these people were my friends, it was my social group as well. So that all makes a big difference in terms of the level of engagement, because if you're just ... It might be a meeting, but if you're going to hang out with friends and then, you know you're going out for a drink afterwards. Well, it doesn't really feel like just another meeting. If that makes any sense. So. Yes. I did all of that.

DW: Then in 2008, you're elected to the East Metro Region as the first Greens ...

XAMON: As the first Green representing the East Metropolitan region. Yes.

DW: ... and as you said, you'd lived in that area, Belmont ...

[00:44:55] **XAMON:** Yes. And I was living in the area then as well because we were living in Bayswater. We'd lived there for a long time at that point. So umm, very East Metro, felt very ... Yeah. Huge affinity with East Metro [region] as well.

DW: In your first speech, you mentioned that there were 17 candidates for that position. What made you ... what do you think made you the successful one for the Greens to get up there and be the candidate?

XAMON: There was a lot of things that I think contributed to that. Frankly, I think a lot of it was just the luck of numbers. That was the election where [ALP Premier] Carpenter had just pulled the snap election and got smacked by the electorate as a result. But people were not quite ready to vote for the Liberal Party. So they were prepared to vote for the Greens for the first time. We'd come close to winning East Metro in the past. So I think a lot of it was that.

I think that it would be really arrogant of me to sort of really attribute anything much more than that, other than the fact that in that snap election, and it really was snap, I had a really lovely, loyal team so, you know, there were no stuff ups. But the other thing that had been advantageous, which I notice you didn't mention, is that we'd come straight off a Federal election, a successful Federal election. That was where we'd run the Take Action Green Action campaign. And that was the first time that we'd ever run a successful national branded Federal election campaign. And we were able to use the materials and the branding, which was still so fresh, virtually still hot off the press and, and feed it straight into the State election campaign.

But the reason I mention that is because I ran Scott Ludlam's [Senate] election campaign in 2007. It was a year of my life. So I was very familiar with it. And that helped as well, because, I mean, I had the deep experience under my belt about how to run a campaign. So that was helpful. But during that time, I also had done two terms as the National Convenor of the Australian Greens as well. So I was ...

DW: From Perth?

XAMON: From Perth, and I was the first National Convenor of the Party to do the job from Western Australia. I was also the first Convenor to ever be elected by consensus.

DW: The National Convenor?

XAMON: Yes. And they've had it since. But at the time it was significant. And prior to that, I'd been the Deputy Convener and I'd also been on AGCG [Australian Greens Coordinating Group]. And I'd also been the State Delegate to the Australian Greens as well. So I'd had a very large national involvement.

DW: Can you remember the years you were the State Delegate?

XAMON: Again, it's in the 2000s. So it was not long after we finally joined the Australian Greens. So, I think I first got elected to a national role in 2004, I THINK, but I can't quite remember. So I was on the AGCG, the Australian Greens Coordinating Group. And then, then I got appointed as an office bearer and then, then I got elected as the National Convener. I did all of that while I had the kids. Yes. So ...

DW: And working for the ETU?

XAMON: Oh yes. I was working the whole time but yes. The thing I most remember about that time was doing the national roles and running the election campaign with my youngest in a sling, breastfeeding the whole way through. So shades of early days of the Greens I think and, wearing a headset. That's pretty much what I did for a year. I just had children on me and a headset. [laughs] So yes, it was pretty funny. Was good, though, I learned a lot.

DW: So your years as National Convenor, what years were they?

XAMON: Well, I remember I finished as National Convener, my second term, in 2007. So it would have been 2006 and 2007.

DW: So just before you were elected [to State Parliament] ...

XAMON: Just before I was elected, ...

DW: ... because not only had you gained that experience and run Scott's campaign ...

XAMON: Yes.

DW: ... you'd also stood for the Greens earlier?

XAMON: Oh, yes.

DW: A couple of times, the 1998 Senate election?

XAMON: Yep, so in 1998 I was number three on the [Senate] ticket, 2000 - this is Federal - 2001, I was the candidate for [the House of Representatives in] Perth. 2004 I was the candidate for Perth. And then, of course, in 2007, I was number two on the Senate ticket. And if, of course, if we'd picked up that [Scott] was ineligible to be a Senator during that term, I would have been elected to the Senate. NOT that I ever wanted to be elected to the Senate, because I have young children. So, ...

DW: A lot of travel?

[00:50:02] **XAMON:** Yes. But, you know, it's pretty funny when you think about the way things work.

DW: But you also stood, I think, for East Metro?

XAMON: Yes, I ran for East Metro number two in 2001. And actually, I was asked to run for East Metro number one in 2005, but I did not put my hand up¹². The reason I didn't put my hand up is because I knew that I wanted to have another child. My husband and I had been talking about wanting to have a third child, my planned child, as I like to call him. And he was, of course, born in 2006 conveniently between semesters as I finished my law degree.

So it wasn't something that I seriously contemplated, but it did certainly mean that by the time that 2008 came around, I had been well and truly tapped on the shoulder. And people had made it quite clear that if I put my hand up that I would have a high degree of support, which I did. So, yes, I put my hand up then, but I chose not to put my hand up in 2005.

DW: So you had a lot of experience at managing elections, running election campaigns?

XAMON: Yes. Yes.

DW: Managing the volunteers, all of that.

XAMON: Yes.

DW: It would give you good base then to be successful in 2008?

¹² Alison ran as number 2 on the East Metro ticket at the 2005 State election.

XAMON: Yes. Having said that yet ... I don't ... I never enjoy being the lead candidate as much as I enjoy being either a support candidate or behind the scenes, because you've got a lot more at stake. But yes. Yes. It's true to say that I've gone in with a great deal of experience. I think the thing that's really useful about that is it also means that I know what it feels like to be a volunteer on someone else's campaign.

I hope I run good election campaigns with people. I've certainly always received positive feedback. And I note that my election teams have never been the ones that have actually fallen apart. But I think it's as simple as having an idea of what it feels like to be that person who's putting in all the hours, get NOTHING for it, often paying out of your own pocket. And if you've got a lead candidate that's been frankly acting like a bit of a flog, then there's no fun. You know what? What on earth would you want to do it for?

DW: The 2008 and the 2005 elections, it was a lot of doorknocking?

XAMON: No, none. Although there was a lot of leafleting, a lot of leafleting, we used to do a lot of it. But not doorknocking. No.

DW: When did that get introduced to the campaign?

XAMON: That really only became a thing in the 2014 by-election.

DW: Right.

XAMON: It really was not ... it really wasn't a thing before then.

DW: And what about the phone banking, phone calling?

XAMON: Same.

DW: So about 2014?

XAMON: Yes round about that time, it was when there was a shift. And obviously the [2014] Senate by-election was a new beast in its entirety.

DW: Right, so that's after Scott [Ludlum], that's when Scott ...

XAMON: So Scott lost his seat in 2013. Don't forget. And then ballots were lost. [laughs] And so there's the infamous lost ballots¹³, which I'm sure someone has in their cupboard somewhere in some dingy hidey hole, and they're just too embarrassed to ever produce them. But nevertheless, that resulted in the [Court of Disputed Returns] decision to have to rerun the entire ballot.

And with that came a specific and focused support from the Australian Greens, which is something we don't obviously ordinarily have because we're all trying to do a campaign simultaneously. And a new approach was tried, and that was the approach [doorknocking and phone banking] that was adopted. I understand that the thinking behind that at the time was to try and replicate the sort of tools which had been, and continue to be, employed successfully in Lower House [Federal] seats such as the seat of Melbourne.

¹³ In the 2013 Federal election nearly 1,400 Senate ballot slips disappeared in Western Australia and a Parliamentary committee found that they "may have literally fallen off the back of a truck". See <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2015-04-15/senate-ballot-boxes-may-have-fallen-off-truck-committee-finds/6395716>

DW: Okay, yeah, you subsequently lost in East Metro [in 2013]?

XAMON: I did. It's a hard seat to win and it's a hard seat to keep.

DW: But you then were successful 2017 ...

XAMON: Yes.

DW: ... in North Metro? Given your whole history of the East Metro area and living there and so on growing up. What made you transfer seats and try and be successful?

[00:54:21] **XAMON:** I'd already moved at that point, and I was living in the North Metropolitan region. But also, I was getting some encouragement to come back. And, there were a number of factors, partly the fact that I'd already moved to North Metro. But also because it's pretty wounding to go back to a seat that you'd already lost. And I wasn't quite sure if I even wanted to run again or not. I only had one term, which was not enough.

I knew that I'd been a good MP and that I'd worked really, really hard. I'd actually made myself quite sick by the end of that, by the end of the 38th Parliament, physically sick because of the sort of the sheer workload that I was taking on, and how hard I was working. So there were a lot of things that came into my considerations.

And so I decided to run for North Metro instead of East Metro, it was interesting, though, because I found out once the close of nominations came through, everyone had just presumed I was going to run for East Metro. The only person who didn't presume it was Tim Clifford, [DW chuckles] because he said to me, 'Alison' - he was going to run for North Metro, and he said to me, 'Alison, are you running for East Metro?' And I said, 'No, I'm not going to run for East Metro. I've decided that I'm going to run for North [Metro]'. He actually ASKED me. And he went 'Oh, I was going to run for North, but in that case I'll run for East'. So he ran for East and he was unopposed.

DW: Very smart man.

XAMON: Very smart man, and people said to me afterwards, 'Oh look I had no idea'. Well why didn't you just ask me. You know. Tim had actually asked me. So. Yes. So he obviously ran and he was successful, which is fantastic. Having said that, I LIVE in North Metro now. As I mentioned early on in this interview, I'd moved around, like I mean I'd lived, obviously, apart from Duncraig, I'd also lived in West Leederville, lived in Mount Hawthorn, you know, lived in a range of areas around the electorate. Trigg. But I live in Highgate now. So this is my home and that's where I'm going to be forever. So, yes.

DW: In your second first speech which wasn't ...

XAMON: My second rant. Yes.

DW: You mentioned that between elections, you immersed yourself in mental health and suicide prevention advocacy.

XAMON: Yes. Yes.

DW: And you are quite open in Hansard talking about your Dad's depression.

XAMON: Yes.

DW: Was that a factor in going into that sector?

XAMON: It was ... it was a key driver. So I was ... my father took his life when I was 11 years-old after unsuccessfully trying to defeat depression. And that impacted on my life immeasurably. And it resulted in 15 years of what I could term lost ... lost life for me. So my own quite serious struggles with mental health issues and suicidality. Hence a lot of the stuff around, you know, disrupted early years in my 20s. And the reality is you recover, but you never, like, really fully recover on this.

I'd already started doing a lot of important work around mental health when I was in Parliament, in the 38th Parliament. I had the [mental health] portfolio and I started really immersing myself in the space. And probably the hardest thing for me when I lost my seat in 2013, apart from the fact that I suddenly found myself unemployed and I still had three dependent children and a mortgage, was this overwhelming sense of unfinished business pertaining to mental health, particularly the work I was doing around mental health, because I'd started to make some serious inroads in terms of parliamentary intervention around the space, legislative as well as policy.

And quite frankly, I was very interested in doing it, but I didn't know what that would mean. And I got approached ... so much of my life is about getting approached. And I got approached by a large NGO who wanted me to be on their board. And then after that, I actually got approached by the WA Association for Mental Health, asking me if I would be their President, which is, of course, the peak body. And so from there, everything just sort of ... there were other roles that came.

I ended up being appointed to the Ministerial Council for Suicide Prevention, and I ended up being appointed as the inaugural co-leader for the statewide Mental Health Network for the Department of Health. And I got elected as a Director of Mental Health Australia. And I got elected as the Deputy Chair of Community Mental Health Australia.

And I just also ended up doing a lot of work around my own area of expertise, which is looking at what happens for children who have been bereaved by suicide. And I ended up doing a lot of public presentations and training and worked advocating to get the first service established, not only in Western Australia, but indeed in Australia. That is a targeted post-vention specialist service for children who have been bereaved by suicide.

DW: A counselling service?

[01:00:03] **XAMON:** So it's a whole range of things. It's about counseling as well as group therapy, as well as education, a whole range of things like that. That's now being auspiced by Anglicare. And, so that was a really important part of the work that I did in between [parliamentary terms], as well as the fact that I was doing... I was still doing legal work.

So the legal work I was doing with was with CASE for Refugees [Centre for Advocacy, Support and Education for Refugees Inc] and also the Mental Health Law Centre. And also I'd been appointed as one of the statutory visitors for the Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services, which had a really interesting overlap with mental health issues, as you can imagine. So again, it was multifaceted roles, a whole bunch of stuff that I was doing.

And probably in terms of my involvement with the party, that was probably the quietest period of my time within the party since 1995. So obviously, I attended all my Regional Group meetings and did all that stock standard stuff that members ideally will do, but didn't take on any key roles or anything like that. I was very much immersed in the mental health and suicide prevention sector.

DW: And you probably wouldn't have had much to prove, going back to [Party] administrative roles or whatever, in terms that you had done all that.

XAMON: Well, actually, what I was very conscious of is that other former Members of Parliament who had done that, had actually cut off a range of options for themselves. So I'm aware, for example, that Giz [Watson], after she lost her seat in 2013, immersed herself in terms of getting very involved with the administration of the Party. And that meant that she was not considered for statutory appointments. Those sorts of things, because people saw her as simply remaining too close [to the Party], whereas I was fortunate enough to be appointed by the Barnett Government to two key statutory roles.

I was still a member, and I didn't pretend I wasn't, and people knew that I was a Green because I'd been a Member of Parliament. But the reality is that those opportunities are not gonna be made available to people who, if they think that you're still so involved with the party that you're simply going to use those independent positions to try to push a party line. And I wasn't going to do that. I can't politicize issues of suicide and mental health. It's too personal.

DW: It's interesting reading your two first speeches, because in the first one, you really do focus on climate change, as a crisis that we're facing in the future, that there's no room for nuclear power anywhere in a post carbon future. And on sustainability ...

XAMON: And I still believe that very strongly.

DW: ... as one of our four pillars ...

XAMON: Yes. Yes, indeed.

DW: ... and sustainable cities and public transport, whereas in the second speech you do really focus on your roles in the mental health sector after leaving Parliament and the importance of that.

XAMON: Because can I say, because what I was really conscious of is that having worked in the sector for that four-year period, I was so conscious of how much the voice around for that sector didn't exist within the 39th Parliament. It didn't exist, yes we had a couple of really strong ministers but they were obviously government. But in terms of talking about it and challenging it from ANY opposition party ... crickets.

So I know that when I got elected and ran again I got a lot of support from people in the mental health sector. And one of the things they said was, we are so pleased to have a voice back in Parliament that's going to talk about mental health. And I know there was a great hope in that from people that I'd been working with that mattered to me, and still do, that I would put that at the forefront. And so I did that and did that unashamedly and I know that it was a bit of a brain dump of all the things that are wrong in the world. But believe me,

I could have gone for another couple of hours on that stuff. I was time limited, unfortunately.

DW: Well it's great you had the passion. But the other difference, it seems in terms of your two terms in Parliament, were the colleagues you're dealing with. So first term you had Giz, Lynn [MacLaren], and ...

XAMON: Yeah. Yes and Robin [Chapple].

DW: And then second time round only Robin's there and you've got Tim [Clifford] and Di [Evers].

XAMON: Yes. I also like to point out in that first term I also had Adele Carles¹⁴.

DW: Right, sorry ... in the Lower House.

XAMON: Just to let you know you can't take that away from me because that was a very significant part of the 38th Parliament. I can assure you I'll never forget it.

DW: Yes, I would imagine that. You know, Giz was very experienced, Robin was very experienced ...

[01:04:32] **XAMON:** Oh, Giz was so amazing, I was so lucky because obviously I had known Giz at that point for a very long time. But Giz and I shared a parliamentary office and we also sat next to each other in Parliament and we did lots, we had a very similar style in terms of our staffing arrangements. We employed quite heavy research and policy expertise, legislative capacity. We both took the Parliament itself and the actions of Parliament really seriously. I am going to be ETERNALLY grateful that in my first term of Parliament, I was able to be guided by Giz. It really was absolutely invaluable. No ego from her, just very generous with her time.

I mean, I was a quick learner, too. Like, I know that I wasn't an idiot and I tried really hard and I would take counsel. And so hopefully she would also go, yep. You know, she did say to me once, she described me as being like a duck to water with this, with the work, which was very kind of her. But I think what she had done is understated, just how much I'd learned from her and watching her, even on the first day because I didn't know anything. I'd never worked in a Greens parliamentary office before. I was one of the few people. Lynn had worked as an electorate officer. So had Robin, but I didn't come from that world. I came from the regular world of employment.

And I remember the first day when Question Time came and I'm standing next to her [Giz] and she goes, 'Stand up, stand up'. So I stood up, and I said, 'Okay, what was that for?' And she goes, 'Oh, that's so he [the Council's President] knows you've got a question'. I said, 'I don't have a question'. [both laugh] And she went, 'Oh!' And I went, 'I didn't know I could do that'. She goes 'Yep'.

So she quietly crept up to Barry House, who was the President, and whispered and said 'Alison didn't realise and she doesn't have a question'. And he looked over at me and he

¹⁴ Former Greens member for Fremantle in the Legislative Assembly in 2009, who resigned and then sat as an independent. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/32e457f9ba7d7c5148257b5500242416/536156440659a6b348257c1a00141c08/\\$FILE/Chapter%2077.%20Adele%20Carles%20Making%20a%20Difference.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/parliament/library/MPHistoricalData.nsf/32e457f9ba7d7c5148257b5500242416/536156440659a6b348257c1a00141c08/$FILE/Chapter%2077.%20Adele%20Carles%20Making%20a%20Difference.pdf)

smiled and he nodded. And that was fine. He didn't call on me, so he spared me the embarrassment of standing up and going, 'I don't have a question'. I had a question the next day and have had questions ever since. More than you can poke a stick at.

But, you know, it's those sorts of things that you remember because I didn't know, there's not a manual for doing this job. And the only reason that others can do it is if they actually come through as political operatives working from other offices. So ...

DW: And they are very particular processes ...

XAMON: Yes, absolutely.

DW: ... and the Chambers have different processes between them?

XAMON: And the Chambers have different processes as well. Although I'm happy to say, I've only ever been in the [Legislative] Council, I look at the way the Legislative Assembly operates. It's a complete mystery. I can't say that they do anything productive whatsoever, but I'm very familiar with my Council proceedings, and so I'm comfortable in that zone.

DW: In both Parliaments, the four of you, did you operate jointly? Did you meet regularly and discuss tactics?

XAMON: Ah look, they've operated quite differently. So with the first Parliament we used to have ... obviously it was deeply disrupted by the resignation of Adele Carles following revelations of her affair with the Liberal Treasurer. But, that did actually serve, once she left, to bring us together because we'd been through hell. And yes, there was some ... Giz and I certainly had a huge amount of overlap with our work and we would work collaboratively on stuff, but not so much with the others. I think a lot of that depends on personalities.

In this Parliament, I've taken on a disproportionate workload this time ...

DW: In terms of portfolios?

XAMON: Both in terms of portfolios and also in terms of legislation. And of course, I'm leading the Party as well, just as Giz did before. And that's additional work as well. And we get together to discuss the business of the day and obviously ... look, I say on leader, it's small 'l', it's a facilitative leadership. There's no actual directive leadership. So I work with the team to make sure we've got a consensus on how we're going to proceed on things like Bills and processes and those sorts of things. But I don't have any power. I don't make those decisions.

DW: Do you get extra resources?

XAMON: No. No. It's just more work.

DW: You became [Parliamentary] Leader in February 2017. How -

[01:09:39] **XAMON:** Yeah, can I say it really is small 'l', it really is small 'l' leader. I've just got to stress that.

DW: I know ...

XAMON: I actually ordinarily would call myself the Whip because it's almost, because a lot of what I do is more, it's more, it's really ...

DW: Organising?

XAMON: Yes, it really is. Like I say, it's a facilitative leadership only. It's really just about coordinating the team. There are statutory responsibilities, which is why I'm called the Parliamentary Leader. So, for example, I participate in the business meetings of the Parliament. It means that I am co-opted on occasion to the Procedural and Privileges Committee, too, for particular matters. And it also means that we ... that I'm consulted when the Premier is required to consult with the leaders of all parties on certain statutory matters, [such as the] appointment of the Electoral Commissioner. You know, those sorts of things. And that's happened several times during this Parliament.

But beyond that, really, it's just a bit of me just Whipping the team is, is all it is. When it comes to being a spokesperson, I am a spokesperson for my portfolios and my portfolios only. My colleagues are the spokespeople for [theirs]. I do not direct their work. I don't play that role. So I really do want to stress that, and the reason I suppose I want to emphasize it as well is because I think it's a good style of leadership. I actually prefer it to the top-down approach party room that exists at the Federal level. I think it's more respectful, but it also means that when I get called party leader by *The West* [newspaper], for example, I always get a little bit twitchy because, even though it is actually accurate, I am the Parliamentary Leader and that's obviously reflected on the parliamentary website and had to be formalized by the party, it doesn't bring with it all the connotations that other people would think that it brings as Parliamentary Leader. It just means more work. [laughs]

DW: Can I go back to that meeting that, where you were elected as ...

XAMON: Yeah, yes.

DW: ... leader? How did that happen? Did you just say, well ...

XAMON: No, well, because the role is limited ...

DW: Right.

XAMON: ... and required basically at the time, Scott was there and Rachel was there as well. It was as simple as saying, well, look, the urgency to get that appointed was because we needed to have the Parliamentary Leader to be able to negotiate membership of committees. So that was prior to the term commencing. So basically, it was just done by agreement, by consensus. So 'Alison can do it'. And that's all it was. And because it isn't a big deal, and that's one of the reasons why it bothers me if people turn it into a big deal, because really, I'm just there to make sure ... You have to have one person that does the work. It used to be Giz, and now it's me.

DW: In terms of this second term, obviously you're very experienced. So did you help use that experience to help Tim Clifford and Di Evers in becoming new MPs?

XAMON: Well, people don't necessarily want that. I mean, I think Tim has wanted that guidance more than Diane necessarily has wanted to. So it's not up to me to impose on my colleagues. Diane shares an office with Robin and sits next to Robin in Parliament. I

obviously share an office with Tim. Not that I'm ever there. I'm always in the Chamber. So really, practically speaking, it's been more ... I suppose I've had more to do with Tim. But if they ever need my help on anything, or want my help with anything it's always there, and they know that.

DW: In terms of your activities in your first term of Parliament, you introduced four Bills, which allows you a chance to get up and speak to them, obviously they're not going to get passed ...

XAMON: I thought there was five, actually, but anyway.

DW: I could very well have it wrong. *The Perth Hills Planning Bill*¹⁵ ...

XAMON: Yep. *Industrial Manslaughter, Pay Equity*. And there would have been ...

DW: The *Criminal Code Amendment Bill*.

XAMON: *Access to Ministers*, and then there was a sixth one as well, which was on the cards, which was actually one that I was trying to negotiate with the Nats [National Party] around party status. But anyway. Yes.

DW: So you're very active as a new member, getting up and using the processes of parliament to put your issues on the agenda ...

XAMON: Yes, that's what it's for. I am one of 36 people, 35 once you take the President out, who has that platform. And as far as I'm concerned, if I'm not prepared to use that platform to its full capacity, then I should get the hell out. So I'm very clear that it is an extraordinary privilege to be a Member of Parliament, and even a greater privilege to be a Greens Member of Parliament. And I have an obligation to the Greens Party, to my Greens membership, and my Greens voters and to the broader left and to the broader progressive movement to try to maximize that opportunity. So, yes, I do work really hard.

DW: Those Bills, five or six ...

XAMON: Yes.

DW: Where did they originate from, were they things that somebody came to you and said, 'We need a bill about these' ...

[01:14:26] **XAMON:** One of the Bills was... one of the Bills that I inherited was a great body of work that had come from Paul Llewellyn¹⁶. And that was the *Water Conservation Bill* that had been put together by a marvelous, marvelous mind, Michael Bennett, who had also previously been the solicitor for the EDO [Environmental Defenders Office]. And so I inherited that Bill, I was more than happy to reintroduce it because it was a good piece of legislation. So that one.

¹⁵ *Perth Hills Planning Bill 2010*. See

[https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/c4189b6e204be427482577900025b5a7/\\$FILE/C38+S1+20100520+p3015b-3017a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/c4189b6e204be427482577900025b5a7/$FILE/C38+S1+20100520+p3015b-3017a.pdf)

¹⁶ Former Greens MLC for the South West region between 2005-09. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Paul_Llewellyn

But other than that: *Industrial Manslaughter*¹⁷, obviously, I'd come from the union movement. I had dealt with too many people who were experiencing the trauma of having lost loved ones in circumstances where basically people should have gone to prison. I continue to this day to remain enraged at the fact that people who die ... If you want to, basically, if you want to kill someone, David, knock them off at work because there'll be no penalties. So *Industrial Manslaughter* was very much a Bill from the heart. And also that version of the *Industrial Manslaughter Bill*, because I've subsequently reintroduced it, and also included a whole range of desired amendments to the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*¹⁸.

Same with *Pay Equity*¹⁹. I'd been the Women's Industrial Organizer at the State School Teachers Union. So pay equity was, has been a particular concern of mine. I reintroduced that this term of Parliament.

There was one that I introduced that was around mental health and to try to put a defence in relation to assault of a public officer for people who were clearly psychotic at the time that the offence was committed.

*Access to Ministers*²⁰, which is one I've reintroduced as well, which needs to be law.

DW: Has to, yes.

XAMON: And which ...

DW: Are they the same Bill?

XAMON: Yes. And that's one which I designed. Yep, that one is the same Bill because the same problem still is there. And that is, just as the Barnett Government had what they termed the Leaders' Forum and used to charge \$25,000 or something like that to get, usually industry leaders, to sit down and have a one-on-one private chat with the Minister of their choice, and the Labor Party at the time used to slag them off about that, how terrible it is.

Well, the Labor Party does that now. So they're both as bad as each other. It needs to be outlawed. People shouldn't be allowed to buy their way to Ministers to have private chats, particularly when Ministers are given extraordinary powers around a whole range of discretion and decision-making processes. So that, that was despicable.

I've obviously introduced two other Bills this time as well around ticket [voting] reform²¹ and religious exemptions²² [to Equal Opportunity laws]. But yes, so like I say, the party status

¹⁷ *Criminal Code Amendment (Industrial Manslaughter) Bill 2017*. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/dc30b495bf56da66482581b800115b05/\\$FILE/C40+S1+20170615+p942b-943a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/dc30b495bf56da66482581b800115b05/$FILE/C40+S1+20170615+p942b-943a.pdf)

¹⁸ *Occupational Safety and Health Amendment Bill 2010*. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/b3eef20e3005cbf0482577910013d4d3/\\$FILE/C38+S1+20100701+p4838b-4840a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/b3eef20e3005cbf0482577910013d4d3/$FILE/C38+S1+20100701+p4838b-4840a.pdf)

¹⁹ *Industrial Relations (Equal Remuneration) Amendment Bill 2011*. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/7f7be95e96f8beb048257933001a1d50/\\$FILE/C38+S1+20111020+p8425c-8428a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/7f7be95e96f8beb048257933001a1d50/$FILE/C38+S1+20111020+p8425c-8428a.pdf)

²⁰ *Electoral Amendment (Access to Ministers) Bill 2017*. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/b7bd5aa2c2dfb8ab4825819800253ff4/\\$FILE/C40+S1+20170907+p3495d-3496a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/b7bd5aa2c2dfb8ab4825819800253ff4/$FILE/C40+S1+20170907+p3495d-3496a.pdf)

²¹ *Electoral Amendment (Ticket Voting and Associated Reforms) Bill 2019*. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/9c9cb27f706914b8482583de001e6950/\\$FILE/C40+S1+20190321+p1620d-1621a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/9c9cb27f706914b8482583de001e6950/$FILE/C40+S1+20190321+p1620d-1621a.pdf)

one was trying to address the chronic under-resourcing of the Greens, even though we have on average, about 10% of the overall State vote. So, yes.

DW: In terms of your terms, you've got a year to run.

XAMON: I do.

DW: And you're currently ... the Upper House is currently debating the *Industrial Manslaughter Bill* that the Government ...

XAMON: Yes. They're, they ...

DW: How different are they exactly?

XAMON: Well, mine's actually in the Criminal Code. So my Bill actually makes it clear that industrial manslaughter can be prosecuted under the Criminal Code. And it brings with it all the usual defences and all the processes that come with, you know, prosecuting procedures under that Code. This [Government's] one is under the *Occupational Health and Safety Act*, slightly different. It's quite controversial. I'll still support it.

But my Bill is better [laughs] and that's okay. That's fine. I'm pleased to see some progress. I'm also pleased that behind the scenes, even though there's no public credit for it, I've had a number of unions say, 'Thank you, Alison. It's been the fact that you've kept shaming the ALP on this and pushing them on this, that they've needed to introduce industrial manslaughter legislation'. Still don't know if it'll get up. I would be unsurprised to discover that those bits get extracted from the overall *Occupational Health and Safety Bill* and we end up not having it at all, in which case my Bill still stands.

DW: Yes, the farmers don't seem to be that interested.

XAMON: Whatever, blah, blah. Yep.

DW: In terms of your other activities, you did mention, getting up and asking Questions Without Notice in the House. And there's obviously questions on those. And in the first term, you had over 827, I counted, Questions On Notice. A lot of work, 500 this term, about 500 Questions Without Notice.

XAMON: 500, and I've still got it's only, I've still got a year to go.

DW: Yep, yes. But how much work does that involve in your day to day life?

XAMON: A lot of work. Well, a lot of work because those questions don't come from nowhere. Those questions are either because we're engaging with stakeholders directly. But a lot of the time it's because we're doing a body of work and having to drill down to try to get the answers. I know, for example, that an awful lot of the work ... those questions that I asked in the first term pertain directly to my water portfolio. But I tell you if you wanna talk about opaque government departments, let's talk about the Department of Water.

²² *Equal Opportunity (LGBTIQ Anti-Discrimination) Amendment Bill 2018*. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/b2b45a7e170d05c04825830b001085d3/\\$FILE/C40+S1+20180628+p4065b-4067a.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Hansard/hansard.nsf/0/b2b45a7e170d05c04825830b001085d3/$FILE/C40+S1+20180628+p4065b-4067a.pdf)

But also particularly fracking, because that time was the early days of the fracking industry within Western Australia. My office was the first and only office that started looking into the risks associated with fracking here. And I needed to get a strong handle on what was actually happening, what was being proposed. So a lot of the questions are about that. It was a huge body of work, really important. I'm glad we did it. Again, it stopped in 2013 [election loss]. But by then, other groups like Lock the Gate had been established and they started taking that [information].

But I do remember when I lost my seat, they had a farewell thing, a thank you thing. And I remember, Piers Verstegen, who's obviously the head of the Cons Council [Conservation Council of Western Australia] coming along to that and speaking and saying, 'Alison, I just want to thank you for the fracking work'. He goes, 'I don't know who's gonna pick that work up now that you've gone'?

DW: I think they've run a bit of a campaign in the last ...

[01:20:16] **XAMON:** Yes, a few. But, there was a level of detail that we were able to pursue in the parliamentary office. And I will say I was very blessed because I had volunteers who were coming in every single week for two years who would sit down and actually do that analysis and do that work and helped pull together those questions. And a lot of it was just following, you know, following the trails and saying, 'What is actually happening here, what's being proposed with the industry'? Because it is.. it was and is a very secretive industry.

DW: With that volume of questions, both on notice and without ...

XAMON: Yep.

DW: ... does your staff keep track of what you asked three years ago, what was the answer, what it might ask now?

XAMON: Yes, of course they do, because they're all part of broader campaigns. The only exception would be if we're asked by stakeholders to just put some questions in, which does happen periodically as well, in which case we do that and we handball it back to them and we go, 'There you go. Here's your answer'. They go 'Thank you very much'. Because that's part of it. It's also recognizing that when you're dealing with stakeholders, that sometimes you're their only portal into that process. And trying to get an answer out of a Minister on the record, where in theory they're not allowed to lie can be quite beneficial for them.

DW: And what about whistleblowers, they come to you, 'This is happening in this department' ...

XAMON: Yes. Whistleblowers are always harder because sometimes the act of asking the questions can run the risk of inadvertently exposing the whistleblower. But yes, some of the questions we've asked have been as a direct result [of them]. Got to say, and some of the questions we have asked on behalf of so-called whistleblowers have just been a nonsense. You know, that, people come to you with all sorts of conspiracy theories and the like, and they're just really in their own head. But, you know, that's part and parcel of it, isn't it?

As long as you don't take on board what they're saying as though it's fact and you're prepared to critique it. I mean, that's what's helpful about being a lawyer, is that you automatically go to, 'Okay, nice, nice theory, where's the evidence?' So, you have to be quite careful in this game. I've seen other Members of Parliament, including this term of Parliament, who've allowed themselves to be ... I'm thinking one other member from another party in particular, that I'm thinking of at the moment, who's allowed themselves to be quite seriously led by the nose on some stuff ... and it can be very dangerous. It hurts your reputation. So you've got to be careful.

DW: You remember a certain Malcolm Turnbull and 'Ute Gate'²³, for example, badly dented his reputation. The other activity for politicians that takes up a lot of time that's quite important is committee work.

XAMON: Yes.

DW: And you've been involved in a number of committees over both terms?

XAMON: I have.

DW: Was there any particular inquiry that stands out as one that you ...?

XAMON: Easily, yeah, the one that I Chaired, the Parliamentary Inquiry Into Alternative Approaches to ..., oh, here it is.

DW: 'Help not Handcuffs'.

XAMON: Yes, 'Help not Handcuffs: Evidence based approaches to reducing harm from illicit drug use'²⁴. That's a labor of love for me, because obviously coming from that mental health and suicide prevention background, there is a serious overlap with the alcohol and other drug sector, which I'm very passionate about. And that felt like a really important body of work. It's one that I know I can use as a resource and we'll be coming back to over and over again. So that, in terms of committee experiences without a shadow of a doubt, that is the one that to date is the most important for me and was a really thoroughly enjoyable experience. And also I loved my fellow committee members. All of them. It was a really important inquiry.

The Elder Abuse one was also very interesting, bit harrowing, but that was excellently chaired by the Honorable Nick Goiran²⁵. You know ...

DW: You were the Deputy Chair?

[01:25:01] **XAMON:** I was the Deputy Chair of that, but not that I ever had to chair that meeting because he attended every single meeting, as did I. But that was interesting. Of

²³ A 2009 controversy in Federal politics revolving around allegations made by then-Federal Leader of the Opposition Malcolm Turnbull that the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, had acted improperly on behalf of a Queensland car dealer. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utegate>

²⁴ Final Report of the Select Committee into Alternate Approaches to Reducing Illicit Drug Use and its Effects on the Community, November 2019. See [https://parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/76DC63572B331E7F482584BE00219B5F/\\$file/id.alt.191111.rpf.final.xx%20web.pdf](https://parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/76DC63572B331E7F482584BE00219B5F/$file/id.alt.191111.rpf.final.xx%20web.pdf)

²⁵ 'I Never Thought It Would Happen to Me': When Trust Is Broken, Final Report of the Select Committee into Elder Abuse, September 2018. See [https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/\(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID\)/5D4DB8F8EB0A444848258307000F6874/\\$file/el.eld.180830.rpf.000.xx.web.pdf](https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/commit.nsf/(Report+Lookup+by+Com+ID)/5D4DB8F8EB0A444848258307000F6874/$file/el.eld.180830.rpf.000.xx.web.pdf)

course, now I'm doing the inquiry into the provision of palliative care services within Western Australia at the moment. So three select committees this term of Parliament alone, as well as on the Joint Standing Committee overseeing the CCC [Crime and Corruption Commission], which has been a highly controversial committee, but very, very interesting. We're completing an inquiry at the moment into the CCC's handling of police complaints of excessive force. We've just had some public hearings last week. So ...

DW: In terms of palliative care, that's another, liked elder abuse, an emerging issue that affects a lot of Western ...

XAMON: Absolutely ...

DW: ... Australians and their families.

XAMON: Oh, absolutely. Well, you know what? A good portion of us are going to die slowly and possibly in pain. So I think that it's quite important. And that, of course, emerged as one of the undertakings of government following the passage of the euthanasia laws, the voluntary assisted dying laws.

DW: Yes, in terms of that committee work, what proportion of your daily life in Parliament does that take up?

XAMON: When Parliament's sitting, none. But overall, a HUGE proportion of my time. And it's a problem because I find that some of the most interesting part ... it's an interesting part of the job, but of course it's hidden work. Not only is the actual activity itself, with the exception of public hearings, subject to confidentiality. So people, you know, can't see what it is you're actually doing. But it takes up a lot of time. There's no media scrutiny, there's no opportunity. Nothing like that. So it takes up hours and hours and hours of time.

But at the same, that's not recognized. And at the same time, it's really, really valuable. My colleague, Senator Rachel Siewert, colleague and dear friend, is very similar to me in that she also values that committee work highly. Giz Watson used to also really value it. But in terms of public profile for the party, there's no benefit. So that's always the challenge, really, isn't it?

DW: In terms of your time in Parliament over the last term, and almost the whole term this time, what do you think's been the thing that you've contributed most to the debate? A report ...

XAMON: There is no one thing. I can't. I mean ...

DW: Is there something you're most proud of?

XAMON: I mean, I've got 23 portfolios now. And you can't have that many portfolios and participate in 80% of the parliamentary debates on legislation, and then sort of point to one thing. So I get asked that question. But that is a question for someone who has not done much. I've covered too much. I could point to a range of things that I've done that I look back and go, that's actually important and meaningful work. But if I, in a sheer state of exhaustion, what I would look back probably on this term of Parliament, apart from the committee report, is I'd look back and I'd go, 'Well, I think that my contribution to the debates in Parliament have been very good'. I know I've moved countless amendments to countless Bills that have been passed that have improved legislation, that have mitigated

the worst effects of some legislation, that ... And I've been able to achieve that because I've convinced a majority in the Parliament to support the position I've got.

Bearing in mind there is only four of us and we do not have the balance of power in our own right. So, I think that I take legislation really seriously, bearing in mind that our lives are governed by legislation. Legislation governs our lives, and I think it's important to get it right. So I've tried to instill Greens values into legislation, and amend it, and improve it as much as I possibly can. Much to the chagrin of the Government, I don't care. If they didn't craft their legislation so poorly, I wouldn't have to amend it. But that's been something that I'm really pleased with.

I know I've got a good reputation in the Parliament for the work that I do there, which is also why people support me. Like, if I was obviously putting up stuff that was stupid, no one would, then people would just vote it down and then that'd be the end of it. But I'm supported and it means that I'm consulted widely as well on stuff that occurs. And that's something that I think is good. Yes.

DW: What's the hardest part?

XAMON: The workload.

DW: The workload,

XAMON: The workload!

DW: Parliamentary involvement... the committees... just overall?

[01:30:07] **XAMON:** Overall, the workload. I'm still a Mum of three. Two of my children now are still dependent. My youngest is going blind. I've got, you know, I've still got a personal life. You know, I've still got a family. I've still got a husband that ... I still would like to see my family occasionally. I'd like to see my friends. But, so the workload, the sheer load ... you can't carry this amount of workload.

I'm very blessed with my staff. I've got some of the same staff that I started with in the 38th Parliament and have been with me the whole time I've been in Parliament. And they, when I lost my seat in 2013, they ... one of them moved over to New South Wales and another one became permanent in the public service. And when I got re-elected, they both quit their jobs and came back to work for me again. And I'm really lucky to have that. So we also know that ...

DW: Can you mention their names?

XAMON: It's Kirsten Richards, who's my electorate officer, and Jocasta Sibbel, who is one of my research officers. And they have been the backbone of the Xamon office from the very, very beginning and remain so. And deeply competent, highly, highly capable, very loyal. And have been ... I know both of them have served in a quite critical role in terms of supporting other staff in other offices as well. Very lucky.

I mean, the reality is I couldn't do this job on my own. It's just insane. Anyone who thinks that I would be able to, I'm not a one woman show. I've got a group of very capable people who are behind me as well. I'm just very lucky that I keep them. [laughs] So that's good.

DW: One of the hardest parts must be late sitting hours, because the Parliament does sit late?

XAMON: We do, yes. Late sitting hours suck. But they were worse in the 38th Parliament because we used to sit until 10.30[pm] on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. Now we only sit until 10.30[pm] on Tuesdays. Very family unfriendly, very bad in terms of maintaining good physical and mental health. They're terrible. I'm not going ... there's nothing I can say in favour of them. I think it leads to poor decision making. It's premised on an old model which presumed that, you know, we have regional members who are coming in off the farm, which is a load of crap, and also that they were all men with women at home who were looking after the kids. Dumb.

DW: So the changes between the last term you were here and this term in terms of not sitting late one of those nights ...

XAMON: Mmm.

DW: ... was that driven by female members or ...?

XAMON: Allegedly, because it changed in the 39th Parliament. Allegedly, it was driven by [them], in an effort to create more family friendly hours. Yeah, but you know what, it's just the tip of the iceberg. Like I say, it's just dumb. We could easily sit the hours that we sit, but within more reasonable ... just a more reasonable span of hours. But we don't because, tradition. Bleah, bleah, bleah, bleah. Whatever. But it was hard. It was hard in the first term because when I first took my seat, Blake, my youngest, was three. That's pretty young. And he was still wearing nappies at night. So, yeah, not good.

DW: Turning your thoughts now to the Greens and the future. At the moment we've got four members of the Upper House and two Senators. Is that it or can it get better, in time?

XAMON: We're going to need electoral reform.

DW: Electoral reform?

XAMON: Of course, we need electoral reform. We need to have one vote, one value, and we need to actually get rid of ...

DW: In WA?

XAMON: Yes, and we need to get rid of ticket voting²⁶. And until we have both of those reforms, the numbers are really clear. We will always be in the cycle of no more than four [MLC seats] and quite possibly none.

DW: Right.

XAMON: So it's just the way it's going to be. Whereas because we've had ticket reform at the Senate level, we've got a good chance of always having at least one Senator.

²⁶ The introduction of ticket voting led to the establishment of a multitude of minor parties and the creation of preference deals between them, enabling one or more candidates within the group to receive sufficient preferences to achieve the requisite quota for election, especially in multi-member electoral divisions such as the Upper House in WA. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Group_voting_ticket

DW: If we had that reform, how many members of the Upper House could [the Greens] get elected?

XAMON: Six.

DW: Six. And what about in the Lower House? Is any chance of regaining ...?

XAMON: Not on the current numbers. I mean, I always hope that, obviously the Lower House is the Holy Grail. I'd love to be able to do that. But we had a Lower House member and we blew it ... through a poor choice. So, yes, I think that people still have memories around that. We'll see.

DW: In terms of your involvement over time, obviously in 1990, you've got landline ...

XAMON: 31 years.

DW: Yeah. Landline phones, Gestetner machines²⁷, faxes and now you have ...

XAMON: I know.

DW: Mobile phones.

XAMON: Hilarious.

DW: In terms of the operations of the Party, what do you see as the really big change from then until now?

XAMON: Well, obviously, social media has changed things dramatically and I mean with the Internet. When I first started, the great innovation was the use of magic tape. So we ...

DW: I haven't heard that before, so ...

[01:35:16] **XAMON:** So magic tape. So when we used to put together newsletters and fliers and all that sort of stuff, you'd buy something called magic tape. And the thing that ... the reason that made magic tape magic was that it was ... you could put it through a photocopier [laughs] and it wouldn't reflect²⁸. So that was the most technologically advanced activist tool that we utilized at the time.

But since then, yes, we've seen obviously the Internet come on board and I've seen the way that discussions have gone from email to Loomio²⁹ to all that. So, I mean, it's a world away, really, isn't it?

DW: It is, and we've seen in recent years the rise of Extinction Rebellion³⁰, that younger generation getting active about climate.

²⁷ A small duplicating machine named after its inventor, David Gestetner. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gestetner>

²⁸ Still available in 2020! See <https://www.officeworks.com.au/shop/officeworks/p/scotch-magic-810-invisible-adhesive-tape-19mm-x-33m-3m0285270>

²⁹ Loomio is a software product used by the Greens (WA) to make it easier for members to collaborate and make decisions without meeting in person. See https://help.loomio.org/en/guides/western_australian_greens_case_study/

³⁰ A global environmental movement established in the UK in May 2018 with the aim of using nonviolent civil disobedience to compel government action to avoid tipping points in the climate system, biodiversity loss, and the risk of social and ecological collapse. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extinction_Rebellion

XAMON: The younger generation was always active around climate. I joined at the age of 20 years because I was concerned about global warming and we had a really strong young contingent. Even in those days. And the interesting thing was that in THOSE days, people used to say, 'Oh, why don't you form the Young Greens?' And we actively resisted it because the view we took was that we didn't want to be 'othered' into being the young Greens. Like I was 20 years old. I wanted to be mentored through the Party. And I wanted to be taken seriously as a member.

And I think that was hugely to my advantage because it meant that I was able to learn from some of the older, particularly women members, who did mentor me through that, through the way that the party was operating, and that was good. The other thing is, I think it helped in those days, quite frankly, that we were so active in student politics because it meant the degree to which we wanted to act like, you know, we wanted to exercise some of our more confrontational, or I don't know, belligerent leanings they were sort of, they'd play out within the student guilds rather than internally within the party. So it's almost as though the party was where we went to be serious, and the student politics was where we went to be silly.

DW: An interesting insight, so doing silly things at university ...

XAMON: So yes, and in fact, one of the roles that I held back in the '90s was I was the first [Greens] Campus Liaison Officer. So that was a role that was established by Reps Council and I was appointed to that. And my job was to liaise between Reps Council and the various campus groups of Greens groups. We had quite an active little bunch of student activists who were involved on the various [campuses], at ECU, at Curtin and UWA and Murdoch, but particularly Murdoch because Murdoch ... So, yes, that was one of the roles I held as well.

DW: In terms of social media, that's going to be important probably this next [State] election in March 2021 with COVID³¹, you know the whole idea of getting people together physically, and meeting ...

XAMON: Well, you know what? That's the crystal ball, isn't it? Where I don't know at the time of giving this interview ... we don't know what's gonna be coming in terms of the second or third waves of COVID. So yeah, it's the great unknown.

DW: In terms of your 30 year involvement, it is the 30th anniversary this year of the formation of the Greens (WA). What do you think has made you the most proud of your involvement over that time?

XAMON: Sticking with the Party. I've been approached by, particularly the Labor Party, in the past to actually run for them in, even for winnable seats. And, you know, it's always tempting, but I've always just gone, 'No'. Actually, you know, sometimes it would be easier to be a Member of Parliament in a party that, you know, is going to be part of government, that you get opportunities in other parties to be ministers and a range of things like that. But at the end of the day, I have to be able to live with myself.

And I believe in what the Greens are trying to do too much. I like the fact that I never have to compromise on what I believe. I NEVER have to compromise. I believe in human rights for refugees. And I don't have to stand there with a massive lump in my throat trying to

³¹ A global pandemic caused by the transmission of severe acute respiratory syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/COVID-19_pandemic

justify how you can detain people for years and years. I like the fact that I can speak the truth about climate change and about the role of industry. I like the fact that I can call out the way that corporate interests interfere with our electoral process. And I don't have to sit there and pretend that it's all okay.

So, I think it's not easy being a Green in many ways, not least of which because every election I could lose my seat. And frankly, being suddenly rendered unemployed is pretty crap. But at least I can always say that I have been true to what it is I believe and to my values.

The Greens have changed a lot, immeasurably in 30 years ...

DW: And grown too ...

[01:40:45] **XAMON:** ... and grown so much, just have changed enormously. I think some things are better. I think we've lost a lot, though, which is really sad.

DW: Like what?

XAMON: I think we're far less committed to grassroots democracy. I've seen the rise of factionalism and I've seen the rise of stacking, and I hate that. And I see that sometimes there are certain people that are still pretty committed to that, too, engaging in that sort of behavior. I've never been a member of a faction. I've never done that. So ...

DW: Is that in the Greens (WA) party?

XAMON: Yes. Absolutely ...

DW: Or Australian Greens?

XAMON: No, Greens (WA). It happens. It happens in other states too. And I think that is most unfortunate. And I wish we could get better at calling it out, and I wish we could get better at protecting the party from those things. But I think that in our haste to corporatise a lot of our operations, I think we can lose a lot of what actually are our strengths. So let's see. See what the future holds.

But the Greens are a global movement. That's the thing that I always take comfort from. Last year I was over in the UK to do some stuff actually with the CPA, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association and, you know, being able to connect with Greens that are over there. And it's just like no, we're all part of this, we're all part of the same thing, we're all part of the same movement. It's pretty powerful, to be perfectly honest. Like I can meet with MPs from the Greens parties in other countries and already know that I'm meeting with a kindred spirit. Yeah, that's extraordinary.

DW: The same sort of values?

XAMON: Yes, absolutely. So, yes.

DW: So what's it meant to you personally to have that 30 years involvement with the Greens?

XAMON: Umm, mixed. I mean, obviously I'm proud of being one of the only members that was here at the beginning that's still incredibly active. I think that's really important we learn from the history of our party and we don't ignore the lessons of what the party's been through. And I feel like sometimes I'm a bit of a broken record, particularly at my local, at my Regional Group meeting, trying to remind people that a lot of what we have has come about through learning hard lessons internally within the party. But. Yeah. I don't know.

DW: Well, your family's obviously grown up in that time.

XAMON: Yes. And, like I say, Luke my husband, he's the National and the State preference negotiator for the Party and has been for a very, very long time ... he has played the key role. He is the person who orchestrated and created the first national preference strategy and has been the person who has been asked to come back to run it election after election, and also gets asked to do other state preferences in other states as well. He gets called over to assist with those. And he's paid a price for that because he's still a union official and he's a known Green. And he would be an Industrial Relations Commissioner now if it was not for his involvement with the party.

But my daughter, who has grown up in the Greens, is a member of the party as well. And my son, who's 16 joined the party as well. But he's joined the party because he got involved with the school strike for climate movement and he's quite funny because it's only been, he's 16 and bearing in mind that, you know, I've been in the Greens his whole life, he's been at all the meetings. He's just always been there. But it's only this year that he's been saying 'So, Mum, what do you do in Parliament again?'

So he's very funny because he's just starting to become very interested in what I do for a living and wanting to know about how it works and those sorts of things. So, it's funny because I think of my kids, of course, have just grown up and Mum's just had a job. And is going to yet another Greens meeting. And it doesn't really mean anything. You know, it's just part of the furniture and really largely indifferent, and now. But my daughter she said to me recently, she said she's really proud of me. And that was really nice, because I've got to say, I think she was pretty nonplused about the whole thing there for a while.

DW: So that's Miette?

[01:45:23] **XAMON:** Yes, that's Miette. Yes, my daughter, she's a beautiful woman.

DW: Alison, we've covered a wide range. It's been fantastic talking to you. Is there anything we've missed that you'd like to add onto the record before we finish the interview?

XAMON: Aah, apart from the fact that I think you should interview my husband, because I think you'd find that he's got a lot to say from a really interesting perspective, both at a National level and a State level. I suppose it is reiterating that we've come a long way as a party. It's been a very, very interesting journey. But I think it's really important that we don't lose those parts of our party that have always made us very precious and very special. Both in terms of policies, so let's not chuck out our nuclear policy, for example, because it's absolutely cool. I'm not interested in being a member of any party that becomes pro-nuke.

But also it's about making sure that we recognize that our processes are not cumbersome. They're precious and there for a good reason and have served us as the backbone for how our party has operated for a very long time. And I'm hoping that we can start to

fiercely call out and speak out against those practices which are terribly tempting if you are a member of a political party, such as factionalism, such as crunching the numbers, all those sorts of things. And recognize that in the long term, you might get some short-term outcomes that might serve your interests. But long term, it's devastating for a party. And I certainly hope that we can make sure that that's not a path we go down. Because I've seen how it serves other parties, most notably the Labor Party, and it's bad news.

We need the Greens desperately, and we need the Greens to be as strong as they can be. And our processes have actually been the way that we've achieved longevity.

DW: Fantastic. Thanks very much, not only for the interview, but your contribution over the last 30 years. As you say, there are not that many people still active who were there in January 1990. Thanks Alison.

[01:47:21] **XAMON**: No worries.

END OF TRANSCRIPT

Link to Alison Xamon's WA Parliament Biography page-

<https://www.parliament.wa.gov.au/Parliament/Memblast.nsf/WAllMembersFlat/Xamon,+Alison+Marie?opendocument>