

The Australian Women's Register

Entry type: Person
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Stephen-Smith, Rachel

Occupation Parliamentarian

Summary

Canberra-born Rachel Stephen-Smith was first elected to the Legislative Assembly of the Australian Capital Territory as a Member for Kurrajong in 2016, after a career in public policy across Federal and ACT Governments and non-governmental organisations. She was appointed a Minister in the Labor Government, holding portfolios in Community Service and Social Inclusion, Multicultural Affairs, Government Services, Employment and Workplace Safety, Urban Renewal, Health, Disability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, and Children, Youth and Families. She has a Bachelor of Economics (Honours) from the Australian National University and a Master of Real Estate Development from the University of Maryland in the United States.

Details

Rachel Stephen-Smith was born in the Australian Capital Territory in 1974. The daughter of two academics who moved to Australia from the United Kingdom, she grew up in O'Connor in Canberra's inner north. She was educated at local public schools, O'Connor Coop, Turner Primary, Lyneham High and Dickson College.

Stephen-Smith describes her upbringing as not lavish but fortunate and educationally privileged, and it was assumed and expected that she would attend university. She enrolled in a Bachelor of Economics at the Australian National University (ANU) in 1990 and graduated with a Bachelor of Economics (Honours) in 1994. She is the fourth generation of women in her family to receive a tertiary education. The book *Remarkable Relations: The Story of the Pearsall Smith Women* was inspired by her unusually well-educated for their time female ancestors.

Following university, Stephen-Smith was first employed as a Policy Officer at the Productivity Commission (1995-1997) and a Project Manager at Consumers' Health Forum (2000-2001). She has been appointed to several public service roles and has worked as an advisor on health and community services to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet (1997-1998, 2001-2003). She was Chief of Staff and Principal Advisor to Victorian Senator Kim Carr (2005-2009, 2014-2016) during his tenure as Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, which led to a posting as Minister-Counsellor at the Embassy of Australia in Washington DC (2010-2012) where she worked to promote Australian research and science.

As an active member of Canberra's equestrian community, Stephen-Smith is a qualified Riding for the Disabled Coach and was a Committee Member for the National Capital Horse Trials and ACT Equestrian Association (1992-2009), a Board Member for Pegasus Riding for the Disabled (2000-2004) and committee member of the Equestrian Park Management Group (2014-2016). She was President, Vice President and Event Director of the National Capital Horse Trials Association (2014-2016, 2004-2009) and has been involved in community activities as Treasurer, ANU in the USA Foundation (2012-2014) and Volunteer Project Manager and Construction Crew Leader for Habitat for Humanity of Washington DC (2012-2014).

After leaving the Embassy of Australia, Stephen-Smith remained in Washington DC for another two years with her partner Michael and studied a Master of Real Estate Development at the University of Maryland (2012-2014). She moved back to Canberra in 2014, along with Michael, who returned to DC shortly after as he could not find work in Australia. Stephen-Smith was elected to the ACT Legislative Assembly as a Member for Kurrajong in 2016. Her inaugural speech paid tribute to Michael who took his own life in November 2015 at age 44.

She was appointed a Minister in the Labor Government immediately following her election, holding the portfolios: Community Services and Social Inclusion (2016-2018), Multicultural Affairs (2016-2018), Government Services and Procurement (2018-2019), Employment and Workplace Safety (2016-2019), Disability (2016-2019), and Urban Renewal (2018-2020).

She is currently Minister for Health (from 2019), Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs (from 2016) and Minister for Children, Youth and Families (from 2016).

Published resources

Meet your assembly: Rachel Stephen-Smith, the diplomat, Burges, K, 24 April 2018,
<https://www.canberratimes.com.au/story/6038569/meet-your-assembly-rachel-stephen-smith-the-diplomat>

ACT's newest politicians speak of family tragedy, childhood abuse during inaugural speeches, Fettes, J, 14 December 2016,
<https://www.abc.net.au/news/2016-12-14/loss-of-loved-ones-strengthens-resolve-of-new-act-politicians/8117968>

Stephen-Smith, Rachel: Legislative Assembly for the Australian Capital Territory website,
<https://www.parliament.act.gov.au/members/tenth-assembly-members/kurrajong/stephen-smith-rachel>

Author Details

Clare McLellan

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