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Brittany Higgins' March 4 Justice speech

Brittany Higgins delivered a powerful speech at the Canberra March 4 Justice rally on Monday. Read the full text here.

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Former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins delivered an emotional speech at the Canberra March 4 Justice rally on Monday, in her first appearance since going public last month.

Ms Higgins' harrowing story of an alleged sexual assault in the Canberra office of Defence Minister Linda Reynolds sparked the movement behind the [March 4 Justice rallies around Australia](#).

Here is the full text of her speech.



Former Liberal staffer Brittany Higgins.

"I speak to you today out of necessity. We are all here today not because we want to be here, but because we have to be here. We fundamentally recognise the system is broken, the glass ceiling is still in place and there are significant failings in the power structures within our institutions.

"We are here because it is unfathomable that we are still having to fight this same stale, tired fight. As it has been said before, time can be used constructively or destructively. Human progress rarely rolls on inevitability. It is through

dedication and effort that we move forward. When we fall asleep at the wheel, what tends to happen is that the tide becomes an ally of those who seek stagnation.

“We regress.

“It is the custodians of the status quo keeping the existing order alive. To see real progress, we must seek it out.

“I am cognisant of all the women who continue to live in silence. The women who are faceless. The women who don't have the mobility, the confidence, or the financial means to share their truth. Those who don't see their images and stories reflected in the media, those who are sadly no longer with us. Those who have lost their sense of self-worth and are unable to break their silence, all of which is rooted in the shame and stigma of sexual assault.

“One out of every five women in Australia will be sexually assaulted or raped in their lifetime and if you are a woman of colour the statistics are even higher.

“Thanks to Chanel Contos we now know how rife this sort of behaviour is in our schools. There is a confronting sense of finality about sexual violence in our community.

“I was raped inside Parliament House by a colleague, and for so long it felt like the people around me neither cared because of where it happened and what it might mean for them. It was so confusing because these people were my idols. I had dedicated my life to them. They were my social network, my colleagues and my family. As suddenly they treated me differently. I was not a person who had just gone through a life changing event, I was a political problem.





Ms Higgins at the March 4 Justice rally outside Parliament House. Picture: Sam Mooy/Getty Images

“Amanda Vanstone, a former Liberal minister summed it up the other day. If there was a young girl alleging she had been raped in a different office, would it be on the front page? No it would not. I think Ms Vanstone is missing the point. There is a horrible societal acceptance about sexual violence experienced by women in Australia. My story was on the front page for the sole reason that it was a painful reminder to women that it can happen in Parliament House, it can truly happen anywhere.

“These past few weeks on a personal level have been extremely difficult. Like many of you I have watched this all play out in the media. I watched it happen via a laptop in a spare bedroom in my dad’s apartment on the Gold Coast.

“I watched as the Prime Minister of Australia publicly apologised to me through the media, while privately his team actively discredited and undermined my loved ones. I tuned into Question Time to see my former bosses, people that I had dedicated my life to, deny and downplay my lived experience. I read the news updates every day at five am because I was waking up to new information about my own sexual assault through the media. Details that were never disclosed to me by my employers, information that would have helped me answer questions that have haunted me for years.

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“I watched as people hid behind throwaway phrases like ‘due process’ and ‘presumption of innocence’ while failing to acknowledge how the justice system is notoriously stacked against victims of sexual crimes.

"I read the advice from defence chief Angus Campbell who advised women on how not to fall prey to those who have the proclivity to harm others. Advice aimed solely at modifying the behaviour of victims and does nothing to address the actions of perpetrators.

"I was dismayed by senior male journalists who routinely implied that my partner was pulling the strings behind the scenes. The sudden inference being that a traumatised woman wasn't capable of weaponising her own story. I watched as advocates on the macro level disappeared when the issue hit too close to home at the micro level.

"I had my suspicions confirmed when the media exposed a long list of people who knew what had happened to me. A list that seemed to grow by the day as truths about internal reviews, Senate committee submissions, office cleans and witness accounts were all unearthed. These are the people making our laws and governing the country. As our leaders, they should be the exemplar – the gold standard. Sadly, this just isn't the case.



Rallies were held around Australia on Monday. Picture: Sam Mooy/Getty Images

"If they aren't committed to addressing these issues in their own offices, what confidence can the women of Australia have that they will be proactive in addressing this issue in the broader community?

"This isn't a political problem. This is a human problem. We've all learned over the past few weeks just how common gendered violence is in this country. It's time our leaders on both sides of politics stop avoiding the subject and sidestepping accountability. It's time we actually address the problem.

"I decided to resign and share my story because it was the only thing I felt I could do to say that I didn't co-sign this behaviour. That I don't believe what happened was right. That I don't believe a brochure is adequate support. That I don't believe people should be isolated, intimidated and ignored after traumatic incidents inside the workplace. I came forward with my story to hopefully protect other women.

"By staying silent, I felt like it would have made me complicit and if something of this nature had ever happened again, my ongoing silence would have inadvertently said to those people in charge that you can treat people in this way and it's okay. I want to be clear -- it's not. So I have spoken out with what little I have to say this isn't okay and they need to do better. We all need to do better.

“I encourage each and every one of you to set boundaries for yourself and be ruthless in your defence of them. Speak up. Share your truth and know that you have a generation of women ready, willing and able to support you.

“Take ownership of your story and free yourself from the stigma of shame. Together, we can bring about real, meaningful reform to the workplace culture inside Parliament House and, hopefully, every workplace, to ensure the next generation of women can benefit from a safer and more equitable Australia.”

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