

*Marilyn Waring is a renowned feminist, economist, politician and activist from New Zealand. In 1975, at the age of 23, she became the youngest member of the New Zealand Parliament. Since leaving Parliament in 1984, she has served as a member of the Board of the Reserve Bank of New Zealand, worked as a consultant for various organizations and written several books. Waring is currently a professor of public policy at the Institute of Public Policy at Auckland University of Technology. The Review sat down with her after her talk on campus this week.*

**How did you become interested in social justice issues, such as LGBT, women's and domestic workers' rights?**

I grew up in a very small community in New Zealand, but I was aware even as a child that there were other students who came to school without food, or without having breakfast or anything. In those days, the New Zealand government gave free bottles of milk to every primary school for every student, and these kids would come to school and head straight for the milk stand and consume about three bottles.

[Furthermore, there are] communities in which [people] get beat. Fourteen-year-olds get pregnant, and not from choice. Where I grew up taught me a lot about reciprocity, and about gift-giving, and about a different economy where people do things for each other without being paid for it.

**How did you launch your career in government and activism?**

I did an honors degree in political science, but it was in the early '70s when there was an extraordinary resurgence internationally of the feminist movement. It's hard to believe today, but about once every month, there'd be a brand-new, bold feminist book — one on justice, one on rape, one on health. And in my

**you suggest?**

GDP is a very narrow economic data set. And life's about a great deal more than just that. Too many people don't understand GDP at all, including economists and politicians. They don't understand what it leaves out. They don't understand the fact that there's no debit side. They don't understand that pathologies are good for growth. It's a very lazy way to make policy, to think that if that a figure's up or down is the only thing that you need to worry about in terms of strategy. It's also used by people who are very scared to exercise judgment across a range of data sets and characteristics. Obviously, the bigger the country's economy, the more shackled to the GDP the decision-makers are, because the people who can buy politicians' time find it advantageous to only have one indicator.

The most important alternative is that no decision proceeds without a huge range of data, and that it's understood that per capita GDP is not an expression of the well-being of a community. There are a number of different initiatives. Genuine Progress Indicator is one that began with an organization called Redefining Progress in San Francisco. [Economists William] Nordhaus and [James] Tobin long ago suggested a system of economic welfare as an alternative. The most advanced alternatives are now led by the Canadians. The Canadian index for well-being and the Genuine Progress Indicator work in Alberta and in Nova Scotia.

**Do you think other countries are heading in the same direction as Canada?**

Yeah. Europe is definitely heading in that direction. And Europe has been building the databases like environmental and time use indicators quite steadily over the last 20 years. Japan has had green accounts for quite a long time. And there are now initiatives to develop indigenous economic accounts in Melanesia.

**How about the United States?**

I think some of the most important responses in the United States have been community or city responses. Cities like Seattle have had different frameworks over a period of time. And smaller communities have also been able to elect different people to their own governance arrangements with different priorities to tackle: in particular, environmental well-being. First nations peoples have also been looking at alternative accounts frameworks, and there is a new wave of work on community accounting for black and colored communities, which is far more about social and cultural capital and trust and reciprocity.

**How have you seen your fields of expertise — environmentalism, economics, social justice issues, to name a few — change over the course of your career?**

In my lifetime, there have been a number of environmental shifts that have demonstrated that the ecosystem doesn't really know about nation-state boundaries. They would include Three Mile Island, Chernobyl, Fukushima; they would include acid rain, deforestation, carbon emissions, melting ice caps and desertification. Awareness of an activism for intergenerational sustainability of our environment and our ecosystems has internationally magnified in my lifetime. In terms of feminism, there have been a number of achievements in respect of the liberal feminist agenda, including access to work places, office holding, et cetera. But the fundamental feminist agenda of the safety and integrity of the woman's body has a long way to run yet, [until] when there are no longer cases of incest, rape, sexual assault, battery, harassment, medical malpractice and forced pregnancies. While there is still racism and homophobia, which are all part of a feminist movement, we've still got a long way to go.

*Interview by Caroline Hui, staff writer*