



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Lalor Electorate: Multiculturalism

SPEECH

Wednesday, 30 November 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker	Ryan, Joanne, MP	Question No.	

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (10:06): I rise this morning to talk about harmony and the threats to harmony in the community of Lalor. I attended a citizenship ceremony last weekend. One of the absolute pleasures of being a member of parliament is to attend those ceremonies where, in Lalor, 120 new citizens at a time are welcomed into the Australian family. It struck me there, looking at the multicultural, multifaith new members of our community, what a fabulous job we are doing in the city of Wyndham in the federal seat of Lalor in creating and building harmonious communities.

But it also took me back to a few meetings I have had. I met recently with leaders from our broad African community across Melbourne two weeks ago. I also attended a Victoria Police and local South Sudanese community forum last weekend. At both of these forums I listened, and what I heard was not new to me. What I heard was something that I have known of and lived many times while working in education, working with families newly arrived to this country and working with them as they settle and develop links to their local community. What I heard about was fear: fear that the actions of some criminal young people were tainting the South Sudanese community in my local area, tainting the whole community with the actions of a few. They are fearful that a stereotype, an American-style stereotype if you like, of their young people is permeating the community through the broad media.

As someone who has worked with young people and their families for almost three decades, I have seen this before. I have heard their stories, their wonder and their fears before. We hope that we have learnt from history, but unfortunately it feels like we are going to live again through the same patterns. I heard their fears, and I hope my reassurances that the system will not fail them, that their genuine efforts to build a new life, a happy life, in our community, will be fruitful.

Fear of others drives much of this well-worn path to division, alienation and fear, and overcoming these factors takes time. But it means that we, as members of our community, need to reach out. We need to get to know one another. Being part of a multicultural community, one of the pleasures is what you learn about the rest of the world. But the more you mix with people from different parts of the world, the more the notion is reinforced that what we have that is similar is much more than what we have that is different. We learn about one another's humanity. That is what we learn most: our common humanity, our pride in our children and our fears for the future. We have more in common than what we have that is different.