



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

BUSINESS

SPEECH

Wednesday, 18 June 2003

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Wednesday, 18 June 2003
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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the House) (9.01 am)—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent the routine of business for Wednesday, 18 June 2003, being as follows, unless otherwise ordered:

1. Notices and orders of the day, government business;
2. Presentation of, and statements on, a report from the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works;
3. Presentation of papers; and
4. Notices and orders of the day, government business.

It is right that on this day the whole focus of our nation should be on welcoming home the men and women of the Australian armed forces who have served in the Iraq war. As a result of the government's desire to see nothing detract from the quality of the welcome which our armed forces receive, it is right that we adjust the ordinary sitting program of the House. As members would be only too well aware, the welcome starts at midday. It will take some time. It is followed by a reception. It would be impossible for the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition, other senior ministers and frontbenchers to be back here until late in the day. We have some 80 question times a year. I think it is perfectly reasonable that we should sacrifice one of our question times in order to appropriately and properly honour the men and women of the Australian armed forces. If it was possible for the British and German armies to play soccer in no-man's-land on Christmas Day in 1914, it surely should be possible for the members of this House to suspend politics as usual for just one day to honour the men and the women of the Australian armed forces, who have served this nation and served humanity so well recently in Iraq.

I am extremely disappointed that members opposite, by their interjections and by all their indications so far, have demonstrated their unwillingness to enter into these perfectly right, proper and appropriate arrangements. Because of the way the opposition has indicated it intends to behave today, members on this side will be unable to attend this homecoming as they wish. I know that there are a large number of members on this side who want to welcome home our forces. They will not be able to do so because of the way the opposition proposes to conduct itself. I think that there are lots of good, decent and patriotic members of the Australian Labor Party on the other side of the House who would like to welcome our troops home but are not being allowed to because of the take no prisoners, give no quarter, junkyard dog tactics which are now being employed by members opposite. I commend the motion to the House.