



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Automotive Industry

SPEECH

Thursday, 4 December 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Champion, Nick, MP

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Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (11:29): On 11 December last year, GM announced the closure of local production in Australia. This announced the end of what has been a great tradition in manufacturing in this country. It was a very sad day for my electorate.

On that day, 11 December, parliament was sitting and we were greeted by a headline in the *Australian Financial Review* saying, 'Hockey dares GM to leave'. That was the story, that day, on the front page of the *Financial Review*. I remember that day very clearly. It was a devastating day for my electorate, for the people who work at Holden and for all of those who rely on Holden—not just for their jobs but for the community's wellbeing and for their pride in making something in this country. I vividly remember reading, in the days before that announcement, an article by Phil Coorey in the *Australian Financial Review*. It said:

... Treasurer Joe Hockey, backed by Abbott, stood in Parliament and told Holden to pee or get off the pot. At that very instant, this column received a text message from a Holden executive who was watching question time. "They're telling us to leave."

The only thing of substance Holden referred to in their statement at the time about the decision to close production was the value of the Australian dollar, which at that time was very high indeed—about US\$1.10, as quoted in that statement. Currency appreciation had a devastating effect on Australian manufacturing—and make no mistake: it had a big effect all throughout our economy. I know many wineries in my electorate felt the effects, as did hay exporters and the like, all of whom had very big structural challenges because of the value of the Australian dollar. It is the debate this nation should have been having, because it had a devastating effect. With the GFC passing and the commodities boom passing, we have seen the Australian dollar fall to US84c. At that exchange rate, Holden could have been exporting cars to the United States, both to the police car market and to the rear wheel drive performance market. We would be exporting now had the government shown any sense at all, but of course they did not.

The government made a calculation—and we know they made this calculation because the Treasurer admitted it on Fran Kelly's program only recently. Fran Kelly asked:

So, what will your message be to your colleagues?

The Treasurer, Mr Hockey, replied:

Well, that the economy is on a good trajectory; that we have delivered this year. That you know, there would not have been any free trade agreements if we hadn't of made the hard decisions about industry assistance at the beginning of the year. So, there would have been no free trade agreements if Labor were elected.

What he is saying there is that he sold out Australian auto workers to make it easier to get free trade agreements with China, Japan and Korea. That is what Mr Hockey is telling the Australian people. He sold auto workers down the river so that it would be easier to sign these trade agreements, so that they could brag about signing these trade agreements—agreements they have not yet even put before parliament or given the Australian people the detail of.

When the Prime Minister had his reset, he bragged about the considerable achievements of the government. In doing so, he mentioned:

... responding to the closure down the track of Holden and Toyota.

So he has listed that as one of his achievements—closing car manufacturing in this country! This government has gone completely bananas. They have cost good Australians their jobs and they have cost us our manufacturing base. It is a disgrace that they are now trying to turn it into something that was 'inevitable' or something to be

bragged about or something to be 'managed'. This is disgrace. The jobs of all of those people will hang around the neck of this government—make no mistake—from now until polling day.