



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**SPEAKER**

**Election**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 28 September 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 28 September 2010  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Gillard, Julia, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms GILLARD** (Lalor—Prime Minister) (11.30 am)—Mr Speaker, on behalf of the government I offer my sincere congratulations on your election as Speaker of the House. It seems to have been a long time coming. I welcome your appointment not only as a valued colleague and old friend but as a person learned in the ways of this parliament and eminently suited by temperament and ability to be the Presiding Officer of this House. Given the unusually high level of attention recently to parliamentary reform, I honour your commitment to this cause and your longstanding dedication to improving the workings of the parliament. I can think of no-one more worthy of holding this office at such a crucial time for our democracy. The Leader of the Opposition has stated that you are the ‘ideal candidate to start a Westminster style speakership in this country’, and in that assessment I fully concur.

Mr Speaker, not since the election of your predecessor Walter Maxwell Nairn in the hung parliament of 1940 has your office played such a key role in our democracy. Three generations later we have a remarkable opportunity to rebuild the standing of this parliament in the eyes of the Australian people. Of course the role of Speaker is an ancient office that dates back continuously in the House of Commons to 1376, but in recent decades the existence of strong party rooms and large parliamentary majorities has inevitably affected the role of the Speaker. I sense a possible change ahead of us—for us and for you, Mr Speaker, in this parliament.

The outcome of this year’s election has renewed the importance of your office in making our parliament succeed. As your role is, of course, to be independent, Mr Speaker, I know that you will honour that in word and in deed. The quality of independence we associate with the office of the Speaker was strongly reaffirmed by the Agreement for a Better Parliament, signed on 6 September. That document confirms that the speakership is to be independent of government and that the Speaker will not attend the party room as other party members do. The government welcomes these obligations and we will do our best to uphold them.

Mr Speaker, the result of the 21 August election is a salutary reminder that parliament is not a creature of the executive and that every piece of legislation will require, and should be given, careful and thoughtful deliberation. It is also a reminder that our colleagues on the crossbench have their own rights as legislators which must be protected and upheld. For the government’s part we accept these realities and welcome the opportunity for reform that they present. We want this parliament to be productive both in its rules and procedures but also in its outcomes for the nation, and we pledge to uphold the spirit of consensus and goodwill at every possible turn.

It is true that our early hopes for a new beginning have not been fully realised. Both the government and the opposition had abundant opportunity to shape the agreement for a better parliament before freely accepting to be bound by its terms. This agreement is a charter of honour requiring the integrity of those who volunteered their endorsement. That some of the reforms outlined in the agreement have not been adhered to is a cause for regret, but I do not regard the agreement or the spirit that engendered it as a lost cause. Instead, I renew an invitation to the opposition to embrace the possibility of reform that characterises this new parliament and I say to my colleagues opposite: do not squander this moment whatever the temptation. As we have seen in other political cultures, short-term tactical victories lead only to longer term strategic defeat as our system declines in public esteem. That is the wrong path for Australia and a mistaken reading of the election result. This term of parliament is not an opportunity to re-fight the election, vote after vote, bill after bill. This is a time for consensus not confrontation, debate not destruction.

Of course we all know that does not mean that we have to agree on every issue, because a democracy is by definition a contest of values and ideals. But where we do diverge, our disagreements should be discussed with reason and civility, taking the national interest as our guide. The Australian people have sent us here expecting something better. They want a constructive parliament freed from the rancour and name-calling that has dragged it into such poor regard. As Speaker, we will seek your fair and impartial guidance in the unfamiliar landscape that lies ahead, and in turn you will seek from us our best endeavours to make this parliament work as our founders hoped. As the 43rd parliament begins, I would like to think that members will show not only the respect due to your office but also the personal regard that you have earned over your 24 years in this place where you have

become renowned for your sense of good humour, which we have already seen on display today, your decency and your abundant common sense. With those qualities in mind I know the parliament has made a wise choice of Speaker and I thank you for accepting the office in these remarkable and demanding times. On behalf of the government, I extend to you my very warmest wishes on your election as Speaker. Thank you very much.

**Honourable members**—Hear, hear!