



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Queen Elizabeth II

SPEECH

Thursday, 10 September 2015

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Questioner
Speaker Prentice, Jane, MP

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Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan) (10:51): Today I rise to pay tribute to the reign of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II who, as we know, today has become the longest reigning British—and therefore Australian—head of state. It truly is a remarkable record, spanning generations of political leadership, wars and the evolution of the role of Great Britain in the Commonwealth and in world affairs. Throughout, the Queen has kept a relentless schedule of public engagements while demonstrating a dignified, level-headed and subtly effective approach to diplomacy when the times have required it.

To put her reign in perspective, consider that the Queen commenced her time on the throne in February 1952. Sir Robert Menzies was just three years into his own record-breaking leadership, leading a Liberal Party less than a decade old. The world was just seven years removed from the Second World War and global leaders were still defined by that conflict. The Prime Minister of the United Kingdom was the great Winston Churchill. The President of the United States was Harry Truman. Joseph Stalin was Premier of the Soviet Union and Mao Zedong was Chairman of the Communist Party of China.

Among those giants of world history was a 25-year-old Queen Elizabeth II, ascending to the throne on the death of her father, her claim to the Crown only possible due to the abdication of her uncle, Edward VIII, 16 years earlier. Since then, through seven decades, 12 British prime ministers and 13 Australian prime ministers, the Queen has remained a constant in global politics. When you consider how the world has evolved since then, it is possible to grasp the level of wisdom and experience she has gained during her reign.

The role of a modern British monarch is a mix of ceremony, politics and diplomacy. During her reign the Queen has certainly demonstrated her unwavering commitment to that role. Since taking the throne the Queen has kept up a brisk pace of public engagement. Even at the age of 89 she keeps a schedule that would tax people half her age. She has given her life to serving the people of Great Britain and the Commonwealth and shows little sign of slowing down.

During her reign, Her Majesty has shown deference to representative politics befitting a modern monarch in a parliamentary democracy. However, in her role as head of state she has, at times, been called upon to participate in political decision making. On two occasions she has been required to appoint a new British Prime Minister on the advice of the cabinet. However, it is in her role in leading and representing the Commonwealth's interests abroad in which she has truly excelled: over the years deftly managing Britain's evolving role in the Commonwealth as they completed their transition from colonial master to ally and partner as their remaining colonies in Africa, South Asia, Oceania and the Caribbean transitioned to independence.

In her first Christmas broadcast the Queen said:

At Christmas our thoughts are always full of our homes and our families. This is the day when members of the same family try to come together, or if separated by distance or events meet in spirit and affection by exchanging greetings.

She then went on to say:

But we belong, you and I, to a far larger family. We belong, all of us, to the British Commonwealth and Empire, that immense union of nations, with their homes set in all the four corners of the earth. Like our own families, it can be a great power for good - a force which I believe can be of immeasurable benefit to all humanity.

That the Queen has remained a revered and beloved figure throughout the Commonwealth over this at times turbulent period is testament to her diplomatic skill, her clear commitment and her ability to command respect and adherence. As a frequent visitor to Commonwealth nations, the Queen has visited Australia 16 times during her reign. There is a genuine affinity and respect for her when she visits us, which seems only to grow with each

visit. Indeed, it is the lament of many an Australian republican that Australian voters appear unwilling to part with the monarchy for as long as Elizabeth remains on the throne.

This is not a uniquely Australian phenomenon. In the past decade, voters in the Commonwealth nations of St Vincent and the Grenadines and Tuvalu have similarly rejected moves to dispense with the practice of adopting the British monarch as head of state. Much of this respect and affection comes down to her personal style. Queen Elizabeth at all times gives the outward impression of calmness, competence and pragmatism. She has always had a realistic understanding of both the privileges and the limitations on her role as monarch in a modern democratic society. Never has she sought to play an activist role in day-to-day government; however, she has always been willing to offer sound counsel to leaders who have sought it and to represent the interests of Great Britain and the Commonwealth when called upon.

In this place we know that holding public office is an honour and a privilege, but that it also comes at a cost of increased scrutiny and reduced privacy, so we can only imagine the pressures that come from 63 years at the head of a family that lives very much in the public eye. The Queen has endured family scandal and tragedies often gleefully exposed by a creative and evermore enterprising tabloid media. Throughout, however, the Queen has carried herself with dignity and composure. Whether one is republican, monarchist or ambivalent, Queen Elizabeth's record reign is a remarkable achievement. It is rare indeed for a public figure to be so universally respected and admired, and for Her Majesty to retain the affection of the people after all these years speaks volumes about her qualities as a leader. I add my congratulations to Her Majesty today and wish her good health and good fortune to continue her reign for many years to come.