



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**BILLS**

**Succession to the Crown Bill 2015**

**Second Reading**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 17 March 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 17 March 2015  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Leigh, Andrew, MP

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**Dr LEIGH** (Fraser) (16:46): Walter Scott said:

Breathes there a man with soul so

dead, Who never to himself hath said;

This is my own, my native land.

These fine words have never been uttered by any Australian head of state about Australia. Under our Constitution, they never could be uttered. That is because, while no British citizen can ever be Australia's head of government, only a British citizen can ever be Australia's head of state.

This bill brings the monarchy into the 19th century. It ensures that the sexism inherent in the current arrangements is no longer present, that a firstborn girl can succeed in preference to her younger brother. It ensures that marrying a Catholic is no longer a bar to ascending to our head of state. But it fails to ensure that any of my three little boys—Sebastian, Theodore or Zachary—could one day aspire to be Australia's head of state or, indeed, that any of the 800 children born today could be Australia's head of state.

The republican movement has a proud history. I look to the Eureka uprising, at which there was a strong strain of republicanism prevalent among the miners. Among the Irish—it is appropriate we acknowledge this on St Patrick's Day—were republicans, because of their hereditary hatred of the English. The Americans were republican because of their long history of struggle against the British, and many of the Europeans bore Republican sympathies, having lived through the 1848 revolutions that swept through Europe.

When we look back at the Eureka charter, it is so easy to understand how republicanism was fired up among those who came to the shores of Australia, a nation where they quickly recognised that Jack was not just as good as his master but perhaps better. Here in the ACT we are natural republicans—the one jurisdiction that in 1999 voted for a republic and the one jurisdiction that voted for Waltzing Matilda as our national song.

In 1999 Australia held a referendum. It was a three-cornered contest between bipartisan parliamentary appointed republicans, direct-election republicans and monarchists. As the member for Wentworth has pointed out, the monarchists 'delightedly, if cynically, exploited the division by promising the direct electionists that if the parliamentary model were defeated at the referendum they could have another referendum on the direct-election model within a few years'. It has been half a generation since then.

Some, like the previous speaker, counsel patience. They argue that the push for an Australian as head of state should wait until King Charles III ascends the throne. That fundamentally misunderstands the argument for an Australian republic. Our quibble is not with Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Charles, their heirs or successors. Each of those individuals has done their job diligently. Indeed, a belief in a republic does not lessen respect for them as individuals. In 2012, when Prince Charles and the Duchess of Cornwall visited Canberra, I was pleased to welcome them on the tarmac of Canberra Airport, representing the government.

Respect and politeness for the Royal Family sits alongside my passionate belief that Australia should have one of our own as head of state. I held the same courtesy in my heart as I went out to the tarmac last year, to welcome Prince William, Kate Middleton and their baby, George, to Canberra. Again, I was representing the Labor Party. I took my son Sebastian out with me the first time, onto the tarmac, and my son Theodore the second time—we see too little of our families in this job and it is nice to be able to spend some time, with your children, when you can.

It was a real delight for me to have my son Theodore meet their son, George. I thought at the time: why is it that baby George is better suited than every Australian baby to grow up to be Australia's head of state? The 800 babies born in Australia today will grow up around gum trees and sandy beaches. They will call their friends

'mate' and they will barrack for the baggy greens, the Wallabies and the Socceroos. Their success in life will not be decided by their surname. If they say they live in a castle, it will be because they are quoting Darryl Kerrigan. In short, every one of the 800 babies born today will be Australians and every one of them should be able to aspire to be our head of state.

Those who disagree with this view sometimes claim that the Governor-General is our head of state. At best, that is a contentious, strained protestation. As members of the parliament of the Australian Commonwealth of states, we all swore or affirmed our allegiance to the Queen, not to the Governor-General. At state dinners, visiting heads of state toast the Queen of Australia. Her image is on our currency. Australian government websites say, 'Australia's head of state is Queen Elizabeth II.'

The slogan 'don't know, vote no' has never been more powerful in Australian public life. The Prime Minister used it when he was campaigning for the monarchy in 1999 and he has deployed it relentlessly in recent years, including against a market-based solution to climate change, fibre-to-the home broadband and fiscal stimulus to save jobs. It is a seductively simple line, but one that is more dangerous than ever as Australia grapples with complex challenges. The member for Griffith went to exactly this point a moment ago in speaking about how the anachronism of the Australian monarchy looks to our friends in the Asian region. What must they think? Looking from Indonesia, China, Korea and Japan, it is that we here in Australia cannot shrug off the 19th anachronism of having a member of the house of Windsor as our head of state. How does it sit with our claimed belief in a fair go when the qualification to be our head of state is that one must be British and white? They are characteristics that remain unchanged as a result of this bill.

While I support this bill, as I suspect everybody in this place will do, I also call upon this parliament to make it a priority to hold a referendum to make Australia a republic. In so doing, we will make it clear to ourselves and the world that, instead of a foreign child from a foreign land, Australians trust an Australian child to grow up and be an Australian head of state. Such a child will be more appropriate for us, more representative of us and more worthy of us—a child who knows their own native land and their living Australian soul.