



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Whitlam, Mrs Margaret Elaine, AO**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 19 March 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Plibersek, Tanya, MP

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**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney—Minister for Health) (14:08): I rise to add a few words to this motion of condolence. Margaret Whitlam's full and influential life has been the subject of much public comment over the last few days, and justifiably so, for she was a much loved figure. I do not repeat the public facts of her life but rather make a few remarks about the woman I knew. Margaret Whitlam was independent and fiercely so. She was a great supporter of her husband and I am sure that he would be the first to say as both local member and later as Prime Minister that she was his greatest supporter and closest adviser.

But she did not always agree with Gough; she did not automatically agree with him. She was a life member of the Labor Party and had her own views about the issues that face us and on people, too, as I found to my benefit when I asked for her support in my pre-selection, in which her husband was backing another candidate. She was kind. She made every person she came into contact with feel comfortable. When she attended branch Christmas parties or other party functions she would be mobbed but she would give each person her full attention.

She was modest. She was very surprised when I asked her to be the guest speaker at a function I was putting on. She said, 'Oh, no: I can get Gough for you.' I said, 'No, I would like you to speak, Margaret.' She said, 'What could I possibly have to say that anyone would be interested in hearing?' We in fact had to turn people away. We could not fit everyone in. Everybody wanted to hear from Margaret.

She was a magnificent example to many women entering the workforce. She balanced her public duties with raising her family. She raised four children with a husband who, as all of us in this place know, worked long hours and was away from home a lot. But she always continued her own fights for equality and for social justice. She was humorous, fun, witty, intelligent and lively. I was fortunate enough to dine with Margaret just recently. She was still absolutely full bottle on current events. She had a lot of very sensible opinions and advice to offer. She was great company that night, as always.

I express my deepest condolences to her devoted husband and loving family. We have lost much as a nation with her passing, but they have lost a great deal more.