



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Member for Griffith

SPEECH

Monday, 18 November 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Monday, 18 November 2013
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Questioner
Speaker King, Catherine, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms KING (Ballarat—Minister for Road Safety, Minister for Regional Services and Local Communities and Territories) (16: 12): It is with some pleasure and a bit of sadness that I speak on the retirement of the member for Griffith, Kevin Rudd, but I think that in terms of this contribution I will probably be one of the few people who speak on this particular topic, on this particular aspect of the work that he has done.

In particular, I want to pay tribute to Kevin's—and I hope you will give me some leeway for using his first name a little; I know that is not within the standing orders—enormous contribution to organ and tissue donation. I had the enormous privilege of being parliamentary secretary for health, with carriage of organ and tissue donation and the legacy that Kevin has left and the incredible work that has been done in this space. There is much more to do and a long way to go, but it would not have happened and it would not be where it is today if it had not been for the then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd taking a decision and actually pushing this agenda and making sure that there was change in this place.

For many of us in this House, our values and ambitions for public office are formed by our own life experiences, especially from the generosity of others in our community who inspire a willingness to make a positive change and to give something back. The member for Griffith was twice a recipient of the most generous gift a person can receive: the gift of life. Such a generous gift is not easy to repay. As Prime Minister, in 2008, Kevin put a world's-best-practice approach to organ and tissue donation at the forefront of the national reform agenda. It was followed up in 2009 by the establishment of the Organ and Tissue Authority, and through the DonateLife network we now have in this country a nationally-coordinated approach to organ and tissue donation for transplantation, in partnership with states, territories, clinicians, consumers and the communities. DonateLife's research identified that one of the key findings to lifting the rate of organ and tissue donation is to encourage families to have the difficult conversation about their donation wishes, enabling loved ones to make an informed decision at a time of grief and tragedy.

The then Prime Minister had the willingness to share his own story, and to roll up his sleeves and go to hospital after hospital to talk with people on the waiting list and to transplant recipients to gain a complex understanding of what is a very difficult area of public policy, but one that was desperately needed. The importance cannot be underestimated of the then Prime Minister's commitment in taking a submission to cabinet, making sure that the funds were available—some \$140 million and continuing—to lift the rate of organ and tissue donation in this country. We are starting to see the results of that work.

Many more Australians are now having that conversation and the results are proving to be what we anticipated, but there is more to do. Since 2009, the number of organ donations in Australia has increased by more than 43 per cent. It would not have happened without the then Prime Minister's commitment. Last year, almost 250 more people received an organ transplant than in 2009. From 2009 to the end of last year, the number of organs transplanted increased by 30 per cent, and the number of organ donors and transplant recipients was the highest since national records began. We are starting to see consent rates slowly improve, and we are starting to see family conversations happen as a matter of course.

When I was Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing, I met with countless families who had performed the most gracious and selfless act of donating their loved ones' organs. For all the generosity of donors and their families, there are thousands of Australians who have been given a second chance at life. We owe each of these donors and their families our most sincere gratitude but also, in this debate, I would like to pay tribute to Kevin Rudd, the then Prime Minister, for taking the decision on organ and tissue donation. Lifting Australia's quite woeful rates of organ and tissue donation was something that needed the attention of a prime minister, and it took the attention of a prime minister to have it placed on the national agenda and acted upon. I pay tribute to his contribution to many thousands of lives; they now get a second chance.

Over the course of these reforms, from the start and for the many years to come, we will continue to see increases in the rate of organ and tissue donation. I do want to highlight not only the fact that this is an area of public policy that was lagging behind but also the fact that we had a prime minister take a decision to invest such substantial amounts of money as well as research and investigate the best model to adopt. It has made a substantive difference.

I know that the member for Griffith has signalled that this is an area he wants to continue to work in, and I certainly hope that he does bring all of his skills to bear on what is probably one of the most fundamental areas of health policy that you could ever come across. It is not often in public life that you are involved in making a policy change that effectively saves lives. This is one of those changes. I want to pay absolute tribute to the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, and member for Griffith for having that foresight and for making that extraordinary investment in the gift of life for people in this country.