



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

MOTIONS

Ukraine Air Disaster

SPEECH

Wednesday, 27 August 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Andrews, Karen, MP

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Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson) (11:42): I rise today on behalf of my constituents to express the heartfelt shock, grief and sorrow that we all felt and continue to feel about the shooting down of flight MH17. It is a very sad reflection of the terrible barbarism that exists in parts of our world—where life is held cheap and politics or ideology trumps reason. Our TV screens seem to be flooded with appalling images of violence these days. The shooting from the sky of flight MH17 is seared in our consciousness and is a reminder of the many threats to our security and our way of life.

But the evil that resulted in this tragedy is not something I want to dwell on in this motion. In fact, I would like to spend this time celebrating a very special woman, a constituent of mine, Helena Sidelik, who lived a life of joy, generosity and strength. She embodied all that is good and right with the world—the complete opposite of those who committed the atrocious act of shooting down the plane in which she was travelling.

Last Saturday I joined with well over 200 friends and family members at the Burleigh Heads Mowbray Park Surf Life Saving Club to remember Helena, to celebrate her life and to mourn with them the loss of a remarkable lady. Helena was obviously very, very loved. Friends travelled from Perth, Adelaide, Melbourne, Canberra, Sydney and New Zealand to attend the memorial on Saturday. I am reliably informed by her good friends Paul Wyeth and Ian Morice that in true Helena style, her 'after party', as she liked to refer to a wake, continued until 2 am on Sunday. It was a fitting tribute to a woman who loved life and who had a tremendous generosity of spirit.

I was given the honour of reading a personal message from the Prime Minister at Helena's memorial. The Prime Minister outlined some of the challenges Helena had faced including the death of her long term partner and her decision to relocate to the Gold Coast three years ago. She had just completed a major renovation on her apartment in Burleigh a week before she left to go on her overseas holiday. As the Prime Minister described it, after having dealt with the loss of her partner, joy and happiness were again in her life.

What I learnt at her memorial, however, was the incredible joy and happiness that Helena brought to the lives of others. As her friend Sally Dunn described her, she was larger than life, a barrel of fun and she collected friends wherever she went. Despite having moved to the coast just three years ago, she was very big part of the Burleigh community and had made very dear friends. She was adored by her workmates at Vision Burleigh. She was loved and will be terribly missed by her brother Hans. Her generosity and kindness was such a big part of who Helena was. While she was away she actually let two different lots of friends in her very newly renovated apartment on the Esplanade so that they could enjoy the lovely home that, sadly, she only spent a week in.

I have heard stories of how when a friend's husband took ill she would go around and collect the couple's children and take them bowling just so the couple could spend some time together. She was affectionately known as 'Big H'. The 'Big' referred to her heart, her generosity and her love of life.

The loss of Helena, just like the loss of the other souls who perished on MH17 leaves a hole in the hearts of so many people. It is a difficult loss to overcome given the senseless nature of this act. It simply just should never have happened. As the Prime Minister pointed out in his message at Helena's memorial, we are a nation united in grief and in our determination to see that justice is done. I am proud to be member of this government that has taken a leadership role to ensure that the international investigation got under way swiftly. We are very determined to ensure that the perpetrators of this crime are brought to justice. When I asked two of Helena's very dear and oldest friends what message they might like to convey to the federal parliament, they said they would very strongly support any moves to ban Vladimir Putin from entering our country for the G20. It is entirely understandable that those who loved and who will always love Helena Sidelik should hold this view.

As the Prime Minister said recently, it is one thing to do the wrong thing; it is another thing to persist in wrongdoing. Russia armed and assisted separatists in eastern Ukraine and supplied these separatists with sophisticated weaponry including the sophisticated weaponry that we are very confident was responsible for this

particular atrocity. In two or three months, the government will be in a better position to make a final decision on this invitation. Right now, the ball is clearly in Mr Putin's court. Australia and the world will be looking to him to cease destabilising eastern Ukraine and fully and openly cooperate with the international criminal investigation now under way.

I extend the condolences of the people of my electorate to all of Helena's family and friends, to the family and friends of the other 37 people on flight MH17 who called Australia home, and to the loved ones of the other 260 people on board who lost their lives. May this loss make us ever vigilant to the evil that threatens our security and safety. It should be a reminder to everyone in a leadership position of the heavy responsibility we have to try to make our world a safer place.