



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Hawkins, Ms Rhonda

SPEECH

Thursday, 5 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Owens, Julie, MP

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Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (10:11): Last week I wanted to call the University of Western Sydney—my great local university. I was looking for a person who might help me in a particular area and I wanted to know who the best person to call was. Naturally, I thought I would call Rhonda, the Deputy Vice-Chancellor. To my horror, I realised that Rhonda Hawkins had retired the previous month.

For all of us in Western Sydney that phenomenal source of knowledge—a person who had been with the university for 31 years and had served it incredibly well—had left our small world and gone to spend more time with her grandchildren. We will have much harder jobs because of it. I am sure in my office and all around Western Sydney we are having to increase our staffing levels to cope with the loss of Rhonda's support, so extraordinary she was.

Rhonda hates attention. There are very few photos of Rhonda around. She does not like to be in the limelight. She is probably cowering under the bed at the moment if she has realised I am speaking about her in the parliament! She has been like the glue of the University of Western Sydney. She was there in the early days of previous Vice-Chancellor Janice Reid; in fact, she was there for the interview process. The two of them were a formidable team who led the university through its re-emergence, growth and restructure and all the trials that have made the university so strong.

Rhonda was one of those very quiet achievers. She had a wicked sense of humour, but you had to be around for it. She had an unflappable good common sense and ability to work with everyone. That made her absolutely essential. She knew everyone. She knew them personally. She knew what they did. She knew what they needed. She knew the students as well as the staff and professors. It was her quick grasp of self-discipline and her ability to keep that big picture in mind—and her extraordinary corporate knowledge—that made her valuable. We will really miss her not just within the university but on the campus itself.

She was the first deputy vice-chancellor of the university not to hold a professorship. But she held responsibility for a large number of areas that kept the university running on a day-to-day basis, including finance, risk management, strategy, IT, campus and capital development, marketing and communications, and community and regional engagement, to name just a few. You could add to that list that she did anything else that needed doing—she was there. Nothing was too trivial for Rhonda if it needed doing. She was absolutely there for the university and for all of us. Her problem-solving and general engagement of the university community—and the wider community—was a very valuable asset and one that I know will be sorely missed.

I wish Rhonda Hawkins all the best. Her grandchildren were there for her farewell. I know she is spending much more time with them now than she has been able to over the last 31 years. Thank you Rhonda, and good luck.