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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Deputy Prime Minister

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Pyne, Christopher, MP

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Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Defence Industry) (15:06): I'm sorry to say that the member for Hunter was even worse than the member for Isaacs usually is, which is really pushing the boat out there! Fancy the chutzpah of the Labor Party, to come into this chamber and lecture the Liberals and Nationals about parliamentary ethics. In the 43rd Parliament the Labor Party were the party that suborned Peter Slipper, the member for Fisher, and the party that stuck the knife into Harry Jenkins, the former member for Scullin, to get him out of the chair as Speaker to slip Peter Slipper into the Speaker's chair in order to deny the coalition a vote on the House of Representatives. It was a disgraceful and ruthless act of realpolitik. And didn't that end well? That was the record of the Labor Party in office when they thought they had the chance. They didn't think for one minute about the right way to behave in this place.

But that's not even the worst example of the Labor Party, because the Labor Party spent three years supporting the member for Dobell, Craig Thomson, in this place, taking his vote in this House when we had refused to take his vote in the opposition. The member for Dobell was backed in by the Labor Party in a disgraceful protection racket in order to save the skin of Julia Gillard, the then Prime Minister of Australia. And the person who sidled up to Craig Thomson—supported him—was the current Leader of the Opposition, the member for Maribyrnong. So, for the Labor Party to come in here and lecture the coalition, who has done the right thing by the government, by the people of Australia, when we are behaving ethically in every respect—on every part of this journey we have done the right thing.

The Prime Minister has made it absolutely clear in the House and elsewhere that we are totally confident of the status of the member for New England, and that is the very clear advice of the Solicitor-General. And nobody has sought to impugn the Solicitor-General's reputation. It is absolutely clear, however, that this area of the law needs to be clarified. This area of the law, under section 44(i), needs to be clarified. What the government has decided to do is, on the request of the Deputy Prime Minister, refer this matter to the High Court, to get a very clear ruling from the High Court about what section 44(i) means—

Mr Brian Mitchell interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lyons.

Mr PYNE: particularly with respect to citizenship gained by descent. So, we have done the right thing, yet Labor comes in here and thinks they can lecture the government—

Mr Brian Mitchell interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lyons is warned.

Mr PYNE: about us taking the right course of action to ensure that, in the public interest, people have absolute confidence in how the Constitution works, because this government is the adult in the room. Where the Leader of the Opposition and the Labor Party keep playing old politics, this government is the one that is getting on with dealing with issues like low wages, creating jobs, growing investment in the economy, reducing inflation, keeping interest rates low, balancing the budget. That's what sensible governments do—they deal with welfare reform and the economics of opportunity. All the opposition does is play politics day in and day out, and that's why the public are thoroughly sick of it. They are thoroughly sick of it, and that's why they continue to support this Prime Minister over the Leader of the Opposition every day of the week.

If you take the Manager of Opposition Business's logic to its logical conclusion, if a member who was referred to the High Court, such as in the circumstances of the Deputy Prime Minister, could no longer sit in the parliament until the High Court decided the outcome of that application, the government could use its numbers any time it wished to refer any member of the Labor Party to the High Court if it chose to do so. In fact, I'm sure that, if the Labor Party had that kind of power and the shoe was on the other foot, that's exactly what they would

do. But, taken to its logical conclusion, if the government was unsure of winning a vote, we would simply refer one of the members of the opposition to the High Court and ask the High Court to determine their status, and, until the High Court got around to it, we'd say that they couldn't vote in the chamber. That might work in Third World Stalinist countries, one which many of the Labor members would draw their political inspiration from, but it doesn't work in a democracy like ours. That's why we will not be supporting the suspension of standing orders. That's because the government—the adult in the room—is getting on with the business of government, and that's what the public expects and wants us to do.

The other reason we're not going to be lectured by the Labor Party about this matter is the Prime Minister wrote to the Leader of the Opposition today. In his letter to the Leader of the Opposition, he said, 'There are a number of cases already referred by the Senate, so it would be helpful if all relevant matters could be heard by the court at the same time.' In other words, we would be quite keen to refer members on the other side of the House over whom there may be a cloud to the High Court for determination.

Opposition members: Who?

Mr PYNE: I've been asked to name them, and I will. The member for Braddon, for example, has a much worse case than Senator Malcolm Roberts. The only difference between the member for Braddon's status in this House as a UK citizen and Senator Malcolm Roberts is the matter of months it took for the UK to write and say that both he and she were not citizens of the UK. But, on election day, neither of them had renounced their citizenship to the United Kingdom, and the only difference between the member for Braddon and Senator Malcolm Roberts is a matter of months. That is the only material difference.

There are others. It surprises me that, if members on that side of the House had evidence of renouncing their citizenship, they would not be providing it to the media. I understand that *The Courier Mail* has asked the member for Longman on many occasions to prove that she has renounced her UK citizenship. She has refused to do so. If the member for Longman has absolutely nothing to fear, why doesn't she release the evidence that shows that she renounced her citizenship? What about the member for Makin? The member for Makin has been asked time and again by the press to show how he's renounced his citizenship. He says that he has, but where is the evidence that the member for Makin has renounced his citizenship? It was okay for the member for Cowan to produce her evidence. The member for Cowan, who had the potential to be an Egyptian citizen, produced the evidence which shows that she has renounced her citizenship. She's done the right thing. So, if it's good enough for the member for Cowan, why isn't it good enough for the member for Makin, the member for Longman or, in fact, the member for Braddon, who is in a worse position than Senator Malcolm Roberts? I understand that the member for Calwell has also been asked to produce her evidence to show that she is no longer a Greek citizen. They all claim that they're not dual citizens, but if in fact they have this evidence, which is apparently clearly able to be obtained, why haven't they produced it for the general public?

If the government decided to refer those members to the High Court to seek clarity about their status, would we insist that they not be allowed to vote in the House of Representatives until justice had been able to take its course?

Of course we wouldn't. We would expect their status to be resolved by the High Court, and once resolved they would be able to continue to do exactly what they had done before unless they were found to have been disqualified.

There are many more. If Labor wants to open this Pandora's box, that is a matter for them, but the reality is that there are more, and they need to prove that they are not disqualified from sitting in the House of Representatives before they start to criticise the government for being the ones that did the right thing and recognised that this was an area that needed to be clarified by the High Court in relation to section 44(i) for us to be able to have full confidence that the Constitution is fit for purpose. That's what the public expects us to do: to get on with the job. When an issue is raised, they expect us to deal with it maturely, calmly and sensibly, while all the time the cabinet and the rest of the parliament on this side of the House are serving the interests of the people: creating jobs, building investment and supporting local communities. That's exactly what we're going to continue to do, and we're going to vote against the suspension of standing orders because we want to deal with the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection's citizenship laws, which is much more important than pathetic political point-scoring from the Labor Party.

The SPEAKER: The time allotted for this debate has concluded. The question is that the motion moved by the Manager of Opposition Business to suspend standing orders be agreed to.