



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE**

**Cummings, Mr James Bartholomew (Bart) AM**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 9 September 2015**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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<b>Questioner</b>	<b>Responder</b>
<b>Speaker</b> McCormack, Michael, MP	<b>Question No.</b>

**Mr McCORMACK** (Riverina—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance) (11:04): It is so good to be following on from those gracious and fine words by the member for Flynn. I think he and I are probably the two most avid racehorse followers in the chamber. There are very distinct Riverina connections to Australia's two best thoroughbred racehorse trainers: Tommy Smith and Bart Cummings. My electorate is one of the strongest racing regions in the nation, and it has been that way since the 1860s. Wagga Wagga's Murrumbidgee Turf Club, of which I was a director for nine happy years until 2002, was established in 1860, a year before the first Melbourne Cup was run and won by Archer. Indeed, in 1874 the Wagga Wagga Gold Cup offered a richer stake than the Melbourne Cup the same year, prompting *The Australasian* to ask, 'Will the VRC play second fiddle to Wagga?'

Bart Cummings, to whom we pay our sincerest respects with this condolence motion today, never won a Wagga Cup. He certainly nominated horses in the race which stops a region on the first Friday in May but, Bart being Bart, his charges were always lumped with more lead in their saddlebags by Southern District Racing Association handicappers than Cummings was ever prepared to cop. Such a shame.

The southern Riverina had a special place in Cummings' heart, for it was that fine district—Deniliquin, to be precise—from which the late Roy Higgins emanated. Higgins, appropriately dubbed 'The Professor', rode Bart's first and third Melbourne Cup winners, the tiny mare Light Fingers in 1965 and Red Handed in 1967. Red Handed gave Cummings his initial Melbourne Cup winner in the trainer's own colours, the now famous green and gold diagonal stripes. Like Light Fingers, he was the well-named son of French-bred sire Le Filou. I am interested to note that Racing Victoria stewards will allow Bart Cummings's name to remain in the training partnership with his grandson if the evergreen stayer Precedence makes the Melbourne Cup field in 2015. Precedence, who has already contested four Melbourne Cups, is being set for a fifth attempt at the race that Cummings made his own. That is why, as the member for Flynn mentioned, he was called the Cups King. Chief Steward Terry Bailey said that, if the horse made the Melbourne Cup field in 2015, the partnership name of James and Bart Cummings would remain. I tell you what: if Precedence gets in that field, get on it.

Tommy Smith was raised in the small western Riverina town of Goolgowi, where he spent much of his boyhood driving bullock teams and breaking in horses from the age of seven—just seven; imagine that—with his dad. Smith rode on the flat around the Riverina racetracks. They were pretty rough tracks back then. However, increasing weight resulted in him trying his luck as a jumps jockey, but a bad fall and a severely shattered hip forced him out of the saddle at age 20. TJ took up a trainer's licence and, by a stroke of good fortune, transformed a Riverina rogue, Bragger, into a handy horse—and the rest, as they say, is history. As his daughter, Gai Waterhouse, would later reflect, Tommy Smith famously told jockey George Moore, on a train from Wagga Wagga to Melbourne, that one day soon he would train the Derby winner and Moore would be aboard. There was never any doubting Tommy Smith's confidence. He realised his prophecy when Moore landed a 100 to one outsider, a real roughie, Playboy, a maiden, to win the 1949 Australian Jockey Club Derby. It was the first of a remarkable 35 Derby successes for TJ. Oh, how the sporty Riverina helped shape the careers of Australia's greatest racehorse trainers.

Finally, I would like to relate a tale about Bart, who passed away on 30 August, aged 87, which tells a lot about what a laconic wit he was and what a legend of the one-liner we have lost. The story goes that Cummings's Adelaide stables were being 'cased' by a council health inspector. Cummings trailed after the inspector—you can just see him doing it—throughout his long examination, peering over his shoulder as he scribbled down notes on his clipboard. At long last the inspector turned to Cummings and declared, 'You've too many flies in your stables, Mr Cummings.' To which Bart, peering out from under those big, bushy, iconic eyebrows, retorted, 'How many are we allowed to have?'—just classic Bart, absolutely classic Bart. Anyone who has backed a winner in the race that stops a nation on that first Tuesday in November has probably benefited from Bart. He won a dozen Melbourne Cups. Vale James Bartholomew Cummings. We will probably not see your like again.