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HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

ADJOURNMENT

Australian Labor Party

SPEECH

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Date Thursday, 9 February 2017
Page 614
Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton—Opposition Whip) (12:48): This afternoon I am going to talk to two of my constituents particularly. I know they have never voted for me and perhaps will never vote for me, but I want to address my remarks particularly to them. They are my son Stanley Perrett and my other son, Leo Perrett. As I said, they might never vote for me down the track, but I want to talk to them about why I do my job and why I love doing my job.

I know it is very hard for them that I was not around for the start of their school year. I was doing my job as a politician, like many other politicians. Obviously we make sacrifices. It is a wonderful job and a great calling, but our families particularly suffer. So, Stanley and Leo, I want to talk about my job as a politician. Obviously I did other things before being a politician. Before you came along I was a schoolteacher and a lawyer, but I saw this opportunity to help more people. Being a schoolteacher and a lawyer are about helping people, but being a politician you particularly get to help many people across the nation.

Why join the Labor Party? I want to address that question in this speech. Over the summer, before Christmas, I took you to the Tree of Knowledge at Barcaldine to talk a little about the history of the Labor Party, to help explain that. You can break political parties up in all sorts of ways—on the political spectrum, left and right, and according to what they are focused on. You might say there are clusters of selfishness—people that focus on the individual, trumpeting the belief that the individual is supreme—and then other parties that have more of a focus on caring for all, and that is what the Labor Party is. There are also political parties that are parties of protest and will never, ever form government. But the Labor Party has always been a progressive party of government, and that involves making compromises and actually delivering things, rather than promising 'pie the sky'-type things.

I can explain politics to you, Stanley and Leo, pretty simply. If you believe tomorrow can be better and want to feel good while actually doing nothing, that is when you join the Greens political party. If you believe that yesterday was better and want to feel good while doing nothing, that is when you join the Liberal political party. If you believe in a yesterday that never was and never will be, then you join the National Party. Once upon a time you used to have to be a farmer to be in the National Party, but I have heard from people that nowadays that is a disadvantage—and that is a disgrace, coming from a farming community like St George, I would say. But, if you believe in a better tomorrow and want to feel good by actually achieving something, then there is only one party to join, and that is why I joined the Australian Labor Party. It has been around for over 125 years, and that is why I took you to the Tree of Knowledge in Barcaldine.

The Labor Party, when it started, was a racist party. It was a party that had particularly tough rules for the Chinese community, but since then it has become a much more inclusive and multicultural party. In my time in the federal parliament, it has done some great things, some incredible things. Stanley and Leo, on my first day at work in this building we saw the first ever welcome to country by the Indigenous owners of this land and then an apology by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd to the stolen generations. Later we saw the incredible work of Kevin Rudd, Wayne Swan and Julia Gillard to get us through the global financial crisis. Then we had the National Disability Insurance Scheme, paid parental leave and a price on carbon so that your children will have a planet that they can live on, rather than one affected by climate change.

They are some of the reasons why I have asked you to put up with the fact that I am away for 30 weeks or so of the year. I know it is tough on you, Stanley, and tough on you, Leo, and particularly tough on your mum, but they are some of the reasons why I am proud to be a member of the Australian Labor Party and why I hope that you can understand why your dad is away.