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GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

SPEECH

Tuesday, 10 December 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Tuesday, 10 December 2013 Page 2212 Questioner Speaker Taylor, Angus, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof No Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr TAYLOR (Hume) (16:40): I rise with great pride on behalf of the people of the electorate of Hume. As the crow flies, the closest Hume border is 10 kilometres from where I stand. But it is in many respects a world away. Uniquely in this country, the Hume electorate spans the fringes of two capital cities. It is bounded by outer Sydney in the north, the ACT in the south and small western towns like Stockinbingal and Quandialla. Taking in 12 local government areas, it is the electorate of historic small towns, villages and rural hamlets. From the rugged high country of Crookwell, where snow often settles in winter, to the flat, sometimes dusty and dry red dirt of Caragabal, we have wind swept tablelands and gentle slopes and plains.

In the earliest settled agricultural region in Australia, it is a joy to me that we have some of the best livestock country and some of the highest yielding wheat and canola crops in Australia. Yet, with the nation's biggest transport corridor running through its heart, Hume is more diverse and more connected than you might think. Over 30 per cent of the Hume workforce commutes into Sydney or Canberra each day. My constituents range from ultra-progressives, particularly close to Canberra, right through to hardcore conservatives. But in the middle is a great swathe of people who are fairly moderate and mostly tolerant and who want government to get off their backs so that they can get on with their lives. They work on farms, in shops and in hospitals and schools. Like country people all over, they typically have a lot of common sense. People in Hume are great detectors of spin.

Hume's representatives have been as fearless and wise as the great explorer after whom the electorate was named. I am honoured to follow the exceptional Wal Fife, John Sharp and, of course, Alby Schultz, who is here in the gallery today. I thank them for their service, and I aspire to the high bar set by each of them.

In the early 19th century my Taylor ancestors set out from Yorkshire on their pilgrimage to make a better life. Let us just say they were not on the right side of the establishment and, being offered no land from the government, they kept moving south. They made their way via Berrima to Taylor's Hill—now Mount Taylor—just a few kilometres from here. For his assistance to the Rum Corp in deposing Governor Bligh, James Taylor was given land. But some in the

family were pushed south again. That side of the family was sceptical of power and dismissive of the political establishment long before Federation and Canberra were conceived.

I was born an hour's drive south of here and now I live an hour to the north on the edge of a beautiful frost plain near Goulburn. My childhood home sits on the Monaro, high on the Great Divide. My three brothers and I had a freedom and an independence that most children these days—and even then—could only dream of. It was not until the mid-1990s that on our place we switched from horses to motor bikes for our stock work. So I spent much of my childhood and young adulthood on the back of a horse. We rode 10 kilometres across the paddocks to pony club in Nimmitabel. We fished in the big dam for yabbies and trout. We rode our pushbikes to the school bus. We mustered, drenched and marked our way through school and university holidays. At a young age, it was unexceptional to be sent to pick up a mob of sheep or cattle many miles away with just a lunch pack and a horse—and, if we were lucky, a good dog.

We had exceptional parents. Dad, who is here in the gallery today, was busy running the farm and later even busier making a contribution to rural politics during that extraordinary era when farmers were leading national reforms. Our mother was devoted to us. She taught us all to read and write well before we went to school. Education was paramount and we learnt to approach every task as if our lives depended on it, and to never, ever give up. Mum was strong but gentle. She was unfailingly kind, loyal and generous, with the strongest moral compass of anyone I have known. We lost her to breast cancer when she was in her 40s, the age I am now. She would be proud if she were here today because she believed in service of any kind. She was deeply influenced by her parents and their values, especially her father. My grandfather William Hudson was, and remains, a pervasive role model in my life. He was commissioner and chief engineer of the Snowy Mountains scheme and led it from its inception in 1949 until just before completion in 1967. He conceived of the idea and insisted, against resistance, to bring in large numbers of refugees from war-torn Europe. He insisted that people from over 30 countries, who had just been fighting each other in the Second World War, live and work together in multi-ethnic camps. The

Snowy scheme, quite literally, changed the face of our nation.

My grandfather treated every single person with whom he came into contact, from humble truck drivers to senior engineers, with equal dignity and respect. He abhorred snobbery and judged people on character and conduct, not rank. He worked prodigiously and was extraordinarily humble. The Snowy was never about him. He retired to Canberra, a stone's throw from here, and he died owning a modest house and modest possessions. He never focused on accumulating material wealth.

On nation-building we can take many lessons from the Snowy scheme. There was, even then, a rigorous cost-benefit analysis. The project met a clear and universal public need which could only be achieved through government involvement while setting new benchmarks in the use of private contractors. Legislation ensured it was insulated from party politics. It was forward-thinking and its safety regime was the world's best at the time. After a quarter century of construction, the scheme came in under budget and before time. At the peak of a rewarding career in the private sector, my decision to enter public life was not an easy one. In the end, though, it was influenced heavily by my grandfather's record and impact as one of our nation's great public servants.

At the University of Sydney I found law interesting and rigorous, but it never pushed my buttons like economics. Economics is about making smarter use of limited resources to make people better off. It shapes history and society at every level. Good economics is the key to good government, job creation and funding for world-class schools, health services, roads, railways and broadband networks.

At university I read Smith, Bentham, Burke, Mill, Marshall, Schumpeter, Galbraith, Keynes and Friedman. But 20 years ago I stepped into McKinsey. Since that time I have learnt that no single economist, thinker or philosopher has the answer for everything. At McKinsey, then at Port Jackson Partners, I worked alongside some of the world's best management thinkers. From mines and farms in South America, Africa and the Pilbara, to ports, smelters, steel mills and railways across Asia and Australia, and even to cow sheds and wool sheds deep in rural New Zealand, I learnt about what really drives growth, jobs and productivity. I learnt to think strategically, to focus on the two or three things that really matter. I built a career on helping clients understand the phenomenal rise of China and India and the changing role of minerals, energy, food and water in the global economy.

Helping some of our biggest companies to shape their long-term plans gave me licence to think long and hard about Australia's place in the world, a world where ideas, people, money and products cross borders faster and with more intensity than ever before. I have witnessed the lasting benefits that massive private sector investment can bring. I have witnessed extraordinary leadership turn organisations around. But I have also seen successful organisations, including governments, grow big, lazy and complacent when discipline is lost.

In my own personal involvement with small businesses, particularly in agriculture, I have learnt the necessity of experimentation and the value of persistence and I have felt the ignominy of failure. In this place I will never forget that it is the army of small-business people and entrepreneurs who put their necks on the line, their noses to the grindstone and their faith in humanity every day. They contribute more to our economy than big business ever will.

The heaving and irresistible force of globalisation now well and truly bears down upon us, fuelled by rapid Asian growth. It is creating huge new opportunities and the world is signalling that Australia should focus on what we do best. It is also signalling that we should let go where we are not competitive. Our response will define our future.

Since John Macarthur put his first bale of merino wool on a ship to England, we have depended upon trade, foreign investment, immigration and innovation. More than ever our future prosperity will stand on these four pillars. The last government put at risk a huge opportunity in our resources sector. Although the remaining prospects are strong, this must never happen again. With tens of millions of people in the developing world moving each year from agrarian poverty into urban and middle-class lives, our small country is poised on the brink of yet another prospect: a boom in demand for our food and fibre. But it is only a chance. We could easily botch this one. Many of our competitors are eyeing this prize.

Resolving the clash between liberal economics and isolationism, between openness and insularity, is the first-order priority in taking advantage of our changing world. Those who argue for fortress Australia are wrong. The pursuit of global opportunities in sectors where we can excel will strengthen us. This is how we will sustain our sovereignty, not by putting up new barriers. However, the monumental benefits of openness are not sufficiently clear to many Australians on all sides of politics. That is partly because the raw appeal of populism is an easy grab on the evening news, but it is also because our policy settings are not right. We must hungrily seek out fast-growing new markets

to our north. We need the big licks of capital and the skills others can provide. We must boldly expound and stay true to a narrative that explains the benefits of openness.

At the same time we must guard against the voracious thirst of vested interests and monopoly. Whether it manifests in companies, unions or the most powerful monopoly of all—government—monopoly will exploit if left unconstrained. Our competition watchdog must be given everything it needs to encourage competition and see off exploitation in a more global economy so that consumers and small businesses can prosper. We need to stop giving public money to rent-seekers and we must be strong against the loud voices of narrowly-focused interests. Laws passed in this place must not drag down the living standards of the majority by benefiting a few. This government has shown that it understands the urgent need to step up and focus on bilateral trade deals that position our best exporters to win. New Zealand has achieved great benefits by backing its strengths, and agriculture in particular has gained much. Tax and welfare policy must encourage participation and productivity, recognising that capital, businesses and highly-skilled people now move quickly to more attractive countries. But we must also ensure that global companies and investors cannot game our tax system at our expense.

In immigration, like any self-respecting nation, we must control our fortune, not have it foisted upon us. Along with a generous humanitarian program, we should be unapologetic about actively seeking out new citizens—and many of them—who bring us skills and a strong work ethic and who will contribute to the fabric of our nation. Meanwhile, we must embrace innovation from all over the globe, focusing our research and development on our strengths. Our industrial relations system will need to be more flexible and more outward looking. Australian school and university students now compete with those beyond our borders, billions strong, whose appetite for learning is unprecedented. This year there are more university students in China than the entire Australian population. Our competitors know that you do not need to spend billions more on education to achieve outstanding outcomes. We need to get smart, stop the ideological warfare and focus on great teaching.

In the shorter term, we face clear challenges. This government has been left with a deep structural deficit. Consumers are saddled with debt and are nervous. Our dollar is stubbornly high and mining investment is on the skids. In time, export growth is the hope of the side. But to pick up the slack we must strongly encourage non-mining investment, particularly infrastructure and housing—finding clever

means of attracting investment without drowning ourselves in more red ink. Making the most of every dollar of government expenditure is now more crucial than ever. The productivity revolution has been sweeping through the private sector for decades. It is now time for the public sector to follow. Whether in health, education, defence or welfare, it is time for governments to treat every dollar of expenditure as if it were our own.

I want these things because I want grain, meat and cherry producers in my electorate to be selling without barriers into fast-growing Asian markets now. I want the children in Hume's schools to have the same opportunities as their Asian competitors. I want to know that we will look after our most vulnerable and elderly as their numbers continue to grow. I want the Barton Highway, which connects 12,000 of my constituents to Canberra every day, to be the road it should be. I want more rural doctors and hospitals to be installing new technology and offering new services, not cutting them. I want mobile phone reception and internet connectivity to be improved quickly so that more of my constituents can run their small businesses or work from home, creating more local jobs.

At the same time, we must protect our basic values and bedrock institutions. I first encountered political correctness as a student at Oxford. It was 1991, and a young Naomi Wolf lived a couple of doors down the corridor. Several graduate students, mostly from the north-east of the US, decided we should abandon the Christmas tree in the common room because some people might be offended. I was astounded. My friends from Oklahoma, Alaska and Oregon explained this new kind of moral vanity that was taking hold in America. A few of us pushed back hard. In the end we won, because we were mainstream. But we must resist the insidious political correctness that would have us discard those core values that have made us great. In our times, the world over, the foundation of democracy—free speech—and the foundation of capitalism—property rights—are being chipped away by shrill elitist voices who insist that they know what is best for people who are not remotely like them. I can tell you, I will always defend property rights and free speech. And in this place I will back the parliament over the executive and the judiciary, because it is through this parliament that each of us here is accountable to our constituents.

I owe so much to so many people: to Alby Schultz and Gloria, thank you for the faith you placed in me, your support and your famous generosity of spirit; to the 1,000 people across Hume, many of whom are here today, who helped on polling day; to the core Hume campaign team—my wonderful campaign manager, Michele Costello and Nancy Roberts, Paula

Clegg, Graham Templeton, Sam Rowland, Brooke Hilton, Jane Reardon, Danny Kennedy, Ian Norris, Ian Weakley, Geoff Pearson, John Plews, Ruth Gibson, Sarah Bucknell, Holly Campbell, Bob Rogers, Tim Meares, Frances Douch, Geoff Kettle, Maree Ireland, Sam McGuinness and Holly Hughes—and many others who volunteered not for days but for weeks and in some cases, Paula and Nancy, for months of their time. Thank you. You set the gold standard.

I thank MPs Pru Goward and Jai Rowell as well as a host of current and former federal MPs who visited the electorate. I thank those who provided wise counsel, including Bill Heffernan, Malcolm Turnbull, John Howard and the Prime Minister.

Finally, to my family. I met Louise 25 years ago. She was—and still is—talented, clever and warm. She was a girl from the bush who was interested in big things: politics, God and the world around her. And she came from a family that was brimming with love. I was lucky to find her and her parents, Paula and Richard, who are so generous and so supportive to us and to everyone who inhabits their world. To our beautiful children—Hamish, Olivia, Adelaide and Roo: we love you dearly. I thank you from the bottom of my heart for accepting such a dramatic change in our lives.

Some people say politics is about power. I do not agree. It should be about leadership, service and making an enduring difference to the lives of others. I hope the work I do in this place makes a real difference and will one day make my children proud. Thank you.