



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**MOTIONS**

**Equal Rights**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 23 November 2016**

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>	Littleproud, David, MP	<b>Question No.</b>	

**Mr LITTLEPROUD** (Maranoa) (17:50): Today, I stand in this chamber as a proud member of a government that throughout our nation's history has supported and respected the tolerance of others no matter what their race, religion or gender and it continues to do so today. I am also proud of the fact that this country is the most successful multicultural society in the world. This is something all Australians should be proud of. If you ask a person in the street what they think defines our Australian culture I am sure the words, 'mateship' and 'getting in and having a go' are likely to be the responses that you will get. In fact that narrative rings true here with this motion today, where both the government and the opposition agree, just like it was 20 years ago when our former Prime Minister, John Howard, and the then opposition leader, Kim Beazley, spoke on this very motion.

It would be remiss of me not to say that this generous, respectful and multicultural Australia has been underpinned by giving our people peace of mind. When I refer to the giving Australians peace of mind I am referring to the efforts we take to ensure that Australia remains a harmonious multicultural society, underpinned by the focus on our country's national security.

I have to say that I am extremely proud to be part of a government focused on the security of our borders and diligently managing our immigration programs. It is our ability to control our borders that enables us to live in a harmonious, well-balanced and multicultural society. We are definitely one of the luckiest countries in the world, and as a member of a functional global society this government recognises the need to do our part. I believe that the people who come to this country by visa, whether as a skilled immigrant, a refugee or as a humanitarian entrant; as partners or carers; as a business owner; as a regional skilled migrant; or as parents, and who agree to respect our country's sovereignty and laws deserve our mateship and an opportunity to contribute. Entry to our country through our humanitarian program—a program that is global and non-discriminatory—provides hope for a better future for people and their families who are displaced by conflict.

This government has committed to settling 12,000 additional humanitarian refugees who have been displaced by enduring conflict in Syria and Iraq. This government will work to ensure that refugees who are welcomed to Australia through our humanitarian program pass imperative security checks and meet health and character criteria. This government will be providing the necessary services to our humanitarian entrants to help them to build a life here in Australia so that they too can become self-reliant and participate equally as members of our Australian society.

My electorate of Maranoa is classified as regional, rural and remote and I would like to talk with the tangible benefits of ensuring that migrants successfully integrate in our regional rural and remote areas. On the ABC's *Australian Story* two weeks ago we learned firsthand about the benefits of encouraging multicultural integration in the small community town of Mingoola, just over the border in New South Wales—a town that my leader, Deputy Prime Minister Barnaby Joyce, actually represents. This is a town which in many ways is similar to the sum of the towns in my electorate of Maranoa, in the sense that these communities are facing the challenges of a declining population and sustaining their essential services and facilities. Smaller rural communities like Mingoola, and the many communities across Mingoola, while facing challenges are also proud, community-minded and respectful communities, where people are friendly and helpful and care about the future of their town.

Julia Harpham noticed the pressure placed on the future of Mingoola. It was a problem which almost resulted in the closure of the local Mingoola school. Instead of accepting a sad end, Julia worked to find a solution that would suit her community. In Julia Harpham's words:

You don't like to see a community die. And there's not much joy in a place with no children.

Together the community of Mingoola worked with refugee advocates to facilitate, with the help of this government, to bring refugee families from Central Africa to Mingoola.

Families arriving here as refugees from countries in Central Africa, like Rwanda, often do not want the hustle and bustle of the city. They want a life on the land, to live in smaller communities to which they can contribute and for their children to enjoy a country upbringing. Earlier this year three families relocated to Mingoola, increasing the small rural town's population by 29 and saving the local school from closure. The relocation of these three families has also provided employment opportunities for people with local farmers and alleviated the pressure placed on farmers in the area in attracting a reliable workforce.

By all reports this project is a success for Mingoola and is an example of how Australia's humanitarian program produces good outcomes, particularly in regional, rural and remote Australia. This outcome is exactly what the evidence tells us. When we integrate our immigrant population into our rural towns we broaden and revitalise our communities. We have people to utilise our schools and people to take job opportunities that we in rural Australia often find hard to place. Maintaining sustainable populations in our smaller communities means that all levels of government are able to ensure adequate investment in planning, infrastructure, programs and services in the country. In my first speech I spoke about infrastructure being important for unlocking our economic prosperity in Maranoa.

In the three months I have been in this role I have been fortunate to attend two citizenship ceremonies: one in Dalby, at which the community welcomed 21 new citizens, and another at Kingaroy, where 23 citizens joined the South Burnett community. In fact, the citizenship ceremony in Kingaroy was one of the largest held by the South Burnett Regional Council. I watched proudly as our new citizens pledged loyalty to Australia, our people, our democratic beliefs and our rights and liberties and promised to respect and obey our laws. After speaking to some of Maranoa's newest citizens and learning about them, their children and their background I was able to fully appreciate the value of their contribution to the social fabric and the economies of their new regional and rural communities.

Another issue which I have been focusing on in my electorate is the value of our passionate, dedicated and community minded volunteers in helping address community disadvantage, whether that be by reason of unemployment, disability or otherwise. I have been encouraging people to recognise good citizens—the people who donate their time to help others. In preparing my speech on this very important motion I was surprised to learn that, according to Volunteering Australia statistics from 2010, 36.2 per cent of people aged 18 years and over participated in formal volunteering, so roughly about 6.1 million people or 27 per cent of the then 2010 population. Of that amount 1.44 million volunteers were people who were born overseas, and 840,000 of those were people who spoke a language other than English. I think these statistics truly reflect the fact that the opportunity we provide to people through our immigration programs is of benefit to Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who contribute so much towards this country. I am grateful for our First Australians who are now saving lives as doctors, nurses and paramedics, teaching children, working with our unique Australian environment and serving the Australian people here in this place. But I am also cognisant that we must continue our work in bettering the lives and opportunities of our First Australians.

Our government is extremely committed to preserving our First Australians' history. While the Prime Minister was in Birdsville with me last month we met with Jean Barr-Crombie, who through Red Ridge received a grant to publish a book on the Indigenous language unique to outback Birdsville. This grant will ensure that our Indigenous languages survive the years to come and remain an important part of Australia's history.

In closing, what we as a nation have achieved in creating the most functional and harmonious nation on earth is a great achievement but we can never take this for granted and we should be prepared to defend and preserve that achievement at all costs.

Debate adjourned.

**Federation Chamber adjourned at 17:59**