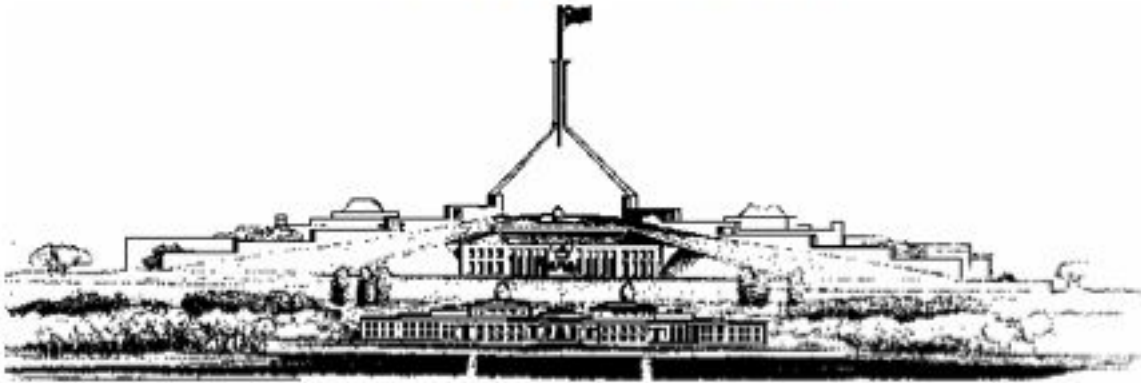




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**  
**PROOF**  
**GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH**  
**Address-in-Reply**  
**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 13 November 2013**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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# SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 13 November 2013  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** McKenzie, Sen Bridget

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator McKENZIE** (Victoria—Nationals Whip in the Senate) (10:31): It is an honour for me to second the motion supporting the address of the Queen's representative in Australia, the Governor-General, outlining the government's agenda for the 44th Parliament. It is a key part of our democracy. I would like to refer to our founding document, the Constitution, which says:

The legislative power of the Commonwealth shall be vested in a Federal Parliament, which shall consist of the Queen, a Senate, and a House of Representatives, and which is hereinafter called The Parliament ...

In looking back in preparation for this speech, I had a look at the first address-in-reply speech, made in 1903. The senators, to a man, all stood up and argued with several aspects of the Governor-General's speech that was presented to the Senate at that time. I think there were some issues around the High Court. But I will not be doing that today, because I am very, very proud to be a member of the Abbott-Truss government for the 44th parliament that will be delivering on the Governor-General's address, which was given yesterday in this place.

I note that the Governor-General grew up in regional Queensland and has spoken often about the importance of Australia's connection to the land and how important it is for our cultural heritage to pass on that love of the land to future generations—particularly for her, her children and her grandchildren. So I second this motion as a National Party senator representing the interests of regional Victoria. As a party we recognise that great connection that the Governor-General has spoken about. The Nationals are the second-oldest political party, celebrating 93 unbroken years of representation of rural and regional Australia in the federal parliament. We are proud partners in the new Liberal-National government, as we have been in so many successful Liberal-National governments in the past. We help to bring to government and to parliament the voice, concerns and aspirations of the one-third of Australians who live outside our capital cities. Within the new Abbott-Truss ministry the range of portfolios reflect the diversity of regional Australia, concerning health, employment, Indigenous affairs, finance, defence, agriculture, infrastructure and regional development.

I know that the Governor-General and, indeed, the Prime Minister have made several references to the importance of stable government since coming to government. As we begin this 44th Parliament, it is worth reflecting on our history and the importance of developing the strong and stable government that we have today. Our Constitution was drafted in a spirit of fairness, balancing bigger states with smaller ones. It was simple and pragmatic. We held constitutional conventions right around Australia, bringing the people to the document and ensuring that citizens were at the heart of the government of this new nation, drawing on the British and American experiences. And they got it right. I think the government that we have today for this 44th Parliament will completely reflect the intentions that the drafters of that original document had in bringing the people to the parliament, reflecting the people's desire. We look forward to delivering on the mandate that they have given us.

Our Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, has indicated that the 44th Parliament will be a respectful parliament, a parliament focused on the real concerns and aspirations of the people of Australia. Much of the work of government is already underway, as we parliamentarians have traversed the regions talking about the challenges and opportunities that we face as a government and as a nation. The new government wants a parliament which is less about political point-scoring and more focused on raising the issues of the people we represent. I support the comments of Senator Ruston in welcoming the return of majority government. The coalition will provide strong, stable government and we have a clear mandate for our legislative priorities.

Our regions urgently need good government that delivers competent, efficient and predictable administration. Regional Australia needs a government with the same characteristics that have helped it survive and thrive: independence, resilience, creativity, an entrepreneurial spirit and an outward focus. That is what has driven success for regional Australia and I know those are the characteristics that will underpin an Abbott-Truss government. The role of government should be to support and develop a nation, not to bury it in restrictions, regulations and pointless paperwork. This is precisely where Labor went so wrong, as it shackled Australia with tax upon regulation upon

further tax: 21,000 new regulations in such a short space of time.

In the regions we are not looking for welfare but simply for a fair go, and that means a government that works to provide opportunities for people and businesses in the regions as well as the cities, and I know that, unlike the last six years, the Abbott-Truss government will have regional Australia right at its heart. It is a government that will deliver on transport and better communications to our regions, a government that will deliver education, health services and infrastructure. It is a government willing to unlock the potential that lies within regional Australia, the potential for rural Australia to prosper and help maximise Australia's standing as a global partner.

And there are significant opportunities for growth in regional Australia—agriculture, agribusiness, tourism and energy to name a few—in coming decades. This government is ready, willing and able to ensure that regional Australia is able to capitalise on those opportunities in coming decades. In agriculture, we can then help meet the needs of global food demand, expected to grow by 60 million people a year over the next 20 years. We already boast the cleanest, most efficient and least subsidised agriculture sector in the world. We need to ensure that that continues and that we capitalise on that aspect of our economy.

International tourism is growing at four per cent per year and will double over the next two decades, providing employment for more than half a million Australians and accounting for \$107 billion of economic activity and \$25 billion of export earnings. A lower Australian dollar is making Australia attractive again, especially to the growing middle class in Asia, which is both close and in a similar time zone. Tourists want to see the Opera House and the MCG, but I think we all know that they love our magnificent natural heritage. They can experience that within the regions, whether it is along the Great Ocean Road, up in Senator Scullion's country in the Northern Territory or, indeed, Mr Acting Deputy President Smith, in your own beautiful WA. The natural heritage and environment of Australia has so much to offer, but I think we can actually do more to ensure that our cultural heritage is similarly promoted to the international tourism market, and there may be some opportunities for us there.

There is growing demand, similarly, for energy worldwide, providing significant opportunity to regional Australia—not only to lower our CO2 emissions as we look towards other sources of energy but also for jobs in the regions. We just need to ensure we do this in an environmentally responsible way, and one that is in the national interest.

The government's agenda will support the growth in regional Australia right across tax reform, small business policy and deregulation, the Commission of Audit, trade with Asia, communications, education, defence and environment—the list goes on. We have taken a very holistic approach, as the Governor-General outlined yesterday. And I am only going to touch on a few of those aspects.

Tax reform is essential, as I mentioned earlier. Today we start the work: we begin the agenda that Her Excellency outlined for us yesterday by, as we speak, the carbon tax being repealed in the House of Representatives. This fulfils the mandate given to us by the Australian people in such a resounding electoral result. We will also cut the company tax rate from 30 per cent to 28.5 per cent. We are also repealing the minerals resource rent tax, another significant election promise. Axing these taxes, if we are to do this responsibly, requires very difficult decisions to be made because some spending must also be cut to balance the books. But it is the right thing to do, it is the grown-up thing to do and it is the responsible thing for the government to do, to ensure that we are not keeping the goodies while we are taking with the other hand.

Much of Labor's spending promises relied on phantom revenue from the mining tax, whereas initiatives like our \$1 billion National Stronger Regions Fund are fully funded. I think that is going to be of great benefit to those regional areas that require significant support from government. It is a practical measure that is fully costed, unlike the previous government's support.

Labor claimed that agriculture was exempt from the world's biggest carbon tax; but for those of you who are interested I know that Devondale-Murray Goulburn has actually upped the bid for Warrnambool Cheese & Butter down in western Victoria, showing that domestic and international investors are realising the potential that Australian agricultural industry provides. Dairy farmers, particularly down in my state—we are the heart of dairy farming—were sluggish under the carbon tax, upwards of \$10,000 per farm in electricity costs. This was totally not factored into the carbon tax, despite the rhetoric that agriculture would not be affected.

Similarly, the coalition government's white paper on tax reform will review the efficiency and effectiveness of all taxes. We actually recognise the interconnectedness of the tax system and that you need to take a holistic look at the system, rather than cherry picking what you can look at and then cherry picking the recommendations you choose to adopt. Already the government has dealt with 93 tax measures that were left unlegislated and unresolved—getting the house in order. We have scrapped 63 other new tax measures

because we want to encourage and reward people who work hard and get ahead.

As a daughter of a small-business owner I know that when you grow small businesses you grow Australia. I am very passionate about small business and I am extremely excited about the Minister for Small Business's pursuit of this issue. While he was the shadow minister and since he has been the minister he has been promoting small business and getting on with the business of assisting small business from day one. It is about time that government got off the backs and out of the pockets of small business, and the new government is making its first root-and-branch review of the Competition and Consumer Act in 20 years. A lot has changed in 20 years in competition across our economy. Relationships between processors, producers, retailers and consumers have changed because of the uniqueness of our market. We need to take a look at that and assess whether the regime and the legislative framework we have in place are actually delivering on the policy outcomes that we need. So that is going to be a fabulous initiative of this government.

Deregulation is desperately needed. We must dismantle the regulations that are smothering everything from small business to universities. Education providers have also been complaining about the former government's regulation and the impact it was having on educating the next generation of young Australians. I think it is always useful to bear in mind that it is not just business that is affected.

As Thomas Jefferson said:

My reading of history convinces me that most bad government results from too much government.

I agree! So we are taking active steps as a government to reduce the impact of government in our lives and on our industries.

Our National Commission of Audit is already underway. It is an essential step in addressing Labor's record of waste and mismanagement, dealing with a century of regulation and legislation that has built up over time and actually having a really detailed look at it. The government has three principles at its heart that I think encapsulate our philosophy as a coalition government: firstly, that we respect taxpayers by ensuring every dollar of their money is spent wisely; secondly, that we should live within our means—not much to ask; and, thirdly, that the government should only do for the people what the people cannot do for themselves as free, independent beings. That is exactly a government's role. This aspiration actually is not new for the Nationals in a coalition government. John 'Black Jack' McEwen, a Victorian member of

parliament, the member for Murray—the food bowl of Australia, I would argue, with the Goulburn Valley, SPCA et cetera, right in the centre of my state of Victoria—who went on to be Prime Minister, said in his maiden speech in parliament in 1937 that it was the task of government 'to discover the basic facts upon which our national economy is founded, and search there for the root causes' of problems. That is exactly what the National Commission of Audit will do, receiving submissions.

Jobs are much more than just a pay packet. They are about independence, dignity, social interaction and family. So one very important role of government is to ensure that all our citizenry have fair access to the workplace: young people—we have seen the issues in Spain; older people; Indigenous Australians; and women, through increasing their workforce participation. Every young Australian who moves from unemployment to work represents a building block towards Australia's future. Indigenous Australians for the first time have a Prime Minister who is passionate about their plight and a minister, in Senator Scullion, who genuinely understands their issues and is committed to ensuring they reach their maximum potential and contribute to the building of a strong Australian future. I support the government's workforce participation initiatives, which will particularly benefit women, including a Productivity Commission inquiry into child care and a real paid parental leave scheme. Access to child care has been a real challenge for many families in regional Australia who do not have the same choice available as parents in the cities, without the benefit of economies of scale.

International trade has been part of the Nationals' DNA since well before the previous government suddenly discovered the Asian century and it has been at the heart of coalition governments. Trade has always been essential to regional Australia, which has always had to look offshore to sell its goods and to build a nation. Regional Australia will benefit greatly from the Abbott-Truss government's determination to seize the opportunity presented by the economic growth in Asia, not just in China. We will progress trade arrangements with Korea, China, Japan, Indonesia and India—great opportunities for Australian agribusiness, farmers and our food processors. It is worth mentioning here that the food-processing industry represents the largest part of our manufacturing industry, employing more than 300,000 Australians, more than half of them in regional Australia, and value adding to the fabulously clean, green Australian produce before we ship it offshore. So it is surely in our national interest for this to continue. We will end the delays and confusion that agribusiness has had to struggle with under previous governments.

Technology means that the world is also now in our lounge room and holds untold opportunities, particularly for those of us in regional Australia. The coalition's broadband plan to deliver communication services to regional Australia—much, much faster, Senator Polley, and at a much more reasonable cost—provides untold economic potential gains for those of us that live in the regions. Similarly, it is not so fabulous delivering gold-plated broadband in Kew whilst people in Wycheproof cannot make a phone call, so our commitment to improving technology for those of us out in the regions means a \$200 million investment to improve mobile coverage in regional Australia, particularly in smaller communities, along major transport routes and where black spots exist. Acting Deputy President Senator Smith will agree that those senators who travel the highways and byways of regional Australia know very well where the black spots are—not that we are the ones on the phone! This is going to be the hallmark of this government: dealing with the everyday concerns of people in a practical, efficient manner.

I am passionate about education and the opportunities for young people. For too long they have had to move away from home without the support of government. This coalition government will be determined to ensure that education is something that all Australians can participate in. We also will address cyberbullying. Senator Bilyk, I know you have been a part of that, but it was a great privilege for me to be part of the coalition's committee that examined cyberbullying right across the nation and we will be making some significant announcements about that. We are also going to ensure that parents and communities are much more engaged with local schools.

I briefly want to touch on defence because, as we withdraw from Afghanistan, there is no greater responsibility for the Commonwealth government than the defence of a nation. Regional Australia makes a significant contribution to the defence industry through our small and medium enterprises. We are also going to continue the strong tradition of past Liberal-National governments of ensuring a practical response to environmental leadership—and I do not say that lightly. What I am looking forward to is having a leadership team in Tony Abbott and Warren Truss that is committed to the service of the Australian people, and I think that is unique. I think that character, if you like, will be a good role model for all of us senators and members who are part of their government to actually remember why we are here and what we are about. We live in a dynamic and changing world and I think we now have the government that will allow our nation to participate fully. *(Time expired)*