



Speech by

GEOFF WILSON

MEMBER FOR FERNY GROVE

Hansard 28 October 1999

REPUBLIC

Mr WILSON (Ferry Grove—ALP) (10.13 a.m.): The constitutional referendum in 10 days' time will be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to modernise one key part of our structure of Government: the head of state. Australia's democracy is protected by checks and balances. A critical one is the head of state. The Prime Minister and Cabinet, through Parliament, exercise the executive power of Government. The Prime Minister is always in the thick of the hurly-burly of partisan party politics. However, the head of state is a neutral, impartial, bipartisan umpire who is not involved in day-to-day Government but who stands above politics to protect the Constitution and Australia's democracy.

The referendum is not a vote of confidence in the Prime Minister or in Queen Elizabeth II, who has performed her role with great distinction, sensitivity and dignity. Like it or not, there is only one choice on Saturday, 6 November. We can vote for a head of state who is and must always be a foreigner, who pays no taxes, who does not live in Australia but on the other side of the world, who does not vote in Australia or experience day-to-day Australian life and whom Australians cannot choose. Or we can vote for a head of state who must be an Australian, who lives and votes in Australia, who pays taxes like the rest of us, who is part of Australia's life and culture, who is nominated by Australians and who in effect is chosen by consensus of the supreme law making body in Australia—the Federal Parliament.

Broadly, I support the principle of the direct participation of people in the processes of Government, but fortunately this is Australia, not America. A direct election of the head of state would not give consensus across the community or a neutral umpire—the very opposite. We would be subject to a highly controversial, partisan political campaign, just like we have seen in the lead-up to this referendum. If an honourable member were a member of the Ferry Grove Bowls Club voting at an AGM for a new club constitution, would he or she demand that the club president must not be a member of the club, must live outside Queensland, must always have a proxy to attend club meetings and functions, and must never have a drink at the bar or play in competition pennants? Of course they would not. I invite all members to join with me in voting "Yes" for an Australian head of state.

Time expired.
