



Speech by

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REPUBLIC

Mrs LAVARCH (Kurwongbah—ALP) (7.21 p.m.): A majority of Australians want to replace the monarchy because it is a meaningless symbol of values which no longer resonate with Australians. This of itself, however, does not mean that the referendum on 6 November to replace the monarchy will succeed. Ignorance, complacency, misinformation and fear may well combine to defeat the forthcoming republican vote. That these factors are very much in play in the current campaign was graphically illustrated last week by the outcome of the so-called deliberative poll conducted in Canberra. This exercise in participative democracy demonstrated that everyday Australians, armed with the facts and given time to make reasoned judgments, will not only support an Australian republic but will do so by an overwhelming majority.

Just as interesting was the outcome on the republican model. Only 20% went into the process supporting the actual model being proposed, while 50% favoured a directly elected president and 26% no change. After the intensive information process, support for the actual model on offer went up by 41% to 61%, while support for direct election fell to 19%.

What is to be made of this poll? Firstly, it clearly demonstrates that if the "No" campaign succeeds, it will do so on the back of ignorance and lies—ignorance and a lack of understanding of how our system currently operates and what are the respective roles and powers of the monarch, the Governor-General, the Executive and the Parliament, and lies from the strange bedfellows who have joined forces in the "No" campaign.

Secondly, it shows that support for direct election is, in effect, very soft and is based on a misunderstanding of how things currently operate and what is the nature of the change proposed. It reveals that the entire republic debate became disjointed two years ago, when the media portrayal of the issue was reduced to slogans about how the job was to be filled and not what the job was about.

Thirdly, it reinforces the often recognised fact that, as a nation, we have not educated our children or ourselves about our Constitution and our system of government. It is a sad reality that many of us would know more about the American Constitution from popular media than about our own Constitution from our education.

In the balance of my remarks tonight, I want to confront the biggest lies and half-truths about the republic peddled by the "No" case. The "No" case advocates that the republican model will put more power into the hands of politicians. This great fib was revealed as the sham that it is by the deliberative poll last weekend. The truth is that the model reduces the absolute power now in the hands of the Prime Minister to hire and fire the Governor-General and transfers that power to the people first and then to the Parliament. The appointment method for the president would involve the public in nominating the candidates for the president and the Parliament approving by a two-thirds majority the nomination accepted by the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. By no stretch of any warped reasoning can this be said to be more power when the existing system places absolute power in the hands of a single politician.

The "No" case's second great furphy is that the proposed dismissal process for the president is unheard of in any nation on earth. Well, in answer to this one, not only is there a precedent, but it is the Australian system right here and right now. The Australian Prime Minister can dismiss the

Governor-General instantaneously - no questions, no appeal. Equally, the Governor-General can instantaneously remove the Prime Minister.

It was this kind of intellectual dishonesty which was exposed and rejected by the everyday Australians who heard the facts at the deliberative poll in Canberra last weekend. We have been on a journey of nationhood, which inevitably must reach an Australian head of state. A republic is not just our destination; but as a free and proud independent and democratic nation, it must be our destiny. To both questions on 6 November, the answer is a resounding "Yes".
