



Speech by

PHIL REEVES

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AUSTRALIA ACTS (REQUEST) BILL

Mr REEVES (Mansfield—ALP) (12.07 p.m.): I was not going to speak on the Australia Acts (Request) Bill initially. However, the comments of some members opposite motivated me to do so. Thanks to the courage and hard work of Australians, we live in the best country in the world. Members of this Parliament have come from all walks of life. However, we have come here in the full knowledge that we have been elected democratically by the people we are representing.

No Australian, no matter how clever they are or how hard they work, will ever be Australia's head of state. Only the Queen can be the Australian head of state. Why? The only reason is that she comes from the family from which England takes its King or Queen. Why should every single Australian not have a chance to represent Australia at the highest level, that is, as Australia's head of state? The Governor-General is merely the Queen's representative. Queen Elizabeth is not an Australian and does not live here. One of the key roles of a head of state is to represent the nation. We want a head of state who is proud of and committed to us. We want a head of state who is an Australian.

It does not make sense that our head of state lives in another country. It does not make sense that parliamentarians and judges swear allegiance not to Australia or Queensland, but to the Queen—just because she came from a certain family. As is currently the case with the Governor-General, under a republic the main functions of the president would be ceremonial. The president would act only on the advice of the Prime Minister.

On becoming a republic and having a president, the most significant difference would be the symbolic change for Australia to have an Australian as our head of state. Our present systems of justice and government would not change, despite much of what has been said in this debate. In fact, most Commonwealth countries already have their own head of state, and their system of government has not changed.

Having an Australian president would require no additional expense. This is an opportunity to have as our head of state someone who is one of us, a fellow Australian who lives amongst us and whose first allegiance is to Australia and Australians and is not a head of state just because they are a member of a certain family. As proud Australians, we should enter the new century with one of our own citizens as the head of state.

Some of the members opposite portrayed myths in relation to the Constitution. The Constitution of Australia defines the Parliament as the Queen, a Senate and a House of Representatives. The Executive power of the Commonwealth of Australia is vested in the Queen. The Queen has the power to disallow any law within one year of its being made—even after the Governor-General has given assent. Why should she be allowed to do that?

Mr Springborg interjected.

Mr REEVES: The right is still there. Why should she have the power to do that just because she is a member of a certain family—not because she was elected, just because she was a member of a certain family. The Governor-General holds office only "during the Queen's pleasure", which means that he or she can be dismissed at any time by the Queen.

As I said, all parliamentarians are still required to swear an oath or declare an affirmation of allegiance not to Australia, not to Queensland, but to the Queen. The Governor-General is appointed to

represent the Queen, not Australia. It is clear that, under the provisions of the Act, such as sections 2 and 59, the Governor-General is subservient to the Queen. No oath of allegiance is required to be sworn to the Governor-General by the people of Australia.

The Queen is intended to be the embodiment of the Commonwealth of Australia. A perfect example of this can be seen from the visit to Australia in November 1996 by Bill Clinton during which reciprocal toasts were given to each nation by giving a loyal toast to the head of state as the embodiment of the nations. To honour the United States of America, a toast was given to the President. To honour Australia, the toast was given not to the Governor-General but to the Queen, a person who is our head of state just because she is a member of a certain family.

If the Queen is not Australia's head of state, why does her portrait appear on all our coins and the \$5 note? If the Queen is not the Australian head of state, we should have an Australian symbol on these coins. We have heard a lot of talk opposite about Chief Justices, etc. But what about Chief Justice Sir Anthony Mason? He said—

"Well, those people"—

who support the view that we already have an Australian as head of state—

"haven't read Section 2 of the Constitution where the Governor-General is clearly described as Her Majesty's representative in Australia. It is nonsense to say that Sir William Deane is the Australian Head of State—much as I would like him to be our Australian Head of State—he just isn't our Head of State."

There is something odd about having as our head of state the head of state of another country—a person who does not reside here and primarily identifies with the goals and aspirations of the other country.

The fact is that some countries have refused to accept the Governor-General's visits as that of a head of state. He has travelled in some countries in Asia, as we have heard, "as if he were the head of state". It is common knowledge among many Australian diplomats that this required considerable arm twisting by Australia. The fact is that we are a grown-up nation and in November we should all vote in favour of a republic. I support this Bill, which will make that process a lot easier.
