




Speech By
Scott Stewart

MEMBER FOR TOWNSVILLE

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ADJOURNMENT

James, Miss E

 **Mr STEWART** (Townsville—ALP) (11.32 pm): I rise this evening to present an extract of an essay written by Elena James, a year 10 student from Pimlico State High School. The larger essay forms Miss James's submission to the National History Challenge 2016 where this year's theme was 'Triumph or Tragedy?' where she won this year's state competition. The extract states—

A triumph is a great victory or success. Gough Whitlam was a triumph throughout his political career and beyond, regardless of what those on the opposite side of politics might believe. His life changing reforms truly made Australia fundamentally fair and egalitarian and shaped the nation that we are today. In terms of healthcare, one of the main achievements of the Whitlam government was the creation of Medibank, Australia's national health insurance system. Whitlam sought to reduce the amount of money families had to spend on medical services by providing free access to hospitals and health coverage for those who could not afford private health insurance. Whitlam also made sure that low income earners were not disadvantaged—before Medibank, richer Australians were paying less for health insurance than poorer Australians.

Education for all, regardless of wealth, was another factor that Whitlam strongly believed in. By abolishing university fees, Whitlam gave all students a chance to have a free tertiary education and allowed them to explore and study the subjects they would later use for employment in high paying areas. Free education particularly helped women.

As an environmental advocate, Whitlam protected the natural heritage of Australia by passing the Seas and Submerged Lands Act, preventing the planned oil drilling on the Great Barrier Reef and creating the Great Barrier Reef Marine Park. The park acted as a safeguard against any destructive activities posed towards the reef and is still operating today, preserving the beauty of the reef for the future generations.

However, one of the most significant achievements of the Whitlam government was the fight for the rights of Indigenous Australians. On August 16, 1975, Whitlam returned the traditional lands in the Northern Territory to the Gurindji people, ending their nine year battle for land rights. As Whitlam poured soil into Vincent Lingiari's hand, he said "Vincent Lingiari, I solemnly hand to you these deeds as proof in Australian law that these lands belong to the Gurindji people, and I put into your hands part of the earth as a sign that this land will be in the possession of you and your children forever." This marked the beginning of the reconciliation process with the Indigenous which was a considerable turning point in Australian history.

With such bright young women like Elena James in our schools right across Queensland, I can safely say that our future is in safe hands.