



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Democracy

SPEECH

Wednesday, 17 June 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP	Question No.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (11:16): I'm reminded this week of the importance of defending our fragile democracy in light of what has been going on in Victoria. Democracy is important at all levels, especially in our political organisations. We have seen how easily that can be eroded this week by those who seek just one element of democracy—power—over all else.

I know that in Moreton democracy is alive and well in my Labor Party branches—branches like Annerley, Coopers Plains Acacia Ridge, Robertson Macgregor, Runcorn Kuraby, Salisbury, Stratton, Sunnybank Central, Yeronga and Walter Taylor. These branches are filled with motivated and politically minded locals who meet regularly to discuss how to make our society better, fairer and wealthier. These grassroots political organisations are a living and breathing tribute to democracy at work. It is the sum of all parts that creates this success, but a good leader is an essential element, so I particularly acknowledge the local branch presidents and secretaries. They do their best to make sure that democracy is strong.

Of course, it is not just political organisations that make a healthy democracy. All constituents, whether they are aligned to a political organisation or not, should have their voices heard by their parliamentary representatives. Locals in Moreton know that they always can reach my ear. I listen to their issues and make sure their concerns are known here in the corridors of Canberra. That is how a representative democracy works, but we always need checks and balances. In Queensland we have the Crime and Corruption Commission; in Victoria they have the Independent Broad-based Anti-corruption Commission; in New South Wales they have ICAC, the Independent Commission Against Corruption. But there is no federal equivalent.

It's 2½ years since the Morrison government claimed to have started work on its own weak, ineffective and opaque Commonwealth integrity commission. The Attorney-General promised the government's draft legislation would be ready by the end of 2019, yet here we are, halfway through 2020, still waiting. If we truly value our democracy, we need a Commonwealth integrity commission that is powerful, transparent and independent.

It should be no surprise that the Attorney-General is no fan of a transparent process to protect democracy. There is currently a trial being conducted here in Canberra in secret. Yes, I said here in Canberra. In Australia. In what we celebrate as a liberal democratic country. The trial is being held in secret at the behest of the Attorney-General, using his national security powers. The trial is the prosecution of lawyer Bernard Collaery for revealing national secrets, specifically that Australia bugged East Timor's government buildings in 2004 to gain advantage during crucial oil and gas negotiations. It is troubling to me that the trial is being held in secret, and it is troubling to me that the Attorney-General is pursuing Bernard Collaery at all.

A liberal democracy requires all four principles to function: legitimacy, justice, freedom and power. We should be ever vigilant to protect our fragile democracy, and that duty is incumbent on all of us to make sure that everyone is accountable.