



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

United States-Australia Alliance Relationship

SPEECH

Monday, 27 March 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 27 March 2017 Page 156 Questioner Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (17:58): I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that a simple resolution is currently before the United States Senate in the name of Senator Benjamin Cardin of Maryland and 13 other United States Senators reaffirming a strong commitment to the United States-Australia alliance relationship;
- (2) reaffirms the strong alliance relationship between Australia and the United States;
- (3) supports continued diplomatic, military and economic cooperation between Australia and the United States; and
- (4) reaffirms the importance of a United States-Australia relationship based on mutual respect befitting a close and longstanding alliance partner crucial to the preservation of Australia's national interests in the Asia-Pacific region and around the world.

If you have ever watched track and field events at the Olympics and if you are familiar with the four-by-100-metres relay—an event historically dominated by the United States, by the way—you would know that the manoeuvre of transferring the baton from one runner to another is tricky and those baton transfers are points in the race carefully followed by the crowd and also the commentariat. The transfer of power from President Obama to President Trump reminded me of such a race. There was much confused speculation by the commentariat in the lead-up and following the inauguration, including here locally after that now famous phone conversation between the new President and Prime Minister Turnbull.

Of course, the panic merchants and nervous nellys had their say on the future of the United States under the new President and, indeed, the future of the United States-Australia alliance. James Curran, from the United States Studies Centre, suggested the Australian government may potentially be 'trading away key national security interests' and warned that if the government is 'prepared to kowtow', 'it doesn't augur well for the ANZUS alliance'. Meanwhile Peter Jennings, from the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, told the ABC, 'Australia should consider a freezing of the alliance, a sort of lull in alliance cooperation.' Then, on 7.30, the former foreign minister in the Gillard Labor government, Bob Carr, in his limitless wisdom, claimed the US President did not 'regard ANZUS as a useful starting point for the Australian-American relationship' and further suggested that Australia should 'reflect on its "special relationship" with the United States'.

It was in this swirl of claim and counterclaim, tweet and countertweet, that the sensible circuit-breakers on both sides of the Pacific quickly cut in to calm elements of the media who seemed determined to blow the situation out of reasonable proportion. Supporting sentiments expressed by our Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, ranking Republicans in the United States such as Senator John McCain, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee, together with Senator Marco Rubio, joined with other senators—13 in all—to support a resolution in the name of Democrat Senator for Maryland and ranking member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee Senator Ben Cardin, reaffirming a strong commitment to the United States-Australia alliance relationship.

Historically, Australian governments of both persuasions have acknowledged that Australia's alliance with the United States—signed on 1 September 1951 and coming into full force the following year, at the height of the Korean War, with the memories of World War II still very raw in the national consciousness—has been, and continues to be, the cornerstone of our strategic architecture. The United States is Australia's principal long-term strategic partner and also our foremost investment partner, with US investment providing much of the rich flow of foreign capital that our country needs.

Australia sees a strong and active US presence in the Indo-Pacific and a robust alliance relationship as key to underwriting continued peace and security in our region. We have benefited greatly from the United States as a security guarantor and exemplar of an international rules-based order which has delivered the stability needed for freedom and prosperity to flourish. Clearly the future is unknown and the present is not without its challenges, challenges such as the threat of terrorism and a shifting geopolitical landscape; however, Australia and our neighbours are in a far better place to tackle these challenges by working closely with the United States, rather than contemplating any alternative paradigm.

I want to acknowledge the words of US Senator John McCain from earlier this year:

... Australia is one of America's oldest friends and staunchest allies. We are united by ties of family and friendship, mutual interests and common values, and shared sacrifice in wartime.

Today in this chamber, via this motion, we reciprocate the generous sentiments endorsed by members of the US Senate by expressing the same ourselves, by expressing sentiments of mutual respect, common endeavour and brotherhood of purpose with the United States. The United States is indeed our staunchest ally. The United States is our friend.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mrs Wicks): Is there a seconder for this motion?

Mr Leeser: I second the motion and reserve the right to speak.