



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

BILLS

Appropriation Bill (No. 1) 2017-2018

Consideration in Detail

SPEECH

Thursday, 1 June 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Thursday, 1 June 2017	Source House
Page 86	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (10:39): US senator John McCain was here in Canberra this week. It is his view that vast swathes of the world are in turmoil and that within our very region we are at a critical juncture due to risks including that posed by the North Korean regime, and I believe he is right. The global political economy is amidst a period of heightened volatility. Major conflicts are causing upheaval the world over, and, while there are also many economies crippled, there are millions of people who are struggling to survive. As I speak today, there are approximately 28 wars raging across the world. If you include smaller tribal conflicts in African states, that number jumps to 58 wars. In 2017 thus far, these wars have recorded 47,000 deaths. Due to such conflicts and the persecutions, violence and human rights abuses they create, 34,000 people are forced to flee their homes each day. We have an estimated 65.3 million displaced people around the world, about 21.3 million of whom are refugees and at least 10 million stateless.

Australia is one of the few countries in the world that have a planned resettlement program. It proactively goes out and selects the most vulnerable of these people and resettles them here in Australia. This is something that all Australians should be proud of. Australians are an open, tolerant and generous people, but we are also a pragmatic lot. I have never heard any Australian suggest we should invite all 21 million refugees to immigrate here or invite all 65 million displaced people to take refuge. We want to do all we can, understanding that there will always be limits to the resources we commit and the number of people who can immigrate.

A social compact, to which the minister has already referred, has emerged in Australia, and that reflects a correlation between how well the government manages its borders and the people's appetite for taking in new immigrants. But a social compact is more than just a numbers game. It is not as simple as saying: the stronger the borders, the more the immigrants. It is also about an expectation of integrity in the system, which includes ensuring that those who join us here in Australia have their allegiance to Australia and to its people. It is about ensuring that they are willing and able to integrate and to make a contribution to our community.

As a nation, we rightly celebrate our diversity. Indeed, all of us except our Indigenous peoples, our first peoples, are relative newcomers to this nation. What unites us despite our differences, and what must continue to unite us, is a common set of values. The foundation upon which our future must continue to be built is a common set of values, values that bind all Australians. There is no greater value than that of freedom, for nothing else guarantees happiness and fulfilment more than freedom, freedom realised through independence, self-reliance and the dignity of the individual, the individual who is equal, no better and no worse than other individuals. It is these ideals in turn that promote the protection of free speech and property rights and encourage human endeavour and enterprise, the very things that have created the Australia of today: an open, liberal, free-market political economy that is the envy of much of the world. Is it any wonder that citizens of Australia love their citizenship?

Let us not forget, however, that, while citizenship comes with rights, rights come with commensurate responsibilities. As citizens, it is our responsibility to embrace the very values that unite us, to integrate into our local communities and to contribute to our civic society. It is within this context, therefore, that I wish to ask the minister today: Minister, what action is the government taking to strengthen Australian citizenship, and why is it important that aspiring Australians share Australian values?