



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Western Values**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 26 June 2018**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** O'Brien, Ted, MP

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**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (16:03): On the front page of *The Australian* today we again see an article on the withdrawal by the Australian National University from negotiations with the Ramsay Centre for Western Civilisation. I do not know any more than other people in this House. I'm not privy to confidential information, so I'm no expert in that debate, but I am deeply concerned that it is symptomatic of a broader issue, and that is a dilution of our values as a Western civilisation. At the end of the day, the liberal democracy that we celebrate in this chamber is built on values. Those values are very strongly Western values. I would say, more than any other Western country in the world, better than elsewhere, Australia has embodied those values of both Christianity and Enlightenment. By virtue of our history, Christianity and Enlightenment did not have the same clash: they coexisted. And that is why we created a country that can, for example, embrace multiculturalism so well—so strong are our values.

What we see with the Australian National University's rejection of a new course on Western civilisation is symptomatic of a lack of leadership through other institutions when it comes to fostering those key values of our liberal democracy: freedom, equality, justice and so forth. Unless we have our key institutions fostering such values, then, indeed, our civilisation will decline. Most students of international affairs or, even, of history would be familiar with Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilisations?* where he talked about the fault lines of this century coming down to a clash of civilisations. Probably the most celebrated book last year on the same topic was by another Harvard academic, Graham Allison, who talked about the Thucydides trap and questioned the civilisations of the United States and the West and the Sinic civilisation.

Regardless of whether you buy into these sorts of theories, there's one thing that we can do as a country, as we face an uncertain future. We can pull down hard and double down on the values that define who we are as a nation. Those values are Western values. And, unashamedly, that is why this government's foreign policy white paper starts with an anchoring to those values, and I ask other institutions across Australia to do the same.