



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Votes and Proceedings

Hansard

TUESDAY, 22 FEBRUARY 2011

CORRECTIONS

This is a **PROOF ISSUE**. Suggested corrections for the Official Hansard and Bound Volumes should be lodged in writing with the Director, Chambers, Department of Parliamentary Services **as soon as possible but not later than:**

Tuesday, 1 March 2011

Facsimile:	Senate	(02) 6277 2977
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	Main Committee	(02) 6277 2944

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

The House divided. [4.09 pm]
(The Speaker—Mr Harry Jenkins)

Ayes.....	71
Noes.....	<u>71</u>
Majority.....	<u>0</u>

AYES

Abbott, A.J.	Alexander, J.
Andrews, K.	Andrews, K.J.
Baldwin, R.C.	Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.	Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R.	Buchholz, S.
Chester, D.	Christensen, G.
Ciobo, S.M.	Cobb, J.K.
Coulton, M. *	Crook, T.
Dutton, P.C.	Entsch, W.
Fletcher, P.	Forrest, J.A.
Frydenberg, J.	Gambaro, T.
Gash, J.	Griggs, N.
Haase, B.W.	Hartsuyker, L.
Hawke, A.	Hockey, J.B.
Hunt, G.A.	Irons, S.J.
Jensen, D.	Jones, E.
Katter, R.C.	Kelly, C.
Laming, A.	Ley, S.P.
Macfarlane, I.E.	Marino, N.B.
Markus, L.E.	Matheson, R.
McCormack, M.	Mirabella, S.
Morrison, S.J.	Moylan, J.E.
Neville, P.C.	O'Dowd, K.
O'Dwyer, K.	Prentice, J.
Pyne, C.	Ramsey, R.
Randall, D.J.	Robb, A.
Robert, S.R.	Roy, Wyatt
Ruddock, P.M.	Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D. *	Simpkins, L.
Slipper, P.N.	Smith, A.D.H.
Somlyay, A.M.	Stone, S.N.
Tehan, D.	Truss, W.E.
Tudge, A.	Turnbull, M.
Van Manen, B.	Vasta, R.
Washer, M.J.	Windsor, A.H.C.
Wyatt, K.	

NOES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Bandt, A.	Bird, S.
Bowen, C.	Bradbury, D.J.
Brodtmann, G.	Burke, A.E.
Burke, A.S.	Butler, M.C.
Byrne, A.M.	Champion, N.
Cheeseman, D.L.	Clare, J.D.
Collins, J.M.	Combet, G.
Crean, S.F.	D'Ath, Y.M.
Danby, M.	Dreyfus, M.A.
Elliot, J.	Emerson, C.A.
Ferguson, L.D.T.	Ferguson, M.J.
Fitzgibbon, J.A.	Garrett, P.
Georganas, S.	Gibbons, S.W.
Gillard, J.E.	Gray, G.
Grierson, S.J.	Griffin, A.P.
Hall, J.G. *	Hayes, C.P. *
Husic, E.	Jones, S.
Kelly, M.J.	King, C.F.

Leigh, A.	Livermore, K.F.
Lyons, G.	Macklin, J.L.
Marles, R.D.	McClelland, R.B.
Melham, D.	Mitchell, R.
Murphy, J.	Neumann, S.K.
O'Connor, B.P.	O'Neill, D.
Oakeshott, R.J.M.	Owens, J.
Parke, M.	Perrett, G.D.
Plibersek, T.	Ripoll, B.F.
Rishworth, A.L.	Rowland, M.
Roxon, N.L.	Saffin, J.A.
Shorten, W.R.	Smith, S.F.
Smyth, L.	Snowdon, W.E.
Swan, W.M.	Symon, M.
Thomson, C.	Thomson, K.J.
Vamvakinou, M.	Wilkie, A.
Zappia, A.	

PAIRS

Keenan, M.	Ellis, K.
Schultz, A.	Rudd, K.M.
Briggs, J.E.	Sidebottom, S.

* denotes teller

The requirements of standing order 47(c)(ii) for an absolute majority having not been satisfied, the motion was not carried.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Immigration

The SPEAKER—I have received letters from the honourable member for Chifley and the honourable member for North Sydney proposing that definite matters of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion today. As required by standing order 46(d) I have selected the matter which, in my opinion, is the most urgent and important; that is, that proposed by the honourable member for Chifley, namely:

The urgent need for leadership to re-affirm our commitment to a non-discriminatory immigration policy for Australia's future.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Mr HUSIC (Chifley) (4.12 pm)—I have often said that if you want to see some of the proudest Australians you should go to a citizenship ceremony. On those days, when families are brought together, seeing others take the pledge to their new nation, you see some of the happiest faces in this country. I have to admit my own heart bursts with pride watching the smiles and looks that are exchanged and the arms around other people's shoulders, and every moment the bond between the new citizen and their new home deepens. It is among the moments that I live for as a member of parliament, and I share in that joy as people feel the uplifting power of a second chance, sensing a brighter future ahead. Our new citizens feel that they can grow in a nation free of persecution, one where democracy, freedom of thought and freedom of religion are core

values held dear by the nation and expected to be cherished, nourished and protected by citizens. So many of us have shared that experience in electorates across one of the greatest nations on the planet. It is a powerful experience where we are inspired by the outward demonstration of unity and commitment to the common good.

However, a commitment to a united and common good cannot be found upon divided ground. Those before us in this place have had the wisdom to recognise this. Over the course of a quarter of a century, they worked together to peel away a policy we rightly shun today—the White Australia policy. The policy had its birth in the Immigration Restriction Act 1901, but in 1949 Minister Holt of the Menzies government took the step of releasing the grip of this policy by allowing non-European refugees from World War II to remain in Australia, followed up by a decision in 1957 to allow certain non-Europeans with 15 years residence to become citizens. The Menzies government, to their credit, ditched the ‘dictation test’, which had applicants undertake tests in languages they had no hope of learning or knowing, such as Latin. In 1966, Minister Opperman announced applications would be received from non-Europeans but, significantly, in 1973 the Whitlam government introduced a specifically non-racially based immigration policy. It has been a cornerstone of policy for 38 years. It was unchallenged—until last week, when three distinct events combined to create a firm image in the minds of many that leveraging off religion for political advantage is something not being pursued by a fringe group but being considered by elements of a major party in this country.

The first event was the revelation that a Liberal senator would table a petition, signed by all of three people, calling on the government to prevent immigration to this country of people who are of Islamic faith. Then there was the revelation that the opposition shadow cabinet had put before it as a discussion point the issue of Muslim immigration. The interpretation of shadow cabinet colleagues, as passed on to the media, was that the member for Cook sought to capitalise on this issue. Finally, the Leader of the Opposition’s own shadow parliamentary secretary, Cory Bernardi, went on radio and declared:

Islam itself is the problem.

As if to comfort those aligned with this statement, he went on to say:

It’s not Muslims. Islam is a totalitarian political and religious ideology.

There is a tangled logic there that only the brave or idle would seek to unravel.

I ask the Leader of the Opposition, who seeks high office which comes with the responsibility to protect and advance the unity of a nation he seeks to lead, how the comments of his own shadow parliamentary secre-

tary reflect upon him. He is yours. You chose and keep him for that position. When he speaks from that position, it is as if he makes those comments within earshot of you. How do you think this does not impact on you? When pressed on radio, Senator Bernardi said he has not been prevented by the Leader of the Opposition from expressing these views:

Well no, he—

Tony Abbott—

certainly hasn’t. I’ve been in contact with Tony, I’m his parliamentary secretary.

Importantly, all these events occurred in the space of a week and, unlike events in 1996, we are not prepared as a government to let these matters hang in the air, smothering relations between us within this country and affecting our relations with those outside our country.

This matter of public importance is necessary to immediately deal with this matter. The Leader of the Opposition has had the opportunity to demonstrate his commitment to a non-discriminatory policy and bring to a head this subterranean contest within his side, where these comments are deliberately floated in the public domain for political advantage—and to the shock and dismay of those within the Liberal Party. I have sought for some time to put a spotlight on these extreme elements of the Liberal Party that have sought to divide on the basis of religion. Their continued fascination with this form of political campaigning, stretching over elections held in 2004, 2007 and 2010, is a blight on a party of liberalism. Why is the senior leadership of the party unable to deal decisively with this extremism? What inferences are to be drawn by this? It is clear that there are those within the party that seek no association with this sentiment, yet the extremists continue to crowd out common sense and decency within the coalition. The events of the last week have been truly staggering, because the advocacy of discriminatory immigration policy seeks to tear at the combined efforts of our respective parties over 60 years. Worse still, the events of the last week suggest to me that elements of those opposite are perpetuating a fraud, leading on those who seek to tread a path that is truly beneath them and suggesting somehow that the opposition wish to potentially translate this position into official policy. For political gain, elements of the opposition harbour support from dark ambitions, nurturing hope in the minds of the extreme that their divisive wishes might just become policy. What desperation drives people—people who put themselves forward as able to meet the responsibility of leading the nation—to this point?

For us, the imperative is to demonstrate to those who take comfort in this backward policy that this is a false comfort that will eventually work against their interests and our country’s interests. It will sap our

ability to express ourselves as a country united that values diversity of opinion, thought, expression and faith. As I stand here today, I think of the mums, dads, students, small business people, professionals, community workers and sportspeople—those drawn from the Islamic faith who are trying to do their best to contribute to the betterment of our nation. How are those people supposed to feel when they ponder on how they were admitted to share the richness of life here but that others of their faith have been locked out? I still hear from refugees who have escaped war-torn nations and of their expressions of guilt and shame that they survived and prospered while others less fortunate suffered or perished. And we would then, by operation of a discriminatory policy, seek to place on our citizens the weight of that guilt—to enslave them to that shame? Once we put up that barrier, how are those who live here supposed to feel? We would give comfort to those people who seek to prey on fear and anger, setting us back from where we want to be. What does this do to the strength of the nation's unity and purpose, when we enslave our own to the burden of this shame?

We have as a nation learned from our mistakes, yet we have a party where elements therein are ready to walk headlong into another mistake. How is this leadership? How does this advance our nation? And how does it help us internationally? Let me take the House, in broad terms, to the value of our exports to the following countries in 2009-10: Indonesia, \$4 billion; Malaysia, \$3 billion; United Arab Emirates, \$2 billion; Saudi Arabia, \$1.5 billion; Pakistan, \$600 million; Bangladesh, \$400 million; Turkey, \$300 million; Jordan and Iran, respectively, \$150 million; and Lebanon, \$25 million. Just out of those countries, during that time, we earned a shade over \$12 billion in export dollars. They are nations with over 50 per cent of people who consider themselves Muslim. Do not forget the other \$18 billion we earned from countries with sizeable Muslim populations within our very region: India, the Philippines and the Russian Federation. If we were to regress to a discriminatory immigration policy, would we effectively say to those countries, 'We'll take your dollars but not your people'? It is absurd. Do we believe that people in these countries would not react? Do we think that governments in some of those nations would be mute while their local citizens ask why their governments tolerate a policy of discrimination by our government? Remember that through the seventies and eighties we placed massive international pressure on countries that abided and supported discrimination. Given this proud history, what then would this do to our ability to advocate on the world stage the need for countries and other corners of the globe to embrace liberal democracy, tolerance and fairness? We would be hamstrung, utterly and completely crippled in our ability to get others to do something which we are simply unable to do ourselves.

I do not ignore the fact that there has always been concern about the ability of migrants to settle within our land. Wave after wave of migrants has encountered this. Without doubt, there are always the misguided that walk amongst us on the fringe as they peer disdainfully at us distancing themselves from the common decency and respect that hold us together as a vibrant, progressive community. But we must acknowledge we have settled seven million people in this great country of ours since World War II and, as reflected on by the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in a powerful speech he gave last week to the Sydney Institute, we have succeeded where others have failed because of the genius of our multiculturalism. He put this down to three key principles: respect for traditional Australian values, our citizenship centred multiculturalism and, finally and importantly, political bipartisanship, which I reflected on earlier. In particular, I draw the House's attention to the quote that stood out in my mind:

If Australia was to be free and equal then it will be multicultural. But if it is to be multicultural, Australia must remain free and equal.

Our immigration policy and our approach to multiculturalism are intrinsically linked and they are underpinned by how we see ourselves as a nation celebrating values of respect, acceptance and liberty.

On Australia Day I had the pleasure of participating in a citizenship ceremony held at Blacktown City Council's Bowman Hall. The special guest for the day was Todd Greenberg, who was there in his capacity as an Australia Day ambassador. He is the CEO of the Bulldogs NRL club—and I suppose we cannot all be perfect. He related to the audience the story of he and his wife inquiring of their son, who had only recently started school, about his new friends at that school. His son mentioned one boy in particular. 'Where is he from?' asked his parents. 'I don't know,' was the reply. 'Has he got brothers and sisters?' 'I don't know.' 'Where do they live? Where are they from?' The response: 'Dad, I don't know; he's just my friend. He's my age, speaks like me, he's my friend'—all the questions of a regular parent along with the dismissive, sometimes irritated, responses of their child. When Todd and his wife finally got to meet their son's friend at a school function they discovered he was of Chinese background and it reminded Todd of how children do not put barriers in the way of their friendship with others; they just get on with things. I remember in Minister Bowen's speech to the Sydney Institute where he recounted growing up in Western Sydney and going to school at St Johns Park. As he said:

When I was at school, I didn't sit around with my mates from Vietnam, Iraq, Bosnia and Croatia and talk about the genius of Australian multiculturalism. We had much more pressing teenage matters to occupy us.

Rather than philosophising about multiculturalism, we lived it.

Again, the clear sight of the young at work.

Back in January, the US was shocked by an event that would resonate with many here. We did not necessarily pay too much attention to this event, understandably so, because our friends and neighbours in Queensland were battling some of the worst events that nature could throw at them. Arizona congresswoman Gabrielle Giffords was holding in effect a mobile office, called 'Congress On Your Corner', outside a local shopping centre when a gunman opened fire. Six people lost their lives, including nine-year-old schoolgirl Christina Taylor Green, who was born on 11 September 2001. The incident triggered nationwide discussion about the incitement of hate and violence creeping into national political dialogue.

Republicans had homed in on Congresswoman Giffords during the previous mid-term elections by controversially and graphically marking her position with a gun-sight target. About a week later, President Obama spoke to a stunned and grieving nation. It was an incredibly moving speech in which it was as if, through his words, he took the hands of the grieving and led them to somewhere better. With indulgence, I quote from that speech because so much of it translates neatly to our own experience:

We may not be able to stop all evil in the world, but I know that how we treat one another is entirely up to us. I believe that for all our imperfections, we are full of decency and goodness, and that the forces that divide us are not as strong as those that unite us.

That's what I believe, in part because that's what a child like Christina Taylor Green believed. Imagine: here was a young girl who was just becoming aware of our democracy; just beginning to understand the obligations of citizenship; just starting to glimpse the fact that some day she too might play a part in shaping her nation's future. She had been elected to her student council; she saw public service as something exciting, something hopeful. She was off to meet her congresswoman, someone she was sure was good and important and might be a role model. She saw all this through the eyes of a child, undimmed by the cynicism or vitriol that we adults all too often just take for granted.

This is the most moving part in my mind:

I want us to live up to her expectations. I want our democracy to be as good as she imagined it. All of us—we should do everything we can to make sure this country lives up to our children's expectations.

Our nation's children would not expect us to throw up stark barriers to divide us from others. Are we without the ability or strength to summon up what is required to lead this country and meet the expectations of the youngest among us? I think not.

Mr RUDDOCK (Berowra) (4.28 pm)—Members on this side of the House stood to support the matter of public importance discussion proposed by the member for Chifley, and did so in good faith, because members on this side of the House are strongly committed to a

non-discriminatory immigration policy for Australia. I regret that this matter of public importance has been proposed—and I do not question the bona fides of the honourable member for Chifley, who may have been encouraged to bring the matter forward—but I listened to the three arguments that he raised as to why this matter was important at this time. The first was because there was a petition tabled by a Liberal senator in the Senate that spoke about levels of Islamic immigration.

He did not say in relation to that petition that that was also tabled in this chamber by the member for Newcastle, Jill Hall; the member for Banks, Daryl Melham; the Chief Government Whip, the member for Hunter, Joel Fitzgibbon; the then member for Charlton, Kelly Hoare; the member for Capricornia, Kirsten Livermore; the member for Parramatta, Julie Owens; I might say the member for New England, Mr Windsor; and also Senator John Faulkner. If the inference is to be drawn that this matter should be raised because that petition had been tabled by a Liberal, what does it say of the others? He spoke about comments at the opposition shadow cabinet.

Mr Melham—I didn't raise it in shadow cabinet or anywhere else.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)—Order! The member for Banks does not have the call.

Mr RUDDOCK—Let me just say: I was at the shadow cabinet meeting, and what I have seen reported—because I do not talk about these meetings—does not reflect what I heard. If the member for Banks were desirous of ascertaining what he thought were the views on these matters of the member for Cook, he might well reflect on some of the speeches that the member for Cook has given, particularly one after he participated in the Kokoda pilgrimage with the member for Blaxland, Jason Clare. I table the speech that the member for Cook made to the Sydney Institute on 6 October simply to put that on record.

The only other point he had to make was that a parliamentary secretary had made a statement and had later recanted from those views as expressed by him. I do not believe that this is a substantial case for debating this matter at this time other than to distract from the internal divisions of the Labor Party. But I will not use the speech of the government leader in suggesting that distraction is all that is being sought. I want to take some time to spell out where the opposition does stand on these issues and to put down once and for all that our position is absolutely non-discriminatory in relation to race.

Honourable members interjecting—

Mr RUDDOCK—And religion, and culture, and country of origin. But that does not mean you should not be prepared to discuss issues of composition. Cer-

tainly one might well be concerned about the lack of emphasis from time to time on the importance of skilled migration to adequately assist Australia, or about the way in which fraud can impact on allowing some elements of the program to grow at the expense of more bona fide migration, or in focusing on refugees, particularly those who come through the front door rather than the window.

I am always surprised about the extent to which members opposite walk away from their history—because from time to time it is appropriate to reflect upon your history—and always pay attention to the leadership on these issues from this side of the House. I listened to the Prime Minister speaking about multiculturalism, and she paid tribute to Prime Minister Menzies, who supported postwar migration. She paid tribute to Prime Minister Menzies for creating the Colombo Plan; to Prime Minister Holt for ending the White Australia policy; and to Malcolm Fraser for admitting Vietnamese boat people to this country and creating SBS. I did not recall the comments of a former Prime Minister who spoke of ‘Asian Balts’, or another Prime Minister who was opposed to Vietnamese boat arrivals—although not Prime Minister at that time. We could go back and discuss those issues in that way, but I think it is unnecessary, I think it is divisive and I do not think it reflects well on us.

When I listen to these debates, I reflect on the matter as one who presided for 7½ years over an immigration policy which was totally and absolutely non-discriminatory in terms of race. I was one who was responsible for a report endorsed by John Howard, *A new agenda for multicultural Australia* in December 1999, in which John Howard—who is often maligned as not supporting multicultural Australia—spoke of Australia occupying ‘a unique intersection of culture, geography, history and economic circumstance’, being ‘blessed with immense natural resources, living in a continent of great physical beauty’ and having ‘an educated and skilled workforce, democratic institutions, social harmony and a lifestyle that is the envy of the world’. He said:

Australia’s cultural diversity is one of our most important attributes as we face the challenges of a rapidly changing world.

... ..

We are an open and tolerant society that promotes the celebration of diversity within the context of a unifying commitment to Australia. Our diversity is a source of competitive advantage, cultural enrichment and social stability.

These were the comments of John Howard. It is important, because sometimes I think there is a reflection on cultural diversity as being the only element of multicultural policies and programs. I think it is important to understand that our cultural diversity, which is something of which we are all very proud, does have to be

supported; it has to be supported by reflecting on each of its values. That report, *A new agenda for multicultural Australia*, said:

For multicultural Australia to continue to flourish ... multicultural policies and programs should be built on the foundation of our democratic system, using the following principles:

- **civic duty**, which obliges all Australians to support those basic structures and principles of Australian society which guarantee us our freedom and equality and enable diversity in our society to flourish;
- **cultural respect**, which, subject to the law, gives all Australians the right to express their own culture and beliefs and obliges them to accept the right of others to do the same;
- **social equity**, which entitles all Australians to equality of treatment and opportunity so that they are able to contribute to the social, political and economic life of Australia, free from discrimination, including on the grounds of race, culture, religion, language, location, gender or place of birth ...

I hope I have mentioned them all!

- **productive diversity**, which maximises for all Australians the significant cultural, social and economic dividends arising from the diversity of our population.

That was the approach to Australian multiculturalism of the former government. Provided people are prepared to accept that this is the handshake—that it is a two-way street and that those who come from other cultures and who want to be respected offer the same respect to others—it seems to me that we can move forward sensibly. I have always been disappointed when I find that when multicultural policies and programs are being talked about some only emphasise the elements that they want emphasised, and not the whole of the agenda. I think it is very important to keep that in mind.

It has been suggested that the new Minister for Immigration and Citizenship has broken new ground. It seems strange to me, because I thought the member for Werriwa was, in fact, the last Parliamentary Secretary for Multicultural Affairs. I thought he was—he might disagree if he was not—but the title was stripped away by the present Prime Minister at the last election. I do not know why that happened; I did not hear an explanation. But now it needs to be brought back with great fanfare; presumably to make a statement.

It is very interesting; I come from New South Wales, and the issues about which we are speaking loom larger in New South Wales than I suspect they do elsewhere. Much more of the migration outcome settles in and around Sydney, and most of our seats have something like 30 per cent or so of our population overseas born—some of the colleagues opposite have even greater. We live with it every day, but it was in New South Wales that Premier Carr stripped away the title from what I think was called the Ethnic Affairs Com-

mission and re-established it as the Community Relations Commission.

I do not know what he was saying when he did that, and I have not heard from anybody else what he may have been saying as he made that decision. You might forgive me; I think this debate is too important to politicise. I was prepared to participate in it because I wanted to take the opportunity to reaffirm, as positively as I could, that the approach of the coalition is to conduct immigration policies that are absolutely non-discriminatory in terms of those characteristics about which I have spoken.

I have had to put my political career on the line to affirm it in the past; I would not want to have to do it again. Let there be no doubt; our position in relation to these matters is absolutely non-discriminatory. We were not trying to politicise it in any way, shape or form whatsoever. But the nuances of debate can sometimes reflect on many, and I think I have demonstrated how sometimes even those on your own side can be caught up in that way.

Let me just say, as I did in relation to these matters: our position is absolutely non-discriminatory. There were people who tabled petitions to whom I see the Clerk of the Senate suggesting have an obligation to table—including members on both sides of the House. I do not draw any inference from their tabling of those, and nor would I in relation to my good friend Senator Gary Humphries.

I have heard comments about my colleague, the member for Cook. I do not talk about what happens in our shadow cabinet, but from time to time I hear things that are said. I have not heard anything in the nature of what I have seen reported. That is what I say, and I usually have a pretty good recollection of these matters.

Mr Gibbons—Give Cory a go!

Mr RUDDOCK—Cory Bernardi has walked away from comments of his own, and he ought to be allowed to do that. They were the only three pieces of evidence upon which this matter of public importance was raised. While I respect the honourable member, I do not think he should have been used in the way in which he was.

Mr Deputy Speaker, I seek leave to table the address to the Sydney Institute on 6 October by the honourable member for Cook.

Leave granted.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (4.43 pm)—I am very proud to be able to stand here today in support of the member for Chifley's matter of public importance on the need for a non-discriminatory immigration policy.

Given recent comments by some in this parliament, the symbolism of the member for Chifley moving this

motion will not be lost on this House—nor, indeed, do I suspect that it will be lost on the public. Let me therefore say at the outset that I am proud to stand in this chamber with the member for Chifley. I know him to be a strong and effective advocate for all people in his electorate, regardless of their background, their religion or their race. I am proud to serve with the member for Chifley as, indeed, I am to serve with all members of this chamber—each of us with our unique backgrounds. I thank the member for Berowra for his comments, but I think it would be really nice if his leader actually reiterated and underscored his views.

I believe these unique backgrounds contribute to and enhance our decision making in this chamber. Diversity helps in every way. That is why it is good to have people from different backgrounds and of different sexes on boards: it gets rid of group think, which is absolutely lethal for innovation and creativity and a nation's future. And the diversity of cultures in Australia contributes to and enhances our nation. So it is not just on boards, it is not just in the chamber; diversity contributes to and enhances our nation. Apart from our Indigenous brothers and sisters, everyone in this chamber and in this country has an ancestor from somewhere else. We are all migrants.

In my own case, my father's family came out from China in the 1850s to work in the gold rush. Members of the family on my father's side also came from Germany in the 1850s, when there was a huge diaspora of Germans coming to Australia. My mother's family came out from Ireland and Scotland in the late 1800s. What is interesting about that melting pot of family history is that during the First World War a number of my relatives had to be interned but, also, one of my relative was Albert Jacka, Victoria. He fought for Australia in the First World War and won the first VC for Australia, fighting in Turkey, and in another part of the world I had relatives in Germany who were out getting photos with Kaiser Bill. So that is an interesting example of the diversity of Australia but also of how quickly people who come here and decide to make a life here will sign up to our values, call themselves Australian and be willing to defend the nation. In this light I would like to congratulate the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship for last week's release of *The People of Australia: Australia's multicultural policy*. It reaffirms the government's view that multiculturalism is not just desirable but essential to this country; that multiculturalism is strong because it gets people to sign up to our values, our rule of law, our democratic principles, our rights and responsibilities and also the equality of sexes, races and religions.

I was asked yesterday by a journalist if we should have a debate about multiculturalism in this country. I believe we should have a debate and, in the process, celebrate the fact that our multiculturalism has been a

great success and is a great example of national cohesion. We are the envy of the world. You only need to look at what is happening in Europe, and we have seen the comments from Angela Merkel and David Cameron about what is happening there. I believe what has happened there is that communities, rather than integrating and working together, have been ghettoised. You get examples in East London and in Paris of what is happening there, where it has created social disorder, whereas here we have had cohesion ever since the original settling of this country. And that is because most Australians are tolerant, and they have been tolerant for many years, if not 150 years. The working class of this country has also tended to be at the vanguard of this tolerance and this melting pot, and my own family attests to that. You get families these days throughout Sydney and throughout Australia where all sorts of races and religions marry and work together in a cohesive pattern. It is not just because of the tolerance of Australians; it is also because leadership has been shown on this issue over many years and by Liberal and Labor governments. We have heard about the contribution of Menzies and the contribution of Fraser and we all know about the contribution of Labor governments over that time.

For the debate on multiculturalism to be useful, leadership is required to ensure discussions are constructive, productive and acknowledge the significant contribution made by all Australians, no matter what our backgrounds. The debate needs to be one that acknowledges diversity and the benefits of diversity. And I am not just talking here about food and the fact that you can go to 10 different restaurants over the course of two weeks and have interesting meals. I am talking here about diversity of skills, diversity of culture, diversity of language, diversity of trade with other parts of the world.

However, if members of the opposition had their way the debate would focus on the most base of propositions. We have had the comment from Senator Bernardi that Islam is the problem. Further to this, the alleged comments in shadow cabinet by the member for Cook deliberately play to Islamophobia. What is worse is that the Leader of the Opposition has refused to discipline his members. In a way, he has been boxed into a corner, and the only response is to play the race card. It is the lowest form; it is incredibly base. What can we draw from this refusal? Either that he is not in control of his party, or that the cuts he was suggesting to foreign aid were suggested by One Nation, or that he or his office had advance warning of Mr Morrison's comments about the funerals, or that he or his office had sanctioned Senator Bernardi's regular attacks on Islam. I am glad that some in the opposition have the moral strength to stand against this and I particularly congratulate Senator Moylan.

Mr Anthony Smith—She's a member of this House.

Ms BRODTMANN—While I am a strong supporter of this discussion brought forward by the member for Chifley, I am extremely sad, disappointed and even somewhat ashamed that it is necessary for us to reaffirm our commitment to a non-discriminatory immigration policy. I am disappointed because I thought that, at least in the parliament of Australia, the White Australia policy was dead. I had thought that this parliament was of the view that it was immoral. However, it would appear I was wrong.

Sadly, I am a member of parliament where some think it is not just tolerable but desirable to deliberately play to certain fears in the community as a political tactic. That is an outrage. Last year the Prime Minister acknowledged those fears, which is the responsible thing for a leader and member of this parliament to do. However, it is one thing to acknowledge that these fears and attempt to ease them; it is another, entirely different, thing to fan these fears and use them for political gain. The fact that such a thing is not just openly canvassed but actively endorsed by senior members of a major political party is truly abhorrent. It is the basest of politics. It is not befitting a member of parliament.

We are privileged to be in this chamber and it is our role not simply to represent those in our electorate but also to show leadership. We must be a unifying force in our communities and for our nation. We come to this place in Canberra to do this task and to lead our country to a brighter and better future—a future in which all Australians regardless of background, origin, race or religion are considered of equal worth as people. It is not our role to take the fears of our communities and then use them to gain political advantage. It is not our role, and it is beneath us as parliamentarians, to take the fears of our communities and then use them to drive a wedge between Australians.

I call upon those in this House to show the leadership appropriate to their positions, to reaffirm their commitment to a multicultural Australia, to reaffirm the fact that diversity is important to this country and to reaffirm a non-discriminatory immigration policy. I call most importantly on the Leader of the Opposition to repudiate the views of some in his party. I call upon the Leader of the Opposition to stop showing even tacit support for the wedge politics of race and immigration. It is beneath this parliament; it is beneath this nation. We are all better than this and I call upon this chamber to support this matter of public importance of the member for Chifley.

Ms GAMBARO (Brisbane) (4.53 pm)—The coalition has always supported a non-discriminatory immigration policy, so I am very proud to be standing here today to support the matter of public importance from the member for Chifley. I also acknowledge the previ-

ous speaker, the member for Canberra, and her diverse cultural background. She and the member for Chifley have truly lived the multicultural dream, as have I. My parents and, firstly, my grandfather came to this country in 1939, and many years later so did my family. I have lived, one could say, two cultures. While my parents are Italian and I was brought up in the full Italian way, I speak Italian but I call myself Australian. That is what makes multiculturalism so great in this country. While we all celebrate diversity, we also work towards unity.

The matter of public importance here today is just being used as a wedge. It is being used to highlight the very worst in society. We are all Australians. We live under one language, we live under one law and we have one national identity. But, unfortunately, the member for Chifley and, yesterday, the Prime Minister's rhetoric do not quite add up. Quite conveniently yesterday, the Prime Minister brought up the issue of multiculturalism, which is something that we support on this side of the House and always have.

I am very privileged today to be speaking after a former minister for immigration, the member for Berowra, who spoke so eloquently before me. I must say that in all of my dealings with him the compassion that he provided to the immigration program was outstanding. There were many times when I went to him for ministerial intervention where he granted immigration status. I am also proud to be serving with the shadow minister for immigration and citizenship, the member for Cook, whom I find to be a man of great integrity. We have had many discussions since I was appointed to the portfolio. In all of those discussions he has supported multiculturalism, he has supported me in every way and he has supported programs that provide the great settlement services that new immigrants and those under the humanitarian program so richly deserve. So the comments that have been made about him today are absolutely unfounded and false. I have found him to be a man of great courage.

Today we are here talking on this matter of public importance at a time when the Labor Party, under the leadership of Julia Gillard, continues to struggle with an immigration policy that cannot stop boats making their perilous journey and that holds more than 1,020 children in detention. How compassionate is that? The government is short on humanitarian credentials. So what does the Prime Minister do? She starts to ignite the multicultural wars, and that is what we are seeing here today. If the Prime Minister really cared about multiculturalism, she would have included it in her ministry. As the member earlier mentioned, she would have put it in her ministry straight after the election, not six months after the election and especially since the recommendation to the government by its own

Multicultural Advisory Council was made some time ago in April.

I have been travelling around the countryside and I know why the Prime Minister has suddenly put multiculturalism on the agenda. It is because all of those out in the ethnic communities are very angry with this government. They are angry at their inaction. They are angry at their ability to make a statement in this area and have been sending motions of no support to the government in their policies on multiculturalism. If the Prime Minister really cared about multiculturalism, she would have travelled to parts of Australia where there is a high density of Australians that come from migrant families or who are migrants themselves and talked to them. But, instead, we saw her take the member for Lindsay, David Bradbury, out to Darwin so that they could do a little bit of illegal boat spotting on a Customs naval patrol. How cynical was that exercise to Australians who were watching it before the election? But I guess that was the 'old Julia' and now we have the 'new Julia', who supports immigration and supports multiculturalism—just like the 'old Julia' did not support a carbon tax and the 'new Julia' supports a carbon tax.

The government today, in the MPI, calls for the urgent need for leadership in a non-discriminatory immigration policy for Australia's future. But this is a very far cry from what happened on 9 April 2010. On that day the then Minister for Immigration and Citizenship, Senator Chris Evans, suspended all immigration from Sri Lanka and from Afghanistan. Labor's attack on the decision to freeze the processing of Afghan and Sri Lankan asylum seekers shocked many at the time. Mirko Bagaric, an associate professor from Deakin University, said:

This is probably the most repugnant refugee policy of any Western country that is a party to the international refugee convention. I know of no precedent of anything approaching a Western democracy doing anything as brutal to refugees as this.

No Western democracy has done what those in the government have done. As far as I am concerned, there has never been a more racially discriminatory immigration policy in Australia's history since the repeal of the White Australia policy. The Labor Party have been very happy to use immigration to their political advantage, but now they are heralding a new era of multiculturalism. What a disgrace! Since Labor have won office, they have made a mess of migration, they have made a mess of multiculturalism and they have made a mess of border protection.

There is so much history here. The former immigration minister spoke of the history of the Labor Party. We have a proud history in the area of immigration. He quoted Whitlam earlier. I will not give you the full quote, but in the book, *China, Communism and Coca-*

Cola, Clyde Cameron, Whitlam's minister for immigration, said on 21 April 1975, around the fall of Saigon:

Don Willesee—

the foreign affairs minister—

came to see me with a request that I accompany him to Whitlam's office. He wanted to get a ruling on the admissibility of certain categories of refugees ... Whitlam stuck out his jaw and, grinding his teeth, turned to Willesee and thundered, "I'm not having hundreds of—

I cannot repeat the word for parliament, but it starts with F—

Vietnamese Balts coming into this country with their political and religious hatreds against us" ... I could have hugged him for putting my own view so well ... [Willesee] made a ... plea for Vietnamese who had been employed by the Australian embassy, claiming that we had a moral obligation to take them into our arms. Whitlam rejected this plea out of hand.

Of course, we saw the boatloads of Vietnamese refugees that were accepted by the Fraser government and we have seen the wonderful contribution that the Vietnamese community has made to this wonderful country of ours. So the Labor Party has really got form with its past history.

Under Prime Ministers Fraser and Howard, Australia saw a well-ordered but also a very generous immigration policy. There was no public angst about immigration of ethnic groups. When people from different ethnic groups came to Australia, they were encouraged to settle—not to forget their origins but to realise that they were now Australians and that we had common and fundamental rights enshrined.

I know that diversity of cultures is desirable. I know firsthand how they contribute to the Australian identity. But we also need to focus on what holds us together as a society. We need to focus on what is good about multiculturalism. The government's policy on immigration shows that the Labor Party does not care about people stuck in overseas detention camps. I have just come back from the Thai-Burma border and, I must say, the harsh and unjust treatment of people in refugee camps and the ability of this government to accept more of them really needs to be looked at. We really need to accept many more offshore applications. The government shows that it really does not care about people living in tent cities in the Sudan, in Ethiopia and at the Thai-Burma border who are fleeing economic, religious and social persecution. The Labor Party does not care about refugees on the border of Iraq; it does not care about those in Bhutan or the Congo who have fled for their lives from oppressive regimes and seek resettlement right now through the full and legal processes of the UNHCR. To the Labor government it does not matter because the refugees are not part of the 9,000 or so illegal maritime arrivals in Australia since it watered

down its policy in 2008. Out of sight, out of mind. I have seen firsthand the people who live in refugee camps on the edges of these regions, fleeing prosecution.

Not only do I question the government's commitment to a fair and equitable immigration policy but I also question the commitment of the government to support a culturally cohesive Australian society. On only 10 February, it cut \$6.8 million to multicultural funding in 2010-11. It appears that Labor had hoped that these funds would go unnoticed. How can we stand here and listen to the government say that it supports multicultural policy when only 10 days ago it cut such a large amount from the program? (*Time expired*)

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Throsby) (5.03 pm)—I am very pleased to stand and speak in relation to the matter of public importance that has been brought to this House by my good friend of 12 years, the member for Chifley. I say I have known the member for Chifley for around 12 years. It was probably three years into that relationship before I discovered that the member for Chifley is Muslim. That goes to show that those who say that you can know everything about a person if you know what their religion is are wrong.

There has been a tragedy in New Zealand today: the earthquake in Christchurch. Our response shows that we in Australia share a common bond with those in our region. It is the common bond of humanity. Our response to it—not just the response of people in this place but the response of all Australians—is to instinctively say: how can we help? It is not new. In January 2005 we saw the same response when the area of Banda Aceh in Indonesia was hit by the terrible tsunami. We did not ask ourselves: what is the colour or creed of these people? All Australians rose to the tragedy and said: how can we help? It is what we stand for as a nation. It is deeply embedded in our values.

This matter of public importance asks us to reconsider those values and asks us to show leadership in relation to them. Leadership calls for clarity. It calls us to stand up here and in our communities and say quite clearly what we stand for. On this side of the House we have absolutely no shame in saying that we believe in a non-discriminatory immigration policy. We believe in an Australia that is confident in itself, its lifestyle and its culture—so confident that we are able to embrace and learn from others who share our values whilst retaining their identity, some of their culture and their nationality that they brought with them from the countries of their origin. It does not mean that we tolerate anything in the name of culture and religion. That is what our view of multiculturalism is all about.

We believe in these things because they spring from basic Labor values and, I believe, the basic Australian values of fairness, dignity and equality. We believe in these things because we believe that with diversity