



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Multiculturalism

SPEECH

Monday, 12 October 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 12 October 2015 Page 158 Questioner Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (17:04): It is a frightening thing to feel different to everybody else. We have all experienced it at some time in our lives, even if it is just a fleeting moment. My parents separated when I was in grade 1, and at the time it felt like we were the only family in our small town where we had separated parents. People in class can feel they do not know what the answer is to a teacher's question, or you might be the only teenager whose parents insist you must be home by 10 pm or midnight, or the only one who turns up at a fancy dress party—or what you thought was a fancy dress party—wearing fancy dress. Being that odd one out can be brief or it can be a lasting feeling. We all know what it feels like, so imagine if you felt a highly magnified version of that feeling every day—if you felt like your nation treated you like you did not belong. That is how some sections of our community feel every day, including some people in my electorate of Moreton, particularly the Muslim community. So we as Australians need to think more carefully about our actions towards others and the effects our actions might have.

There have been some very troubling events in South-East Queensland in recent weeks. A man verbally abused a 35-year-old Muslim woman at a shopping centre just down the road from my electorate. Within a few days of that attack, some anti-Islamic graffiti appeared on rubbish bins in Sunnybank right outside my electorate office. The hateful message was stencilled in black paint on rubbish bins by cowards in the middle of the night. I would ask people to stop and think how that 35-year-old woman would feel after being attacked just because of her faith and how the Sunnybank residents who are of the Islamic faith would feel walking past that graffiti. I do commend the Brisbane City Council for getting rid of that graffiti quickly.

Most of us obviously would never dream of acting in such a way towards any person, but, as the then Chief of Army, Lieutenant General David Morrison, said in one of his most famous speeches, 'The standard you walk past is the standard you accept.' All sensible Australians would be disgusted by acts like those that I just mentioned. We should be disgusted and we should voice our disgust, which is why I am standing here today. We should not accept such behaviour or any behaviour that targets any group in our community, particularly targeting them because of their faith.

Sadly, we will see in the Senate this week a bill introduced by Senator Bob Day from Family First that will weaken section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act. This bill is cosponsored by two Liberal senators, Cory Bernardi and Dean Smith. Another Liberal Senator, the Prime Minister's assistant minister, Queensland LNP Senator James McGrath, is on the record as saying he will cross the floor to support this proposed amendment. This is when the Prime Minister needs to decide what standard his government will accept and what standard he will merely walk past. Will he allow intolerance to be encouraged by watering down section 18C of the Racial Discrimination Act; a piece of legislation that has served Australia—our multicultural community—so well for decades? Does the Prime Minister want to promote disharmony in our community? The Prime Minister needs to lead by example and ensure that no Liberal senators supports this divisive bill. He needs to speak up.

This nation definitely does not need a rise in racist hate speech. What we are seeing in Australia in recent times, sadly, is an escalation of discrimination that is primarily on the basis of a person's religion. Discrimination based on a person's religion is not new. It has been going on for certainly thousands of years, and even when I grew up there was always a bit of rivalry between the Catholic primary school I attended and some other kids; I know many people will have experienced that particularly in sporting competitions. But this is an entirely different sort of singling out. It is hateful.

Our Commonwealth laws do not protect us from discrimination that is based on the grounds of religion. In Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory, the Northern Territory, Tasmania, Victoria and Western Australia, discrimination on the basis of religious belief or activity is prohibited, at least to some extent. That prohibition is contained in state laws. The man who verbally abused the 35-year-old woman in the shopping centre just down the road from my electorate of Moreton has been charged with public nuisance and wilful exposure. The Queensland police are also investigating whether he has committed an offence under the Queensland Anti-Discrimination

Act. Signs and symbols are important, and it is particularly important that the LNP government send a strong message to those that want to incite division, because this type of behaviour is unacceptable. They are breaking the law, particularly in those states that have laws banning religious discrimination, and if they are caught I believe they should be prosecuted. No-one should be discriminated against because of their religion, be they Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or whatever.

I attended a meeting of my community leaders on the south side of Brisbane last Tuesday night. It was a meeting called urgently by the Queensland Police Service commissioner, Commissioner Ian Stewart, after the tragic incident at Parramatta. I would particularly like to pass on my condolences to the family, friends and work colleagues of Curtis Cheng, the poor gentleman who was going about his business serving his community. The meeting that was called by Commissioner Stewart was held at the Islamic College of Brisbane in Karawatha. The MC was Sultan Deen. There was a great turn-up of people from all around South-East Queensland, from the Islamic community but also the Queensland Police Service and the Anti-Discrimination Commission. The Australian Federal Police had a strong presence there as well. There were young people and older people, men and women. It was a great turn-up where they shared their concerns and also ideas about how we can make our community more harmonious.

Commissioner Stewart called the meeting to assure the community members of his and the Queensland Police Service's commitment to providing a safe and inclusive Queensland. That is the sort of leadership that we like to see and that Australia needs. That is how communities are united and how an inclusive modern society is strengthened. It is up to all of us to do our part to promote inclusiveness in our everyday lives. It is the small gestures that can make all the difference—focusing on what connects us, not what divides us and not our differences. That is how an inclusive multicultural society should be: we are united by what we have in common and we forget about our differences.

Obviously, in a place like Australia sport is a great way to connect people that have differences. On Brisbane's south side I have a very multicultural community. I am proud to say that the member for Rankin, Jim Chalmers, and I will be holding our second annual cricket match between the Moreton Muslim community and the Rankin Muslim community. I will go on the record and say that last year the Rankin community won, but we are looking for some revenge when we play on 1 November at St Laurence's playing fields at Runcorn. I thank St Laurence's, a Catholic school, which will be hosting this match between these two communities.

This will be, as I said, the second match, and I thank Ali Kadri from the Holland Park mosque, who has helped to organise the team for Moreton. I will let the member for Rankin talk about the team that is being organised for Rankin, but in my electorate I have various Muslim communities: the Bosnian community, the Somali community and the Sudanese community—not particularly well known for their cricket-playing ability, I would stress. So it is a bit hard to try and find a representative cricket player from each of these mosques, but thankfully some of the other mosques have been able to step up and find players. Obviously communities from countries like Pakistan and some of the South African Muslim communities have been able to provide cricketers, but I am looking forward to finding someone from the Bosnian, Somali and Sudanese communities who can be a part of the representative side.

This event kicked off last year, and Queensland Cricket supported it and supplied kit and equipment and umpires as well. It was played in great spirits. I do thank St Laurence's for letting us move on to some better facilities, but we particularly wanted to play last year at the Runcorn State High School because of its connection with some of the young men who have been led astray by the deception that is being perpetrated by Daesh and we wanted to make a symbolic statement that the Islamic community was a strong presence on the south side.

When we have those people who turn up trying to say they are not racist but who are particularly targeting one group, the Muslim community, I say to them that they need to listen carefully to the second verse of our national anthem, which talks about welcoming those who have come across the seas. We need to welcome those, making sure that we recognise the differences and not listening to those people who want to focus on the things that divide us. Obviously, I am always wary of people that go out in organised rallies that are particular targeting a group of people. *(Time expired)*