



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

Federation Chamber

MOTIONS

Forced Adoption

SPEECH

Thursday, 16 May 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Thursday, 16 May 2013 Page 99 Questioner Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (10:15): It was my honour to be asked by the previous Attorney-General, Nicola Roxon, to be on the committee to draft the apology for forced adoption. It was a tough task. We were very ably led, but a number of people who had been the victims of forced adoption appeared before the committee. They were mainly the mothers forced to give up their babies for adoption, and even a father appeared before the committee. People like Paul Howes also appeared. It was quite an experience for me.

I should stress that the reason I appeared on the committee drafting the national apology for forced adoptions is that my sister had had a child adopted when she was 14. She has never classed it as a forced adoption, although my mum was a single parent at the time. My dad had left and there were nine kids in the house. My sister gave as much content as a pregnant 14-year-old child can give. However, that has been a fantastic story as far as adoptions go. My nephew Andrew Garvey was adopted by a wonderful family. He has had a magnificent relationship with the family who adopted him and my sister now has a great relationship with him. I remember meeting him at my sister's 50th birthday, which was like finding a new family member. He fits in wonderfully, and it is great to have a new nephew. I think Andrew is a constituent of the member for Solomon, although I hope he does not support her! I will have to check with him next time I catch up with him.

However, not every person involved with forced adoptions has had such a wonderful experience. Being on the committee that drafted the national apology for forced adoption, we heard incredibly sad tales. In the consultations around Australia—not that I was involved in all of those as I went only to the ones in Brisbane—we heard horrific tale after horrific tale. I urge people to read the report of the Senate committee, chaired by the Greens Senator Rachel Siewert, that set up the process that led to the Prime Minister delivering the national apology for forced adoption on Thursday, 21 March this year.

Unfortunately, democracy being what it is, that day was not a great day. It was also the day of the faux coup, and that took a lot of the attention of the nation from the forced adoption apology. However, those people who were in the Great Hall and heard the Prime Minister's apology were moved significantly, including the Leader of the Opposition since this was a bipartisan event. The apology from the Prime Minister was significant although it will not make up for past wrongs and it could never make up for the heartache of those who never got to see their mum or their families and who have never found out who their parents are. Not everyone has a magnificent story like Andrew Garvey, my nephew, not that that story does not have a heartache attached to it as well. However, the nation saying sorry was a significant gesture.

My first day in parliament was the day the member for Griffith, former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, delivered an apology to the stolen generation. That was the very first thing I did as a member of parliament in Canberra. There was a welcome to country first and then we had the apology. It was an incredibly moving moment. It was an apology that has been heard around the world and that gesture lifted the standing of this nation. Again, it was a bipartisan gesture from both sides of parliament. I remember Brendan Nelson, then Leader of the Opposition, delivering the apology on behalf of the opposition. These as well as the other national apology are significant gestures.

As there is a Western Australian in the chamber, the deputy leader of the opposition, I particularly mention the contribution of the member for Swan, which was incredibly moving. He is surely one of the most significant gentlemen in this parliament. He is well liked on both sides of the chamber. The way he carried himself throughout his speech is a memory I will always have. I remember his first speech when he touched on some of these messages as well. It was incredibly moving.

The national apology for forced adoptions is something that we should be proud of as a parliament. These chambers can be quite adversarial sometimes, but I remind the Australian people that we can step up and do things in the national interest and be united. Thursday, 21 March, when the Prime Minister delivered the national

apology for forced adoptions, is a day that should be remembered, and I am particularly proud of it. I commend the apology to the House.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Order! The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.