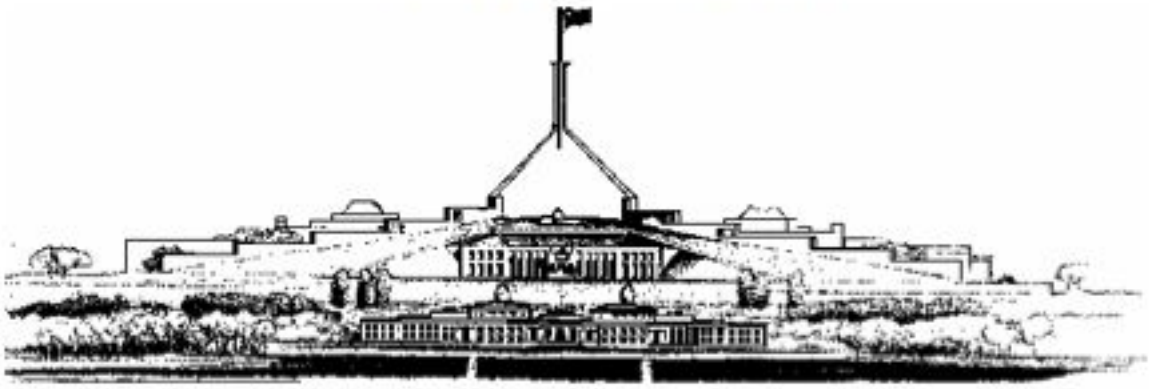
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

Address-in-Reply

SPEECH

Tuesday, 22 July 2025

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date	Tuesday, 22 July 2025	**Source**	House
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Questioner		**Responder**	
Speaker	Ng, Gabriel MP	**Question No.**	

Mr NG (Menzies) (18:53): I'm honoured to stand here as the first ever Labor member for Menzies. I represent a movement I passionately believe in and a community I love, a place I grew up in and have spent most of my life in.

I joined the Labor Party because of its unwavering commitment to social justice and progressivism, because I know that only Labor governments have delivered and defended so much of what makes us a more just and kind country. Only Labor introduced Medicare, land rights, antidiscrimination legislation, needs based school funding, the NDIS, collective bargaining and worker protections. Only Labor governs for modern Australia, with all its diversity and promise. We do not bury our heads in the sand as the world changes around us but embrace new challenges and the opportunities they present. At the last election, our platform reaffirmed our commitment to these fundamental principles. I will be forever grateful that the people of Australia and of Menzies endorsed these values.

Social justice and progressivism ask that we engage in truth-telling and reconciliation. I therefore acknowledge the traditional owners of the lands and waterways on which this parliament sits, the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people. I pay respects to elders past and present and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today. I also acknowledge the traditional owners of my electorate of Menzies in Melbourne's east, the Wurundjeri Woiwurrung of the Kulin nation.

The northern boundary of Menzies is formed by the Yarra River, or Birrarung in the Woiwurrung language. Birrarung means 'river of mists and shadows'. For 65,000 years, it has been the centre of life and creation stories that continue to be nurtured and shared to this day. Menzies is blessed with many culturally significant sites as well as sites of resistance to the devastating impacts of colonialism. The Wurundjeri believe that they are part of the land and the land is part of them. While many of us as more recent arrivals do not have the same unique connection to place, we could learn much in recognising our interconnectedness with and duty of care for the land and natural environment.

Without the Labor Party, it is fair to say I wouldn't be here today—not just here in this parliament but here at all. My dad, John, is a Chinese-Singaporean immigrant. He came to Australia in the 1970s as a skilled migrant—a licensed aircraft maintenance engineer. To this day he still does physically demanding shiftwork and applies himself to keeping up with ever-changing technologies. He has always been frugal and self sacrificing to provide for his family both here and back in Singapore, sending money home for his mother, brothers and sisters, who did not have the opportunities that Australia provides.

It was Labor's commitment to antidiscrimination that led the Whitlam government to finish the work begun by the Holt government and finally stamp out the White Australia Policy. This made his migration possible. My mum, Tina, is from regional Victoria and was the first in her family to go to university. She supported herself as a hospital worker, became a lawyer and later in life became a Uniting Church minister. Again, were it not for the Whitlam government's commitment to equality of opportunity in providing free university education, she would never have realised her potential. Less wholesome is the fact that they met each other at a disco! But—moving on quickly from that—without Labor they would not have been able to make the contribution to Australia that they have.

When my parents brought me home from the hospital, it was to their first house in Doncaster East in what would become Menzies. It was a wonderful area to grow up in—a mix of peaceful suburbs, beautiful parks and bushland. We went to church at St Gregory in Doncaster, learnt to ride our bikes at Banksia Park and walked our dogs by the river in Warrandyte. I would go with my dad to Box Hill to eat noodles and buy ingredients for dinner we couldn't find anywhere else. At the risk of carbon dating myself, as a teenager in the nineties, I'd go to Westfield shopping town to get an undercut, find the latest CDs at Sanity and buy jeans which I'd promptly go home and rip, to my parents' dismay. I hung out with my friends in Surrey Hills and Blackburn and played futsal at Box Hill indoor sports centre. It is not a log cabin story! It's been a fortunate life.

That good fortune meant I knew I should give something back. I volunteered in an aged-care home, a community legal centre and my community. I became a public servant and worked in migrant and refugee settlement. This helped me appreciate what a gift it is to live in a tolerant, democratic country. It also showed me that it is not enough that government supports be available but that they be accessible to everyone. I became a plaintiff lawyer. I saw many people's lives derailed by circumstances outside their control, demonstrating the importance of social safety nets and access to justice to help people get back on their feet. And I joined the Australian Labor Party.

When I got older, I moved to other parts of Melbourne, interstate and even overseas. These experiences broadened my horizons but helped me realise where home was. When my wife, Maaya, and I decided to have a family, we moved back to the Menzies area, and in those years it had changed. It still had the same mix of suburbs and bush, but it had grown more diverse. Our established Italian and Greek communities were still there, but we now had the largest Persian community in Australia, a growing Indian community and people from practically every country on Earth. Forty-four per cent of people in Menzies were born overseas, and 68 per cent have at least one parent born overseas. The Chinese Australian community had grown so that those with Chinese ancestry now make up 27 per cent of the electorate, the highest proportion in any electorate nationally.

When I was growing up you didn't see many East Asian faces in the street. Still, instances of overt racism were rare. There were occasional slurs in the playground and the time a neighbour suspected my dad of wanting to eat their dog. More pervasive was the question, 'Where are you really from?' or comments like, 'You speak really good English.' While these episodes were significant enough to remember, they weren't much more than annoyances. Then, in 1996, a member of this House—Pauline Hanson, in her maiden speech—said Australia was 'in danger of being swamped by Asians,' dredging up tired old colonial fears of a yellow peril. For the first time, I felt there were some in the population, maybe a sizable number, who considered me less Australian because of my race. I am happy to say that we now have a much more reputable member for Oxley. Not long afterwards I learned that the then prime minister, John Howard, had not only failed to denounce Ms Hanson's words but had said similar things himself earlier in his career. This was in stark contrast to other prime ministers I had known. Bob Hawke was a fierce antiracist who spoke out against John Howard's opportunism in favour of the brotherhood of man and compassion over fear. Paul Keating had the vision and bravery to embrace Australia as part of Asia. I raise Ms Hanson's infamous speech not to elicit sympathy but to remind all of us in this House, if we need any reminding, that what we do in this place matters, not only in the legislation we pass but in the words we speak.

It is not just Chinese or Asian Australians who have suffered. Prejudice comes in waves, and bullies will always target the most vulnerable. Muslim and Jewish Australians, refugees, the LGBTIQ+ community and, especially, our First Nations Peoples have all been vilified by opportunists, some of whom have held seats in this place. We have one of the most powerful platforms in the nation, and I urge all of us in this parliament to turn away from opportunistic division to embrace and tell the story of modern Australia as it is, in all its rich diversity and cultural expression. The Labor Party have led on this because social justice and progressivism mean antidiscrimination and inclusivity. We championed multiculturalism for years when it was denied by conservatives. We have stood against racism and discrimination because we believe in the equality of all Australians.

In my lifetime I have seen enormous change in how Australia talks about migrants. I look around my community—at the kids playing in the schoolyards, the sporting clubs, the small businesses and the thousands who attend the Box Hill Lunar New Year festival and the Persian fire festival—and I do not see division. I see people embracing diversity and revelling in the sharing of culture.

I look around at this new parliament, particularly those on this side, and I see it beginning to reflect the diversity of the communities we serve. This is not diversity for diversity's sake. It is vital that young Australians of all races can look at federal parliament and think, 'That is somewhere I can aspire to be.' Our backgrounds, whether professional or cultural, allow us to bring knowledge and skills to parliament that result in better government. We have seen how improving gender representation has allowed more equitable policy in health care, in industrial relations and in education. Cultural representation will enable us to break down barriers, make the most of our skilled workforce, provide fairer government services and create more opportunities to engage with our region and the world.

Social justice and progressivism also demand we act on other urgent issues. We live in a country of increasing inequality, where the fair go is being eroded. Income inequality, after being stagnant for years, had increased to a 20-year high before we came to government. Wages as a proportion of company profits have been in decline

for decades, particularly in the last five years. Too often we hear the CEOs of large companies openly say their only responsibility is to their shareholders, forgetting their responsibilities to their customers, their employees and broader society. Meanwhile, workers are saddled with an increased share of the tax burden. The picture is worse for wealth inequality. The top 10 per cent of households possess 44 per cent of all wealth in Australia. Twenty years ago, the richest 200 Australians held the equivalent of 8.4 per cent of GDP. Now they hold almost triple that. This is not due to a tripling of ingenuity or risk taking but is largely the result of passive capital gains.

We as a party welcome aspiration and people enjoying the fruits of their labour, but there is a point at which gross wealth next to poverty damages the social fabric. It breeds division and instability. Only Labor will address this. We cannot sleepwalk our way to a society where our children never reach their full potential because of inadequate health care, underfunded schools, unaffordable housing and an insufficient social safety net. I am proud to be part of a government that, under the leadership of this prime minister, has increased wages and reduced income inequality, strengthened Medicare and public education, and invested more in housing than any government since World War II. We must continue this work with renewed ambition and drive.

We must also ensure that government services are accessible and effective by maintaining our commitment to a strong public service. I am proud to have been a public servant and to be part of a government that respects the vital role the Public Service plays. In the last election campaign, those on the opposite side attacked the Public Service. In some circles, it seems, it will always be fashionable to do so. It was as if they learned nothing from robodebt, the fullest realisation of a public service hollowed out by neoliberal ideology, cronyism and corporate outsourcing, which cost the lives of some of the most vulnerable in our community. A strong, well-resourced public service that can provide frank and fearless advice is essential to avoiding these mistakes in the future. It is not about big or small government; it is about government that works for people.

That is not to say that government is perfect. As both a public servant and a lawyer, I saw how easy it is for people to fall between the cracks of services and the justice system. All too often, government is not a helping hand but a bureaucratic labyrinth that compounds trauma and disenfranchisement. All of us here have good intentions about the legislation we want to pass and the programs we want to create. We must ensure that we back that with the means to deliver it. I am optimistic about the ability of this parliament to solve these problems. I am eternally grateful to the people of Menzies for the opportunity to contribute to this work.

As with all achievements, but particularly those in the Australian Labor Party, my presence here today is the result of a collective effort. Above all, I want to thank the loyal rank-and-file branch members of the Labor Party. It may shock you all to know that Menzies has not always been Labor heartland. For decades, we would stand candidates and run campaigns with little hope of success. But, when we asked volunteers to staff the booths on polling day, to doorknock or to letterbox, it was the stalwarts who always turned up.

So thank you to all those who kept the flame alive for Labor in Menzies, particularly the many long-serving Labor members, including some life members who are here today. The party and I owe you a huge debt. Thank you to my campaign team: Harry, Alessandra, Dustin, Tracy, Alfonso, Daniel, Mia, Tim, Mandy, Natalie and Ian. I'm incredibly proud of the grassroots campaign we ran and of the discipline, hard work and determination we showed against what seemed like unsurmountable odds. Thank you to all the volunteers. Every doorknock, phone bank, street stall, yard sign and donation made a difference. Thank you to all my friends who came out and helped, especially those who would never usually entertain the idea of joining a political campaign.

Thank you to the Prime Minister for an amazing national campaign and for all your visits to Menzies. I hope you enjoyed the beef and black bean sauce! Thank you to the Foreign minister, Penny Wong, for leading the way for Chinese Australians in parliament for so long and for all your support in Menzies. Thank you to the Deputy Prime Minister, the members for Bruce, Isaacs and Scullin, Senator Jana Stewart and the many parliamentary colleagues who supported the campaign. Thank you to my state colleagues the members for Box Hill, Glen Waverly and Eltham, as well as the MLCs Sonia Terpstra and Shaun Leane.

Thank you also to Julijana Todorovic and Kat Hardy, Labor lawyers in Slater & Gordon, for your support. Thank you to the union movement, particularly the CPSU, ASU and AMWU. The union movement remains the heart of the Labor Party, ensuring we stay true to our principles and our roots, driving so many of the reforms we undertake for working Australians.

Thank you to my staff—Emily, George, Dustin, Tracy, Chris and Kimberly—for all your hard work and support. You're all incredibly talented people, and I'm looking forward to everything we can achieve. Thank you to the

previous Labor candidates for Menzies for chipping away at what seemed like an impossible margin. Thank you to the Labor supporters in Menzies. It has meant the world to have people coming up to me since the election and saying they have voted Labor their whole lives but this is the first time they've had a Labor representative. I'll do everything I can to make you proud.

Thank you, of course, to the voters of Menzies. Whether you voted for me or not, I promise I will work hard for you every day. Being the candidate and now the member has given me the opportunity to meet so many extraordinary people who volunteer in their business associations, sporting clubs and arts organisations, in their local Rotary and in places like Doncare and Eastern Community Legal Service to give their time to build our community and help the vulnerable. I was particularly proud of the civil and respectful way all the candidates and political groups conducted themselves in Menzies. That we could have a genuine contest of ideas is something of which we should all be proud.

I'd like to acknowledge the previous member for Menzies, Keith Wolahan, who throughout the campaign was a thoroughly decent and gracious person. I'd also like to acknowledge Kevin Andrews, who served his electorate and this House with dedication for an incredible 31 years.

Finally, I would like to thank my family. To my dad, John: thank you for teaching me the value of hard work and keeping my feet on the ground. To my mum, Tina: thank you for teaching me to always challenge myself and to seek out adventure. To my sister, Stephanie, about whom I can only say nice things publicly because I'm covered by parliamentary privilege: I've always looked up to your drive and strength. To my niece, Poppy: thank you for always being so kind and considerate. To my children—to my eldest, Ayana: thank you for your fierce intelligence, your independent mind and your sense of humour. To my youngest, Miles: thank you for being so caring, so bright and so joyful. You kids are a light in all of our lives. And to my wife, Maaya: I can't thank you enough for everything you have given me. You're the strongest and most loving person I know, and none of this would be possible without you.

I am grateful to the people of Menzies for this opportunity to serve and to contribute to making this country a more equal and just place for all. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: Before I call the honourable member for Griffith, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech, and I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.