



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**CONDOLENCES**

**Corporal Richard Edward Atkinson**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 8 February 2011**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Tuesday, 8 February 2011  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Robert, Stuart, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr ROBERT** (Fadden) (2.10 pm)—I rise to join the Prime Minister, the Leader of the Opposition and the Minister for Defence here in this great hall of democracy to honour the fallen Corporal Richard Atkinson—22 years old, short-haired, fit, strong, healthy, the world seemingly at his feet—who under normal circumstances would be considered a young man, yet to us here is a warrior old beyond his years—old enough to serve his country; old enough to die for it.

The English poet and Great War veteran Siegfried Sassoon said:

Soldiers are dreamers; when the guns begin

They think of firelit homes, clean beds, and wives.

It is profoundly sad that Corporal Atkinson will never realise his dream of marrying his fiancée, Dannielle, or spending another holiday with his parents, Ross and Kate, his brother, James, and his sister-in-law, Sumah. To them and his wider family and friends, we offer our most sincere condolences.

Corporal Atkinson epitomised all that is great about the volunteer Australian soldier. He was tragically killed in action because he would not ask his men to do anything that he himself would not do. Selfless, spirited and professional to the very end, he has set an enduring example, leading from the front, caring for his mates and staring down adversity with grit and determination.

This is a selfless act that we cannot forget. He fell on a battlefield that is the front line in the fight for our very way of life. He fell fighting for freedom for the Afghani people and freedom for all Australians that dream of a life where the insipidly cowardly act of terrorism is a mere byword. He and his family have paid a high and exacting price for the freedom we enjoy.

For 110 years, Australia's military have watched zealously over our national freedoms. They have stood in the watchtowers of our national conscience and have borne the brunt of our national demands. Over 100,000 Australians have fallen, sealing this commitment with their blood, and Corporal Atkinson has now joined their hallowed ranks, his name added to those of 21 other Australian soldiers tragically killed in action in Afghanistan.

Corporal Atkinson never asked for anything in return for his service except our friendship and our understanding. It is incumbent upon us to remember him always, for he has richly earned our respect and enduring admiration. He knew service above self and demonstrated so ably that there is no greater love than this: to lay down your life for your friends. If the price of freedom is eternal vigilance then let us steel ourselves once again for the fight ahead; let us recommit anew to care for our fighting men and women and those left behind; and let us honour Corporal Atkinson's sacrifice. He is the epitome of the modern-day Anzac, and he has truly made us proud.

**The SPEAKER**—As a mark of respect, I invite honourable members to rise in their places.

*Honourable members having stood in their places—*

Debate (on motion by **Mr Albanese**) adjourned.