

## GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH

### Address-in-Reply

[Mr ROBERT](#) (Fadden) (5.58 p.m.)—It is with great humility that I rise today to deliver my first speech to the 42nd Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia. I am humbled by the trust that the people of Fadden have placed in me as their representative and I can assure them that I will not let them down. I enter this place with youth, vigour, determination and experience to ensure that the people of Fadden have someone that has the courage and capacity to fight for them.

I am especially pleased to have been elected on the 200th anniversary of when a great hero of mine, William Wilberforce, secured passage of the Slave Trade Act that abolished the abhorrent trade throughout the Commonwealth. His firm Christian commitment, his passion for justice and his unstinting resolve to fight for what was right are a great personal inspiration. I look forward to bringing the same courage of my convictions to the inevitable parliamentary battles that are ahead.

The electorate of Fadden was named for Sir Arthur Fadden, a distinguished parliamentarian who served briefly from August to October 1941 as the Prime Minister of this great nation. He led Australia during a critical period of our history, and he often joked that he was like Noah's flood: he led the nation for 40 days and 40 nights.

There have been three previous members for Fadden. I specifically want to acknowledge the immediate past member, the Hon. David Jull, who held the seat for 23 long years with great distinction. I believe he is the longest-serving Queensland Liberal parliamentarian, and his legacy is surely substantial.

The electorate of Fadden is one of the most beautiful areas of this nation, located in the magnificent Gold Coast. I make this claim with great boldness here in this House, secure in the knowledge that Fadden is the fastest-growing federal electorate in the country, having grown by 31.6 per cent in the last six years. Indeed, more people want to relocate to Fadden than to any other federal electorate represented in this place, and frankly, colleagues, it is not hard to see why. Fadden is as diverse as it is spectacular. The suburbs of Labrador, Runaway Bay, Hollywell and Paradise Point cling to the magnificent Broadwater in the east, one of the nation's great, exquisite playgrounds. To the west are the hinterland suburbs of Nerang, Gaven, Pacific Pines, Oxenford and Upper Coomera, that range from rural to family-friendly suburban areas. To the north are the cane fields of Woongoolba and the emerging areas of Coomera and Stapylton, and in the centre is the magnificent Gold Coast Marine Precinct, boasting some of the world's great luxury boatbuilders as well as what is arguably the theme park capital of the nation.

Fadden clearly offers a lifestyle unparalleled, with world-class shopping, entertainment and living. There is a strong and vibrant heart to the electorate, and the Gold Coast also boasts the highest number of small to medium enterprises per capita in the nation. Fadden, together with the other two great Gold Coast seats of McPherson and Moncrieff, which are proudly held by Liberal parliamentarians, makes the Gold Coast the small to medium business capital of the nation. Fadden, and the Gold Coast, clearly has much to be proud of.

The background I bring to this place is one that resonates with and complements the broad base of the Liberal Party. I grew up in Bundaberg on a cane farm with hard-working parents who sacrificed a great deal for me and for my brother and sister. My family would later embark on a range of successful small businesses and would prove that hard work, initiative and risk-taking maximise one's opportunity for success. I am forever grateful for my family's unconditional love and support. I owe them a debt of gratitude and acknowledge my parents, Alan and Dorothy Robert, who are in the gallery this afternoon.

The value of family to our way of life is undeniable. The great Christian statesman Edmund Burke spoke of the 'little platoons' of our society—of family, church, neighbourhoods, workplaces and professional associations. He said:

... to love the little platoon we belong to in society is the first principle ... of public affections.

I think we must recognise that the most important of these little platoons is the traditional family unit. Family is the glue that holds society together; indeed, it is the bedrock of the nation. Families must be supported and encouraged, and what constitutes the traditional family unit should never be weakened. If we lose the family we lose everything.

My family, like many others, struggled financially to ensure that my siblings and I could enjoy the best possible education. I completed my schooling at the Rockhampton Grammar School, and my experience there strengthened my resolve that parents should be able to send their children to a school of their choice. I note that many parents struggle and sacrifice to do so. I firmly believe the federal government has a responsibility to support the private school system as the states do the public system.

I was fortunate at Rockhampton Grammar to secure a scholarship to the Australian Defence Force Academy as an army officer cadet. Twenty years ago this year, I marched into the academy, which is five kilometres down the road, at barely 17 years of age. Five months later I would stand in the military guard of honour that opened this great Parliament House. Following the academy, I attended the Royal Military College Duntroon and was subsequently fortunate to serve with a diverse range of units. These included the 3rd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and the 51st Battalion, Far North Queensland Regiment, based on Thursday Island, which was at the time the largest Indigenous unit in the Defence Force. This period was also a time of study, mostly part-time, for many years, to complete two master's degrees in business administration and information technology, which would prove of tremendous value in later life. My military and tertiary education was instrumental in the success of future endeavours. Both are of great benefit to the development of future leaders and deserve our support.

A great part of my 12-year military career was spent working within military intelligence, specifically in intelligence and security. That included a five-month tour of duty with the peace-monitoring force in Bougainville following the civil war. I was proud to have served my country overseas and to have helped bring peace to an island that had suffered so much. I was proud to have worn a military uniform and to have served in the long military tradition of this nation and of my family.

My cousin was the first casualty in Korea as an Air Force pilot, and my uncle Alan was twice wounded in Korea with the 3rd Battalion. My grandfather enlisted at age 42 to fight with the 9th Division in Africa during World War II and would die midwar whilst on leave. His daughter, my mother, was two years old. He was a grandfather I never knew because he loved his country more than he valued his own life. Three cousins, who were brothers, fought in World War I, two of them with the 3rd Light Horse Brigade in Gallipoli. One of them, a young lieutenant with the 8th Light Horse Regiment, gave his life on 7 August 1915 with 233 others when the 8th and 10th Light Horse charged valiantly at the Nek. They lie buried where they fell, as do over 100,000 other Australians buried on foreign soil.

Notwithstanding our military service in the Sudan and the Boer War, that fateful day of 25 April 1915 began a great tradition of men and women serving this Commonwealth—serving us—with honour and distinction in demanding and dangerous operational areas. We owe our veteran community a debt of gratitude that in many ways we can never repay. They have served selflessly, many of them shedding their blood to protect and preserve the rights that we daily take for granted. This place has an absolute responsibility to respect and care for our veteran community. This place must ensure that our great nation remains safe and secure with a Defence Force capable of projecting power wherever it is needed. Our nation has a right to defend itself

and an obligation to all Australians to maintain our national security. I look for inspiration to that great nation of Israel, which has an absolute right to exist and to strongly defend its borders from all aggressors. Its growth and prosperity is an inspiration to all free nations.

Following my military career, a colleague and I founded an IT services firm that has since grown to be a nationwide company. For the last two years our firm has been named in the *Business Review Weekly* Fast 100 list, which recognises the fastest-growing 100 companies in Australia. I was proud to have led our firm during a period of exponential growth. Founding and developing a small business is difficult. It demands tremendous risk-taking, resourcefulness and courage in the early days to go without paying yourself for six months to meet cash flow requirements, to mortgage the family home and to work long hours to get ahead. This is what it means to start and run a small business in Australia. This is what it means to step out and employ fellow Australians.

Small business owners fight a daily battle to survive, to grow, to improve the livelihood of their families and to generate employment. They achieve this in the shadow of ignorant governments that battle tirelessly against them with moribund ideologically based legislation such as unfair dismissal laws, the rolling back of individual statutory agreements, land tax and payroll tax. The sheer notion that Labor state governments still tax the payroll of a small business for simply employing Australian workers is patently ludicrous; it is grossly anti-business and it is anti-employment. I salute all small business owners and I thank you for your contribution to our economy and our way of life. You employ 50 per cent of all Australian workers and you are, indeed, the backbone of this country.

I salute the tens of thousands of Gold Coast small businesses and thank you for the risks that you take. Thank you for employing Australians to help achieve record low unemployment. Thank you for your courage despite the dark, looming spectre of union interference cresting the horizon of your businesses.

I specifically acknowledge my business partners—David Smith, who is in the gallery today, and Andrew Chantler. They embody everything that is great about the Australian business owner: they work hard, they take risks, they put others first and they provide opportunities for everyday, ordinary Australians. I look forward to strongly defending small business in this place against narrow-minded collectivists who know little, if anything at all, of the challenges of the small business environment.

The purpose of my life has always been guided by a strong Christian faith that has set my moral compass and cemented my values. These values led me to become a founding director of Watoto Australia and a member of the Watoto International board, which operates one of the world's largest and most unique orphan programs, operating out of Uganda, where there are currently more than two million orphaned children due to HIV-AIDS and war. The Watoto model is to rescue children and care for their physical, spiritual and emotional needs, including housing them with a mother and seven new siblings. These houses are grouped into villages with electricity, running water, schools, medical clinics and auditoriums. The premise is that orphaned children growing up in a home with a loving mother, with an identity and with an opportunity to go to the best schools, universities and technical colleges, will shine more so than if simply placed in an institution. I believe that, as we rescue a child, we raise a leader and we will rebuild nations. Children are 100 per cent of the future of every nation. We have a responsibility to protect our children and provide them with the best of education and care to preserve our nation's future. We also have a responsibility as good international citizens to reach out with appropriate aid and development to build nations and enhance our international security and standing.

My own political journey began very early in life, when I first joined the Liberal Party in 1991. I was motivated to action as I witnessed the diabolical consequences of the recession which, apparently, 'we had to have', the crippling interest rates and the very high level of industrial

disputes which so adversely impacted on my family and many surrounding families. Through all of this turbulence, the urgency to ensure that this place governed for all Australia and not just for sectional interests became self-evident. Sir Robert Menzies said to those who came to the Canberra Conference in October 1944:

... what we must look for, and it is a matter of desperate importance to our society, is a true revival of liberal thought which will work for social justice and security, for national power and national progress, and for the full development of the individual citizen ...

These great tenets of what it means to be a Liberal hold as true today as when the party was founded. Among other things, I choose to stand in parliament to defend these views. I firmly believe they represent a path for every good citizen to have not only a chance in life but also a self-respecting life. I am proud of our nation's common Judaeo-Christian heritage and the values that underpin that heritage and, indeed, underpin our society and way of life. We welcome new Australians from all nations and we look forward to them integrating into our great nation and embracing our shared values.

I am proud of the personal freedoms we enjoy, based on a bedrock of Christian based ethical standards. I believe in the family as the basic building block of society. I believe strongly in the sanctity of life. I stand for one common law for all Australians and will vehemently oppose any move to establish any other parallel law within Australia. I stand for a secure nation able to defend its borders from aggressors, internal or external. I agree with Jefferson that the price of liberty is eternal vigilance. I stand for the great tradition of smaller government and deregulation within a set of traditional virtues, initiative, hard work, saving, mateship and a fair go for all. I also support an appropriate safety net to assist the disadvantaged and the hurting without creating an ongoing welfare society.

I am an ardent and passionate supporter of free enterprise and of allowing people to engage in the free market unencumbered by government interference. People need to be provided with incentive and opportunity to better themselves, not mechanisms to vainly attempt a false equality. People must have the basic freedom and right to enter into an employment agreement with their employer, unencumbered by a third party. Small business must be able to operate in an environment of incentive and reward.

I began this speech by saying how humbled I am by the trust placed in me by the people of Fadden. Winning the seat well in the almighty shadow of the enduring legacy and strong personal following of the Hon. David Jull was achieved through the efforts of hundreds of people. I would like to take the opportunity to thank many of them now, as without them I would not stand here today. I have already acknowledged my parents, and I do so again in consideration of their great love and guidance. Thanks also to my brother Ian for never ceasing to believe in me and my sister Lisa, who always ensured I remained firmly grounded. I am indebted to some of the most tireless Liberal colleagues, with whom it has been my pleasure to work. To my campaign director, Steve Houlihan, who ran an excellent campaign to his enduring credit, you are not only a great campaign director but an astute political mind and a good friend. To his wife, Janet, thank you for releasing him to fight the campaign of his life. To my campaign personnel coordinator, Robert Knight, thank you for encouraging me to contest the seat and well done on a sterling job in difficult circumstances. Ably supported by your wife, Kerry, I salute you both.

To other tireless supporters: Phil Hunniford, Shannon Crane, Felicity Stevenson, Sandra Kuppe, Ros Bates, Simone Holzapel, Christopher Stear, the late Bill Stear and many others, a huge thank you. To my patron, Senator Brett Mason, you were always available and I look forward to campaigning with you in the future. To the FEC chair in Fadden, Peter Gallus, thank you for your guidance and support. To the Young Liberals, for coming out each weekend to campaign, well done. To the Fadden Liberal branches, and of course the Fadden women, thank you for your support and encouragement.

Let me also acknowledge some especially dedicated people on the campaign trail—87-year-old Nan Rogers, who campaigned with me for 70 days straight, as did Laurie and Betty Robertson. I am humbled by your commitment and support. Your lives are already rich through your community service, and my life is richer for the pleasure of knowing you. To 91-year-old Ron Bagely, you salty old seadog, I only hope I have your stamina in later years. To your wife, Judith, you bring grace and dignity to the party. To those parliamentarians who campaigned in Fadden, notably the Leader of the Opposition, the Hon. Brendan Nelson, the Hon. Tony Abbott, the Hon. Julie Bishop and the Hon. Ian Macfarlane: thank you. To my colleague and friend Steve Ciobo, thanks for all your support, guidance and answers to a million questions, some of which I may have inadvertently asked twice. You were a great coach. To the state director, Geoffrey Greene, your advice and guidance has been and will always be appreciated. Thank you to the state secretariat campaign staff: Peter Epstein, Sara Allard and Glenn Snowdon. To the many others who gave their valuable time, I sincerely thank you.

Let me conclude by acknowledging some great influences over my life: Robert Brown, Bill Thorburn, Brian Willesdorf and Gary Skinner. To my local community church, Southport Church of Christ, so compassionately led by Pastor Ross Pelling, thank you for your prayerful support. Let me also acknowledge some great and enduring friends: Ben Butson, Anthony Coleman, Steve Peach, Bryce Savill, Rob Molhoek and Peter Melville.

Finally, to my beautiful wife, Chantelle, who is in the gallery and our two sons, Caleb and Isaac: I thank you, Chantelle, for your love, support and patience over the many years of my military service, business pursuits and humanitarian work around the world. You and our beautiful children remain my inspiration to make this a better world as a gift for future generations we will not see. *(Time expired)*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Before I call the honourable member for Forrest, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech. I ask the House to extend to her the usual courtesies.