



## **Josh Frydenberg MP Federal Member for Kooyong**

25 October 2010

### **First Speech To The House of Representatives**

**E&OE** .....

Mr Speaker, I am honoured and privileged to represent the people of Kooyong, a place of strong community values and the home of the Liberal Party's great founder, Sir Robert Menzies—our longest serving prime minister.

Standing before the parliament of our great country, I see my journey to this place in the continuum of my family's story.

My grandparents on both sides were migrants from Europe. In the late 1930s Morrie and Leah Frydenberg came from Poland to Australia to seek a better life. They arrived while Europe was plunging into darkness.

The experience was different for my maternal grandparents, Sam and Ethel Strauss, and their young daughters, including my mother, who were interned in the Budapest ghetto by the Hungarian fascists. They survived and eventually made their way through displaced persons camps to Australia.

My great-grandparents, and many relatives on both sides, perished in the Holocaust, but one who survived is with us today.

My great-aunt Mary Frydenberg spent two years at Auschwitz. She was transferred back to Germany by the Nazis and then sent on a death march, but she escaped with the assistance of a humane German guard. In her run for freedom, she was given shelter by a Catholic priest—at great risk to him—before making her way to Australia.

Mary's story serves us all as a constant reminder of hope, even in the presence of tragedy.

Like so many other immigrants to our great shores, all of my grandparents came here with nothing. With his family of five crammed into a one bedroom Bondi apartment, Sam Strauss found room to punch holes in belts to eke out a living.

Morrie Frydenberg worked on the docks fixing naval vessels during the war and later went into small business, opening three haberdashery stores in country Victoria with his cousins.

I have vivid memories of accompanying my grandparents on weekends as they drove their Kingswood to Colac, slept over at the pub and restocked the shop.

My grandparents on both sides worked hard, determined to give their children a better start in life. My mother, Erica, became a psychologist and my father, Harry, became a surgeon. Both are deeply respected for their contribution to the health and well being of their local communities.

This is a source of great pride to my sister and I, as our parents built a home where unconditional love and the obligation to help others was never in doubt.

The welcome my family received and the opportunities and freedom they enjoyed is for me the essence of what makes Australia great.

My parents, like my paternal grandparents before them, settled in Kew, right in the heart of the Kooyong electorate.

Never would they have dared dream that decades later, one of their own family members would represent Kooyong in the federal parliament.

But in Australia anything is possible. We are only limited by our imagination.

The seat of Kooyong derives its name from the Aboriginal word meaning 'resting place'. It is my home and where my beautiful fiancée, Amie, and I hope to raise our family.

Encompassing the suburbs of Balwyn, Balwyn North, Hawthorn, Kew, Camberwell, Surrey Hills, Deepdene and Canterbury, the electorate is characterised by natural beauty, demographic diversity and a thriving local economy.

Not far from the embankments of the Yarra, one can find bustling shopping strips, historic public buildings and churches—many dating back to the 1800s. Some of the architecture from the Victorian period reflects the gently faded glory of an ambitious past.

You need only to be on a late afternoon tram to see some of the 30,000 school students making their way home from the more than 50 schools in Kooyong to realise that the electorate is an educational metropolis.

More than one in five people speak a language other than English at home, with Mandarin the fastest growing among them. Vibrant ethnic communities, be they Chinese, Greek or Italian, are flourishing in our suburbs and enrich the cohesive, yet distinctive, Kooyong community.

Kooyong has an active citizenry. The service clubs, religious organisations and community groups are passionately committed to helping others. It was a cause well advanced by my predecessor, Petro Georgiou, and is reflected in his work.

One of the great strengths of Kooyong is that it is full of grassroots organisations that are inspired and created not by government but by the people themselves. They are exemplars of cohesion.

I derive enormous satisfaction from working with the people of Kooyong. Lending a helping hand is not only meaningful for me but my first responsibility.

The history of Kooyong tells a powerful story about Australian liberalism over more than a century.

On 18 March 1895 Alfred Deakin addressed a public meeting at St Columb's Church in Hawthorn with a speech entitled, 'What is liberalism?' His speech was an early enunciation of the attributes which we now identify as a fair go. His clarion call for equality of opportunity and a society tempered by a safety net for those in need has resonated through the decades.

The members for Kooyong have taken heed of Deakin's words—many have been giants in this place.

Sir John Latham was deputy prime minister and later, chief justice of the High Court of Australia. Andrew Peacock was, like Latham, a distinguished foreign minister and Leader of the Opposition. But of course, it was Sir Robert Menzies who consolidated the Liberal cause during the course of his long prime ministership. His record of achievement is a measure of excellence for all of us.

It is of special significance to me that Heather Henderson, the daughter of Sir Robert and Dame Pattie Menzies, is in the gallery today. Thank you, Heather, for your encouragement and support and, in particular, for sharing the stories of your father with me.

Each member for Kooyong has sought a tolerant, fair and prosperous Australia. I will be no different, for this is an honourable legacy.

How would I like to see the future unfold?

I want to see an Australia that is safe and secure.

I want to see an Australia where the only relevant consideration is the content of a person's character.

I want to see an Australia where families are valued and encouraged.

I want to see an Australia where each citizen has the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

And I want to see an Australia where individuals, not governments, invent the future.

This is why I am a Liberal, this is why I joined the Liberal Party and this why I am here.

What drives us as Liberals are notions of individual liberty, individual responsibility and a fairness borne out of a particular kind of equality.

The equality which Liberals seek in a society is the equality of opportunity, not the other kind of equality—the equality of outcomes.

It seems to me that these two notions of equality reflect the fundamental fault lines between us and the members opposite. It is not a thin divide.

Let me illustrate.

How can we all be better off when a teenager loses his daily two-hour job at the local store merely because his employer cannot afford to pay the minimum three-hour shift?

How can we all be better off when the government targets independent and Catholic schools merely because parents are exercising choice?

How can we all be better off when the government discourages private health insurance at a time when the public system is overburdened?

These examples go to the heart of the other side's preoccupation with the equality of outcomes.

By mandating outcomes, the state removes responsibility from individuals and denies the worker, the student and the patient the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

In the writings of John Stuart Mill, Edmund Burke and Adam Smith, I have found what I consider the best elements of both liberal and conservative traditions.

Mill's argument that the state only has the right to intervene in the affairs of the individual in order to prevent harm to others is a fundamental building block in my political philosophy.

Burke's defence of the traditions of society and the institutions of the state and his opposition to utopian notions of change for change's sake are also critical to my understanding of what is an effective role for government.

The opportunity to prosper is given its best chance through competitive markets—the insight reached by Adam Smith more than two centuries ago.

My vision is to achieve what Menzies termed 'civilised capitalism', unleashing the power of the individual and his enterprise while always providing a safety net for those who despite their best efforts are unable to cope.

These are my motivations, my cause and my way, and they not negotiable.

In this place we are painting the canvas of the nation and its future.

We have a responsibility to dream large and think of what is possible in a difficult world.

It may appear a paradox but the first of my large thoughts is that we need to limit the government. Our government is too big.

For problems large and small, bureaucratic outcomes always seem to be the default option. This comes at a price—paralysing monopolies and a culture of dependence. It removes incentives for innovation and creativity.

It often crowds out a capable private sector, impeding its ability to create jobs. The net effect is a less productive nation.

We must always remember that whenever we create a new arm of bureaucracy or expand a field of activity, we are not spending our own money; we are spending the money of our citizens who look to us as the guardians of their wealth.

More than 30 years ago, Margaret Thatcher said that the problem with socialism is that you eventually run out of other people's money.

Thatcher's nemesis was socialism; ours is bigger and bigger government. My goal is to ensure that government learns to live within its means.

A rigorous reform agenda needs to be maintained by broadening our skills base, lifting the participation rate and creating incentives for those on welfare to find work.

Our policies must engender a person's confidence in their own self worth and, for those who can, a responsibility to make their own way in life.

Less dependence on government makes for a better Australia.

The next battleground will be the simplification of a complex tax system.

This will require reconciliation between the centralisation of taxation powers and the need to maintain an effective distribution of responsibilities and roles between federal and state governments.

In a world of global capital and competitive tax regimes, the threat of sovereign risk is poison.

I come to this chamber with a deep interest in foreign policy and national security.

It is a passion fired by a belief that Australia has an important role to play in the world. Our geography is a strategic asset. It sets the stage for all our thinking.

Located in the Pacific region, our strategy must be to broaden and deepen our ties with Asia.

Asian engagement must be a national endeavour. It is where the opportunities lie.

Genuine commitment in Asia requires immersion across all areas of public and private sector life—commerce, education, diplomacy and people to people links. Building our foreign language competency is an important element in this.

Such a strategy upholds the finest traditions of the Liberal Party.

May I remind the House that it was in 1957 that the Menzies government, in the teeth of opposition from Labor's Arthur Calwell, negotiated the historic commerce agreement with Japan. This was as farsighted as it was courageous. The wounds of Changi and the Thai-Burma railway had not yet healed.

Through the 1950s, Percy Spender's Colombo Plan was visionary in its scope, helping to build a pro-Australia constituency among the next generation of regional leaders.

Our challenge is to find and follow through on the next building blocks in what are always complex but fundamental relationships.

Government's have no greater duty than to protect their citizens. In a volatile international environment, we can take nothing for granted.

Our alliance with the United States is the cornerstone of our national security strategy. It must be protected and defended by both sides of the House.

Our friendship and common purpose rests upon more than Realpolitik; it reflects our values, traditions and commitment to the democratic ideal.

Those who seek to harm Australia and our citizens do so because of our values not our alliances.

It is true that China is rising but this does not demand a choice. While China's growth has widespread benefit for our region, America must not be encouraged to vacate the field.

On the contrary, American primacy in the Asia-Pacific characterised by a web of alliances is critical to maintaining the balance.

I am under no illusions. During my time in this place, the security threats and foreign policy challenges for Australia will not subside. They will constantly require our very best judgment.

The third challenge I wish to address today is responsible sustainability.

The reduction of our per capita consumption of energy and non-renewable resources is necessary.

But part of being responsible is knowing what it will cost, who it will impact and how communities and businesses will need to react.

There has never been a better time for innovative technologies, practices and solutions.

It seems inexplicable that in Australia we have yet to have a constructive and thorough debate about nuclear power, the only baseload, carbon neutral energy source.

More than 30 countries have successfully embraced the nuclear concept and more are coming on stream every day. It is a curious moral, economic and environmental position that we find ourselves in where we are prepared to supply uranium but not use it.

Surely it is time to move on from the ideological battles of yesteryear.

Fourthly, I would like to address certain aspects of our education debate.

It would be hard to find anyone who would disagree with the words of Thomas Jefferson that education is the first defence of the nation.

It is a process with a beginning and no end. It is a foundation stone for civil society.

It seems to me that there is bipartisan agreement with Menzies proposition that 'lack of money must be no impediment to bright minds'. But at this point the ideological battleground begins.

Increased transparency for the performance of schools and a national curriculum as a baseline are welcome but what seems to be missing is taking the pursuit of excellence seriously.

In the case of schools this requires educational opportunities more tailored to the individual and less dominated by a centralised, unaccountable bureaucratic system. School principals, councils and those closer to their students are much more likely to get this approach right.

Much of Australia's future depends on opportunities created by research and teaching in our universities and the quality of training in our vocational sector.

The funding of our tertiary institutions needs review. We must do better than funding them at below the OECD average.

To underfund these institutions is self defeating because the harvest of intellectual property generated by them can be the source of our prosperity in the knowledge economy of the future.

In this sector we need big goals.

We should aim to have 10 Australian universities in the top 100 by 2030. This would also provide diversity, choice and regional representation.

The hard one but the one we really should go for is to have two of our universities rated in the world's top 10 by 2030.

Then we can truly say that Australians will be afforded the opportunity to be the best that they can be.

The maintenance of public confidence in immigration is the final issue that I would like to address.

I am one of the eight million Australians who have at least one parent who was born overseas.

The success of the Australian migration story is a tribute to the tolerance inherent in the Western liberal democratic values and institutions of our great country. These values are paramount and reflect the kind of Australia we should always defend and strive to be.

Australia's diversity is a source of strength and reflects a confidence and a maturity in our approach to the world. We should never lose sight of these fundamental attributes.

We too cannot avoid the numbers reflected in our changing demographics and the demand for labour arising from our economic growth.

To meet both these challenges we require a vibrant and orderly immigration program. At the same time I am conscious that a failure to provide sufficient public infrastructure dangerously undermines the community's natural embrace of and optimism about the power of immigration.

It is an experience I have seen in Kooyong, where clogged roads and plans for high-density living enforced over the wishes of local people are having this effect.

We must do better. We must harness the creativity and the capital of the private sector. We must set in place long-term land release strategies and plan for the future. If we do not, we fail future generations.

Our leaders have an opportunity and, in my view, a duty to make the public case in favour of immigration. It is in the national interest and it is the right thing to do.

Today, I have the extraordinary privilege to stand before you because of the trust and hard work of so many people.

I am deeply grateful to the Liberal Party, its members and the people of Kooyong for giving me the honour and the responsibility of representing them.

To my many friends in the gallery, thank you for making the special effort to come today and for your support on this exciting journey. I could not have done this without you.

I want to thank my parents, Harry and Erica, for always loving me and for leading me gently by example.

I am blessed to be surrounded by my young nephews, Oscar and Luca, and my niece, Claudia, the children of my dear sister, Lexi, and her husband, Adam. These beautiful young children are a constant reminder of the possibilities that we must make available to the next generation.

To my darling fiancée, Amie: your unconditional love, your fierce honesty and your endless support are a source of vitality and strength for me. This is very much our shared journey.

I also thank Amie's parents, Jackii and Nich, for embracing me.

To those formidable former cabinet ministers with us today—Alexander Downer, Richard Alston, Peter Reith and Dame Margaret Guilfoyle—and one who should have been—Michael Kroger—and the ones who are not here—Peter Costello, Michael Wooldridge, Kay Patterson, David Kemp and Rod Kemp—thank you for your friendship and for sharing your wisdom over so many years.

I have had the privilege of working for Alexander when he was foreign minister, a man of deep conviction. He taught me much but perhaps most tellingly that in politics nothing is ever as good or as bad as it seems.

Richard's selfless commitment to our great Liberal cause has been an inspiration. He has always been prepared to stand up and be counted.

Two decades ago my close friend and counsel, Steven Skala, introduced me to his mentor, Sir Zelman Cowen. Since then I have had the good fortune of being challenged over hundreds of breakfast conversations with Sir Zelman, the most brilliant, decent and civil of men. He and Lady Cowen are two of the finest Australians.

I would also like to pay tribute to John Howard and Andrew Peacock, both of whom have helped me significantly on my journey.

I was fortunate to work with John Howard when he was prime minister. His dedication to the people of Australia knew no bounds. His leadership, integrity and determination were profound. His record will stand the test of time.

Andrew Peacock afforded me friendship and insight into the Kooyong that seemed once his own. I deeply appreciate his support.

The key to the Liberal Party's success and why we had been in government for 42 of the last 66 years is because we are a grassroots volunteer organisation. There are hundreds of people who have stood up for me and I just want to mention the Swinburnes, the Booths, the Blackwell and Murray families, the Garwolis, Irene Hanvin, Jane Hargreaves, my campaign director Simon Frost, Tim Smith, Hugh Morgan and my friends in this House, Kelly O'Dwyer, Peter Dutton, Ian Macfarlane and my longstanding mate Greg Hunt. I am indebted to you all.

I also want to put on record my thanks to the party's federal and state directors Brian Loughnane and Tony Nutt for their support.

Today under the strong leadership of Tony Abbott our fortunes have turned with more members on our side than on the other. This is no accident. It is a tribute to the strength of our party's message and to the people's confidence in our leader's ability to deliver it.

I am proud of my Australian story. Decades ago in the gathering darkness of Europe, my family could never have imagined this day.

But because this country is truly a land of opportunity I have been given this chance.

Working with my colleagues and my party I dedicate myself to advancing the Liberal cause in the betterment of our great nation and its people.

Thank you.

**End.**