



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

Hansard

TUESDAY, 9 MARCH 2004

CORRECTIONS

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Tuesday, 16 March 2004

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PROOF

that of her colleagues was that today more people were willing to protest and to speak out against injustice. Thank you, Freda Brown

Australia Day

Senator SANTORO (Queensland) (7.25 p.m.)—Australia Day is truly a day for all Australians. Anyone who says that it is not such a day does not understand the vitality and importance of the heritage of our country. I believe very strongly in my country. It is the best country in the world and I am very fortunate to live in the best part of it—Queensland. I believe the overwhelming majority of everyday Australians share this deep faith—it is often unspoken; we are not an overly demonstrative people—in their country, heritage, and future. Australia Day is not a day on which to feel sorry; it is a day on which to feel glad. It is a day to celebrate what we are—as a people, as a country, and as individuals—in the context of what the past has helped to make us and the promise that the future offers the generations to come.

On Australia Day this year it was a privilege to represent my good friend, the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs, Mr Gary Hardgrave, at the Hamilton Citizenship Ceremony hosted by the Rotary Club of Hamilton. It was held at the Hamilton Town Hall, a place of great historical significance for the locality and an important part of today's civic infrastructure. It hosts local theatre groups, Hamilton Red Cross functions, public meetings and many other community activities. Hamilton is a suburb of Brisbane. It is a small part of our country but it displays the true Australian nature that distinguishes us from other members of the global community. It is a cultural landscape that reflects our rich national heritage and our forward-looking architecture that so ably combines the old with the new. As such, it is always a pleasure to take part in public events in Hamilton—and in other places around Queensland and throughout the country—because it helps in that essential business of life and public affairs, the constant revisiting of the things that define us as a country as an aid to renewing and revitalising our national psyche.

The ceremony at Hamilton Town Hall on January 26 this year—as was also the case last year—was presided over by another good friend and political colleague of mine, Councillor Tim Nicholls, who represents the Hamilton ward in Brisbane City Council, Australia's largest local government. It was an interesting and inspiring morning. At the ceremony 36 people—including four children—of 17 nationalities presented themselves as new Australian citizens. Hamilton has a population of 4,536—that is on the basis of the 2001 census—of whom nearly 20 per cent were born overseas. That percentage has been rising. In the 1996 census 18.6 per cent of Hamilton residents were born overseas. In the 2001 census, the three most common

languages other than English spoken at home in Hamilton were Chinese languages, Italian and Greek—in that order of precedence.

In the context of the Hamilton celebrations, to which I shall return in a moment, it is interesting to note that by a substantial margin more noncitizens resident in Queensland, than noncitizens resident in other states, are choosing to take up the privileges and obligations of an Australian citizen. In the first six months of this financial year there were 7,981 applications for citizenship from foreigners living in Queensland, an increase of 18.6 per cent in the state's application rate compared with the national average increase of around 10.4 per cent. Plainly, the benefits of becoming an Australian citizen are clearly seen by migrants who choose to settle in Queensland. Based on the 2001 census, there are 230,702 eligible noncitizens resident in Queensland—6.5 per cent of the state's population. The top five countries, from which eligible noncitizens have come to Queensland, are: New Zealand, the United Kingdom, South Africa, Germany and the United States—again, in that order of precedence.

On Australia Day this year, at Hamilton Town Hall, candidates for citizenship came from Canada, Colombia, Denmark, Fiji, Finland, France, India—seven from there—Indonesia, the Irish Republic, Italy, and New Zealand—seven from there also. Three came from the Philippines, two from Tokelau, three from the United Kingdom, and three came from the United States. Others came from China and Samoa. I pay tribute to all of these people tonight, for their faith in their new country and their courage in formally cutting ties with their old one. As a migrant Australian myself, I am only too aware of what a wrench cutting ties can be, even though the benefits of one's new land are so extensive and inviting.

We often forget what goes into running functions such as these. Hamilton Rotary president, Dr Miles Moody, and function convenor, Brian Mallon, are due a vote of thanks on that front. There are many others who deserve to be recognised: Councillor Nicholls, as the instigator and driving force behind the Hamilton citizenship ceremony; Stephanie Lee, who sang the National Anthem and other songs; Paul Hannah from The Front Row Theatre Group who looked after the sound and lighting; the Rotary Club of Hamilton, whose members decorated the hall and provided the barbecue lunch afterwards; and the Hamilton Hotel, whose management kindly provided the beverages.

As I mentioned earlier, it is always a special privilege to represent the Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs at citizenship ceremonies. The function at Hamilton was also a special moment for the new Australians and their friends and relatives, for the audience in general, and of course for the official party. These things are never to be taken lightly. In fact, we

honour ourselves by honouring others. While I was representing the minister at the ceremony it was obvious to me that one thing he said in his message, which I conveyed on his behalf, was absolutely beyond argument: all Australians recognise with pride what it means to be an Australian citizen.

The Howard government has a firm belief in the importance and value of Australian citizenship, something that has been given additional zest by the appointment of the member for Moreton, Mr Hardgrave, to the position of Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Affairs. One result is that we have been making substantial progress in bringing long-term foreign residents into the Australian family. We do not expect new citizens to forget their heritage or the traditions of their original homelands—in fact, we encourage people to retain them if that is what they want to do. In the age of the global citizen that is not only proper but also common sense. We are among the most culturally diverse of nations and ours is a land of immigrants. We are brought together by core civic values, chief among them being loyalty to Australia and its people, a shared belief in democracy, respect for the rights and liberties of other Australians, and a commitment to observing the law. That is, in fact, as it should be.

I want to turn briefly to something that is not as it should be. It is the issue of flying the national flag in Queensland on Australia Day. This is the blue flag that was chosen in a national competition and announced on 3 September 1903, 101 years ago. It is the flag that the Menzies government, in a 1950 cabinet decision, decided should be the national flag. It is the flag that King George VI approved in 1951. It is the flag that is defined as the national flag in the Flags Act 1953. The Australian flag is a magnificent symbol of our nationhood. It describes our geography. It delineates our heritage flowing from British parliamentary democracy: the ethics, governance and the rule of law that have done so much to make Australia what it is today. Yet in Queensland for Australia Day this year, the Premier's Department attempted to ban the distribution of the Australian flag separate from distribution of the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag. The Premier's Department sent out an email message saying that the national flag should not be distributed other than under its approved methodology. It is true that the Premier overturned this bureaucratic idiocy immediately it became a public issue because of the swift response of my friend Allan Pidgeon, Queensland President of the Australian National Flag Association. When he heard about the ban, Allan wondered out loud—very loudly in fact—about the motivation or perhaps the stupidity of any government apparatus that would allow such a message to go out.

It is fair to say that the flag touches the hearts of all Australians. I receive a lot of letters from people con-

cerned about the flag and how it should be flown, honoured and protected. Tonight, in that context, I would specifically like to mention John and Marion Grummett of suburban Mount Gravatt in Brisbane who wrote to me only last week on that very topic. The worrying thing about the Queensland government's Australia Day flag ban—the ban that Allan Pidgeon so swiftly put an end to—is that Peter Beattie's poor excuse for a government ignores the Commonwealth Flags Act, which states clearly that the national flag should be flown more prominently, in other words higher, than subordinate flags. The worrying thing is that, on something as fundamental as handing out Australian flags to people celebrating Australia Day, the Queensland government's bureaucracy wanted no-one to get a flag unless they also got two others of—apparently in its view—equal standing. The Flags Act is quite specific. The flag cannot be changed under the act without a referendum, and it must have precedence over other flags. That is to take nothing away from other emblems—state flags, territory flags or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. It simply decrees an order of precedence for all the gazetted—that is, official—flags of our nation that makes the national flag supreme. That is how it should be. The Queensland government, I would respectfully suggest, should take careful note of that fact.

Education: Lifelong Learning

Senator TIERNEY (New South Wales) (7.34 p.m.)—I rise to draw the Senate's attention to an issue that I believe is vital if Australia is to achieve a civil society. With our ageing population we are faced with the very real possibility that children born today might live lifespans of close to 100 years. Elderly people are enjoying healthier lifestyles and this record looks set to improve with each new medical breakthrough. As the population ages, society and communities need to adapt to support the needs of a growing number of senior citizens. People are living longer and remaining active and can therefore contribute to the community for a longer period of time. Throughout their lifetimes many Australians will have more than one career; in fact, most will have two or three. Some people will take time off work or will look to reskill themselves as they move forward in their career. Education—in particular the concept of lifelong learning—is central to this revolution throughout their working life and retirement, throughout both their work and leisure. Lifelong learning is one of the central keys in ensuring that we as a society move forward.

When I entered the Australian parliament, my first Senate inquiry was into adult and community education. It was also the most moving one. There are more people studying in the adult and community education area than there are in the universities of Australia. They usually undertake short courses, sometimes for interest.