
The Role of the Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia in International Affairs, Globally and in the Asia/Pacific Region

Address to the Canberra Branch of the Australian Institute of International Affairs
by Ian Harris, Clerk of the Australian House of Representatives, 19 November 2003

Impact of globalisation on Commonwealth Parliament

A LONG-STANDING INTEREST

There is perhaps a relationship between Australia's interest in global events that is relative to the distances that separate us from the traditional power centres of the world. I have always found that the coverage of events from around the world to be much greater in Australia than I have found when I have been temporarily overseas. Once, when in the United States of America, I could not help notice that it took the impending impact of Skylab in our country for Australia to receive any attention at all in the American press! However, in looking back over our political past, it appears to me that we, as Australians, have always demonstrated a healthy interest in world events. Our founding parents were very much aware of what was happening in the external world, possibly more so because of the isolation they felt, and the fact that the centre of political gravity was far removed from the southern pacific portion of the globe.

EXTERNAL INFLUENCES ON THE AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION MOVEMENT

In the late 19th Century as now, the fear of foreign aggression was recognised as a classic reason for pushing smaller states into a greater federation. The Australian colonies in the 1880's recognised potential threats to their existence in the activity of foreign powers in the Pacific. The "Paris Letter" in the *Sydney Morning Herald* in July 1883 quoted the London correspondent of *Le journal des débats* in saying that the slumber of Australians had been troubled by a succession of bad dreams, of which Germany, Italy and France had by turns been the cause. Russia and China were also the cause of fear. The Australian colonies believed that the strategic safety of Australia and New Zealand depended on Oceania's becoming British, or at least not falling into hostile hands¹. There were three main areas of Australian interest: New Caledonia, the New Hebrides and New Guinea. Interest in New Caledonia was mainly because of its proximity: 795 miles from Brisbane, and at the time of its acquisition by France, only 10 days sail from Brisbane²; steam brought it closer. France had annexed New Caledonia in 1853, and Australians were irked by the lack of serious opposition from Great Britain³. It was 'well-established British opinion that Pacific affairs must necessarily be subordinated to European diplomacy'⁴, and the major objective of British policy was to preserve the status quo. The independence of the New Hebrides was preserved by an Anglo-French agreement, and both countries disclaimed annexation intentions in 1870⁵. However, missionaries began to fear for the group's independence when a French company made large land acquisitions. The Australian colonies believed that the passage through the French Parliament of the Récidiviste Bill in 1884, primarily concerned with New Caledonia, would ultimately cause the New Hebrides to become a French possession.

Finally, there was the question of New Guinea. There were many campaigns in the 19th Century to have New Guinea annexed. The *Sydney Herald* even thought that, failing British annexation, action by

¹ J M Ward, *British policy in the South Pacific (1786-1893)*, 1948, Sydney, Wellington and London, pp 197-8.

² H L Hall, *Victoria's part in the Australian Federation Movement, 1849-1900*, London 1931, p.39.

³ J M Ward, Op cit, p.147.

⁴ Ibid, p151.

⁵ *Journal and Printed Papers of the Federal Council of Australasia*, Vol.1, Paper 3(1), p1

Germany would be preferable to that of France⁶. Queensland took the initiative and on 4 April 1883 the police magistrate at Thursday Island proclaimed possession in Port Moresby⁷. The British government disavowed the action, and this was the primary cause of the inter-colonial conference of 1883, which led to the formation of the Federal Council of Australasia.

INFLUENCE OF OTHER GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEMS ON AUSTRALIAN FEDERATION MOVEMENT

There is no doubt of the British proclivity of those who forged our national institutions. Speaking on the occasion of the centenary of the High Court in 1903, Chief Justice Gleeson said:

The founders regarded themselves as British, and saw the High Court as interposed between the State courts and the Privy Council, just as they saw the Federal Parliament as interposed between the States and the Imperial Parliament⁸.

Perhaps this is nowhere more evident than in Bills reserved for Royal Assent, pursuant to section 58 of the Constitution. The first such Bill, a Customs Tariff (British Preference) Bill 1906 failed to gain the Sovereign's Assent. The next seven, and eight of the next nine reserved Bills, were Navigation Bills, reflecting the United Kingdom Admiralty's hesitation in granting Australia freedom from control. More recently, Bills of this kind have tended to reflect a particular aspect of the Sovereign or British institutions, such as the Flags Bill, the Royal Style and Titles Bill and the Privy Council (Appeals) Bills⁹.

However, there is also no doubt that the founding fathers were very much aware of other governmental systems at the time of the discussion groups and constitutional conventions that characterised the Australian Federation movement. On 23 March 1897, at the Adelaide Convention, there were many references to the impact of international influence on the minds of those drafting what would become the Constitution. The person, who was to become our first Prime Minister, Edmond Barton, indicated that an elected Governor-General would bring the nation nearer the condition of the South American republics¹⁰ reflecting contemporary debate today on the institution of the Governor-General, and comparison with banana republics. On discussion of responsible government, Barton indicated that he did not want his boots made in Germany, and that he did not want his Constitution made in Switzerland. He thought that British forms of government, as adopted and adapted, were the best fitting. His boots had always been made in Great Britain¹¹. Sir Richard Baker, who was to become the first President of the Senate, responded 'I want my boots made where they fit me the best'. He pointed to federations in Germany, Switzerland, and America and, to a limited extent [because of the appointed Senate there], Canada¹².

WESTMINSTER/WASHMINSTER/AUSMINSTER

Lao Tzu said that the journey of a thousand miles must start with a single step. The boots chosen by Australia have done a lot of walking. The House of Representatives in particular has shown that it is prepared to adapt its practices and procedures and give them a more Australian flavour. We took our starting point from Westminster and drew inspiration from the USA to be appropriately described as Washminster. I would argue that we have now moved to a position of Ausminster, and having absorbed the benefits from a global parliamentary world in our formative period, we are now exporting our parliamentary benefits to the rest of the world. I will discuss this in greater detail subsequently.

⁶ Edition of 26 February 1883.

⁷ A C V Melbourne, *The Relations Between Australia and New Guinea, up to the Establishment of British Rule in 1888*, Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society, vol 12 (1926) pp301-2.

⁸ Chief Justice Murray Gleeson, *The Centenary of the High Court: Lessons from History*, Australian Institute of Judicial Administration Banco Court, Supreme Court of Victoria, Melbourne 3 October 2003, www.hcourt.gov.au/speeches/cjcj3oct.html.

⁹ A full list is at Appendix 19 of *House of Representatives Practice*, 4th edition (2001), p.805. I am indebted to Mr Peter Mason, Director of the House of Representatives Table Office, for drawing my attention to this point.

¹⁰ *Official Report of the National Australasian Federation Convention Debates, Adelaide, 22 March to 5 May 1897* (1897) p24.

¹¹ *Ibid*, 26.

¹² *Ibid*, 29-30.

THE AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT'S COMMITTEE ACTIVITY IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS

Many parliamentary committees have inquiries the subject matter of which might have an impact on international affairs. For example, we have a regular committee exchange with the New Zealand Parliament. However, in this address I propose to limit my remarks to the specific areas of foreign affairs and treaties.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COMMITTEES

There has been a joint committee relating to foreign affairs since 1952, initially known as the Joint Committee on Foreign Affairs. The name was changed to 'Foreign Affairs and Defence' in 1973, and 'Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade' in 1987. Atypical of the arrangements that apply to committee reports, the committee in 1952 met in private, was required to forward its reports to the Minister for External Affairs, who decided whether they should be printed and presented to Parliament. The committee was to inform Parliament that it had reported. In later Parliaments, in inquiries not initiated by the Minister, the committee was not authorised to report to the Minister or the Parliament without the Minister's consent. Where members of the Opposition were represented on the committee, copies of reports were to be forwarded to the Leader of the Opposition for the Leader's confidential information. These arrangements were justified on the ground of national security. The Labor Opposition refused to participate for more than fifteen years, until its major objections were met. The committee made five reports under the restrictive arrangements. It had presented well in excess of one hundred reports since.

The restrictions no longer apply, and the committee now undertakes inquiries on reference from the House or the Senate, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Minister for Defence or the Minister for Trade, or, for certain inquiries, on its own remit. The committee reports to the Houses, and the Government responds to committee reports to the Houses. The committee covers a wide range of international affairs, and as part of its inquiry process, the full committee or subcommittees have visited East Timor, Bougainville, the United Nations in New York, Central Europe and South America. Australia's diplomatic representatives have reported positively as to the impact that elected representatives have on representations, negotiations and general discussions. The committee may also inquire into any matters raised in the annual reports of the relevant Commonwealth departments and authorities, and in Auditor-General's reports. The breadth of the committee's span is evident from looking at its current areas of inquiry:

- Human rights and good governance education in the Asia Pacific Region;
- Australia's relations with Indonesia;
- Australia's maritime strategy;
- Expanding Australia's trade and investment relationship with the economies of the Gulf States;
- Review of aspects of the 2000-01 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Annual Report;
- Scrutiny of the World Trade Organisation;
- Review of Australia's relations with the United Nations;
- Watching brief on the war on terrorism;
- *HMAS Sydney* update.

Past reports have included:

- Expanding Australia's trade and investment relationship with the countries of Central Europe;
- Visit to Australian forces deployed to the International Coalition against Terrorism;
- Australia's relations with the Middle East;
- The link between aid and human rights;
- Australian Government Loan, and Second Australian Government Loan to Papua New Guinea;
- Australia's role in United Nations reform;
- World debt

- Australia's trade relationship with India;
- The Asian Currency crisis and its effect on Australia;
- Australia and ASEAN: Managing change;
- Report on a seminar on the Commonwealth of Nations;
- ANZUS after 45 years;
- Hong Kong: The transfer of sovereignty;
- Papua New Guinea update (1996);
- The implications of Australia's services exports to Indonesia and Hong Kong;
- Australia's relations with Southern Africa;
- Bosnia: Australia's response.

One of the key, yet lesser-known activities of the committee are the informal private discussions it holds with prominent persons, visiting dignitaries and both Australian and locally accredited ambassadors. These discussions occur on a regular basis and tend to be wide-ranging in focus and off-the-record. Members themselves place great value on the opportunity the committee provides to have such exchanges with significant figures. Some recent examples of meetings include Dr Amien Rais, Chairman of the People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia and Mr Wellington Chibebe, Secretary-General of the Zimbabwean congress of Trade Unions.

The Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade is by far the largest committee of the Parliament. There is considerable competition amongst our Members and Senators to become members of the committee, reflecting, I think, its importance in their eyes.

There is also a Senate Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade. Its recent inquiries have covered:

- Australia's foreign and trade policy strategy;
- General Agreement on Trade in Services and Australia/US Free Trade Agreement;
- Security threats in South East Asia.

An informal group of Senators and Members meets regularly to spread awareness and discuss certain issues relating to Australia/US free trade. The first activity of the group was to hear an address from, and ask questions of, the United States Ambassador to Australia.

JOINT COMMITTEE ON TREATIES

Shortly after the election of the Howard Government in 1996, the first ministerial statement made by the Minister for Foreign Affairs was to inform the House of the reform of the treaty-making process. There is no doubt that making treaties is an executive function. However, there was a perception that the treaty-making power vested in the Commonwealth by the Constitution through the external affairs power¹³ was being exercised in a way that impinged on the rights of States and Territories, and of individual citizens. In announcing the reforms, Mr Downer indicated that:

In considering policy options, the government has taken careful account of national and international considerations. Among the latter, it is vital to note that trade flows, environmental concerns, human rights, to name only a few of an increasing array of such issues, can only be effectively managed and handled through international agreement. This means that treaties, the fundamental instruments of international law, are an increasingly important component of contemporary international relations and of Australia's own legal development. Accordingly, the treaty-making system must be reformed and updated, so as to reflect this growing importance and influence on our domestic system in a way which will provide greater accountability to the treaty-making process.

¹³ *Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia* s51(xxix)

This, for Australia, means that we must have an efficient domestic methodology for assessing the way proposed treaties meet our own national concerns. Parliament should be in a position to examine the considerations which are weighed by the government when it determines the need for Australia to take binding action¹⁴.

State and Territory governments were to be involved in the treaty-making process through the establishment of a Treaties Council. The measures were also designed so that every Australian individual and group with a concern about treaty issues had the opportunity to make that concern known.

Central to the process was the appointment of a Joint Standing Committee on Treaties. The committee's terms of reference include inquiring into and reporting on:

- matters arising from treaties and related National Interest Analyses and proposed treaty actions presented or deemed to be presented to the Parliament; and
- any question relating to a treaty or other international instrument, whether or not negotiated to completion, referred to the committee by either House or a Minister¹⁵.

The Minister regarded the establishment of this committee as being a landmark step in strengthening Parliament's role in treaty making. It has been re-appointed in subsequent parliaments, and is one of the hardest working and most productive of the parliamentary committees. Indeed, in this Parliament alone, the committee has reviewed some sixty proposed treaty actions.

BILATERAL VISITS

Productive and amicable international and regional relationships with other parliaments, parliamentary bodies and organisations is a sub-outcome of the Department of the House of Representatives (administered by the Parliamentary Relations Office). A principal element of the Parliament's regional and international relations affairs is met by bilateral visits. In the financial year 2002-03, there were 31 such visits to other parliaments, and 14 visits from other parliaments.

While sometimes receiving less than favourable treatment in the media, these visits play a very important role in the way in which the Australian Parliament delivers its message. The bilateral program does not simply focus on our traditional allies or traditional areas of interest. It also focuses on countries with which Australia has strong cultural, trade and strategic interests. For example, six delegations have visited Australia since the recent democratic reforms, and more are planned. At the same time, our delegations have frequently visited Indonesia. In addition, Australian delegations are currently visiting Syria, Lebanon and Israel, as well as Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam. Visits will be made shortly to Papua New Guinea, Indonesia, Japan and Korea.

The impact of this contact between parliamentarians from Australia and a range of other countries is hard to quantify, although to some extent it can be gauged by the report that each delegation makes to Parliament. However, it does lead to improved understanding between our different societies and cultures. Hopefully, it assists our parliamentarians when they are called on to consider issues related to Australia's place in our region and in the world. The value of legislator-to-legislator contact is significant, especially in areas where negotiations at officer level have not produced satisfactory results. Occasionally, when there are tensions at a government-to-government level, the contact between the parliaments provides a means of continuing communication.

¹⁴ *House of Representatives Hansard*, 2/5/96, p.231.

¹⁵ *Votes & Proceedings of the House of Representatives*, 21/5/96, pp134-5.

ASSISTANCE TO OTHER PARLIAMENTS

Study tours and seminars

Australia is particularly involved in assistance to Parliaments in the Pacific region. Each year, invitations are extended to Members of Parliament from Commonwealth Parliamentary Association Branch Pacific Island Parliaments to participate, on a rotational basis, in the Study Tour Program. The purposes of the study tour are:

- to observe parliamentary practice and procedure in the Australian Federal and State/Territory Parliaments;
- to exchange views with other Members and parliamentary staff;
- to learn about committee systems in the various parliaments;
- to obtain an overview of the operation of parliamentary libraries and Hansard;
- to learn of parliamentary administration, as well as aspects of local government.

Seminars for Pacific parliamentarians are also held regularly. Invited participants exchange views with other participants and Australian Members of Parliament.

Every year, the Department of the House of Representatives sponsors an inter-parliamentary study program, designed for parliamentary staff. The program offers participants a chance to mix with parliamentary staff from around the world, and to consider the role of their own parliament in the context of Australian practice, and that of other parliaments.

The Department also supports attachment programs for visiting parliamentarians and parliamentary officials, and provides presentations and briefings to other groups. Email correspondence in relation to matters of parliamentary procedure and practice is significant.

In the past two years, Australian staff have continued in assisting the development of parliamentary staff in the Pacific region. Staff of the House of Representatives have participated in programs in East Timor and Kosovo. I am currently responding to a request for developmental assistance in Afghanistan. We also co-operate fully with the programs prepared by the Centre for Democratic Institutions

MEMBERSHIP OF INTERNATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY BODIES

The Commonwealth Parliament is a member of a number of international parliamentary organisations.

CPA

The Commonwealth Parliamentary Association (CPA) is comprised of national and State/provincial legislatures in the Westminster tradition. It holds an annual conference and a number of seminars each year. Its annual conferences do not carry resolutions and its proceedings are not recorded in a verbatim way. However, it seeks to build parliamentary capacity and knowledge of parliamentary institutions and practices through sponsorship of workshops, seminars, educational programs and similar activities, such as post-election seminars. Australia is regularly invited to organise or provide resource persons for these.

APPF

Australia is also a member of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum (APPF). The APPF is a loosely structured and non-exclusive forum of national parliamentarians who participate in annual meetings either as delegates of their parliaments or in their personal capacities. The Forum seeks to:

- identify and discuss matters of common concern and to highlight them in a global context;

- deepen participants' understanding of the policy concerns, interests and experiences of the countries of the region;
- examine the critical political, social and cultural developments resulting from economic growth and integration;
- encourage and promote regional co-operation at all levels on matters of common concern to the region; and
- play a role as national parliamentarians in furthering in their respective countries a sense of regional cohesion, understanding, and co-operation¹⁶.

Those who attend regard the annual meetings seriously. Communiqués are issued which reflect the general sentiments of the meetings, and most member countries are represented by a formal delegation. However, actions recommended by the APPF meetings are not binding on the participating parliaments, and the unit of participation is the individual Member of Parliament.

IPU

Australia is also a member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU). This is a world organisation of sovereign states, established in 1889. It works as a focal point for worldwide parliamentary dialogue, concentrating on peace, co-operation and representative democracy. The IPU describes itself as supporting the efforts of the United Nations, whose objectives it shares, and with whom it works in close co-operation¹⁷. It has considered, and rejected, seeking observer status at the UN, but is exploring ways to establish a new and formalised relationship. It has been granted the right to have its documents circulated at the UN, a right that only the PLO otherwise enjoys.

Australia plays a leading role in the IPU. A number of observations have been made to the effect that Australia punches well above its weight in the IPU. We are well-regarded for our honesty and our integrity. However, the Australian group has looked less than favourably at a proposal for the IPU to become the parliamentary wing of the UN.

The United States of America ceased being a member of the IPU in 2000. The IPU's headquarters is in Geneva, not far from the Palais Wilson, where the League of Nations met following World War I. Comparisons with that body are understandable.

An association of parliamentary staff is constituted as a consultative body of the IPU, the Association of Secretaries-General of Parliaments (ASGP). Membership of the Association is open to chief executives of national parliaments or their deputies. The ASGP's tasks are to study the law, procedure, practice and working methods of different parliaments and for proposing methods to improve them. It assists the IPU when asked to do so. It is possible for a Secretary-General to be a member of the ASGP even though her or his parliament is not, or is no longer, a member of the IPU. For example, the USA is a member of the ASGP. In April 2003, I was elected as the Association's President, for a three-year term. I am assisted by an Executive Committee, whose membership is drawn from France and Sweden (two Vice-Presidents), and from Burkina Faso, Chile, Uruguay, Nigeria and India. During the period of my presidency, I hope to increase co-operation with the IPU, make the ASGP more accountable to its membership, and develop resources for the training of parliamentary staff.

¹⁶ APPF home page, <http://www.appf.org.pe>.

¹⁷ "What is the IPU?" IPU home page, <http://www.ipu.org/english/whatipu.htm>

EXTENSION OF AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENTARY PRACTICES TO OTHER JURISDICTIONS

Westminster parliamentary practice in the Pacific

In the second half of the 20th Century, the influence of Australian national parliamentary practice extended both to internal jurisdictions and to emerging countries in the Pacific region. For example, the standing orders and practices of the legislatures of the Northern Territory and the Australian Capital Territory within Australia, the external territory of Norfolk Island, and the nations of Papua New Guinea and Nauru were modelled on the Australian House of Representatives. In many instances, resort is had to House practice where there is not a domestic provision in this regard.

Occasionally, one could be forgiven for pondering whether the transferring of Australian procedure and practice, drawing as it does on the UK experience, has always been a total success. Perhaps in adopting a Churchillian attitude that the system of parliamentary democracy is the worst form of government except all the others that have been tried, we have attempted to translate systems to Pacific countries that do not always sit well with their traditions. In examining the position in the Solomon Islands (which has a basic Westminster system although the Speaker, as in a number of Pacific jurisdictions, is appointed from outside the Parliament), Dr Stephen Sherlock, of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Group of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Library, has said:

British colonial officials, although a relatively benign and stabilising force in Solomons society, gave little attention to education, with the few schools being run by the missions...

The Solomons inherited Westminster institutions that interacted with Melanesian political systems in unpredictable ways. With fewer Western-educated people and with indigenous experience of representative institutions only dating from the creation of local administrations in the 1960's, there was only a tiny stratum of Solomon Islanders who had a sense of national political identity. Westminster-style elections encouraged leaders who appealed to narrow local loyalties and provided few incentives for the development of national-level policies. Broadly, leadership in Melanesian society is not inherited, but is achieved through winning benefits for one's own clan and becoming a "big man".

The melding of Westminster institutions and Melanesian political practice has tended to break down the divisions between the private and public use of state and national resources that is a key (but often unstated) element of democratic accountability as it has developed over hundreds of years in the West. This has led post-independence Solomons' politics to be marked by shifting unstable alliances, frequent changes of government and the creation of coalitions through blatant vote-buying. Corrupt and inefficient use of government resources, together with policies created for minority interests, have enriched some powerful individuals (mostly the "big men" of national politics), but have squandered the country's scarce resources¹⁸.

The same could probably be said of elsewhere in the Pacific.

Australian parliamentary practice elsewhere in the world

I mentioned earlier that I believed that our national parliament was cast in the mould of Westminster, but adopted elements of the American system so as to be appropriately described as Washminster. We adopted a Senate and a House of Representatives, not a House of Commons and a hereditary second chamber. It has been said that the most striking achievement of the framers of our Constitution was the successful combination of the British system of parliamentary government containing an executive responsible to the legislature with the American concept of federalism¹⁹.

¹⁸ Dr Stephen Sherlock, *Behind the Solomons Crisis: A Problem of Development*, <http://www..aph.gov.au/library/pubs/rn/2003-04rn02.htm>

¹⁹ *Reg v Kirby; Ex parte boilermakers Society of Australia* (1956) 94 CLR 254 at p.275, quoted in G. Lindell, *Authority for War*, "About the House" magazine, May-June 2003, p.23.

An instance of our moving down a different path was evidence twice recently, when President Bush and President Hu addressed both Houses of Parliament meeting together. This followed earlier addresses to the Houses by President bush (senior) and President Clinton.

Our parliamentary system has continued to be alert to influences from elsewhere in the world that might make ours more workable. For example, in recent years, we adopted the Canadian system of short statements, giving private Members more opportunity to make a short contribution to proceedings on any matter that they wished.

However, our House of Representatives has exerted its own influence with procedures and practices that it has developed, along the path that might be described as Ausminster. One procedure that we have adopted, known colloquially as the “sin bin”, borrows from the sporting concept whereby a player might be shown a yellow card or a red card for misbehaviour. In the parliamentary context, a Member who has been unruly or disruptive might be ordered by the Chair to leave the Chamber for one hour. The red card alternative would mean suspension from the House for periods from twenty-four hours up to seven sitting days, depending on the number of times a Member had offended in the calendar year. This has been adopted by some Australian States and Territories, and is being considered with interest by other jurisdictions.

Another concept that has been adopted by the United Kingdom, is the body currently called the Main Committee of the House of Representatives. In effect, this body parallels the House of Representatives Chamber. It can undertake all parliamentary consideration except initiation and a final decision on a matter. A report of the House’s Standing Committee on Procedure has recommended that it be called “the second Chamber”. It has been a great success, and has been adopted by the “Mother of Parliaments”, the United Kingdom House of Commons. Canada has looked at the body with interest as well.

CONCLUSION

As I mentioned earlier, the boots chosen by the founders of the Australian parliamentary system have done a great deal of walking. Established with an eye to the parliamentary and governmental systems of the western world, the Australian Commonwealth has continued to be open to developments elsewhere, but has exerted a growing influence, both in our local area and in the wider world. As indicated in relation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, Australia is punching well above its weight in international affairs. As respect for our nation continues to grow, I would expect our influence in the international parliamentary arena to be maintained and increase accordingly.

Thank you for the opportunity to talk to you this evening. I would welcome any questions.