



3 August 2018

Mr Richard Pye
Clerk of the Senate

Via email: clerk.sen@aph.gov.au

Dear Clerk,

Thank you for your email of 5 July 2018 inviting responses to the inquiry by the Procedure Committee into the proposal to replace the parliamentary prayer with an invitation to prayer or reflection.

I write this response to the inquiry in my capacity as a Senator for Queensland.

I wish to state my unequivocal opposition to any amendments to Standing Order 50 that would remove the reference to God and the Lord's Prayer from the proceedings of the Senate – including in the terms currently before the Committee.

The parliamentary prayer has been part of the Senate's proceedings on 6,684 sitting days since it was first read on 27 June 1901 – the Senate's nineteenth sitting day.

It was adopted by the Senate following a number of petitions and consideration of the matter by the Standing Orders Committee. In its Second Report of the First Session, the Committee recommended: *"that the prayers adopted by the House of Representatives be adopted by the Senate."*

The House of Representatives had earlier incorporated the parliamentary prayer in its own Standing Orders. It was first read in the House on 14 June 1901.

The parliamentary prayer was incorporated in the first permanent Standing Orders of the Senate adopted on 19 August 1903. It has only ever undergone minor changes.

I note this history to illustrate that this prayer – in essentially the same form – has been integral to the traditions of the Senate for over 117 years.

There is no good reason to abandon this tradition.

The parliamentary prayer draws from the Judeo-Christian foundations of our nation and the values flowing from this heritage that all Senators must uphold as representatives of the people: parliamentary democracy, individual liberty, and equality before the law.

Commencing each sitting day in this way – by calling upon God for His blessing and guidance, and praying the Lord's Prayer together – is valuable and appropriate.

I note that the current inquiry was initiated upon a motion from Senator Lee Rhiannon of the Australian Greens. This is not the first time that the Australian Greens have tried to erase God and the Lord's Prayer from the Senate.

Indeed, former Senator Bob Brown proposed a similar amendment in late 1997. That proposal was also referred to the Procedure Committee for inquiry.

The Procedure Committee, in its Second Report of 1997, rejected the proposal – as did the Senate itself when Senator Brown's motion to amend Standing Order 50 in the proposed terms was negatived on 27 November 1997.

I urge the Procedure Committee to once again reject this proposal from the Australian Greens and maintain the parliamentary prayer in the Senate.

Yours sincerely,

JAMES McGRATH
Senator for Queensland