

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
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Questioner
Speaker Siewert, Sen Rachel

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia) (12.50 pm)
 —The Australian Greens also wholeheartedly support this motion. Anybody who was in the Great Hall and heard the apology could not fail to be moved by the words that were spoken and the genuine emotion that people felt upon hearing those words. It is genuinely a very significant step in helping the forgotten Australians and former child migrants to heal.

Over seven years ago, the Senate delivered its first report on this issue—the *Lost innocents: righting the record* report—which focused on the issue of the suffering of child migrants, predominantly from Britain but also from Malta. Over four years ago, the Senate then delivered its second report—the *Forgotten Australians* report—which tackled the issue of neglect and abuse of children in institutional or out-of-home care within Australia. In June this year, it was my privilege to deliver, on behalf of the Senate Community Affairs Committee, its third—and, I hope final—report: *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited*.

Today in parliament the Prime Minister delivered a formal apology on behalf of the nation to all from these groups who suffered neglect and abuse when their welfare was the responsibility of the state and they were supposedly under the care of the state. It was good to see Australia finally acknowledge the hurt and damage that has been done.

Hopefully, in the weeks and months to come, we will see all the states and territories which have not yet done so, including South Australia and Victoria, deliver apologies. Hopefully we will also see the churches and institutions who were involved in providing care—or, rather, failing to provide care—and who have so far not formally apologised to forgotten Australians and former child migrants offer their sincere apologies for the harm that they have caused.

We want to hear—and justice demands—a clear, public, unreserved expression of sincere apology in acknowledgement of the awful wrong and injustice that was done to these innocent and accepting children during their crucial formative years when they had every reason and every right to expect that they would be cared for, nurtured and, most importantly, loved. The overwhelming comment that you hear from people

is about the lack of love given to children who were in care and could have expected better.

We understand now—and I believe there was every reason for it to be understood then—that the long-term consequences for children growing up in loneliness and great hardship in institutional care can be significant and severe. The neglect and abuse suffered by these children cannot be excused by any reference to good intentions or to the prevailing norms of the day. It was wrong then and it is wrong now. It was an injustice knowingly committed on the innocent. Childhood should be a time for growth and nurturing, a time for exploration and play and, above all, a time to learn about and experience friendship, family and love. It should not be stark, grey and regimented. It should not be a time of loneliness, fear and abuse. It should not be spent on hard, menial tasks or wasted on pointless, repetitive tasks. It should not be lived in fear and misery. Yet half a million Australians lived that way.

For those children who were not only neglected but experienced physical and sexual abuse, I know that even the most sincere and heartfelt apology is only the start. The damage that has been done by the years of neglect is significant and severe and has left scars that take a lifetime to deal with; in fact, they impact on the next generations. We have acknowledged today that this abuse happened and we have said sincerely, as a nation, sorry. We wish that it had not happened. We would do anything to turn back time and undo the harm, but unfortunately we cannot. Now that we have taken this first step of an apology, we must do our very best to help those who have suffered. We have to ensure that the consequences of what occurred are dealt with. We need to support these people for the rest of their lives. We need to show them care and support and do all in our power to ensure these abuses do not happen in the future.

It has been challenging and at times emotionally gruelling for the people working on the three committees that looked at these issues. We listened to stories and to evidence and experienced second-hand the neglect and abuse. But what we felt pales into insignificance compared to the pain and discomfort experienced by those who were brave enough to tell us their stories. Today in the Great Hall I was sitting next to a lady called Therese Williams. She had been in an institution in Geraldton and she told me a story which

I promised to relay today so that other people could hear it and remember Eileen Sinnott. Eileen died on 26 June 1948, aged 10, as the result of a kicking applied by a nun in Geraldton. Therese had never told this story before today. She had with her a little framed picture of Eileen's headstone. I promised that I would tell that story today so that Eileen is remembered and so that we never again allow that sort of thing to happen to a 10-year-old.

I also had the privilege recently to read a book by Margo O'Byrne, who is in the gallery and who, with her brother, Micko, is also an institutional survivor. The book tells of their institutionalisation in St Vincent's in Brisbane and then in boarding school. It holds stories that are common to all the people who were in institutional care, those formerly forgotten, now remembered Australians, the former child migrants. The theme that comes through in Margo and her brother's story, as well as in many other stories, is of powerlessness—of seeing abuse but not being able to do anything about it. Margo tells of seeing her brother abused and being powerless, as a child, to do anything about it. Another common theme of the stories the forgotten Australians tell is of wanting to be invisible, because if you were invisible in an institution you could survive a bit better. Of course, abuse and trauma come through all the stories you hear, and they do in Margo's story.

Margo also tells of visiting the nursery in St Vincent's and seeing cots and cots of babies putting their arms up to be hugged and loved. She tells of runny noses and the smell of wet nappies and of no-one dealing with that. She tells of not wanting to go back there because of the feeling of helplessness and not wanting to have to deal with that. I know that story has been repeated in institutions across this country. Those are the things that people remember and will carry with them to their graves.

It is our duty as Australians to support these people. It is a question not only of the half a million people who were directly affected by an institution but of their parents, many of whom went to their graves thinking their children were dead. Many of these people thought their parents were dead. And of course there is also the question of the impact on these people's children. If you grow up in an institution—you are not shown love and care; you are shown abuse—you do not learn how to cuddle your children; you do not learn parenting skills. What was done to these people has had a direct impact on the next generation. We need to be aware that we also need to help those people.

I very strongly support the Prime Minister's commitment to the new initiatives. The Senate made many other recommendations, and I implore the government to implement those recommendations as

well. This apology is a first step. It is an absolutely essential first step—you only had to see and feel the emotion in that chamber to know how important this apology is—but we need to back it up. We cannot let it be just words. As I said, the Greens very strongly support this motion, and I am very pleased to see that finally the recommendations of the committee reports have been implemented.

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Questioner
Speaker Moore, Sen Claire

Source Senate
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Responder
Question No.

Senator MOORE (Queensland) (1.14 pm)—Today is a really important day. It is an important day for all of the people who came forward and told the world, the Senate and each other about their experiences, their pain, their loss and their betrayal. It is especially important for them; it is their day. It is also an important day for our parliament, our government and our community because we have been able to stand together and say that we are sorry.

Most particularly we have been able to say, ‘We hear you and we believe you.’ So often members of this Senate were given the great honour of listening to people who had the strength, the resilience and also the anger to come forward and talk about what happened to them. Many of them said that they had felt that they had been taken away from their lives and isolated from their community and, most importantly, that they had not been respected or believed. They had the strength to come forward and tell us their stories. No-one who had the honour to be part of the process of listening to these people has remained unchanged. We have had the special privilege—from being in this party and in this place—of having the opportunity to make a difference. And as I listened today to the apology in our Great Hall I shared the emotion as I watched the people’s faces and saw how they were experiencing the process. That made a lot of the work really worth while.

We have heard already today that the role of the Senate and the Standing Committee on Community Affairs was important in this process. I am immensely proud to have been part of that committee and to have shared experiences over such a long time with so many senators. I am not going to name them all, you will be relieved to know, but I think that all of us are part of this process. You cannot pick any individual for particular effort because everyone who attended a single meeting had the honour of being part of something that was going to make a change. That has been expressed to me so many times over the last few days. I had phone calls from people who had come and given evidence and I had meetings with people who were wondering whether they would have the strength to come here today to be part of the whole very traumatic experience of the public apology.

I listened, today and last night, to people who were thinking about themselves and their own histories and about the people who could not be with us—people

who have not been able to survive the process. Today there were some very important statements made about people who have gone before us and about families that have been broken. I know that the child migrant group have kept their wonderful poster about their mothers, and today there were many tears shed for broken families and in particular for mothers—mothers who had lost their children or who did not have a chance to see the future together with their families.

Today I want to pay particular respect to all of those who would not give up after years of abuse in many ways—not only physical abuse but deep psychological abuse and trauma—and who were not prepared to remain quiet. They actually took the risk, the significant risk, of coming forward with their stories and telling us about their personal pains. We must thank them today for having that strength and for giving us the important trust and responsibility of taking the challenge. We, as a government and as a parliament—as people who represent the community—have had the opportunity to listen and to make recommendations. Today one of those recommendations—just one—came forward. We now have a public apology—an acknowledgement and a real statement—on record which is about their community, their country, accepting the pain of those people. I want to thank those people who came forward. I want to acknowledge that we will continue to walk the journey with them. Today was just one step—a big step, but nonetheless one step—in the ongoing process. It makes us all stronger to be part of that.

I want to put on record particular acknowledgement of the staff members of the secretariat of the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs. Over many years these people have built up relationships with many people in our community who are often at the other end of the phone or the other end of an email expressing amazing pain. Many people in the secretariat—who often do not get mentioned in this place but just go about doing professional, responsive work—have made a genuine difference in the lives of many people who experienced trauma in institutions and also were child migrants.

A very special bond is built up when you are working through the whole process of public testimony. I know that all of those people in the community affairs committee secretariat have been extraordinarily

important in making sure that this process has been able to occur. Over many years, through a series of reports which we have already acknowledged in this place, the people in the secretariat have maintained the respect—and the confidentiality, in many cases—of the people whose stories they have listened to. Some of those stories have not even come before the Senate because there was too much trauma and there was a desire to keep them confidential. On the record I would like to thank Elton Humphery and his marvellous team for the role that they have played in being able to make the Senate do the job that the community demands of us, which is to represent the needs of our community.

I have been deeply honoured to work on this process. I have made many, many friends. I have met with them a lot over the last few weeks. Sharing with them in this process will always remain a very important part of my time in this place. Senator McLucas and Senator Hutchins were chairs before me on the committee. I also acknowledge Senator Siewert, Senator Humphries and the then Senator Crowley. All their work will now be on record. We know of the extraordinary efforts of ex-Senator Andrew Murray. All the work was seen on his face today in that room. You could see the pride, the emotion and the sense of achievement but there was also recognition that this is an ongoing process.

We have not finished our job. We have taken one step. As I said in this place several months ago to the people who were in the gallery at that stage: ‘You are not the forgotten Australians. You will always be part of our achievements and our processes moving forward.’ The Prime Minister today called them the ‘remembered Australians’. I think that is really important, but to those people who have lived the trauma which we have heard about and will never forget I say: ‘Thank you for giving us the trust to walk this journey with you. Thank you for allowing us to hear your needs and your pain.’ In our ongoing efforts we will continue to work with the remembered Australians into the future.

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Questioner
Speaker McLucas, Sen Jan

Source Senate
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Responder
Question No.

Senator McLUCAS (Queensland) (9.50 pm)—Today is a day that I thought would never come. It was with enormous pride that I joined with some 900 Australians in the Great Hall today to witness the historic apology to the so-called forgotten Australians and child migrants. I want to commend the Prime Minister and Minister Macklin and her staff. I want to thank them for hearing the representations that have been made on behalf of many people who were institutionalised as children and who were child migrants. The Prime Minister and Minister Macklin have listened to a call that has been going out for decades, and they have responded to that call in, I think, a very heartfelt way today. I welcome the bipartisan support for today's apology, and I acknowledge that Mr Turnbull's contribution was also very heartfelt.

The words of the motion which was moved today in this place and in the House of Representatives and put in front of those people this morning reflect a sound understanding of the history and the hurt and suffering that was experienced in the past. They reflect an understanding of the ongoing struggle of many people in dealing with their experience. They also recognise what we need to do in the future to continue to assist people who were institutionalised.

I never thought it would happen. The previous government's response to our report, which was tabled in 2004, said in response to recommendation 1, which was that we issue a formal statement of apology:

While it would not be appropriate for the Australian Government to issue an apology for a matter for which it does not have responsibility, the Government expresses its sincere regret that these children were placed in situations where they did not receive the care they deserved.

Like many on the committee, when I read that response I was deeply saddened—but not as deeply saddened, of course, as those who experienced institutional care.

The value of the apology was on display today. We saw in the Great Hall a celebration of survival. As we all saw, there were lots of tears, but there were also many laughs and a coming together of people who have struggled, personally and collectively. They believe, and I share their belief, that they have made a great gain today. Today was an acknowledgement and a validation of their experience. We heard many times during the inquiry that people knew they were

not being believed when they told their stories. Today I hope that care leavers across the nation and child migrants feel that the Australian government, on behalf of the Australian people, believes them.

Today I sat beside a man who was in care in a number of states. He was taken into care in South Australia, moved to Victoria and then to New South Wales. I had not met him before. He was very quiet and then asked me if I would talk to his wife rather than talking to him. She told me that they did not know about the 2004 inquiry—they had not heard about it and only knew about the work of many who have been agitating on behalf of care leavers for the last couple of years. They are not alone. Even now, from time to time, I am contacted by care leavers who have no knowledge of the inquiry and who have just realised the work that the Senate Community Affairs References Committee did. I encourage people who are in that situation to seek support from counsellors. Remembering their shocking treatment, which they have pushed back from their mind for so long, revives emotions and feelings that are very hard to deal with. We know from having so much experience in this that the simple fact of remembering what happened to them in their younger years does raise significant issues that require support.

I describe myself as a person who sees good in humanity and who believes that people are essentially a positive force in society, but the evidence that we heard during that inquiry sorely tested that view of the world. There were stories about lack of food, lack of blankets, lack of clothing and horrible stories of children in Victoria with no shoes. There were stories about the beatings, the use of children as slaves and the menial or worthless tasks that children were told to do simply to fill in time. There were stories about the verbal abuse and the emotional torture these children lived with, and the horrifying and all-too-common sexual attacks. These stories will stay with us all forever. But the bit that really gets me, and the bit that I cannot deal with, is the callous, heartless behaviour of so-called carers who intentionally built a culture of lovelessness in so many of the institutions. That is what cut me to my core.

How could these people systematically ensure that babies, toddlers, children and teenagers did not receive any affection, any kind words or any cuddles—no love at all? That is the bit that I cannot understand. How can an adult human being not show affection for a

vulnerable child? Those actions are actions that have to be acknowledged. The hurt that they caused so many people has to be talked about. That is why I am so pleased with the announcement today by the Prime Minister that funding will be made available for care leavers to allow them to share their stories. I have in my office in Cairns a whole section of books that have been written by care leavers. It is clearly really helpful for people who have been institutionalised to write down their story and to share it. It seems to purge them in some way of the horrific experience that they have been subjected to. I do encourage many care leavers to take the opportunity to share their story. It is a very hard thing to do, I am sure, but if you share your story then I hope it will help you to heal.

There are many people we need to thank in this process and a lot of them have been referred to today. Various support organisations exist around this country and every one of them needs to be applauded for their persistence and their strength. Persistence is the word that comes to mind. They are all brilliant people. I want to talk about one person who made this happen—that is, former senator Andrew Murray. Andrew saw me in the corridor today. He said ‘Jan’ and we had a hug and that was sort of it. We did not really have to say much. I pay tribute to him. His dedication and commitment to ensuring that justice started to be done—and ‘started’ is the right word; we have not finished the work—initially for the child migrants and also for the care leavers is something that I know all of us in this place really applaud, but not as much as those people in that hall today. The ovation that he was given was truly well deserved.

Like Senator Moore I want to pay tribute to the staff of the Community Affairs References Committee. These people have carried on this work through the changes of leadership on the committee. They have ensured that the initial work done in the first inquiry into lost innocence and then the subsequent inquiry into the forgotten Australians was not lost. So to Elton Humphery, to Christine McDonald, to Geraldine Badham, who was there then, to Peter Short, who was also there then, to Leonie Peake, who has done a fantastic piece of work, and to Ingrid Zappe I say thank you for your commitment to this work. My final comment is on the word ‘forgotten’. I think we should forget the word ‘forgotten’. I think we should from now on ensure that we talk about the ‘remembered’ Australians.

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Questioner
Speaker Humphries, Sen Gary

Source Senate
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Responder
Question No.

Senator HUMPHRIES (Australian Capital Territory) (1.22 pm)—Thank you, Mr President, for the chance to support the motion which is before the Senate today. Like others who have spoken in this debate, I am deeply grateful to have been a member of the federal parliament on this day when we take the step of acknowledging the hurt inflicted on so many hundreds of thousands of Australians by virtue of the policies pursued in institutions run throughout this country.

I am glad to have been here to have shared, to have heard retold, the stories of so many people who sought and deserved, but did not receive, the assistance of Australians when they were young and vulnerable. Sometimes, when we sit in this place making decisions and reporting on things, the ivory tower concept makes us wonder how what we do here translates onto the streets of Australia. In this particular instance, the work of the Community Affairs Committee did not need much translation. The people who came to us to tell us their stories translated the reality of what we were talking about beautifully in our minds.

I see here in the gallery today some of the people who told me their personal stories. I am very grateful to them for sharing deeply intimate details of their lives in order to make real for us their unimaginable childhood experiences. I see Patrick in the gallery. He cannot see me—Patrick, wave to me—but he can at least hear me. Patrick was a child migrant who came to this country and experienced some dreadful things but who has used his experience to build a different life and make a difference in his community. For so many of the so-called ‘forgotten Australians’—now ‘remembered Australians’—and former child migrants, this has been a positive pathway for them to pursue. We acknowledge today that many could not pursue that pathway because they were too badly affected, too badly hurt, by their experience. I am glad for the opportunity to acknowledge today the courage, tenacity and thirst for justice which were characteristic of many of the people who came before our committee wanting to make a difference and wanting to support those who had had similar experiences to theirs. They could be forgiven for turning their backs on a society which appeared to turn its back on them when they needed support, but they have not done that.

It is true that not all the stories of children in institutional care were wholly tragic. It is true that

some children in institutions, on balance, had a positive experience. Some people who looked after them were good people and good carers. But no survey of the evidence can fail to conclude that there were, in too many institutions and by too many individuals, horrific and consistent failures to provide proper care and protection to innocent and vulnerable people. In some institutions there was a culture which could only be described as evil. It is that failure to nurture, care for, respect and love the children in those institutions that has to be atoned for today, not only because it inflicted such damage on those children—damage which, as has been said, has had repercussions through generations—but because it is a powerful reminder to all of us in this parliament of why a relentless focus on the best interests of children must be at the centre of all social policy that we discuss, debate, consider and support. To do anything less would be to betray the sad experiences of so many people who passed through institutional care in the 20th century.

I want to use my short time to acknowledge that, for many of these people, the experience of being in a so-called ‘home’ was an experience of isolation, of separation. For a child, being locked away somewhere creates a sense of being punished, of having done something wrong—they feel they have been locked away because of something to do with them. When, on telling the story of what had happened to them, they were further not believed, that exacerbated their sense that there was something wrong with them for having been in those places.

I see the apology today as a chance to say to all of those people that that element of blame, of personal wrongdoing, is wiped away. It was never true. We acknowledge that it was others’ failings that led to their being in those places, that they are more than welcome to be full, participating members of Australian society, that they are not outsiders, that they are people with a great role to play and that their experience of suffering is an experience that we should build on to make a difference. I am confident that, with the apology today, that will be the case.

I also have to say that—as Senator Moore, Senator Siewert and others have pointed out—we have much unfinished business here. This apology is not the end. Today, sadly, only half of the Australian states have actually set up compensation schemes. I can

understand people being cynical about compensation; I am generally cynical about compensation schemes. But, in this case, the argument for financial redress is absolutely overwhelming. What greater loss can there be to a person than the loss of their innocence and their childhood? What could possibly repay people for that loss? The question of redress needs to be tackled directly and immediately by those Australian states which have not yet done so, and those states that have schemes with problems should address those problems by talking to the people who need, who rely on, the schemes.

I also need to say that there are still shortcomings in the responses of the charities and churches that were responsible for running so many of the institutions we have discussed in these reports. They could do much more to strengthen the assistance they provide to their former charges, to extend a hand of assistance that would allow these people to regain that place in Australian society which they crave.

Senator Moore was right to suggest that we have all been changed by this experience—not changed as much as those people who passed through institutions, as we have only a dim reflection to behold of what happened to them. We have the power to make a difference through what we do in this place, and that is absolutely what I and other members of the committee, former and present, will do as a result of our experience on these inquiries. We particularly need to ask ourselves how we can make sure that the 30,000 or so Australians who remain in out-of-home care of one sort or another can be assisted never to experience what those in institutional care experienced. I pay tribute to these people, I thank them for their candour and their courage and I look forward to working with them in a variety of ways in the future to learn valuable lessons from this experience and build a better future for children.

Question agreed to.

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Questioner
Speaker Boyce, Sen Sue

Source Senate
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Responder
Question No.

Senator BOYCE (Queensland) (10.20 pm)—I would like to associate myself tonight with the earlier remarks of other senators and of the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition in the Great Hall in making the apology to the forgotten Australians and the lost innocents, the child migrants of the past. It was an honour to be part of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, which recommended that this apology be made. And it was a delight to have the opportunity today to be part of such a raw, emotional but uplifting experience as the apology.

I met a man who came from the Sunshine Coast, in Queensland, who was proudly wearing his CLAN colours—CLAN being the Care Leavers of Australia Network. He told me that he had spent 16 years in an orphanage and very briefly went through an account of his experiences there. But when he got out of that orphanage he became involved in what he called motorcycle clubs. Others would have referred to them as outlaw motorcycle gangs. But it was in those gangs, or clubs, that he found someone at last who cared about him—a sense of belonging somewhere, where someone cared. He spent time in jail because of that involvement, so he has now given away being involved in motorcycle clubs and has started his own motorcycle club. He was there proudly wearing the result of that lifetime of getting to the stage of being happy in his own skin and being able to function as part of the law-abiding community. But it was a long, long road for him.

I met another man today who, when I asked him where he was from, said he came from Ireland in a very broad Australian accent. He had come to Australia more than 40 years ago, and today was the day he could remember that and feel better about the fact that now it was being recognised, now it was being accepted and now it was being apologised for; people were saying sorry.

I think the speeches today by both the Prime Minister and my leader, the opposition leader the Hon. Malcolm Turnbull were superb. I want to quote a little from the end of the speech made by the Prime Minister:

... let us also resolve this day, that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's story. A turning point for shattered lives. A turning point for governments at all levels and of every political colour and hue, to do all in their power to never let this happen again.

We have already had people tell us about the sacred duty that we should all have as adults, to protect children. But the problem is that even though we can say we will never let this happen again we know it has happened again, we know it will go on happening whilst we have institutions that are not open and easily accountable to the community. I was interested to see in the *Courier Mail* today this comment from a woman who calls herself 'Mum of Brisbane':

So the apology is for the abuse in care up until the 1970's. Where is the apology of the 80's and 90's—that is when I was in care, being abused under the watchful and knowing eyes of the Dept—

meaning the Queensland Department of Community Services—

...Why try to make out this ended long ago when you know it didn't.

Probably the most awful truth for all of us to try and face is that this was not done by unknowing people; it was done as systematic abuse, as the Prime Minister said today, as systemic abuse. The system was set up to be an abusive system, and while we continue to have institutions where people are not easily able to speak their mind you will continue to have the same problem.

I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister say today, in terms of the aged-care needs of the forgotten Australians, that there would be a special needs component. The reason that there is concern about the aged-care needs of the forgotten Australians is that they will be re-institutionalised, as everyone who goes into an aged-care home is. Institutions can function well, but they are always institutions. Whenever we put people in special places away from the community we accept that those that are vulnerable may be abused and may be exploited. But we go on doing it because it is an efficient and economical way of dealing with some of the issues that we find too hard to deal with in our communities.

This has got to be where we start to think about institutionalisation across the board, not just to comfortably try and tell ourselves that this is in the past and that this will not happen again, that if a state government builds an institution for children with disabilities or an aged-care home it will be different, that this time these institutions will be good

institutions. An institution can only be as good as the people who constantly watch, constantly check and constantly tell themselves: 'This happened before, it can happen again, it will happen again if we do not continue to remind ourselves over and over that it is absolutely and unfortunately a part of human nature to behave in diabolical ways towards people less powerful'. The only way we can stop this from being an apology that will have to be made again in 50 years or 60 years or to a new group of vulnerable people is to keep reminding ourselves that this can happen, it is happening now and it can continue to happen until we open up the institutions, until we stop assuming that there can ever be good institutions without constant and total vigilance.

I can appreciate the sentiments of the people who suggest that we should talk now about the 'remembered Australians' not the 'forgotten Australians', but I think we need to continue to remember the lessons of the forgotten Australians today, tomorrow and forever.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
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Questioner
Speaker Evans, Sen Chris (Leader of the Government in the Senate)

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator CHRIS EVANS (Western Australia—Leader of the Government in the Senate) (12.31 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the Senate support the apology given on this day by the Prime Minister, on behalf of the nation, to the Forgotten Australians and former Child Migrants in the following terms:

We come together today to deal with an ugly chapter in our nation's history.

And we come together today to offer our nation's apology.

To say to you, the Forgotten Australians, and those who were sent to our shores as children without your consent, that we are sorry.

Sorry – that as children you were taken from your families and placed in institutions where so often you were abused.

Sorry – for the physical suffering, the emotional starvation and the cold absence of love, of tenderness, of care.

Sorry – for the tragedy of childhoods lost – childhoods spent instead in austere and authoritarian places, where names were replaced by numbers, spontaneous play by regimented routine, the joy of learning by the repetitive drudgery of menial work.

Sorry – for all these injustices to you as children, who were placed in our care.

As a nation, we must now reflect on those who did not receive proper care.

We look back with shame that many of you were left cold, hungry and alone and with nowhere to hide and nobody to whom to turn.

We look back with shame that many of these little ones who were entrusted to institutions and foster homes – instead, were abused physically, humiliated cruelly and violated sexually.

We look back with shame at how those with power were allowed to abuse those who had none.

And how then, as if this was not injury enough, you were left ill-prepared for life outside – left to fend for yourselves; often unable to read or write; to struggle alone with no friends and no family.

For these failures to offer proper care to the powerless, the voiceless and the most vulnerable, we say sorry.

We reflect too today on the families who were ripped apart, simply because they had fallen on hard times.

Hard times brought about by illness, by death and by poverty.

Some simply left destitute when fathers, damaged by war, could no longer cope.

Again we say sorry for the extended families you never knew.

We acknowledge the particular pain of children shipped to Australia as child migrants - robbed of your families, robbed of your homeland, regarded not as innocent children but regarded instead as a source of child labour.

To those of you who were told you were orphans, brought here without your parents' knowledge or consent, we acknowledge the lies you were told, the lies told to your mothers and fathers, and the pain these lies have caused for a lifetime.

To those of you separated on the dockside from your brothers and sisters; taken alone and unprotected to the most remote parts of a foreign land – we acknowledge today the laws of our nation failed you.

And for this we are deeply sorry.

We think also today of all the families of these Forgotten Australians and former child migrants who are still grieving, families who were never reunited, families who were never reconciled, families who were lost to one another forever.

We reflect too on the burden that is still carried by your own children, your grandchildren, your husbands, your wives, your partners and your friends – and we thank them for the faith, the love and the depth of commitment that has helped see you through the valley of tears that was not of your making.

And we reflect with you as well, in sad remembrance, on those who simply could not cope and who took their own lives in absolute despair.

We recognise the pain you have suffered.

Pain so personal.

Pain so profoundly disabling.

So, let us therefore, together, as a nation, allow this apology to begin healing this pain.

Healing the pain felt by so many of the half a million of our fellow Australians and those who as children were in our care.

And let us also resolve this day, that this national apology becomes a turning point in our nation's story.

A turning point for shattered lives.

A turning point for Governments at all levels and of every political colour and hue, to do all in our power to never let this happen again.

For the protection of children is the sacred duty of us all.

This motion is supported by the Leader of the Opposition, Mr Turnbull, and, I am sure, by all senators.

I acknowledge first of all the forgotten Australians and former child migrants who are in the parliament today, who have come from all around Australia to hear the Prime Minister and the opposition leader offer the apology on behalf of the nation. I remind senators that on 13 February last year the Prime Minister rose in the other chamber to deliver the national apology to Australia's Indigenous people. At that time he said:

... there comes a time in the history of nations when their peoples must become fully reconciled to their past if they are to go forward with confidence to embrace their future. Our nation, Australia, has reached such a time.

Today we seek to acknowledge and reconcile with another dark chapter in Australia's past so that the nation can once again move forward. Today the nation acknowledges and apologises for the pain and devastation caused by the actions of governments and institutions against the forgotten Australians and former child migrants—children placed in care. In speaking this morning the Prime Minister outlined the abuse, deprivation and neglect that befell children placed in orphanages, homes and institutions where they were supposed to be protected, nurtured and educated.

Many senators are familiar with the terrible wrongs and injustices carried out. They have been documented through the course of three separate Senate inquiries. Firstly, there was the report *Lost innocents: righting the record*, from the committee chaired by former Senator Rosemary Crowley. She rang me today to apologise for not being able to be here; she was keenly interested in the apology. Then there was the report *Forgotten Australians: a report on Australians who experienced institutional or out-of-home care as children* in 2004, from the committee chaired by Senator Jan McLucas. The most recent inquiry, chaired by Senator Rachel Siewert, produced the *Lost innocents and forgotten Australians revisited* which was tabled this year. These reports pursued an issue that is really important to

many Australian citizens. They provide a record of the damage done to so many and give voice to those who are suffering. I think it does the Senate great credit that as a result of those inquiries we have got to this position today—a formal national apology.

I will not attempt to name all the senators involved but I do acknowledge the work of the chairs: former Senator Crowley, Senator McLucas and Senator Siewert. I know Senators Humphries, Moore and others have been highly engaged in this issue, and it is to their great credit. Of course, I would also like to mention the work of former Senator Andrew Murray, himself a victim, if you like, of these processes. He has been a tireless advocate on behalf of former child migrants and forgotten Australians and he used his time in the Senate to agitate and advocate on their behalf. He has been involved in chairing the consultations that assisted in developing the apology today. It is very good to see him back in the parliament. The work he did is a great credit to him.

To our shame as a nation, we failed to provide the essentials of a good life for the half a million children placed in the care of state governments and charitable and religious institutions in Australia—half a million children who were deprived of their childhoods, many of whom were also torn from their families. These children were denied love, affection and protection from those charged with their care and instead were neglected, exploited and abused.

As Minister for Immigration and Citizenship I feel a special concern for the 7,000 former child migrants who were shipped to Australia from the United Kingdom and Malta. These children, who were predominantly placed in residential institutions, were the victims of a deliberate and tragically flawed government policy to help populate Australia. Even those children who escaped mistreatment and abuse in these institutions still suffered from the loss of identity and sense of alienation that comes from being torn away from one's family, friends and homeland and shipped to the other side of the world alone. Many of these children were sent to Australia without their parents' consent and were oftentimes lied to and told that their parents had died or did not want them any more.

These forgotten Australians and former child migrants are now middle-aged, but the past continues to have profound and far-reaching effects on their adult lives. Beyond the devastating impacts of such deprivation and abuse for the individuals, we also see that the families have come to be burdened and haunted by their past as well. That is why today we also acknowledge their husbands, wives, partners and children for the love, support and commitment they provide. We also remember today those people who,

unable to cope with the pain and horror of these experiences, took their own lives.

The apology delivered by the Prime Minister today and this motion are first steps in the healing process. Today the nation, through its highest institution, the Australian parliament, says, 'We are sorry'. The apology signifies that this chapter of Australia's history and the lives of the people affected will be forgotten no longer. It also signifies that the journey of recognition and healing will continue and that the government will continue to offer understanding and support for those in need.

On a practical level, 600 counselling services are being made available under the Family Support Program, offering trained counsellors to help individuals and families to heal further and have strong and healthy relationships. To support former child migrants, the government will continue to provide funding for counselling services, family tracing support and other assistance, as it has since 1990. This assistance occurs through the Child Migrants Trust, an independent organisation for former child migrants, their parents and relatives. The trust is working with about 1,000 people to rediscover their origins and deal with the legacy of their childhood experiences.

The Australian government is also working with those who support the forgotten Australians. We are funding the Alliance for Forgotten Australians and the Care Leavers of Australia Network to continue support for care leavers. We must also ensure that the abuses of the past do not happen again. In conjunction with the states and territories, the government has developed the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. It includes strong national standards for out-of-home care, so that the care is of a high quality and children are safe and well cared for.

I acknowledge that these are small steps forward, but they are positive steps which demonstrate the Australian government's and the Australian parliament's commitment to offer practical and meaningful support to those who seek it. Today marks a turning point in Australia's history. From this day forward, I hope that all governments and institutions that have in the past neglected their responsibility for children in their care will act on their obligations in practical and meaningful ways. One of the most important things we can do now is to ensure that this chapter in our history is never repeated.

Today we recognise and applaud the courage of former child migrants and forgotten Australians in speaking out. We admire the courage of people who have shared their individual stories and, in some cases, have been further traumatised by revisiting the past. Through today's apology we show our respect for all

people affected, our support for further recognition for the terrible wrongs inflicted and our hope to assist the process of healing. I commend the motion to the Senate.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 6
Questioner
Speaker Joyce, Sen Barnaby

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator JOYCE (Queensland—Leader of the Nationals in the Senate) (1.00 pm)—I rise to concur with the remarks of Senator Evans, Senator Minchin and Senator Siewert, and support this motion on the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. I would like to endorse the remarks of and the work done by former Democrat Senator Andrew Murray, who has been tireless in seeking this objective. I also endorse the work done by Senator Gary Humphries. Child migrants are part and parcel of the history of Australia. Much sadness has surrounded them. I can see that Senator Hutchins is in the chamber. Senator Hutchins and I are descended from child migrants.

Removal must be the last alternative, and the removal of people from love and a family structure to an institution is a diabolical thing for any human being. It is interesting to think about some of the towns where these orphanages were located. I remember the orphanage at Armidale. Orphanages were part and parcel of so many country towns, a peculiarity now that is hard to get our minds around. People who migrated from England and other places could be found in these orphanages. They had to grow up in an institution in loco parentis with people who were in no way related to them. I went to a local state school and I knew the fear people had when the welfare officer would come around. I knew that people had been removed. Some of them had to be removed, to be honest. There was no alternative because sometimes the situations people were in were diabolical. But they should never have been removed and placed in a situation that was on a par or worse than the one they came from. This was the great crime that happened. People were put in situations where they were under threat of sexual predators and under threat of being bullied and harassed, and where they were lumbered with a life of menial tasks. These people should have received love, attention and care, and not put in places which were comparable or worse than where they came from.

I hope that this apology brings some sense of solace to those people who came to Parliament House today—about 900 of them. We do not for one second pretend that we can replace all that has been lost in their lives. It would be impossible to do that. What value do you put on a family life? What value do you put on the knowledge of a mother and a father? What value do you put on the love that you receive by being tucked into bed and being kissed goodnight by your mother? How

can you possibly replace those things? It is beyond payment. But there has to be an acknowledgement of the wrongs that were committed against these people. For someone to be removed and told that their parents had died, and for their parents to be told that their child had died, as happened in some instances, is an abominable punishment for that person.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work done by the Senate Community Affairs Committee over a long period of time and their persistence in this matter. As a positive, I would also like to acknowledge the bipartisan stance taken by the committee in trying to bring about a resolution and showing that this chamber can bring about something good—not something equivalent to the loss but something that at least in a minor way alleviates the pain suffered. I wish those people who came to Parliament House today all the best. This parliament stood in unison today and said: ‘We offer our heartfelt apology and we acknowledge that you have suffered. Whatever small thing we can offer to mitigate the pain you have felt then we offer it to you here today.’

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 95
Questioner
Speaker Kroger, Sen Helen

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator KROGER (Victoria) (10.00 pm)—In opening, I would like to associate myself with the comments that Senator McLucas has made about the forgotten Australians and share her empathy, appreciation and understanding of what so many have experienced and still deal with. In my first speech over a year ago I spoke about the importance of family for me and quoted Thomas Moore:

Family life is full of major and minor crises—the ups and downs of health ... success and failure ... is tied to places and events and histories. With all of these felt details, life etches itself into memory and personality. It's difficult to imagine anything more nourishing to the soul.

Sadly, hundreds of thousands of children were stripped of the opportunity to experience these ups and downs, these normal failures and successes, and these major and minor crises that we all have enjoyed. Sadly, their souls had little, if any, opportunity to be nourished. Today, Australians had the opportunity to witness our parliamentary leaders shelve their political agendas and recognise the torment and suffering of hundreds of thousands of children from the 1920s through to the late 1960s. It was a moving ceremony, with many of the brave victims present, supported by family, friends, community and group leaders. Many of those who attended today we have come to know as child migrants and lost innocents. Today we extended a deserved apology on behalf of the nation.

A word, in and of itself, means absolutely nothing. The *Book of James* famously reminds us that faith without works is dead. Considering the application of that sentiment today, we may conclude that an apology without action is meaningless. That is why I welcome the commitments that both the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition made today. Their genuine concern and action in this matter is admirable and respected by many. I note with gratitude the many charitable and religious organisations that have in the past been involved with state care programs which have published public apologies to those abused and neglected whilst in their care. Similarly, most state governments have issued apologies to victims.

The Hon. Malcolm Turnbull earlier today drew attention to a quote at the beginning of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee's *Forgotten Australians* report. Nelson Mandela said:

Any nation that does not care for and protect all of its children does not deserve to be called a nation.

Of the 39 recommendations in that Senate report, the very first recommendation has now been accomplished. The report wisely recommended:

That the Commonwealth Government issue a formal statement acknowledging, on behalf of the nation, the hurt and distress suffered by many children in institutional care, particularly the children who were victims of abuse and assault; and apologising for the harm caused to these children.

I note that the Prime Minister today pledged to advance some of the 33 recommendations made in the Senate report on child migration titled *Lost innocents: righting the record*. This action is also welcomed.

In my home state of Victoria today there were two events which coincided with the national apology. One organised by the Interim Service for Forgotten Australians and the other by MacKillop Family Services. I commend both organisations for their initiative and coordination of today's events. On a day such as today it is important to recognise the organisations that remain committed to this important work—of which there are many—but in particular I would like to note the Care Leavers Australia Network, the International Association of Former Child Migrants and their Families, and the Alliance for Forgotten Australians.

Without the determination and resolution of these organisations to pursue what is right, there would be no apology and, sadly, no acknowledgement of past evils. I must also acknowledge the continuing work of the National Association for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect—NAPCAN—and Adults Surviving Child Abuse, who I have worked closely with and support in whatever way I can.

Today the Australian parliament acknowledges the individual experiences which children had whilst in institutional care. In many instances they were taken from disadvantaged circumstances with the objective of more appropriate care but were frequently separated from their family and, in the case of British child migrants, moved to the other side of the world. We have heard of the conditions to which they were subjected to: from brutal, isolated and emotionally inadequate to physically, emotionally and sexually

abusive. Whilst not all children claimed mistreatment, the personal stories of so many are heart-wrenching. We know that there are 500,000 of these survivors nationally and 90,000 survivors in my home state of Victoria. No words can ever be sufficiently adequate in recognising the trauma inflicted by these events, and they should not be forgotten.

In reading some of the submissions to the Senate's inquiry into institutional care, I was overwhelmed by the horror, abject fear and misery that these children endured rather than knowing and enjoying unconditional love. During the ceremony today, I saw the anguish of the past on so many faces. I can only imagine the continuing pain from a lifetime of torment that needs and demands our support and understanding. I also want to recognise and note my admiration for the strength and courage that was shown today by so many who chose to come and share. I am humbled by that strength and fortified by the collective will. As a nation we must ensure this dark chapter in our history book is not ignored but used to assist us in shaping our future.

I read the testimony of Mrs Deborah Findlay to the Senate inquiry who told of her ordeal as a ward of the state. She wrote at some length about this, and I wish to share just a little of it with you. She starts by saying that she is writing this story because she believes it needs to be told. She was born in 1964 and, at the age of two, was made a ward of state. She was placed in the Alexandra Toddler's Home in Ballarat, Victoria in 1966, then transferred to the Ballarat Children's Home on 19 September 1969 where, until 1979, she spent her whole childhood in state care. I will quote her from this point in her story:

While in the care of the Ballarat Children's Home in Victoria I was subjected to physical, sexual, emotional Abuse constantly walking a fine line of terror, fear, hate and shame.

From 1971-1978 my cares physical abused me such as:

- 1) I was made to have cold showers every morning, due to bed-wetting.
- 2) Had my face rubbed in my wet sheets of my bed?
- 3) I was belted with a cane, belts, bats anything that they could get their hands on.
- 4) Had my mouth washed out with hand soap?
- 5) Dragged along the hallway carpet by my hair.
- 6) Kick in the stomach and body while I was on the floor.
- 7) Made to stand in hallway in the cold at night.

8) Made to clean on hands and knees cleaning metal strips on carpet runners cleaning hours on end.

9) Had my ears pulled upwards that I was standing on my tippee toes.

10) Thrown up agents the hallway wall.

I reflect on her life. Mrs Findlay is now 45 years old, five years younger than I am. And yet she has experienced such enormous tragedy and torment in her life. In her submission she continued to recount the emotional abuse she received. I cannot bring myself to mention the physically and emotionally violent atrocities inflicted upon her but, needless to say, no person should ever, ever have to experience what she has, let alone a child who has every right to expect that we will protect them. For the neglect and abuse inflicted on so many innocents by governments, churches and charities, we say sorry.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 3
Questioner
Speaker Minchin, Sen Nick

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator MINCHIN (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (12.40 pm)—I, on behalf of the opposition, indicate our strong support for the motion moved by Senator Evans. The opposition joins with the government in acknowledging that the abuse and neglect suffered by many children in institutional and other out-of-home care during the last century was entirely and completely unacceptable. We join with the government in offering this apology to the more than half a million forgotten Australians and former child migrants who had traumatic experiences in institutionalised care across the country. In doing so, we acknowledge and express our sympathy for the suffering of these children.

Under UK legislation, as Senator Evans mentioned, an estimated 150,000 children left the UK as child migrants. It is estimated that something between 7,000 and 10,000 of those children were sent to Australia between 1947 and 1967. The forgotten Australians are the approximately half a million people who found themselves in institutional care in the 20th century between the 1920s and 1970s. It was in the 1980s and 1990s that the stories of these child migrants and forgotten Australians began to come to light, particularly the stories of child migrants through the work of the Child Migrants Trust. Since about 1990, Australian governments of both persuasions have provided funding to the Child Migrants Trust to assist with caseworker and counselling services for former child migrants.

We are delighted that the parliament is acting on the recommendation of the latest report of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee, a committee which, as Senator Evans properly said, has ensured that the stories of children in institutional care and former child migrants have been heard. We also join with the government in acknowledging the work of all members of that committee over the years since its first inquiry in 2001. In that year, the committee tabled its report into child migration entitled *Lost innocents: righting the record*. In 2004, the committee tabled the report on its inquiry into children raised in institutional care and other forms of care, entitled *Forgotten Australians*. That was followed in 2005 by the report *Protecting vulnerable children: a national challenge*. Of course, the committee then tabled its report on the inquiry into the implementation of the

recommendations of the *Lost innocents* and *Forgotten Australians* reports.

As Senator Evans quite properly said, I think we all owe a great debt to our good friend and former colleague, former Senator Andrew Murray, who proved what you can do even if you are not in government or opposition at any stage in your career. It was he, through his diligence and commitment, who focused this Senate's and I think the nation's attention on the importance of looking into the circumstances surrounding former child migrants and children in institutional care. I have no doubt that Andrew will be more pleased than anyone about what has occurred today.

I also want to particularly acknowledge Liberal Senator Gary Humphries, as a very longstanding member of the Senate Community Affairs References Committee and someone who has followed this issue and been closely involved in it with tremendous commitment. Senator Humphries was strongly involved in the 2004 inquiry into the forgotten Australians and with this latest Senate inquiry that looked at the progress made since those earlier reports. He has heard firsthand and directly many of these personal accounts of neglect and abuse. They will have had an enormous impact on him, as they have had on all committee members and Senate committee staff. Andrew Murray said in a speech at the University of Western Australia in 2008 that the committee inquiries he was involved with on this issue impacted heavily on everyone involved. In that speech, Andrew said:

I do not want to give the impression that every child in care was harmed or hated it. I do not want to give the impression that every institution or care-provider was bad. That was not so. There were positive stories. But we also heard stories that defied belief. Submissions revealed horrific stories of slave labour, of physical assault, of sexual assault and rape, of profound emotional abuse and cruelty, of widespread and systemic abuse and neglect.

The Senate's inquiry into child migrants followed a British House of Commons health committee inquiry into child migration in 1997. That report stated:

Exact number of child migrants to Australia and New Zealand are not known, but it is thought that during the final period in which the migration policy operated, from 1947 to 1967, between 7,000 and 10,000 children were sent to Australia. These children were placed in large,

often isolated, institutions and were often subjected to harsh, sometimes intentionally brutal, regimes of work and discipline, unmodified by any real nurturing or encouragement.

In relation to Australia, the House of Commons report further stated:

It is fair to say that the sending agencies appear genuinely to have believed that they were acting in the best interests of the children. ... Official assurances to this effect were given to Parliament when legislation enabling child migration was debated. During the passage of the Children Bill in 1948, the Lord Chancellor assured the House of Lords that 'the Home Office intends to secure that children shall not be emigrated unless there is absolute satisfaction that proper arrangements have been made for the care and upbringing of each child'.

As we now know, and as that House of Commons report found, the reality was very different for those child migrants, with often quite questionable practice used to expedite the process of migration. The House of Commons committee concluded that:

Child migration was a bad and, in human terms, costly mistake.

The British government responded to this inquiry in 1998 and accepted that the policy had been badly misguided. In 2000 our government provided a response to the British government's position which included a commitment to cooperate with the British to assist former child migrants tracing their families. It was then, on 20 June 2000, that the Senate, on the motion of Senator Andrew Murray, referred the issue of child migration to the Senate Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report. As mentioned earlier, this *Lost innocents* report was tabled in 2001. That committee received 99 confidential and 153 public submissions, most of them from former child migrants. In the words of that committee:

This report recognises that while some former child migrants have prospered in this country, have successful relationships with partners and children and never lost contact with family, many others are not in this position. The report illustrates the consequences of emotional deprivation and abuse in childhood, and the struggle such children face as adults to cope and contribute and to live fruitful and constructive lives.

As the committee noted in that report, many submissions were also received from Australian-born people who were brought up in institutional care in Australia, often in the same institutions as these child migrants. Hence the 2004 inquiry into *Forgotten Australians* focused on those children. Again, it was on the motion of Andrew Murray that the Senate supported that inquiry in 2003. That inquiry received 440 public submissions and 174 confidential submissions. Many of those were highly emotive, telling very personal stories about personal experiences

as children in institutions and how these often horrific experiences had subsequently shaped the lives of those children. The committee report described the submissions as:

... graphic and disturbing accounts about the treatment and care experienced by children in out-of-home care.

In June this year the Community Affairs Committee recommended that the government issue a formal acknowledgement and expression of regret to former child migrants and to children who had suffered hurt and distress or abuse and assault in institutional care. The coalition strongly supports these recommendations and we particularly support and encourage government provision of practical support to assist—as we did in government with the support of the then opposition—those affected by these damaging policies of the past with support for counselling, information, family research and reunion services.

As a society we can acknowledge that a variety of factors contributed to this often abhorrent standard of care and that there is no one person to blame. We do need to recognise that there were many motivating factors, not all of them malevolent, for the policies of the past and that, often, authorities and charities simply got it wrong. We, as the opposition, have tremendous sympathy for the distressing experiences that many faced in institutional care or as child migrants to Australia in the last century. We strongly support this acknowledgement and apology. We provide our sympathy to those who, through forced migration, separation and institutional care, experienced abuse and neglect and the ultimate denial of the freedoms and support most children in Australia happily experience.

There are many lessons to be learnt for all of us from their experiences. It is, as Senator Evans said, a tremendous sign of what the Senate can achieve and we certainly join with Senator Evans in saying that we are pleased that, through the Senate, these forgotten children and these child migrants have been given a voice to allow their stories to be heard and for this apology to be made.

SPEECH

Date Monday, 16 November 2009
Page 7
Questioner
Speaker Xenophon, Sen Nick

Source Senate
Proof Yes
Responder
Question No.

Senator XENOPHON (South Australia) (1.09 pm)—I add my unequivocal support for the government's motion and endorse the heartfelt remarks of my colleagues—Senators Evans, Minchin, Siewert, Joyce and Fielding. Cruelty in all its forms is completely unacceptable, but cruelty against children is a particular kind of evil. It causes incredible emotional pain as well as the physical pain. Too often it destroys hope and a passion for living in its victims. We need as a nation to say sorry for what was done to the forgotten Australians and former child migrants. We need to acknowledge their pain and bear witness to their suffering. We need to say: 'We hear you, we believe you, we acknowledge what our country and institutions did to you and we are sorry.'

Wounds do not heal if they are left to fester and are not dealt with. Many of these forgotten Australians have been forced to stay silent and hide secrets their whole lives. This apology is a way to make it clear once and for all that the forgotten Australians should not be expected to keep our country's and our institutions' shameful secrets. The 2001 Senate inquiry into child migrants, brought about by the advocacy of former Senator Andrew Murray, heard from more than 200 victims, many of whom were deported to Australia and told they had no families. The subsequent work by the Senate Standing Committee on Community Affairs, chaired by Senator Siewert and worked on by Senator Humphries, built on that valuable body of work. Senator Evans is right when he says that this shows the Senate at its best. As state wards, these forgotten Australians were subjected to unthinkable abuse—emotional, physical and sexual. They were neglected and many children were forced to work as virtual slave labour. These stories need to be told and their suffering needs to be acknowledged.

In my home state of South Australia the abuse of state wards was also endemic. For a long time South Australian institutions did not want to know about the allegations of abuse of wards of the state and migrant children. There was a shameful silence and an unwillingness to listen. But one survivor in particular helped change the debate in South Australia in a way that in hindsight is truly remarkable. I have spent a significant amount of time talking to Ki Meekins. Ki is a survivor who arguably did more to expose my state's shameful history when it comes to the mistreatment of children than anyone else. As a ward of the state,

Ki was routinely sexually abused by a well-known Adelaide children's entertainer and his partner. He was frequently taken out of state care by these men, abused and then taken back. Ki was flown interstate to be raped. He was punished if he ever told authorities what had happened to him.

The things that happened to Ki should have been a knockout blow for him. No-one would have been surprised if someone in his position could not get out from underneath the pain he had endured. But Ki did get out; he did fight back. He told his story again and again until somebody listened. That somebody was Graham Archer, the executive producer of the Adelaide edition of the *Today Tonight* program. Despite the prevailing desire amongst some in the community to not investigate this matter, Graham took a stand in 2002 and commissioned a series of investigations into the abuse of Ki and other wards of the state in South Australia. It was investigative reporting at its best. It would be reasonable to conclude that initially the government and the institutions did not want to know. They did not give the allegations the urgency and gravity they deserved. Calls for a royal commission or a formal inquiry were initially dismissed, but the victims were not willing to be silenced this time. They kept telling their stories and the media kept reporting them and eventually the momentum was unstoppable.

In 2005, the state government had ordered an inquiry by former Supreme Court justice Ted Mulligan into the abuse of wards of the state. It showed a disgraceful history of abuse of wards of the state—physically, emotionally and sexually. Commissioner Mulligan did an outstanding job of listening compassionately to victims and the recommendations in his report are invaluable. The tales of neglect and abuse were unimaginable, yet they were all true. These stories should not be forgotten and these victims cannot be forgotten. Ki Meekins has emerged from this stronger. There is a saying by the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche: that which does not destroy you makes you stronger, and Ki is living testament to that. He wrote a book, *Red Tape Rape*, which gives a harrowing account of what he and others were subjected to.

However, from all this sadness there is some hope because, if anyone had a right to give up and lose their way, it was the forgotten Australians. Instead of love they were given pain, instead of security they

were given fear, and instead of a promising future they were given seemingly insurmountable odds. Yet overwhelmingly they survived and against the odds so many have flourished. Their lives are testimony to the strength of the human spirit. They would not allow their oppressors to define their destinies. And so I pay tribute to the forgotten Australians and I join the Prime Minister and all my colleagues in support of this apology. To all the forgotten children I say: from the worst possible starts in life, you have come to represent the best in us all.

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 16 November 2009 Page 6 Questioner Speaker Fielding, Sen Steve</p>	<p>Source Senate Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Senator FIELDING (Victoria—Leader of the Family First Party) (1.04 pm)—Family First fully support this motion and our heartfelt apology goes out to the children who were taken from their families and placed in institutions where they were often abused. We are sorry for the physical suffering, the emotional starvation and the cold absence of love, tenderness and care. We are sorry for the tragedy of the childhoods that were lost to authoritarian places where names were replaced by numbers, spontaneous play was replaced by regimented routine and the joy of learning replaced by the repetitive drudgery of menial work. We are sorry for all the injustices delivered to these children who were placed in so-called care. Massive hurt and damage has been done. Massive hurt and damage has resulted from being placed in care. Massive hurt and damage has resulted from a breach of care and a breach of trust. How would anyone cope with that situation where trust was broken? How was this allowed to go on for so long? Why was it allowed to go on for so long? We may never know how humans allowed these things to happen, even after all the stories came out. It is hard to fully understand how it was allowed to happen. This apology means a lot to many thousands of people, tens of thousands and even hundreds of thousands, and even to those who are sadly no longer with us.

I remember growing up and hearing that sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me. Sticks and stones do break bones, but words also hurt and damage people. The word ‘sorry’ is such an important word to come from this parliament, this government and this nation in the context of our standing with those people who have been through such horrific circumstances. I spent some time this morning talking to some people just outside the Great Hall. You cannot help but weep when you hear these stories. They are just so horrific and hard to comprehend. How it could go on for so long without anyone really blowing the whistle on this sort of stuff, I just do not know. To the survivors, all those people who have had to put up with this, my heart goes out to you. I am hoping that this apology, our saying sorry, allows you to continue to grow and evolve beyond those memories. May it be a new chapter and a new beginning for many people.

To survive such things is hard to contemplate, but I think the government has proven today that it is serious about addressing those issues and this offer of

assistance will go a long way to helping those people. I know the report in 2004 said that the legacy of some of these childhood experiences includes low self-esteem, lack of confidence, depression, fear and distrust, anger, shame, guilt, obsessiveness, social anxieties, phobias and recurring nightmares. I do hope that today is a new beginning for those Australians who will now be called remembered Australians; they are no longer forgotten. We stand here with them today and say sorry.