

### FIRST AND FOREMOST

Not long after a new parliament is opened, newly elected members have the opportunity to make their 'first speech' in the House of Representatives.

A member's first speech, previously referred to as a 'maiden speech', is a tradition that originated from the British House of Commons.

It is a significant occasion and an opportunity for a new member to outline to the parliament what they hope to achieve.

However, it may not necessarily be the first time a member speaks in the House – for example, if a member speaks as a minister or opposition spokesperson then it is not counted as a first speech.

Members' first speeches are as diverse as the people they represent in their electorates.

In their first speeches many members choose to express their political views and goals while others thank their supporters or speak about personal experiences.

Members may also mention specific issues affecting the people in their electorates, such as health or education, or speak about financial or economic matters.

Normally, a first speech is made in the House of Representatives during the Address in Reply debate.

The Address in Reply debate is a formal communication from the House to the sovereign or the Governor-General. This debate generally occurs at the start of each parliament to thank the Governor-General for his or her opening speech.

The Address in Reply is usually spread over several sittings and allows members to speak on any matter they wish for up to 20 minutes. It is customary for members to make their first speech during this debate in the House of Representatives.

### *We're all ears*

There is a convention in the House that a first speech is heard without interjection or interruption, and the Speaker normally draws the attention of the House to the fact that a member is making a first speech.

Although there have been occasions when a member's first speech has not been heard in silence, most of the time people remain quiet out of courtesy for the member.

In return for this courtesy, the member must follow a few conventions.

This includes keeping the speech succinct and uncontroversial, so as not to provoke interjection.

Members are also asked not be tediously repetitive or debate a matter which may be debated later in the sitting period.

It is also customary for members not to make unkind references to what others have said in their first speeches.

### *What they said*

With broader changes in Australian culture and more people entering politics from non-traditional backgrounds, it should come as no surprise that a wide variety of views and ideals are expressed in first speeches.



Cartoon: Pat Campbell



SPEAK UP: *An MP's first speech is a significant occasion.*  
Photo: AUSPIC

On 26 October 2010, Australia's youngest-ever MP, Wyatt Roy (Longman, Qld), declared in his first speech: "I am not a young member of parliament; I am a member of parliament who happens to be young."

The first Indigenous member in the House of Representatives, Ken Wyatt (Hasluck, WA) said "there is no 'one size fits all' solution to deal with any social issue".

Both the Prime Minister and Opposition Leader spoke about their guiding philosophies during their first speeches. In November 1998, Julia Gillard (Lalor, Vic) said "we stand for the right of ordinary Australians – those who have neither wealth nor power – to a fair go". In May 1994, Tony Abbott said: "I place on record my deep conviction that, nourished by the past and inspired by our great ideals, there is no limit to what Australia can achieve."

And commenting on the unique opportunity afforded to each member in a first speech, the current Speaker of the House of Representatives Harry Jenkins (Scullin, Vic) said in April 1996, "it is a pity that the time allotted for me to speak is so relatively short, especially when one has such an attentive audience".

## [www.aph.gov.au/myfirstspeech](http://www.aph.gov.au/myfirstspeech)

### OVER TO YOU...



#### *My First Speech competition*

If you are an Australian secondary student enrolled in years 10 to 12, you are invited to write your own first speech then present your speech on video. It is part of a new competition run by the Australian parliament and you can submit your video to the parliament for judging. The winning video will be incorporated into an exhibition at Parliament House in Canberra and the winner and runner-up will be flown to Canberra for the launch. The winner will also receive a cash prize of \$250 for themselves and \$500 for their school, with the runner-up receiving \$100 for themselves and \$250 for their school.

*For more on the work, procedures and history of the House of Representatives, you can get the House of Representatives history pack 'A House for the Nation', including cd-rom encyclopaedia, four episode documentary and study guide, for \$55 (including GST). To order: email [news@aph.gov.au](mailto:news@aph.gov.au) or phone freecall 1800 139 299.*

### OVER TO YOU...

#### *Record your first speech*

Imagine you are a newly elected member of the House of Representatives. Write a three minute speech about an issue or issues you feel passionate about. It could be of interest to the people in your area or something you want to communicate to the federal parliament and to the people of Australia. Record yourself presenting the speech on video and send your entry on CD or DVD to the International and Community Relations Office, PO Box 6021, Parliament House, Canberra ACT 2600. Entries close Thursday 16 June 2011.

For inspiration, ideas and more details go to the competition website: [www.aph.gov.au/myfirstspeech](http://www.aph.gov.au/myfirstspeech)



DEBUT: Wyatt Roy, the youngest member of the House of Representatives, making his first speech. Photo: aapone