



## We have a voice

Three young Australians have had their voices heard at Parliament House in Canberra.

It was the kind of reception usually reserved for world leaders.

In the middle of Question Time, Speaker Harry Jenkins announced that seated in the public galleries were three young Australians who were the winners of the inaugural House of Representatives 'My First Speech' competition.

Applause from MPs and the public echoed throughout the chamber as the three teenagers from Canberra, Brisbane and Terranora in northern New South Wales stood up from their seats to acknowledge the congratulations.

The 'My First Speech' competition asked year 10 to 12 students to write and video a three minute speech as if it was their first speech as a member of the House of Representatives.

The competition attracted 176 entries as students from 68 schools throughout Australia gave a loud and clear message that they have a voice worth listening to.

The winner was Jeeven Nadekumar, a year 12 student from Marist College Canberra, with year 12 student Timothy Lo Surdo from Brisbane State High School second

and Penelope Meeves, a year 10 student from Lindisfarne Anglican Grammar School, Terranora, the third placegetter.

The entries were judged by the chair and deputy chair of the House of Representatives Education Committee, Amanda Rishworth (Kingston, SA) and Rowan Ramsey (Grey, SA), and the Seven Network's political editor, Mark Riley.

As well as selecting the three winning entries, the judges highly commended Mathew Makot of St Patrick's College in Shorncliffe, Queensland, who spoke about his life as a former child soldier from Sudan and his experience as a refugee coming to this country.

As part of their prize, the three winners were given the opportunity to deliver their first speeches in front of MPs at Parliament House when the Speaker launched the 'My First Speech' exhibition showcasing the competition entries.

In his winning speech, Jeeven Nadekumar spoke about his strong belief in the ideal of a 'fair go'.

"Since I was a child, I have valued social justice because it was the reason

my parents and wider family began a life in this country," he said. "In this parliament I want to ensure that the rights of all Australians and the rights of those who come to this country, like my family, are upheld."

Following the exhibition launch, Jeeven, Timothy and Penelope met Prime Minister Julia Gillard in her office, where they had the opportunity to talk about some of the issues they raised in their speeches such as the environment, population policy, and the importance of standing up for what you believe in.

They also met with Australia's first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives, Ken Wyatt (Hasluck, WA), who has loaned to the exhibition the Boohka (kangaroo skin cloak) that was presented to him by Noongar Elders and that he wore when he made his first speech to the House in September last year.

The exhibition is on until the end of August in the Presiding Officers Exhibition Area on the first floor of Parliament House in Canberra.

The winning entries can be viewed and read on the competition website at: [www.aph.gov.au/myfirstspeech](http://www.aph.gov.au/myfirstspeech)