



PRIME MINISTER

FOR PRESS

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ADDRESS AT PARLIAMENTARY LUNCH TO FAREWELL THE GOVERNOR GENERAL

Your Excellency, we are delighted to be with you and Lady Kerr today. As Prime Minister, I know I speak for the overwhelming majority of Australians in saying that you have carried out the duties of your office with dignity, calm, and integrity.

Sir, you are respected by Australians. You are respected for your personal strength, your courage and your determination. This strength and resolve-characteristics displayed throughout your life - was never more publicly evident than early in your term of office with the loss of your first wife. I and my colleagues greatly admired the way you did not allow that time of personal suffering to diminish - in any way - your utter commitment to carrying out your duties.

You set standards of a high order. You have never allowed yourself to be distracted from carrying out the tasks of the Queen's representative. You have faced some difficult times, but you have always faced them with dignity. I do regret that the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues have not seen fit to attend this Parliamentary function.

Political debate in Australia is vigorous and criticism harsh. This is a fact of politics. Politicians - of all political persuasions, and at all levels - live with the rough and tumble of political debate. We learn to accept it. But beyond this conflict, and beyond that competition, the politician in a democratic society has a cardinal responsibility to unite, a responsibility not to divide. It is his task to strengthen the common bonds that make society workable, not to erode them. The personal bitterness that has manifested itself in the kind of boycott evident here today, has no place in Australian parliamentary life. It has no place in Australian politics.

Your Excellency, you are one of a group of outstanding men who have represented Her Majesty in Australia. Your achievements in law and administration prior to your appointment as Governor General in 1974 marked you as an outstanding Australian. As Governor General, your integrity, and your commitment to this country and to the freedom of all Australians, has added immeasurably to that stature.

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The ultimate role of the Monarch is to ensure that the country is governed within the terms of the Constitution - a cardinal principle of which is the supremacy of Parliament, and through it the people, over the Executive. In this way, the Monarchy is the ultimate protector of the people. The residual powers of the Monarchy are few and rarely used - but one instance when they may properly be called upon arises when the Executive tries to usurp the role of the Parliament. Any attempt, for example, by the Executive to continue to govern without appropriation of funds by Parliament demands that the supremacy of Parliament and of the people be upheld.

That is the exceptional situation you had to face in 1975, and I believe quite certainly history will judge you a faithful servant of the Constitution who discharged his responsibilities under the Constitution in a time of exceptional difficulty.

Your Excellency, I am unaware as to whether you intend to write memoirs. If you were to do so, I am sure there would be some passing interest in them. It is fair to say that distinguished Australians have traditionally - in time - recorded their own account of their public achievements. I hope, Sir, that one day we may have a chance to read your account of an important and fascinating period.

My comments today would not be complete without special mention of Lady Kerr. I know that Lady Kerr has stood beside you throughout the difficult times, and has been a source of strength and encouragement. We all, in public life especially, owe much to our wives. They endure what we endure yet are always ready to lend willing support, sympathy and understanding. Lady Kerr has certainly fulfilled this role.

Your Excellency, on behalf of the Government and the people throughout Australia who think so highly of both of you, can I offer my sincere wish for many useful and enjoyable years ahead. You have made a significant contribution for many years to Australia's development.

I know you will continue to apply your talents to the good of our country and the benefit of all Australians.
