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**PRIME MINISTER**

CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

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**PARLIAMENTARY DINNER ON THE OCCASION  
OF THE FIRST SITTINGS IN THE  
NEW PARLIAMENT HOUSE  
MONDAY, 22 AUGUST 1988**

Excellencies,  
Madam Speaker,  
Mr President,  
Distinguished guests,  
Parliamentary colleagues past and present,  
Representatives of Australian Parliaments and  
of Parliaments throughout the World  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a pleasure to welcome you all to Australia's new Parliament House on the day of Parliament's first meeting here.

According to the architects, this building has been constructed to last for two hundred years.

And after all the effort and disruption of moving from our former Parliament, I am sure we will all appreciate that breathing space.

This Great Hall has already proven its worth as the ceremonial heart of our new and permanent Parliament House.

It was here that the Queen opened this building on 9 May, and it was here that Parliament has already hosted a number of important functions for foreign leaders visiting Australia to participate in our Bicentennial celebrations - the King and Queen of Spain, and the Prime Ministers of Japan, Ireland, the United Kingdom and last week New Zealand.

So it is high time that tonight the guest of honour in Parliament's Great Hall be Parliament itself - members of Parliament, presiding officers, parliamentary staff: in short the men and women who today embody and bear the responsibility for upholding the great institution of Parliamentary democracy.

Those of our guests tonight who are making their first visit to Canberra may appreciate less vividly than those who return here each Parliamentary session just how far Canberra has come since the first sitting was held in the old building in 1927.

As we take up office in a great new building situated in the heart of a vigorous and established city, we would do well to recall that six decades ago the first Secretary of the Prime Minister's Department could comment that the best view of Canberra is "from the back of the departing train".

An historian of Canberra has written that in 1927 Parliament House and East and West Blocks stood out starkly in a dusty plain criss-crossed with roads seemingly leading nowhere, through paddocks fully planted with trees.

The population of Canberra then was just under 6,000 people.

A timber cottage could be rented for two pounds a week.

And remuneration of Federal politicians stood at just under 10 pounds a week.

That salary may seem inadequate - but we must remember that those were prohibition days and liquor could not legally be purchased in Canberra!

For those Members and Senators who became accustomed to working out of offices the size of broom closets in the old building, the dimensions of this new building and the quality of its finish will take some getting used to.

Those who enjoyed the cheek by jowl intimacy which the old place enforced - and I count myself among them - will have to make sure the new building captures and retains some of that atmosphere.

And even though there have been one or two teething problems - maybe more than two - I am confident the new building will succeed in becoming as effective and as friendly as the old one was.

It was very fitting that when Parliament met this afternoon we passed a resolution extending our thanks to all those men and women whose care and dedication have created a building of magnificent qualities.

We also passed a motion expressing our thanks to all those people, from within Australia and from overseas, whose gifts adorn this building. It is my pleasure to echo those thanks tonight in particular to the representatives of foreign Parliaments present this evening.

As a symbol of the growth of Canberra, as a proof of our national confidence, above all as a solid and enduring testament of our commitment to the system of parliamentary democracy, the importance of this building cannot be overstated.

When I spoke at the official opening of this building in May I made mention of the ghosts or spirits of the past - the earliest inhabitants of this region the Aboriginal people, those who created the Australian Federation and who served in the first Parliament House in Melbourne, and those of our more immediate predecessors who served the Australian people as Members of Parliament in what was courageously, and as it turned out accurately, termed the provisional Parliament House.

The distinguished presence of those parliamentary spirits places a heavy responsibility on those of us who are their successors.

It will be our job over this and succeeding sessions to imbue this new building with the best elements of their robust and vigorous parliamentary tradition.

We must ensure the continued development of this nation as a home for all Australians and for all who come to live in this country. I believe it is a fundamental strength of our legal and political institutions, and of our community at large, that we have an openness, a tolerance and an encouragement of individual expression and endeavour which will enable us successfully to meet the many challenges awaiting Australia in the future.

It is worth recalling that one of the significant design features of this Parliament House is its invitation to visitors to observe, and to participate in, the democratic process. I hope that as many Australians as possible will accept that invitation. And it is encouraging to know that thousands and thousands of people from around Australia and from overseas have already done so.

I said at the outset that the architects intended this building to last for two hundred years.

I am sure it will - though, of course, none of us will be here to find out.

In two hundred years time, when Australians celebrate their quater-centenary, the four hundredth anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet - they will perhaps pause to look at the events of the Bicentennial.

No doubt our clothing and speech will look quaint to our successors and many of the political issues which excite us today will have receded out of sight.

But these successors will I hope appreciate at least one fact about us: the fact that we in 1988 were possessed of such a commitment to the principles of democratic government that we were prepared to build this building to enshrine and to advance those principles.

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Today, after all the planning, all the hard work of design and construction, all the fitting out, and all the rigors of the move from the old Parliament House, we completed the ceremonial elements of the initiation of this new building.

Tomorrow we will be getting down to the real business of this new building.

As we go about that business, we must make good the underlying principle of these democratic chambers: that a people are best governed when they govern themselves.