



NORTHERN TERRITORY
***of* AUSTRALIA**

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Member for Fong Lim

HANSARD EXTRACT

HON JOHN HOWARD AC

THURSDAY 31 JULY 2025

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fill our lives with hope and prosperity. Well done to President Rubina Bhardwaj and the committee members for the event.

I make special mention of the Super Mini Teej winner for 2025, Miral Sharma. Miral is only five years old, and she stole the hearts of everybody at the event. The Mini Teej winner 2025, Ajooni Challana, also did an exceptional job of representing her beautiful culture. As they said, crowned with absolute grace, was Ms Teej 2025 Sharanpreet Kaur Pannu. Congratulations. I have to say that watching those young women demonstrate the culture and the dance of their communities was truly wonderful. I was jealous because there was no way I would ever be that graceful, but there you go.

I will speak about something dear to my heart and recognise the recipients of my Larrakeyah Primary School citizenship awards. A big congratulations goes to Christos Hatzivalamis for excelling in STEAM day and using the four Cs; Nameerah Jahan for consistently displaying the school values of respect, responsibility and achievement; and Digby Preece for outstanding problem-solving during the school's sleepover and in the classroom. I am not sure what the problems were that he solved in the sleepover, but I might need to find out.

I also recognise the recipients of my St Mary's Catholic Primary School citizenship awards: Eulalie Wenzel, for always demonstrating kindness by being a welcoming and inclusive friend, especially to new students joining the school; Vahaan Rakhra, for his care and consideration of members of the school community; Sunday McAloon, for showing care and compassion to her fellow students; and Chloe Munday, for her welcoming and kind attitude to her fellow students.

A big congratulations to a member of our Port Darwin community, young Joshua Harrington, who received the Chief Minister's Youth Volunteer of the Year Award. It is presented in celebration of an individual aged 14 to 27 years who has made an outstanding voluntary commitment and who, through their volunteering, has positively impacted on the lives of others. Joshua received this recognition for his exceptional volunteer leadership skills within St John NT, particularly as the Secretary of the St John NT Youth Round Table since its inception in early 2024.

I have previously acknowledged the amazing achievements of local boxer Stacey Barnes who represented the Northern Territory in a boxing tournament in Sydney earlier in the year. Stacey continues to excel in her boxing career. Following her win in Sydney she won her division at the Club Championships in Adelaide in May. She has reached super legend status as she goes from strength to strength in not only her boxing career but also her ongoing efforts as a cancer survivor to raise awareness of ovarian cancer.

Finally, I give a big shout-out to Julian Barry from Darwin Family Law, who is responsible for me getting on my pushbike for the first time in a very long time to undertake what, quite frankly, I thought might be the death of me—the 49-kilometre Sunbuild Gran Fondo Pollie Pedal. Julian sponsors this event, which is part of the larger Sunbuild Gran Fondo event, by generously donating \$500 to the charity of choice of any politician who manages to complete the event.

My chosen charity was Total Recreation, a fabulous charity that works to ensure people living with a disability get to enjoy activities like the Gran Fondo that most of us take for granted—so maybe not the Gran Fondo; I am not sure that the team members at Total Recreation would want to cycle for 49 kilometres. I could be wrong; they might want to do it. I will have to ask them. Julian, a big thank you for the \$500 donated to Total Recreation and your words of encouragement.

Thanks to my colleagues who encouraged me along the way: Hon Lia Finocchiaro; Hon Gerard Maley; Hon Josh Burgoyne; Hon Jinson Charls; Matt Kerle MLA and Khoda Patel MLA; as well as the members of the crossbench, Justine Davis MLA and Kat McNamara MLA, who gave me a bit of a hoo-ha as they whizzed past me on their way back the other way. I made it in the end, and I am pleased.

I think I committed to do it again next year; I am not sure, because I was too exhausted to recall the conversation at the end of that momentous event. No, I have not got on my bike since I put it back in the shed after the end of the race.

Dr RAHMAN (Fong Lim): Madam Speaker, last Saturday Rt Hon John Winston Howard AC turned 86. He was the 25th Prime Minister of Australia from 1996 to 2007. His 11-year tenure as PM was the second longest in Australian history. His birthday was noted by people across the political spectrum, and for good reason.

It is really only with the passage of time that people are starting to appreciate the totality of his contribution to Australian society, and that includes me. His Prime Ministership corresponded with my time as a student

at the University of Sydney. I was not particularly fond of him then, I must confess, while I was busy being a student politician.

Tonight I pay tribute to and reflect on his legacy, most unusually with a focus on his time in opposition and his early Prime Ministership. I do so because his leadership teaches us that enduring reforms come from establishing bipartisan consensus. The hard work that happens behind the scenes is what makes things stick. I have limited time to make these reflections, so I will confine my remarks to just two examples. I could have chosen from many.

The first is in relation to economic reform. Much is made of the Hawke–Keating government’s economic reforms of the 1980s—the floating of the dollar, the dismantling of protectionist tariffs, compulsory superannuation and so forth. Less widely remembered is the role of John Howard as Treasurer in the period preceding that. Over the course of the 1980s the Liberal Party came to accept those free-market policies in spite of itself. John Howard’s advocacy as Treasurer, against the wishes of then Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser, are what led to fundamentally decentralisation of wage fixation, financial deregulation, a broad-based indirect tax and the rejection of counter-cyclical fiscal policy. The modern Australian economy owes an enormous debt of gratitude to John Howard, as much as to Hawke and Keating for their willingness to cooperate with government behind the scenes. Arguably this was to his huge initial political detriment. That takes real political courage.

The second case study I draw on is in relation to public safety reform. Many people in this House will not have the memory of April 1996 when 35 people were killed by a gunman at Port Arthur Historic Site in Tasmania. It remains the worst mass shooting that was ever committed by one person in Australia’s history. The massacre received significant media attention around the world at the time.

In the aftermath of it there was great focus on access to firearms. Less than two weeks after the Port Arthur shooting, the newly elected conservative Howard government had secured agreement for a nationwide bipartisan consensus on gun law reform. That reform would require all states and territories, which had responsibility under the Constitution for licensing and possession of firearms, to pass uniform legislation to restrict and control the sale and ownership of certain types of firearms. The Commonwealth similarly had responsibility for trade and would restrict the import of those firearms.

It is worth going back to the context of this because people forget the background. In 1987 there were killings in Melbourne and then Prime Minister Bob Hawke tried, through the National Committee on Violence, in 1988 to do something about this, but fundamentally conceded in 1991 on television that he did not have the constitutional power to pass the laws necessary to keep people safe. Paul Keating assumed the Prime Ministership in 1991. Whatever appetite there was for change was not seen through after the Hawke years. Another shooting in 1993 in Sydney resulted in the Safer Australia policy. Most commentators will fairly admit that also led to little substantive change.

In that political context it is remarkable to think that the conservative Coalition government, led by John Howard, which was elected in March 1996 and won a landslide victory, securing 94 of 148 seats in the House of Reps, ending 13 years of Labor government, chose then to stop Australia from replicating what John Howard regarded as American gun culture. In a prominent speech delivered in June 1995 he said:

Whilst making proper allowance for legitimate sporting and recreational activities and the proper needs of our rural community, every effort should be made to limit the carrying of guns in Australia.

John Howard was put to the test and called upon by the Coalition for Gun Control to show leadership, and he did. He was also urged on by the Liberal government in Tasmania at the time, which was a coalition Liberal–Greens government. Can you imagine that such a thing might exist in this day and age?

The Australian Parliament sat for the first time two days after the Port Arthur shooting. In his first speech to parliament as Prime Minister, John Howard moved a condolence motion and committed to pursuing gun reform for the betterment of Australia. His response was:

I will do all that I humanly can as leader of the government to bring about a significant improvement (to gun laws) and to address some of the great deficiencies that exist.

Those proposed reforms could not happen overnight, but for the fact that the Howard government was willing to work with people like Daryl Smeaton, the senior private secretary to several Labor ministers in the Hawke–Keating government, who knew how to tackle gun reform. Bipartisan cooperation is what resulted in those changes being made.

On 6 May, under the auspices of the Australasian Police Ministers Council, the federal Cabinet endorsed a draft policy for effective nationwide gun and firearms control. That included ruling, under that policy, all gun owners would require a licence; firearms would need to be registered; and gun owners would need a genuine reason for owning their firearms such as sport, farming or hunting—and a genuine reason did not include self-defence. Lots of people opposed that and did not want to pay a political price and so, as a consequence, did not want to be involved, but ultimately, Premier Bob Carr, Tasmanian Premier Tony Rundle and everybody fell into line in the national interest.

What is the legacy of these reforms? In the 15 years preceding gun reform, Australia saw 14 mass shootings in which a total of 117 people died. In the 20 years that followed, no mass public shootings occurred in Australia. In the years after Port Arthur, there was also a significant reduction in fatal shootings of fewer than five people, as well as a decline in suicide by firearm.

Implementation of the gun reforms enhanced John Howard's reputation and played a role in establishing him in the popular imagination as a strong and decisive leader with empathy and determination. It is prudent to mention that Rob Borbidge, who was the Queensland Premier at the time, paid the ultimate price in supporting the right thing to do. Howard said of Borbidge:

He never wavered. He was defeated at the next election and the strength of the One Nation vote in the 1998 Queensland election was the main reason why he lost. He paid the heaviest price of all and I've always acknowledged his courage.

Today is a significant anniversary for me. Two years ago I left the UK to return to Darwin to try, in my own small way, to make a contribution towards turning around the fortunes of the Northern Territory.

In March 2022 when I visited the Territory, I found the place topsy-turvy, with a lack of viable political opposition, an upside-down civil service with more generals than soldiers and oppressive economic conditions which were making it impossible for people to succeed and have opportunity in the Northern Territory. I am pleased to note that there are small signs of improvement across a range of metrics in the Northern Territory, but much remains to be done. Little will be achieved unless we can work together.

I was no great fan of John Howard when I was a university student. With the passage of time, I have come to understand that people like John Howard have done things that I looked over in the background. They laid the foundations for modern Australia in many ways. On their 86th birthdays, I would love to reflect equally on the contributions of other great political leaders across Australia who have set up our country by having respect for the game and our institutions and by protecting our parliaments and their conventions.

It is incumbent on all of us in this place to do the same so that we might also improve the prospects for Territorians and afford them all opportunity. We could all stand to learn from the example of John Howard, a great Liberal statesman and a great Australian leader.

Mr KERLE (Blain): Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, I deliver a message from the Member for Drysdale. He says:

'Dear Chamber,

'Oh, how I've missed you this week. First and foremost, I've missed you, Madam Speaker. The void simply cannot be filled through a screen. I've watched where I could and pass on some notable mentions.

'To the Member for Arafura, your Bert and Ernie had me genuinely laughing. The Member for Blain and I will be squabbling over who's who, but I certainly enjoyed it.

'To the Member for Karama, fine form on your CLP award set-up. I look forward to hosting the Member for Gwoja as a special guest at our CLP AGM should the vote pass.

'Yes, my cinematic edit on Facebook seems to have caused a bit of turbulence. The Greens are losing altitude, Labor has opened fire and somehow, despite lying in my sick bed, I managed to earn a gentle rebuke from the Speaker. I hope even my political opponents can appreciate that kind of skill. Perhaps I am the most mischievous Ernie after all.

'To the Member for Johnston, if all is fair in love and war, just remember there is always more love than war in this heart for you, my friend.