



My first speech

Does the thought of public speaking scare you? How about standing up so the whole country can hear you?

High school students across Australia took up the challenge - entering a competition that asked them to imagine themselves as a newly elected MP making their very first speech in the chamber.

Story: Pip Blackwood



WINNERS OF MY FIRST SPEECH:

(Top, left to right)

Chay Conaglen (Rockhampton, Qld)

Courtney Sinclair (Elimbah, Qld)

Zachary August (Waverley, NSW)

When we see our politicians on the news, they're often shown in passionate debate in the House, seasoned legislators who seem at home in the chamber. But before they become caught up with committees and get busy with bills, new Members must make their first speech to the House. This is the theme for the My First Speech competition, an event run by the Department of the House of Representatives. High school students were asked to imagine themselves as a newly elected Member of Parliament and write and deliver a speech on issues they are passionate about.

A Member's first speech, previously referred to as a maiden speech, is a tradition that originated in the British House of Commons. It is a significant occasion and an opportunity for a new Member to outline to Parliament what they hope to achieve.

Members' first speeches are as diverse as the people they represent in their electorates. Many Members choose to express their political views and goals in their first speeches 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.

There is a convention in the House that a first speech is heard without interjection or interruption, and the Chair normally draws the attention of the House to the fact that a Member is making a first speech. In return for this courtesy, the Member must follow a few conventions. This includes keeping their speech succinct and uncontroversial, so as not to provoke interjection.

The winner of the 2014 My First Speech competition is Chay Conaglen from Rockhampton, Queensland. Chay's heartfelt delivery won the judges over as he spoke about his own personal story, Australia's economic policy, the climate change debate and our relationships with India and China.

Second and third placed in the competition were Courtney Sinclair of Elimbah in Queensland and Zachary August from Waverley in NSW.

All three were flown to Canberra to meet the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Hon Bronwyn Bishop (Mackellar, NSW), and present their speeches live at Parliament House in front of many MPs.

Over 150 students entered the competition. All of the 2014 entries are featured in a public exhibition at Parliament House running to March 2015. ■

2014 My First Speech Competition - 1st place

Chay Conaglen, Rockhampton, Qld



Chay Conaglen: Thank you, Madam Speaker. I remember back to when I was a little boy seeing this great big green room on the television screen, I didn't know what it was or why it was on my TV screen, but I remember staring at it in sheer amazement of its grandness. I now know what this place is, and what it represents, yet it still astounds me. This great building, Parliament House, represents the Australian people, it represents democracy at its greatest and most purest form and I am so humbled to have been given the opportunity to represent the people of Capricornia in this great place.

Like many Australians I am from humble beginnings. I was raised by my beautiful mother and shared my childhood with my little brother and sister. My family and I have been through some tough times along the way, but we have always come out shining. My mother did her best to give us kids a great upbringing, and she did this in the face of domestic violence and poverty. My mother has taught me everything I know and everything I wish to be. My past has shaped me into a true, hardworking and committed Australian, and I believe my life is a clear illustration of

how anyone, irrespective of their background, can achieve in life.

Our nation requires strong economic policy and planning if we wish to see our economy prosper into the future. We must do this by strengthening our relationships with the emerging powers of Asia, such as China and India. We must ensure that we take an active stance on climate change, and do our best to ensure the health of this planet for generations to come. We must also ensure that we continue to create opportunities for all Australians by investing wisely in education, training and infrastructure.

I will work to the best of my ability to ensure all Australians can benefit from our great economy. We can do this because we are Australian, and together the things we can achieve are simply astounding. If you put your mind to it you can do anything, because our nation is a great place, and it doesn't matter where you are from, or how disadvantaged you have been in life, because opportunities are sprouting up everywhere for all Australians to grab a hold of. And as long as I am a member of the Australian parliament the Australian people can be assured that this will never ever change.

Famous firsts



William Groom *Australia's first First Speech*

Publican. Newspaperman. Convict.

William Groom was all three. When the Australian Parliament opened for the first time in 1901, Mr Groom moved the address-in-reply to the Governor-General immediately prior to delivering his speech. There are a number of references to it being the first 'substantial' speech made in Parliament, and it can be considered as the first 'maiden' speech (as it was then known).

So what did Mr Groom talk about?

Australia had just become a Federation. He was concerned there wouldn't be enough money to run the country (he felt the cost estimate fell two million pounds short). A White Australia, the end of kanaka labour from the South Sea Islands and the introduction of German-style pension schemes also all rated a mention.

Although Mr Groom was initially worried about Federation he was hopeful about the new system and the way the members of the House would behave, closing with:

"I feel assured, however, from what I know of my fellow members, that every matter coming before us will receive the gravest consideration and the most matured deliberation, and I fervently hope that upon all occasions our deliberations and discussions will be of such a character that people may point to us with pride, and say that we are worthy of the great charter which Great Britain has conferred upon us."



Julia Gillard *Australia's first female Prime Minister*

Julia Gillard is famous for being Australia's first female Prime Minister. But, like all politicians she had to start somewhere. Ms Gillard was elected to the seat of Lalor, Victoria in 1998. Although a backbencher to begin with, many of the themes Ms Gillard touches on in her first speech to Parliament are issues she remains passionate about today - such as women in leadership and the importance of educational opportunities.

It would be over a decade before she became PM herself yet Ms Gillard references the work of previous prime ministers from her party - reflecting how their policies helped both her personally and the community she represents.



Ken Wyatt *Australia's first Indigenous MP*

In 2010, Ken Wyatt became the first Indigenous Member of the House after he was elected to the WA seat of Hasluck. Mr Wyatt wore a bookha, the traditional cloak of the Nyungar people made from kangaroo skin.

During his speech, which was witnessed by Aboriginal elders, Mr Wyatt said he stood in the House as an equal to all other MPs with 'deep and mixed' emotions.

He also paid tribute to his constituents for creating the historic moment which saw him elected and spoke about the path that led him to federal parliament.



Terri Butler *The most recent First Speech*

Holding the seat of Griffith on Brisbane's south-side (the electorate of former Prime Minister Kevin Rudd) Terri Butler is the most recent MP to have made a first speech.

Ms Butler spoke of her grandparents and parents, her upbringing and her belief that our pathway to future prosperity is built on the foundations of education and training.

