

**The Speaker of the
House of Representatives**

2nd Edition

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*Entrance to the Speaker's Suite
House of Representatives Parliament House*



THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Speakership is the most important office in the House of Representatives and the Speaker, the principal office holder. He or she is the House's representative or spokesperson, the chair of its meetings and its "Minister" in respect of its administration and support services. Because the Speaker chairs or presides over the meetings of the House he or she is also referred to as the House's Presiding Officer.

THE TITLE "SPEAKER" AND ORIGIN OF THE OFFICE

The name "Speaker" dates back to the early history of the House of Commons in the United Kingdom. "Mr Speaker" was originally more a job description than a title. The Speaker was the Member of Parliament who was chosen by other Members to speak for them—that is, to be their mouthpiece or spokesman—particularly in the House's dealings with the King. The first recorded use of the term "Speaker" was 1377 (Sir Thomas Hungerford) though a title with similar meaning—"parlour" or "prolocutor" was used from 1258.

EARLY DEVELOPMENT OF THE OFFICE

At the time the King was very powerful, and usually only called the Parliament together in order to get it to agree to pay taxes. It was the Speaker's task to report the decisions of the House of Commons to the King. This could be dangerous if the decision was not one the King wanted to hear—for example, if the House did not approve the amount of tax demanded, or made conditions for its approval. Several early Speakers were beheaded after displeasing the King. Indeed, between 1399 and 1535 no fewer than seven Speakers were beheaded and another was "murdered". The traditional token reluctance shown by a Member on being elected Speaker dates from this time, when a Member's struggle not to be physically forced into the Chair could have been completely genuine. The practice in the House of Representatives that the newly elected Speaker is escorted to the Chair by his supporters derives from this tradition.

CONTINUING EVOLUTION OF THE ROLE

The early history of the Speakership of the House of Commons includes Speakers whose chief allegiance was to the Crown, but others who courageously defended the rights of the House. A famous statement of the ideal of the Speaker's role was made by Speaker Lenthell in 1642. When King Charles I entered the Commons chamber to arrest five Members for treason, Speaker Lenthall told him:

May it please Your Majesty, I have neither eyes to see, nor tongue to speak in this place, but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am here ...



This assertion of the privileges of the House against the King is regarded as having established the principle that the Speaker is the servant of the House and not of the Crown/Executive. The role of spokesperson for the House continues although additional functions have been added.

THE SPEAKERSHIP IN AUSTRALIA

When Britain established the Australian colonies during the 18th and 19th centuries, the system of parliamentary government of the home country was one of many institutions which were successfully transplanted. Like other transplants, it has developed independently while continuing to express its origins.



*The Chamber
of the House
of Representatives*

It has been argued that the provisions for legislative power outlined in the Australian Constitution derive from Washington as well as Westminster—hence the term “Washminster”. This argument does not hold for the speakership. The origins of the colonial and later state and federal Speakers are firmly Westminster, though they have clearly evolved to meet a different set of social and political factors.

Most comparisons made between the speakerships of the House of Commons and the House of Representatives appear to reflect adversely on the independence of the Australian Speaker. This is because critics fail to appreciate the very different political environment in which Australian Speakers must operate. A former Speaker, the Rt Hon Sir Billy



Snedden, complained that the Australian system requires of its Speaker impartiality yet continued a system which obstructs it. The House of Representatives has fewer than one quarter the number of members of the House of Commons. The threat of a hung parliament is never absent and the concept of a Speaker standing aside from party politics is not consistent with this political reality. Moreover Australia has a strong tradition that all Members, regardless of any office he or she might hold, support the electorate. At a more practical level, a Speaker must remain politically active if he/she is to hope for re-election in the electorate—a challenge the Speaker at Westminster does not face.

PARTY INVOLVEMENT AND IMPARTIALITY OF THE CHAIR

As noted above, the Speaker remains a member of his or her political party, and may choose to attend party meetings. Speakers also need to contest their seat in an election.

In the United Kingdom the convention of the Speaker being above party has been established for over a hundred years and in the House of Commons the Speaker abandons all party loyalties. When governments change, the current Speaker is re-elected to office, and at general elections a Speaker is usually unopposed by the major parties. This development has not been transposed to Australia, although from time to time people have proposed that a similar arrangement should be introduced here.

In practice the office of Speaker is normally filled by the nominee of the governing party or parties. Although the Speakership in Australia is regarded as a political appointment, Speakers keep themselves detached from government activity and attempt to carry out their duties with impartiality.

Members are entitled to expect that, even though the Speaker belongs to and is nominated to the position by a political party, his or her functions will be carried out impartially. At the same time a Speaker is entitled to expect support from all Members regardless of their party.

IMPORTANCE OF THE ROLE OF SPEAKER

It is because the Speaker represents the House of Representatives, which itself represents the people of Australia, that the person occupying the position of Speaker is treated with honour and dignity. The importance of the role is acknowledged by the Speaker's ranking in the Australian Order of Precedence (a formal list used to determine issues of protocol at official functions), where it ranks (with the President of the Senate) directly after the Governor-General and State Governors, the Prime Minister, and a State Premier within that Premier's State. While in office the Speaker is addressed by the title "Honourable"—and with the Governor-General's approval this title may be retained for life.





Dragging the newly elected Speaker to the Chair of the House is a historic link to the Speakership at Westminster where several centuries ago a Speaker might well have been reluctant to undertake such an office.

THE ELECTION OF THE SPEAKER

Section 35 of the Constitution states that “The House of Representatives shall, before proceeding to the despatch of any other business, choose a Member to be the Speaker of the House”. The process for choosing the Speaker is set down in detail in the standing orders of the House. When there is more than one candidate the Speaker is elected by Members in a secret ballot, but often (in about 50 per cent of cases) the Member nominated is unopposed. An election for Speaker is conducted at the beginning of each Parliament even if the previous Speaker is still available. However, the Speaker of the previous Parliament may be re-elected.

The Speaker is elected for the duration of a Parliament. At the dissolution of the House before a general election Members of the House, including the Speaker, technically cease to be Members. However, so that important functions can be carried out the Speaker is considered, by law, to continue in office for administrative purposes until a Speaker is chosen in the next Parliament.

Normally the House selects as Speaker a Member who has had many years of experience of the Parliament and parliamentary procedure. The Speaker’s authority is derived from the House, to which his or her duty lies and to which he or she is answerable. Just as the Speaker is elected by the House, he or she may be removed from office by a vote of the House. However, a motion of lack of confidence in the Speaker is very unusual and none has ever been agreed to.



THE SPEAKER'S DEPUTIES

At the beginning of each Parliament after the Speaker has been elected the House elects Members to the positions of Deputy Speaker and Second Deputy Speaker. The Second Deputy Speaker must be a non-government Member.

The Speaker also appoints a panel of Members drawn from both sides of the House to serve in the Chair. The Deputy Speaker, Second Deputy Speaker and Speaker's panel members are all able to take the Chair in the House at the request of the Speaker. In practice an unofficial roster is maintained to provide occupants for the Chair throughout a sitting. While in the Chair they have virtually the same procedural powers and functions as the Speaker.

DRESS AND CEREMONIAL

The earliest Speakers wore the traditional black silk gown, full wig and lace ruffles at the sleeves and neck, on ceremonial occasions and when in the Chair. Despite the deference for tradition, nowadays in the Chamber and for ceremonial occasions Speakers from the non-Labor parties wear just a black gown over a business suit. Speakers from the Australian Labor Party have chosen to dispense with the gown.



Mace detail

THE MACE

The Mace symbolises the authority of the House and the Speaker. The Serjeant-at-Arms carries the Mace in front of the Speaker into the Chamber at the start of each sitting and it stays on the Table of the House throughout the sitting. The Mace also precedes the Speaker on ceremonial occasions, for example, to hear the Governor-General's speech at the opening of Parliament.

The House of Representatives used a Mace borrowed from the Victorian Legislative Assembly from 1901 to 1951. In November 1951 the current Mace was presented to the House by a delegation from the House of Commons at the direction of King George VI, to mark the Jubilee of the



Commonwealth Parliament. The design (at Australia's request) resembles that of the Mace used in the House of Commons. It is made from heavily gilded silver and the ornamentation includes symbols of the Australian Commonwealth and States as well as devices illustrating Australian achievement.



Ceremonial procession

IN THE CHAIR OF THE HOUSE

As Presiding Officer the Speaker chairs the meetings of the House and ensures they are conducted in an orderly manner and according to the provisions of the Constitution and the standing orders (written rules) of the House.

At the start of each day's sitting the Speaker reads the Prayers set out in the standing orders and then calls on the various items of business in the order set down in the standing orders.

The Speaker must ensure that the rules of parliamentary procedure are applied. The Speaker interprets and enforces the standing orders, responds to Members' points of order relating to them and gives rulings on procedure when necessary. For example, the Speaker is often called upon to decide whether remarks made in a speech about another Member are offensive, whether a Member's speech is relevant to the motion or legislation being debated or whether a particular motion or amendment is allowed to be moved, and when it may be moved.





The Speaker presiding over question time

The Speaker calls upon Members to speak in debates or to ask questions during question time. In doing so he or she seeks to share the opportunities evenly between the government and non-government Members. The Speaker also makes sure that backbenchers are not overlooked, despite the greater responsibilities of Ministers and opposition frontbenchers. An important part of the Speaker's task is to protect the rights of individuals and minorities in the House and make sure that everyone is treated fairly within the framework set by the rules.

The Speaker must maintain order during debate. While most proceedings are routine and without incident there are occasions when passions become inflamed, excessive interjections occur and the House becomes noisy and unruly. The standing orders provide disciplinary powers to enable the Speaker to maintain order. These vary in their severity and allow the Speaker to deal with breaches of order in the most appropriate manner. For a minor infringement a Member may merely be called to order or warned. For a more serious or repeated offence, a Member may be ordered to withdraw from the Chamber for one hour (sometimes unofficially referred to as being "sin binned") and, for a major offence or persistent defiance of the Chair, a Member may be "named" by the Chair and a motion for the Member's suspension (usually for 24 hours) moved.





Layout of the Chamber from the Speaker's perspective

The Speaker supervises rather than participates in proceedings. He or she makes statements or announcements to the House as necessary, but does not normally take part in debate and does not vote in the House except when numbers are equal, in which case the Speaker has a casting vote.

The Speaker spends a considerable part of each sitting day in the Chamber but because of other duties, is not there for all proceedings. When the Speaker is not present the Speaker's deputies take the Chair. The Speaker always takes the Chair during question time and for more important occasions, such as a Prime Minister's statement, the presentation of the Budget by the Treasurer and the Leader of the Opposition's speech in reply.



QUESTION TIME

The Speaker is most visible to the public during question time, as that is the only part of proceedings normally broadcast on television. [Complete coverage is possible if television channels wish to broadcast it and is available on some cable services. It is also possible to watch parliamentary proceedings live on the Internet.]

Question time starts at 2 pm every sitting day when the Speaker calls on “Questions without notice” and asks “Are there any questions?” Of course there always are, and the first call is always given to an opposition Member, often the Leader of the Opposition. The next question is from a government backbencher, and so on, alternating between non-government and government Members.

The Speaker’s task in the Chair during question time can be extremely challenging. This is the period when the intensity of partisan politics is clearly shown. Opposition questioners attempt to point out flaws in government administration. Government questioners are tempted to give Ministers opportunities to put government policies and actions in a favourable light and to embarrass the Opposition. The sometimes emotional and unruly debate during question time can be unsettling to some observers, but others defend its spirited nature as a sign of a healthy democracy where disagreement takes the form of verbal rather than physical conflict. It must be stressed that question time is not representative of proceedings in the House generally. Most debate is rather tame in contrast—probably that is one reason for there being less media attention.

During question time the Speaker often has to make rulings about acceptable language and behaviour, and about the nature of questions that can be asked, in accordance with the rules of the House. Where the Members concerned are unhappy about the Speaker’s decisions they may make repeated “points of order”.

In some matters, the Speaker’s hands are tied by the rules of the House. An example of this is the lack of rules about the nature of Ministers’ answers, which often leave questioners dissatisfied.

After question time questions can be asked to the Speaker about the administration of the Parliament. Strictly, that is all that should be asked, but Members often also ask questions about procedural matters.



OTHER FUNCTIONS AND DUTIES

Under the Constitution the Speaker is responsible for the issue of writs for by-elections. In addition he or she has a variety of specific duties laid down by a number of laws, and in particular by the Commonwealth Electoral Act.

The Speaker administers the oath or affirmation of allegiance to any Member not present at the opening of Parliament and to new Members elected during the course of a Parliament. (Most Members are sworn in by the Governor-General's deputy before the Speaker's election at the first sitting of the House after a general election). The Speaker is responsible for calling the House together for its next meeting if a time and date has not been fixed or if the time fixed needs to be changed.

The Speaker is a member of some parliamentary committees concerned with the operations of the Parliament, including the Joint Committee on the Broadcasting of Parliamentary Proceedings and the House Committee. With the President of the Senate, the Speaker is Joint President of the Commonwealth of Australia Branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, Joint President of the Australian Group of the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Chairman and Joint President of the Australian National Group of the Asia Pacific Parliamentary Forum.

CEREMONIAL AND REPRESENTATIONAL DUTIES

Apart from the Speaker's work in the Chamber, the most visible part of the duties occur on grand occasions. This part of the Speaker's role is perhaps closest to the origins of the Speaker's functions—namely, speaking on behalf of the House. In the parliamentary world the Speaker is the head of such hierarchy as exists, though this would be better described as the chief amongst equals. He or she takes precedence over the Prime Minister and Cabinet ministers on parliamentary occasions. This is reflected in some of the duties which fall to the Speaker.

The Speaker is the House's representative. He or she is the spokesperson for the House in its relations with the other parts of the Parliament—the Senate and the Sovereign (represented by the Governor-General), the other arms of government—the Executive and the Judiciary, and with other outside bodies and people. In this role Speakers are expected to maintain the authority of the House, and to protect its rights and privileges.





Speaker Hawker delivers the Address in Reply to the Governor-General

Official communications from and to the House are signed by and addressed to the Speaker. The Speaker receives delegations from other Parliaments and other visitors on behalf of the House. When important official guests such as Heads of State or Government from other countries address the House, the Speaker announces and introduces them. On formal occasions involving the House the Speaker plays a central ceremonial role.

In representing the House the Speaker represents and is responsible to the House and all of its Members, whether in government or opposition. He or she is not responsible to the Executive Government and seeks to preserve the House's independence from it.

Official visitors to the Parliament—most frequently distinguished visitors from overseas—are welcomed to the House by the Speaker, who rises from the Chair in the Chamber to announce distinguished visitors in order to pay his or her respects. This is the public face of the representational and ceremonial role of the Speaker. Behind the scenes much more is involved. The Speaker (and the President of the Senate) is frequently one of the “greeting party” to receive VIPs when they first arrive at Parliament House. Almost invariably, one of the “calls” made by visiting parliamentary delegations and distinguished individuals will be to the Speaker in his Parliament House office. These calls may be as simple as an informal chat with refreshments or, more formally, a ceremonial dinner or lunch complete with speeches.

Regardless of how formal the visit might be, the Speaker must be knowledgeable about the visitors themselves, their country and, particularly, of issues important in the bilateral relationship between Australia and the other country.





Speaker meeting with the Belgian Ambassador



Before each sitting commences the Speaker and Deputy Speaker meet informally with the Clerks to discuss the program

ADMINISTRATIVE RESPONSIBILITIES

The Speaker has overall responsibility for the administration of the House of Representatives and has a similar role in the Department of the House of Representatives as a Minister does in a government department. The Chief Executive Officer of the Department of the House of Representatives is the Clerk of the House, who is also the House's and the Speaker's chief procedural adviser.



The Department of the House of Representatives provides the administrative machinery for the efficient operation of the House of Representatives and its committees and a range of services and facilities for Members in Parliament House. These include office accommodation, printing and other support in Parliament House and the responsibility for the payment of Members' parliamentary salaries and allowances.

The Speaker and the President of the Senate have shared responsibility for the administration of services shared by both Members and Senators and for the operation of Parliament House. These services are administered by the Department of Parliamentary Services, and include information and research services for Members and Senators (provided by the Parliamentary Library); the reporting of the debates and proceedings of both Houses and their committees (Hansard); computer and telecommunication services to Parliament House and radio and television broadcast and closed circuit facilities; the maintenance of Parliament House and its grounds; housekeeping and catering services, and guide services for visitors.

The Speaker and the President of the Senate also have shared overall responsibility for security services in Parliament House and its immediate surroundings (the Parliamentary Precincts¹). The Speaker has sole authority over the House of Representatives area in Parliament House.

THE SPEAKER AS LOCAL MEMBER

Election as Speaker does not alter the Speaker's primary role as a representative in Parliament of his or her electorate. This work includes responding to correspondence from constituents, explaining the work of the Parliament to community groups, schools and individuals and acting on behalf of the public when they have questions about government actions.

On taking office the Speaker continues to carry out his or her duties as an ordinary Member of Parliament and continues to represent the electorate and assist constituents.

Like any other Member he or she is involved with local interests and liaises with, for example, community groups, schools, and businesses in the area. The Speaker also receives school children and other visitors from the electorate during sitting periods. Like any other Member he or she continues to be available to advise and to discuss the problems of individual constituents.

¹ The Parliamentary Precincts are defined in the *Parliamentary Precincts Act 1988*. They include the building itself, all the internal courtyards and the external areas between the building and the ring road which circles the parliamentary campus—Capital Circle.



Unlike other Members the Speaker is not able to raise matters in the House on behalf of constituents. However, Speakers are able to raise matters with government departments and Ministers outside the House.

THE SPEAKER'S ACCOMMODATION

The Australian Parliament has not adopted the Westminster practice of providing within the parliamentary precincts, living quarters for the Speaker and other senior officers. However, the Speaker's representational role means that the Speaker's accommodation in Parliament House must include more than a simple office. As well as a reception area, staff offices and the Speaker's own office, the Speaker's suite includes a formal sitting room, a dining room, and kitchen.





The Speaker's office



The Speaker receives members from the Federation of Australian Scientific & Technological Societies





The Speaker meets informally with visitors from the Wadeye Indigenous community.

THE SPEAKER'S COURTYARD

There is also a beautiful courtyard garden where guests may enjoy more informal dining when Canberra's weather permits. The courtyard allows the Speaker to receive larger groups and is used, for example, to accommodate end of year activities to thank departmental staff for their efforts in support of the House.

There are 17 internal courtyards in Parliament House including the Speaker's courtyard. Each features distinctive designs, water features (inoperative in times of drought) and plants. The courtyard of the President of the Senate has been designed as a showcase for Australian native flora. By contrast, the Speaker's courtyard features plants with a more European influence, with azaleas, camellias, maples, rhododendrons and a variety of perennials, annuals and bulbs. Honey locust trees and maples provide autumn colour.

The courtyard is divided by a glazed linkway leading to the Chamber, which results in two courtyard areas. The corrugated iron roof and timber beams of the walkway give a veranda-like (and very Australian) appearance to the area despite the exotic plantings.







The Speaker's courtyard (photos by courtesy Elizabeth Hawkes)



A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE SPEAKER

As well as duties in the Chair of the House, a routine sitting day for the Speaker is full of engagements, meetings and paperwork. Before the House sits the Speaker meets with his senior advisers, including the Clerk of the House, to discuss the program for the day, and plan for anticipated events in the Chamber. He is also briefed on security and administrative issues that might arise. During the day the Speaker may talk with his deputies or with the party whips about the management of the business of the House. Individual Members may also come to seek advice. The Speaker must always be available to greet official visitors and guests of the Parliament and hold discussions with visiting delegations from other Parliaments. When not in the chair of the House, or busy with meetings and engagements, the Speaker spends much of the rest of the time in his or her office, dealing with the paperwork that comes with the responsibilities of the job.

SOME FORMER AUSTRALIAN SPEAKERS

There have been many colourful Speakers during the 107 years of the House of Representatives. A complete list is at appendix A. The following longer notes on a number of well known occupants of the Chair provide a glimpse of the history of the institution of the House Speaker.



***Hon. Sir Frederick William Holder
KCMG [1850–1909]
Speaker: 1901–1909***

Frederick Holder was a first generation Australian—born in South Australia of English immigrant parents—who became the first Speaker of the House of Representatives.

His early involvement in politics was through local and then colonial government. He became the mayor of Burra and later a

member of the South Australian House of Assembly. He was Premier of South Australia—briefly in 1892 and again in 1899. Holder was also a federalist and a member of the Federal convention held in Adelaide in 1897. He was an influential member of the convention, especially in relation to financial matters. He was elected to the first Parliament following the formation of the Commonwealth in 1901 to represent the state of South Australia. On 9 May 1901 Holder was elected (unopposed) the first Speaker at the first meeting of the House of Representatives.



While there was no other candidate, the argumentative nature of the House was apparent from the beginning. One Member bemoaned the fact that as a free-trader Mr Holder was needed on the floor of the House. The then Member for Parkes was outraged that a letter had been circulated urging Members to support Mr Holder—a practice disappointing to those who “expected to see realized the higher and rarer atmosphere of which so much has been said in the various States” and one which they “may feel sure ... would have been deprecated in the old country”.

Together with the first President of the Senate, he had to adapt the procedures of the Parliament at Westminster, already adapted to some extent by the various colonial legislatures, to the needs of a federal parliament. Not surprisingly, the first standing orders of the House owed much to the House of Commons via the South Australian House of Assembly.

The first Speaker was well respected by Members. In the second parliament he stood as an Independent for the new seat of Wakefield (also in South Australia) and was successful in the elections of 1903 and 1906. On each occasion he was re-elected unopposed. He played no part in party politics and aspired to the model of the impartial Westminster-style Speaker. While party politics was less structured at the time the tradition of vigorous—bordering-on—ferocious debates established in the colonial legislatures continued in the new federal parliament.

Holder was not a physically strong man—a fact mentioned by the Member who nominated him as Speaker. He had failed to seek suitable medical attention following an accident involving a mule in 1899 and no doubt the stresses of the campaign for federation and the administration of the new parliament did little for his well-being. He is said to have told friends that he found the bitterness between parties and interest groups distressing.

All Speakers will sympathise with Speaker Holder’s final night in office. The House sat through the night (though much of it in committee with the Chairman of Committees presiding). It included a dissent motion (at approximately 4.00 am); followed by name-calling; a question about whether “bully” was unparliamentary; a demand that the Chair protect Members who have been insulted on the topic of the size of their brains; and a challenge to the Chair’s authority. The Hansard records that the sitting was suspended from 5.06 am to 5.47 am, because of “the indisposition of Mr. Speaker”. At 5.45 am the Prime Minister told the House “Honorable members will profoundly regret to learn that the Speaker, ... has evidently over-taxed his strength”. Following further sympathetic comments the House adjourned at 5.52 am. Members were unaware of the serious nature of the Speaker’s indisposition. He died that afternoon of a cerebral haemorrhage without recovering consciousness. His last words, uttered in the House, are reported to have been “dreadful—dreadful”, though this is not recorded in the Hansard. A memorial service was held in the House before his body was returned to Adelaide for a state funeral.



The Prime Minister's comments regarding Speaker Holder (made at the next sitting of the House) epitomised the ideal of a Speaker. Amongst other things Prime Minister Alfred Deakin stated:

Inspired by a lofty conception of the duties of his office, he presided over the House of Representatives with conspicuous ability, firmness, and impartiality. An unsparing devotion to administrative duties was associated with a personal courtesy which endeared him to members and officers of the House.



**Hon. Archie Cameron [1895–1956]
Speaker: 1950–1956**

Archie Galbraith Cameron² was another South Australian Speaker. He left school at 12 and got a job clearing bushes before working on his father's farm. He was a member of the Australian Imperial Force in the First World War and fought on the Western Front. On returning to South Australia he became a soldier settler with a farm at Noora. Like many of his generation (and his Presbyterian background),

Archie educated himself by reading widely. He also learned to speak German. Like Speaker Holder, he first entered political life via local government—serving on the Loxton District Council after the War.

He moved to State politics, winning the seat of Wooroora in 1927 for the Country Party (now The Nationals). He became the party's parliamentary leader the following year. As Member for Barker he was elected to the House of Representatives in 1934—a position he retained until his death 22 years later.

Cameron (who had converted to Catholicism) created some public interest on his first day in the House by making an affirmation rather than taking the oath. He was articulate and strong minded. Either because of or despite these characteristics, he was appointed as an assistant Minister in the Joseph Lyons' Cabinet in 1937. The next year he became the first Minister (he was acting Minister for Commerce at the time) to be named and suspended from the House (for refusing to withdraw the term "clean skin"—meaning unbranded—aimed at an Independent Member—when told to do so by the Speaker). He was soon after promoted to Postmaster-General—a post which allowed ample opportunity for his firm opinions. He is reported as having told the chairman of the Australian Broadcasting Commission "Forget your charter, I don't believe in boards or commissions—I believe in ministerial control."



² Most of the information on Speakers Holder and Cameron is from the *Australian Dictionary of Biography*.

In 1939 Mr Cameron returned to the backbench when Robert Menzies' first ministry (consisting of only United Australia Party members) took office. In the same year Cameron became leader of the Federal Country Party following the retirement of Sir Earle Page. When the coalition was restored, Mr Cameron became deputy Prime Minister. He was also Minister for Commerce and Minister for the Navy in 1940. Only seven months later he left the party (and consequently the ministry) and spent the 1940s sitting with the United Australia Party—later the Liberal Party. He became a noted and fierce critic of the Labor governments of Curtin and then Chifley. During the war years he also undertook military duties in the Directorate of Military Intelligence—also based in Melbourne.

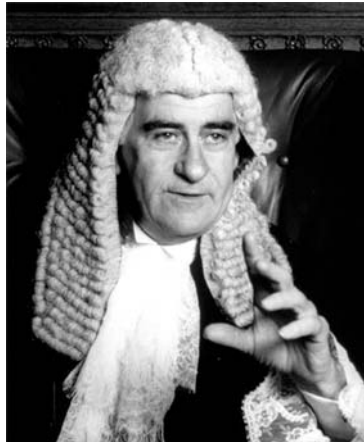
Labor was defeated in the 1949 election and the Coalition of the Liberal and Country parties, under Prime Minister Menzies was returned. Archie Cameron was elected as Speaker at the opening of the new parliament in 1950. His Labor predecessor, J.S. Rosevear had not worn the traditional Speaker's gown and wig, but these were restored by Speaker Cameron. The new Speaker's customary forthright approach made its mark on the speakership and conduct outside the Chamber.

From time to time a tongue in cheek comment has been made to the effect that the content of a Speaker's ruling is not as significant as the tone and authority with which it is expressed. While the observation is probably ancient, it may have received something of a boost in the speech by former Speaker Rosevear in the course of his (congratulatory) remarks after the election of Speaker Cameron. Mr Rosevear said:

I have to admit that you, Sir, had a great advantage over any other aspirant on the Government side of the Chamber for the office of Mr Speaker, because I do not think that any Member of the Opposition in the last Parliament raised so many points of order as you did, and was so consistently incorrect as you were.

Speaker Cameron's leadership and firm views became a fact of life in the House. Betting and card playing were banned. Members were told to be properly dressed in the lobbies—though the Speaker himself was sometimes seen barefoot and wearing shorts and singlet on hot days. His views however, were most marked in the Chamber. He was both well-informed and a skillful debater—good attributes for a Speaker. He was also said to be autocratic and eccentric. References to rulings made by Speaker Cameron remain ensconced in *House of Representatives Practice*. His speakership continued for six years until his death in 1956. Speaker Cameron was often accused of being partisan and anti-Labor so perhaps his greatest compliment is that from Labor Member Clyde Cameron who, in 1977, described Cameron as “easily the best Speaker in living memory”.





***Rt Hon Sir Billy Mackie Snedden
KCMG QC [1926–1987]***

Speaker: 1976–1983

The Hon Billy Snedden MP was elected as the 19th Speaker of the House on 17 February 1976. He was married to Joy and had four children.

Billy Snedden was another in the tradition of those who reached the high office of Speaker following a less than privileged start in life. He was born on the

last day of 1926, the youngest of six children of a Perth stonemason and his wife. According to some sources, Billy left school when he was 12 years old and worked as a clerk and salesman for the next six years. (Note: During the condolence motion on Sir Billy in 1987, the Hon Bob Hawke told the House that Billy started work as a law clerk at the age of 15.) At any rate, young Billy's first job was as a newspaper boy at the age of eight. In 1945, the then 18 year old joined the RAAF as a pilot trainee. After the war he studied law at the University of Western Australia and was admitted to the West Australian Bar in 1951. He joined the Department of Immigration and had postings in Italy and England from 1952–54—a period which he no doubt found useful when he became Minister for Immigration from 1966–69. When he returned to Australia he settled in Melbourne (1954) and was admitted to the Victorian Bar in 1955. He established a private legal practice and became a QC in 1964.

Billy Snedden developed an early interest in politics. He claimed to have fed his interest in public affairs by reading the newspapers he sold as a boy. While working as a law clerk he managed an election campaign for his employer. He joined the Liberal Party in 1944 and was thus one of its founding members. Also while working as a law clerk, he joined the Western Australia Young Liberal Movement and became its chairman—later moving to the chairmanship of the National Organisation of Young Liberals. He was also a member of the West Australian executive of the Liberal Party.

Mr Snedden's first attempt to enter federal politics was in 1949 when he was narrowly defeated by Kim Beazley Snr for the seat of Fremantle. He lost another close-fought election battle at the double dissolution election of 1951, this time for the seat of Perth. It was after this defeat that he went to Rome as an immigration officer. On returning to Australia in 1954 he settled in Melbourne. His political ambitions were realised in December 1955 when he became the first member for Bruce—a seat he held until his resignation in 1983.

Billy Snedden's first 11 years in Parliament were years of political stability with the Rt Hon Sir Robert Menzies entrenched as Prime



Minister and leader of the Liberal Party. Mr Snedden joined the Government as Attorney-General towards the end of this period (1963–66). The remainder of Mr Snedden’s parliamentary service (from 1966 to 1983) was what the Chinese proverb might term “interesting times”. During the politically volatile period which followed the Menzies era, Mr Snedden continued as part of the Government, serving as Minister for Immigration (1966-1969), Minister for Labour and National Service (1969-1971) and Treasurer (1971-1972).

The leadership of the Parliamentary Liberal Party attracted Mr Snedden’s attention in the hiatus resulting from the death of Sir Harold Holt in December 1967. On that occasion he was eliminated in the first round of the contest. He later became Deputy Leader of the party (August 1971) and leader in December 1972 following the defeat of the McMahon government. He thus faced the difficult position of being Leader of the Opposition following the Coalition’s defeat after 23 years in government. He led the Liberal Party to the general election in May 1974 and lost by five seats—a very close result which remained in doubt for 10 days after the election. The result was not enough to cement his hold on the leadership of the party. In November 1974 he survived a move to replace him with Malcolm Fraser but this merely delayed the leadership contest which he lost to Malcolm Fraser in March 1975.

From the start of his parliamentary career, Billy Snedden brought his talent for hard work to his duties. Before the advent of a comprehensive parliamentary committee system, he was very much involved as a member and chairman of several parliamentary committees. He also represented the Parliament and the Government at numerous international conferences and on many delegations. He was Leader of the House from February 1967 to November 1968 and again from November 1969 to March 1971.

The highlight of his parliamentary career was his election as Speaker of the House in 1976 (following the dismissal of Gough Whitlam’s government in November 1975 and the election of a new Coalition government). During his speakership he was appointed a Knight Commander of the Order of St Michael and St George (January 1978). If he regarded the speakership as a consolation prize relative to the Prime Ministership, he never showed it. He threw all his considerable energies into being Speaker, a post he held until 1983 (when the Coalition government was defeated).

From early in his speakership he tried to strengthen the Parliament’s ability to withstand pressures from the Executive. He considered that government control of funds for the purposes of the Parliament was contrary to the concept of an independent legislature. In an effort to further the cause of the financial autonomy of the House, he authorised parliamentary officers to prepare a major research paper on the topic – *The Parliamentary Budget*, in 1976. This became a step in the ongoing process of facilitating parliamentary budget formulation



without excessive Executive domination. He was also a staunch supporter of a new and permanent home for the Parliament—the planning for which was well underway by the end of his speakership.

Sir Billy Snedden was a great champion of the independence of the Speaker. He favoured the British model, under which the Speaker, upon election to the office, removed himself from his political connections. He wanted the Parliament to ensure that a Speaker remained in office despite a change of Government and proposed that the party organisations agree not to contest the seat held by the Speaker. He further proposed that a Speaker would remain in office for five to seven years, and should then resign from Parliament and not hold any further public office. In 1979 he distributed to all Members a paper outlining his proposals. The Fraser Government did not adopt his proposals. No doubt Prime Minister Fraser considered the Speaker to be quite independent enough after an altercation on 18 February 1982 during which Mr Hawke escaped the normal penalty for calling Mr Fraser a liar and refusing to withdraw when so directed. However, Sir Billy enacted part of his proposal by resigning from Parliament after the election of the Hawke Government in 1983, to avoid having a former Speaker remain as a member of the House.

While not achieving his proposals for institutionalising the independence of the Speaker, Sir Billy nevertheless stressed the impartiality of the office through his decisions in the Chair, many of which remain House precedents.

Speaker Snedden exercised greater control over the form and content of oral questions than many of his fellow Speakers and, if necessary, did not hesitate to rule questions out of order. Although he noted that the standing orders did not give him authority to require a Minister to end his answer, he was not averse to requiring Ministers to be relevant in their answers and he did, on occasion, remonstrate if answers were too long. Amongst other clarifications of House practice, Speaker Snedden's views on the incorporation of unread material in Hansard (bolstered by similar views by Speaker Dr Harry Jenkins), remain authoritative. In a major statement to the House in October 1982 Speaker Snedden explained why the excessive incorporation of unread material in Hansard was undesirable, including: a Member's speech would be lengthened beyond his entitlement under the Standing Orders; incorporated material may contain irrelevant or defamatory matter or unparliamentary language; and other Members would not be aware of the contents of the material until production of the daily Hansard next morning.

Mr Bob Hawke summed up Billy Snedden's contribution as Speaker as:

It was perhaps as Speaker that Sir Billy achieved most and made his greatest contribution to this Parliament. He strongly believed in the Westminster system and actively sought to lift the position of Speaker above party politics.





Hon. Joan Child AO [1921–]
Speaker: 1986– 1989

Gloria Joan Liles Child (known as Joan Child) was the first female Speaker of the House, having been elected to the position in 1986 after Speaker Dr Harry Jenkins resigned from Parliament because of ill health. She was the last Speaker in the “Temporary” Parliament House that had been the home of the Federal Parliament for almost 60 years and the first Speaker in the “new and permanent” House

when the House moved up the Hill in 1988. This gave her a unique perspective on the effects of architecture on parliamentary proceedings. She did not find the comparison favoured the new House.

Speaker Child had some experience of chairing the House before assuming the position of Speaker. She had been Chairman of Committees and Deputy Speaker from 1984 to 1986. When Speaker Jenkins was ill in May 1985, Mrs Child was acting Speaker for a fortnight. It was only the second time she had been acting Chair and the experience was a daunting one.

Mrs Child was not bowed by the experience. Throughout her speakership she displayed reserves of strength and willpower which some found surprising in the kindly looking 65 year old grandmother. She was dwarfed by the large, ornate Speaker’s chair in the “old” House but this did not detract from her presence. She had firm opinions about the sort of Speaker she would be. On the first day of her speakership she told the *Melbourne Age* that her style would probably be less formal than Dr Jenkins’. She was quite clear about the fact that she did not support the British system under which the Speaker resigns from the party and separates him (or—theoretically—her) self from political partisanship. She noted “Just because I’m Speaker doesn’t mean I’m not a member of the party or interested in its policies. I don’t see any conflict of interest” [*The Age*, 11 February 1986].

She was a keen supporter of expanding televised proceedings. She had been present at the televising of the historic joint sitting in 1974 and considered the coverage created a lot of interest in Parliament. She hoped that televising proceedings might result in an improvement in Members’ behaviour in the Chamber. While the current view is that the opposite is probably closer to the truth, this was by no means apparent before the event. Mrs Child told Richard Guilliat of *The Age* “who knows, it might make us all spruce ourselves up a bit, behave better. You never know what might happen—cameras have a remarkable effect on politicians.”

The speakership of the House of Representatives could perhaps be seen as an unexpected profession for a person with Mrs Child’s experience and background. Her personal life was certainly a contrast



to that of her fellow Members—a distinction which was emphasised when she made her “maiden” speech on 16 July 1974 as the new Member for Henty (in Melbourne’s eastern suburbs). She was the second new Member to speak on the Address in Reply debate, following Mr Mick Young, the new Member for Port Adelaide. He spoke of his “long journey from the shearing shed to this chamber” and hoped he would “always be able to represent ... the interests of my old mates around the sheds”. Mrs Child did not refer to her personal background which would certainly have seemed different to that of Mick Young.³ The only personal note was to thank the electors of Henty. Nevertheless, Mrs Child probably brought to the Parliament a more profound understanding of the reality facing many Australian families than most of her colleagues (all male) could have. The daughter of a Melbourne postmaster, she had attended a private girls’ school in Victoria (Camberwell Church of England Girls’ Grammar School) but had also worked hard in low-paying menial jobs. Barry Jones gives the following account of her private life:

*... she left school early, married, had five sons and was widowed in 1963. She joined the ALP in 1964 and supplemented her widow’s pension by working as a house cleaner, then in a factory. She also cared for aged parents. She joined Jim Cairns’ staff;⁴ then became a trade union liaison officer [B. Jones, *A Thinking Reed*, p. 247].*

Her political career was by no means plain sailing. She first sought political office as an Australian Labor Party candidate for the seat of Henty in 1972 when she was defeated by a mere 308 votes despite a 9% swing towards Labor. She was finally successful at the 1974 election which saw Gough Whitlam returned, for a second term as Prime Minister. When she made the oath of affirmation on 19 July 1974 she was the only female member of the 127 MPs in the House. She lost her seat in the election which followed the dismissal of the Government in November 1975. She was also unsuccessful in the 1977 election but persevered and was returned for the seat of Henty in the 1980 election. She held the seat until her retirement at the 1990 election.

No doubt the experience of being the only female member of the House following the 1974 election equipped Mrs Child with a certain flexibility and strength of character which would stand her in good stead for the future challenges of the speakership. Mrs Child was only the fourth female Member of the House and the first to represent the Australian Labor Party. The statistics for the women Senators are much healthier, but even so, when Mrs Child came to Canberra in 1974 there were only four women in the Senate (Margaret Guilfoyle, Ruth Coleman, Kathy Martin [later Sullivan] and Jean Melzer).

There was not even a toilet available for female Members—the assumption being that all Members would be male. A previously male

³ In an interview with Tony Horwitz of the *Sydney Morning Herald* she listed her interests as “gardening, patchwork quilting and detective stories”, adding that her real passions are Elvis Presley and the Hawthorn footy team.

⁴ She had also worked as secretary to three Labor parliamentarians [J. Faulkner & S. Macintyre eds. *True Believers* p. 221].



staff toilet was given over to female use and female Members as well as staff had to make do with that.

One might think that the move to the new building would be seen as an unalloyed delight for all Members but such was not the case. Mrs Child told Stephen Redenbach [who interviewed her for his thesis *Servant of Two Masters? An Exploration of the Speaker's Role in the Australian Commonwealth Parliament*, 1999], that the lack of space in the old House led to close contact and camaraderie that was lost in the new House. In the Chamber the increased size made it harder to hear and more difficult to exercise authority by means of eye contact. At a personal level she recalled:

We knew each other; we got to know each other's wives or spouses; we knew about their kids; we knew when people were sick. You don't know anything like that in the new House because everybody's got their own loo, their own kitchen and far more space than they can possibly use. And they're isolated; they don't see each other [S. Reddenbach, p. 136].

Several months before the end of the Parliament which was to be her last, Joan Child resigned from the speakership. When the House met on 29 August 1989 (after a two week break in sittings) the Clerk reported a letter from the Governor-General (Bill Hayden) to the effect that the Speaker had resigned and the House should elect a new Speaker. There was press speculation that she had struggled to assert her authority over the House. Barry Jones had a slightly different perspective, noting "As question time became more gladiatorial, Joan was regarded as being too gentle and dignified to remain as Speaker..." [B. Jones, *A Thinking Reed*, p. 248].

In an interview six years after retiring from Parliament, Joan Child said she believed that as a consequence of being a woman, the House had been more willing to challenge her authority, particularly in the early stages of her incumbency. She considered that she had battled through these problems successfully; however, the experience had made her "harder" and a bit quicker and more unpleasant in the Chair than normal [S. Redenbach, p. 182]. This is possibly a sentiment with which other Speakers might identify.



**Hon David Hawker [1949–]
Speaker: 2004–2008**

The Hon. David Hawker MP was the 27th Speaker of the House. He served as Speaker from his election on 16 November 2004 until his replacement as Speaker by the election a new Speaker for the 42nd Parliament (which was on 12 February 2008). This arrangement ensures that there is no break in the speakership for certain purposes in the interim between the end of one



parliament and the start of the next. (*Parliamentary Presiding Officers Act 1965*). Although no longer Speaker (there being a change of Government), Mr Hawker continues to be a Member of the House.

Before entering the Parliament, Mr Hawker was a farmer in Western Victoria after obtaining an Engineering degree from the University of Melbourne. His farm produces wool, meat and grain. Mr Hawker's election as Speaker in 2004 continued the South Australian motif—his Great Grandfather was elected Speaker of the South Australian Legislative Assembly in 1860.

Mr Hawker's election to the speakership followed the tradition of appointing a Member of extensive experience of the House and its traditions. Mr Hawker was elected as the member for the Victorian electorate of Wannon in 1983. First elected at a by-election following the resignation of the Rt Hon Malcolm Fraser, he has been re-elected at the nine general elections held since then.

Mr Hawker's preparation for the speakership included extensive parliamentary committee experience including service as chair of several significant committees. He was Chair of the Financial Institutions and Public Administration Committee from 30.5.96 to 31.8.98 and the Economics, Finance and Public Administration Committee from 9.12.98 to 31.8.2004. He served as a member of the Speaker's panel for six years prior to his election as Speaker in 2004. He was Opposition Whip from 1994 to 1996.

As Speaker, Mr Hawker extended the practice of taking every opportunity to explain the House to his own community, school groups and the people of Australia more generally. He regularly gave lectures to university students—particularly those studying politics.



THE CURRENT SPEAKER

Harry (Henry Alfred) Jenkins is the 28th Speaker of the House—elected on 12 February 2008. He is married to Michele and they have three children and one grandchild.

Mr Jenkins has a solid political background. His election as Speaker offers the unique opportunity to reflect on the current and a former Speaker in the same note. Harry's father, Hon Dr Harry (Henry Alfred) Jenkins

AM, BA, MB, BS, MSc (1925–2004), medical practitioner, was elected to the Victorian Legislative Assembly for Reservoir (in Melbourne) when young Harry was nine years old. Dr Jenkins moved to federal politics in 1969 on his election to the House of Representatives for the seat of Scullin. He resigned at the end of 1985 and served as Ambassador to Spain from 1986 until he resigned for health reasons in 1988.



Harry Jenkins Senior had a long apprenticeship (ten years) in the Chair of the House. He became Deputy Chairman of Committees in 1973—a position he held until 1983 when he became Speaker. [Note: The position of Chairman of Committees was abolished in 1994 when the committee of the whole was abolished as part of the changes which established the Main Committee.] Dr Jenkins' apprenticeship was upgraded briefly when he became Deputy Speaker and Chairman of Committees in August 1975. This turned out to be unfortunate timing as he was in the position for under three months when the House was dissolved (in somewhat dramatic circumstances) on 11 November 1975.

Harry was seventeen years old when his father took his seat in the House. His (Harry's) association with Canberra was strengthened when he enrolled at the Australian National University. He graduated with a BSc and joined the ranks of the public service. He served in Local Government as a member of the Whittlesea Shire Council from 1979–86 (President of the Council from 1984–5). Following his father's retirement from Parliament Harry became the member for Scullin in 1986.

The electorate of Scullin, established in 1955, was named after James Henry Scullin (1876–1953) who was Prime Minister of Australia from 1929–32. Harry Jenkins is only the third member for Scullin—which could be regarded as a feat of political stability and longevity in an electorate which was established fifty-three years ago. The electorate covers an area of approximately 101 square kilometres in the northern outer metropolitan area of Melbourne. It includes the suburbs of Lalor, Mill Park, Thomastown, Watsonia North and parts of Bundoora, South Morang, Diamond Creek and Epping. The area is noted principally for its manufacturing industry as well as its health and education services.

The parallels in the careers of Dr Harry and Harry Jenkins the younger are reflected not only in their lengthy service to the electorate of Scullin, but also in their long apprenticeships in the Chair—in the case of the current Speaker, almost eighteen years. He served as Deputy Chair of Committees from May 1990 to February 1993, Deputy Speaker from May 1993 to January 1996 and Second Deputy Speaker from April 1996 to September 2007. Following the Australian Labor Party victory in the election of 24 November 2007, Harry was very well prepared to be a candidate for the speakership.

As well as extensive experience as an acting Chair, Mr Jenkins has served, as a member and Chair, on a large number of House and joint committees. He has represented the Parliament on several overseas delegations and also held office in the Australian Labor Party.

These notes are being prepared following the first two sitting weeks of the new Parliament. Mr Jenkins has had an eventful introduction to the role of Speaker—one that has put to good use the expertise he has developed in his long service as an acting Chair of the House. On the day of his election (12 February 2008) debate on the motion to change the standing orders was marked by a series of hotly contested issues. Debate on the standing orders changes attracted thirty-nine speakers—thirty-five of them from the opposition. The first sitting day finally ended at 1.59 am, the longest opening day in the history of the House.





1st Row: Hon. Sir Frederick William Holder KCMG;
 Hon. Charles Carty Salmon;
 Hon. Charles McDonald;
 William Elliot Johnson KCMG.

2nd Row: Rt Hon. William Alexander Watt;
 Hon. Sir Littleton Ernest Groom KCMG, KC;
 Hon. Norman John Oswald Makin AO;
 George Hugh Mackay.

3rd Row: Hon. Sir George John Bell KCMG, DSO, VD;
 Walter Maxwell Nairn;
 Hon. John Solomon Rosevear;
 Hon. Archie Galbraith Cameron.

4th Row: Hon. Sir John McLeay KCMG, MM.





1st Row: Hon. Sir William John Aston KCMG;
 Hon. James Francis Cope CMG;
 Hon. Gordon Glen Denton Scholes AO;
 Rt Hon. Sir Billy Mackie Snedden KCMG, QC.

2nd Row: Hon. Dr Henry Alfred Jenkins AM;
 Hon. Joan Child AO;
 Hon. Leo Boyce McLeay;
 Hon. Stephen Paul Martin.

3rd Row: Hon. Robert George Halverson OBE;
 Rt Hon. Ian McCahon Sinclair AC;
 Hon. John Neil Andrew;
 Hon. David Peter Hawker.

4th Row: Henry (Harry) Alfred Jenkins.



APPENDIX A

Speakers of the House of Representatives since 1901

	<i>Date first elected</i>
HOLDER, Hon. Sir Frederick William, KCMG	9.5.1901
SALMON, Hon. Charles Carty	28.7.1909
McDONALD, Hon. Charles	1.7.1910
JOHNSON, William Elliot	9.7.1913
McDONALD, Hon. Charles	8.10.1914
JOHNSON, Sir William Elliot, KCMG	14.6.1917
WATT, Rt Hon. William Alexander	28.2.1923
GROOM, Hon. Sir Littleton Ernest, KCMG, KC	13.1.1926
MAKIN, Hon. Norman John Oswald, AO	20.11.1929
MACKAY, George Hugh	17.2.1932
BELL, Hon. Sir George John, KCMG, DSO, VD	23.10.1934
NAIRN, Walter Maxwell	20.11.1940
ROSEVEAR, Hon. John Solomon	22.6.1943
CAMERON, Hon. Archie Galbraith	22.2.1950
McLEAY, Hon. Sir John, KCMG, MM	29.8.1956
ASTON, Hon. Sir William John, KCMG	21.2.1967
COPE, Hon. James Francis, CMG	27.2.1973
SCHOLES, Hon. Gordon Glen Denton, AO	27.2.1975
SNEDDEN, Rt Hon. Sir Billy Mackie, KCMG, QC	17.2.1976
JENKINS, Hon. Dr Henry Alfred, AM	21.4.1983
CHILD, Hon. Joan, AO	11.2.1986
McLEAY, Hon. Leo Boyce	29.8.1989
MARTIN, Hon. Stephen Paul	4.5.1993
HALVERSON, Hon. Robert George, OBE	30.4.1996
SINCLAIR, Rt Hon. Ian McCahon, AC	4.3.1998
ANDREW, Hon. John Neil	10.11.1998
HAWKER, Hon. David Peter Maxwell	16.11.2004
JENKINS, Henry (Harry) Alfred	12.2.2008

