



THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES





THE SPEAKER OF THE
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

© Commonwealth of Australia 2016
ISBN 978-1-74366-502-2 Printed version

Prepared by the Department of the House of Representatives

Photos of certain former Speakers courtesy of The National Library of Australia and Auspic/DPS (David Foote)



THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Speaker of the House of Representatives is the Honourable Tony Smith MP. He was elected as Speaker on 10 August 2015.

Mr Smith, the Federal Member for Casey, was first elected in 2001, and re-elected at each subsequent election.

The Victorian electoral division of Casey covers an area of approximately 2,500 square kilometres, extending from the outer eastern suburbs of Melbourne into the Yarra Valley and Dandenong Ranges. Industries in the electorate include market gardens, orchards, nurseries, flower farms, vineyards, forestry and timber, tourism, light manufacturing and engineering.

The Speaker has previously served as the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister from 30 January 2007 to 3 December 2007, and in a range of Shadow Ministerial positions in the 42nd and 43rd parliaments.

Mr Smith has also served on numerous parliamentary committees and was most recently Chair of the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters in the 44th Parliament.

The Speaker studied a Bachelor of Arts (Hons) and Bachelor of Commerce at the University of Melbourne. The Speaker is married to Pam and has two sons, Thomas and Angus.

THE OFFICE OF SPEAKER

The Speakership is the most important office in the House of Representatives and the Speaker, the principal office holder. He or she is the representative or spokesperson for the House, 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 Presiding Officer of the House.

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.

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. “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. It was the Speaker’s task to report the decisions of the House of Commons to the King, possibly at some personal risk if the message was not one the King wanted to hear. 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 supporters derives from this tradition.





Lucy Wicks, Member for Robertson, and Michael Sukkar, Member for Deakin, dragging the newly elected Speaker to the Chair of the House. This 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. (Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)

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. 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 elects as Speaker a Member who has had many years of experience in the Parliament. 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. Many recent Speakers, including the current Speaker, have chosen not to wear any form of ceremonial dress.

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.

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 makes an acknowledgement of country and reads the Lord's prayer as outlined 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 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 role 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. However, in maintaining order in the House, the Speaker understands the need for robust debate to take place.





Speaker Smith in the Chair. (Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)

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

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.

The Speaker supervises rather than participates in proceedings. He or she makes statements or announcements to the House as necessary, but does not



Speaker Smith in the Chair during Question Time. (Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)

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.

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.





Ceremonial procession. (Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)

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 them. 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 often one of the “greeting party” to receive important dignitaries 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 or her 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.

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 Speaker meeting with the Clerks and Deputy Speaker. (Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)

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 two Presiding Officers also have shared responsibility for the Parliamentary Budget Office.

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 Precincts). The Speaker has sole authority over the House of Representatives area in Parliament House.

PARLIAMENTARY SKILLS CENTRE

Through the Speaker's administration of the Department of House of Representatives, the Speaker oversees the work of the Parliamentary Skills Centre, which conducts capacity building and parliamentary strengthening programs with other parliaments.

The Parliamentary Skills Centre's work is particularly focused on work in the Pacific through programs such as the Pacific Parliamentary Partnerships and the Pacific Women's Parliamentary Partnerships Project. Programs such as these provide an opportunity for members of parliament and parliamentary staff in Australia and other countries to exchange





Speaker Smith receives from the Governor-General an authority to administer to Members the oath or affirmation of allegiance.
(Photo by Government House)

experience and skills through visits to either the Australian or other parliaments. The Speaker will often take part in this capacity building by meeting with guests of the Australian Parliament and visiting other parliaments.

PARTY INVOLVEMENT AND IMPARTIALITY OF THE CHAIR

Although many of the traditions and conventions of the Australian Parliament are derived from the House of Commons, the Australian Speakership differs from that of Westminster. The House of Commons requires a Speaker to prove they will be truly independent by resigning their party membership and allowing them to contest their electorate unopposed by the major political parties. By contrast, in Australia, the Speaker must act impartially in the chair, while being permitted to choose to maintain their party membership and attend party meetings. The Speaker continues their role as a Member of Parliament representing their electorate. Further, the Speaker contests and campaigns for re-election as a member of their party. The current Speaker has chosen not to attend regular party meetings.

In contrast to Westminster, where a sitting Speaker does not change with a change of government, in Australia 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.



*The Speaker with Mr Mohammad Suleiman, a recipient of the Parliamentary Library's 2016 Summer Research Scholarships.
(Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)*

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.

Unlike other Members, the Speaker has limited opportunities to raise matters during debate on behalf of constituents. Changes were made to the Standing Orders in 2010 to permit the Speaker and Deputy Speaker to participate in Private Members' Business. Speakers are also 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 courtyard. (Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Hawkes)



Ambassador's lounge in Speaker's suite. (Photo courtesy of Auspic/DPS)

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 welcome visiting delegations from other parliaments.

There are 17 internal courtyards in Parliament House including the Speaker's courtyard. Each features distinctive designs, water features 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.

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF THE SPEAKER

As well as undertaking duties in the Chair of the House, a routine sitting day for the Speaker is full of engagements, meetings and signing parliamentary documents, such as messages from the Senate. Before the House sits the Speaker meets with his or her senior advisers, including the Clerk of the House, to discuss the program for the day, and plan for anticipated events in the Chamber. He or she is also briefed on security and administrative issues that might arise. During the day the Speaker will often talk with his or her 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.

TWO FORMER AUSTRALIAN SPEAKERS

There have been many colourful Speakers during the history of the House of Representatives. A complete list is at appendix A. The following longer notes on the first Speaker of the House and the first female Speaker of the House provide a glimpse of the history of the institution of the Speaker of the House.



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 as Speaker unopposed. He played no part in party politics and aspired to the model of the impartial Westminister-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 am); followed by name-calling; a question about whether “bully” was unparliamentary; a demand that the Chair protect Members who had 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 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 overtaxed 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. Joan Child AO [1921-2013]

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 herself 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 Guillatt 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. 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, and 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, 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 affirmation of allegiance on 9 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 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 (Liberal), Ruth Coleman (Labor), Kathy Martin, later Sullivan (Liberal) and Jean Melzer (Liberal).

There was not even a toilet available for female Members—the assumption being that all Members would be male. A previously male staff toilet was given over for use by female Members and staff.

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. Redenbach, p. 136].

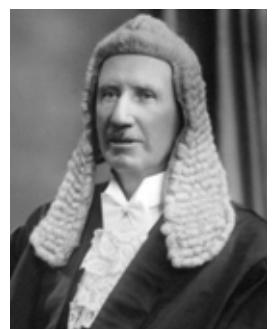
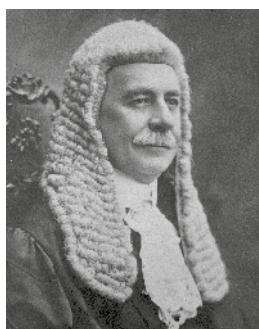
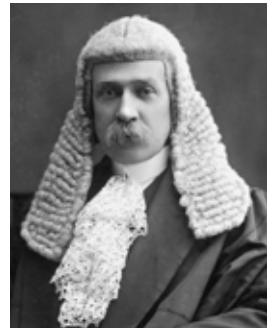
Several months before the end of the Parliament which was to be her last, Joan Child resigned from the speakership. When the House met on 29 August 1989 (after a two week break in sittings) the Clerk reported a letter from the Governor-General (Bill Hayden) to the effect that the Speaker had resigned 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.



SPEAKERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SINCE 1901



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.

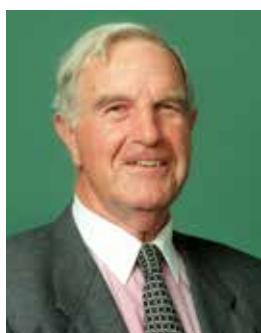
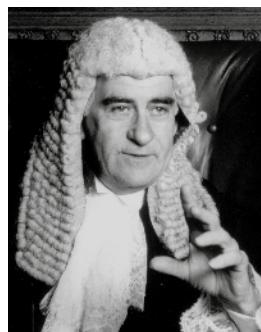
3rd Row: Hon. Sir George John Bell KCMG, DSO, VD;

Walter Maxwell Nairn;

Hon. John Solomon Rosevear;

Hon. Archie Galbraith Cameron.

SPEAKERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SINCE 1901



1st Row: Hon. Sir John McLeay KCMG, MM;

Hon. Sir William John Aston KCMG;

Hon. James Francis Cope CMG;

Hon. Gordon Glen Denton Scholes AO.

2nd Row: Rt Hon. Sir Billy Mackie Snedden KCMG, QC;

Hon. Dr Henry Alfred Jenkins AM;

Hon. Joan Child AO;

Hon. Leo Boyce McLeay.

3rd Row: Hon. Stephen Paul Martin;

Hon. Robert George Halverson OBE;

Rt Hon. Ian McCahon Sinclair AC;

Hon. John Neil Andrew.

SPEAKERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SINCE 1901



1st Row: Hon. David Peter Maxwell Hawker;

Henry (Harry) Alfred Jenkins;

Hon. Peter Neil Slipper;

Anna Elizabeth Burke.

2nd Row: Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop;

Hon. Anthony (Tony) David Hawthorn Smith.



SPEAKERS OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES SINCE 1901

	Date elected Speaker
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
SLIPPER, Hon. Peter Neil	24.11.2011
BURKE, Anna Elizabeth	9.10.2012
BISHOP, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen	12.11.2013
SMITH, Hon. Anthony (Tony) David Hawthorn	10.8.2015