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Speaker Alexander, John, MP

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Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (11.59 pm)—Mr Speaker, I rise to speak to this chamber for the first time as the member for Bennelong. I congratulate my new colleagues from both sides of the House on the quality and substance of their maiden speeches. Your stories have been diverse, compelling and educational. Your stories have been moving, motivating and yours, Ken, inspiring.

It is an honour to be in this position, and I am truly grateful to the people of Bennelong for the trust and faith that they have placed in me. However, that honour is immediately replaced with a deep sense of responsibility to do my best, with integrity, honesty and fairness. I acknowledge my predecessors in Bennelong: Sir John Cramer, our former Prime Minister John Howard and Maxine McKew.

The electorate of Bennelong, located in the north-western suburbs of metropolitan Sydney, was named after a senior man of the Eora people—one of the first Indigenous Australians to effect influence and understanding with the English settlers. Befriending Governor Phillip, they travelled to England together in 1792 on what would now be called a cultural exchange. Bennelong died in 1813 at Kissing Point in modern-day Putney, and a landmark remains to this day on the spot where he is buried. A rowing race and our first brewery were also established on the site at around this time.

In 1868 a local grandmother by the name of Maria Ann Smith, also known as ‘Granny Smith’, grew the first batch of green apples that bear her name and are now grown the world over. Two weeks ago an estimated 85,000 people were attracted to the 25th anniversary of the Granny Smith Festival in Eastwood to celebrate the history and culture of our Bennelong community.

Bennelong has transformed from market gardens to billion-dollar shopping malls like Top Ryde City and the third largest business district in the region, Macquarie Park. It was also the birthplace of Betty Cuthbert, one of our greatest ever Olympians. Sport has had a significant role in our country’s history, in defining our character, and in my own personal development. I am honoured by Ken Rosewall’s presence here today. Ken is the most enduring champion tennis has seen. Ken played in his first Wimbledon final in 1954—and I can see he is

embarrassed already—and his last 20 years later. I won’t say what the result was!

When you enter Centre Court at Wimbledon there is a quote from Rudyard Kipling’s poem *If* that reads:

If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster; and treat those two imposters just the same.

This is the hallmark of champion people. Ken Rosewall and John Howard grew up in close proximity and are of a similar vintage. John Howard demonstrated every characteristic of a champion; he was both modest in victory and gracious in defeat. John and Ken both treated those two imposters just the same.

My motivation to enter politics was largely inspired by a meeting with John Howard and another with Brendan Nelson. Both expressed the view that our party would benefit greatly by attracting people with real-life experience who could contribute to the development of policy. John made the point that the only way a party should seek government was through the strength of their policies, and the only legitimate way a government should hold office was to implement those policies.

I grew up as the youngest member of a great family filled with love, laughter, support and encouragement, whatever the latest endeavour. Not long ago my mother quizzed me on hearing a report that I was entering politics. She was incredulous, but quickly repaired to assure me that she thought that I would make an excellent Prime Minister—and you think she was optimistic! My dad went bush before finishing school. Mum had been a school teacher. Dad was passionate, the dreamer, the joke teller, the man with a raucous laugh and a very naughty sense of humour. Mum was proper, restrained, reasoned, practical: moderation her motto. They were a great team. We were a classic Menzies-era family: Dad a small businessman, our ultimate prize to own our family home.

I have three sisters, Pam, and Annette and Sue, who are both here; three great brothers-in-law, Lach, Alan and Marcus, and three wonderful children, Emily, Georgia and Charlie. Annette threw me my first tennis balls to hit. I was using Pam’s racket. I swung and missed time and again but Annette was patient. The racket was abused—I am sorry, Pam! I became angrier and angrier at my inability to make contact with the ball

despite my enormous confidence. I persisted, leading to a series of death matches with my sister Sue. Losing to her was worse than death. It was very hard to be a good sport. Sue went to boarding school, and against my next opponent—Hughey from across the road—the death matches continued. It was years before I won a set. When I finally did I ran around the court cheering and screaming with delight, punching the air. I was not modest in victory.

At my first major event I met a girl called Evonne Goolagong. We were both 10. Sitting next to her was comforting as we seemed to share an equal amount of apprehension and pre-match nerves. My first coach, Sid Drake, had a saying that you don't learn much when you win, but you should learn when you lose. Many losses followed. I learned to try hard. I learned to keep trying regardless of the score. I learned to observe and analyse, to stay calm in a crisis and to control my temper. Sometimes the pursuit of my tennis dreams meant that I had to miss school. I loved tennis!

My education was very different to that of many of my colleagues. Year 11 was replaced with the world as my classroom, and Harry Hopman, the legendary Davis Cup captain, my teacher. Harry was more mentor than coach. He often talked of his friendship with our party's founder, Sir Robert Menzies, whose daughter, Heather, is here today. We travelled to Europe in 1968, which was plagued with industrial unrest. The Italians had elevated strike action to an art form, which provided them with more time to be Italian, and they did it with such style. The French Open was nearly cancelled because of the strikes. The event proceeded, with an added benefit: as no-one was working, the crowds were great, and so was the tennis. Rosewall beat Laver in the final. Later that year we were due to play in Czechoslovakia, but that event was cancelled: Russia had invaded! We then went to Russia. Our guide kept to the Communist Party line for much of the time, but by the end of our time there her private thoughts were being confided. We played in Poland and were taken to Auschwitz by Harry's friend from before the war. He cried and we cried. These were not the experiences enjoyed by a regular 16-year-old boy from Sydney's Northern Beaches.

I learnt of discrimination travelling to South Africa with Arthur Ashe. He had been granted a visa declaring him an 'honorary white'. In Arthur's home town I practised on the adjoining court at the Richmond Country Club; he was the first African-American allowed to play there. In one of life's great ironies, Arthur's father had worked as a janitor at that same club. I played my first professional tennis match in China. I played in Iran when the Shah was the ruler and I toured India on many occasions. It is these experiences that have provided me with the

opportunity for a real life education and has served as preparation for my role as a representative of one of Australia's most diverse and multicultural electorates. Bennelong boasts nearly every language and culture, attained through a strong history of migration dating back to the English settlers. People have come from every part of the world to make Australia their home. In many ways, Bennelong is modern Australia.

Bennelong perfectly reflects the diversity and harmony we are so proud of in this country. Why do people leave all that is familiar to go half way around the world to start over again? They bring their dreams for a better life for themselves and their families. They bring their courage to 'have a go', with the odds stacked against them, playing so far from home. Our new Australians bring energy, effort, innovation and, most of all, their hopes. Every soul who comes to our country enriches us and continues the constant redefining of what it is to be Australian. In the case of Bennelong, with vibrant Chinese, Indian and Korean communities, all they want is opportunity, the opportunity to have a 'fair go'. Our country was founded on those who came here seeking opportunities. Opportunity is the first essential ingredient to achieve success.

Through tennis I was fortunate to have the opportunity to be coached, mentored and, most of all, subjected to the scrutiny of competition. The system was clear and encouraged competitive performance and the scoring gave no advantage to reputation. It was a performance oriented occupation. Harry Hopman's core philosophy was to relieve his players of any expectation of winning, leaving them free to go for their shots, to expand their envelope, to do their best and to fulfil their potential. Playing safe may achieve a short-term goal against inferior opposition, but the ultimate goal would be lost. As Alan Jones says, 'To win without risk is victory without glory.'

To realise our country's full potential, every Australian must have the opportunity to compete and earn just reward for their effort and success. For the past 15 years I have been involved with the development of multiactivity sports centres. The formula is the sporting equivalent of the modern shopping mall. These facilities have been successful throughout Europe and North America and provide communities with the opportunity to exercise, participate in sports and socialise. This is the best medicine for physical and mental health. These centres are in reality preventative medicine health clinics, but more fun.

In Australia we have gone from the highest levels of participation in active sports to now being amongst the most obese and unhealthy people with increasing health costs spent on illness resulting from poor lifestyle choices. In Britain, land zoned for sport and

recreational development may be leased from 99 to 125 years. In contrast, I needed an act of parliament in South Australia to scrounge a 50-year lease to redevelop the historic Memorial Drive Club. The entire process took seven years. The Ryde Aquatic Centre and Next Generation club in my electorate of Bennelong only exist because of the once-in-a-lifetime event of the Olympic Games coming to Sydney. A decade later, that centre attracts over one million visitors each year. In the time it took to develop three clubs in Australia, our founding company in Britain went from having 20 clubs to over 90 clubs, employing thousands of staff and having over half a million members. This business sold for over £900 million. If our laws mirrored those in Britain, it would have given us the opportunity for this kind of investment in our nation's economic and physical health.

During six months of campaigning, including doorknocking over 9,000 homes, one of the most common complaints was that neither the state nor federal governments showed any clear vision for the future. No business operates without serious consideration of its plans for the future. What is our master plan? Where will we be in 50 years time?

One of the big issues confronting my electorate is population density. Community organisations like RAID, MARS and CAPO have sprouted up from the grassroots to challenge the overcrowding and overdevelopment, with little consideration for infrastructure planning. In their maiden speeches, so many of my colleagues have talked about these coinciding dynamics on a collision course in their own electorates. There has been talk in the past of decentralisation and a conversion from the lucky country to the clever country, but little has been achieved. It is now time for us to make our own luck and not squander our inheritance. We must look beyond three-year cycles and embrace long-term vision.

The growth of our two largest cities has been disproportionate to the rest of the country, and infrastructure development has not kept pace. It is outrageous when you consider that the air corridor between Sydney and Melbourne is the fourth busiest in the world, and yet the highway linking these two cities is still not four lanes all the way, and the railway line reduces to a single one-way track for parts of this journey! I witnessed similar growth pressures whilst based in Atlanta, Georgia in the 1970s. During this time the great northern cities of the United States were encountering problems of overdevelopment and the infrastructure was not keeping up. The cost of living was skyrocketing and the cost of doing business was rising in line. The deterioration of the quality of life in overcrowded and underserviced cities brought

with it the prevalence of crime. Does this sound familiar? Atlanta seized on this opportunity of selling the competitive advantage of relocating companies south, where housing prices and business costs were a fraction of those in the north. Infrastructure was vital. Highways and railroads were built to anticipate demand. Hartsfield-Jackson airport was upgraded to the point that it is now the busiest airport in the world. There is a saying in Atlanta: 'If you die in the south, you got to go through Hartsfield to get to heaven.' And that is true.

This phenomenal growth in Atlanta triggered the boom in the sun-belt from Florida to California. Where is our Atlanta, to trigger a broader, more sustainable, efficient and competitive plan for growth in Australia? The current path of relentless expansion of two or three cities, and little more than a welfare mentality of handouts to regional areas, is simply not sustainable. By partnering with business and planning long-term infrastructure programs, government can help develop a far better outcome for our citizens. Through this comes sustainable economic development for those regions, allowing them to lift themselves up and stand on their own strong, proud feet. Sydney and Melbourne will remain our two greatest cities. This greatness should not be judged by population and size but by liveability and efficiency. If we continue to focus our growth largely on these two cities, we are limiting how much we as a nation can grow. If, through infrastructure, we can encourage the development of tens of cities, our potential for growth is enhanced commensurately. Strategic long-term planning is essential for optimal growth.

With less than a week to go in the recent federal election campaign, the biggest single election pledge—\$2.1 billion—was made by this government to build a railway line from Epping to Parramatta: a piece of infrastructure that would greatly help an overcrowded and underserviced part of my electorate. This pledge was given despite the New South Wales state government spending millions of dollars on analysis of transport and infrastructure needs and not even listing this railway build in their 10-year plan! Such rash planning decisions, made in the heat of a campaign, should never corrupt our nation's long-term infrastructure development. We have become victims of a need to play infrastructure catch-up. We must follow the lead of visionary Australians like John Bradfield and build beyond our present needs and effectively plan for our future. Can we capture, harness, use or modify what we have seen in the phenomenal growth of the sun-belt corridor of the United States? Progress on these issues will help ease pressure on the limited amenities, roads and classrooms in Bennelong and around the country. This is a national issue that impacts on each one of us.

Let us debate in this chamber a contest of ideas, a contest of visions. As with any endeavour in life, true and honest competition unfettered by political bias will produce, in this case, the best plan and the best result for our nation's future. We need the courage to attack this challenge. It has been ignored for too long. To shirk this responsibility, to say it is too tough, would be an affront to those who fought to make Australia what it is today—our forefathers, who had a plan, an optimistic vision, and who made the most of their opportunity to have a go.

My ability to be addressing these issues here today is due to a tremendous effort from a large team and unflinching support from the Liberal Party, captained by our leader, Tony Abbott. Tony, your strong message—to stop the waste, stop the boats and repay the debt—really cut through. You led from the front; you led by example. As a result, our party is intact, our policies are intact and our integrity is intact. We are united. Thank you for your inspiring leadership. To Julie Bishop, Mark Neeham, Richard Shields, Chris Stone, Michael Photios, Wendy Black—I'm sorry I called so often—Barry O'Farrell and all the members of the Liberal Party: thank you. To my patron senator, Connie Fierravanti-Wells: doorknocking was never more fun. To my neighbouring Liberal colleagues Philip Ruddock—my new Harry Hopman—Joe Hockey, Paul Fletcher and Marise Payne, and state colleagues Victor Dominello, Greg Smith, Anthony Roberts and Stuart Ayres: your advice, encouragement and many hours of hands-on assistance will always be highly valued, but most of all I value your friendship. To our local representatives, Mayor Artin Etmekdjian, Councillors Bill Pickering, Roy Maggio, Sarkis Yedelian, Sue Hoopmann and Ivan Petch: I appreciate your support and look forward to working closely with all of you over the coming years to put control over local decisions back in council hands.

Alan Jones, Ita Buttrose and Lachlan Murdoch all encouraged me from day one of this new career. I thank you for your friendship and for your support—in particular, Alan's role as MC of our Legends Dinner with Ken Rosewall, Mark Waugh, Benny Elias, John Konrads, Don Spencer and Bettina Arndt. To watch Alan interview Bettina on the issues raised in her latest book on sexuality and relationships was most entertaining—and educational for Alan! The generous support of Carolyn Currie on that night was phenomenal, and David Hayman's great support and generosity were also present.

The core team that prepared me for political life and guided me, too, in my fight for preselection were Josh Bihary, Bill Gough, Craig Brown and Rob Moffatt. I thank you for your hard work, your dedication, your honest advice—at times too honest. We are due for

another dinner. Our campaign team was led by our general, Rod Bosman, a military man, and his trusty lieutenant, Nat Smith. Nat, thank you for coming today. Mitch Geddes accompanied me on every single one of those 9,000 doorknocks. Thank you to Peter Poulos, Caroline Beinke, Matt Dawson and Michael Kitmirides, who mail dropped 35,000 homes. Stephen Woodnutt spent from dawn till too late, for him—and me—as my PA; thank you, Stephen. Thank you Sue Honeybrook, Jerome Smith, Richard Henricus, Miriam Geddes, Peter Graham, Peter Bardos and Artin. To every booth captain, stall worker, scrutineer, pamphlet distributor, dinner jacket wearer, balloon blower and to every one of the hundreds of volunteers: I have had many chances to express my appreciation since election day, but I say here, in this place, thank you so very much.

We had a campaign slogan during this time of battle. I would call out: 'What time is it?' and whoever I was near had to respond: 'The best time of your life!' My office staff have this chant now. They are known as Team Alexander. Jaci, Josh, Peter, Belinda, Suzanne and Jennifer: I am just one member of your team and we have much work to do.

Gillian, you have been by my side throughout this odyssey, quietly supportive, the voice of reason, always ready to listen, even when I call late at night. Thank you for your understanding. Thanks also to your daughters, Sophie and Georgia, for their support and to your mother, Elizabeth, who is here today.

In the lottery of life I have been very fortunate with regard to family. My children, Emily, Georgia and Charlie, are all perfect. When they are not perfect, I threaten them with DNA testing with the possibility of expulsion. Christopher, I think you understand this—where is the love? Naturally, we play tennis together. Sometimes we hit a lot and talk a little. Generally we talk a lot and do not hit very much at all. Today Emily drove a manual car from Sydney, which I taught her to drive. It was a bonding experience. Emily is fearful that I will tell jokes—dad jokes, which are the worst jokes in the world. Georgia is safe from such embarrassment, as she is on gap year in England. I talked to her this morning; she is now in Ireland. I taught her also to drive a manual car. When I express an opinion, as I have today, Georgia always refers to me as 'theory man'. Charlie and I watch *Two and a Half Men* together, and I apologise for that. We laugh at the same time, and I apologise for that too. I am teaching Charlie to drive a manual at the moment. That is a work in progress.

What do I want for my children? What I want for every Australian: opportunity—the opportunity to pursue their dreams, whatever they are, and not be restrained by their age, their sex or their colour. Opportunity is to be able to have a go. Opportunity

without discrimination is to be given a fair go. We here have much work to do.

Mr Speaker, I thank you for your indulgence and I thank the House.