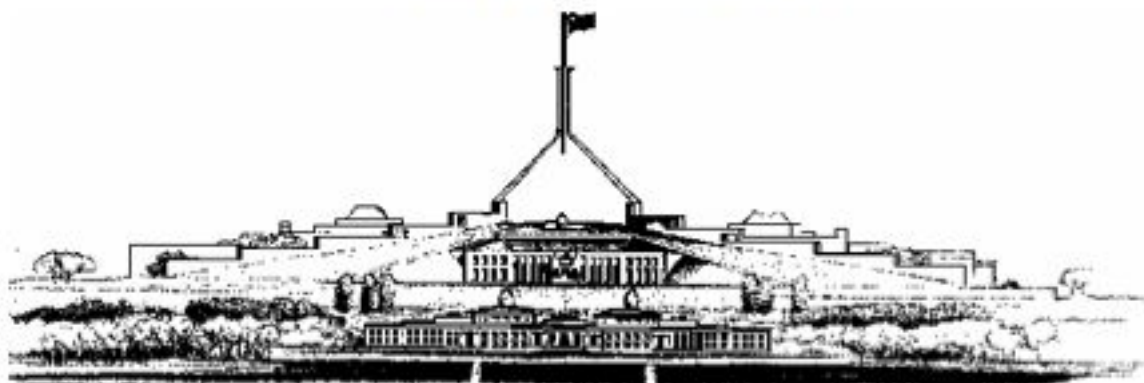




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

CONDOLENCES

Hon. Dr Reginald John David Turnbull

SPEECH

Tuesday, 8 August 2006

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Evans, Sen Chris

Source Senate
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Question No.

Senator CHRIS EVANS (Western Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (3.41 pm)—On behalf of the opposition, I would like to support the motion of condolence moved by Senator Minchin following the death, on 17 July this year, of the Hon. Dr Reginald Turnbull, who I understand was better known as Spot. I inquired about the reasons, and apparently it was to do with some sort of facial spot, but it is a great Australian nickname. On behalf of all Labor senators, I would like to extend our sympathies to his widow, children, family and friends. Reginald Turnbull had a long and, dare I say it, controversial career in politics at the local, state and federal levels, including serving 12 years in the Senate as a representative of the state of Tasmania. As Senator Minchin said, interestingly he was born in Shanghai in 1908 and trained in medicine, a discipline he continued to practise throughout his long career in public life. During World War II, he served as a major with the 12th Australian Field Ambulance.

In 1946, he was elected a Labor member for the seat of Bass in the Tasmanian House of Assembly. He remained in the House of Assembly for 15 years, until 1961. During his 15 years in state parliament, he served as the Minister for Health for more than 10 years and was responsible for the introduction of a variety of important health services. These included the introduction of fluoride to town water, the introduction of compulsory X-rays to fight tuberculosis and the establishment in Tasmania of the Royal Flying Doctor Service. For a time, he also served as Tasmanian Treasurer. I think it is fair to say that with his distinctive personal style he cut a highly controversial figure in the Tasmanian Labor Party and in public life more generally. After a decade in the Tasmanian cabinet and some considerable controversy, he was eventually estranged from Labor. I do not know what it is about Tasmania, but we seem to have a record of that. It is obviously a very independent group of people in Tasmania.

Nonetheless, Reginald Turnbull was regarded and is remembered as an intelligent, committed and somewhat larger-than-life individual. He was a very popular man in his home state and gave many years to public life. He was elected to the Senate as an Independent in 1961 for a term commencing in 1962 and was re-elected in 1967. From 1959 to 1967, he served as an alderman on Launceston City Council, with a period as mayor between 1964 and 1966. Thus

he balanced the dual roles of Independent senator and Mayor of Launceston for two years and continued to practise medicine. I dare say he was a very busy man.

For a period of about eight months from August 1969 he was leader and sole representative in the federal parliament of the Australia Party. In the early days of the Senate standing committee system he was a member of the committee on health and welfare. As I understand it, he was also a parliamentary adviser to the Australian delegation to both the 25th and 27th sessions of the General Assembly of the UN in the early 1970s. He retired from the Senate in 1974. Despite his retirement he remained interested in politics and apparently even considered running for the seat of Bass in 1977.

Dr Turnbull was married twice. His first wife, Elizabeth Turnbull, passed away in the 1980s. He is survived by his widow, Nell, and by his three children. He was clearly a person who made an enormous contribution to public life in this country and was, obviously, a very interesting character. To his family and friends in this time of mourning I extend the sympathies of all opposition senators.