

Comments on PM Turnbull's republic speech of 18.12.2016

In this speech to the ARM, Malcolm Turnbull states two pre-conditions for holding a republic referendum: the model must be settled, and it must have very high popular support. He says both must be delivered by the republican movement, not the government. This is a censure of the ARM which refuses to discuss models.

The occasion was formal with prominent guests in a grand setting. Obviously, 25 years of failure is not grounds to celebrate and Mr Turnbull enjoins the ARM to "humility and respect for the people." It is essentially the speech he has given since 1992 along with his explanations for the 1999 referendum failure.

The speech is here complete from his website. I've emphasised a few of his remarks in bold type and my comments are in this typeface. I contend that to find a model with popular support requires innovation and for this, the people must be able to talk.

The people must be able to talk and the only feasible discussion venue is the ARM. The ARM must change its de facto mission from promoting the failed model of the past to hosting a public conversation to find the successful model of the future.

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<http://malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/speech-to-australian-republican-movements-25th-anniversary-dinner>

Malcolm Turnbull MP Federal Member for Wentworth, Prime Minister **Speech to Australian Republican Movement's 25th Anniversary Dinner 18th December 2016**

Thank you very much and what a treat to be here in the Great Hall. This is such an amazing hall. Most of us who have been to Sydney University have done exams here; for those who did well in their exams, got their degrees here.

I've got one experience that may well be unique. I can't see any other members of the cast here tonight but nearly 50 years ago I appeared in a production of King Lear which was held in this hall.

I don't want to give you the wrong impression about the length of my speech but the drama teacher at my school thought Shakespeare's poetry was so beautiful he felt that none of it could be cut. The production ran for four and a half hours. There is nothing Shakespearean about my address here tonight.

So my friends, twenty five years ago we founded the Australian Republican Movement with the same spirit that has brought us together tonight.

Patriotism - pure and simple.

Love of this nation above all others.

A profound commitment that every office under our Constitution should be held by an Australian.

We are citizens of a most remarkable country.

We seem to be living in an age when technology is advancing but tolerance, or mutual respect, is retreating.

Around the world, most bloodily today in Syria, we are reminded that peoples and faiths which had lived together for hundreds of years are now at each other's throats.

And yet, here we have created the most successful multicultural society in the world - no comparable nation has so many of its people born beyond its borders or from such a diversity of cultures, religions and races.

Our values of democracy, the rule of law, mutual respect, a fair go, mateship are all consistent with the values of other democracies - but the combination, the Australian formula is unique – it is unmistakably ours.

The cause of the Australian Republican Movement is a cause for Australia.

We do not diminish or disrespect the patriotism of those who take a different view, but we have no other motive, no other reason than love of country.

We look neither down nor up. We look to each other with respect and admiration and we say we are united and we are Australian. And so our Head of State should be one of us.

Tonight, I thank you all for coming here to honour the founders of the Australian Republican Movement and all of its members and supporters over 25 years.

Some of our founders are no longer with us - Neville Wran, Geoff Dutton, Donald Horne, Faith Bandler, Harry Seidler and Franco Belgiorno Netti - but it's wonderful to be joined tonight by some of the originals including Tom Keneally, Franca Arena and Geraldine Doogue.

And I want thank Peter FitzSimons and the national committee for inviting me and Lucy here tonight - although it's unusual for us to be at a republican dinner where our children aren't selling raffle tickets, as they did for so many years. And thank you all, so many of you, for buying them over so many years.

And thank you Stan Grant for your warm welcome to country and a reminder of another and urgent piece of unfinished constitutional reform - the recognition of our First Australians.

There have been so many great and warm and good Australians in our movement. Uncle Bob Hughes waving his crutches at Tony Abbott on the stage of the Town Hall. Or opening an ARM dinner with “**welcome chardonnay sipping elitists.**”

Neville Wran walking the corridors of the old Parliament House **as we quietly stitched up one deal after another at the Constitutional Convention.** I've been trying to channel a bit of that with the Senate recently.

They were elites. And they did stitch up deals at the 1998 convention.

Normal politics, but inappropriate for the republic. At the Canberra convention those opposed to the Turnbull-Wran model were not politicians. They did not have those political smarts, those political contacts, those staffed offices five minutes away. And they were stitched up.

This whole attitude is wrong. A republic which squeaked in by using political advantage to crush its republican opponents would be improper. In 1999 it nearly happened but a stitch-up won't work now for no government will again attempt a republic referendum which is in doubt.

If we are going to become a republic it must be with a will, with republicans solidly behind it, with overwhelming popular acceptance. Even monarchists should be satisfied that the change is the clear national will, not the power program of a well-connected ginger group. As Turnbull himself says below, “nobody must feel excluded.”

Republicans should stop thinking of win and lose. Those who insist, “My model or none!” must rethink. They must seek to persuade and be open to persuasion. We need to think out of the box.

Tom Keneally, my distinguished predecessor, as Chairman and leader of what he always described as the provisional wing of the Australian Republican Movement.

When we founded the ARM in 1991 we did not imagine we would be celebrating 25 years without a republic achieved.

Although it must be said that at the time, that wily Prime Minister Bob Hawke, suggested a good date for a republic referendum was 2041.

Of course, he would have imagined that would have coincided with his 20th term as Prime Minister.

But we always knew, and often said, that an Australian republic is far from inevitable.

Indeed history is littered with inevitable causes that never came to pass.

Only hard work, **smart work, unrelenting advocacy** will secure an Australian republic and so while the convivial surroundings draw me to an evening of fond reminiscence, tonight I will offer you my frank analysis and advice on how to win - because **I know more than most how we lost.**

Does losing qualify to give advice on how to win? It's not clear he does know "how we lost" and his analysis has self-serving elements.

Smart work is surely good. But unrelenting advocacy? Promotion will not get us a republic.

What I am going to say is not influenced by partisanship or political advantage.

I am speaking to you as one of the founders of the movement, a passionate Australian republican and one who wants you to succeed.

But I also speak to you recognising that the Constitution does not belong to the Government, or the Parliament, or the Judges.

It belongs to the People. Only they can amend it.

And so those of us who propose change must approach our task with humility and respect for the people to whom the Constitution belongs.

Humility and respect for the people. An excellent idea—and the opposite of that stitch-up behaviour at the 1998 convention and the 1999 referendum.

Perhaps this is a rebuke of the ARM whose actions—the hiring of political campaign experts and refusal to publicly discuss the details of a republic—show disdain for the people, rather than humility and respect.

Only 8 out of 44 proposed amendments have been carried.

The last mildly controversial one was in 1946 and since then a number of amendments with bipartisan support have been defeated - including the preamble amendment in 1999.

The formula as you know requires a national majority and in four out of six states.

Australians have proved to be constitutional conservatives. Our great friend and constitutional guru **George Winterton once talked about Australia in constitutional terms as the frozen continent.** A little gloomy, but none the less a useful reminder that constitutional reform is not for the faint hearted or the over-optimistic.

Winterton was a very respected scholar but this is incorrect: Australia is no more frozen constitutionally than comparable countries. Don't blame voters for those 36 failed referendums.

Blame politicians' poor judgment. Nearly all the failed proposals were, like the 1999 referendum, attempts to increase politicians' power.

We can forget winning four out of six states, forget scraping through by barely satisfying the rules. The government will hold a republic referendum only if it is set to win in all states. Massively.

This conservatism is enhanced by our system of compulsory voting. A voter who is not familiar with or even interested in the issue would in a voluntary voting system stay at home. In our system they are made to vote and quite rationally will not agree with a change they don't understand.

As our opponents said in 1999 "If you don't know - Vote No"

An excuse. Analysis of the voting showed that if it had not been compulsory, the referendum would still have failed.¹ Opponents submitted sound objections (which were never answered).

To allege conservatism is again to blame the people, not respect them. It is also largely a myth for good proposals achieve big majorities. The vote percentages for the eight successful referendums —83, 55, 74, 54, 91, 73, 78, 80—do not indicate conservatism.

He grieves for his lost referendum. If only post mortems revived corpses.

This means that for referendums to succeed you need to achieve a high level of interest and familiarity with the question. **You also need to achieve a very high level of public support and the minimal level of opposition - as was done nearly 50 years ago in the 1967 referendum.**

The 1967 referendum received a vote of 91%. That's the spirit!

We also need to recognise that the media landscape has completely changed since 1991.

Back then the media was curated - in order to reach the people you needed to persuade an editor, a director, a producer to let you have access to their platform.

Media outlets sought to reach a wide audience so they could generate more advertising generally and so therefore sought to be reasonably balanced.

Now the mainstream - the curated media - is in retreat both financially and in terms of influence. People increasingly can receive the news, or what passes for it, that agrees with or confirms their views.

These social media bubbles are fertile grounds for lies, or what is euphemistically called "post truth politics".

As we saw in the last election, an audacious absurd lie can be made, exposed, denounced, its author humiliated but then successfully persisted in through direct digital means.

The "audacious absurd lie" would have been by Shorten on Medicare. Thank goodness what he has to say is "not influenced by partisanship."

So one very important task for every political movement, including the ARM, is to better understand the new environment, anticipate the scares, rebut them again and again and creatively embrace those digital channels to tell their positive story.

¹ John Warhurst, *The republic campaign in Australia: past present and future*, APSA conference 2003.

Timing is absolutely critical.

The 1999 referendum was the culmination of the commemoration of the Centenary of Federation - this was a time for review and we were able to pick up that momentum and present the republic as an appropriate coming of age as we celebrated 100 years of the Commonwealth of Australia.

The vast majority of Australians have known no other Head of State than the Queen. She is so admired and respected that few of us can say - whether monarchists or republicans - that we are not Elizabethans.

I do not believe Australians would welcome let alone support another republic referendum during her reign. And as you know I have held this view for some time.

Indeed, during the republic referendum campaign when **the direct electionists disingenuously urged Australians to vote “no”** to the “politician’s republic” so they could have another vote for a different model in a few years, **I warned that a “no” vote meant “no republic” for a very long time.**

Oh those disingenuous direct electionists. And the voters—too silly to heed Malcolm’s warning.

We simply have to stop this. Republican opponents in 1999 (a) were not all direct electionists, (b) raised principled objections and, (c) defeated the referendum despite weak organisation. It is 17 years behind us. When do we cease the self-justifying post-mortems?

We need to practice some of that “humility and respect for the people.” We should respect the people’s 1999 decision; we should talk to fellow republicans, not sling off at them.

Regrettably my prediction was correct.

Let me turn now to the **direct versus parliamentary election** point. The rock if you like on which the referendum foundered.

If this choice was the rock that wrecked the referendum, shouldn’t we stop trying to sail over it? Let’s navigate around it; let’s innovate.

The Australian Republican Movement model which the Constitutional Convention adopted provided that the President, who would have the same powers as the Governor-General would be chosen **by a two thirds majority of a joint sitting of the Parliament nominated by the Prime Minister, seconded by the Leader of the Opposition.** The logic was very simple.

The logic was a bit too simple. Has Mr T not heard what happens in the US Senate when the opposition party must cooperate to approve appointments? They are routinely held hostage to partisan politics. US Supreme Court Judge Scalia, who died in February a year ago, is only now being replaced. Politicians do deals. It is not simple to have them do the appointing.

Simple is where politicians are excluded—as at present where the Queen appoints the GG. The 1999 proposal would have had politicians take the place of the Queen and appoint the candidate nominated by the Prime Minister. Simple would be to have the people appoint the PM’s candidate. Simple—and respectful of the people as well.

That is how judges are appointed in half the states of the USA and how Japan’s Supreme Court judges are appointed. It is called the Missouri Plan and such appointments have been a common

event since the 1940s. The innovation would be quite modest: just apply the same well-tested procedure to the GG/president.

Appointing the PM's nominee is the Australian sovereign's sole power. If a republic is where the people are sovereign then the people should take over this power. The logic is very simple.²

Under our constitutional system the Head of State is a non-political position, acting on the advice of the government of the day but **with certain reserve powers in extremis to remove and appoint a Prime Minister**, but again to be exercised with scrupulous neutrality.

So if the job description is to be a non-political Head of State, the best way to appoint them we felt at the time, was in a bipartisan manner.

This exposed us of course to the claim that the ARM model was "a politician's republic". We were told that **you can't trust politicians – ironically most vocally by politicians**.

As Peter Costello said, increasingly incensed at this line, "apparently you can trust politicians to set your taxes and go to war, but not to appoint the Head of State". "The monarchist's argument," Peter observed "is **that's so important that's got to be left to genetics and bloodlines.**"

Very amusing. Another put-down of the people. No humility or respect here.

Doesn't Peter Costello think the GG's power to sack the PM is important?

Why is it ironic for politicians to say they can't be trusted? Betrayal is so common in politics it is virtually normal. Has it become ironic for politicians to speak the truth? Do we really trust politicians with taxes and war? What are our other options?

No one defended bloodline. But also, no one said the Queen can't be trusted. The defence was that the process had worked for a century and it ain't broke. Republicans who can't respect this argument do the cause no favour. In 1999 many listened to it and preferred to remain subjects of the ancient, apolitical English monarch rather than deliver themselves up to Australian politicians.

Smart-aleck put-downs won't get us a republic.

When the Constitutional Convention assembled **in 1998 we saw for the first time organised groups advocating a directly elected President**. Some supported it because they believed it had a better chance of success, others because they wanted the President to have more powers than the Governor-General.

For the first time, yes. Perhaps not so much **for** direct election as **against** politicians' appointment. If the Republic Advisory Committee had done its job properly it wouldn't have been necessary.

In 1993 the RAC, chaired by Turnbull, was commissioned by the federal government to report how we could become a republic. But the RAC abused the public trust. Instead of analysis, it produced a polemic. It disregarded its terms of reference, set up the crude dichotomy of direct election versus politicians' appointment, promoted the latter and vilified the former.³ Through the 1990s, the ARM, also chaired by Turnbull, continued this bias—and polarised the country.

Resistance in 1998 didn't come from nothing. The RAC's insistence that there existed only two models, its endorsement of one of them, and the ARM's aggressive campaigning for it, thwarted sensible discussion. By 1998 the lack of balance had become obvious and those who felt shut out

² For more on the Missouri Plan applied to Australia see the article "Popular Appointment"

³ For details of the RAC bias see pp10-13 of the open letter to Peter FitzSimons.

formed opposition groups. Still today such discussion as there is, consists of the two sides sniping at each other from their trenches—as this speech illustrates.

Though the opposition was disadvantaged in terms of media and prominent endorsement, voters ultimately agreed with it. Yet after the people had rejected the politicians' appointment model at referendum, the ARM continued to promote it. Still today, the ARM supports this model. Still today it campaigns instead of discussing. Apparently, what the people think just doesn't matter.

But it matters to sitting politicians. They'd like politicians' appointment but do nothing for they know if it again got traction, implacable opposition would again come out of the woodwork.

The ARM's lack of humility and respect for the people has ensured that "no" meant "no republic" for a very long time.

A directly elected President is feasible. Indeed in 1993 George Winterton and I had drafted a codification of the reserve powers so that such a President would be confined to no more than the current powers of the Governor-General. Largely due of course to George's scholarship that codification has over the years been looked at and regarded as a pretty good piece of work.

High-powered commissions have looked at codification since the 1930s. Their reports show such extensive, fundamental disagreements that nothing ever comes of it. We currently have a PM who is in favour of it, which should be an opportunity. But nothing's going to happen. Talk of codification is hollow; there isn't the political will to tackle it.

I think legally, technically it is possible to preserve the status quo of a neutral, non-political head of state who is directly elected in a legal sense.

So a directly elected president could be non-political in the legal, technical sense. And now, having set up the direct election straw-man, he will, for the millionth time since 1992, treat it as a punching bag...

But the problem remains none the less that a directly elected President could, depending on the character of the person elected and regardless of his or her constitutional authority, constitute a potential alternate centre of political power to the Prime Minister and the Parliament.

Fraser, Whitlam, Keating, Howard, Beazley, Carr - the leaders of the time were all united on that point.

Indeed, a directly elected President would be the only federal official for which every Australian had the opportunity to vote.

And now, having turned the direct election straw-man into a bogeyman, the white knight of the 1999 politicians' appointment model rides to the rescue...

A key element of the ARM's strategy then and now is to secure **the broadest range of political support** and to minimise the opposition wherever possible.

Parliamentary appointment at that time had the advantage of being supported by leading political figures of right and left. It would be fair to say that it had the support of most of the

Labor side of politics and a substantial part of the Coalition including of course people like Peter Costello.

It also had a good housekeeping tick of approval from former Governors-General and High Court Judges as being safe.

It's true: the elites did favour the politicians' appointment model—though less from enthusiasm for it as from dread of direct election. But political scientists didn't favour it. Nor did the people. Not exactly a broad range of political support. Not exactly "humility and respect for the people."

Turnbull is singing the song he sang in the 1993 RAC report and which he has sung ever since: direct election is all bad, with no redeeming features; politicians' appointment is without blemish; the important people agree; opponents are disingenuous; no contrary argument exists.

Yet it is patently obvious which of the two options is the more republican.

When do we stop fighting the 1999 referendum? When do we abandon the polarity, politicians' appointment versus direct election? What this country needs is some innovation.

On the other hand a direct election model would have been opposed root and branch by John Howard's whole government - as he said to me at the time, "there would be no conscience vote then" as well as being opposed by many of the leaders of the Labor Party.

Added to that we found that when the matter was discussed in groups large or small, support for a direct election quickly diminished when people understood that a directly elected President would almost certainly be a politician and a rival, if only for attention of the Prime Minister.

Surely, his last eight paragraphs are convincing evidence that the direct election model will never get a glimmer of a look-in with the politicians and other important people. They won't have it—and they are the gate-keepers. He keeps saying direct election is possible but he never has a good word for it. In his eyes it is all bad and, as he says, leading figures are united in this. It is just not possible for a PM to propose it to the parliamentary party room.

If codification is needed for direct election, then codification, already too hard, is tainted. If it opens the way to the horror of direct election, politicians will make no move toward codification.

Turnbull is fixated by his direct election monster but the relentless criticism from him and other elites probably just enhances its credibility. Harping on its defects to make politicians' appointment appear "simple" reinforces the republican divide and it is quite pointless because neither option will ever go to referendum. The generals should stop fighting the last war.

New ideas are needed. The 2004 Senate inquiry invited model suggestions from the public. It received a "plethora" (its word) of models. The ARM has ignored these innovations. The people who submitted them were, and are, treated with contempt, not humility and respect.

So in addition to a referendum being at the right time to be successful, **the republican movement will need to have settled the issue of the model.** The model presented to the public must be made constitutionally sound and also be one which is likely to win popular support.

The PM states the bottom line: the model must be settled and it must be settled by the republican movement. Wake up, ARM.

The government will hold a referendum when the republican movement hands it a model which is certain to pass. How to find a viable model? Innovation is the key. A government website says:

“Australians are renowned for their smart ideas, but we often fail to back them.” The 2004 plethora of models is a case in point.

But the politicians don't think of innovation; they think of power and with only two models in their mental universe, they plump for politicians' appointment. At present it would fail again so the ARM is their stalking horse in a forlorn hope that it will somehow save the 1999 model through “unrelenting advocacy.” This has been the strategy of the last 17 years.

To prop up the 1999 model, discussion of alternatives had to be quashed. This policy—itsself a betrayal of republicanism—has led to the ARM's irrelevance and to the republic's becoming moribund. Note that in this speech Mr T talks only of pre-1999 matters. For him, the history of the republican movement ended in 1999. This is what the ARM gets for spending 17 years making nice to politicians. For him, as for the wider public, the ARM of the last 17 years is non-existent.

Since 1999 the ARM has bent over backwards to avoid discussing models. The Prime Minister has now made it clear: the model must be settled and the ARM must do it. How has the ARM responded? It has issued a media release saying that the PM “called for the ARM to demonstrate genuine popular support for an Australian republic.” The release made no mention of models.

The ARM will either wake up and start looking at innovative models, or it will stay irrelevant.

The 1999 referendum itself while strictly a choice between the monarchy status quo and a President appointed by Parliament became in many respects a **proxy battle with direct election**, not least because so many of the direct election supporters advocated a “No” vote, allowing the perfect to be the enemy of the good. And so many of the monarchists chose to slip into the clothing of the direct electionists at least for the purpose of the campaign.

Those foolish direct election supporters! Those deceitful monarchists! He can't let it be; the referendum loss haunts him.

We never overcame that fundamental fault-line in the republican camp.

So how do we deal with it?

In my view we would need to have an advisory plebiscite which offered a choice between two republican models, **presumably direct election and parliamentary appointment**. I doubt if there would be much support for a President with different, let alone wider, powers than the Governor-General – so the question would relate solely to the method of appointment.

“Presumably” the old ideas will be repeated. You might think a prime minister would presume there will be new ideas and perhaps even encourage innovation.

We had this plebiscite already. He said so 20 seconds earlier: “The 1999 referendum ... became ... a proxy battle with direct election.” Now he wants a plebiscite to repeat it. As if we need another formal confrontation. If this new plebiscite didn't turn out as Mr T prefers, would he want to do it yet again, twenty years further on?

Actually, such a plebiscite is politically a non-starter. He hasn't thought it through. Given a choice between two options, one would win. The pressure would then be on the government to hold the referendum. But what if this winner hasn't the support to pass a referendum? Whoops—better not hold the plebiscite in the first place.

On the other hand, what if the winner is a real winner and sure to pass a referendum? Then there is no point in a plebiscite: just hold the referendum.

There'll be no plebiscite. The lesson of Brexit is not lost on our politicians. They aren't going near any plebiscites. Nor should they: holding plebiscites for constitutional change is folly.

This whole way of thinking is wrong. Wide support won't come from one model defeating another. (Especially if the losing side won't accept the result!) The path to a republic is not by having two committed sides face off in a slanging match, defending rigid positions.

We must stop seeing other republicans as foes to be struck down, and start seeing them as allies to be encouraged. A strongly supported model can only arise through discussion. Negotiation (without a power imbalance where one side stitches up the other) is very different from do-or-die campaigning. No matter how heated, it leaves room for modification, innovation, compromise.

This plebiscite is absolutely critical for two reasons.

First, **we need to ensure that the Australian people feel they have chosen the model** to be presented. Of course every member of the Parliament is elected, but we cannot be blind to the levels of cynicism about politics, parliaments and governments. If anything they are greater today than they were back in 1999.

So we need to ensure they feel they have chosen? This elite condescension has characterised the republican movement for 25 years. No humility here. And no respect: in a republic the people actually choose; they are not just kidded into feeling they have chosen.

Second, **the arguments against direct election need to be played out before the referendum itself.** By surfacing all of the concerns I noted a moment ago, **the people will either conclude it's not the right approach or be reassured** that it can be managed. Either way the question will be settled.

No no. It's not the people who'd need to be reassured. It's the politicians, and they never could be. For them—as for Turnbull himself—no direct election plan would ever be reassuring no matter how perfect the codification (which anyway won't occur). It's all academic; direct election can't happen.

Turnbull wants the arguments against direct election to be played out. But he and others repeated them endlessly during the 1990s. Millions were spent to absolutely no effect. As long as direct election is compared only with a "politicians' republic," those arguments will fall on deaf ears. An attractive alternative model is needed in order for direct electionists to let go. Refighting 1999 is no use. Innovation is needed.

The arguments against every model (not just the one Mr T doesn't like) must be played out. We would need to know we have covered all options in order for one model to earn high support. There will be no plebiscites and the playing out will have to occur through media discussion.

The politicians will only hold a republic referendum if it is a formality. A referendum will only be held to confirm a proposal which the polls have been saying, for months or years, will pass easily.

That happy day is far away. A step toward playing out the arguments would be for the ARM to show some humility and respect for the people by turning its website into a wiki and a blog, thus making the site a resource on the republic and the place for systematic model discussion.

Once the model is chosen at the plebiscite, the Parliament should then formulate the terms of the amendment in line with the people's choice and present it at a referendum. If direct election is chosen, we can make it work; it will require much more detailed amendments, as I said earlier it is possible.

Well, you'd need the amendments worked out before such a plebiscite. Otherwise the meaning of the plebiscite wouldn't be clear. It's all nonsense.

Notice, by the way, that Turnbull makes no mention of having a plebiscite to ask simply if the people want a republic. This the ARM has advocated since 1999 and is currently actively promoting. It appears the PM does understand this one is nonsense.⁴

Let me now turn to the critical question of ownership. To succeed at a referendum, a republican proposal cannot be seen as a plaything of one or other of the major political parties.

Labor leaders in particular are always tempted to exploit this issue for political gain because they believe it divides my side of politics more than their own.

In truth they would always rather be Her Majesty's Prime Minister than the Leader of the President's Loyal Opposition.

Oh, those Labor leaders! Mr T correctly warns about exploiting the issue for partisan purposes and instantly commits the offence himself. Verily, if this republic ever happens it will be despite, not because of, politicians. The ARM website boasts that a majority of politicians support a republic. You have to wonder if this is really a plus.

And right now, in terms of constitutional reform, we have an immediate and pressing and bipartisan commitment of securing constitutional recognition of our First Australians. That task is challenging enough and Mr Shorten and I should not be distracted from it.

What Parliament needs to see is a strong grassroots political movement mobilising a substantial majority behind the republic. That must be delivered by the republican movement today, just as it did twenty years ago - not by the Government or the Opposition.

Parliament will act when the ARM hands it a model which has substantial majority support.

Neither direct election nor politicians' appointment has ever had that support or ever will have it.

I know that the people expect my Government - indeed the whole Parliament - to devote all our attention to the pressing issues of today - our national and economic security, health, education, energy security, infrastructure to name a few. It is a long list and each issue on it requires my attention right now.

Either way, the clear lesson is that you cannot succeed in any referendum - let alone one that goes to touchstone issues of national identity - if the proposal is not **seen and understood by the Australian people as one over which they all have ownership.**

Nobody must feel excluded.

But all of us have to be pragmatic in acknowledging that it is not something that keeps most Australians awake at night.

Today, if anything, it is more a slow burner than it was 20 years ago.

As I have said before - and this is the cold, unyielding practical reality - it is hard to see how this issue will return to the forefront of debate in this country during the Queen's reign.

⁴ For the politics of this plebiscite proposal and its Senate inquiries, see the FitzSimons letter.

I concede that the controversy around the knighthood proposed for Prince Philip in the 2015 Order of Australia Awards may have stirred some passions. But I don't think anyone should delude themselves into thinking this was the game-changer that would reinvigorate the republican cause.

Around the world, big political change usually only occurs under duress, under some kind of urgent, pervasive pressure. We are attempting to become a republic without any pressure.

Will the Queen's death bring pressure? Doubtful. There'll be grief, weeks of TV retrospectives, then a glamorous coronation. It is hard to see this as pressure toward a republic.

If respect for the Queen is the hold-up, one answer might be to get the republic organised and then delay implementation till she goes. Or we could patriate the GG's appointment without touching the monarchy—and then consider at leisure how and when to become a republic.

And in any event, I have to report, knights and dames are no longer able to be awarded in the Order of Australia.

Nearly two decades after the republic referendum, are we any nearer that groundswell of overwhelming public support among a majority of Australians in a majority of States that would cast aside the doubts about the republican model, put to rest the fear of change, and assuage lingering anxiety about updating a system of government most Australians seem to think works ok? Whatever reservations they may have about the people actually governing.

That is why I say tonight, to you Peter and your team at the Australian Republican Movement, you have a lot of work ahead of you – a gruelling, demanding and often thankless struggle.

Those of us that founded this movement in 1991 will know exactly what that involves. I wrote on this in 1999. I suspect it remains true today:

“The ARM is not a well-oiled machine waiting to carry would-be national heroes into the history books. It is no more than a vehicle for work – **boring, expensive and endless work**. But it is that work, and the dedication of those who worked, that **has got us this far**. Nothing less than that sort of dedication will bring us to the republic.”

And how far has the ARM got? At the recent Australia-wide elections of the ARM executive, just 1040 members voted. That follows a period of relatively high activism. After 25 years, interest in the republic is as low as it has ever been.

The ARM made it boring so it became endless. Certainly, professional publicity campaigns are expensive. But public discussion of models would not be boring. And opening the ARM website to such discussion would cost little.

The less party political the republican movement is, the broader its base, the deeper its grassroots, the better positioned it will be when the issue becomes truly salient again.

It has to be a genuine popular movement. To proceed on any other basis is to miss the point of what happened in the 1990s.

Genuine. Popular. This can't possibly develop unless people talk about it.

The ARM doesn't want any talk. That has been its stance since 1999. The current ARM National Director has publicly adamantly rejected discussion of models and the website is silent on them. The stated reason is that discussion is divisive. To want a republic and refuse to say how, is bonkers. It stops the republic dead and is a gift to monarchist derision.

Fear of talk is not republican and the real reason concerns control. Model debate would publicise options, exposing the 1999 model to comparison and further discredit. It may well finally kill it.

The ARM website recently withdrew its (hypocritical) claim of democracy. It now promises that "the public will have a say," that ARM "leaders" will "drive the conversation" and "consult the Australian people."

There is no hint of conversation or consultation. The site is effectively content-free and the ARM Twitter account is used, like Donald Trump's, as a way to broadcast while avoiding feedback. Unlike Trump, the ARM Twitter says nothing. Boring and endless indeed.

Will the professional campaign for a vague "Australian head of state" create a popular movement? No. And if it did, it wouldn't be genuine.

If the republic becomes the agenda of this or that political leader, or this or that Prime Minister or Opposition Leader, it also becomes prey to partisan politics. And that way leads to failure.

We all remember Paul Keating's ferocious advocacy of the republic, and I don't doubt for one moment his commitment to the cause.

But when he unleashed both barrels in the Parliament in 1992, accusing outrageously the Liberals of cultural cringe and colonial subservience. Yes, he grabbed the headlines; yes, he energised his backbench. But for the ARM, this over-the-top diatribe was not the speech we wanted to hear.

Paul Keating's support for the republic gave it a lot of profile, no doubt, but it made the task of forging national consensus so much harder. It was one step forward, two steps back.

What must not forget is that the most potent argument against us in 1999 was the accusation of the "politicians' republic."

And Rod Cameron sitting right there, he remembers that extremely well. That was the most potent case that was presented against us.

Bringing all of this together, the only conclusion that can be drawn is that success for the ARM in any future referendum will depend on building support from the grassroots up. The movement has a massive task of community outreach ahead of it – and it doesn't start at Sussex Street or Menzies House.

So why should we be a republic? What is the pitch?

It is as I said at the outset, it is a straightforward issue of principle and national pride.

I am an Australian, I am proud to say so.

Our Head of State should be someone who can say the same.

Our Head of State should be one of us.

Our President should be a resident.

I take heart from your mission statement which I believe, provides the ARM a roadmap to success. It is about broadening your reach; it is about engaging with Australians at all levels, everywhere. It is about patience and endurance and, most of all, mutual respect.

It is also about hard work and dedication.

In your words, “House by house, street by street, suburb by suburb, **we must make the case to our fellow Australians that we deserve one of our own as Head of State.**”

Foolishness. There is no need to tell Australians the HoS should be an Australian. They know that already. Turnbull said above that the model has to have popular support. Now he says the basic idea of a republic has to have support. Rubbish. The republic already has popular support.

The republic had solid majority support in 1999—largely owing to Turnbull’s hard work through the 1990s. Exit polls showed more than half the no-voters were actually in favour of a republic. If the ARM hadn’t insisted on its preconceived model, history could have been different.

In 1999 all that was needed to get a republic was an acceptable model. That is still the situation today. Yet the ARM still wants the model that lost in 1999.

The ARM’s own recent poll says republic support is at 52 per cent.⁵ The poll figure has no meaning for if the republic ever again looks like going anywhere, a very large majority of Australians will again support it. *So never mind support for a republic. We need majority support for a model.*

The basic conditions for a model to achieve a high level of support would be that it (a) assign no power to politicians or other elites, and (b) pose no risk to political stability.

With the republic on the agenda and a viable model, the case for continuing the monarchy vanishes—it’s all over bar the referendum formality.

By definition, a republic will be on the agenda if it is talked about. To get talked about there must be drama. The new professional campaigners will make little impression; effective publicity for the republic is the free kind, provided by the media because there is genuine content, because it’s news, because there’s drama.

Repeating that Australia deserves its own head of state (and whingeing about a hereditary monarchy) really is boring. The hot topic is the model. That is the problem to be solved and the issue which would create controversy, generate publicity, and find a viable model if there is one.

“Right now, an Australian republic is not inevitable. But we can make it so by working together on this great unfinished business for our nation.”

⁵ In late 1992 independent polling said 65%, according to Turnbull in *The Reluctant Republic*, p. 205.

You are on the right track, there will be unexpected obstacles along the way but great opportunities as well.

The ARM is on the track it's been on for 17 years—lost in the scrub. Great opportunities? The Queen dying? The ARM does have a significant opportunity: to host a discussion on models.

In this speech Malcolm Turnbull looked backwards. He advocated parliamentary appointment and attacked direct election just as he has done since 1992—pro forma, superficial, biased. He blamed the 1999 referendum failure on others and unrealistically proposed to repeat it as plebiscite.

Parliamentary appointment, direct election, and plebiscites are politically impossible—as would have become evident long since if the ARM had tolerated discussion.

One element of the past is permanently valid and the Prime Minister made it crystal-clear. As a condition for a referendum, the republican movement, not the government, must produce the model, and the model must have substantial support.

The republican movement means the Australian Republican Movement. There are other groups and individuals but they don't have anything like the ARM's status. There is no burning political pressure for this republic (because the system ain't broke) and to start a rival group would be an implied criticism of the PM and wouldn't attract prominent supporters.

While the ARM exists, there can be no rival. If the ARM collapses, then someday a new group will arise, but for now the ARM occupies the space. And as long as the ARM fails to act on models, it will continue to function as if it is a monarchist fifth column designed to prevent a republic.

The movement's job is to hand the government a model with overwhelming support. This is impossible unless models are discussed—and the only forum is the ARM. The ARM's refusal to allow discussion of models over the last 17 years made the republic a non-issue. It is not too late to turn it around but "humility and respect for the people" would have to actually apply.

The only proper way for Australia to change its identity is if Australians are part of it. It is also the only practical way. The ARM should overcome its fear of free speech, invite submissions of models, publish them, and host a public discussion of their pros and cons.

My own suggestion for proceeding to a republic is outlined in the article "Popular Appointment".

Thank you for reading.

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Keep the faith, advance Australia, up the republic.

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