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Senator FAWCETT (South Australia) (17 :0 6): Mr President, may I start by congratulating you on your re-election. To quote the Old Book, 'To those whom much has been given, much will be required,' and Australia has given me much to be thankful for. I have been blessed with the opportunity to see life in Australia from different perspectives. I was born and raised in a country town and enjoyed the freedoms of outdoor play and activities that that afforded a youth growing up in the sixties. As a young person, I had the opportunity to live overseas in a developing country and experience what it is like to live among different cultures and values.

Through a career in the Australian Defence Force that spanned over two decades as an Army pilot, I was privileged to travel throughout Australia, living and working in the bush, in our cities, in the outback and in Papua New Guinea. I have seen the best and the worst of life for Australia's first people in contemporary Australia. I have been posted overseas to live and work in the UK, Europe and the USA with counterparts from many countries of the world. While recognising the strengths and positive aspects of all these other nations, there is no place that I would prefer to call home than Australia. So I was honoured in 2004 to be elected as a member of the Australian parliament representing the communities of Wakefield in South Australia. It is a testament to the strength and stability of our democracy that three years later I would leave that role, along with the change of government, in a transition that was unblemished by corruption or violence.

We live in a land that many in the world can only dream of: a democratic land of opportunity and freedom which aspires to equality and equity of access—the notion of a fair go. So often we take these things for granted, even though in recent weeks the news has been full of people all around the world laying down their lives for these basic freedoms. The vast majority of us who are able to benefit from and enjoy all that this nation offers have a responsibility to give back in any way we can. First and foremost, we have a duty to defend and develop those things that preserve our democracy and freedom. Secondly, we have an obligation to reach out to those amongst us and those beyond our shores who for many reasons do not enjoy the same security or quality of life.

In most areas of endeavour and interest in Australia, there is much to celebrate and much to unite us. I wish to play a role in preserving and enhancing these aspects of life in Australia. However, I also stand here today because there are things we can do better. I have been in the homes of some of Australia's most marginalised people and I have seen the crippling generational effects of life lived on handouts. I have been challenged to find more effective ways to empower people to be responsible for outcomes in their own lives—to give them a hand up and a reason to take it.

I have stood with rural communities facing uncertainty around basic services such as health care, often due to the inability of bureaucracies to realise that not all the world neatly fits into their statistical models. I have been motivated to invest my time in advocating for better policy and supporting local solutions until governments finally listen.

I have stood with small businesses facing bankruptcy as a direct result of poorly administered Commonwealth programs, and I have been convinced that the true measure of a successful government should be positive outcomes for people in the real world—outcomes achieved by looking beyond the funding announcement to effective implementation.

I have stood in the home of a sole parent in desperate need of respite and support for a disabled child who is so physically strong and aggressive that they live in a house remote from others with locked rooms and a fenced-in verandah. I have been motivated to do more for carers and those with a disability because we as a nation can do better than this.

I have stood with our service men and women in conflict zones and witnessed both the selfless service they provide on our behalf and the complexities and sometimes dysfunction of the organisation that trains, supplies and directs them. I have seen again the need for Defence policy that finds the balance between seeking efficiency and ensuring effectiveness.

Finally, to paraphrase the words of Abraham Lincoln, I am here because I want to play a part in helping this parliament to fulfil its purpose: not to be a place of politicians with an eye just on the next election but of statesmen working with a vision for the next generation.

Being in this place, therefore, is not about my efforts or aspirations alone. I recognise that I am here by the goodwill of the people of South Australia and by the grace of God. I thank my fellow South Australians for placing their trust in me to serve the interests of our state and, in a broader context, the interests of Australia as a member of the Senate. I am acutely conscious that my decisions and priorities will not please everyone all of the time. I trust, however, that over time even my worst critics will recognise that my aim is to be characterised as someone who works with passion, integrity and balance. In 1774, Edmond Burke said:

Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays, instead of serving you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion.

That people have considered my industry worthy of their support, and to the extent that I have experience and judgment, is because of the investment that many people have made in my life. Foremost among those who have shaped me are my parents, Bob and Helen Fawcett. They have instilled in me lasting values, helped shape my character and work ethic and taught me the worth of faith and relationships. Friends from school, church and community groups have given me the freedom over many years to try, to fail and to succeed. They have encouraged me to strive for high standards but have had the grace to forgive in the times when I have failed to live up to them. I thank my many friends and colleagues in the Australian Defence Force, an organisation that has afforded me not only the means to serve Australia but many opportunities to grow in wisdom, skills and experience.

Foremost among those who sustain me are my family. To my wife and best friend, Lorna: thank you for your love, support and counsel. That you would commit to paying the price of releasing me to public life is all the more remarkable in that you have been there before and you go into this season of our lives with your eyes wide open. To my daughters, Alexandra and Emily: your unconditional love and support has delighted and humbled me over many years. I am very proud of you both and grateful for the character and values I see you living out every day.

To retiring senators Nick Minchin and Alan Ferguson: thank you for your support and wise guidance over the years. You have left large shoes to fill. My thanks go to the members of the Liberal Party for their faith in me and for their support and tireless work in metropolitan and regional areas across South Australia. My thanks also to the many people who contacted me in August last year to indicate that, for the first time ever, they were going to vote below the line. I trust that in years to come they will look back and consider that effort worth while. By far the largest part of my aviation

career was spent serving as an experimental test pilot. By definition, I am therefore an optimist, as well as a conservative, who is not afraid of change or measured risk. I am an optimist because I believe we will find a way to cross new frontiers and fix problems and, importantly, will have one landing for every take-off! I am a conservative because, no matter how visionary the design, there are certain laws of physics that cannot be ignored and have guided design principles over the years for good reason. I am unafraid of change because we can always improve, but the risk must be measured because no system operates in isolation and unintended consequences can result in tragedy. The same can be said about public policy.

Aristotle is credited with asking: 'What is democratic behaviour? That which preserves a democracy, or that which the people like?' I believe a priority for this parliament is to defend and develop those things that will preserve our freedoms and democracy. I also believe there are long-held principles which we ignore at our peril, no matter how inspirational the goal or how passionate the ideals of a would-be reformer. The freedom to question, to critically evaluate and to comment on facts, whether by the media or individuals, is an essential part of an open and free society. All Australians should be concerned when attempts are made to codify or restrict what we can or cannot say about politics or religion, no matter how plausible the reason may appear.

Innovation, jobs, compassion and community are created and sustained by people, not programs or policy. The vast majority of our society benefits from small government that empowers local control rather than intrusive, centralised control by a bureaucracy. This is true not only for individual wellbeing and wealth but for equity in the community. It is no surprise that the most effective access to meaningful work and self-determination being afforded Australia's Indigenous people today is coming from individuals and private enterprise. Some of the most effective and efficient non-government organisations are those that are not tied to the government purse strings. Encouraging and rewarding both personal responsibility and behaviours that take responsibility for those around us will always have more genuine, sustainable outcomes than a focus on individual rights.

The defence of our nation is a core responsibility of the national government and, by extension, this parliament. Australians are rightly proud of the professional, exemplary service the Defence Force is providing around Australia and the world. However, they are also right to ask why there appear to be so many headlines about problems with the broader administration of the defence organisation.

The Black review and the Rizzo review are the latest investigations that highlight many symptoms of underlying dysfunction. But how should the parliament respond? Instructing defence to apply even more process driven bureaucratic band-aids to the symptoms will not fix the problems. Rather than pointing the finger of blame at defence—again—parliament needs to be prepared to step back and take time to understand the unintended consequences of two decades of downsizing, outsourcing and splintering of the chain of command that has been forced on defence by government in the name of efficiency. If the desired outcome is an organisation that is efficient, effective and accountable to the elected minister of the day, then government needs to return to the principle of providing our military leaders both command and control of all the resources they need to do their job.

Inextricably linked to defence is our ongoing responsibility to those who have served this nation. I am heartened by the improvement in quality of care for both the physical and mental health of our ex-service personnel and their families, particularly the change in policy which sees more accessible options for rehabilitation and continued service. I am conscious, however, that with sustained operational commitments the number of people requiring support is increasing, and this parliament has a duty to ensure that the funding for support services increases at a rate that is at least commensurate with the need. With respect to pensions, members and senators should remember that the principle of loyalty flows two ways. The ex-service community was justified in their anger when the coalition bill for appropriate indexation of the DFRDB pension earlier this year was voted down by the ALP and Greens. We expected the loyalty of service men and women when they enlisted and if they deployed; they have a right to expect ours now they have returned and retired.

Alongside all the aspirations and goals that have been mentioned during these first speeches, I wish to place on record another principle—that true success is measured by outcomes. We need a focus on how the government works, what the government achieves, not just what it sets out to do. Again, perhaps it is my background as a test pilot, where unintended consequences can literally be the difference between life and death, but I see that the urgency to respond to a need or opportunity must be balanced with thorough planning and implementation. Leadership and ownership of an issue by a minister must extend beyond the media conference where funding is announced, and should be focused on assurance of outcomes rather than just highlighting the quantum of the inputs.

One size does not fit all. This is particularly true when it comes to education. This is not just about parental choice of schools, which I support; it is about a young person's choice of vocation. Not all young people will go on to university and many find their niche using both their head and their hands in a trade. If we really value this option, we will provide a path for young people to make a trade their first choice, not the option offered in the shed at the back of the school to those who do not opt for the purely academic program. St Patrick's Technical College in South Australia—a product of the Howard government—is one outstanding model for how an industry led, trade focused technical college can lead to high enrolments, high retention rates and, most importantly, real trades for young people. There are other opportunities that we can develop, such as the Skilling Australia's Defence Industry program. This program has proven successful, providing tertiary and postgraduate training for the staff of prime contractors. From my discussions with industry, I know that there are viable ways in which we can make those funds flow down to their second and third tier small business subcontractors, who are the ones who actually take on apprentices but need the additional cash flow margin to do so. Finally, there is the foundational value of family. Hugh Mackay writes in *Reinventing Australia*:

Family life is thought to teach us important lessons about loyalty, responsibility and compromise, and many Australians believe the quality of family life is an important index of the quality of life in the wider society.

This point was reinforced by the Assistant Secretary for Children and Families in the US, Wade Horn. In quoting research by social scientists he concluded:

... marriage is more than a private emotional relationship. It is also a social good. Not every person can or should marry. And not every child raised outside of marriage is damaged as a result. But communities where good-enough marriages are common, have better outcomes for children, women and men than do communities suffering from high rates of divorce, unmarried child-bearing, and high-conflict or violent marriages.

While we need to support compassionately people in all relationships, we must be prepared to actively promote the traditional model of the family as a desirable goal. Research shows that the viability of a marriage and family is not just about the circumstances that surround the parents. Tensions and conflicts affect most relationships. Rather, viability hinges, firstly, on the couple's willingness to decide that the relationship is worth working to preserve and, secondly, on their ability to create a shared framework of relational skills to reach a resolution. Clearly, two keys to supporting

families are enabling people to access relationship education and helping them to see the value in doing so through raising awareness and incentive. This will go some way toward empowering people to play a far more active part in the outcomes they seek. The family is a foundational element of our society and should be valued as such. Our promotion of family must move beyond rhetoric and result in meaningful investment and support.

Mr President, in conclusion, there is much to be thankful for, much that should unite us and much to give us hope for the future of our journey as a nation. There are people we need to include as fellow travellers and key principles to defend and build upon along the way. To the people of South Australia, both those who supported me and those who did not on this occasion, you have my industry, my judgment and my commitment to serve you with diligence and integrity. I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to once again serve in the national parliament.