



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Australian Space Industry

SPEECH

Monday, 29 July 2019

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 29 July 2019 Page 14 Questioner Speaker Marles, Richard, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr MARLES (Corio—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10:56): Like it was for the member for Fisher, this was a deeply inspiring event for me. On 12 September 1962 President Kennedy said:

We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard ...

The member for Fisher described the events of Apollo as being essential to the human condition and, in that, he is right. It is because it goes precisely to the centre of what we are as beings. When we look at those who have shared our time on the planet and who might be remembered 500 or 1,000 years from now, the person who will be remembered the most is Neil Armstrong. Apollo 11 landed on the moon on 20 July 1969, and Neil Armstrong took those first remarkable steps on 21 July 1969. He stepped into a new world and, as the first human to do it, he will be remembered more than any other person who we have shared our time with on earth right now.

There is a deep Australian connection to this incredible feat. As Neil Armstrong took those first steps, they were beamed to 650 million viewers around the world as a result of the Honeysuckle Creek radio telescope and the Parkes telescope, as has been immortalised in the movie *The Dish*. The Apollo program was cancelled after Apollo 17 as a result of budget cuts. That was a pity because, had that not been the case, there may well have been an Australian who stepped on the moon. Dr Philip Chapman was an Australian who was participating in the NASA program and had every possibility of being slated for one of those originally planned future Apollo missions to the moon. But his participation in NASA was the forerunner for Dr Paul Scully-Power and Andy Thomas, two Australians who did go to space through the NASA program. To this day, the deep space network at Tidbinbilla, just south of where we are now, is a facility co-hosted by CSIRO and NASA, and NASA retains a pretty significant presence in this city of Canberra today.

This was an event which, for me, being born in 1967, loomed over my childhood and my early teens and absolutely shaped my choices of what I studied. In 1982 I was in year 10. That's the year in which people make their decision as to whether or not to pursue science. It was a no-brainer for me given that the Apollo missions defined science as being the single most exciting endeavour that any of us could engage in. And so, without blinking, I pursued science for the rest of my school career and right through university to complete my Bachelor of Science.

That is not the case today. In 2017, the Office of the Chief Scientist published this statement:

Participation in most Year 12 mathematics and science subjects is declining, and for science is the lowest in 20 years.

I think the celebration of big science as we engaged in with Apollo, the kind of celebration which saw this on the front pages of all our newspapers, was so important to inspiring the likes of me to pursue science in the early 1980s, but in fact 1982 is where the graph peaks when it comes to kids choosing to pursue science in school. We need to change this.

Big science is being undertaken in Australia, but we do not give it the prominence we gave to Apollo 11, and we should. The Square Kilometre Array telescope is an example. It is the single largest science project in the world today, jointly based in Karoo, South Africa, and Murchison, Western Australia. We are deeply connected to this. The Square Kilometre Array dishes, when they are completed in 2025, will produce digital information equivalent to 10 times the global internet traffic of today. They will be able to identify planets in distant solar systems which have bio markers and will be able to confirm, in most of our lifetimes, the existence of life elsewhere in the universe, and that will be a profound moment in the human story.

Yet, we know nothing of this. This is not something which makes it on to the front pages of our newspapers, but it needs to. This needs to be the scientific endeavour equivalent to Apollo 50 years ago, inspiring students in

decades to come to pursue science, because, as a country, we must change our cultural relationship with science. If we do not, we will be overtaken by countries within our region and around the world and we will not be the prosperous country in the future that we have been until this time.