



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MOTIONS

**Kosciuszko, General Tadeusz
Andrezej Bonawentura**

SPEECH

Monday, 23 October 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Monday, 23 October 2017	Source House
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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Falinski, Jason, MP	Question No.

Mr FALINSKI (Mackellar) (11:23): I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges that:

(a) 15 October 2017 marks the 200th anniversary of the death of Tadeusz Kosciuszko; and

(b) on 22 June 2016 the Polish Sejm (the lower chamber of Polish Parliament) adopted a special resolution proclaiming 2017 'The Year of Tadeusz Kosciuszko', leading to world wide celebrations under the patronage of UNESCO;

(2) recognises Tadeusz Kosciuszko as an indomitable fighter for the universal values of freedom, liberty and equality;

(3) acknowledges the importance of Tadeusz Kosciuszko to the 180,000 strong Polish community in Australia, marked by our naming of the highest mountain on Australian mainland after him; and

(4) recognises the work of Kosciuszko Heritage Inc. whose mission is to promote Kosciuszko in Australia, and to organise activities aimed at commemorating this Polish national hero.

Fifteen October this year marked the 200th anniversary of the death of the Polish, American and Australian national hero, Tadeusz Kosciuszko. To commemorate this momentous occasion, the Polish Sejm, equivalent to our House, proclaimed 2017 as the year of Kosciuszko, and I'm honoured to present a motion recognising Kosciuszko's monumental contribution to the universal quest for freedom, liberty and equality. Involved in not one but two revolutionary movements, Kosciuszko has come to embody the defiance of tyrannical authority characterised by the Polish people. His genius in the battlefields of Europe and North America in pursuit of Polish and American liberation played a large part in shaping the evolution of military tactics, and his exemplary leadership made him a model for others to aspire to. As a young engineer in the Continental Army, having been inspired by the American desire for independence, Kosciuszko was instrumental in redesigning and shoring up American fortifications, ensuring that the British advance was halted. Back in Poland in 1792, as a general, Kosciuszko's valiant attempts to defend Polish sovereignty resulted in his forces defeating a Russian army five times their size.

Described by Thomas Jefferson as being 'as pure a son of liberty as I have ever known', Kosciuszko's message is not confined to the historical context of Poland. Nor is his legacy relevant only to military tacticians. Rather, he has come to represent the fight for the universal values of freedom, liberty and equality. As both the leader of the Kosciuszko uprising in 1794 and a senior figure in the American Revolutionary War, Kosciuszko championed not only the cause of freedom from tyranny but also that of emancipation. Throughout his life, he paid little regard to the distinctions of race, culture and religion that were so prevalent at the time. While serving in the Continental Army, Kosciuszko earned the trust and respect of Native Americans. Applying his values of tolerance and respect for all humankind, he acknowledged the mistreatments of Native Americans and actively combated the scourge of slavery. He fought against injustice and discrimination throughout his life, even when it came at the expense of his own personal relationships.

Kosciuszko steadfastly pointed to the inequalities and faults within his own community. A close friend of the American founding fathers, he long detested the mistreatment of African-Americans and their subjugation within the slave trade that was rampant at the time. Kosciuszko decided that he could not abide the perpetuation of what he saw as a cruel practice and made repeated attempts to improve the conditions of forced labourers, including those of his friend Thomas Jefferson. Such was his altruism and dogged determination for equality that, in his will, Kosciuszko set aside his estate to buy the freedom of as many slaves as money could buy and to ensure their

education and continued wellbeing. Above all, Kosciuszko was a man of unwavering integrity. In Poland he was a vocal advocate for the equality of Poland's peasants and religious minorities as well as for the fair treatment of women—and this in the 18th century. Unquestionably, Tadeusz Kosciuszko was a man ahead of his time. He fought for values and freedoms that most of us take for granted in Australia today—freedoms that had not been accorded to mankind equally; freedoms that are still being fought for in many countries around the world today.

As part of the rich tapestry that is our great country, Australia is home to a large Polish community. Our first Polish settler, Joseph Potaski, arrived in 1804. Since then, the community has grown to over 180,000 Australians. Over a thousand Polish Australians live in my own electorate of Mackellar. To them, as to many others, Kosciuszko's legacy is significant and certainly enduring. A national hero, Kosciuszko is seen as a standard-bearer of the Polish character—one of resilience, strength, courage, compassion and defiance.

Through these values and by sharing their own culture and history, the Polish community has had an immeasurable impact on our own culture and what it means to be an Australian today. The legacy of Kosciuszko cannot be overstated. Many might, in fact, not know that our nation's highest peak is named Mount Kosciuszko after Tadeusz. The famed explorer Pawel Strzelecki thought it an apt name because he saw the mountain as a fitting tribute to the general's indomitable spirit, stating, 'I felt I was among a free people who appreciated freedom.'

The Kosciuszko Heritage group based in Sydney is vital in keeping this flame of Kosciuszko's legacy alight. Promoting the life and achievements of Kosciuszko, the group plays a vital role in encouraging the celebration of Polish culture and history as well as the large contribution Polish Australians have made to the national fabric of our great country. Organising community events and producing radio shows and documentaries, the Australian youth for generations to come helps to preserve the Polish identity for all Polish Australians.

Our relationship with Poland is as enduring and unwavering as Kosciuszko's legacy. In fact, this year marks the 45th anniversary of the establishment of Polish-Australian diplomatic relations, and in May we were honoured to receive the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Witold Waszczykowski, to mark our enduring cooperation and continued support for the values that Kosciuszko championed. Throughout our shared history we have cooperated in our desire to ensure liberty, equality and progress. Australians and New Zealanders fought alongside the Polish in World War II in the liberation of Italy and many other nations. The Battle of Monte Cassino reflected the values imbued by Kosciuszko. Outnumbered and outgunned, Polish forces carried forward his legacy with tenacity, fighting for freedom from oppression and persecution.

Following the war, countless Polish migrants helped to secure Australia's economic future through the construction of the engineering marvel that was and is the Snowy Mountains scheme. Our continued cooperation can be seen to this day with Poland and Australia both being major partners in the global coalition against Daesh.

It is clear that even today there is a lot to be learned from Kosciuszko's life. The freedoms that he fought for are still not a reality for all. We must hold up his message and legacy and recognise Kosciuszko as a beacon for the values of freedom and freedoms for all.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Rob Mitchell): Is the motion seconded?

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 23 October 2017 Page 37 Questioner Speaker Kelly, Mike, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (11:33): I second the motion. I congratulate the member for bringing forward this motion. It is well and proper that we celebrate the life and achievements of Tadeusz Kosciuszko and, of course, the links that we have in this country to the honouring of that memory and the Polish heritage that we enjoy and celebrate together.

This was a remarkable man by any standards—a man who I believe was well ahead of his time. I studied quite some time ago the biography and life of General Kosciuszko as a man who really was a citizen of the world in so many ways. He didn't allow himself to be confined by the geographic boundaries of the time or the narrow thinking of the time. He was well ahead of his time in seeking improvements for women and the situation of Polish Jews, minorities and serfs in his own country but then took up the cause of the American Revolution in 1776, inspired by the Declaration of Independence and the values that were proclaimed in relation to their struggle against Great Britain at that time.

But he was also, of course, very cognisant of the circumstances of American slaves in the South and America of that day, notwithstanding the fact that he had property in the United States given to him by a grateful nation after his tremendous contributions, particularly in relation to employing his military engineering skills in fortifications and in ensuring the successful defence of Saratoga. But, in recognising the situation of the slaves in America, he also donated the money from his estate to be used to buy the freedom of slaves and to help educate them and provide them with enough land to support themselves. He truly was a man ahead of his time and he continued his struggles right through his life, not only in North America but back in Europe as well.

So it is well and proper that we not only celebrate his life but that we celebrate his presence in our own landscape. Paul Strzelecki, a surveyor, named our highest mountain after Tadeusz Kosciuszko in 1840 and there's a national park that surrounds it that also bears his name. It's a coincidence of that step forward by Strzelecki that there would be a continuing association with the Snowy Mountains landscape by the Polish community, as has been mentioned, in relation to the hydro scheme. Quite a number of Poles came to Australia to help build the scheme as part of that wonderful step forward that created the beautiful and multicultural matrix landscape that we celebrate across the nation. In my own background, I was privileged to have served alongside Polish troops in Iraq.

The Kosciuszko tradition is celebrated in our region with the Kosciuszko festival held in Jindabyne. One of the things that's not well-known about Tadeusz Kosciuszko is he was also a very fine musician who composed a number of pieces, and we celebrate those pieces in the Kosciuszko festival. Kosciuszko Heritage has been coordinating its activities with UNESCO throughout this bicentennial celebration. This weekend in the Snowy Mountains there will be a continuation of those activities and the festival, and I'd like to encourage all to travel to the region to attend the activities around the festival.

Interestingly, in recent times we've been looking at our landscape and the true Indigenous connections to it. A lot of the terminology, labelling and names of our prominent features have been adjusted, like Mount Gulaga. But when the Indigenous community of our region came to look at the situation of Mount Kosciuszko, they did actually accede to that continuing association with General Kosciuszko because they accepted the fact that this was a man who had a broader international importance, particularly acknowledging his struggle for racial equality, racial liberation and his fights against slavery. So the Indigenous community of our region have been quite happy and indeed honoured to have his name associated with our landscape, quite appropriately so. I would encourage all to travel to Jindabyne over the weekend to continue the celebrations of General Kosciuszko's life and achievements, and I certainly, as an ex-military person, acknowledge all of those rights and services he rendered to the world. (*Time expired*)

SPEECH

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Kelly, Craig, MP	Question No.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (11:38): I am pleased to rise to support this motion moved by the member for Mackellar and I thank him for it. This motion acknowledges that 15 October 2017 marks the 200th anniversary of the death of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, who is known to Australians by our famous Mount Kosciuszko. Kosciuszko was born on 4 February 1746 and died in October 1817. He was a Polish-Lithuanian military engineer and a military leader who became a national hero of Poland, Lithuania, Belarus and the United States. In fact, I'll go further than that. I'd say he is a hero to all people who loved freedom, liberty and equality. He fought in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth struggles against both Russia and Prussia and also on the American side in the American Revolutionary War. As supreme commander of the Polish National Armed Forces, he also led the 1794 Kosciuszko Uprising.

Born the son of a Polish-Lithuanian noble, he could easily have lived a simple life of pleasure, but he didn't. He gobbled up liberal ideas from a young age. In his 20s he travelled to France, where he was exposed to writers like Rousseau and Voltaire. During his trips to America he even became a close friend of Thomas Jefferson, who described him as 'a pure son of liberty'. In fact, when Strzelecki, the famous Polish explorer, was exploring and discovered what was our highest mountain and was considering that he should name it Kosciuszko, he said these words:

... although in a foreign country on foreign ground but amongst a free people who appreciate freedom and its votaries, I could not refrain from giving it the name of Mount Kosciuszko.

It is a great honour that we have our highest peak named after such a famous and important person in history.

The Polish people for centuries have had to fight for freedom. At no time in Polish history was this perhaps greater than during the Polish resistance in World War II. Much has been written of that resistance. Poland was one of the few occupied nations that produced no major traitors or collaborators. The Polish operatives secured valuable intelligence or destroyed Nazi infrastructure in daring missions. The pilots of the Polish government in exile matched and exceeded their Western comrades in the air. Only when the cracks started to appear in the communists' control in the 1980s could they enter public discourse.

It was Poland's great legacy to be sandwiched between the fascists to the west and the communists to the east. And after having survived the tribulations and the resistance during World War I, they found themselves again oppressed under communist tyranny. When Lech Walesa and the rest of the Polish resistance finally led that nation to freedom, I'm sure they would have gone back to the great spirit of Tadeusz Kosciuszko, who wanted freedom, liberty and equality for all Polish people.

We congratulate the Polish nation on the great achievements that they have made since the fall of the Berlin Wall. We wish them all the best and, with not only all the people in Poland but all people of the world, we share in the celebration of this great man's achievements.

SPEECH

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Questioner	Responder
Speaker Champion, Nick, MP	Question No.

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (11:43): It's good to see this parliament in furious agreement over the member for Mackellar's motion about Tadeusz Kosciuszko. Of course, we tend to regard liberty in Australia and in the world as a given. But, for much of history, mankind has been ruled by divine right and by force and held in bondage, and our liberties have been decided by monarchs, typically on their arbitrary whims. Despots, benign or not, ruled the world, and the very idea of liberty and democracy was foreign. No nation knows this better than Poland because for centuries it was, on one hand, dominated by Russia and its interests and its desires to have a buffer between itself and Europe—and that buffer was held at the price of Polish liberty—and, on the other hand, threatened by Germany, and by Prussia before that. So, frequently, they had to fight for their liberty, fight for justice and fight for their rights.

A book by Mr Jay Winik, *The Great Upheaval*, alerts the reader to the interlinked nature of the American Revolution, the French Revolution and what was happening in Poland at the time. Of course, Kosciuszko was mentioned many times in this book—many times indeed. Interestingly, it says on page 488:

About him, Lord Byron once declared Kosciuszko's very name alone would "scatter fire through ice". It had also been said that he was one of the "most admirable men of the eighteenth century" and a "harbinger of a new era in the human struggle for the highest ideals."

This book tells you much about the struggle with the new idea of liberty. It was new in America, it was new in France and it was especially new as an idea in Europe. Those three revolutions really came to dominate the forces that now rule our world. On one side are freedom and liberty and on the other side is despotism. Despotism is making a comeback. All around the world we see not human liberty and not democracy but, rather, despotism ruling great swathes of the world and vast populations. Kosciuszko fought against that. He was lionised in the America Congress after his death. On page 490 of *The Great Upheaval* it says:

... he would be lionized as "a friend of man" and "an advocate of freedom," and, in his own day, Thomas Jefferson called him "the purest son of liberty" ...

You know from this man's life that he was prepared to make great sacrifices for not just Polish nationality or nationalism or liberty, and not just for American liberty, but for the rights of man—the ideals of mankind that have come to dominate the 20th century but are under threat in our current century.

A fascinating story which I'll share with the House from the book *The Great Upheaval* talked about when the Russians launched their final assault on the Polish rebellion. The book says:

Kosciuszko, after shrieking that Poland "was immortal," was himself seriously wounded and then taken prisoner. The heroic revolt was all but over.

It goes on to talk about how Catherine's the Great's army slaughtered 20,000 men, women and children in the wake of that revolt. We know that human liberty and these rights have often been borne of great tragedy, of great fights, and we should celebrate the lives of all those who have stood for liberty, particularly Kosciuszko's, but, more importantly, we should remind ourselves that the great legacy is not automatic in this world. It has to be fought for. Liberty, justice and democracy are critical and crucial things, and Australia and Poland have always stood together to protect them.

SPEECH

<p>Date Monday, 23 October 2017 Page 39 Questioner Speaker Wilson, Tim, MP</p>	<p>Source House Proof Yes Responder Question No.</p>
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Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (11:48): It's my pleasure to rise to support the motion to honour the 200th anniversary of the death of General Tadeusz Kosciuszko and his incredible legacy as an individual, but, of course, we honour him in this great nation through a mountain. General Kosciuszko made a significant contribution to the world and particularly, as many other speakers have mentioned, around driving the principles of equality of all people, regardless of their background, particularly on the basis of their gender, their skin colour or their religion. What it really reinforces is the contribution of the Polish community, not just in Poland but around the world. In fact, the electorate that I am very proud to represent, the federal electorate of Goldstein, is also named after somebody who is Polish: Vida Goldstein. I pronounce 'Vida' very specifically, with an emphasis on the 'i', and 'Goldstein' like 'beer stein' because I once found an article from 1904 where she explained how to pronounce her name. Vida Goldstein, like Kosciuszko, was a trailblazer in her own right.

Both of them actually stood up for the rights of people, whether they were part of that representative group or not. Both of them stood up for principles and values that sit at the heart of a liberal democracy: the principles of freedom that endure to this day. Particularly in the case of Kosciuszko, as I said, it's with reference to people regardless of their background, and it was similar with Vida. She was a suffragette who went on to stand up for the right of women to own property when they could not do so and the right of women, of course, to vote. She was actually a marriage equality advocate of her day, arguing that women should be able to enter into marriages on the same terms as men. And so today we don't just honour the legacy of Kosciuszko; we also honour the contribution of all Australian Poles to our great country.

Earlier this year I represented the government at an event for the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs, because the Goldstein electorate, named after a Pole, appropriately has one of the largest Polish communities in our great country. They were celebrating their 25th anniversary as an institute. On 1 February over 80 guests gathered at the Sandringham Yacht Club to mark this important occasion. Amongst the guests were the ambassador of Poland to Australia as well as the CEO of the Melbourne Cinematheque and many others. In particular, there were many people from the Polish community in Melbourne and the executive committee of the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs, including Adam Warzel, President of the Australian Institute of Polish Affairs. They have played an incredibly important role in bringing Polish speakers out from Poland to Australia not just to build and enhance the relationship between our two great countries, not just to invest in communicating the principles that their nation shares and the cultural common ground between us but also to recognise what we can learn from Poland.

What has been said by other speakers and I'll repeat now is that the contribution of the Polish community in Australia has been sound because it has been anchored in the ideals and the values that we mutually share. And they don't take the principles of freedom for granted. Because of the recent history of the tyranny of the Soviet Union and many other countries who have sought to impose their value system of conformity, Poles understand that the principles of freedom have to be fought for through sacrifice if necessary. It's through the solidarity of free people wanting to continue to enjoy their liberties that there is freedom to speak up, say unpopular things and speak truth to power. It is making sure that people are able to stand up and practice their faith without fear or intimidation in private as well as the public square. They understand that principle, and it's something that sits at the heart of our liberal democracy as well. But, more importantly, they saw firsthand the tyranny that comes when the government comes along and tries to suppress people's freedom and limit how they can engage in the marketplace. They saw that, if you try to control capital, in the end you will control people and you will stifle their ambition, their imagination and their capacity to make a contribution to build a better world.

The Polish people experienced that firsthand, and they have never forgotten that legacy and continue to be fighters for freedom in their own country and around the world today. It's on these days that we honour that contribution. We celebrate it, recognise it and wish them well into the future by acknowledging one of their favourite sons, General Kosciuszko; by acknowledging one of their greatest migrants to this great country, Vida Goldstein; and by acknowledging the continuing contribution that the Australian Polish community makes in our great nation today. Thank you very much.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Goodenough): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.