

Truth, Democracy and the Commonwealth

Melbourne Legacy

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Address by

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Melbourne, Australia

Distinguished Guests – Friends, Friends of my Father, Friends of Roy Morgan Research, Friends of Melbourne, Ladies and Gentlemen.

*“The fundamental values of our society are under threat”** according to the majority of Australians (66%). Most of us believe *“Globalisation brings more problems than it solves”* (60%). People elsewhere in the world – US, UK, New Zealand and Indonesia – feel the same way.

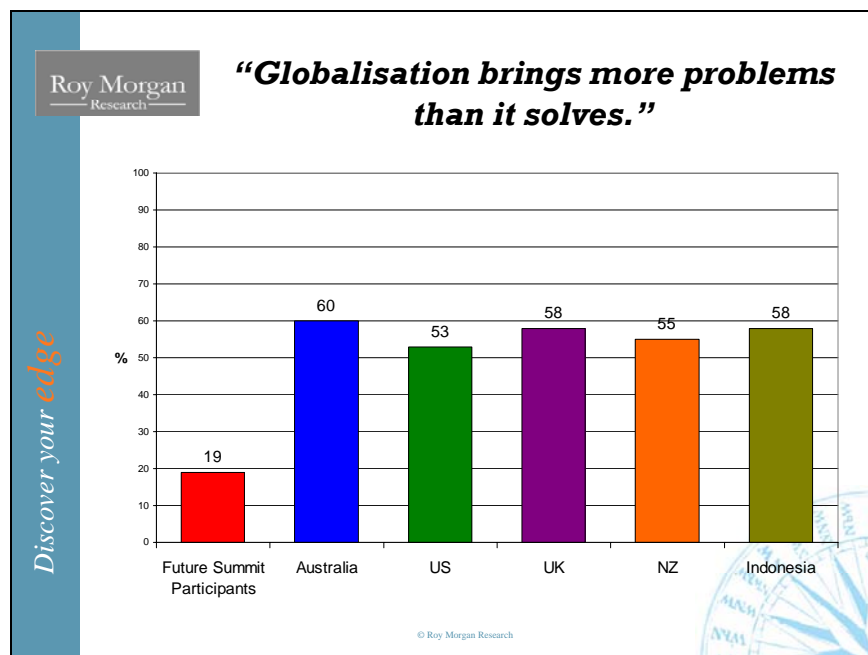
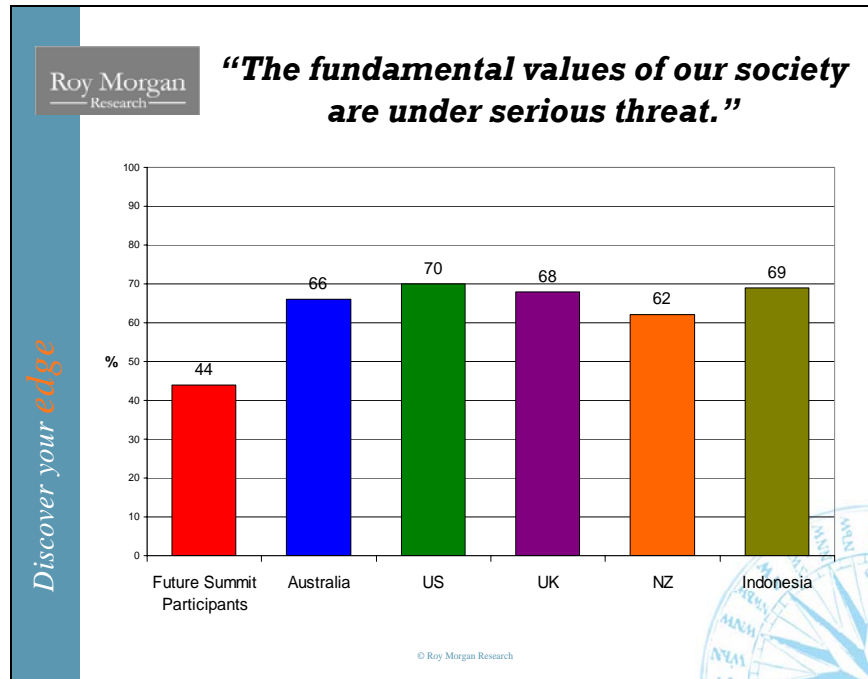
The majority of Australians (57%) also believe *“Corruption is one of the major problems facing this country”*.

However, our Leaders do not necessarily see the situation the same way as the average Australian.

Michele Levine (CEO, Roy Morgan Research), in a paper [“The Value of Listening to People”](#) presented at the Future Summit 2006 in Brisbane, May 11, 2006, showed that Future Summit Participants/Leaders are much less concerned about these issues than the average Australian – only 19% believing *“Globalisation brings more problems than it solves”*, only 16% believing *“Corruption is one of the major problems facing this country”* and a minority, albeit a large 44%, are concerned that *“The fundamental values of our society are under threat”*.

*Paper “The Value of Listening to People” presented at the Futures Summit 2006 in Brisbane, May 11 2006, by Michele Levine (CEO, Roy Morgan Research)

<http://www.roymorgan.com/resources/pdf/papers/20060501.pdf>



This is a worrying situation, and today I want to talk about the important leadership role for Legacy, to represent those people who care about the values of our society and refuse to allow them to be lost.

I want to talk about:

- Truth – and the difference between “right and wrong”;
- Democracy – and the crucial role of independent media, and the need to be very wary of corruption; and
- The potentially vital role the Commonwealth of Nations and Legacy can play.

On March 1, 2006, at the Rotary Club of Melbourne I presented a paper "[Everyone Knows the Difference between Right and Wrong](#)". I began my address by quoting a Crikey article which covered a report from [The Times](#) of London:

"For the first time MPs, ministers and civil servants will have to agree to a code of conduct which binds them to the truth as part of a package of measures proposed to combat the low level of public trust in Government.

Sir Alistair Graham, head of the powerful sleaze watchdog, is driving through the first major changes to the Seven Principles of Public Life since their introduction in 1995.

The Chairman of the Committee on Standards in Public Life said that he believed that trust in Government had declined further over the last two years.

He will start by proposing overhauling the code's definition of "honesty" – at present a technical definition focusing on conflicts of interest – after focus groups said this missed the central point.

The final wording of the new definition has yet to be agreed, but Sir Alistair said that it must revolve around the notion of truth.

At present, MPs are prohibited from lying in the House of Commons, but there is no specific stipulation that they must tell the truth outside the chamber."

From a young age everyone knows the difference between "right and wrong" regarding the truth!

I learnt it from Margaret Little at Preshill from 1944-1947.

It became clear to me, during my first weeks at Melbourne Grammar in 1948, how few people care about what is "right and wrong". Boy after boy would lie to the teacher in front of the whole class, everyone knew of the lies however since it was to the teacher, nobody cared – a very different culture than Preshill!

This was perhaps my first introduction to the concept of "non-core truths" – the idea that "right and wrong" may be "flexible" concepts.

The Australian Wheat Board and the public's response to the AWB shows Australia is not comfortable with a "flexible" notion of "right and wrong", or "truth and lies".

Roy Morgan has now published [three polls](#) about whether Australians believe the Federal Government acted ethically on the AWB issue or not.

The most recent [Morgan Poll, conducted on April 19-20](#), showed that 63% of Australians believed the Federal Government did not act ethically, while 18% said they did – the public’s opinion is right!

There was little, if any, reference to those Morgan Polls made in the mainstream media despite the results being clear. In our most recent Morgan Poll release (April 22, 2006) I stated the following:

“Clear majorities of Australians think that Prime Minister Howard (54%), Foreign Minister Downer (56%) and Trade Minister Vaile (55%) did not act ethically over the AWB affair. These senior Government Ministers all gave evidence to the Cole Royal Commission last week.

Furthermore 65% of Australians (up 6% since late February) think AWB Ltd’s actions were not ethical and 63% (up 6%) those of the Government.

The Prime Minister and his Ministers seem unconcerned about the fallout from the AWB Royal Commission, the ‘sleeper’ however is the possibility that Commissioner Cole may recommend criminal charges be laid.”

There are today many published public opinion polls - every media has its own, or its own favorite poll. None, except the Morgan Poll, ask the hard questions such as whether Australians thought Howard, Downer or Vaile acted ethically over the AWB affair.

It is critical that the media is independent of politicians and business – just as it is important to separate Church and State. It is imperative that media owners around the world are not beholden to politicians and that politicians are not beholden to media. Anything else is corrupt and threatens Democracy.

It is just as important for Directors and other people running Companies or Institutions to abide by these same rules.

We all know what is “right and wrong” about paying bribes and kickbacks to the Saddam Hussein regime. At the time Iraq was already under UN embargo and trade sanctions for refusing to allow independent inspectors to verify whether they had chemical, biological and nuclear weapons programmes.

There are many other examples of rights and wrongs that I referred to in [my paper to Melbourne Rotary](#) on March 1, 2006. I could talk about them today but I want to look to the future and solutions.

I believe the Queen's Commonwealth of Nations and Legacy working together are a crucial combination.

Since 1923 Legacy Members have made a significant contribution to ensure the families of those Australians who lost their lives fighting for a Democratic Society were not forgotten.

The Commonwealth of Nations holds a potentially powerful key to the future. With many member nations representing many races, many religions, diverse histories and cultures, the Commonwealth can bind us together in a way that is more powerful than purely economic or legal agreements – through shared values.

I can think of no better vision for Legacy than to set about binding nations together through the Commonwealth for a secure future for all.

The Commonwealth Games, held in Melbourne this year, represented the ideal opportunity to focus on international cooperation and world peace. Unfortunately this opportunity was not fully grasped. I am talking here about the briefness of the Queen's appearance and the Queen's involvement in the Commonwealth Games. I mentioned this in my paper to [Melbourne Rotary](#) before the Commonwealth Games.

From polls we have conducted over many years I am sure the majority of Australians would have been pleased the Queen visited Melbourne to open the Commonwealth Games. However as we all know the Queen visited Melbourne for only about a day to open the Games, after visiting Canberra twice and Sydney once.

It was obviously a missed opportunity for the Queen to spend such a short time at the Commonwealth Games where 71 Commonwealth Nations participated. The Queen's 71 nations made a considerable effort to make the Games a success – along with the many millions of dollars, spent much time and effort was contributed by thousands of loyal Commonwealth Games supporters.

The purpose of the Queen visiting Melbourne was not just for the benefit of Melbourne or the Ceremonial Games.

It was also the confirmation of the importance of the bond between the 71 nations who participated. Many of those nations had citizens who had fought side-by-side with Australians and other Commonwealth countries during two World Wars and other Wars.

Despite the Queen's short stay, it was wrong for the Melbourne Commonwealth Games' organisers not to play the full 'God Save the Queen'. As we all know from childhood, two wrongs don't make a right.

I wonder whether the Queen realised the importance of her visit, and that the shortness of her stay undermined the potential impact of such a unique and significant world meeting of the many Commonwealth representatives from many walks of life.

If the Queen had spent just a short time with each nation she could have single-handedly guaranteed the Commonwealth lasts for another 100 years. As it is now, there is a lot more work needed to work to keep the Commonwealth spirit strong.

Unfortunately Commonwealth member countries cannot wait another four years before, as a group, they take the initiative in setting the agenda to make the world a safer and better place for everyone – time is running out!

We cannot leave the solution to the US or Russians or French – I do not need to explain why – it is up to us: the Commonwealth of Nations.

No other international group is going to do it. There is no other group of countries with the historical background and people with the knowledge and diversity of ethnic groups/religious beliefs who know the difference between “right and wrong”, and who hold similar fundamental social values.

And what of the role of Legacy?

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed it’s the only thing that ever has.”

Margaret Mead (1901-1978)

After the two World Wars Legacy looked after the families and children of soldiers – families and children in crisis. Today Legacy has a crucial role to play in preventing the need for such post-war care and support.

Legacy has earned the right to take charge of the agenda, to speak for the Australian people, and ensure the lessons of the past are learned, and that our children – the children of the Commonwealth – carry on the fundamental Legacy values.

But the challenge today is international. Education is critical – especially shared education opportunities, shared language, exchanges so people get to meet others in the world.

So what else can Melbourne Legacy do to continue the cause in a very difficult and changing world?

The answer is not simple. However, Legacy has the contacts – the Legacy children have grown up – many are today’s business leaders here and around the world.

At a local level Legacy can put pressure on the Federal Government to significantly increase foreign aid not in the form of “food” or “machines” but in “education”.

However we must think globally and actively seek to lead the world in teaching English, History, Law, Social Values and the difference between “right and wrong”. Only then will we have a safe, productive, democratic world. We must teach those involved in international trade and affairs to respect the law and act ethically.

We must make sure the Federal Government maintains laws that ensure both Australian and Overseas Governments, Institutions and Companies/People act honestly.

We must only support a Government that believes in a competitive and honest media. I am not concerned who owns our media so long there are many media owners and they are independent of Government – only then will we have a true Democracy.

Melbourne Legacy is one of Australia’s most important Institutions. Those who belong or have been helped by Legacy understand the difference between “right and wrong”. That is why all those who have been members since its foundation in 1923 have helped families of Deceased Veterans – those who were less fortunate than ourselves.

Personally, I would like to thank all members of Legacy for what you have done, I know many people who never knew their father because they were killed at war. You are more than wonderful people who know the difference between “right and wrong” – you have contributed your time and efforts in helping those who gave their lives for this country.

But more still needs to be done and Australia needs your continued effort to work with the Commonwealth of Nations to build a better world.

Following my address, Legacy President Bill Rogers presented me the book “Breaking the Road for The Rest” by W.D. Joynt VC, first published 1979.

Thank you

Gary Morgan, May 17, 2006