In August 1984, I became Patron of the Young Liberal Movement. This was a rather political statement by that political body as I was identified then as a philosophical liberal and was therefore out of step with the more conservative people running the Liberal Party of Australia. I had previously described myself as a ‘political warrior’.

Tonight you have honoured not just a person but also a system of belief. To be your patron is important. You will not be tainted by association with this political warrior and your gift will not become an albatross around your collective necks.

Our liberalism is the belief that came to us from Alfred Deakin.¹ Refined by nineteenth-century philosophers, it is a system of belief that recognises our obligations to those around us and to a wider community, which accepts obligations along with rights, and which contributes to, as well as takes from, its society.

It follows that we will never reject people because of things over which they have no control, like race, or religion, or skin colour. We will give help because we recognise that some of those in society need our help, and that others in society will succeed only because of help we give, and that everyone should enjoy a fair electoral system, an independent judiciary, and protection from abuse by governments.

We believe in fair elections.

We believe in action against racial discrimination.

We believe in a fair and adequate system of taxation.

We believe in protection against exploitation.

We believe in a vibrant and relevant public sector alongside a vibrant and honourable private sector.

It is sad that our views are not shared by all in our party or in rogue parties of protest that, alas, are popular now. That some are libertarians is a throwback to an earlier and less generous time. That some are conservatives is accepted.

But we are different. We are liberals.

We are sorry that few in mainstream Australian politics today seem to identify with our values and our needs. But that is how it seems to be. Our task is sacred and continuing. Not least it is to keep a light burning in troublesome times. We are as entitled to a view as is anyone else.

Thank you for your vote of confidence. Thank you for attending this function. Thank you for your personal support. But most of all, thank you for being liberals and for keeping the faith in this harsh and ungenerous time.