Republic? Abbott backs next-gen monarchs to reign

EXCLUSIVE

JOE KELLY
JARED OWENS

Tony Abbott has countered Malcolm Turnbull’s view that a republic should be pursued at the end of the Queen’s reign, saying that support is growing for the monarchy because of interest in the young royals.

Mr Abbott’s entry into the debate, after the Prime Minister quashed a new push for an Australian head of state, came as old rivalries emerged within the republican movement with former Northern Territory chief minister Shane Stone pledging to lead a splinter group that will campaign for a directly elected head of state.

Mr Abbott, replaced by Mr Turnbull as prime minister in September, is a staunch constitutional monarchist who is in the US to deliver an address to a function run by conservative Christian lobby group the Alliance Defending Freedom.

He told The Australian yesterday the republican debate was a distraction from the main business of government and argued that Continued on Page 6

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Abbott backs young royals

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support for the royal family was on the rise.

“The fundamental priority should always be helping families to get ahead and keeping communities safe,” Mr Abbott said.

“Republicanism gets trotted out from time to time but support for our existing constitutional arrangements is stronger than (it has been) for many years, helped by enthusiasm for the younger royals.”

The debate over the preferred model for an Australian republic was reignited yesterday, with Mr Stone warning against allowing the head of state to be a “captain’s pick” of a prime minister and slamming the Australian Republican Movement as elitist.

“I was sick of (the) Australian Republican Movement point of view being shoved down our throats (in 1999); nothing has changed,” Mr Stone told The Australian.

“I am not going to stand idly by and have a system imposed on our democracy that is a prime minister’s captain’s pick lamely endorsed by a complaint parliament; that’s how we got (Peter) Slipper as Speaker.”

Mr Slipper, a Liberal-turned-independent MP, was nominated Speaker in 2010 to shore up the minority Labor government’s numbers in parliament. He ultimately stood down over sexually explicit text messages sent to a staffer.

Prominent republicans, including South Australian Premier Jay Weatherill and former foreign minister Bob Carr, have favoured a “minimalist” model that would give the prime minister and parliament the power to appoint a head of state. Peter FitzSimons, the new head of the ARM, has kept an open mind about the model but hopes republicans will coalesce around whatever model is proposed.

Mr Stone agreed with Mr Turnbull that the timing was wrong for the republic and this was “no time for heroics”.

Conservative Liberal MPs voiced concern yesterday that Bill Shorten, who has called on Mr Turnbull to work out a timetable for a republic, had not tackled the issue of how to devise a suitable model. Tasmanian Liberal Andrew Nikolic wrote yesterday to all his Senate and lower-house colleagues voicing his concern. “Decisions taken about the structures of our government and altering the Constitution are done in an informed way, based on fact, and not emotion,” he said.

West Australian Liberal senator and anti-republican crusader Dean Smith said: “If Bill Shorten was serious he would have learnt the lessons from the 1999 referendum and proposed a republican model. Instead, he has hidden from the real republican debate.”