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## Parliamentarians Turn Away from Welcome to Country Ceremony

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One Nation senators sparked controversy by turning their backs during a Welcome to Country ceremony at the opening of Australia's 48th Parliament, igniting debate over the ritual's role in public life. This article examines the incident, the growing pushback against such ceremonies, and concerns about the Australian Labor Party's (ALP) approach to Indigenous affairs amidst rising public spending.

On July 22, 2025, Ngunnawal elder Aunty Violet Sheridan delivered a Welcome to Country in the Senate, a tradition acknowledging traditional custodians of the land. One Nation leader Pauline Hanson and her colleagues turned away, with Hanson later declaring the ceremony “divisive” and urging Australians to follow suit (The Epoch Times, July 22, 2025). Hanson argued it alienates non-Indigenous Australians, stating, “These welcomes are based on lies that Australia is not our home” (Daily Mail, September 18, 2024). The act drew sharp criticism from ALP Prime Minister Anthony Albanese, who called the ceremony a “powerful” symbol of unity, dismissing critics as stoking division (ABC News, July 23, 2025).

The protest reflects broader unease with the ceremony’s ubiquity. Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians Jacinta Nampijinpa Price, a Warlpiri woman, has criticized its \$450,000 cost per parliamentary term, arguing it does little for marginalized Indigenous communities (ABC News, January 31, 2025). She advocates redirecting funds to practical outcomes like housing or education. Former senator Andrew Bartlett echoed concerns, noting the ceremony’s politicization risks alienating voters (The Guardian, March 1, 2025). Critics argue the ALP’s embrace of symbolic gestures, like the \$1.3 billion Indigenous affairs budget, prioritizes optics over results, especially as public debt soars.

Supporters, including Indigenous lawyer Vanessa Turnbull-Roberts, insist the ceremony fosters respect and connection (SBS News, April 29, 2025). Yet, public sentiment is shifting, with some viewing it as performative, particularly after incidents like the Anzac Day heckling in Melbourne (The Guardian, April 28, 2025). As the ALP navigates its second term, it must address these tensions, balancing cultural respect

with fiscal responsibility and practical policies that deliver for all  
Australians.