



Sir John William Downer (1843-1915)

Senator for South Australia 1901-1903

John Downer was born and educated in Adelaide, South Australia, where he was admitted to the Bar in 1867. He was member for Barossa in the South Australian House of Assembly 1878-1901. In that time he held many high ranking positions, including Premier, Attorney-General and Treasurer. Downer became a Queen's Counsel in 1878 and was knighted in 1887.

An ardent supporter of federation, Downer represented South Australia at the federal conventions of 1891 and 1897-98. He advocated a strong Senate as a guardian of states rights and, as a member of the Constitutional Drafting Committee in 1897, assisted Barton and O'Connor in producing a final draft of the Constitution Bill.

Downer was elected to represent South Australia in the Senate at the first federal election in 1901. He supported the Barton ministry in the first Parliament and took a particular interest in the establishment of the High Court of Australia.

After his retirement from the Senate in 1903, Downer continued to practise as a lawyer in Adelaide. In 1905 he was elected to the South Australian Legislative Council, and he remained a representative of the Southern Districts in that chamber until his death in 1915. Sir John Downer was the father of Sir Alexander Downer MP (1910-1981) and grandfather of Alexander Downer MP (1951-), both of whom were appointed as ministers in federal Liberal governments.

The state of South Australia was also represented in the first Senate by:

Sir Josiah Henry Symon

Thomas Playford

Sir Richard Chaffey Baker

David Morley Charleston

Gregor McGregor