COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

SENATE

Hansard

WEDNESDAY, 31 JULY 2019

CORRECTIONS
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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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**SITTING DAYS—2019**

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FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

Governor-General
His Excellency General the Hon. David John Hurley, AC, DSC, FTSE (Retd)

Senate Office Holders
President—Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan
Deputy President and Chair of Committees—Senator Susan Lines
Temporary Chairs of Committees—Senators Askew, Bernardi, Bilyk, Brockman, Brown, Faruqi, Fawcett, Fierravanti-Wells, Gallacher, Griff, Kitching, Sterle and Stoker
Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann
Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Kristina Keneally
Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Anne Ruston
Deputy Manager of Government Business in the Senate—Senator Jonathon Duniam
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Katy Gallagher
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate—Senator Kimberley Kitching

Senate Party Leaders and Whips
Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann
Deputy Leader of the Liberal Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham
Leader of The Nationals in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie
Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Matthew Canavan
Leader of the Labor Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Penny Wong
Deputy Leader of the Labor Party in the Senate—Senator the Hon. Don Farrell
Leader of the Australian Greens—Senator Richard Di Natale
Deputy Leader of the Australian Greens in the Senate—Senator Larissa Waters
Chief Government Whip—Senator Dean Anthony Smith
Deputy Government Whips—Senators James McGrath and Slade Brockman
The Nationals Whip—Senator Perin Davey
Chief Opposition Whip—Senator Anne Elizabeth Urquhart
Deputy Opposition Whips—Senators Raff Ciccone and Malanadirri McCarthy
Australian Greens Whip—Senator Rachel Siewert

Printed by authority of the Senate
## Members of the Senate

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<th>Senator</th>
<th>State or Territory</th>
<th>Term expires</th>
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Pursuant to section 42 of the Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918, the terms of service of the following senators representing the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory expire at the close of the day immediately before the polling day for the next general election of members of the House of Representatives.

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<th>Territory</th>
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<th>Senator</th>
<th>Party</th>
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</table>

(1) Chosen by the Parliament of Victoria to fill a casual vacancy (vice S Conroy), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(2) Chosen by the Parliament of South Australia to fill a casual vacancy (vice N Xenophon), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(3) Chosen by the Parliament of New South Wales to fill a casual vacancy (vice S Dastyari), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(4) Chosen by the Parliament of Queensland to fill a casual vacancy (vice G Brandis), pursuant to section 15 of the Constitution.

(5) Vacancy created by the resignation of Senator David Bushby on 21 January 2019.
PARTY ABBREVIATIONS
AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party;
CA—Centre Alliance; CLP—Country Liberal Party; IND—Independent;
JLN—Jacqui Lambie Network; LNP—Liberal National Party;
LP—Liberal Party of Australia; NATS—The Nationals;
PHON—Pauline Hanson's One Nation

Heads of Parliamentary Departments
Clerk of the Senate—R Pye
Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—R Stefanic
Parliamentary Budget Officer—J Wilkinson
## MORRISON MINISTRY

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<tr>
<td>Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Morrison MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for the Public Service</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Women</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon. Ben Morton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Indigenous Australians</td>
<td>The Hon. Ken Wyatt AM MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister and Cabinet</td>
<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Infrastructure, Transport and Regional Development</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael McCormack MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Water Resources, Drought, Rural Finance, Natural Disaster and Emergency Management</td>
<td>The Hon. David Littleproud MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minister for Regional Services, Decentralisation and Local Government</td>
<td>The Hon. Mark Coulton MP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Road Safety and Freight Transport</td>
<td>The Hon. Scott Buchholz MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister</td>
<td>The Hon. Andrew Gee MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Regional Development and Territories</td>
<td>The Hon. Nola Marino MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Josh Frydenberg MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Population, Cities and Urban Infrastructure</td>
<td>The Hon. Alan Tudge MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Treasurer</td>
<td>The Hon. Michael Sukkar MP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Housing</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jane Hume</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Superannuation, Financial Services and Financial Technology</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Finance (Vice-President of the Executive Council)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Mathias Cormann</td>
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<tr>
<td>(Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Zed Seselja</td>
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<tr>
<td>Assistant Minister for Finance, Charities and Electoral Matters</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jane Hume</td>
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<td>Minister for Agriculture</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Bridget McKenzie</td>
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<td>Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Foreign Affairs</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Marise Payne</td>
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<tr>
<td>Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment (Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate)</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
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<td>Senator the Hon. Simon Birmingham</td>
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<td>Assistant Trade and Investment Minister</td>
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<td>Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Jonathon Duniam</td>
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<td>(Leader of the House)</td>
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<td><strong>Minister for Industrial Relations</strong></td>
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<td>The Hon. Greg Hunt MP</td>
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<td>Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians</td>
<td>Senator the Hon. Richard Colbeck</td>
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<td>Minister for Youth and Sport</td>
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<td>The Hon. Paul Fletcher MP</td>
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<td>The Hon. Dan Tehan MP</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business</strong></td>
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Wednesday, 31 July 2019  

The PRESIDENT (Senator the Hon. Scott Ryan) took the chair at 09:30, read prayers and made an acknowledgement of country.

DOCUMENTS  
Tabling  
The Clerk: I table documents pursuant to statute as listed on the Dynamic Red.  
*Full details of the documents are recorded in the Journals of the Senate.*

COMMITTEES  
Meeting  
The Clerk: Proposals to meet have been lodged as follows:  
Corporations and Financial Services—Joint Statutory Committee—private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) during the sittings of the Senate—from 9.45 am—  
Thursday, 1 August 2019.  
Thursday, 12 September 2019.  
Thursday, 17 October 2019.  
Thursday, 28 November 2019.  
Economics Legislation and References Committees—private meetings otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) on Thursday, 1 August 2019, from 3.30 pm.  
Senators’ Interests—Standing Committee—private meeting otherwise than in accordance with standing order 33(1) today, from 11.45 am.

The PRESIDENT (09:31): I remind senators that the question may be put on any proposal at the request of any senator.

DOCUMENTS  
Ministerial Correspondence  
Order for the Production of Documents  
Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (09:31): I table, on behalf of Senator Cormann, a response to the order for the production of documents No. 59, moved by Senator Waters, relating to ministerial correspondence.

BILLS  
Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019  
Second Reading  
Consideration resumed of the motion:  
That this bill be now read a second time.

Senator ASKEW (Tasmania) (09:31): I rise again to continue my contribution on the Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019, which will amend the Health Insurance Act 1973 by introducing a statutory scheme to administer the reformed bonded medical programs from 1 January 2020.

There are currently 9,406 program participants studying at medical schools or in prevocational training under the older programs—the Bonded Medical Places Scheme and the Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship Scheme—with a further 623 participants undertaking their return-of-service obligations. These participants will have the option to opt in to the new arrangements from 1 January 2020, and those who choose to stay under the existing arrangements will also be able to do so.

As the program matures, up to 700 doctors are expected to commence their return-of-service obligations in rural, remote and regional Australia each year over the next five to seven years. To be eligible to participate in the reformed bonded medical programs, a person must have accepted a bonded Commonwealth-funded place in a course of study in medicine at an Australian university. They must be an Australian citizen or permanent visa holder and agree to participate in the program using a web portal maintained by the department.

Under the new statutory scheme, participants will be required to work as a medical practitioner in eligible locations for a total period of three years. The three-year return-of-service obligation is half of the six years required under the previous Medical Rural Bonded Scholarship Scheme and a reduction of between one and three
years for previous bonded medical programs scheme participants who entered the scheme in 2015 or earlier. Participants in the bonded medical programs scheme who entered the scheme in the years 2016 to 2019 agreed to a 12-month return-of-service obligation. These participants will retain their 12-month return-of-service obligation under the new statutory scheme should they voluntarily opt in.

Under the new scheme, the return-of-service obligations must be completed within 18 years from when the participant completes their course of study in medicine at an Australian university, but they may be completed by a series of periods. The period of 18 years to complete the return-of-service obligation may be extended in limited circumstances only where a participant or a family member has a medical condition that prevents that participant from completing their return-of-service obligation within the time frame. A participant will be subject to a number of conditions, including that they must complete their course of study in medicine at an Australian university. The return-of-service obligation must be completed in accordance with the rules, and the participant must give their information or documents to the department in particular circumstances. These are necessary safeguards to protect our investments in these participants.

Should a participant withdraw from their course of study in medicine after the census date for the second year of study, that participant will be liable to pay the Commonwealth the cost of the participant's course of study for the year or part year—semester—of study undertaken, plus interest. Where a participant does not complete their return-of-service within 18 years from completion of their course of study or an extended period, that person will be liable to pay the Commonwealth the cost of the person's course of study that was funded by the Commonwealth, less a pro rata proportion of the return-of-service completed.

Under the new statutory scheme, medical benefits will not be payable to an MRBS participant who becomes a participant under the new statutory scheme and does not complete their return-of-service within 18 years. Medical benefits will not be payable for six years from the day that breach occurs. Further, under the new statutory scheme a participant may be liable for an administrative penalty of $10,000 if the person fails to comply with the condition to provide the department with information or documents. This administrative penalty is considered to be a debt due to the Commonwealth and may be recovered, if needed, by the Commonwealth.

A participant will be able to withdraw from the bonded medical programs at any time by notifying the department using the web portal maintained by the department.

As I said earlier, these are necessary safeguards to protect our investment into these doctors, and they will protect the integrity of the scheme. However, the changes being made to the bonded medical programs are welcome. They will encourage young people interested in a career in medicine to work in more remote, rural and regional areas of our beautiful country. It will expose them to a different kind of medical practice and give them valuable experience for wherever their career may take them.

Doctors in rural and regional areas often become integral members of their communities, particularly in those small towns, often many kilometres from the nearest hospitals. Their families live in the community. Their children go to the school in the local area, and they go to the local church. They are members of the local sporting teams. They get involved in their community. Their days are not just nine to five working days; they work long hours and they're always on call. They can be exposed to situations where their patients are suffering serious life-threatening conditions and it may be some time before emergency service personnel can assist them. They are often the unsung heroes of their town. In the small regional and rural towns in my home state of Tasmania—Deloraine, Westbury, Bicheno, Smithton, Ross, Strahan, Wynyard; the list goes on—they understand this and they truly appreciate and value their local GPs.

Through the return-of-service obligations, this bill will provide doctors with exposure to a regional, rural and remote location. My hope—and I am sure the intent behind this bill—is that these doctors will settle into their community and find a love for their community. The ultimate outcome may well be that they will understand and enjoy the value they bring to the people within the community and will then decide to stay and put some roots down for many years to come.

I referenced Senator Brockman's contribution earlier in my contribution last night, and I note his comment:

In Western Australia alone there are just over 300 medical vacancies, 115 of them being GP positions, in regional areas. This situation is reflected across the country, with similar statistics in most states and territories. He also acknowledged:

GPs in those country towns are of absolutely vital importance. They're such a central part of a small town's life and existence. In the city it is easy to ignore or forget or not realise what a central component to life in the bush those GPs are.

I cannot agree more with Senator Brockman's sentiments. Those of us who are fortunate enough to be able to pick up the phone and ring the doctor's surgery and get an appointment that day and feel a huge sense of
disappointment if we can't get in for a couple of days should reflect on the experiences those in the rural and regional areas of this country experience.

The coalition government has clearly demonstrated its support for the rural and regional communities of this country, particularly those in drought and flood affected regions. As I mentioned yesterday, the public health system in Tasmania is struggling under the increasing demand and increasing cost of delivering medical services. The coalition government is clearly working hard to make sure that we are helping people in the rural and regional communities of this country, and the changes to the bonded medical programs reform is a great initiative. I strongly urge all senators in this chamber to support this bill.

Senator HANSON (Queensland) (09:39): Australia's Bonded Medical Places Scheme is a sensible system because it benefits the Australian people in rural, regional and remote areas that often, as a result of their distances from capital cities and major services, struggle to attract doctors. It also benefits the new doctors themselves by allowing them to attract government funding support for their studies by promising to work for a period for the people in those needy communities. On the face of it, it is a really sensible arrangement that has various beneficiaries, but I do think it can be improved.

Unfortunately, the lure of the bigger cities and the services they provide—the shopping, entertainment, restaurants and convenient access to professional services, as well as being near to family and friends—often outweigh the apparent attractiveness of the smaller country towns and communities. I think graduate doctors who are supported by the Bonded Medical Places Scheme should be more open to creating a life in rural, remote and regional areas and enjoy the unique offerings of country living and the people that call these places home, who deserve just as much access to professional medical and health services as those in the cities.

However, it is also important to recognise the professional aspirations of these doctors, who have often spent many years in study and professional development to become, for example, a GP. The pathway to becoming a doctor that is able to provide GP services and more in a remote community is not an easy one. The whole doctor training pathway sphere is demanding. It is very time-consuming in terms of the years that it takes from when a first-year medical student finishes their medical training, spends time in a training hospital and then completes his or her area of speciality. It's a significant commitment of at least a decade or more to become a fresh GP who can stand alone in a small community as their local doctor.

The bonded scheme has, since 2016, applied to about 28.5 per cent of first-year medical students in Commonwealth-supported places. It's a significant proportion of all medical students in Australia, and it should, on the face of it, result in good outcomes for country areas. Currently, in exchange for the support the students receive to achieve their medical qualifications, they are required to then work in an eligible non-metropolitan location in Australia for a total of 12 months, with that time to be completed within five years of attaining that fellowship. The Commonwealth provides 850 of these bonded medical places each year. It offers a subsidy of $22,000 per year of HECS or HELP support that does not need to be repaid if the terms of the scheme under which the bonded place was offered are met. The scheme should provide a win-win for the new doctors and also for the needy communities which otherwise would struggle to receive access to health services that are taken for granted in the cities.

However, a problem with this scheme is it's been apparently unable to come to a satisfactory time period for how long the medical graduates should spend in the remote locations and over what time frame that service should be fulfilled. In the past, there has been a requirement that graduates spend a period equal to the period of the medical studies, either four or six years, in these needy communities, but that wasn't successful. It's been turned back to now require graduates to fulfil a 12-month commitment in a needy community, with that service to be completed within five years of graduation. The shortcoming of this arrangement is that it could realistically mean that the new doctor could come and go from the community or communities, spending short times here and there and subsequently fulfilling the requirements of the bonded medical scheme but proving to be of no long-term benefit to the community, the local residents and their health needs.

The value of the Commonwealth support for the medical qualifications is of some $88,000 to $132,000, depending on whether it is a four-year postgraduate medical degree or six-year undergraduate degree. It's unacceptable that, after receiving so much financial support from the Australian taxpayer for a qualification that is well regarded and will lead to significant earnings in the private sector over the length of their career, the graduate spends such a relatively short period of time in a haphazard way repaying the Commonwealth and the taxpayer for their financial support.

This bill makes a further change by initiating a compromised time period, increasing the required payback service to three years to be completed within 18 years from when the formal medical studies are completed. This change would also fail in providing continuity of support for the needy communities. It fails to encourage the
development of relationships between the members of the community and their doctor. We all know how important it is to have longevity of relationship with your doctor and to develop trust over time. The doctor-patient relationship is one that is intimate, very personal and vital as the patient negotiates the many ups and downs and challenges of their health and family relationships over time. It is absolutely more desirable to have a doctor in a community who has taken time to become part of the community, to develop relationships and to build trust. In some cases, they meet a local, fall in love, buy a house, get married and maybe start a family. To require just three years of payback service completed over 18 years is rather counterproductive.

If the three years are locked in as acceptable for the payback of financial support, I would prefer to see that time completed in one three-year stint, not a broken-up mishmash of some days here and a few weeks there. I personally would like to see the graduate spend a full five years in the community once again, but that may be difficult to introduce again. The reason I suggest these stricter ideas is that these medical graduates have been given a massive opportunity courtesy of the taxpayer. It’s a support mechanism that is very generous and provides valuable support towards qualifications that can reap considerable career and financial benefits into the future. It doesn’t seem unreasonable that there should be a fair contribution made to the needy rural, remote and regional communities in recognition of the support given.

If police are required to be posted in remote areas for at least two years after they graduate and teachers also have a similar program, with those who spend at least four years teaching in a very remote location over a six-year period also eligible to have their Higher Education Loan Program debt remitted, these should be taken into consideration.

As I have travelled around the country, I have spoken to many councils, mayors, communities and people living in those rural and regional areas who are crying out for doctor services. A lot of these communities are dying because they don't have the services available to them and they can't have access to health care, especially having doctors in their communities, or are spending an enormous amount of money with fly-in, fly-out doctors. Yes, something needs to be done about it—drastically. As I have said here, the taxpayer is going to be paying an enormous amount of money of between $88,000 and $132,000 in HECS fees for these medical students to get their practice. Surely it is reasonable to expect them to sign this contract in return, to give something back to Australian taxpayers by giving of their services.

It is a shame that the five-year scheme didn't work and a lot of people didn't sign up to it. But it is about working together to keep these communities alive, because when the older generations who live in these rural and remote areas can't get the health services they need they move out. They move to the cities, where they can get their health services provided to them. You have got less people living there. Less services will shut down because of less people living in the areas. It is going to have a flow-on effect. I do believe that extending it to a three-year period, from one year is more favourable. One Nation will be supporting the bill.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (09:50): I rise to sum up the debate on the Health Insurance Amendment (Bonded Medical Programs Reform) Bill 2019. This is one of the targeted strategic responses under the Stronger Rural Health Strategy, which responds to the challenge of ensuring primary health care is accessible and available to all Australians, no matter where they live. Under the strategy, a total of $20.2 million was committed to reform the bonded medical programs. The bonded medical programs are a long-term investment in the health workforce by the Australian government. These schemes are designed to address doctor shortages across regional, rural and remote Australia and in areas of workforce shortages. Participants receive a place in a medical course at an Australian university in return for a commitment to work in underserviced areas.

The bill introduces a statutory scheme, known as the Bonded Medical Program, which will come into effect from 1 January 2020. The statutory scheme consolidates the existing bonded medical places and rural bonded medical scholarship schemes under a single legislative framework to progress the government's long-term view to move towards a single bonded medical scheme. The statutory scheme is clearer about the conditions applied under the program and provides greater flexibility for participants to complete their return-of-service obligation. Participants of the statutory scheme continue to have the right of internal review and now will be able to seek review of administrative decisions by the Administrative Appeals Tribunal. From 1 January 2020, new participants will enter the program under the new statutory scheme, and existing participants will be able to opt in. The statutory arrangements will eventually replace the myriad complex contractual arrangements currently in place with individual participants. Statutory provisions will ensure that existing participants and future participants have access to the same suite of options and opportunities going forward. Legislative amendments will enable entrants to opt in to a statutory scheme without the need for individual contracts. It will make it significantly easier for bonded students and doctors to complete their return-of-service obligation by reducing and streamlining administrative requirements and giving more options as to when, where and how it can be completed.
The reformed arrangements will provide earlier and stronger links with key professional support agencies for doctors.

These improvements to the program will encourage doctors to stay working in the community where they are undertaking their return-of-service obligation beyond their obligations and ensure there are more fully-qualified Australian trained doctors working in regional, rural and remote Australia and in areas of workforce shortage. More importantly, the reforms will also better target the future bonded workforce to locations of need as demographic and workforce demands change over time. The statutory scheme will enable the collection of data for reporting and effective evaluation of the programs. At this stage, it is too early to evaluate the program's success; however, it is critical that the government, the medical profession and the Australian public have access to robust evaluation of the program outcomes to inform policy decisions into the future.

Without legislative reforms, existing administrative arrangements will remain outdated and contractual provisions will continue to be required and will continue to obstruct the delivery of effective and responsive targeting of the bonded medical workforce into the future. The program will become increasingly outdated, with growing frustration experienced by participants and the key stakeholder groups which support them. It questions the benefit of retaining a program which, due to its administrative arrangements, is unable to maintain currency or prepare for the future needs of participants and workforce distribution.

It is the government's long-term view to rationalise the bonded medical programs to a single bonded medical scheme once all existing schemes have expired. It is envisaged this will occur around 2035, when all participants under the existing schemes have either completed their obligations under the program or have chosen to opt in to the new statutory scheme. The government is committed to implementing progressive and responsive administrative arrangements, which support both current and future-bonded doctors keen to make a substantial contribution to better access of medical services across Australia, and I commend the bill to the Senate.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Third Reading

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT (09:56): As no amendments to the bill have been circulated, does any senator require that the bill be considered in Committee of the Whole? I call the minister.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (09:56): I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (09:57): I move:

That this bill may proceed without formalities and be now read a first time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Senator CASH: by leave—I move:

That the provisions of paragraphs (5) to (8) of standing order 111 not apply to the bill, allowing it to be considered during this period of sittings.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (09:58): I note here that normally the Greens do not support exempting most bills from the cut-off order, for reasons that I've articulated in this place before—to enable enough time to look at bills. Given the circumstances of this bill, which I will go into in more detail in the debate on the second reading, the Greens will not be objecting to exemption from the cut-off order. But I don't want that to be taken as a precedence for us changing our view on the rules around bills being exempted from the cut-off order.

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (09:58): I table a statement of reasons justifying the need for this bill to be considered during these sittings and seek leave to have the statement incorporated into Hansard.
Leave granted.

The statement read as follows—

STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 WINTER/SPRING SITTINGS SOCIAL SECURITY (ADMINISTRATION) AMENDMENT (CASHLESS WELFARE) BILL

Purpose of the Bill

The bill will amend the provisions in the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999 related to exiting cashless welfare arrangements, to provide for the Secretary to be the decision maker for all exit applications. It will also co-locate all the wellbeing exemptions and exit provisions from cashless welfare arrangements in the same Subdivision thereby simplifying the cashless welfare legislation.

The bill will also broaden the criteria to allow the Secretary to take into account a person's ability to manage their affairs generally, including their financial affairs.

Reasons for Urgency

The process to exit the Cashless Debit Card commenced on 1 July 2019. Amendments are required as soon as possible to allow applications to be processed and ensure consistency in the processing of exit applications. As community bodies are either not able or willing to make decisions on applications, it is not possible for some applications to exit the program to be considered in the Ceduna and East Kimberley sites. The amendments proposed in the Bill are urgent to ensure an equitable and consistent process for all Cashless Debit Card participants that apply to exit.

Question agreed to.

Second Reading

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (09:59): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

SOCIAL SECURITY (ADMINISTRATION) AMENDMENT (CASHLESS WELFARE) BILL 2019

Today I rise to speak on a Bill that continues the Government's work on one of the most positive developments in welfare for decades and demonstrates our commitment to make a real difference to the lives of all Australians.

The Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019 makes a number of important changes to the trial of the Cashless Debit Card that operates in the Ceduna, East Kimberley, Goldfields and Bundaberg and Hervey Bay regions.

The Cashless Debit Card program is delivering significant benefits for these communities. The program has the objective of reducing immediate hardship and deprivation, reducing violence and harm, encouraging socially responsible behaviour, and reducing the likelihood that welfare recipients will remain on welfare and out of the workforce for extended periods.

The program is showing positive results. The independent evaluation of the Cashless Debit Card trial conducted by ORIMA Research found that it had "a considerable positive impact" in the communities where it had operated.

The statistics back this up:

- 41 per cent of participants surveyed who drank alcohol reported drinking less frequently;
- 48 per cent of participants surveyed who used drugs reported using drugs less frequently; and
- 48 per cent of those who gambled before the trial reported gambling less often.

The Bill continues the operation of the Cashless Debit Card program but improves the processes introduced through recent non-government amendments for participants to exit the program.

The amendments were put forward by the Opposition to the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Income Management and Cashless Welfare) Act 2019 in April this year.

The Government agreed to include these Opposition amendments, however we recognised that more work and consultation was required to improve what the Opposition had put forward. The Opposition amendments allow Cashless Debit Card participants to apply for an exit from the program on or after 1 July 2019, if they can demonstrate reasonable and responsible management of their financial affairs as a primary consideration, taking into account a number of secondary factors.

The amendments also outlined that the local community body is the decision maker for those who live in a trial area where there is a community body. For other trial areas, the Secretary of the Department of Social Services is the decision maker.

Since this amendment was introduced, consultation in all four of the current Cashless Debit Card trial areas have identified concerns on the exit process.

The Government is introducing this legislation, following these consultations with communities, to ensure there is an effective, consistent and fair process for participants to exit the Cashless Debit Card program, whilst also continuing our
commitment to provide the best support to people, families and communities in places where high levels of welfare dependence co-exist with high levels of social harm.

To improve the operation of processes for participants to exit the Cashless Debit Card program, the Bill proposes a number of reforms to the application process and decision making framework.

Firstly, the Bill provides that the Secretary of the Department of Social Services is the decision maker for all Cashless Debit Card exit applications. Community body representatives have stated that they do not support the exit process as it is currently designed, particularly the role of community bodies as the decision-maker.

While ongoing consultation and engagement on the impact of the new exit process will continue with communities including community bodies, providing that the Secretary of the Department of Social Services is the decision maker for all exit applications will ensure fairness for all participants of the program.

The Bill also broadens the criteria for the Cashless Debit Card exit provisions to allow the Secretary to take into account a person's ability to manage their affairs generally. For example, the Bill will enable the Secretary to require the person seeking to exit to not only meet the criteria based on financial grounds but can also take into account matters such as contact with authorities for non-financial reasons such as child protection or family violence issues.

The Bill also enables the Secretary to require the person seeking to exit the Cashless Debit Card program to be able to demonstrate that they are acting in the best interest of children, family and the community such as positive school attendance outcomes.

The development of this change followed consultations where stakeholders stated that any process to exit the Cashless Debit Card program should be based on a participant meeting social norms, consistent with the objectives of the program, as well as the current criteria that relates to the management of their financial affairs.

It is critical that we listen to this feedback and ensure that the Cashless Debit Card maintains its focus on reducing social harm and supporting vulnerable people, families and communities.

Finally, the Bill also clarifies that exit applications need to in a form that is approved by the Secretary, and makes a number of minor amendments to move the exit and wellbeing exemption arrangements for the Cashless Debit Card program under one subdivision in the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999, without any alteration to the existing wellbeing process.

The Bill will not change the effectiveness or day-to-day operation of the program. It simply proposes administrative amendments to the exit application process and streamlines legislative provisions around Cashless Debit Card exit and exemption pathways in the Social Security (Administration) Act 1999.

The Government remains committed to the continuation of the Cashless Debit Card, to provide a strong social welfare safety net, through reducing social harm in areas with high levels of welfare dependency and supporting vulnerable people, families and communities.

We are committed to supporting communities that stand up and promote positive change and better outcomes for children and families and we will continue to work in partnership to ensure the Cashless Debit Card program provides the best support for vulnerable individuals within those communities.

This Bill is another step in this Government's efforts to sustain the positive impacts of welfare management and support communities to tackle the negative effects of welfare dependency.

I commend the Bill.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (09:59): I rise to speak on the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019. Labor has serious concerns about the cashless welfare card, and we have always opposed its rollout nationally. Labor supported the initial trial of the Cashless Debit Card in Ceduna and East Kimberley because the community leaders indicated their support at the time. Of course, the initial support offered by communities came against a backdrop of inadequate local services and inadequate local job creation and economic development programs—the investments that government should have been making in local social and economic wellbeing.

Labor did not support the further expansion of the trial to Bundaberg-Hervey Bay or the Goldfields, because of the lack of evidence and a lack of any clear community support. Let me be clear: Labor will not support the expansion of the cashless debit card to new communities unless the community wants the card and there is informed community consent. At the election, the rollout of the cashless debit card in Bundaberg-Hervey Bay was only partially complete. Labor committed to stopping the rollout of the cashless debit card in Bundaberg-Hervey Bay and to taking a case management approach to putting in place alternative support for people already on the card, as well as investing in support services and programs that work. Labor has not been able to satisfy ourselves through our own consultations that the community desire present in the other trial sites was present in Goldfields and Bundaberg-Hervey Bay.

Labor successfully amended a bill in the Senate in April this year to allow people participating in the cashless debit card trial sites to get off the cashless debit card if they are effectively managing their affairs. Labor's amendment required community panels, which are established in some cashless debit card trial sites, to be the decision-maker. This was consistent with existing arrangements for reducing the portion of a person's income...
quarantined on the cashless debit card. The government's subsequent consultation with the community panels found that they did not want to be this decision-maker, out of concern for the pressure that could be placed on panel members by members of the community who apply to get off the cashless debit card. On this basis, Labor will not oppose this bill—it is consistent with the amendment we successfully made earlier in the year and it will give people a pathway off the card.

This bill will amend the exit criteria under current legislation to allow for a broader consideration of opt-out criteria for persons participating in the cashless welfare card. The bill will create a single administrative process for the Department of Social Services, DSS, to make decisions about people getting off the cashless debit card. The bill also combines the pre-existing welfare exemption which allows DSS to exempt a person from the cashless debit card if it is a threat to their physical, mental or emotional health, with the exit pathway established by Labor's amendment.

Further, the bill clarifies that exit applications need to be made in a form that is approved by the secretary of DSS and expands the wellbeing exemption provisions so they apply more broadly across all regions. This bill will ultimately assist participants who are managing their affairs well and who want to get off the card. We understand hundreds of people are seeking an exemption from the trial and have already approached DSS about the opt-out process. This shows there is strong community support for people being able to get off the cashless debit card.

Labor has some concerns about the operation of certain provisions in this bill, and we will move amendments to address some of these. The cashless debit card has been running too long. It is no longer a trial, and it is time the government produced some real evidence about the effectiveness of the card and reassessed community support in each trial area. That is why Labor moved a second reading amendment in the House calling on the government to: firstly, table a report in parliament by the end of the year, making clear whether or not there is continuing community support in any of the trial sites for the cashless debit card; secondly, table a wraparound service plan in the parliament by the end of the year, explaining how the government has boosted community services in the trial sites and what increased investment will be made in the future; and, thirdly, make the cashless debit card voluntary from 30 January 2020, unless there is clear local community support and consent for the card. This is an incredibly important point—the government simply cannot continue to impose this card on communities where there is not clear support and they cannot continue to impose it in the absence of evidence about the card's effectiveness.

In this context, Labor's future position on the cashless debit card is clear. We will not support the extension of the cashless debit card trial sites or the further rollout of the cashless debit card, unless the government can demonstrate there is clear and genuine local community support. The cashless debit card is over-simplified. Labor will move similar amendments in the committee stages in the debate in this bill, setting out a process for people to come off the card.

Since the introduction of the cashless debit card trials, the government has continually failed to be up-front about the full cost of implementing the cashless debit card. Hopefully, this is something the minister can shed some light on in the course of this debate. The government have already spent $34 million on the cashless debit card, and the budget papers show they're planning to spend $128.8 million over the forward estimates, including on new sites and the rollout of the cashless debit card across the Northern Territory. That's over $160 million that instead could have been allocated to employment and economic development, early intervention services, and to drug and alcohol treatment.

It was reported in mid-2017 that the cost per participant of the cashless debit card exceeded $10,000 per participant. The same year the Auditor-General found that the annual running costs of the cashless debit card would be over $3,700 per participant. The problem is that we have never had a proper evaluation into what better outcomes would be possible if this money was invested differently. This is incredibly concerning, particularly when you consider that the Auditor-General found there was no evidence that the cashless debit card was effective. In addition, Labor has become increasingly concerned about the government's reliance on the deeply flawed ORIMA evaluation to justify the cashless debit card. The Auditor-General's examination of the cashless debit card found that there was no evidence that the card was effective and found deep inconsistencies in the ORIMA evaluation.

At a Senate inquiry into the cashless debit card earlier this year, the Senate Standing Committees on Community Affairs heard evidence that in some trial sites the cashless debit card has now been in operation for so long that the opportunity for a proper piece of evaluation to be conducted has passed. There is clear evidence the card is not maintaining community support, even in areas where some people might have initially been in favour of the card. Indigenous leader and foundation chair in Australian Indigenous Studies at the University of Melbourne, Professor Marcia Langton, has said the cashless debit card is a failure. Professor Langton said, 'Because the local community is not involved in implementing the policy, the policy failed.' One of the
community leaders who initially supported the introduction of the trial, Mr Desmond Hill, has since withdrawn his support. Mr Hill told the recent inquiry one of the conditions community leaders had when agreeing to the East Kimberley becoming a trial site was that people would be able to apply to leave the trial. Another Indigenous elder in the East Kimberley, Ian Trust, who remains a supporter, told the committee he was not opposed to people being able to come off the card in some circumstances. That is why it is important that people can get off the cashless debit card, even in areas where the trial may be supported by the community. This bill will allow people to come off the cashless debit card, and the fact is many of those people should not have been on the card in the first place.

In conclusion, why Labor will not oppose this bill because it implements an amendment we made some months ago and provides a pathway off the card. We will not support the extension of the cashless debit card trial sites or the further rollout of the cashless debit card, unless the government can demonstrate there is clear and genuine local community support. Labor will take an evidence based approach to this policy and to income management. We will not go down the US path of supporting essentially a food stamp system, where people are identified and shamed in public by the card as being on social security, where children are teased and ostracised at school, where people can't buy a second hand fridge on Gumtree, shop at a roadside farm stall or buy food at a market, all because this conservative government would rather hand out tens of millions of dollars to a private company to run the cashless debit card and to set up a privatised, parallel welfare system to be imposed by this government on people regardless of their circumstances or how they are managing their affairs. Australians have a right to adequate social security. It should be considered by all sides a basic characteristic of a fair and civil society. We will not demonise social security recipients, like this government does.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (10:11): I rise to speak on the Social Services (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019. This bill makes changes to the exit and wellbeing exemption arrangements for people to exit the cashless debit card trials. These are necessary because the current processes aren't workable. These changes relate to the so-called exit or opt-out provisions, which were rushed through the Senate by the government and the ALP together in return for the ALP's supporting the government's extension of the cashless debit card trial sites. That happened in April. There was no time to debate the bill itself or the amendments. It was obvious from the start, by reading the amendments that were rushed through, that the exit provisions wouldn't work. But that really didn't matter to the government or the opposition, because they just wanted to see the extension of the cashless debit card rushed through without adequate scrutiny so that they could extend the trials for another 12 months.

That was rushed through before the election. Unfortunately there was no way to debate those changes, as I said, because the gag was applied to a number of bills that were rushed through in April, before the election. The Senate did not have time to adequately scrutinise the amendments. I would hope that, if we had been given time, the fact that they weren't workable would have been realised. What has happened now is that we have a whole lot of people that are in limbo. I will come back to that in a minute.

We have here a bill that makes a number of changes, including removing the role of the unelected, hand picked community bodies in assessing a person's exit applications. It makes the secretary of the Department of Social Services the decision-maker for the exit applications. It also amends some of the exit criteria and clarifies that exit applications that are to be made through a form approved by the secretary of the department.

I will come to the discussion of the amendments shortly, but let me first be very clear: the Greens continue their opposition to income management and the cashless debit card trials and the cashless debit card. This is a punitive approach that unfairly discriminates against First Nations communities, particularly, and does not work, despite the government's rhetoric. Last night in adjournment I articulated and spoke about a number of accounts from people that are subject to the cashless debit card and how it's making their lives worse, not better. The cashless debit card is not supported by lots of people in the broader community and people in the trial sites.

I move a second reading amendment to the legislation:

"but the Senate calls on the Government to abandon compulsory income management and the Cashless Debit Card."

People on the card have articulated how they feel demonised, stigmatised. People have been spat on, called druggies and had their children bullied at school because their parents are on the card. The card restricts human rights and unfairly targets people on income support. We do not support the cashless debit card. We don't support income management.

The government falsely claim the success of the card and of income management. Their own evaluations, if read clearly and properly, don't support those claims, even if you ignore the fact that the methodology is flawed. I have, many times in this place, gone through the flaws in the evaluation process and the way the government falsely claim that those evaluations show the success of income management. They ignore the voices of the
community such as those that I quoted last night in my adjournment speech. Those people, as I said, talk about being shamed, being demonised and the fact that they have a lot of problems with the card.

The Northern Territory, through the Northern Territory intervention, has had income management for 12 long years. Does anybody seriously claim that the situation in the Northern Territory has been stabilised, that it has improved, when we see an escalating number of children going into out-of-home care still and we still have outrageous youth justice interaction problems and problems with the youth justice system? No, of course they don't. In 2007 the then-Howard government made what turned out to be false claims about the situation in the Northern Territory, to justify the dog whistling of the Northern Territory intervention. Those claims have not been proved to be correct. None of the things that they claimed would happen through the intervention and income management have in fact happened, which the evaluation of the Northern Territory intervention clearly showed. The hearing into the rollout of the cashless debit card in Hinkler clearly showed something similar. The authors of that report highlighted the findings from the Northern Territory intervention evaluation, which does not support the government's claims of success.

The Greens remain strongly opposed to the cashless debit card and income management. However, there are now hundreds of people in limbo because the application process that was rushed through this place doesn't work, and there is actually no process in place to assess their applications. The wellbeing exemption process is a mess. My office has tried to help many people who have applied for the wellbeing exemption and been extremely frustrated by the process. The wellbeing exemption process has been in place for a long time. For opt-out and exit there are no processes in place, but we've helped a number of people through the wellbeing exemption process. One person was told, 'You need to be on the card first, so then you can prove that it's adversely impacted your mental health.' In other words, the department at the time was saying, 'You need to be sicker before we can take you off it.' It's ridiculous.

We are supporting this legislation, although I have some strong concerns about it which I will articulate. We will be supporting this process around exemption. I'm being really clear: we do not support the cashless debit card, but we support improving the exemption process, because we want to help what we've been told, through our community contacts, is about 400 people who have applied for the opt-out process and are in limbo. We want to make sure there is a process in place, so we are supporting this particular bit of the legislation. However, I have some amendments to the process, because we think it can still be improved.

I thank the minister for the way that she has undertaken the consultation to get this process fixed. I think that she's been very open to what we had to say. She didn't take everything on board, I must say, but it was a welcome process because it enabled us to look at the legislation and point at some of the issues that we had. Once the legislation was released, we listened very strongly to stakeholders, who have had things to say even in the short time since this legislation was tabled last Thursday. There are a lot of people who are keenly interested in the cashless debit card trials and income management, and they have responded very quickly to our reaching out for their comments.

Unsurprisingly, there have been a number of issues that have been raised with the criteria, and I will go through some of those issues that we have now with the process. Having said that, I will reiterate that I was pleased that we could talk to the government about some of these issues. I just wish they'd gone a lot further. I will say now, too, that I have a series of questions. Although these changes are in place to help the process roll more smoothly, I think there are a lot of questions about how the process will work, so I'd like to get the answers on record in order for people to understand how the process will work when they use this legislation to opt out and also for the wellbeing exemptions.

Some of the issues that I still think are problematic are under section 124PHB(3). It says that a person wishing to exit the trial will be assessed according to the following:

(a) the person can demonstrate reasonable and responsible management of the person's affairs (including financial affairs), taking into account all of the following:

(i) the interest of any children for whom the person is responsible;
(ii) whether the person was convicted of an offence against a law of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory, or was serving a sentence of imprisonment for such an offence, at any time in the last 12 months …

I acknowledge that this is a change from what originally went through this place, which was about whether the person 'has a likelihood of engaging in any unlawful activity'. That was totally subjective. It wasn't measurable. It was dependent on whether somebody in the community, because at this stage it was about the community panels and the community bodies, thought someone was going to carry out any unlawful activity. So I do acknowledge that that's an improvement on what was there. We do, however, have concerns that it's 'convicted of an offence'
rather than 'convicted of a serious offence', so I do have an amendment to make to emphasise that it's about a serious offence.

The criteria also includes:

(iii) risks of homelessness;

(iv) the health and safety of the person and the community;

(v) the responsibilities and circumstances of the person;

(vi) the person's engagement in the community, including the person's employment or efforts to obtain work ...

Anybody reading those will see that a lot of those are also very subjective, so that's why I wish to clarify these issues during the debate of the whole—so people are clear about how this criteria will be assessed. We actually want to take out the whole lot of the criteria and just leave the 'managing financial affairs' part there. That's another amendment that I'll be putting in during the committee of the whole process.

Now, let's look at these criteria. For a start, some of these criteria would well contradict the wellbeing exemption. If having poor mental health, for example, qualifies you for a wellbeing exemption, will it then qualify you for a wellbeing exemption, or does it mean that you are caught up under the criteria that talks about the health and safety of a person in the community? The problem here is that we are at risk of the criteria for the opt-out exemption contradicting the process through the wellbeing exemption, so we need to make sure that that is clarified.

Many, many people responded over the weekend to the criteria, telling us they thought the exit criteria were incredibly patronising and onerous and that they believe they're based on ideological grounds rather than on being workable. These exit provisions require trial participants to provide evidence that goes above and beyond the objectives of the trial. It is unfair that trial participants are being forced to jump through these hoops that no other income support recipients are subject to all because they are unlucky enough to live in the so-called cashless debit card trial sites. Let me say that people who are living on incredibly low payments, such as $277.86 per week on Newstart, are some of the best money managers around. It is objectionable that the government thinks that just because you're on income support, you can't manage your finances.

Many people on income support payments, especially on low payments, find it difficult to provide evidence that satisfies these criteria. Let's take the criteria for risk of homelessness. The chronic lack of housing, especially in remote communities, means that First Nation families often experience housing overcrowding. This will work against First Nation people wanting to exit the card. A person's risk of homelessness could also be exacerbated by being on the cashless debit card. I've heard repeated accounts of people's rent payments bouncing back into their accounts, because of the Indue card, and not being paid on time. How is it fair to assess a person on their risk of homelessness when the card itself makes it difficult to maintain a good rental history?

To exit the card, a person also needs to demonstrate they have not been convicted of any offences in the last 12 months. This could see someone charged with minor offences like jobless, petty theft or graffiti excluded from exiting the card. First Nation people will again be disadvantaged because of the institutionalised and systemic racism they experience through our justice system, and virtually every day of their lives. We know that First Nation people are 13 times more likely to be in prison than non-Indigenous people.

A trial participant's exit application will also be assessed against the health and safety of the person and the community. This is incredibly unfair. How can a person prove the health and safety of their community, and how can they be held responsible for it? Individuals cannot, and should not, be held responsible for the health and safety of their community in return for getting off the card. It also directly contradicts the wellbeing exemptions that allow a person to exit the card based on their physical and mental health issues. It begs the question as to whether, as I articulated earlier, a person's health will determine whether they stay on the card or exit the card.

I also have strong concerns about the criteria around a person's employment or efforts to obtain work. The cashless debit card operates in many regional areas that are suffering from thin or non-existent labour markets. The focus on proving employment also reflects the government's devaluing of unpaid care work. Unpaid care often takes place in private and is not able to be verified by documentary evidence.

Overall, the exit criteria are not measurable or objective and I will move an amendment to have these removed. If that fails, I've got a lot of questions to ask about how they will operate. The objectives remain open to interpretation and allow the secretary of the Department of Social Services to exercise extensive discretion over a person's exit application, and that remains a strong concern for many people.

Despite being fully aware of these flaws, the government has not moved to make significant improvements to the exit criteria. When we are discussing these during the committee of the whole, I will urge the minister to clarify how these criteria will be interpreted, what evidence will be acceptable and how will it be verified? There
are also significant problems with the role of the health and community worker in the reconsideration of the exit applications. Section 124PHB(8) stipulates:

If a health or community worker considers that it is necessary for the person who is the subject of a determination under subsection (3) to be a trial participant for medical or safety reasons, the worker may request the Secretary to reconsider the determination.

While I think the way that is worded shows some improvement, I am concerned that it doesn't stipulate that the health or community worker has to have a professional relationship with the person that they're talking about. Otherwise, any member of the community who happens to be a health or community worker may register an issue with the department to say, 'We want that person reconsidered,' having no justification for that at all, other than it may be their opinion. I'm deeply concerned about the way this could be interpreted and seek clarification from the government that the worker will be expected to have a professional connection with the person they're working with.

Unlike some people, we are in fact pleased that the community bodies have been taken out of this process. Community bodies are unelected. The government has chosen the people there. Nobody knows who they are. I've said this repeatedly in this place and called for those names to be released so that people in the community can know who's judging them. It is totally unfair that the participants of this trial do not know who the people are that are making the decisions in either the community panel or the community reference group, where they exist, in both Hinkler and Kalgoorlie. We don't know if there are participants, for example, on the reference groups. We understand there are businesses. So businesses get a say over the control of people's lives? This is outrageous!

People in the government will continue to get up and say how fantastic the card is. They obviously haven't spoken to the people that are suffering under this card—being demonised, stigmatised, spat on and called druggies who can't manage their financial affairs, when they have proven that they can manage their financial affairs.

Income management stigmatises people. It is discriminatory. It should be abandoned now. We will not support any continuation of the CDC.

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (10:31): I rise to make a contribution on the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019. I note with some trepidation that my new colleague from Western Australia Matt O'Sullivan, who gave an absolutely wonderful first speech last night and who is full bottle on this topic, is speaking after me. Hopefully, I don't mess up too badly, Senator O'Sullivan.

This is something I have taken an interest in, as a senator from Western Australia, since my time began in this place. I was fortunate enough as an incoming senator to be on the community affairs committee, and one of my first committee responsibilities was to travel to Kalgoorlie with the community affairs committee and talk to the local community about this very issue. One of the things that was very clear from that time in Kalgoorlie was the sheer desperation that parts of rural and regional areas in particular face in relation to issues of drug abuse, alcohol abuse, other addiction problems and social dysfunction in general. That desperation was voiced by so many people—people from non-Indigenous backgrounds, people from Indigenous backgrounds and, literally, the taxi driver who took me from the airport in Kalgoorlie to the hearing. The desperation and the desire to give people some hope was palpable. In working with the member for O'Connor, Rick Wilson, a good friend of mine, on the cashless debit card trial in Kalgoorlie—and I know that Senator O'Sullivan, in his previous role, also played a part in the development of the cashless debit card—we've seen that granting of hope. We've see people grasp the opportunity to improve their lives that is presented by the cashless debit card.

We understand those opposite have some ideological objections to the underlying idea of the cashless debit card. However, that granting of hope to people in those communities is something that shouldn't be diminished and shouldn't be put aside on the basis of an ideological view of the world. The cashless debit card is about giving people the chance to get control of their own lives again—of their own spending. Of the stories that have come to me from the Kalgoorlie trial, there is one of a young woman who has been able to get control of her financial situation and has been able to buy a car, for the first time in her life, and maintain the operating costs on that car. There are stories of shopkeepers in the town of Coolgardie who have seen families coming in and buying food for their children's lunch for the first time ever. This is an opportunity for people to take control of their financial situation in the face of the absolutely debilitating impacts of drug and alcohol abuse in particular.

This is a community led program. I think that is something that should not be ignored. I know the genesis, particularly in Kalgoorlie, in the Goldfields region, of the cashless debit card. This was not government in Canberra picking a spot; this was community groups in Kalgoorlie and the surrounding areas coming to their local member, Rick Wilson, advocating to be part of this trial. There was extensive consultation within the area involved. There was a postal survey that went out to 18,000 Goldfields households and came back with 85 per cent support for the trial. There was advocacy from local community groups. I spoke to the local mayor, I spoke to...
the CEO of the local shire, and to the Shire of Laverton and the Shire of Leonora—and I should point out that there is significant Indigenous representation in those local government authorities. These local communities wanted a circuit-breaker, they wanted something to change the dynamic in their community, and that is what the cashless debit card has provided.

Another point—and I have made it in this place before, but it is very important—is that we are looking here at amendments to the regime, and that is because these are trials. This is a process of constant improvement. We know that this is something we need to look at. We need to see what works, and we need to change what doesn't and try again. This is not something that we as a government, as a society, can afford to get wrong. There is too much at stake.

The government believe in a fair go for all and we believe in putting vulnerable people first, but we also have to spend taxpayers’ money in a responsible way. We have high expectations of people who are on welfare and we know that those people, who are often in desperate circumstances, do want to regain control of their lives in the face of addiction and want to make a better life for themselves and their families.

The cashless debit card does look and operate like a regular EFTPOS card; however, it can't be used to withdraw cash, gamble or purchase alcohol. Recipients receive 80 per cent of their payments on the card, with the remaining 20 per cent placed in a bank account. The card can be used to pay for everyday expenses such as rent, mortgages and bills; to buy groceries; and to pay for medical appointments, car registration and similar things. The cashless debit card is a fee-free account. People can check their balances and transaction histories for free, and replace lost or stolen cards at no cost. The cashless debit cards provide effective usability for participants, with the ability to transfer funds between cashless debit card accounts and to access online shopping. It’s accepted at something like just under a million EFTPOS terminals nationally. It is a user-friendly and innovative way for people to receive income support payments, and we continue to improve it all the time.

There are currently four trial areas: the Ceduna region in South Australia; the East Kimberley region in Western Australia; the Goldfields region, which I have spoken a little about, in Western Australia; and most recently the Bundaberg and Harvey Bay region in Queensland. All of these areas face very different challenges, which is why—again, this was community driven—the government chose them. In the Goldfields region, the card is often thought of as directly impacting more on the Indigenous community there. However, it is always important to note that, of the welfare recipients who are on the cashless debit card program, 50 per cent are actually non-Indigenous.

We have a situation where Kalgoorlie is different to the East Kimberley in terms of its demographic profiles. Bundaberg and Hervey Bay are different again. It’s a much younger demographic and targeted as such. This is a government that is committed to seeing what works on the ground and making sure that the rollout is effective—that we monitor the rollout and that we act on the information that we are gathering back.

In the first of the three sites the program applied to all working age welfare participants, but in Hervey Bay and Bundaberg it targeted those under 35. So, again, we are seeking to gain the information on where this is most effective and how we can use this as a tool to help people take control of their own lives.

There are around 11,200 people on the cashless card trial across those four sites. Again, this has been developed in close partnership with community leaders and looks to address those devastating impacts of drug and alcohol that I’ve talked about.

The government has talked about and committed to expanding the cashless debit card to the Northern Territory and Cape York regions of Queensland in 2020. Again, that will offer another snapshot into another set of issues at the local level.

Why do we need this bill? This bill allows the Secretary of the Department of Social Services to be the decision-maker for all cashless debit card exit applications and broadens the criteria for the exit provisions to allow the secretary to take into account a person’s ability to manage their affairs generally, including their financial affairs. The bill clarifies that exit applications need to be made in a form that is approved by the secretary and expands the wellbeing exemption provisions, so they apply more broadly across the regions.

Changes are needed to fix the exit process that was introduced by the opposition earlier this year as an amendment to legislation that extended the cashless debit card program beyond 30 June 2019. Following the passage of these amendments feedback from community representatives indicated a lack of support for the new exit process and particularly the role of community bodies as decision-makers. Community stakeholders also indicated that any process to exit the program should be based on a participant meeting social norms, as well as the current criteria relating to financial management. Without the critical support of the community bodies and agreement to make decisions on these applications it is not possible to implement the exit process as provided for under the current provisions.
The exit application process is accessible to all participants. The criteria to be considered by the decision-maker is outlined in the legislation. This criteria is applied to each participant's own circumstances, however, it may vary. Therefore, a phone interview will ensure that participants have an opportunity for a fair and equitable assessment by taking into account these differences at a time that suits them.

This bill will amend the exit criteria to allow broader consideration of a person's affairs, including their financial affairs. This allows full consideration of all factors, such as the impact on children and family safety. This change to the criteria is in line with the feedback from consultation with community stakeholders and is consistent with the broader social objectives of the cashless debit card program.

This bill will amend the exit process to reflect the feedback from consultation and to require applications to be made in a form approved by the secretary. The amendments also enable the secretary to make a determination in relation to applications, which will be a reviewable decision.

These amendments will also move the exit and wellbeing exemption arrangements under one subdivision of the Social Security (Administration) Act. This removes differences in decision-making processes, increasing consistency and fairness for participants across trial areas, regardless of whether a person is a participant in a trial area where there is a community body in place.

CDC participants can be also be exited from the trial if they were incorrectly placed on the trial or if they no longer meet the participation criteria. This is different to the wellbeing exemption process where a CDC participant could be exempted from the trial if being on the trial could pose a serious risk to their mental, physical or emotional wellbeing.

Just briefly in winding up, I think it is important to note that the government did commit, as part of this process, to ongoing reviews of the cashless debit card in place. The first of those, from the Adelaide University, was published in February this year. It looked in particular at the Goldfields region. It has a section, which I want to go through briefly, on the early impacts of the cashless debit card. I'll read out some of the observations. It says: ... a majority of respondents were of the opinion that early impacts were starting to be observed. These impacts primarily centred on alcohol and drug use and misuse, child welfare and well-being, spending and financial management, financial abuse, crime and domestic violence, and support services.

Levels of substance misuse (and especially alcohol misuse) were reported by many respondents to have reduced in the Goldfields since the introduction of the CDC. Likewise, alcohol-related anti-social behaviour and crime had also decreased.

It goes on to say:

Early positive impacts relating to improvements in child welfare and well-being were commonly reported by respondents with beneficial outcomes of the CDC perceived to be flowing down from participants to their families.

I'll contrast that again—the positives that are coming out of the analysis of the cashless debit card trials—with some of the comments I got on that first trip to Kalgoorlie. The mayor of Kalgoorlie, John Bowler, said:

Locals who live here complain to me about what's happening. They want a solution. I've been almost pulling my hair out—the little bit of hair I've got—asking: what is a solution?

He went on to talk about how the community has been contacting him about the problems they have. He then said:

I then drove to Ceduna to experience it firsthand and make my own observations. I spoke to people ... I spoke to the deputy mayor, I spoke to retailers in the town and townspeople and got the same picture: they were glad that it had been introduced. They said there were some complaints, but even some who initially had been opposed to the card had really come around to say that life generally was better, particularly for those living on the streets.

Patrick Hill, President of the Shire of Laverton, said:

Everyone in town—the police, the hospital, the school, the Laverton Crisis Centre, the ambulance, the fire brigade, the resident group, the shire—has done everything possible to try and stem this abuse and the effects that alcohol, drugs and gambling have on our towns and the availability of cash. Council has formally adopted and supports the cashless welfare card because we see this as an opportunity to try and do something. We have had up to 50 agencies come into Laverton to try and address these social issues, and we do have our Laverton inter-agency group meetings to come up with solutions to try and stem this violence.

Mr Hill went on to say:

This will at least give us breathing space to do something and sit back and analyse where things can be done better and what we can do better as a community. We see it every single day. We have done everything we can as a community to try and solve some of these issues that we've got.

I could go on. There are many more. We heard from Mr Jim Epis, chief executive of the Shire of Leonora. We heard from business owners in Kalgoorlie. We heard from community groups in the Goldfields region. People wanted the chance to try and change the social dynamic, the dysfunction that was occurring in their community. It is a desperately sad situation. I've heard ministers on this side repeatedly say that the cashless debit card is not a
silver bullet, and we on this side all understand that. It is not of itself the solution. However, it can be a part of a broader solution. It can be the circuit-breaker that helps people take back control of their lives. I support the bill.

Senator O’SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (10:49): I rise in support of the Social Security (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019. Last night, it was my great privilege to be able to speak for the first time here in the Senate. In that speech, I spoke about my involvement with the cashless debit card in its early formations. I thought I'd take the time now to talk a little bit about the journey and the genesis—how the whole idea of the cashless debit card actually came about—because I was part of the very early discussions with some of the communities where it's now being trialled.

Senator Brockman said that I am a full bottle on this. Well, I think that's very kind and generous, but I think it's a little overstated. The reality is the full bottles on this are the communities. They are the ones that understand the depth and breadth of the importance of this card and the support that's provided with it—the extra supports of services that come with the card. The government is not delivering just that form of administered welfare payments, the social services payments that people receive. There are other supports that are there.

The Cashless Debit Card came about after a review by Mr Andrew Forrest from Fortescue Metals Group and the Minderoo Foundation, where I was working at the time. He was asked by the then Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, to undertake a review of the Indigenous jobs and training system. In doing the review, having gone around the country and speaking with many people—there were town hall meetings, lots of consultations around the country and about 400 different submissions as well—what became very apparent was that the focus on training and employment was important and we needed to bring some reforms into that space. I spoke about that last night in my speech. What became really apparent was, if people for six out of seven nights are drunk and affected by drugs, then there's no chance of training those people for jobs, even for jobs that are there or where there's a demand for jobs. And so there was a real cry from communities to try something that was different, to try something that could help people get that circuit-breaker.

Senator Brockman said that no-one in this place, in the government or anywhere, even in the communities, is saying that the Cashless Debit Card would be a silver bullet, but it is a circuit-breaker and it does provide an opportunity. We had a look at what was available. Is there a technology solution that could help? Years ago, you wouldn't have been able to do this, but technology has advanced.

We saw that the basics card was in operation in the Northern Territory. It's a similar model. It works similarly, but there are a few important differences between the basics card and the Cashless Debit Card. One of the problems with the basics card, which all welfare recipients across the Northern Territory and other parts in disparate locations across the country experience, is that the merchant has to install a separate terminal at their point of sale. In the Northern Territory in particular, you'd go into the grocery store, into the supermarket, and there would only be one line that had the basics card terminal installed, and it was the basics card terminal. Of course, you'd see all of the welfare recipients lined up at one terminal and everyone else lined up at the other aisles. It created a stigma for people. It was obvious who was on welfare and who was not, so it wasn't empowering. It wasn't helping people. It was actually driving down the despair further. If you're on welfare, it's a challenging circumstance, and no-one debates that, but what we don't need to do is add further stigma or a further issue to their lives, and the basics card was, in many ways, doing that. We took it to the technology providers, EFTPOS, Visa and Mastercard, and had a discussion with them. We got the banks together and said, 'Is there a way we could use one of the mainstream schemes, Visa, Mastercard or EFTPOS, to provide a more ubiquitous program so that the card could work anywhere in Australia, not just at those locations the merchant had installed a terminal to interface with their point of sale?'

We wanted to find a system that would enable people to go freely about their lives, conduct their business, buy the things that they needed—their groceries—and pay their electricity bill and pay for whatever they needed in a pretty unrestricted way, just with the merchants that sell alcohol and gambling products blocked and of course ensuring that there's no purchase of drugs and perhaps prohibiting taking cash out at the ATM.

This was a real breakthrough. It couldn't have been done 10 years ago. This is something that was new, and we thought it was worth trialling. So, we took it to a number of the communities that are now trial communities, and a few others. There were a few that rejected it; they didn't want it. At the time Geraldton, for example, weren't prepared to bring about the trial. But in the communities of the East Kimberley and Ceduna, the leadership group within those communities, said: 'Look, we think this is worth a go. We think this is worth trialling.' So, at Generation One, in Minderoo, where I was working at the time, we took it to the government. The government worked with us and said, 'Well, if you can actually demonstrate that the support is real, that there are actually people who want to see this happen, where we could break the cycle of welfare-fuelled alcohol, drug and gambling purchases, then this might be worth having a look at.' So we did. We got the support of those communities. They were a part of bringing delegations here into this place, speaking with crossbench members,
government and opposition about the kind of support that was there within these communities. The government moved to implement this program, and it's been running now for several years across the East Kimberley and Ceduna, and now into the Goldfields and Hinkler.

It's a circuit-breaker. It by no means deals with all the challenges. I talked to the senior sergeant of police up in Kununurra, who said to me, 'Instead of having five continuous nights and days, after welfare payments hit, of drinking issues and all sorts of social problems that come with excessive drinking, we might now have only one or two nights.' So, it becomes a circuit-breaker. I had the opportunity to go to many of these communities over a number of years, long before the cashless debit card and now since the implementation of the card, and these places really are different. They're very, very different. They're not perfect; you still see issues, you still hear from the nursing staff and police and others, and we know there are still some problems that have to be addressed within these communities.

To me, employment is clearly the way to deal with this, because when someone has to take the responsibility of getting up for work and the responsibility of providing for their family, they make better choices, because they can't be staying out late every night, using all their money to purchase copious amounts of alcohol and drugs and not putting that into their family. People take responsibility. So, this is a real opportunity, and people seize that opportunity when they've got a job. That really is the focus that we need to have.

So, this legislation and the amendment here deals with an important thing that the community is looking for. As Senator Brockman said, this is a trial. This is about moving and adapting to the program and how it's working and how it can be improved. Here we have a situation where community members are saying, 'We think there are circumstances where people can demonstrate that they don't need to be on the cashless debit card and they can transition off that.' The government's listened to what the community is saying. There was a part of the legislation that established a reference group that people would have to go to and make their case, and then that would be able to take them off the cashless debit card. But the community responded, saying: 'Actually, we don't want to be set up against our communities. We don't want to have that sort of involvement. We just want to be participants within our community and not have that sort of role.' So I think this amendment is a very important amendment. It takes pressure away from community members within the group. This is an important change that we would make here today.

In order to make the card even better—it's never going to be perfect—we can invest in the technology that the card operates on. At the moment, it works by blocking an entire merchant. If you use that card at a grocery store, a supermarket, it will work. If you use it at a petrol station, it will work. If you use it to put new tyres on your car, it will work. This is not just in communities where the trial is in operation, but anywhere across Australia and, in fact, the world. However, if you use that card at a liquor store, it won't work. If you try to use it at a casino, to purchase some gambling products, it won't work. This is anywhere across Australia, not just within those trial communities.

The problem is, if you want to see it go into other regions where you don't have these discrete communities, there are mixed merchants that sell both alcohol and groceries through the same point-of-sale system. What we really need, to enable it to expand and go further and to take away any of that stigma that is attached to it, is the ability to limit the sale of particular items. So we need to ratchet up the scale of the technology to limit items rather than an entire merchant. One of the problems is, you can go to a mixed merchant, or even an existing merchant that's allowed—for example, at the service station—and buy a gift card and take that gift card that you purchased in the service station, or the post office or wherever you can buy gift cards, straight down to a liquor store to purchase a trolley full of booze. It's defeating the purpose of the program.

I'll be working with the minister and the government to look at ways of developing the technology to improve its efficiency, to improve how it works, so we can restrict the sale of particular items rather than entire merchants. You certainly wouldn't want to restrict the ability to shop at a supermarket. It has basic provisions that people are going to need. And we can't stop people purchasing fuel from a service station just because they also sell gift cards.

In the trial communities they've got around it with a manual override process, by limiting the sale of particular items. But if we're going to take it broadly we need to invest in the technology. This will further support the communities and the intent of the program, which is not to limit people's lives, not to impose upon them any unnecessary, undue, process. They will be able to go about their lives freely, without any encumbrance, and provide for their families. We've seen some great results in the trial communities. The key finding from the initial evaluation was that 41 per cent of those who reported drinking before the trial were now drinking less, while 37 per cent reported binge drinking less frequently. It doesn't mean they've stopped; it just means there's been a reduction.
I spent many years as a youth worker, and I have never seen a program have such a dramatic social impact. There’s no amount of counselling or support that you could provide—I’ve worked with many young people who have had issues with this. I’ve never seen such a dramatic change in a community brought about, as we’ve seen in this community, with that sort of result. Of participants who reported that they were gambling, 48 per cent said that they were gambling less. Of those who said that they were taking illegal drugs before the program commenced, 48 per cent said that they reported using illegal drugs less often.

The evaluation also found widespread spillover benefits from the card. Forty per cent of participants surveyed that they were better able to look after their children. Forty-five per cent of participants were better able to save money. There was a decrease in requests for emergency food relief and financial assistance in the Ceduna region, and merchants reported increased purchases of baby items and food, clothing, shoes, toys and other goods for children. In the Wyndham store that I went into, for some reason, there’s been a big run on fish fingers. There were copious amounts of fish fingers being sold. It’s often the food of choice for my children, I’ve got to say, when you’re just trying to put a quick meal together on a Sunday night! The point is people are using more money for important support for their families.

Of course, we’re also hearing from teachers and schools that they’re having to provide less food at the breakfast programs in Wyndham primary schools. Instead of kids coming and filling up because they haven’t had any food at home, there are fewer kids now coming to school needing that service and assistance—that wonderful program that’s run in the schools.

In closing, this is an small amendment to this program, but it is very important. This is something that is in response to what the community is asking for. None of us here in this place are necessarily experts on this. The people we need to listen to are those who are on the ground. When the people in the community are saying that this is something that we need to further improve the program and to ensure that it has the best opportunity for success, then that’s something that we should respond to. I commend the bill.

Senator HANSON (Queensland) (11:07): I have supported the cashless debit card as an effective means of reducing the impact of alcohol and drug use since its inception, because it works. I took part in the committee inquiry hearing in Kalgoorlie in 2017 and heard from people about the level of dysfunction which drug and alcohol abuse bring to a community. I have spoken to community representatives since about the positive impact that the card has brought. I have heard about children being sent to school regularly. I’ve heard about families shopping together and filling their supermarket trolleys with food—a new experience as a result of the card. I’ve heard that the level of social disruption has fallen. Domestic violence has lessened. The evidence on the ground shows that the cashless debit card makes a difference in improving lives and improving communities.

This is borne out by a number of research projects. The baseline report into the Goldfields trails supports these earlier findings. There continues to be a decrease in drug and alcohol issues; decreases in violent crime and antisocial behaviour; improvements in child health and wellbeing; and ongoing and even strengthening community support for the income management measures. The independent evaluation of the card trial in Ceduna and East Kimberley regions also show the effectiveness of the trial to reduce alcohol abuse and gambling, which also eats up income, in many welfare-dependent communities. The overall conclusion of the research was that the card has had a considerably positive impact, including 41 per cent of those surveyed reported drinking less frequently, 48 per cent used drugs less frequently and 48 per cent of gamblers gambled less often. Given the positive outcomes that the cashless debit card has shown to have, I cannot see how anyone would not support the continuation of the trials and a broader rollout in other areas where drug and alcohol abuse and social dysfunction are rife.

There is strong support for the introduction of the cashless debit card from community leaders, local government and key community based organisations—for example, the Far West Community Leaders Group, which recently released this statement:

We are now into the third year of the implementation of the cashless debit card rollout in the far west region of South Australia, which covers Oak Valley, Yalata, Scotdesco, Koonibba and Ceduna. We acknowledge and recognise the work done by all our communities and other areas of Australia that have implemented the cashless debit card. It has not been an easy feat but we have united together, influenced the design of the trial and made a real lasting effect in numerous communities, all with unique experiences and individualised benefits. We recognise the government officials and ministers, both current and former, who have stayed true to their word in co-designing the trial with us rather than for us. Our region remains in direct contact with ministers and departmental staff and, furthermore, we encourage the Prime Minister and other ministers to visit our communities and see firsthand the results of the policy.

As I said, I went to Kalgoorlie for the Senate inquiry. I listened to community leaders, councillors, mayors and community elders, and basically the majority wanted the card. The only real issue was communication. They felt that there was a need for the card, especially in Kalgoorlie. You know that it comes down to tough love. I listen to
the Greens speaking on this issue in this chamber and they talk about someone's human rights being taken away from them. I think we need to look at the real issues. The government has introduced the cashless debit card because of certain communities—and let's be honest about it and not back away from it, these communities are basically Aboriginal. That's what they are. That's where the real problem is. Everyone skirts around the whole issue. The big issue is with alcohol and drugs. In 1998 I had a community meeting with Aboriginal women. They brought their children and they told me, 'We are facing sexual abuse and our kids are sniffing glue.' There was no assistance. Everyone turns their back. They don't really want to deal with the issue, because they would be called a racist.

These are real problems and issues in these communities. There is escalating crime. The attitude is: 'Don't lock up Aboriginals, because the incarceration rate is getting too high.' Why is it getting that high? I have been speaking to a lot of Aboriginal communities and it is because there is a lack of employment. Then you look at the reason that is happening. Is it because they are on alcohol and drugs and it makes them unemployable? That's another issue to look at. How are we really going to address the problem? Don't turn your back on it because you think it is too hard.

The cashless debit card is a start, and it is working. I have spoken to police and they have said that, once it has been introduced, reduction in crime has started and families are buying decent food for the kids. Health issues, like diabetes and kidney dysfunction, are another big problem. This is all happening because of their diet. Isn't it best to apply, as I said, tough love? It means they can't go out and use their money to buy drugs and alcohol and end up in a dysfunctional life and a dysfunctional family. Those kids coming through become used to that life because of their parents. We need to break the cycle.

Sexual abuse is another thing. We heard earlier this year that a kid as young as two was raped—and just recently we heard of a seven-year-old boy. No-one wants to discuss this. Why is it happening? Again, it is because of dysfunctional communities. I'm not having a go at the Aboriginal communities. I respect their culture, but it's not working, and we have to be honest with ourselves in this place if we are to find the right answers. I don't think anyone here would have a go at any cultural at all, but we have to be honest with ourselves and find the answers to try to prove it. Billions of dollars a year are thrown at it but nothing seems to change.

Families are asking for help. Let's look at the cashless debit card. The moneys are put into an account. Eighty per cent has to be spent on the card, and it stipulates that you can't go and buy alcohol with it and you can't gamble with it. Twenty per cent is still cash. They can still spend that cash where they want to. And there's another thing with the Aboriginal community, if you understand the culture, which is that if they have cash in their pockets and a family member or a friend comes to them and asks them for money they rarely will say no to that, unless they're very strong. They hand over that money. So there also could be intimidation happening in these communities. If you're going to allow these people to actually have cash in their pockets all the time, other family members will be the ones who will take the money from them. But if they're restricted and they know they haven't got the cash, they can't hand it over, so they can provide what needs to be done for their own families.

The Greens talk about their amendments today. I can't believe their amendments. The Greens will complain and whinge all the time about different things and about people's rights. But I never hear about how they're going to deal with this. It's all right to sit back and whinge and complain about it, but unless you've actually got the answers, how are you going to deal with this issue? Everyone wants their rights, but with rights come responsibilities. If you're going to pull back this card, where are our responsibilities? Because their parents aren't good parents and because of the drinking, the alcohol and the sexual abuse that's going on, where is our duty of care, as the managers of this country on behalf of the people, to give those young children coming through the same opportunity? We have a responsibility to ensure that the kids have at least half a chance to be looked after, educated and not sexually abused.

The Greens have been moving their amendments today. One is to abandon it completely. The other one is that they want to take away the income management of the card so you'll only be on the card if you have had a serious offence of three years or more.

**Senator Siewert:** No, that's not what that amendment is. You've got it wrong.

**Senator Hanson:** All right. It is that if you have a serious offence of three years or more you're on income management. So being drunk and disorderly is no reason for it at all. When you have people who are saying that it is working in these communities, that families are now able to provide for and look after their children, that communities are better for it, that there is less violence, less drinking, less alcohol and fewer drugs, why on earth would you want to say no to it? If this is all about the politics in this place, then I say, 'Get over it.' It shouldn't be about politics. When you look at these bills you have to look at what is in the best interests of the country and the people and start working together. If you're not happy with the bill, then come up with some answers; don't just
say that it should be abandoned and talk about people's rights. As I said before, responsibilities and rights go hand in hand.

I do support this bill. It is working. I say to anyone out there who may be listening to this: if you don't like the cashless debit card and having a responsibility to the taxpayer who is giving you this money so you that can live, put a roof over your head and survive, then my suggestion is that you get a job.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:19): I thank all senators for their contributions to this debate on the Social Services (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019. The cashless debit card is an important part of our plan to improve the lives of Australians by supporting people, their families and communities in places where high levels of welfare dependency co-exist with high levels of social harm. By reducing the amount of cash available in a community, the cashless debit card is reducing the overall harm caused by welfare-fuelled alcohol, gambling, and drug misuse—and it's working.

The evidence on the ground shows that the cashless debit card is making a real difference, improving people's lives and improving communities. Over a dozen research projects attest to the trial's success, most recently the baseline report into the Goldfields, which reaffirmed previous findings. My colleagues in this place have talked about the first impact evaluation and the findings that the cashless debit card is having a considerable positive impact in the first two trial sites. These findings included a number of significant statistical improvements in things like the reporting of less frequent drinking, the reporting of less frequent drug use, and the reporting of less frequent gambling and gambling-addicted behaviour. We have also seen decreases in drug and alcohol issues; decreases in crime, violence, and antisocial behaviour; improvements in child health and wellbeing; improvement in financial management; and the ongoing and even strengthening of community support for the card on the ground.

Results from the Australian Early Development Census show improved outcomes for children living in a cashless debit card site since the introduction of the card. From 2015 to 2018 the number of children living in Kununurra and considered really vulnerable has decreased significantly. Significant improvements were seen in social competence, emotional maturity, language and cognition, communication skills, and general knowledge. Children living in Wyndham saw a substantial improvement in emotional maturity over the same period. Our review of emergency relief food vouchers and parcels in Ceduna found that, within 18 months of being placed on the card, 16.5 per cent of cashless debit card recipients no longer needed, or needed less, assistance in this area.

The cashless debit card is not a panacea. But the evidence clearly shows that it works, and acts as a stabilising force to help people pay for essential items while preventing the excess purchase of alcohol and gambling products. Between April 2016 and July 2019, the total value of all transactions made across all sites by cashless debit card recipients using their cards was approximately $175 million. That is $175 million in taxpayer-funded welfare dollars being used on essential items and not being used on non-essential purchases, which include alcohol, drugs and gambling. Thirty-four per cent of all transactions made on the cards were to buy food. There has also been $400,000 worth of attempted but unsuccessful purchases of alcohol and gambling products, that we're aware of. The Morrison government's priority will always be to put the rights of the child first—to have a roof over their head, and food in their tummy—ahead of a welfare recipient's choice to spend taxpayer-funded welfare on drugs, alcohol or gambling.

Unemployment is also down in all sites since the introduction of the cashless debit card. Most recently, in Hinkler, in Queensland, the unemployment rate has dropped to 7.3 per cent, the lowest in almost seven years. Most importantly, youth unemployment has dropped from 28 per cent in May 2018 to 18.1 per cent in May 2019, a drop of almost 10 per cent in a 12-month period.

The Social Services (Administration) Amendment (Cashless Welfare) Bill 2019 continues the operation of the cashless debit card program but improves the processes introduced through recent non-government amendments for participants to exit the program. It provides a more effective and consistent application process, and ensures that the welfare of children, families, and the whole community is considered when assessing applications for participants to exit the program. The passage of the bill will clarify the administrative requirements of the cashless debit card exit process and ensure that the exit process is consistent with the cashless debit card regions. There is no change to the continuation of the cashless debit card program in the current trial sites. There is no change to the government's commitment to reduce the devastating effects of alcohol and drug use and gambling in these communities. The government is introducing this legislation following consultation with community leaders to ensure there is a clear and fair process for participants to exit the cashless debit card program where appropriate.

The government thanks the community leaders it has worked with and will continue to work with throughout the implementation and operation of the cashless debit card program. We acknowledge their courage and their
leadership to assist members of their community to break the cycle of welfare dependency, to improve social outcomes and to support people to get off welfare and the card and into employment. Taxpayers expect nothing less. The government strongly believes that providing employment is the most important thing that we can do.

We have heard from both Labor and the Greens on this bill, and I thank them for their contributions. The Greens have moved amendments to the extension process that the government unfortunately cannot support. These changes would mean that a participant charged with disorderly conduct for drunken behaviour could remain eligible for an exemption despite demonstrating the exact behaviours that the cashless debit card is aimed to address.

Where Senator Siewert or other people have cases of individuals having difficulty using the card to pay their bills, I invite them to provide me with those details separately, and my office will investigate. Senator Siewert has also asked a number of questions relating to operational matters of the exit process—and I also thank Senator Siewert for the collegiate way in which she has worked with me and my office in drafting this bill. These changes are best suited to an operational guide or information sheet that will be accompanying the application form. I'll instruct my department to ensure appropriate information is contained in this documentation and provide it to the senator and anybody else. I commend this bill to the chamber.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Fawcett): The question is that the second reading amendment moved by Senator Siewert be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [11:30]
(The Acting Deputy President—Senator Fawcett)

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AYES

Di Natale, R
Hanson-Young, SC
Rice, J
Steele-John, J
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Bragg, A J
Brown, CL
Chandler, C
Ciccone, R (teller)
Duniam, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Griff, S
Hughes, H
Lambie, J
McDonald, S
McMahon, S
Paterson, J
Pratt, LC
Roberts, M
Scarr, P
Smith, M
Van, D

Antic, A
Ayres, T
Bilyk, CL
Brockman, S
Carr, KJ
Chisholm, A
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Gallacher, AM
Hanson, P
Hume, J
McAllister, J
McGrath, J
O’Sullivan, MA
Patrick, RL
Rennick, G
Ruston, A
Smith, DA
Stoker, AJ
Walsh, J

Question negatived.
Original question agreed to.
Bill read a second time.

In Committee

Bill—by leave—taken as a whole.
Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:33): Both the opposition and the Greens have amendments, but I have some questions of a general nature. I'm wondering if we could deal with those first and then proceed to some of the amendments?

The CHAIR: Sure. We're in the hands of the Committee of the Whole.

Senator SIEWERT: First off, the minister made some comments in her closing statement, and I'm wondering if she could provide or perhaps take on notice the references for some of the comments she made around some of the figures, because some of those sound like new figures, and it would be very helpful to have them. Can I ask the minister to take that on board? My understanding was that the next report from the University of Adelaide's work was due in June. I'm wondering if my understanding is correct and, if so, has that report been made available to the government yet?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:34): My understanding is that the report is actually due to be provided to me in October. I think the time frame was late 2019, but October is the time I'm expecting it.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:35): Can I be clear that you have received no other reports from The University of Adelaide since the report that was made public in February?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:35): No.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:35): Can I also ask the minister about the consultation that's been undertaken about these particular amendments—communities involved, sorry.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:35): The department has undertaken consultation with all of the communities for community trial sites. I also personally have had discussions with a number of members of one of the communities in Western Australia, in your home state in the Goldfields, in relation to their concerns that were raised about the specifics of the process for financial exemption.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:36): Did that involve general participants—people that were actually on the card—but also participants that were seeking wellbeing exemptions and the opt-out exemptions?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:36): I can confirm that a number of people who were on the card were consulted through the process. I could not be specific as to whether any of those were seeking or intending to seek exemptions through this process, so I can't give you the exact details of the nature of the individuals that were spoken with and consulted with. But I can say that there were a number of people in each of the trial sites that were interviewed and consulted with in relation to the exit mechanism.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:36): You didn't seek out people that applied for wellbeing or who had already started ringing about the opt-out process, because I'm aware there have been lots of phone calls?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:37): Much of the consultation was taken prior to the commencement of the process. We didn't actually seek out people who weren't on the card. Anybody who actually had been granted a wellbeing exemption obviously wouldn't be on the card, so we didn't speak to them particularly. But, whether there were people within the cohort of people that were consulted with who were on the card who would have intended and believed they were eligible for the new exit mechanism, I am unaware of the specifics of the number of those people that were consulted with. I'm not sure if that information is available, but I will certainly try and find out.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:38): That would be appreciated. I take your point about opt-out, although I know my office was getting phone calls prior to the opt-out about how we understood the opt-out process was going to work. I presume that they were phoning the department. I'm aware there are a number of people who have been applying for the wellbeing process. That's why I ask that particular question, because I know that my office has been helping a number of them. I've got specific questions to clarify a number of things. Do we start that process now?

The CHAIR: Yes, Senator Siewert. You can certainly ask questions, make statements or put your amendments through this Committee of the Whole.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:38): I'm seeking some clarification about how the exit arrangements are going to be interpreted, because that's what people are looking for. Minister,
you made a reference to a guide. Is it your intention to provide further interpretation about how people interpret the criteria in that guide, and when is it likely that the guide will be available?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:39): The information that is required for anybody who's making application to be exempt from the card will be contained as part of the package that they will be provided access to as part of their application form. We'll make it available through their online portal or, alternatively, for those people who don't feel comfortable with doing it themselves or doing it electronically, these services will be available to assist them through the exit process through their providers in their local communities. But attached to that application process will be a set of guidelines to enable them to see the process they need to go through and the information they need to provide. At the same time, we will before using a person from the Department of Social Services to assist them, if they require assistance, to talk them through how they make that information available to them.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:40): There are a number of things I want to follow up on, just in that one answer. Do you envisage that someone from DSS will help with that process over the phone, or could someone also go into the Centrelink office in, say, Kununurra to obtain support with the guide? Is that also the sort of thing you see happening?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:41): Just in clarification, it would be more likely that the local partner in the community is where the person would receive that one-on-one assistance. Equally, if they are happier to use our services, there will be telephone services available to them, and substantial online information. We recognise that sometimes connectivity and capacity prevents people from using a purely online service.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:41): When you talk about 'local partner', do you mean Indue or an NGO?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:41): Community organisations or contractors within the community that are contracted by Indue to provide the service. Basically, there will be opportunity within the community—with the existing services provided for the operation or issues that a person on the card might have, not necessarily about this—for people to go and see the service providers, who will have the opportunity to assist them. They will also be able to phone and do it online.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:42): This is the sort of thing I'm being asked about. If I want to get the form, I can go online. Many community members who may be trying to apply for an opt out don't have access to a printer or even a computer. A lot of people do their communications on mobile phones, but it's very hard to fill in these sorts of forms on mobile phones. I don't have to go to an NGO to get the form—can I go to Centrelink and get a physical copy of the form?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:43): Yes, you can. The new suite of technology being put into all of the Centrelink offices will provide you with that bank of access, so the person in Centrelink can assist the person to get access to it online.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:43): Thank you. Then they'll be able to get the guide. Have you got a list of things that you consider necessary for meeting the criteria? Is there documentation? Will they have to go somewhere to get somebody to verify what they're doing for the health and safety of the person and the community? It's those harder things to prove that I think will be concerning people, how they satisfy those criteria.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:44): One of the things that we are currently in the process of doing is working through what is going to be the most streamlined and easiest way for us to make a determination about someone's preparation to exit the card if they're currently on it. Because, as you would understand, many of these situations are quite different to each other, we've actually taken a much more case-by-case approach on how this might be managed. I take your point. That's not the question you're asking. We will provide a guide that will outline what a normal, non-complicated process would be for the average person who would seek to come in and get the exemption. But we are also very mindful—and this is why we are particularly mindful about putting on determined time frames—that sometimes there is a level of complexity to get the information, and, because people are not able to provide the information, there is difficulty in accessing the information. Under a normal set of circumstances, the criteria and the process which the person needs to follow and the evidence that would be required for the exemption application would be clearly set out in the guidelines. Obviously, somebody will be there to help them through that. We also put on record that we understand that sometimes it's not a straightforward
process, and, for those cases, we intend to put in a case-by-case process that could sit around more complicated cases.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (11:46): In terms of the issue I brought up during my second reading contribution, I see a potential conflict with the wellbeing provision. For example—and this is where I've had a little bit of experience—where someone has poor mental health and applies for a wellbeing exemption, how will that interact with the opt-out provisions where they talk about the health and safety of the person and the community? If I just apply for a wellbeing exemption, will that be considered in and of itself?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:47): The conditions that exist around the exit provisions under the basis of wellbeing will remain the same. I thank you for raising the question. It would be my interpretation that the wellbeing provision would be considered a higher level of exit priority simply because you're talking about somebody's personal wellbeing as opposed to, I suppose, a more straightforward financial capability exemption. You would have to prioritise somebody's health and wellbeing above financial circumstances, so I think the wellbeing one would go first.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:48): Before I get on to some specific questions, I want to follow up on Senator Siewert with two questions. How many people have contacted the department to come off the card? And I want to seek some clarification about who will help people get off the card?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:48): Thank you very much, Senator Brown. One thousand and fifty-four people have made a phone call to the relevant number seeking information or advice about the process. In terms of who will assist, it would depend on the individual as to what sorts of services they are seeking. At the moment, anybody who is currently on an Indue card, or the cashless debit card, has access within their community to locally based service providers that can assist them with any issue that they might have with their card. Those people will remain available to them to assist them in the process if they choose to seek an exemption, whether it be on the wellbeing criteria or the financial criteria. Equally, we will also make sure that assistance to exit is available by phone and there are provisions online, to give the person who is wishing to seek the exit provision a choice in the way that they make their application.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:49): You might have to give me an example of going to a location, but I want to know: is exiting off the card going to be provided only online or by phone? Or are there services—and what are those services?—that will help people exit off the card?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:50): Just as an example, Centrecare is a provider that we use in Kalgoorlie. Centrecare provides all the services and resourcing to somebody who is currently on the cashless debit card in that particular trial region. These services are provided in all the sites, but I'm using that as an example, because you asked for an example. So, if the individual who is seeking a financial exemption wants one-on-one assistance in making their application, they can make an appointment, they can go into Centrecare in Kalgoorlie and they can sit down with a person in Kalgoorlie and have them assist them in filling out the form—even to the point of assistance with interpretation, for example, because obviously we want to make sure that we are assisting them in their mother language.

Senator Carol Brown: And they're funded to do that?

Senator RUSTON: Yes; they already are. We already have translation and language services that are available in these communities. If the person went in there and wanted the maximum level of assistance to enable them to make the application, they could go into one of these places and have somebody sit with them and take them through the whole process and tell them what information they need to provide and possibly then assist them in accessing that information as well.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:51): I now want to go to some questions around cost of the CDC. Perhaps you could provide how much has been spent to date on the CDC in total and in each location; how many people are currently on the card in total and in each location; the per-person cost of the card to date; and how much the government will spend across the forward estimates on the cashless debit card combined with expenditure to date—so, the total expenditure.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:52): The costs of the card across all the trial sites, which include implementation, providing additional funding to existing services to provide the wraparound services that were identified as being needed, and communications, for the period up to 30 June 2018, was $34.2 million. Unfortunately I don't have the site-by-site costs broken down for you. There are approximately 12,000 participants on the card, but I can provide
you with the numbers for each of the individual sites. And $126 million is budgeted over the forward estimates for the ongoing CDC program.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:53): Just following up on those responses, are you able to give me cost per location, on notice?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:54): I can't, because some of the costs are shared across all the areas, and others are site-specific. I'm certainly happy to take on notice to see how much more granular I can be in the information you're asking for. I'm more than happy to provide that to you, but at the moment I'm not entirely sure that I'm going to be able to provide the exact information you're asking for.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:54): Okay. I appreciate that undertaking—that you should be able to provide some cost information, based on a region. If you could provide that, that would be great. But you would be able to provide figures on how many people in each location.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:55): I will take it on notice. I could give you an estimation within hundreds, but I'd prefer to take it on notice to be exact.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:55): I'm not sure if you responded about the cost per person?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:55): Obviously we can do an extrapolation of the number of people that are currently affected by the card and the amount of money that's been spent on the trial and I could say to you that, on average, it was X amount per person. But one of the things that I can absolutely assure you of is that the variation in the costs of assisting individuals with the card vary quite significantly.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:55): I now want to ask some questions around outages and the operation of the card itself. How many people have been impacted by the cashless debit card outages to date? Where have the outages occurred? What is the longest outage? How does the minister expect people to buy groceries and pay bills on time if the card is not working? How many people have missed payments or incurred overdue charges because of card outages? I ask these questions because, as you would be aware, Minister, there have been confirmed reports of card outages preventing people from shopping using their card.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:57): I suppose one point would be that there are often outages that occur through external forces, whether it's a power outage or because an EFTPOS terminal from a bank is down or the technology within a particular facility is down. We wouldn't necessarily have any information that relates specifically to outages that were outside of our control. But what I will take on notice and provide you with information on is if there have been any card-specific outages—in relation to the technology or the use of the card specifically—that have prevented somebody from being able to use it in a facility where they would've expected to be able to use it. I'll get that information, and, once we've got it, we'll seek to provide the further detail in terms of the implications of those outages. But my advice is that, in the majority of times that people have been concerned about their inability to use their card, nobody would've been able to use any cards, because the outage was actually a more general community-wide outage—as I say, whether it was a power outage or a failure of an EFTPOS system.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:58): I accept that nobody would've been able to use cards. But other people have other means of buying basic requirements—I'm just putting that on the record—as the minister would know. Have there been any complaints to the department, by the services that are funded to assist people on the CDC or by shop owners, about outages?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:59): You're suggesting complaints made by local partners, like Centrecare for example, or by a shop?

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:59): Yes. Any complaints around outages from shop owners, from people that are actually on the card or from community organisations that are assisting people on the card that have come and complained to them.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (11:59): In terms of the specific details, I'm happy to take that on notice and provide you with detailed information on the breakdown of the kinds of numbers that we're getting from those particular cohorts. But I am advised that it is not a high number of the communications that come to us that relate to the implications of outages.
Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (11:59): Can I now go to some questions around the expansion. What process will the government take to choose a card provider?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:00): Whilst the government's policy position remains consistent—and that is that we will be using the information that we've collected through the reviews of these trial sites to make any decision on further activity of the cashless debit card in Australia—no decisions have been made at this stage, so the policy remains the same.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:00): So are you saying that there's been no decision for further expansion? I'm talking about the NT and Cape York.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:01): I was actually thinking you were referring to it more broadly. Since the re-election of the Morrison government, there are some processes that still have to be undertaken in developing the legislation to enable those people who are currently on the BasicsCard in the Northern Territory and Cape York to move over onto the cashless debit card. So whilst the intention is quite clear, the legislative instruments to enable that to happen have not passed through this place as yet.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:01): I just want to confirm that you've made no decision as to how you'll choose a card provider. Is it open tender or would you consider rolling it over to Indue or have you not made that decision?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:02): Whilst I don't have the exact details in front of me, what I can assure you is that any procurement process that is undertaken by the government in the provision of any service will be undertaken subject to the appropriate procurement guidelines, of course. But I don't have any further detail of that in terms of exactly how that process is going to occur or when it's going to occur—and obviously understanding that we need to get legislative authority from this place before we can proceed anyway.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:02): Thank you for that response. I'm just confirming that no decision has been made by government as to how a card provider will be chosen.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:02): Yes, I can confirm that.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:02): Can you give me some information around what Indue charges the government for each card issued, and how much profit does Indue make from the cashless debit card?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:03): I'm advised that it's less than $1,000, but I would have to take on notice the details. I may not even be able to get access to that information but I certainly will take the question on notice and provide the information that I am able to. In response to a previous question you asked that I took on notice but no longer need to, the number of participants in the four trial sites are: Goldfields, 3,326; East Kimberley, 1,517; Ceduna, 932; and Bundaberg and Harvey Bay, 5,524.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:03): Can the minister confirm the major banks declined to participate in the trial, and was this because the big banks have concerns about the way the government is rolling out this program?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:04): You'll have to excuse me, because I wasn't party to the original negotiations in this area. My understanding was that the original trial sites were quite small, Ceduna being by far the smallest. The banks saw the small scale of the trial as not being something that they were necessarily particularly interested in participating in. That was the reason given to us by the banks, I understand, at the time that we sought their involvement.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:04): I have a few more questions before I either hand over to Senator Siewert or actually move an amendment. Does the minister think that every person on the CDC is incapable of managing their affairs? Does the community think that every trial site has adequate services, such as health, education, early intervention, drug and alcohol rehabilitation, and job creation?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:05): One of the things that was so important about the standing up of this particular trial initiative was the fact that it was co-designed with and we worked very closely with the communities, bearing in mind that the four communities that are participating in the trial voluntarily put forward their communities to be part of the trial. We worked very closely with those communities to ensure the outcomes we're seeking to achieve,
which are better community outcomes, as listed. I don't need to repeat them all to you; they have previously resulted from a prevalence of drug, alcohol and gambling addiction and abuse. We work with the communities to make sure that those outcomes are appropriate and that the people are being appropriately targeted to make sure we deliver the good outcomes the community have requested by voluntary participation in this particular program.

What was your second question?

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:06): My second question was around the communities where the trials are occurring.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:06): Yes—the adequacy of the services. One of the things we did do as part of the process of setting up these trials was to make additional funds available to many of these wraparound services that, in many instances, already existed within the communities. But we saw that, with the introduction of a new way of seeking to get people to manage their financial affairs and the consequences of that, additional funding was needed to assist them with those wraparound services. So the answer is yes.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:07): I listened very closely to your response, but certainly since the start of the rollout there has been a considerable number of people who have actually withdrawn their support for the cashless debit card, and we heard that in some of the contributions here today. Minister, I'm sure that you and the department would be fully aware of that. So my question goes to the services that have been provided to trial site communities. What conversations have those communities had with either the minister or the department around issues that they have with a lack of wraparound services or wraparound services that are not adequate or services not actually being there at all?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:08): Sorry for taking so long to answer, but it's an important question. As part of the rollout of the trial and the assessment of the outcomes that the trial is delivering, we review all services that relate to the outcome criteria we're dealing with, which you referred to, whether they be domestic violence services, police services or the like. We do that every year. Where it is identified that additional services are required, we seek to work with the state governments and other partners in these trials to make sure that the adequacy of the services is addressed.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:09): I thank you, Minister, for that response, but my question was about any complaints that have been directed to the minister or to DSS. But before you respond to that part of the question, can you guarantee that there are drug and alcohol rehabilitation services in every trial site location?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:10): I'm advised that, yes, we do have in each of the trial sites drug and alcohol services that are available to participants. It appears from the advice that I am receiving from the agency, who are closer to the coalface on this than I am, that we receive very few complaints, but obviously when we do receive complaints they are taken seriously and are addressed—and anything will be put into part of the review if it relates specifically to the availability of the services that you're referring to.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:10): This potentially is my last question. Can you take on notice to provide a list of the complaints, where the complaint was made from and the nature of the complaint?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:11): I want to get this clear. Do you want complaints in relation to the provision of services, so anybody who has made a complaint about the inadequacy of the service that was provided to them to deal with the issue that they brought forward, the issue that is one of the outcomes that are targeted as part of the use of the card?

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:11): Essentially, yes. I'm trying to get an understanding—and we talked about wraparound services earlier—of whether the services that have been provided in every trial site are adequate and whether communities or community leaders have come back to you or the department about the fact that whatever has been provided, if it is being provided, is not adequate. I would like to know where that complaint came from, which location.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:12): Thank you. I'm much clearer about what you've asked for. Of course, I'll take that on notice.

The CHAIR: Senator Siewert, are you seeking the call?

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:12): Yes, sorry. I'm trying to reorganise a committee meeting that I'm supposed to be chairing right now, so I apologise. I want to chase up the
alcohol and drug services. I realise it might be a bit hard to give me off the top of your head an update on which services are funded or available in each of the trial sites, what they're funded for and which ones are new services that have been provided through the funding of the trial process.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:13): I'm happy to do that.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:13): Thank you. I want to go back to my line of inquiry about the criteria. I want to now go back to being able to manage your financial affairs. I wonder what specifically will be required there. Will someone with financial management qualifications be providing the advice to the secretary? I'm particularly interested in this because what I consider good financial management by someone on a low income may in fact be very different to what someone with a lot of income can do. For example, I know from personal experience that, when living on a very low income, you sometimes don't pay a bill on time, because you can't afford it. You know you have until a certain time after the due date to pay it, so you pay another bill because this one is just becoming due and you are about to get your power turned off and then you will pay this one. You're managing your money because you have very little. People who don't understand how people on low incomes manage their money and manage to make ends meet may see that as poor financial management.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:14): Thank you very much, Senator Siewert. I think what you raise here is the specific nature of dealing with many of these issues on a case-by-case basis. Going to the analogy you've just made: nobody's going to get a bad credit rating for paying their bills a bit late; you only get a bad credit rating if you don't pay your bills at all and you fall into default and you end up, through the process, getting put on a reach. So, I take very clearly your point on the degree to which financial management imprudence is interpreted. Looking at the holistic suite of issues, as part of this legislation we'd be seeking for someone to be able to demonstrate—I clearly take on board your point about the interpretation of financial management and the necessity for the person who's making the determination within the department to take on board the issues you raised about low-income earners and how they manage their money. So I suppose what I can say is that I believe that for this to be able to work it needs to be able to have the level of nuance that you're referring to, and case-by-case management. There will be a whole heap of people who will tick the box on every occasion and it will be fine, but there will just need to be a level of leniency provided for the demonstration of the example you just gave.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:16): Thank you very much, Senator Siewert. I think what you raise here is the specific nature of dealing with many of these issues on a case-by-case basis. Going to the analogy you've just made: nobody's going to get a bad credit rating for paying their bills a bit late; you only get a bad credit rating if you don't pay your bills at all and you fall into default and you end up, through the process, getting put on a reach. So, I take very clearly your point on the degree to which financial management imprudence is interpreted. Looking at the holistic suite of issues, as part of this legislation we'd be seeking for someone to be able to demonstrate—I clearly take on board your point about the interpretation of financial management and the necessity for the person who's making the determination within the department to take on board the issues you raised about low-income earners and how they manage their money. So I suppose what I can say is that I believe that for this to be able to work it needs to be able to have the level of nuance that you're referring to, and case-by-case management. There will be a whole heap of people who will tick the box on every occasion and it will be fine, but there will just need to be a level of leniency provided for the demonstration of the example you just gave.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:16): Thank you for understanding where we're coming from on this. At the beginning of your answer you referred to credit rating. Do I take it that somebody's credit rating will therefore be used as part of this process?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:16): I think I was just drawing an analogy to suggest that your analogy of somebody who paid their bills late really did not warrant the tagging as being a bad financial manager. I was probably using that as an example of what I think society would accept was a bad financial manager. There was not meant to be any link between the two.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:16): Thank you for that clarification. What sort of documentary evidence around being able to manage your financial affairs is it envisaged will be required for someone to be able to demonstrate that they can manage their money?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:17): I would think generally it would be things like bank statements, proof that things like rent have been paid on time, and those bigger-ticket items.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:17): I want to go back quickly to an answer that you gave to Senator Brown about the support organisations or where you can get advice and support for filling in the form—I think you referred to Indue?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:17): My mistake—I apologise. I correct the record; I didn't actually mean Indue themselves. But the interface between the person who's on the card and Indue goes through a local service provider, like Centrecare, and I think I was referring to the Centrecare type of organisation.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:18): I think the concern that at least some people in the community would have is that if they had to go to Indue for advice they'd see that as a conflict of interest. I want to go to the issue I raised around the health and community worker not having a direct professional relationship with the trial participant. How would you intend to deal with that—that is, ensure that somebody who is asking for someone's exit application to be reconsidered, for them to be put back on the card, is
in a position to make an informed recommendation, through professional contacts, for that to happen? How can you guarantee that?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:18): You raise a very good point, particularly—because we're talking about small communities in many instances—about whether the person's actually talking as the community worker or whether they're just talking as a member of the community. I think we would seek to make sure here that if anybody—a community worker or a health worker—made a recommendation that somebody who had exited the card should no longer be exited, or somebody who wasn't on the card should be on the card, then that would probably trigger an investigation, but that in and of itself would not be sufficient for any action to be taken. If a health worker or a community worker made an application to the Department of Social Services to indicate that someone should be on the card that would trigger us checking but it would not in and of itself. They must only do that in their professional capacity. I understand your point about how you define between professional and non-professional, but it certainly would not be in and of itself sufficient to have the person put back on the card.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:20): I understand what you've said. You built that into the process. It's a reconsideration—not automatically back on the card. My concerns is for a person who has received an exemption there's a degree of trauma going then. Somebody's now said, 'I need to go back on the card.' That person hasn't any professional relationship to me. I haven't gone to see them at the health clinic. I haven't accessed the service that they may be working in, because a community worker could be someone working in an NGO, for example. I don't have any professional relationship with them. They just rang up the department, or did whatever the process will be, and now I'm faced with proving all over again that I meet all the criteria. I really don't see how that's fair.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:21): I probably gave you the wrong answer to the previous question in not understanding. A trigger to reassess somebody's eligibility for being exempt could only be triggered by a community health worker or allied service worker if they were making that recommendation in their capacity as a worker in relation to the individual that they were referring.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:21): Just so I've got it clear, there will be something on the form that someone has to fill out to say, 'I saw this person for this reason,' and that will then ensure it won't be considered unless that box is ticked. Thank you.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:22): I'm not sure I'm quite down to the kind of detail to say if there's a box on the form, but, yes, they must have a relevant and direct professional relationship with the person whom they're referring.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:22): I apologise. It sounded like I was talking literally, but I was talking figuratively. But I take the point. I will now ask about the wellbeing exemptions. One of the things with the wellbeing exemptions—and I'm glad this is being tightened up—is the issue about how the serious risk is being interpreted. Will there now be some guidance for people when they're applying for the wellbeing exemption? I do appreciate there hasn't been a lot of guidance there, so it's been a bit hit and miss quite frankly. Will there be some guide to participants about what information they need to provide?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:23): Thank you, Senator Siewert. As a reflection of some discussions that we've been having with you in the development of this, we quite clearly saw that a clearer set of guidelines or criteria in relation to the wellbeing exemption was needed. In reformatting this, assuming we're successful in getting these amendments through this place today, we would make sure that the same sort guidelines and clarity of what was required sat alongside the wellbeing exemption as well as the financial one.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:23): Will a GP's certificate or advice to support a wellbeing exemption be considered adequate as part of that process?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:24): My understanding is that it would be a very significant part of the process. Although the interaction with a social worker as part of the process would still remain. But, obviously, medical evidence would be the highest form of support.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:24): Thank you. If I understood what you just said, that process will also be included as part of the guide?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:24): Yes.
Senator SIEWERT: Thank you. I will go on to the review process. I would like to get a bit of clarity around how that process will operate. I understand that the process is reviewable. Is it going to be the usual review process under social security law?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:25): Hopefully I'm answering the right question here. Obviously, social security law applies across anything that we do, but what we're seeking to do as part of this new process is actually to put an internal review process into the Department of Social Services to enable them to be able to deal, within the agency at a higher level than the standard determination may well be made, with any complaints or determinations that are not agreed with. This will mean that only those cases that are of a more significant nature will end up having to go to a higher authority like the AAT.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:25): Just so I'm clear: I understand there will be an internal process, and then there's the external process of the AAT. What will the internal process look like?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:26): The internal review process already exists within Social Services but, in effect, what it would be is a review by somebody much more senior within the agency. Obviously, the delegated power for determinations rests with the secretary but, realistically, the secretary is not going to be doing all the detail. So the internal review process enables the person an opportunity to have the determination reviewed by somebody much higher up in the organisation.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:26): So, as I understand it, will that be your usual process?

Senator Ruston: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Will that apply for both wellbeing and opt-out exemptions?

Senator Ruston: Yes.

Senator SIEWERT: Can I ask about the data that's provided. In both of these processes, quite sensitive data will be provided. What arrangements are in place to make sure that the data is adequately protected? How long will the data be stored for? Or will it be destroyed after the decision-making process?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:27): All data that is collected by the Department of Social Services is collected in accordance with the Privacy Act, and we also have a set of privacy principles that exist within our agency because of the sensitivity and the quantum of personal information we have about people. Also in the Social Security (Administration) Act, there are a number of provisions that provide very clear circumstances in which information could be used for any other purpose apart from the purpose for which it was provided. I'm more than happy to provide you with those details if you'd like.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:28): Thank you, that would be appreciated. For the consultation process under clause 124PHB(7)(a), can you outline what definition you're using for 'local communities'?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:28): I suppose that it's pretty much a catch-all term, so that we can consult as broadly as possible. But in terms of the specifics that you're asking for: community leaders, community service providers, the community participants—it really is very much at the broadest possible, catch-all level in terms of the consultation that can occur. But in the specifics, as I say, it is community leaders, community elders, participants, providers, and current participants, most importantly.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (12:29): When you're undertaking consultation under that provision, how will you carry out that consultation? Have you determined that? Because there has been some criticism of the consultation that's been undertaken to date.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:29): As part of this process of co-design, one of the things that is really important is to make sure that we continue to work with the individual communities about how they would like the consultation to occur within their particular areas. Whilst we absolutely support the concept of consultation and the importance of it for this particular project, we'd probably be seeking to tailor our consultation processes so that they meet the desires of the individual community. We'd certainly be working with the community participants, the elders, suppliers, providers et cetera, to make sure that the consultation covered the broadest range of people
possible but also that the process of consultation reflected what that community wanted and whether the people in that community wanted to participate in that consultation.

Senator LINES (Western Australia—Deputy President and Chair of Committees) (12:30): I want to go back to some comments you made earlier, Minister. You gave the example of Centrecare in Kalgoorlie. If I'm a CDC person in Kalgoorlie and I want to get off the card, how do I know to go to Centrelink and who in that agency is going to help me with the form?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:31): As part of the process, we would make people on the card aware of the changes—that we hope will pass through this chamber today—through the normal communication process. Many of the people that we are talking about also constantly interact with places like Centrecare in Kalgoorlie and would know well to approach them, and they do constantly have meetings with them anyway.

Senator LINES (Western Australia—Deputy President and Chair of Committees) (12:31): As one of those forms of communication, would the 4,000-odd people in the Goldfields region receive a letter indicating to them that they could apply to come off the card?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:32): I want to know what form that is going to take. My second question is, whilst I do appreciate some people on the card in the Goldfields region would be in contact with Centrecare, if they are not and they front up to the counter, who specifically is Centrelcage going to provide? Is it the financial counsellor? And how do I know, as a cashless debit card holder? You will send them some form of communication that says, 'You can apply to come off the card.' Will there be a list in the Goldfields region of agencies I can contact if I can't do it online?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:33): Anybody that's currently on the card would be aware of their service provider, within their region, that they would engage with if they had any other issue in relation to the card. There is nobody in any of these sites that doesn't already have a place that they would know to go to if they needed to change any of their conditions or get information, have assistance provided et cetera. That already exists. But part of the guidelines associated with the two exemption categories that we are seeking to amend and have reinserted into the bill today would have all of the information sitting alongside how they should progress, if they wished to avail themselves of this particular provision.

Senator LINES (Western Australia—Deputy President and Chair of Committees) (12:34): Thanks, Minister. You have been very clear about saying the information would be alongside any other information they get, and I think we all accept that. My issue is, when I go into Centrecare in Kalgoorlie, I need to be assured that there is someone there able to assist me in my application if I'm not able to do that myself. I'm asking who it is in Centrecare or which department it is. Is it their financial counselling department? Is it the drug and alcohol service? Is it the domestic violence service? Which service would I be asking for when I walk into that Centrecare office in Kalgoorlie?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:34): If someone walked in and they fronted up at the counter at Centrecare in Kalgoorlie and said, 'I would like to apply for an exemption,' there will be people in that office who have the specific skills and responsibilities to assist somebody who wanted that particular assistance. The other people that sit within that agency that may be more specific to the provision of information that they may need to fill out that form would obviously be accessed, but there are particular people who are the first interface that would assist them with their application process.

Senator LINES (Western Australia—Deputy President and Chair of Committees) (12:35): Minister, you've said there are specific people within that Centrecare office. Are they funded on behalf of the government to undertake this work to assist people who want to put an application in to come off the card? Centrecare has specific services for which it is funded—domestic violence, financial counselling, accommodation and so on. Where does this person come from out of those separate departments, and has Centrecare been specifically funded to do this work?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (12:36): My understanding is they actually have got specific funding to assist us in this process.
Senator LINES (Western Australia—Deputy President and Chair of Committees) (12:36): Are you able to outline—and you can take this on notice—what that specific funding entails and which organisations across the trial sites have got that funding? Thank you, Minister.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (12:36): by leave—I move amendments (1) to (4) on sheet 8731 together:

Schedule 1, item 9, page 4 (after line 23), at the end of section 124PHA, add:

(5) A determination under subsection (1) must be made within 21 business days (the consideration period) of the Secretary being satisfied of the matter mentioned in that subsection.

(6) The consideration period is extended, for each notice given to a person under section 196 requiring information for the purposes of making a determination, by the number of business days falling within the period:

(a) starting on the day the notice was given; and

(b) ending on the earlier of the following:

(i) the day on which the information required was received by the Secretary;

(ii) if the information was not given within the period specified in that notice—the last day of that period.

Schedule 1, item 9, page 5 (line 21), after "on the application", insert "within 21 business days (the consideration period) after receiving the application".

Schedule 1, item 9, page 5 (line 23), after subsection 124PHB(4), insert:

(4A) The consideration period is extended, for each notice given to a person under section 196 requiring information for the purposes of making a determination under subsection (3), by the number of business days falling within the period:

(a) starting on the day the notice was given; and

(b) ending on the earlier of the following:

(i) the day on which the information required was received by the Secretary;

(ii) if the information was not given within the period specified in that notice—the last day of that period.

Schedule 1, page 6 (after line 12), after item 9, insert:

9A At the end of subsection 195(2)

Add:

; (m) for the purposes of Part 3D (about cashless welfare arrangements), in relation to a person who is a trial participant—any information relevant to whether being a trial participant would pose a serious risk to the person's mental, physical or emotional wellbeing;

(n) for the purposes of Part 3D (about cashless welfare arrangements), in relation to a person who is a trial participant—any information relevant to satisfying the Secretary for the purposes of subsection 124PHB(3).

The amendments that the opposition are putting forward on sheet 8731 will require the department to make a decision on the application to leave the card within 21 business days, and there is a stop-the-clock provision to extend the time when further information is requested from the applicant. We believe that this is a fair amendment because people should be able to get off the card in a timely fashion and get on with their lives. I recommend the amendment.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: The question is that amendments (1) to (4) on sheet 8731, as moved by Senator Brown, be agreed to.

The committee divided. [12:42]

(The Chair—Senator Lines)

Ayes ......................33
Noes ......................35
Majority ...............2

AYES

Ayers, T  Bilyk, CL
Brown, CL  Carr, KJ
Chisholm, A  Ciccone, R
Di Natale, R  Dodson, P
Farrell, D  Faruqi, M
Gallacher, AM  Gallagher, KR
Green, N  Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC  Kitching, K
Lines, S  McAllister, J
McKim, NJ  O'Neill, D

CHAMBER
I'd like this afternoon to reflect on the great contribution of two very good Western Australian Liberals who, unfortunately, have passed away in recent months. I single out Mr Neil Oliver and Mr Richard Lewis AM for their distinguished careers as active members of our community in Western Australia, as active members of the Western Australian Liberal party and, importantly, as significant and important parliamentarians who made a great contribution to the growth and prosperity of Western Australia.

Anthony McAdam starts:

We have just lost a proud and valued citizen of WA, and Australia generally, known to all simply as Neil Oliver, former army officer, respected member of the WA Parliament and, not least, a stalwart defender of the public interest, notably during the whole WA Inc. imbroglio of the late 1980s and early 1990s. Although born in the Melbourne suburb of Caulfield, on August 16, 1933, Neil and his lifelong loving partner, Margaret "Joy" Oliver—Joy, as she was known—
made their home in Perth in 1963. He was educated at Caulfield Grammar and the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and was a keen sailor in his youth with the Royal Melbourne Yacht Squadron (in St Kilda).

Initially he was a wool broker with the family business and handled its dealings in New Zealand and throughout Asia. He was an officer cadet in the Australian Army from 1952 to 1954, and served in the Citizens Military (now the Army Reserve) from 1954 to 1977; he was the youngest major in the army and reached the rank of lieutenant-colonel.

He saw active service in the Malayan Emergency and the Vietnam War. He ended his formal army association as honorary colonel of his regiment for more than a decade. For many years he was also vice-president of the Army Museum of WA.

But Neil Oliver's parliamentary and political life is the lens through which I got to know Neil Oliver. Anthony McAdam writes:

On the encouragement of Sir Charles Court, he successfully stood for the Legislative Council in the election of 1977 and was re-elected in the 1983 election.

He will be remembered as a valiant and independent-minded Member of Parliament, attentive to his constituents and the wider issues facing the State.

He was particularly concerned with the improprieties of the Burke government. As the chairman of the Council's select committee—

The WA legislative council's select committee, that is—

into the Midland Brick scandal, he almost single-handedly opened up the many outrageous abuses of State power orchestrated by the Labor government, which eventually led to the collapse of Burke's government.

During this period Oliver was often in the news, not least when it was revealed that his phone had been tapped. It was a lonely fight. The full story of that dramatic parliamentary enquiry and its consequences is chronicled in the 1987 book Burke's Shambles: Parliamentary Contempt in the Wild West (authored by ... the late UWA Professor of Politics, Paddy O'Brien).

Of course Professor O'Brien was also one of my tutors and lecturers at the University of Western Australia.

Colonel Oliver was more than a parliamentarian. He was a man who was committed to his community. Anthony McAdams writes:

Colonel Oliver's other contributions to public life include his service as vice-president of the Multiple Sclerosis Society of WA, as a founding member of the Edith Cowan University Foundation and, for some 40 years, as a justice of the peace.

In later years he was instrumental in ensuring passage of the US-Australia Free Trade Agreement. Long interested in vibrant public debate, he arranged speaking tours for prominent thinkers in the "Putting Australia Right" movement in the 1980s and later helped organise the influential "Achievements of Democratic Capitalism" conferences in Sydney and Melbourne (with such speakers as the historian Geoffrey Blainey and the British journalists Paul Johnson and Bernard Levin).

Neil's health had been fragile for some years and he only finally reconciled himself to going into care a few weeks before his peaceful death in the late evening of July 9.

He passed away in the same nursing home, St Luke's in Shenton Park, where Joy had been resident for some months. It was fitting as they have long been an inseparable couple.

Colonel the Honourable Oscar Neil Blackburne Oliver JP ED RFD did peacefully in his sleep. Neil was 85 years of old.

The second Western Australian parliamentarian that I want to honour this afternoon is none other than Mr Richard Lewis AM, a distinguished member of the Western Australian parliament, a distinguished member of the Court government and a man whose legacy you can see around you when you travel across Perth and its various metropolitan communities. I'd like to share some comments, again reported in The West Australian newspaper on 19 March this year.

Beginning with Richard Lewis AM, cabinet minister and surveyor, born in East Fremantle in 1939, died in Perth aged 79, it continues:

Chopping down trees, bashing pegs into the ground, taking measurements ... and then spending four-hour evenings at Perth Technical College checking calculations and measurements. Cadet cartographers/surveyors like Richard Lewis needed stamina and patience throughout a work day.

While still in his teens he embraced the world of maps, statistics, numbers, angles and distances. He could have stayed on this reasonably straightforward path, but realised that life offered more.

Within months of obtaining his certificate of competency in 1969 he stood as council candidate in Melville, entering the less measurable environment of suburban democracy. Over the next 14 years he was to serve three terms as deputy mayor, proving himself in the sometimes difficult, always changeable, field of local affairs. This proved to be the launchpad for the next level of government. In 1986 he was elected Liberal MLA for East Melville.

Kennan Richard Lewis—
as he was properly known—
was born on September 4, 1939—the day after World War II began—the second of four sons of Marjorie ... and Kennon Lewis, an engineer. Richard, always known by his middle name, attended Richmond Primary School, East Fremantle, Fremantle Boys' and ended secondary education with two years at Scotch College ...

Richard Lewis's contribution to public life is outstanding. I came to know Richard Lewis as a minister in the Court government when I had the privilege of working with Richard Court when he was the Premier of Western Australia. Richard Lewis's legacies to Western Australia are many. He will be fondly remembered by all of those people who got to know him in his local community, who came to work with him as a minister in the Court government, who came to know him through his active involvement and regular attendance at The 500 Club events in Western Australia, and who came to know him as a generous man, a family man, a man who was committed to many things, not least his great faith in the West Coast Eagles.

I might end with this particular story from the same article in The West Australian:

Many attest to Richard's capacity to countenance views different from his. He went so far as to accept free kicks being given against his beloved West Coast Eagles, including while attending all their four victorious grand finals. Surveying profession colleagues enjoyed his company at social functions for decades.

Richard Lewis died on March 3. He is survived by Helen, their daughter Morgen, son Lachlan and three grandchildren and his three brothers, Don, Roger and Lyndon.

Fremantle Rowing Club's tableau of triumph includes a photograph of the eight that in March 1959 won the inaugural Fremantle-to-Perth race. At bow is R. Lewis. This position on boats is for the one who, rowing authorities assert, is technically correct and keeps the boat balanced.

That crew 60 years ago clearly had the right man in the right seat.

I'm delighted to be able to share some comments with the Senate this afternoon about another outstanding Western Australian Liberal—another outstanding Western Australian state Liberal parliamentarian. I'm sure many of my Senate colleagues who know Richard and who know his family will extend to them their deepest sympathies on the loss of an outstanding Western Australian.

**Tasmania: Economy**

**Senator CAROL BROWN:** Today I want to talk about what life is like for everyday Tasmanians. As most people know, I'm a proud and passionate Tasmanian, and it would seem I'm not alone, as our population is growing at its fastest rate in 27 years. Both the state and federal governments like to lay claim to the growth in the Tasmanian economy but have no answers when everyday Tasmanians ask when they are going to see the benefits of that growth.

People are moving to Tasmania but are finding it hard to get a job and, at the same time, finding it hard to afford somewhere to live. Any growth in wages is almost entirely absorbed by increases in prices, so workers are unable to get ahead. Recent ABS data has revealed that thousands of full-time jobs have disappeared from the Tasmanian economy. Today, The Advocate newspaper from north-west Tasmania has the headline 'Jobs Puzzle'. It asks why Tasmania has lost thousands of jobs. It is permanent, full-time jobs that have been hit the hardest. Some 6,200 full-time jobs were lost in the 12 months from June 2018 to June 2019. The most recent CommSec State of the States report also highlighted the job market as being weakest in the Tasmanian economy. In fact, Tasmania has the weakest job market of all the states. The jobless rate in Tasmania is 6.7 per cent, the highest it has been since November 2014 and the highest of any state. To that can be added the fact that, according to the ABS, underemployment in Tasmania is at 10.4 per cent. For Tasmanians lucky enough to have full-time, secure work, real wage growth is only 0.4 per cent above inflation. Hobart also had the highest annual inflation rate for the March quarter, at 2.1 per cent.

As I've said, at the same time that the Tasmanian population is increasing, full-time jobs are vanishing, underemployment is rising, unemployment is increasing and wages are not going up. But the cost of living is going up and rent is going up. The Anglicare Rental Affordability Snapshot illustrates a dire rental market. Of every private rental advertised in Tasmania on 24 and 25 March this year, almost all were out of reach of people on low incomes. Of the 1,245 rental properties in Tasmania, not one was affordable for a single person on Newstart. Only six per cent were affordable for a couple on Newstart with two children. None were affordable for young people on youth allowance. In southern Tasmania, none were affordable for single parents on a parenting payment. Of course, electricity is also going up. The Australian Energy Market Operator data dashboard reveals average annual wholesale prices have gone up nationally 158 per cent since 2015, skyrocketing under the coalition government on energy minister Angus Taylor's watch. In Tasmania, there has been a price hike in wholesale electricity of 142 per cent since 2015.

People are being left behind, even people who have full-time work, not just the underemployed or the unemployed. So what is the struggle like for people without a job? What is the struggle like for pensioners?
Remember, the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator Ruston, believes that the pension is ‘a generous amount of money that the Australian taxpayers make available to our older Australians’. What is the struggle like for those who are homeless? Well, the Assistant Minister for Community Housing, Homelessness and Community Services, Luke Howarth, wants to ‘put a positive spin’ on homelessness. How can the coalition government attempt to put a positive spin on ABS figures that show that homelessness in this nation has increased by 14 per cent in the last five years? These are real issues for everyday people in what is being called a booming economy but is leaving so many people behind at every turn.

How do people on Newstart survive, when the jobless rate in Tasmania is 6.7 per cent, when rent prices are out of reach for many people who do not have jobs and when the price of electricity has risen by 142 per cent since 2015 in Tasmania, all of this on the coalition government’s watch? We know Newstart is too low—so low that it pushes people into poverty and prevents them from getting jobs, so low that some parents have to decide to feed their kids by not eating meals themselves, so low that every sector of society—even members of the Morrison coalition government—are calling for it to be increased. Calls to raise the Newstart allowance have come from economists, the RBA governor, the Australian business community and social service groups, including the Tasmanian Council of Social Service and the Council of the Ageing, but the government refuses to act.

A recent Deloitte Access Economics report shows that Tasmania has the highest proportion of Newstart recipients of any state and the second-highest in the country. We have 21,300 people who are struggling to make ends meet on a payment that is inadequate. In March this year, Per Capita released research showing that 54 per cent of people living in Hobart and 70 per cent of people outside Hobart believe that Newstart should be increased. Newstart is currently just over $555 a fortnight for a single person without children, paid to people who are actively looking for work. That is just over $277 a week. The rate has not increased in real terms for more than two decades.

The cost of living, not least rent and power bills, obviously has done the opposite in real terms. And according to national seniors, older Australians aged between 55 and 64 are being pushed into poverty as they approach retirement age. This is worse for those who rent, those who do not have significant savings and those who are facing significant health costs. For those older Australians, for single-parent families and for people who cannot find work, the story is all too common. In my state of Tasmania, too many people are familiar with this struggle. It’s the struggle of so many Australians to keep a roof over their heads.

The failure to act on Newstart is just one in a series of attacks by this government on those in our community who can least afford it: the lack of action on access to affordable housing, the $1.6 billion underspend in the NDIS to prop up their budget—the list goes on and on.

Senator Duniam interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Bilyk): Senator Duniam.

Senator CAROL BROWN: The economy is floundering for many, wages and living standards are stagnating and the coalition government in Tasmania and here in Canberra don’t have a plan and don’t look like having one any time soon. At the same time, in Tasmania people are dealing with a series of other battles, thanks to the Hodgman state Liberal government. Our health system is in genuine crisis.

Senator Duniam interjecting—

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Duniam, interjecting is out of order.

Senator CAROL BROWN: Yesterday Liberal Senator Wendy Askew came into the chamber and praised former Tasmanian health minister Michael Ferguson. I don’t know what prompted Senator Askew to praise Mr Ferguson, but if she really believes that the health system in Tasmania is doing well, she must be accessing a different system to the one used by everyday Tasmanians who have the misfortune of becoming sick or being in an accident. Michael Ferguson is the former state health minister—former—because he was removed, sacked from the health portfolio, in a midnight reshuffle by Premier Hodgman. He is regarded by the community and by health professionals as being deaf to calls for urgent change.

Figures recently released to the ABC show that ambulance ramping at the Royal Hobart Hospital has been a living nightmare for patients and staff. For the nine months to March, ramping of ambulances at the Royal Hobart Hospital reached just under 10,000 hours. This means hundreds of hours of paramedics’ time spent waiting with patients who cannot get into the emergency department. It means taking overstretched paramedics and ambulances out of emergency circulation. There are many hospital professionals in Tasmania who have been calling for action to fix the health system in Tasmania, and this has been completely ignored by the Premier and the state Liberal government.
This government has no agenda and that's why all it can do is play politics in parliament. That's what they've been doing rather than dealing with real issues that really matter to Australians—

**Senator Duniam interjecting—**

**Senator CAROL BROWN:** Senator Duniam's come in here to chime in with blah, blah, blah. Seriously, he has no idea what's going on in Tasmania.

**Climate Change**

**Senator FARUQI** (New South Wales) (13:05): The climate is in meltdown while the global economy delivers ever growing profits to corporations at the expense of people and the planet. Our political establishment has utterly failed to recognise and address the link between these twin crises. This is put best by Tithi Bhattacharya, a professor of history at Perdue. She says:

Capitalism's relentless productivist drive has now triggered climate change, threatening all life as we know it. Life-making increasingly conflicts with the imperatives of profit-making. We are confronted with the question of whether life-making will even be possible for our grandchildren.

And it's this life making that I want to talk about today. If generations to come are to have any hope of a meaningful life we need nothing short of a wholesale re-imagination of our politics and economy to reclaim the planet-saving, life-making potential of our society.

As I told the chamber in my first speech nearly a year ago, we cannot fiddle around the edges and somehow hope that the tide will turn. Movements like the green new deal in America and the green industrial revolution in the UK are championing social and environmental justice as two sides of the same coin and these give us all hope.

As government underinvestment has eroded essential life-making services, like education and training in communities, the mining lobby and others have been allowed to convince workers that planet destroying jobs in extractive industries are the only option to make ends meet. Governments and corporations have tried to sell working communities the lie that green politics are incompatible with their interests. This is particularly true for communities who have been historically reliant on fossil fuel jobs. But the reality is that the fossil fuel corporations are no friends of workers. We see these corporations relentlessly pursuing automation to avoid hiring, making promises of jobs that will never materialise—as is happening with Adani—and undermining job security and the quality of life at every turn. The stranglehold that coal has had over communities in places like the Hunter in New South Wales have put them at the mercy of a small number of corporations.

Once coal and gas are no longer economically viable, which is already rapidly happening, enormous fossil fuel companies will pack it in and abandon workers and their communities in search of profit elsewhere. Coal communities, whether that be communities in and around coal mines or around coal-fired power stations, will be left high and dry by these coal and power companies. These companies are extractive in more than one sense of the word. They extract the wealth from communities and leave behind giant unrehabilitated holes in the earth, toxic ash dams and the legacy of respiratory disease.

So it is up to us, as we end the extraction of coal and gas in Australia, to change this reality for workers. We need massive investment in secure, sustainable and rewarding jobs in green industries. We need a national and just transition for workers and an unprecedented commitment to education and training, starting with free TAFE and uni for all. But we mustn't constrain ourselves to a narrow conception of green jobs as work in renewables or replacements for fossil fuel workers. Green jobs are those that actually enrich our lives and enrich the community. They are caring jobs in our schools, libraries, hospitals, nursing homes and community institutions. They are the jobs that that have life making and solidarity as their essential purpose—the exact kind of jobs needed to make our world a more just place for all.

Each step towards a post-carbon future must be taken alongside workers, the disadvantaged and all those whose livelihood have been cheapened by the extractive hunger of rampant capitalism. The time of corporations plying politicians with donations, gala dinners and job offers to buy their continued support for rampant environmental destruction and profit making has to pass. In its place our democracy must emphasise the inclusion of community interests in decision-making. Public ownership of our key services, expanded community decision-making bodies, and greater workplace rights are all avenues to realising this. The challenge of just transitions underscores this. If it were workers calling the shots, then a meaningful transition from precarious industries like coal mining would have begun decades ago.

With the creation of life-making jobs it's essential that we raise the overall standard of living through investment in services, arts, and our environment. It's long past time we moved the goal posts from society supplying the mere essentials—healthcare, education and a modicum of legal protection from capitalist employers—to a guarantee of the opportunity to live a meaningful and dignified life. This means rewriting our industrial relations laws to redress inequality and create more space and time for life. It is passing us by. It means
investing in the institutions that enrich our lives from preschools and community centres to local parks, green spaces and arts initiatives. It means investing in future technologies and rebuilding our public universities to conduct the research and development needed for a fair green future.

By restructuring our economy to replace profit making with life making, we make redundant the old measures of economic strength that encourage unchecked growth, exalt business confidence and fetishise surpluses. It's time we turned to measures of society that highlight the impact of the economy of people. We should look to New Zealand's recent wellbeing budget and social measures of inequality in developing new metrics of success as a society. I don't pretend that realising life-making jobs, investment in our communities and a transition to a post-carbon society doesn't demand significant investment. In fact, I welcome it and the benefits it will have. Nothing short of committing a significant portion of our economy to realising this transformation will be sufficient. With that commitment we will need new public institutions to direct this massive investment in our future.

It's vital we don't make the mistake of limiting economic and environmental transformation to an Australian project. These are international problems whose solutions demand international movements. We cannot have global climate justice without recognising and remediating the legacy of extractive settler colonialism that has destroyed countless lives. In Australia, that means continuing our work alongside First Nations people toward treaties and supporting them in the process of truth-telling, healing and self-determination. Internationally, the principles of a fair green future demands we look at climate reparations and commit to ending colonialism, structural inequalities and grossly unfair neoliberal trade and debt systems imposed on the global south. We must look at overseas aid as a global justice issue inextricably linked with our climate change efforts. Our investment must go beyond our borders and ensure supply chains are just and sustainable.

This future cannot be won just from within parliaments and legislatures. The push is coming from the community to deliver the change we need. People are mobilising to take urgent action on the climate crisis we face. But that does not mean politicians have no role to play. To my colleagues here and in the other place, my message is clear. We are not here to swallow neoliberal economic orthodoxy and put markets and profit ahead of people. Our society can't afford us spending another three years watching political paint dry while the climate meltdown accelerates outside these walls. Government must lead in quitting coal, backing renewal energy and supporting workers who are being left in limbo by the major parties' refusal to acknowledge the inevitable decline of unsustainable fossil fuels.

Labor and Liberal governments have provided billions in subsidies to fossil fuel corporations, poisoning our planet. These billions must be redirected to a life-making future and matched with investment of a scale that we have never seen before. The imperative of profit making has driven our planet and society to the edge, with exploitation of the environment and workers, and it must be abandoned. We need to reconceptualise society that isn't predicated on endless unsustainable planet-killing economic growth. That's the fair green future we need.

ACT Hotels Association

ACT Healthy Waterways

Senator SESELJA (Australian Capital Territory—Assistant Minister for Finance, Charities and Electoral Matters) (13:15): It's always good to rise after a Greens, and I thank her for that Venezuelan inspired vision for the future.

I'd like to turn to more important local issues and honour some great achievers here in the ACT. It was wonderful to attend the Australian Hotels Association ACT awards night recently. I want to pay tribute to a number of the wonderful hotels that were honoured at the awards. I also want to thank Michael Capezio and Anthony Brierley, from the local AHA, who do a great job advocating for their industry. It must be said that many of the venues acknowledged at the awards will be known to many in this place and beyond. QT Canberra, in Acton, did particularly well, winning no fewer than three awards, including best food and beverage talent. Other venues recognised would be familiar with honourable senators. They include Hotel Realm and East Hotel.

Without wishing to take away from some of these outstanding venues, I'd like to take this opportunity to draw the Senate's attention to the bars, pubs and clubs that they may be less familiar with that were honoured. Relatively new, Canberra venue 88mph was recognised for its outstanding sales and marketing. I congratulate Antony Arena and all his team for their hard work. 88mph is an eighties themed bar. And speaking as someone who spent much of his formative years in the eighties, it was a magnificent time in our nation's history and it was great to relive some of those memories.

Another of Antony's venues, Molly, was recognised as Canberra's best cocktail lounge or small bar. Molly is another throwback, this time to a prohibition era speak-easy. During prohibition, speak-easies were somewhat ahead of their time. They were some of the original pop-up shops. They would frequently pop up and then vanish again, only to reappear elsewhere, always trying to stay one step ahead of law enforcement. Molly has continued...
this tradition—of course, not trying to avoid the law—but when their original home in Hobart Place, in the city, was knocked down, Molly disappeared for a few months. But I'm glad to say they have risen, like the phoenix, from the ashes and have reappeared bigger and better than ever. Molly is, once again, open for business. I'd encourage people to get out there and check out some of the great bars in the ACT. Without wishing to reflect on former members of the other place, specifically the former member for Darwin, the Hon. King O'Malley, I'm glad we live in more enlightened times and that his attempt to make Canberra a dry city did not last too long.

In addition to Molly winning best cocktail lounge or small bar, Michael Nguyen from Molly was recognised as the AHA's ACT bartender of the year. This is a significant achievement and I want to congratulate Michael and wish him all the best in his future endeavours. Many of us enjoy a good beer, so it was also good to see that the Duxton in O'Connor, the Durham in Kingston and BentSpoke in Braddon were recognised for their outstanding beers. I congratulate all of the venues.

I may get to a couple of the other ones that won awards, but it's worth also mentioning a Canberra institution: Mooseheads. The Mooseheads pub, which many in this place may have experienced, at some point, has been a Canberra institution for many years, for as long as I can remember and beyond. Downstairs Mooseheads is a relaxing place to engage in some rapid hydration, hopefully responsibly, while surrounded by sports, military and university memorabilia. Downstairs Mooseheads has been a big part of student life at the ANU, where I was lucky enough to study, as well as for many from the Royal Military College Dunroan and countless sporting teams around our city. So I wanted to pay tribute to those who have made Mooseheads a Canberra institution, and for some of the awards that it has received.

Other award winners included the new bar Kokomo's, also in the city. Best sporting entertainment venue was won by Kingston bar The Dock. The Dock is owned by a couple of our outstanding former Wallabies, Ben Alexander and Scott Fardy, who also made a great contribution to rugby here in the ACT and are now running The Dock. So congratulations to Ben and Scott and the team at The Dock.

On another issue, I was very pleased earlier last month to announce the completion of the Healthy Waterways project which confirms this government's ongoing commitment to practical environmental action and investment here in Canberra. The $93.5 million ACT Healthy Waterways project aims to improve water quality in ACT waterways as well as improve the long-term water quality downstream to the Murrumbidgee River system and the Murray-Darling Basin. This project represents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to significantly improve water quality in the ACT's lakes and waterways. This program included the installation of 20 water quality improvement sites, such as ponds, rain gardens and wetlands across the ACT. When fully developed, the water quality improvement infrastructure will see a significant reduction in several key pollutants in ACT waterways and downstream into the Murray-Darling Basin.

Apart from the infrastructure projects we have been able to deliver, Healthy Waterways is funding two pioneering research projects on water quality, and the H2OK community education program to stop rubbish and organic matter entering the stormwater system. This research serves to inform future research on what causes poor water quality, including where blue-green algae outbreaks come from and how they behave once they are in the lakes. This will allow researchers to determine what interventions will work best in the future. Now, I know that this is important to the health of the Murray-Darling Basin more broadly, but it's also very important locally, as our waterways, such as Lake Burley Griffin, Lake Tuggeranong and Lake Ginninderra, haven't always been in the best state. In order for them to be used for recreation, it is important that we clean up those waterways. So it's a really important contribution.

Not only do these investments enlarge current understanding of ACT ecology, as mentioned earlier, but they further emphasise the government's commitment to improving community facilities for residents to use and enjoy. I know there are many residents right across Canberra who will be looking forward to the cleaner waterways which have been facilitated in part by this project. The Liberal-National government contributed the vast bulk of the funds, $85 million of the $93.5 million, towards this project. Projects such as this are of course only possible because of the strong economy and the strong budgetary situation our government presides over. We're very proud to be able to deliver these investments in our local environment here in the ACT, making a contribution to the overall health of the Murray-Darling but also, importantly, delivering better local environmental outcomes and better amenity for our waterways here in the ACT.

Newstart Allowance

Senator GALLACHER (South Australia) (13:23): I'd like to address the issue of the Newstart payment, and the commentary and debate about that. I think it's fairly instructive to place on the record first up that I honestly don't know how anybody can survive on Newstart. The standing costs in my household would outstrip Newstart on a daily basis, and that's without looking at things that you eat or do, or your car or electricity costs. Clearly,
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there is broad consensus right across society and also in this place that the fiscal amount is inappropriate. It's also instructive to look at the comment of the Hon. Mathias Cormann that it's a 'transitional payment'. It's clear there are less people coming into Newstart, and there are a substantial number of people who don't stay on Newstart for 12 months or longer, but some of the underlying statistics really do need careful evaluation. The prevalence of long-term unemployment has risen from 13.4 per cent in April 2009 to 22.9 per cent in April 2019, so there are a large number of people who are on it for longer than 12 months. The proportion of Newstart recipients on payments for more than a year has climbed from 69 per cent at 2014 to 73 per cent in 2016, and, according to the department's own figures, to 76.5 per cent in 2018. So at any one time the overwhelming majority of people surviving on Newstart are doing it for more than one year.

This is a real tragedy, because in the short time I've been in this place, both in government and outside in opposition, I've had the opportunity to visit Centrelink facilities in various parts of South Australia. I go to the social workers in those places and say, 'How is it possible that people are structurally unable to get into the workforce?' They'll point to various reasons, but the one that stuck in my mind particularly was dental. Once your teeth are not in a good shape and once you're unable to articulate and openly communicate with people at an interview or in any sort of area, you become withdrawn. They pointed very clearly to the cost of dental remediation and health as a huge impost, a huge impediment, to people actually gaining work, to going through the interview process and doing things that would get them back into the workforce. We all know that the cost of dental health is expensive. It's expensive and considered expensive by people who have full time employment. But we don't have any ability for those people to be referred to a specialist program to get their teeth fixed so they can actually smile at an interview and articulate their case more clearly. So little areas of concern like that are completely not addressed.

I stood in the Centrelink office in Port Pirie and was chatting with people coming and going. A young lad came in, clearly agitated, clearly very upset, a bit dishevelled and not on the top of his day. He was pointed to a phone, and after 30 minutes he got that phone and started banging it on the counter until someone came out and actually interacted with him as a human being. What transpired was that there had been a death in the family. He knew there was an emergency payment through the Centrelink system so he could get a bus fare to Melbourne and attend his grandfather's funeral.

The people who work in this area are unbelievably under pressure and they're dealing with a completely inflexible system, which in some cases is almost inhumane in the way it treats people. It does need fixing. It doesn't need fixing just by a rubber stamp of a dollar or a dollar amount at the headline figure. It needs a fundamental root and branch review. We need to look carefully with an economic lens on what we're going to do to move these people forward, because we cannot continue to consign an enormous amount of people to an inordinately long time in a very, very punitive system of which there appears to be no way of escaping.

If you are suffering from a need for psychological counselling, if you're suffering from a family breakdown, if you've got nowhere to stay so you're on the street, you've got a pittance to survive on and you're expected to boot and suit and go for 30 job interviews a month. This doesn't appear to be the real world. This 46th Parliament should be doing what this parliament should do properly: in a completely bipartisan way evaluate this critical area of social policy and improve it. We will never agree on all matters, but there should be enough decency in the parliament, there should be enough decency in this chamber and in the other place, that we don't politically score points on this issue. We see and walk past people in Canberra, in Melbourne, in Adelaide, who are homeless. If your income is $555 a fortnight as a single person, I don't know how you get a roof over your head. I don't know where you get a roof over your head if you're bereft of family support. When you're not able to get a charitable institution to provide you with a room or a bed or whatever, where do you get the roof over your head? We're continuing to see this in cities all around the world and all around Australia, and we should be doing something about it.

I think that the reference that's gone through this place in recent days is an inordinately well-structured piece of work. It does not go to just the adequacy of payments. We all know, politically, if there's an agreement to increase it, people will say, 'Well, that's been absorbed, and now we want more.' What are we doing about the structural reasons why people cannot get back into interacting in the workplaces, which they would benefit enormously from? And we need to look at the impact of geography, age and characteristics. I know from interactions through my office that we're increasingly seeing people who worked all their lives—in fairly low-paid occupations—who may have accumulated an injury or two along the way. For whatever reason, the business they were in has gone bankrupt or closed, and they've been placed into the jobseeker market at a mature age.

The classic example is a constituent of mine who's 63 years old. His future is Newstart until he gets an increase when he gets to the pension age. He wants to work. He carries an injury; he can't stand for long periods of time. Employers make selective decisions. That's the way the world is. If you put in for job applications and someone
has an impediment that is an injury which has been compensated in the past and restricts their performance, they're not likely to be at the top of employment selection. So he's facing three or four years on Newstart, and it is debilitating. The fact that he can't do what he's always done—participate in a workforce, have friendships, have disagreements, do the normal things of life—means he then starts to get a psychological injury because all of a sudden he thinks the problem is him. We shouldn't be doing this. This is wrong. We should be immediately acting in a bipartisan way to look at a forensic deep dive into the structural causes of this and we should be trying to fix it.

I'm instructed by my colleague Senator Dodson. He makes really insightful comments. Who are the actual beneficiaries of this institutionalised poverty? You could be cynical and say, 'Well lots of public servants work in this space managing the criteria, managing the compliance, managing the paperwork in and paperwork out and managing the stats up and stats down.' If we were to add all of those costs of the institutionalised operation of Newstart, maybe there would be some money around to be able to pay a higher dividend for those unfortunate enough to be in this situation. Some of you may know that I'm fond of the game of golf, so I do know this: Bobby Jones, the greatest amateur golfer in the world, when he was at the bottom of the deepest part of the British open, in a bunker, chipped it up four times and it came back down to the same spot; his caddie said to him, 'You know, Mr Jones, the definition of madness is to do the same thing repeatedly and expect a different result.' That's what we're doing here.

We've been at this for a long time. The institutionalised report that we got is that there are a lot of people unable to move after 12 months. There are not enough funds going in there to sustain themselves. There is not enough effort going in there to understand and attack the issues that are causing this institutionalised, long-term poverty. We need to do something about it, and doing the same thing is not going to cut it. This parliament, the 46th Parliament, should do a real deep dive into this area and start addressing the simple and clear things which people in the sector will identify. They know what is causing people to be not able to front up to interviews, not able to complete job applications and not able to undertake the training activities. We don't need an increase of people living in poverty on the streets of this country.

**Gambling**

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania) (13:33): We've had four scandals in the first four weeks of this parliament. All of them were over ministers and ex-ministers acting—or being seen to be acting—in a way that gives inappropriate benefit to them or their mates. In every case, it's got to do with cash. And then this Crown Casino story comes along and turns up the volume to 11. You say, 'There's nothing to see here!' Just because you can't see anything wrong doesn't mean there's nothing to see. Maybe you just need your eyesight checked. Maybe you've spent too long on a minister's salary cuddling up to gaming lobbyists and executives—lobbyists like former Labor minister Stephen Conroy, who's now the head lobbyist for the gambling industry, and executives like former Liberal minister Helen Coonan, who's on the board of Crown. You spend too long drinking the free drinks of the gambling industry and, what do you know, your vision gets blurry. Maybe that is why you think there is nothing to see here when everyone else can see it a mile away. Here's the truth of it: casinos are above the law because they have money and they pay big. They have dirty, filthy money to buy rotten politicians. They are using it, and you are letting them.

We have allegations that foreign nationals were allowed to get off private jets coming from China. There were no checks from Border Force, no paperwork and no Customs checks—absolutely nothing. One allegation is that a wanted criminal was allowed to touchdown in Australia on his private jet, despite being subject to an Interpol notice. We have allegations that Crown was bringing in people who were being investigated or monitored by police and intelligence agencies. Australia's consular staff knew it was happening. They didn't stop it. They were actually helping it. We have allegations of money laundering going on at the Crown casino.

We have allegations that two ministers pressured the Border Force chief to make it easier for Chinese gamblers to get into Australia on private jets. What is the response from this place? It's a referral to the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. I guess it is just a coincidence that the commission isn't allowed to investigate ministers or former ministers. How convenient! Everyone gets investigated except for the politicians in this place. It is one rule for this place and one rule for every other Australian.

When politicians leave the parliament, they still get a free pass to do what ever they want. Say you are Christopher Pyne and you want to go from being the Minister for Defence to the ex-minister being paid to get money from defence. That's fine! That's within the rules. Once again, there's nothing to see here! Bruce Billson took a salary from a lobby group while he was sitting in parliament. He was getting paid by the public to work for them and, at the same time, was getting paid by a bunch of companies to work for them—both at the same time. That's fine! Apparently, there is no conflict here and nothing to see! Ian Macfarlane went from being the Minister
for Industry, Tourism and Resources—he was responsible for regulating the mining industry—to being the head of the mining lobby. You don't see a problem with that one either?

People see this for what it is: it is politicians treating public service like it is a paid internship for the job you really want when you leave. They see you trading on the professional relationships you have developed, which taxpayers paid for you to develop. You then go and sell those relationships to the highest bidder. What do we get for our investment in you? We get laws that apply to us and not to you. Remind me, how many ministers have ever breached the Statement of Ministerial Standards? We have the only rules that regulate the conduct of ex-ministers being a statement that doesn't do anything. It is like a Monty Python sketch, isn't it? The man responsible for enforcing it says that it can't be enforced.

The Liberals and The Nationals say that they have to send in AFP officers to search the underwear drawers of journalists because nobody is above the law. Are you going to find out who leaked a classified ASIO and Border Force briefing back in February? There are 11 people who had a copy of it, including the minister. The AFP didn't commence any investigation into that one. Is that just a coincidence? We get companies like Crown that face allegations of being so far above the law that it's like they are a country of their own. We get this bipartisan conspiracy of silence when it comes to gambling because both sides are up to their necks in it. Money comes out of the pockets of the most poor and vulnerable via the pokies and then makes its way back to fund your re-election campaigns—charming!

Tasmanians, remember the money being poured into the coffers of the state Liberal Party from the pokies lobby in the last election? Remember the way they spent hard and spent big to stop dead any hint of reform? The Tasmanian Liberals got over half a million dollars into their election coffers to be able to outspend everybody else. They also had two separate multimillion dollar campaigns run by the pub pokie barons and the federal group. They were campaigning alongside them with all of the money in the world and none of the responsibility. They bought an election with money coming from problem gamblers. Half of their money comes from problem gamblers. They are using that money to block anything that would ever help problem gamblers. They're abusing the most vulnerable and they're doing it in alliance with the Liberal Party.

They know that most Tasmanians want pokies gone from pubs and clubs and they know that reform was popular and necessary, so they spent big to send a message to every other state that was watching: 'What we're doing here we'll do there too. If you want to win an election again, you'll leave the gambling lobby alone—or we'll take you down.' That's exactly what happened in Tasmania. That's exactly how it played out. As a result nothing changes—all because a bunch of billionaire pokies bosses would rather hurt pensioners and single mums than their own bottom line.

So they buy an election and they get to write the rules. The rules that apply to them get written by them and the rest of us just have to live with it and suck it up. Crown gets to write its own rules because it has got enough to buy them. If the rest of us have a problem with that, it's tough luck, too bad. Nobody wins when you can buy an exemption from the rule of law. We end up with a democracy that is for sale—and it is for sale. The people out there see it happening and they think it is absolutely disgusting—actually they think it's worse, but I won't use the words that they use; I won't do that in here—and I do too. They're looking at you lot in here to do something about it and they're seeing what I'm seeing—you're doing absolutely nothing and you're now buying seats. People are now living in misery for that. That is not democracy. That is not the Australian way.

### Live Animal Exports

**Senator BROCKMAN** (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (13:41): I rise today to update the Senate briefly on the current state of the live sheep export trade, which is predominantly from my home state of Western Australia. I do so to report some positive news and some disturbing revelations that have come to light in the other place. I will start with the positive news.

Since the resumption of the trade there have been some 714,141 sheep loaded in the Fremantle port. Sheep mortality across all those 11 voyages was 1,867—that is, a 0.26 per cent sheep mortality rate. I've said many times in this place and in many other public forums that, once the sheep export trade got underway again, it could prove that it could be done in a sustainable and humane way, and that is what the industry has proved. That mortality rate is extraordinary for 714,000 sheep. I think those of us on this side of the chamber—we who know the economic importance of the trade, the importance of protein to our markets and the serious way that farmers and exporters treat animal welfare—should be extraordinarily pleased with those numbers.

Yesterday there were some revelations in the other place though from my good friend and colleague Mr Rick Wilson, the member for O'Connor, about the cash-for-cruelty scandal that is engulfing some radical activist groups, including Animals Australia. Media reports earlier this year stated the amount paid to the crew member who procured the footage that outraged so many Australians—and I absolutely acknowledge that it did outrage
Australians. Media reports earlier this year claimed that some $38,000 had exchanged hands. In the other place the member for O'Connor revealed that new evidence suggests that the crew member was paid up to $175,000 to procure that footage. Absolutely damning emails between the crew member and Animals Australia have surfaced, detailing a shopping list of footage that they were willing to pay for. One email included 'key instructions' for filming:

- heat stress – this is sheep with their mouths open panting, as per the video
- piles of dead sheep, the larger the better
- dead or dying animals in pens or alleyways
- sheep standing or lying in melted faeces, as per the video
- overcrowded pens

In another leaked email, there was an offer from the crew member to disable ventilation fans on board to induce heat stress in sheep.

A payment of up to $175,000 is an extraordinary revelation, and I absolutely back up the call from my good friend and colleague from Western Australia Senator Smith, who brought this matter to the attention of the ACNC earlier this year. This is something that requires urgent investigation. It is not acceptable behaviour from an organisation with tax-deductible status to offer these kinds of sums in exchange for footage. It is an absolute disgrace to the organisation and a blot—a stain—on the charitable status of other organisations as well. It's something that must be addressed urgently.

I remind the chamber of the importance of this industry to my home state of Western Australia. Live sheep exports are worth around $1.5 billion to the Western Australian economy. There are around 5½ thousand sheep-producing businesses in Western Australia. More than 100 countries around the world export livestock. We are the only country that regulates specific animal-welfare outcomes. As I have said a number of times, in this place and in many other forums, we do not only export sheep, we export animal welfare. The interconnection between the export trade and the domestic trade is vital, and important to the ongoing capacity of the Western Australian farming community to produce the high-quality lamb and mutton and wool that this nation loves so much. Western Australia's sheep flock is around 14.6 million, which is up 2.6 per cent year on year. Now that's not surprising, because the sheep industry is undergoing somewhat of a renaissance. Following the collapse of the Wool Reserve Price Scheme, the industry underwent a long period of extraordinarily difficult structural adjustment. For the last six to eight years it's been on a very solid upward trajectory. I notice Senator Reynolds has entered the chamber, and, as a proud Western Australian, I'm sure she would support me in this. The upturn in the sheep industry in Western Australia has resulted in much more income, wealth, and activity in those small regional communities that we love so much.

This is a trade that is sustainable. It can be done in a well-regulated manner, as we have seen from the 11 ships that have departed Fremantle since November last year. We still have some challenges ahead. The industry understands that, and the industry is committed both to openness and to continuous improvement. Currently, we're on a three-month voluntary suspension, that is, a three-month voluntary moratorium, for the Northern Hemisphere summer. That was something that those on this side supported and that the industry actually brought forward. We are looking forward to seeing the trade start up again on 1 September this year. I understand the regulator is going to hand down a decision on that today—hopefully I haven't missed that announcement while I've been speaking, and hopefully it will align with 1 September. I'm certainly hopeful that that date of 1 September does see the resumption of the trade once more.

In my final few moments I wish to emphasise once again that a sum of $175,000 to collect footage—a laundry list of cruelty where the crew member has actually offered to disable ventilation fans on board—is an extraordinary accusation against an organisation in Australia with charitable status. I call on the ACNC to examine this matter thoroughly but in the most expeditious manner possible, because I do not think that that is something the Australian people would accept.

**Superannuation**

**Senator McALLISTER** (New South Wales) (13:50): The recent attacks on the superannuation system by the Liberal Party reveal the true face of the government when it comes to supporting workers in retirement. Under Mr Abbott, the Liberals delayed increases to the superannuation guarantee, and last week members of the government lined up one after the other to suggest further delays to the increase in super for working people. Mr Kelly floated the idea of opening up super for housing deposits before stating that he didn't think voters would see it as a broken promise if the government were to delay the super guarantee's rise to 12 per cent. Senator Patterson said that he recognised it's no good putting more money into super if that system is broken. Mr Wilson suggested weakening
the superannuation guarantee by making future increases voluntary. And in his first speech to the Senate here in this place Senator Bragg revealed the true agenda when he suggested that, for some, superannuation be abolished altogether.

It is hard not to see this as an absolutely coordinated attack by Liberal Party backbenchers on the superannuation system. The Liberal Party, at its core, is opposed to compulsory superannuation. It's actually quite puzzling, because our super system is the envy of many other comparable countries. It's puzzling because super is consistent with Liberal ideals around saving and it's puzzling because superannuation eases pressure on the age pension. But the hostility to this system demonstrates just how out of touch the government are with ordinary Australians, because their approach to superannuation would see low-income workers worse off in retirement, and the majority of those low-income workers are women.

Compulsory superannuation offers a chance for all working Australians to have a dignified retirement and access to a pool of savings that was once only afforded to very wealthy people, who were mostly men. For women, superannuation should provide the opportunity to achieve economic security in retirement. The reality is that the balances for women at retirement are still far from adequate, and government policy settings are a big part of this. More than half of working women do not receive any of the $30 billion in superannuation tax concessions each year. The pay gap for men and women has been stuck at around 18 per cent for nearly two decades, and the government have no plans to address this.

Yet, even in this context, the government backbenchers are now out advocating for a policy that will make things so much worse for working women. Increasing the rate of superannuation from 9.5 per cent to 12 per cent is critical to providing economic security for women in retirement. Abandoning it will significantly undermine the ability for many women to have any chance of a comfortable retirement. Modelling from Women in Super shows that today's average 30-year-old woman receiving 9.5 per cent across her working life will fall short of a comfortable retirement, and that's the prognosis for a woman who retires with no debt, with good health and with limited expenses. Astonishingly, Women in Super's analysis suggests that only 2½ per cent of women currently between 30 and 40 years of age will reach a comfortable retirement standard.

Further modelling shows that a 25-year-old woman earning $35,000 a year could lose 15 per cent from her retirement balance if the current timetable to reach 12 per cent is abandoned. That is over $41,000 in today's dollars, and if that woman takes time out to care for children and works part-time over nine years, she will lose a further $35,000 of her retirement balance.

For women who work for less than average wages the prospect in retirement is significantly grimmer. And it's borne out in the stats because 40 per cent of older single retired women currently experience economic insecurity in retirement, and they are the fastest group experiencing homelessness. Without an increase to 12 per cent future generations of women could face a similar situation.

The comments from members of this government advocating a delay, or abandoning the increase to 12 per cent, demonstrate just how indifferent they are to the plight of today's women. It makes you wonder if any of them have ever actually met a low-income woman.

We should not expect women to go it alone. Women expect better from people on the government benches. This isn't just an issue for women who are retiring in the coming years; it's an issue for women who are entering the workforce for their first day on the job today. Government attitudes towards superannuation for women need to change fast or we will condemn the current generation to poverty in retirement.

Federal Election

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (13:55): I would like to talk about what happened on May 18, if I may, especially in the context of Queensland. I want to acknowledge that many people did a lot of work to help the Liberal-National Party achieve 23 out of 30 seats and also return three senators. I would like to acknowledge the fact that we have got Senator Scarr, Senator McDonald and Senator Rennick as new senators on this side of the chamber.

We also have four new members in the House of Representatives. We have the wonderful Angie Bell, who is delivering her maiden speech this afternoon in the other chamber. We have Terry Young, the member for Longman. We all remember what happened in Longman in terms of the by-election that, when you think about it, led to the re-election of the Morrison government on May 18.

Terry Young gave his maiden speech about two hours ago in the other chamber. He is a small business person who grew up in and understands the suburbs of Caboolture, Morayfield and Bribie Island.

We've got Julian Simonds who replaced Jane Prentice in Ryan. He is a brilliant local councillor and a brilliant community representative for the western suburbs of Brisbane.
Up in Townsville in Herbert we have got Phil Thompson. He is a former Queensland Young Australian of the Year. He is someone who received the OAM. He is someone who really understands what it is like to be a digger. He understands the pressures that are on those who serve for us and defend the freedoms that with take for granted.

What I would like to do also is thank those who, sadly, were not able to be elected on May 18. I want to thank Olivia Roberts who ran for us in Griffith, who ran a brilliant local campaign. The Greens were very distasteful in that campaign, especially their behaviour at the Coorparoo pre-poll.

I want to thank Frank Beveridge up in Kennedy, who comes from out Richmond way, one of the largest seats in Australia. Frank ran a brilliant local campaign.

Of course we had Brad Carswell in Lilley. 'Send a worker to Canberra' was possibly the best slogan to come out of a campaign in the last 20 or 30 years. Brad Carswell is someone who has the callouses on his hands. His Labor opponent is one of those other Labor lawyers who comes from that university of Labor 'dulldom'. He would've been a brilliant addition to the benches down here in Canberra—a real worker.

Rob Shearman is someone who ran for us in Blair. He is someone else who served his country in the defence forces. He would have been a brilliant member for Blair. We have Shayne what's his name who is the member down there. I don't know what he does. I can't remember his name. No-one knows who he is.

We've got Russell Bauer who stood for us in Oxley. He is someone else who has served his country in the defence forces. He is a brilliant young, family man.

Then we have got Angela Owen, a Brisbane city councillor, who ran for us in Moreton. Those who know AO, Angela, know that she is a force of nature, someone who is absolutely brilliant. She understands the ethnic communities of Brisbane better than anyone else in Brisbane. She is someone who stands up for the southern suburbs of Brisbane.

Then we have Clinton Pattison, who would make a far better shadow Treasurer or Treasurer than the current member for Rankin will ever make, because he understands the importance of lower taxes. He understands the importance of a strong economy.

We also had Nicole Tobin from up Millaa Millaa way originally, and now in Cairns, and Amanda Camm who's the deputy mayor of Mackay. They are brilliant people who understand their communities.

We should never forget that the LNP returned 23 out of 30 members in Queensland. But we only did that because of the people of Queensland, who understand that we will be humble and we will deliver for them—we'll deliver lower taxes and a strong, safe economy. *(Time expired)*

**STATEMENTS**

**Sexual Harassment**

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) *(13:59)*: I seek leave to make a brief statement in relation to allegations of sexual assault reported in the media today.

Leave granted.

**Senator CORMANN**: I thank the Senate. Allegations in the media today reporting on comments by former parliamentary staff members on bullying, harassment and assault are deeply concerning and distressing. Electorate and personal staff are employed by their senator or member under legislation that allows employees who face workplace bullying and sexual harassment to have their claims heard confidentially and investigated thoroughly.

Where an incident occurs, staff or an employer can contact the Department of Finance to seek advice, request counselling, lodge a complaint, request a formal investigation or seek advice on a workers' compensation claim. If a complaint of bullying or harassment is made by a former employee, they can still contact the Department of Finance, and relevant policies continue to apply to the extent possible. My department would register the complaint confidentially and follow normal processes to advise a relevant member or senator about the complaint, with the consent of the complainant. This allows the parliamentarian to address any concerns about remaining risks in their workplace or consider other appropriate action that could and should be taken.

Where an employee believes they have been subject to a criminal assault, these matters should be referred to the police for investigation. Employees in this circumstance can continue to access support and counselling through the Employee Assistance Program if the matter has been referred to police.

There is no place for any form of bullying, intimidation or sexual harassment in any workplace, and the Australian parliament is no different. That is why we have strict protocols to eliminate or minimise the risk of such acts. All members and senators should ensure their staff are aware of these policies and the opportunities that
are available to them to have any issues addressed. The government encourages staff of any member or senator from any party to make use of these policies and services and assures them that their confidentiality and privacy will be respected at all times.

MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:02): I seek leave to make a statement regarding a ministerial absence.

Leave granted.

Senator CORMANN: I advise the Senate that Senator Payne will be absent from question time from Wednesday, 31 July 2019 to Thursday, 1 August 2019 due to ministerial business overseas. In Senator Payne's absence, I will represent the Attorney-General and the Minister for Industrial Relations, Senator Reynolds will represent the Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Minister for International Development and the Pacific, and Senator Ruston will represent the Minister for Women.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Pensions and Benefits

Senator GREEN (Queensland) (14:03): My question is to the Minister for Families and Social Services, Senator Ruston. The minister has on seven occasions assured the Senate that there has been no debt recovery undertaken in the Townsville area. Does the minister stand by her statements?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:03): I thank Senator Green for her continuing questioning on this particular issue. As Senator Green would be aware, when the devastating floods hit Queensland in February this year the Department of Human Services put a postcode pause on debt recovery in the areas that were identified by those postcodes in recognition of the hardship that had occurred and would continue to occur to those people in that area. I can categorically state, as I stand here today, that the pause that was placed on those postcode areas in the Townsville area post the floods remains in place.

Senator GREEN (Queensland) (14:04): I have now been provided with a robo-debt notice for almost $2,000, issued on 8 July to a recipient in Townsville. How is this notice consistent with the minister's statement in question time last Tuesday that 'There has been no debt recovery undertaken in the Townsville area'? I seek leave to table that debt notice now.

The PRESIDENT: Is leave granted? Senator Cormann.

Senator Cormann: On a point of order, there are longstanding bipartisan conventions in this place. The government will consider the leave request that was made at the end of the question, consistent with the usual conventions and courtesies in this place.

The PRESIDENT: I will take it, in that case, Senator Green, that leave is not granted, pending the request of the minister. I will call Senator Ruston to answer your question.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:05): Can I just express my extreme disappointment. After repeated requests in this place, both privately and during question time, to Senator Green that, at any time Senator Green had, could she please provide that piece of information to me—

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on my left and my right!

Senator RUSTON: As I said, I'm tremendously disappointed, having repeatedly asked for this information to be made available. If Senator Green wished to make this information available through the question time process, she could have availed herself of the opportunity to provide us with a copy of the letter before—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Cormann on a point of order.

Senator Cormann: On a point of order: I think Senator Wong knows that interjections and repeated interjections are disorderly, and I think we've had a fair bit of that.

The PRESIDENT: On the point of order, Senator Watt?

Senator Watt: No—actually on a separate point of order.

The PRESIDENT: Could I rule on this point of order. Interjections are always disorderly. I was having trouble hearing the minister, I will say, with the interjections. Senator Watt, on another point of order.
Senator Watt: There are only 14 seconds left and the minister hasn't answered the question, which is: how is that notice consistent with her previous statements that there has been no debt recovery undertaken in the Townsville area? That's the question.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Watt, as I said, I was having difficulty hearing the minister. There was obviously some debate regarding the tabling of the document. I took it that the minister was actually referring to the document and that issue in her answer. Senator Ruston.

Senator RUSTON: As I was saying, I made the offer in this place, and the offer remains, and I thank the Senator for—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong.

Senator Wright: A point of order on direct relevance. Please answer the question.

Senator Ruston interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong.

Senator Wong: Democracy, accountability of ministers to the people through the parliament.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Wong. Senator Cormann.

Senator Cormann: This is now a debating point. She's not raising a point of order.

The PRESIDENT: Interjections are not helpful. On the point of order, the minister is referring to the document that Senator Green mentioned and sought leave to table. I consider that to be directly relevant. Senator Ruston.

Senator RUSTON: Thank you very much, Mr President. If I could just go back to my line of response to the question that you asked, and that was— (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Green, a final supplementary question.

Senator GREEN (Queensland) (14:08): I am extremely disappointed that people in Townsville keep receiving debt notices even though, on seven occasions, you told the Senate that there has been no debt recovery undertaken in the Townsville area. Does the minister really expect the Senate to accept that a letter telling the recipient that they owe almost $2,000 does not count as debt recovery?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:08): I will reiterate what I said for the senator to hear. In February, there was a pause placed on income compliance debt recovery. As we stand here today, that debt recovery pause remains in place. I have only just received this letter. I am more than happy to have a look at this letter and see what is actually in it. I have not had the privilege to do that as yet. Once I have had the opportunity to review what's in this letter, I will come back to this place and I will advise you of my response to it. But, as I said to you on several occasions in this chamber—and I'm glad that you've eventually provided a letter, which I now have the opportunity to review—I was always prepared, if you ever had an example or evidence of debt recovery that had recommenced in the Townsville area in relation to income compliance debt recovery, to address it. (Time expired)

Honourable senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! There's an opportunity for debating ministers' answers after question time.

Employment

Senator McGrath (Queensland—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (14:09): My question is to the Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business. Will the minister inform the Senate about how the Morrison government is on the side of Australians who want to find employment through the jobactive system?

Senator Cash (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:10): I thank the senator for the question. As I was saying yesterday, the government has put in place the right economic framework so that businesses can prosper, grow and create more jobs for Australians. We're also a government that knows and unashamedly believes that the best form of welfare is a job. We are committed to getting Australians who are on welfare off welfare and into a job. In fact, under this government, welfare dependency in Australia is the lowest it has been in 30 years. This is because, as a government, we know you have to have in place the right policies and the right programs to assist people who are on welfare and want to get a job. Mr President, jobactive is the Australian government's way to get more Australians into work by connecting those who are looking for work, the jobseeker, with employers out there who are looking for employees.

I'm pleased to advise the Senate that since 2015 in July it achieved 1.39 million job placements. Indeed, it continues to achieve around 1,000 job placements every single day. What providers on the network can also do is connect jobseekers with a range of government services and government initiatives. This includes: relocation...
assistance—if somebody wanted to go to the great state of Queensland and work, they could get relocation assistance—employer wage subsidies and training apprenticeships. And, if you want to start your own business, we have a fantastic program that has been going now for in excess of three decades, known as the New Enterprise Incentive Scheme. If you're a young person aged under 25, our Youth Jobs PaTH program can help you get the skills and experience you need to secure a job. The best form of welfare is a job, and we've got in place the programs and procedures.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McGrath, a supplementary question?

Senator McGrath: Could the minister inform the Senate why mutual obligation requirements are an important part of these programs?

Senator Cash: That is a very good question. The government is committed to mutual obligation. Mutual obligation requirements are designed to ensure that unemployed people who are receiving welfare payments are actively looking for work and participating in activities that will actually help them get into employment. This is all about getting people off welfare and getting them into work. It is a fundamental tenet, mutual obligation, of our jobactive system. It ensures that those who are receiving welfare payments and assistance from the Australian taxpayer are taking the necessary steps they need to take to get a job. Mutual obligation includes activities such as job searchers, job interviews and, of course, meetings with the jobactive provider. It can be difficult for some Australians to do this, and that is why those experiencing greater difficulty under the jobactive system are given greater assistance.

The PRESIDENT: Senate McGrath, a final supplementary question?

Senator McGrath: Minister, what are the benefits of a job compared to welfare?

Senator Cash: The best form of welfare is a job. On this side of the chamber, as this government, we understand the benefit of work. When a person gets a job it gives so many personal benefits to the individual. It gives them their self-esteem, which comes from the dignity of work. I have met with so many people in this role and in my previous role who tell me: 'Michaelia, it gave me a reason to get up in the morning. By getting that job, I now get out of bed every single day.' They have pride when they're able to provide for their family. You can never underestimate the pride that a person gets in being able to provide for their family because they have found work. But also, the parents tell me: 'I can now provide for my future generation. When my kids look at me, they see I've got a job, and that's a good thing.'

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The PRESIDENT: I'm going to take this opportunity to acknowledge, in the gallery, former senator and now Queensland minister Mark Furner and former senator Scott Ludlam. Welcome back to the chamber, gentlemen.

Honourable senators: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Child Care

Senator McAllister: My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Government Services, Senator Ruston. How many families will be impacted by the government's application of its robodebt program to the childcare subsidy?

Senator Ruston: I thank the senator for her question, but in a sense I reject the premise of her question. The details you're asking, on specifics, I'm happy to take on notice. But I would point out to those in this chamber that as the minister responsible for social services and as the minister responsible for the welfare system in Australia, I have an obligation to make sure that we have a sustainable welfare system into the future, and that's exactly what I'm doing.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong on a point of order.

Senator Wong: The point of order is on direct relevance. The minister was actually asked, as the Minister representing the Minister for Government Services, a direct question about numbers of families. I appreciate that she wants to talk about her own portfolio, but she is being asked a question in her representative portfolio.

The PRESIDENT: You've reminded the minister of the question. I'm listening carefully. Minister, you have a minute and 30 seconds remaining to answer, but I do remind you of the very specific nature of the question.
Senator RUSTON: Thank you, Mr President, and I would draw your attention to the fact in standing, because I am not the Minister for Government Services, that I do not have the exact information the senator is asking for at hand, and I have offered to take that on notice for the senator. I was merely pointing out that as the Minister for social services I have a certain role, and that's what I was explaining.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McAllister, a supplementary question.

Senator McALLISTER (New South Wales) (14:16): You said that in a sense you reject the premise of the question. Can we explore that further? When asked about the government's intention to recover debt from families receiving the childcare subsidy, Minister Robert said:

… the department will deal sensitively with families to manage the balancing of family payments.

Does the so-called balancing process that the minister refers to actually mean the government's cruel and unfair robodebt program?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:16): As I said in my previous answer, the specifics of your question I am obviously happy to take on notice. But, more broadly, I would say to you that the Australian social welfare system is designed to provide people with what they are entitled to. The expectation of those in this place should be—and it certainly is on this side of the chamber—as well as the broader Australian public, that they expect us to reasonably recover overpayments made to people, to which they weren't entitled.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Gallagher?

Senator Gallagher: A point of order on relevance: the question is about whether, with the childcare subsidy, the word 'balancing' actually refers to the robodebt program. It's a quite straightforward question.

The PRESIDENT: I take the opportunity in dealing with this to remind ministers that even when they have answered or taken on notice part of a question, other information they offer must also be directly relevant to the question. I am, however, listening very carefully to the minister, and I do believe that her answer at this point is being directly relevant, because she was just turning to the issue of—to use the phrase you used—balancing or debts or different collections of payments. So, I think this information is directly relevant.

Senator RUSTON: As I was just getting to the point of saying, as the Australian public would expect of us and as those on this side of the chamber expect, when you have been paid more than you are entitled to then it seems a reasonable expectation that people pay back anything that they've been overpaid. That is the sustainability nature of the Australian social welfare system. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator McAllister, a final supplementary question.

Senator McALLISTER (New South Wales) (14:18): I ask again for clarity. Does the so-called balancing process referred to by Minister Robert actually mean the government's robodebt program?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:18): I will return to finishing off my previous answer in relation to what occurs at the end of a—

The PRESIDENT: Senator McAllister?

Senator McAllister: I would ask you to ask the minister to go to relevance. In particular, we are not asking about general commitments to debt; we are asking about the specific means and specifically whether or not the balancing process is the same thing as the robodebt program.

The PRESIDENT: You've reminded the minister of the question. I remind the minister: while it does occasionally happen, you can't continue your previous answer after a supplementary question. But the minister has been speaking for only nine seconds. I will listen carefully to the remainder of her answer.

Senator RUSTON: In relation to the process in which we determine whether somebody has been overpaid in relation to childcare payments: it is a process that's undertaken through the tax system. If you have any further details that Minister Robert may want to add to your particular question, I'm more than happy to provide those for you. However, I would point out to you that the Australian public have an expectation that, where anybody has been paid more than they were entitled to, the Australian government has an obligation on behalf of the taxpayers to make sure that that is recovered.

Law Enforcement

Senator HANSON-YOUNG (South Australia) (14:20): Thank you, Mr President. My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Cormann. Australians are increasingly concerned about the revelations surrounding Crown Casino and its relationship with authorities. If dodgy visa access, drug trafficking, money laundering, and prostitution aren't enough, reports yesterday about a Victorian property known as a ‘dude
ranch' are simply bizarre. The dude ranch, known to the Victorian police and the local council, is where high rollers visiting Crown allegedly 'gun up' and kill wombats from the windows of their luxury limousine. Minister, what is your government doing to investigate and speak with the Victorian police about this alleged illegal activity?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:21): I thank Senator Hanson-Young for her question. The first point I would make is a point that I made earlier in the week, and that is that the Australian government takes allegations of illegal activity very seriously. Everyone, of course, is required to abide by the Australian law, which includes casino operators, public officials and visitors to our country. You would also be aware that our law enforcement agencies are working hard to disrupt and deter criminal groups by collecting evidence and intelligence about financially motivated crime. It is not something that is done by government at the political level. It is something that is done, appropriately, independently by our law enforcement agencies, and it wouldn't be appropriate for me to provide specific details, given the potential to compromise ongoing investigations.

I would also remind the senator that on 30 July 2019 the Attorney-General referred allegations of corruption involving the Department of Home Affairs and Crown Casino to ACLEI, the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. The referral relates to media reports involving various allegations of corruption with respect to interactions between employees of Crown Casino and others. All these allegations have now been referred to ACLEI. It would not be appropriate for me to comment further.

The PRESIDENT: A supplementary question, Senator Hanson-Young.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG (South Australia) (14:22): I do question that, if the government can't protect our wildlife, how on earth can we believe they can protect our borders? Minister, allegations have been publicly raised about ministers and their relationship with Crown. Can the Minister representing the Prime Minister assure the parliament that there have been no breaches of the Statement of Ministerial Standards by any current or former ministers?

Senator CORMANN: Obviously, I'm not aware of the facts in relation to this at all. Law enforcement investigations are not political exercises. Law enforcement investigations are, appropriately, handled independently by those agencies. I've already referred the Senate to the referral by the Attorney-General on 30 July 2019 of various matters related to this to ACLEI. In relation to the question which is, I guess, implied in Senator Hanson-Young's comment, whether ACLEI can investigate ministers: ACLEI is responsible for the investigation of corruption issues in designated Australian government law-enforcement agencies. If ACLEI discovers information relating to issues outside its jurisdiction, ACLEI may share that information with an appropriate state or territory police force for further action. ACLEI may also share the information with the relevant ombudsman or other integrity agency.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Hanson-Young, a final supplementary question.

Senator HANSON-YOUNG (South Australia) (14:23): Isn't it true, Minister, that the ACLEI inquiry will not investigate whether any former or current ministers have been involved? To that point, is it not true that your government is running a protection racket?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:24): I completely reject that last part of the question—completely and utterly reject it. But in this country, appropriately, law enforcement investigations are not conducted as political exercises. I don't think that the Australian people would be well served by political exercises along the lines that are implied in the question. The senator also clearly did not listen to my previous answer where I pointed out that, if ACLEI discovers information relating to issues outside its jurisdiction, ACLEI may share that information with appropriate Commonwealth, state or territory police forces for further action. ACLEI may also share the information with a relevant ombudsman or other integrity agency.

Education

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (14:25): My question is to the Minister for Family and Social Services. Could the minister please advise how the government is on the side of families in rural and remote areas of Australia wanting access to education?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:25): I'd like to thank Senator O'Sullivan for his question and for his obvious and significant interest in rural and remote communities in Australia. The Morrison government understands the importance of education and the ability for children all over Australia to have access to the resources that they need for their education. I'm delighted to be able to announce that the Morrison government will introduce a bill today to boost support to more than 2,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with children who need
to live away from home to access secondary education. Through these changes, the delivery of an additional $36.4 million in support over the next four years—which means approximately $5,900 per year for these students and the costs associated with them going to boarding school—will be extended to these families.

The bill will extend the family tax benefit part B to eligible secondary students aged 16 who receive ABSTUDY assistance to study away from home. This is a very significant investment, one of which this government is very proud. Amendments introduced by this bill will also build on the measure of 50 years of ABSTUDY. This includes better, fairer and more flexible travel provisions and the portability of ABSTUDY benefits if students change schools. Many remote Indigenous communities have no secondary school, so boarding school is often the only opportunity that they have if the students wish to complete their high school. The financial cost of going to boarding school can be extremely high, and this provides a disincentive for families to continue to send their children to school. It is particularly a disincentive to attaining year 12 qualifications. This is putting at risk the performance of students and their completion of year 12. We know that children who complete year 12 are in a much better position to transition to work in adulthood and be contributing members of their society. Ensuring that FTB is extended to cover any costs associated with boarding relieves financial pressures.

The PRESIDENT: Senator O'Sullivan, a supplementary question.

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (14:27): How is the government taking practical steps to close the gap in educational attainment?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:27): We are doing everything we can to achieve the Closing the Gap targets, including halving the gap in attainment of year 12 or equivalent qualifications between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and non-Indigenous Australians by 2020. This bill helps achieve exactly that. It increases the support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with children who need to live away from home to attend senior secondary school. The priority investment approach modelling of my department suggests that an increase in support for younger Indigenous Australians to complete year 12 will lead to long-term benefits for everyone. Those children who achieve year 12 are more likely to be in work and less likely to rely on welfare. On average, within five years of leaving school, Indigenous young people who study year 11 as boarding students are projected to have income support costs that are 38 per cent lower than those of their peers who leave school earlier. This modelling shows that these students do better in the longer term as well.

The PRESIDENT: Senator O'Sullivan, a final supplementary question.

Senator O'SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (14:28): Could the minister please advise if she is aware of any alternative approaches?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:28): On this side of the chamber, we absolutely are committed to ensuring that the very best interests of all Australians are delivered by our promises. We can be trusted to make sure that we deliver on Indigenous disadvantage, which this bill is evidence of. We're also very committed to ensuring that the next phase of Closing the Gap is developed as a genuine partnership between all governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We're committed to finalising the Closing the Gap framework and its targets through this partnership. This partnership agreement recognises that, in order to effect real change, governments must work collaboratively and in genuine, formal relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples, as they are the essential agents of change. On 12 December last year, COAG agreed to form a genuine, formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples to finalise Closing the Gap refreshment.

Pensions and Benefits

Senator Marielle SMITH (South Australia) (14:29): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Government Services, Senator Ruston. On Tuesday night the Minister for Government Services told the ABC's 7.30 program, 'Bank records, of course, are always available for seven years, and the department won't be going back after seven years, in terms of recovering that.' Is the government pursuing any debts from prior to 2013-14?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:30): I thank the senator for her question. I'll take on notice the actual specifics, of the Minister for Government Services, in relation to the recovering of debt that is the overpayment of taxpayers' funds to Australians. I would also say to this chamber that in many instances the first thing that happens, when it comes to income compliance review—I hope you understand that. When you end up with a situation where we seek from somebody who is a recipient of a taxpayer funded payment to them, if there is a discrepancy that is identified between the records that we hold at the Department of Human Services and the records at the ATO and at the end of a period when we assess that, we will seek a discrepancy clarification—

CHAMBER
Senator Gallagher: I have a point of order on relevance. The question is very straightforward: is the government pursuing any debts prior to 2013–14? That is the question.

The President: Thank you. The minister has been speaking for a minute. I take the opportunity to remind the minister of the specific nature of the question. Senator Ruston.

Senator Ruston: Thank you very much. I can confirm that the online compliance initiative does not go back past seven years. But in response to the question from Senator Smith, as I was saying, when a discrepancy has been identified between the information that an individual or a family has provided to the Department of Human Services and the ATO, we seek clarification from the individual as to whether there is a reason why that discrepancy exists. We do not raise a debt unless it has been formally identified in that process that the person has actually incurred a debt or has received money of which they weren't entitled. The very reason that we do this is the social welfare system in Australia is based on its sustainability, into the future, and that means that we make sure that people get what they are entitled to receive.

The President: Senator Smith, a supplementary question.

Senator Marielle Smith (South Australia) (14:32): I refer the minister to 80-year-old Canberra woman Wilma Spence, who this month was hounded for $61.13 dating back to 1995. How many debts is the government pursuing that are more than seven years old?

Senator Ruston (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:32): Whilst I wouldn't normally comment on a particular case, the case to which Senator Smith refers, I can confirm that the Department of Human Services have advised me that they made an error and they have apologised for doing so.

The President: Senator Smith, a final supplementary question.

Senator Marielle Smith (South Australia) (14:33): When will the government finally admit that robo-debt, with its inaccuracies, cruel enforcement measures and a lack of human oversight, has failed?

Senator Ruston (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (14:33): I thank the senator for her follow-up question. Going back to my explanation of the process whereby we reconcile discrepancies that are identified with overpayments or potential overpayments, and where the individual has been contacted to explain why the overpayment has been made, if it is identified through that process that the person either does not have the debt—and this process, by the way, I point out, is a human-led review process. If it is identified the person does not have a debt, for reasonable reasons, then that person is not pursued. But we have an obligation, where overpayments occur, to sustain our social welfare system, to make sure that we provide people with the amount of money that they are entitled to receive. That is the basis of the sustainability of our system.

Northern Territory: Infrastructure

Senator McMahon (Northern Territory) (14:34): My question is to the Minister representing the Deputy Prime Minister. Could the minister update the Senate on the transformative road infrastructure projects the government is rolling out in the Northern Territory?

Senator Canavan (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:34): I thank Senator McMahon for her question and recognise her strong passion to see the north developed, and to do that we need better roads in the Northern Territory. That is why the federal government is investing $1.6 billion upgrading roads in the Northern Territory. It will improve mobility, it will improve access to tourism in the Northern Territory and it will improve business with lower costs and by helping attract investment and more economic opportunity into the Territory.

Obviously, the Territory is an area of large distances, not just within the Territory itself but also between it and other parts of the economic activity of this nation. That means that, say, the livestock industry in the Territory often faces costs of more than a third of its final value of its product taken up in transport costs. So the more we can lower those costs for the industry the more opportunities that industry will have to attract investment and jobs in the Northern Territory.

That's why we're taking action on specific projects like the Tanami Road, which is between Alice Springs and Halls Creek in northern Western Australia. It was described once on Radio National Breakfast as the worst highway in Australia. It is in need of massive investment. This government is taking action. After decades of talk, finally we're acting to see investment on that. The CSIRO has estimated for us that upgrading or sealing parts of that road could save up to nearly $8 a head for livestock producers in that region. It will be a great benefit to the mining industry as well, who go through trucks like no tomorrow. We are upgrading the Outback Way—a different road. The Outback Way will be sealed progressively over the next decade across our continent, making
only the third sealed route from eastern Australia to Western Australia in our nation's history. Finally, it will go right through Alice Springs and will make Alice the true centre of our nation, with a sealed highway to match with significant investment in the north. There are a variety of other roads we're investing in to help industry and to help the Territory get ahead, and that's why we are investing for northern Australia.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McMahon, a supplementary question.

Senator McMATHON (Northern Territory) (14:36): Could the minister update the Senate on the Regional Deal the coalition government has struck for the Barkly region?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:36): This is a very exciting arrangement, because it's the first time that we have taken the City Deal-type approach to a smaller community in our nation. We've done significant investments and deals with other larger cities around Australia, but it's great that we are also focusing on areas like the Barkly region and Tennant Creek to make sure they get sufficient focus from our nation's government. We are investing, or have already committed, $45 million in that community in a variety of projects. A very exciting one we did was to get radar services properly established there. During the floods in north-west Queensland we saw how important radar is in those parts of the world. Senator Macdonald knows that well. We're investing $16 million to increase housing supply and reduce overcrowding. We also have various investments in mediation services for youth and for reactivating sporting leagues and creating a business hub in the Barkly region to help the Territory get ahead.

The PRESIDENT: Senator McMahon, a final supplementary question.

Senator McMATHON (Northern Territory) (14:37): What is the coalition government doing to support the development of water infrastructure in the Northern Territory?

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (14:38): As I said the other day in this chamber, there are enormous water resources in northern Australia, but we haven't appropriately captured and used those at this stage. Last year, we had the CSIRO look at a variety of catchments across northern Australia, one of which was the Darwin catchment. It's got enormous potential. Some of our best scientists from the CSIRO looked at this and identified a range of off-stream storages on the Mary and Adelaide rivers that could be built in the Darwin region. The CEO of Northern Territory Farmers, Greg Owens, said about this work, 'It is a very comprehensive and detailed report which provides the information that our growers need to make decisions in northern Australia.' We are following up on that report. A few months ago I was with Senator McMahon in Darwin announcing further funding for the Adelaide River Offstream Water Storage project. It could create up to 1,400 jobs and increase farming activity in Darwin and the Northern Territory.

Health

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:39): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Health, Senator Cash. During the health policy election debate, Minister Hunt referred to a decision by the United States Food and Drug Administration to authorise a smoke-free nicotine-delivery product on the basis that it was appropriate for the protection of public health as a public health disaster. Commissioner Gottlieb of the FDA referred to the need to redouble efforts to protect kids from all nicotine-containing products but also said:

… I also hope that we can all see the potential benefits to addicted cigarette smokers, in a properly regulated marketplace, of products capable of delivering nicotine without having to set tobacco on fire.

Given the government's failure to address Australia's stagnant smoking rates, will the government commit to understanding and implementing a system to review and approve products appropriate for the protection of public health?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:40): I thank Senator Bernardi for the question and for giving some prior notice. Senator Bernardi, as you would be aware, in relation to e-cigarettes the Australian government is taking a precautionary approach. As you would also be aware, presently nicotine for use in e-cigarettes cannot be lawfully sold in Australia. The government will continue to monitor evidence about the safety of e-cigarettes, their impact on smoking initiation and cessation, uptake amongst youth and dual use with conventional tobacco products.

In terms of the commitment that we have made, through the National Health and Medical Research Council the government has supported 12 grants and committed over $12 million to research e-cigarettes since 2011. You would also be aware that the government has also commissioned the National Centre for Epidemiology & Population Health at the Australian National University to conduct a public health assessment of e-cigarette use. This assessment was designed by the centre and it will be independent. It will provide further evidence to support high-quality decision-making on e-cigarettes for the Australian context.
The PRESIDENT: Senator Bernardi, a supplementary question.

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:41): Thank you, Minister, and I appreciate your reference to the independent inquiry into the health impacts of nicotine e-cigarettes. Are you able to let me know when that inquiry commenced, the terms of reference for this inquiry, its current status and its reporting time frame?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:41): Senator Bernardi, as I've said, the government has made the reference to the centre at the ANU. The reference itself will be an independent review. As it is a review of the evidence, the project does not have terms of reference. It is a review of the actual evidence—that is what the project will be doing. The project will include consideration of the health impact of e-cigarettes on specific population subgroups, including current smokers, former smokers and people who have never regularly smoked tobacco, and different age groups, including youth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I'm instructed that the project is expected to be completed by December 2020.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Bernardi, a final supplementary question.

Senator BERNARDI (South Australia) (14:42): Thank you, Minister. I presume any reference from a government to an independent body would still have to have terms of reference. I'd appreciate that on notice, if you wouldn't mind. What scientific, medical or other evidence has the government received in relation to the products reviewed and authorised by the FDA? Has this evidence in the FDA ruling been provided to the ANU?

Senator CASH (Western Australia—Minister for Employment, Skills, Small and Family Business) (14:43): Senator Bernardi, as I stated in my previous answer, we have commissioned the review. The assessment itself was designed by the centre and, as such, is independent. As I've said, it is a review of the evidence and, as such, the evidence will be reviewed. The understanding is that that would include the evidence you have referred to.

Conservative Political Action Conference

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:43): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Cormann. US Congressman Matt Gaetz is attending the first Australian event of the Conservative Political Action Conference, or CPAC, in Sydney next week. Mr Gaetz is best known for inviting Holocaust-denier Charles C Johnson to the state of the union. Mr Johnson is a man who asked for help 'taking out' a black-lives-matter activist and denied that over six million Jewish people were murdered in the Holocaust. Does the Prime Minister support members of his party room attending CPAC?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:43): I'm not aware of the details of the issue that you raise and I'm not going to just take on face value all aspects of it. The issue fundamentally that you raise is very serious. I think it is well understood that the coalition has a strong and proud track record of being a supporter of Israel, so I would reject any implication in that question that we are anything other than that. Beyond that, in order to deal with the question that Senator Wong has raised with the appropriate level of sensitivity and accuracy, I will take it on notice.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, a supplementary question?

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:44): The Prime Minister, Mr Morrison, has said previously:

...I'll always be prepared to call out extremism in all its forms.

Senator Amanda Stoker and the member for Hughes, Craig Kelly MP, will be attending this event with Mr Gaetz. Will the Prime Minister call out extremists when they stand next to each other on stage?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:44): Of course, the Prime Minister stands by his statement, but I don't accept the premise of the question that Senator Wong has asked. As I have indicated in response to the primary question, I will provide an answer on notice.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, a final supplementary question?

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:45): I again refer to Mr Morrison's assurances that he will:

...always be prepared to call out extremism in all its forms.

Given this, will he guarantee that no current or former members of the parliament, including Senator Stoker, Craig Kelly MP or former Prime Minister Abbott will attend this extremist conference?

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:45): As I have already indicated in response to the primary question,
I will make sure that I am aware of all of the facts before making an informed statement. I have already taken that question on notice, and I will get back to the chamber.

Sport

Tourism

Senator STOKER (Queensland) (14:46): My question is to the Minister for Youth and Sport. Will the Minister inform the Senate on the benefits of hosting major international sporting events in Australia, such as the ICC T20 Cricket World Cup, and explain how the government is on the side of our tourism industry?

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order! I remind senators on my left that I need to be able to hear all questions.

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania—Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians and Minister for Youth and Sport) (14:46): The Australian government is proud to be supporting the International Cricket Council's ICC T20 World Cup in 2020 here in Australia. This includes coordinating support across a number of areas, including safety, security, taxation, immigration, Customs, intellectual property rights and, of course, event promotion. The coalition has this week thrown our support behind the event by providing $5 million in funding to Tourism Australia in the 2019-20 budget to market the event specifically in India, Australia's fastest growing tourism market.

Earlier this week, the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and I had the pleasure of meeting with Australian cricketers to make this announcement. We met with Billy Stanlake and Kristen Beams here in Canberra. We discussed the importance of promoting the event on an international scale and ensuring that Australian sport remains a world leader, which we are recognised as being, in hosting major international sporting events. It has been fantastic to see the Australian women's cricket team and their dominance in the recent Ashes competition. I congratulate them on their success and trust that will continue into the final game tonight. I certainly hope that that success rubs off on the men's team, who commence their Ashes campaign tomorrow night.

Our funding will be used to drive visitation to both the men's and women's tournaments next year. The women's tournament is starting next year. I certainly hope that we can meet the aspiration of hosting the world's largest ever crowd to a women's sporting event on International Women's Day at the MCG for the final next year.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Stoker, a supplementary question?

Senator STOKER (Queensland) (14:48): Will the minister outline the important of hosting international sporting events in terms of the development and growth of Australia's sporting industry?

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania—Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians and Minister for Youth and Sport) (14:48): As a part of Australia's national sport plan, Sport 2030, the government is committed to strengthening Australia as sporting industry to promote and sustain industry growth, including through the coordinated delivery of major sporting events, such as the ICC T20 World Cup. Consistent with the aims of Sports Diplomacy 2030, hosting the ICC T20 World Cup will strengthen Australia's sport and provide a platform to leverage sport to maximise trade, tourism and investment opportunities. Outside of the ICC T20 World Cup, we're investing up to $10 million to bring the Olympics back to Australia by supporting the bid for South-East Queensland for the 2032 Olympics. We are also backing Football Federation Australia's bid for the 2023 FIFA Women's World Cup, and wouldn't it be so cool to see them playing on Australian soil?

The PRESIDENT: Senator Stoker, a final supplementary question?

Senator STOKER (Queensland) (14:50): Can the minister update the Senate on the government's commitment to ensuring our nation remains a global leader in sport and major events? Can you inform us of the flow of benefits of hosting these events?

Senator COLBECK (Tasmania—Minister for Aged Care and Senior Australians and Minister for Youth and Sport) (14:50): Hosting the T20 World Cup will further strengthen Australia's already strong reputation as a world leader in hosting major international sporting events. It will also help to inspire the next generation of Australian sporting heroes through increasing participation, like Senator Watt this morning playing walking football.

Senator Watt: Hear, Hear!

Senator COLBECK: I hope you scored a couple of goals.

Senator Cash: Walking football?

Senator COLBECK: Walking football—a new sport. Supporting major events and high-performance sport in Australia is critical not only for inspiring the next generation of athletes but also for driving greater levels of participation in sport, such as Senator Watt playing walking football this morning.
**Senator Watt:** It's made for older people!

**Senator COLBECK:** It's made for us all, Senator Watt. The goal laid out in our Sport 2030 plan is for Australia to be the most active sporting nation—a healthy, successful sporting nation with a vibrant participation base, thriving sports organisations and a world-leading sports industry.

**Conservative Political Action Conference**

**Senator KENEALLY** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:51): My question is to the Minister representing the Prime Minister, Senator Cormann. I refer to the CPAC conference to be held in Australia next week, which will feature many right-wing extremists, including failed Ukip leadership candidate Raheem Kassam, who has campaigned against Muslim immigration, labelled the Koran fundamentally evil and attacked the BBC for tranny pushing. Also joining Mr Kassam is guest speaker Senator Stoker. Does the minister believe it is appropriate for Senator Stoker to attend the event alongside Mr Kassam?

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:51): That is essentially the same question as what was asked previously. I have taken that question on notice, and I will add that to the question on notice.

The **PRESIDENT:** Senator Keneally, a supplementary question?

**Senator KENEALLY** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:52): After SNP leader Nicola Sturgeon suffered a miscarriage, Mr Kassam tweeted, 'Can someone just like tape Nicola Sturgeon's mouth shut and her legs so she can't reproduce.' The member for Hughes, Craig Kelly MP, will also be attending this conference. Does the minister support the member for Hughes's decision to appear alongside Mr Kassam?

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:52): The comments that Senator Keneally just quoted are disgraceful and highly objectionable and completely outrageous that, of course, I entirely abhor, and I'm sure anyone in this Senate chamber abhors. I don't think that that is a partisan position. Those are disgusting comments and I reject them. I reject them entirely and utterly.

Now, having said that, I am not aware of this conference. I don't have the information in relation to this conference. I have already taken these matters on notice. I will just make a general point that, just because you are at an event somewhere, you're not expected to agree with everything that everybody says that is at the same event. Let me tell you, all of us have been at events in our electorates where we've come across people who have made highly objectionable comments. *(Time expired)*

The **PRESIDENT:** Senator Keneally, a final supplementary question?

**Senator KENEALLY** (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (14:53): Will the Prime Minister request the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs review Mr Kassam's visa, similar to the action taken against other right-wing extremists like Milo Yiannopoulos, David Icke and Gavin McInnes?

**Senator CORMANN** (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (14:54): As Senator Keneally would know, or should know, the Australian government—that is, governments of either persuasion—does not comment on individual cases. What would say is that all non-citizens entering Australia must meet and continue to meet the character requirements set out in the Migration Act 1958. There are strong provisions under the act to refuse or cancel a visa where a person is found not to be of good character. Any application lodged with the department about visitors who may hold controversial views will be considered, balancing any risk they may pose with Australia's well-established freedom of speech and freedom of beliefs. All visitors to Australia are expected to obey Australian laws and satisfy the character requirements of the Migration Act, but I do make the point again that, consistent with the appropriate practices of governments of both political persuasions, we do not comment on individual cases.

**National Broadband Network**

**Senator CHANDLER** (Tasmania) (14:54): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Cyber Safety and the Arts, Senator Reynolds. Can the minister update the Senate on how the government is demonstrating it is on the side of local communities with connectivity?

**Senator REYNOLDS** (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (14:55): I thank Senator Chandler for her question and also for her commitment to better communications for all of Tasmania. I can say to people in this chamber that I am absolutely privileged to be part of a government that is committed to delivering for Australia the National Broadband Network. Unlike those who made a complete hash of it, we are actually delivering it. As we all know, the NBN is the largest—
An opposition senator: You've got to be kidding me!

Senator REYNOLDS: Just wait and listen, because these are the facts here. You might not want to hear them, but these are the facts. The NBN is the largest infrastructure project ever undertaken in this country and remains on track to be completed by the mid-2020s. And our work rate just keeps on improving. The NBN is now available to more than 10 million Australian homes and businesses. This is an exciting and highly significant milestone in the rollout of NBN's fast and affordable internet for all Australians. It represents great news for all Australians who can now access this high-speed broadband and for those who will be next.

Earlier this month, NBN Co connected more than 1,000 premises to the network every single hour. That's something that those opposite could not even have dreamed of delivering—1,000 premises per working hour. This rollout was so badly managed under Labor that contractors actually downed tools and stopped construction in four states. The NBN's outstanding current rate of connection builds on the timely and efficient rollout of the network in 2018 and 2019, during which the NBN connected just under three million premises in just 12 months. This government's investment in NBN has dramatically changed the communications landscape in Australia, with 5.6 million homes and businesses now connected. (Time expired)

The PRESIDENT: Senator Chandler, a supplementary question.

Senator CHANDLER (Tasmania) (14:57): Could the minister please provide more detail on the progress of the rollout of the NBN?

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (14:57): I would be delighted to continue sharing this great news story for Australians. The NBN is now available to more than 10 million homes and businesses. It now has 5.6 million active connections. Our NBN is connecting more users every two weeks than Labor connected in six years. We are connecting more every fortnight than Labor did in six years. Over 60,000 premises per fortnight are being connected, compared to 51,000 under the entire six years of the Labor government—51,000 premises in six years, and 60,000 premises every two weeks under us. Soon all Australians will be able to connect. We are rolling out a multi-technology mix, just like the United States, the UK, Germany, France and many other countries.

The PRESIDENT: Order, Senator Reynolds. Senator Chandler, a final supplementary question.

Senator CHANDLER (Tasmania) (14:58): Is the minister aware of any alternative approaches?

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (14:58): Well, I can think of only one alternative approach, and that is the failed approach—

Opposition senators interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Order on my left.

Senator REYNOLDS: by those opposite in this chamber. It was an approach that was a complete and abject failure. Under Labor, the NBN was a complete and unmitigated disaster. After six years of Labor—I'll say it again—51,000 users were connected to the NBN in six years. That amounts to two per cent of premises in six years. Labor's failed fibre-to-the-premises NBN policy would have cost $30 billion and taken six to eight years longer to deliver. This would have increased broadband bills by up to $43 a month, or $500 per year, per household. Labor paid $6 billion for the NBN to pass just three per cent of Australian houses. Now, under us, more than 10 million homes and businesses are available to be connected.

Pacific Labour Scheme

Senator CHISHOLM (Queensland) (14:59): My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Foreign Affairs, Senator Reynolds. In 2012-13, 1,473 workers came to Australia in the first full year of the Seasonal Worker Program. The 2007-18 mid-year economic and fiscal outlook projected that 1,900 workers would come to Australia under the Pacific Labour Scheme in 2018-19. How many workers have come to Australia under the Pacific Labour Scheme since it commenced on 1 July 2018?

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (15:00): I thank the senator very much for that question. I have folders full of answers, but I don't have one on that in particular, so I'll take it on notice. Actually, I've just been passed those papers, so in fact I will now answer the question for Senator Chisholm—just in time! In relation to the Pacific labour mobility scheme, claims that the PLS is not meeting the targets are simply wrong. The PLS never had a target of 2,000 places in year one; 2,000 was originally the maximum cap on the number of places. The cap was removed as part of our Pacific step-up initiatives. The PLS is demand-driven and it fills positions when Australians cannot be found.

The PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong on a point of order.
Senator Wong: It may be that the minister is getting to this, but I do ask her to consider the question. I appreciate she's only just been handed the brief, but the question actually went to how many workers have come to Australia under the labour scheme since July 2018.

The PRESIDENT: You've reminded the minister of the latter part of the question.

Senator REYNOLDS: I think I was being extremely relevant, because I was talking about the numbers and I was only 30 seconds into the answer. If I continue—and I thank Senator Wong for her extreme courtesy in this case—in relation to the numbers, Australia remains firmly committed to the growth of the Seasonal Worker Program and the new Pacific Labour Scheme. Experience from the Seasonal Worker Program indicate strong growth over time. Now in its 11th year, with over 12,000 workers in 2018-19, the program granted 56 visas in the first pilot year. Ten countries are now participating in both the Seasonal Worker Program and the Pacific Labour Scheme. There are workers from Fiji, Kiribati, Nauru, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste, Tonga, Tuvalu and Vanuatu. The program has achieved an average annual growth rate of over 40 per cent since 2012. The Pacific Labour Scheme has processed and approved 50 employers in the first year of operation. So that program has 50 employers in two years of operation, following a four-year pilot.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Chisholm, a supplementary question.

Senator CHISHOLM (Queensland) (15:02): Is the minister aware that the government's decision to deregulate the working holiday-maker visa program has seen significant increases in people coming to Australia on backpacker visas and significant increases in the number of these people gaining extensions for their stay in Australia? Does the minister agree that this deregulation of backpacker visas is curtailing Australian employers' interest in the Pacific Labour Scheme?

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (15:03): I'll have to take that one on notice, because I don't have anything on that. It seems like you've changed topics from Pacific labour mobility to backpacker legislation. I'll take it on notice.

The PRESIDENT: Senator Chisholm, a final supplementary question.

Senator CHISHOLM (Queensland) (15:03): Why has the government allowed a central program under its Pacific step-up strategy to be sabotaged by the Nationals? Was it because the foreign minister was rolled in the cabinet by the Deputy Prime Minister?

Senator REYNOLDS (Western Australia—Minister for Defence) (15:03): I completely and utterly reject the whole premise of that question. It was a political assertion and it wasn't a question at all. I completely reject the assertion.

Senator CORMANN (Western Australia—Minister for Finance, Vice-President of the Executive Council and Leader of the Government in the Senate) (15:03): Mr President, I ask that further questions be placed on the Notice Paper.

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS

Pensions and Benefits

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (15:03): I'd like to acknowledge that the government accepts the document tabled by Senator Green earlier in question time. However, I would request that Senator Green provide additional information, because the extent of the redaction makes it impossible for me to be able to assess the claims that she is making.

Senator Wong interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: I was about to say leave had been granted by the government to table it. Are you seeking to make an observation—

Senator Wong interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Is leave granted for Senator Wong to respond?

Leave granted.

Senator WONG (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:04): That seems to be an excuse to do nothing again. We are not going to put—with all due respect, Minister—somebody at risk of, frankly, further being targeted by Centrelink. We have ensured the document—

Senator Birmingham: Point of order.

Senator WONG: May I finish?

The PRESIDENT: I must take the point of order, Senator Wong. Senator Birmingham on the point of order.
**Senator Birmingham:** This is not a response to Senator Ruston's statement. All Senator Ruston was inviting was that the opposition could table their document and provide her privately with additional information to address their concern. Senator Wong is debating.

**The President:** Let me take senators through. Leave was granted by the government—by Senator Ruston. Senator Wong sought leave to make a statement in response to that. Given that leave was granted, Senator Wong is allowed to speak to it in the manner she chooses.

**Senator Wong:** I simply wish to point out there is sufficient information left on there to be very clear that the letter was sent to a person in the Townsville area in relation to a debt. That goes directly to the minister's statements to the Senate. I give the minister clear notice that we do not accept the assertion she just made as a basis for not responding to the questions that Senator Green put to her.

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

**Conservative Political Action Conference**

**Senator Wong** (South Australia—Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:05): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answers given by the Minister for Finance (Senator Cormann) to questions without notice asked by Senators Wong and Keneally today, relating to extremism.

These questions related to the extraordinary decision by Senator Amanda Stoker and Mr Kelly MP to attend a Conservative Political Action Conference. In the wake of horrifying and tragic events and in the wake of inflammatory and divisive comments by a former senator, we have had in this place in recent time a substantial debate about the importance of all of us uniting to overcome hate, fear and division, and I remember the contributions from the other side. I remember how much discussion we had about the need to be far more careful—you should be listening to this, Senator Stoker—and far more vigilant about the hate speech proliferating in our discourse and the people with whom you choose to break bread and the people with whom you choose to share a stage.

**Senator Stoker interjecting—**

**Senator Wong:** I'll take an interjection, even though you're not in the chair and you're crouching on the floor and you shouldn't be interjecting from there. I'm very happy to take it from over there. The Australian parliament passed laws requiring social media companies to act upon instructions from police and other authorities to remove material inciting violent hatred, and Mr Morrison, our Prime Minister, made much fanfare for doing something that we do acknowledge was an appropriate thing to do, which was a statement at the G20 pressuring social media companies to act immediately when contacted by authorities to remove terrorist content such as a live video of an attack or other violent posts that seek to spread terror or recruit followers.

These are all fine words, but it's time for the Prime Minister, Mr Morrison, to show he's for real. It's time that he showed some leadership, because here in Australia we have a real-life conference which is a veritable academy for those wishing to learn the dark arts of hate speech. Some of the most extremist elements from the US and the UK are here running workshops on how to recruit people into the ideologies of hate. This requires a response from Mr Morrison, because if it's important enough to act decisively on hate speech in the virtual world of social media it's certainly important enough to act decisively on hate speech in real life; otherwise it will be clear that Mr Morrison's concern for maintaining a peaceful, cohesive Australia risks being far more virtual than real.

Now some might dismiss the conference—I heard some such interjections during question time—as being harmless. This one is not. This is the place where movements are built. And this is the place where Senator Amanda Stoker and Mr Craig Kelly, and potentially others who might not be listed, will be sharing the stage with the people who have the views that were quoted in question time today—views that the Leader of the Government in the Senate described as abhorrent.

There is much to love about America, but there are many things we don't want to replicate here. The white supremacist movement is gaining momentum. Conflict over race and religion is increasing. We have seen more and more attacks on Jewish, Islamic and black Baptist places of worship, along with neo-Nazi rallies that have turned deadly. As I referenced in my question, one of the speakers at the Australian conference of CPAC next week is US congressman Matt Gaetz, best known for inviting a Holocaust denier Charles C Johnson to the State of the Union. Mr Johnson is a man who asked for help in taking out—"taking out"—a black civil rights advocate and who denied that over six million Jewish people were murdered in the Holocaust. There is an argument to make that he ought not be allowed into Australia, on character grounds. But there should be no argument that the Prime Minister should call out this extremism as he said he would. And there shouldn't be an argument as to whether the Prime Minister must ensure that nobody from his party attend or be associated with this workshop, which is about spreading extremism in Australia.
We are a proud, decent, multicultural nation. As I said when we moved on a bipartisan basis to censure Fraser Anning, that multiculturalism and that tolerance and that respect has been built by both sides of parliament. That means that those people in the coalition who know that this sort of activity and these sorts of views are abhorrent should ensure that their colleagues do not engage in this conference with people who peddle such hatred and whose views are so contrary to all of Australia. This Prime Minister, Mr Morrison, said he would call out extremism wherever it was. He gave very clear commitments to the Australian people about his support for multiculturalism, respect and acceptance. Well, it's time he showed it by making sure that his people don't turn up to this conference. (Time expired)

Senator PATerson (Victoria) (15:11): Smear by association is one of the cheapest, nastiest arguments to be made, and it is befitting of an intellectual lightweight. I had the misfortune of sitting in the Senate last night to hear Senator Keneally's contribution to the adjournment debate, and I've had the misfortune again to hear the attacks by Senator Keneally and Senator Wong on Senator Stoker and others in this place. Attacking someone for attending an event where someone else has views that you find objectionable is a cheap and nasty smear—as I said, befitting of an intellectual lightweight.

On this side of the chamber we believe in personal responsibility, not collective responsibility. People who say things that are reprehensible deserve to be held responsible for it. People who happen to attend conferences with other people who say things that are reprehensible do not deserve to be held responsible for it. Please allow me to illustrate why, for your benefit, Senator Keneally. I imagine that you, along with all your colleagues, have over the years attended many national conferences of the Labor Party that were attended by people such as John Setka. Am I to hold you personally responsible for all the offensive things John Setka has said over the years? Does attending a conference with him constitute your endorsement and agreement with all his ideas, all the things he's said?

Senator Keneally interjecting—

Senator PATerson: I'll take that interjection. Senator Keneally, you said you're kicking him out. Yes, you are kicking him out now. The straw has finally broken the camel's back when it comes to John Setka. But it took an attack on Rosie Batty for you to do that. What about every other statement he made prior to that? What about his attack, outside the front of the Australian Building and Construction Commission, where he said that the families and children of public servants deserve to be attacked and singled out for their work?

Senator Wong: You're standing up with racists. You're on the stage with racists. It's not the same thing.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Order! Senator Wong, Senator Paterson has the right to be heard in silence. Senator Abetz, a point of order?

Senator Abetz: I think the opposition leader should withdraw the personal allegation against Senator Paterson that he's standing on a platform with racists.

Senator Wong: I should have said Senator Stoker is standing on a platform with racists. I'll withdraw, and I'll replace it with that.

Senator Abetz: That is clearly a reflection on—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I think we're getting into debating points.

Senator Abetz: No, the standing orders—

The PRESIDENT: Senator Abetz, please resume your seat. Minister?

Senator Cormann: What I would ask you to do is to perhaps take this on notice and consider, because there is a very clear standing order that requires for there not to be reflections on the motivations of individual members and senators and that is, on the face of it, a breach of them, and I think it should be considered on notice.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: On the same point of order, Senator Wong?

Senator Wong: I don't think there is any argument that the same conference Senator Stoker is attending is being attended by Raheem Kassam, who has labelled the Koran fundamentally evil and campaigned against Muslim migration. Now, I think that's racist. This is a statement of fact. I'm not making assertions. People can draw their own conclusions.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Wong and Senator Cormann, resume your seats. I didn't hear the comment, so I will take your advice, Senator Cormann, and we will review the tapes and come back if there is anything to report on. Please continue your remarks, Senator Paterson, and I will ask others to listen respectfully.

Senator Paterson: Thank you, Madam Deputy President. I would be sensitive too if I had a decades-long personal and political association with characters as unsavoury as John Setka. Those opposite should be ashamed of their long association with someone of such poor character, and it reflects very poorly on them that it has taken
them as long as it has for them to denounce him. But if it's good enough for them to level these accusations against coalition senators, then they should accept the exact same standard for themselves.

If they think the attendance of Senator Stoker and Mr Kelly, from the other place, at a conference with people who have obviously objectionable views, that they're personally responsible for that, then you should all be willing to stand up here and take personal responsibility for the views that you've become associated with over the years by attending conferences with people such as John Setka.

John Setka, by the way, is far from the only person to attend Labor Party conferences over the years with objectionable and offensive views, and if I had more time in this place I would go through all the other union officials who have threatened violence, who have made despicable smears against people's characters, that you've happily palled around with at your Labor conferences for years and years.

The best thing I can do to close this discussion, though, is to read out the fantastic statement that Senator Stoker put out, in response to Senator Keneally's smear last night. Senator Stoker says: 'Senator Keneally is so muddle headed, so weak in her thinking, that she seems to believe that everyone who walks into a room, by definition, has the same views on all issues. Any sensible person can see that that's not so. She said:

If we are doing our job properly as politicians, we should be talking with people from all walks of life, every day. We won't agree with them all. Trying to shame into silence anyone who would speak to a person who is wrong on an issue damages our capacity for constructive democracy. When we are confronted with people with whom we disagree, we need to talk to them more, not less.

She continued, 'We need to engage with and persuade people whose ideas we disagree with—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Paterson, please resume your seat. Senator Cormann.

Senator Cormann: The Leader of the Opposition is well aware—

Senator Wong interjecting—

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator Wong, order. We've got a point of order.

Senator Cormann: that interjections are disorderly. Senator Wong is constantly interjecting, and I would ask you to call her to order.

The DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Thank you, Senator Cormann. I have asked senators to listen respectfully and I have asked Senator Wong, in particular, to do that. I'll ask senators, once again, to listen respectfully to the debate. I call Senator Paterson.

Senator PATerson: I wouldn't want to hear it either, because I think it frames very clearly the dirty and despicable smear they're engaging in here. Stoker continues: 'It also means you can't walk into a room without doing background checks on everyone—that would be a real problem in the Labor Party. It's stupid, impractical and harmful for civil society. Clearly, Senator Keneally would rather that Australians are silenced and siloed, rather than be able to interact with people who have different beliefs.' Senator Stoker says, 'While I don't know all the speakers at CPAC, I'm proud to be talking about economic productivity at an event with people of the calibre of John Anderson AO, Jacinta Price and Janet Albrechtsen, to name a few. If Senator Keneally had any intellectual consistency, she would also be casting nasty labels on other people—like Steve Baxter, the former Labor appointed head of the Office of the Queensland Chief Entrepreneur, of course, but she doesn't.'

Senator Keneally (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (15:18): Talk about intellectually weak arguments! We heard Senator Paterson, first of all, assert one thing and then undercut his own logic with the second assertion. It doesn't even bear reflecting upon. All I am calling for is the same consistency that this Liberal-National government has applied in the past to people like Gavin McInnes, who founded the alt-Right group Proud Boys in November last year. He was denied a visa by this government so that he could not come here and speak, because he is a racist.

This government denied Holocaust denier and conspiracy theorist David Icke a visa in February this year. Here we go: Holocaust deniers and racists denied visas by this government. Senator Paterson, in all his love of free speech and all this quoting of Senator Stoker, that, 'It's okay, we just have to talk to racists and we can make it work out all right; we shouldn't be denying racists, we should be talking to them more.' Senator Paterson completely ignores that it is his government, a Liberal-National government, that has denied visas to people like this.

We're talking about Milo Yiannopoulos, who, in March 2019, was denied a visa by this Liberal-National government—your government, Senator Paterson; your government, Senator Cormann. They denied Yiannopoulos a visa. Why? Because he called Islam a 'barbaric' and 'alien' religion. He did it in the wake of the Christchurch massacre. Is that why they denied the visa—just because it was in the wake of the massacre—or does this Liberal-National government actually uphold the multicultural, multireligious values that have made
Australia great? This is why we have this section in the Immigration Act; this is why we have this discretion for the minister for immigration: to ensure that people who are going to come to this country and incite discord, possibly violent reaction, in the community are able to be barred. Senator Paterson would have us believe that we just let anyone in. We don't. His government has barred people like Gavin McInnes, David Icke and Milo Yiannopoulos, but yet there is someone as reprehensible as Raheem Kassam, just because, oops, Senator Stoker accepted a speaking invitation, and she wouldn't want to be embarrassed twice, because already, earlier this year, she had to pull out of a conference because of the people she was going to be sharing the stage with.

After I made my speech last night, I wrote to the Minister for Home Affairs, Peter Dutton, and the Minister for Immigration, Citizenship, Migrant Services and Multicultural Affairs, David Coleman, asking them to deny Raheem Kassam a visa, as they have done with Gavin McInnes, as they have done with David Icke, as they have done with Mino Yiannopoulos. These letters were hand-delivered to the respective offices at 10 am this morning. This afternoon, I saw a headline on the The Australian home page that said:

The government will reject Kristina Keneally's calls to ban far-right UK activist.

That story says:
The Australian understand that the Department of Home Affairs will not revoke a visa for former Brietbart UK editor Raheem Kassam despite his offensive tweets which have included calling on Scotland's First Minister Nicola Sturgeon to "shut her legs"— so she couldn't reproduce— after she revealed she had a miscarriage.

These are comments that, today, Minister Cormann has described as reprehensible and abhorrent. The government, however, so far seems to be quite happy for someone like this to come to Australia.

Senator Stoker told The Australian that she's proud to be speaking at the CPAC event. I cannot believe that someone like Senator Stoker or Mr Kelly, or anyone in the Liberal-National government, is comfortable sharing a stage with someone like Mr Kassam, who describes Islam as 'fundamentally evil'. It's not all that different, in fact, to what Milo Yiannopoulos said when he described Islam as a 'barbaric' and 'alien' religion. And, frankly, regarding his comments about Nicola Sturgeon and his implications about the role of women in public life—the view of women fundamentally that he portrays—it is bile; it is being spewed. Raheem Kassam has also said that Islam is a 'fascistic and totalitarian ideology'. So my question to the government is: how is Raheem Kassam any different to Milo Yiannopoulos? How is he any different to the man to whom you had already issued a visa and banned? And why won't you review the decision by Minister Coleman to allow him into the country? (Time expired)

Senator ABETZ (Tasmania) (15:23): The issues the Australian people are concerned about include jobs; they're concerned about the cost of living; they are concerned about the future for their children. These are the issues that engage the minds and concerns of the Australian people. But yet here today we have the alternative government, yet again devoid of any policy platform, seeking to pick on individual new senators. Last week, it was about two sentences out of Senator Bragg's first speech that the Labor Party sought to take note of as the big issue of the day. Today, it is relative newcomer, Senator Amanda Stoker, for going to a conference, as though that should excite the interest of the national parliament. And, just in case those listening are wondering about this conference, a person who was described by John Howard as the most decent man he had ever come across in politics, former Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, will be attending that conference. Just keep that in mind. And the person Senator Wong and Senator Keneally went to the barricades on to try to make sure that he became Prime Minister, Mark Latham—thankfully they failed—is also appearing at this conference. That's the former Labor leader, as indeed is Warren Mundine, a former national president of the ALP.

So, I am starting to take the side of Senator Wong and Senator Keneally and ask Senator Stoker what on earth she is doing rubbing shoulders with these former Labor people! But the reality is, as Senator James Paterson has indicated, that this is an issue not about with whom one shares a stage but about what one personally believes. Good heavens above: I've even appeared on The Drum! I've even had GetUp! people in my office! But I can tell you, I didn't agree with GetUp! and didn't agree with all the panellists who were interjecting on me because I was, as is always the wont on The Drum, the lone voice. I even appear on Q&A from time to time! Does that mean I agree with the views and values expressed by other people on the panel? Of course not. That is where the intellectual bankruptcy to which my good friend and colleague Senator James Paterson referred is so absolutely rife in this debate. Indeed, other people who will be appearing at this conference include Nick Cater, from the Menzies Research Centre; Jacinta Price, a well-known Indigenous councillor and advocate; Janet Albrechtsen—and the list goes on.
But let's be very clear here: the Labor Party's affected outrage today is because they have no policy issues to talk about, and in their eagerness to try to find something to talk about today they overlook the fact that in their own midst they have the John Setkas, they have the Luke Colliers, and that one former Labor senator in this place spent over 60 questions trying to defend the indefensible, and the Hansard records—I won't go through all the antecedents of one Mr Collier or indeed Mr Setka and the misogynist, ugly things they said to female enforcement officers in the workplace—deathly silence! There is deathly silence from the Labor Party, especially from the leader and deputy leader of the Labor Party in this place—not a word of criticism. Are they willing to condemn that sort of behaviour? Of course they're not.

So, Mr President, as you resume the chair, I indicate for anybody who might have listened in to the speeches of the Labor Party's leader and deputy leader in this place: their contributions were laced with hypocrisy, duplicity and a standard they would never apply to themselves. Why do they do it? Because they are devoid of policies and have no platform to engage the Australian people, so they engage in this politics of personality rather than politics of policy.

Senator DODSON (Western Australia) (15:29): This could be a pantomime. This is a serious matter for the integrity of Australia. I stand in support of my colleagues Senator Wong and Senator Keneally in expressing concern about this conference, CPAC, the Conservative Political Action Conference, and about the standards that our leaders, particularly the Prime Minister, need to make clear when it comes to the participation of leaders from this place and other places. In the US, CPAC is an annual political conference attended by conservative activists and elected officials from across the United States. CPAC is hosted by the American Conservative Union. Now we have CPAC down under, with a conference in Sydney from 9 to 11 August.

What's this about? Is this a sign that our fierce Australian characteristics of independent thinking are finally capitulating to rejected offerings from overseas? There was a time when we were concerned about how our national discourse was informed. Now it looks like we're submitting to poisonous ideas without reflection. You can buy a Reagan VIP Freedom Pass to the conference for $599. No-one from Newstart will be there; that's more than their fortnightly allowance. The one-line blurb promoting CPAC in Sydney bills the conference as a chance to 'learn', 'have fun' and 'protect the future'. Learn—what are they going to learn? What do those attending hope to learn from right-wing proselytisers from other hemispheres? Why should our political discourse be polluted by imported poisons and propaganda? Fun—locked up in a conference room with a clique of visiting right-wing nutters who shouldn't be allowed in the country. Protect the future—God save us, if all of those that are in this bunch see themselves as our protectors.

Mr President, I invite you to go to the CPAC website and take a look at the line-up of visiting speakers. Some of them shouldn't be allowed in this country. They obviously have not come by boat! That should not be the reason for them being banned from coming here—they are more likely to fit into an 'intellectual terrorist' category than that of a tourist. Their demagoguery is a danger to democracy. Australia is so intent on protecting its borders from refugees, but how about protecting our borders from prejudiced zealots and intellectual terrorists? Why do we need to hear the US congressman with a questionable record, Trumpified and infecting Australian politics? And what's there to learn about right-wing Americans? Or why do we need to hear from someone who is promoted as a 'British political activist'—someone who is really a racist bigot? Don't we have enough homegrown fascists and fanatics? We already have too much homegrown bigotry and racism in our country. CPAC has taken to social media to defend their invitation to this man. Apparently CPAC is proud to have him at the Sydney conference, arguing that free speech is at stake here.

Like both of my colleagues, I am a strong defender of free speech, but, like my colleagues, I reject any right to hate speech. We already have enough homegrown bigots and racists in Australia. Extremism should not be allowed into our country. And if CPAC sees itself as the exemplar of Australian conservatism—look out, everyone. It's time for the Prime Minister to act on this matter, as it is a threat to our nation.

Question agreed to.

Law Enforcement

Senator HANSON-YOUNG (South Australia) (15:34): I move:

That the Senate take note of the answer given by the Minister for Finance (Senator Cormann) to a question without notice asked by Senator Hanson-Young today relating to ministerial conduct.

These answers related to the—it seems—forever-evolving scandal and bizarre behaviour coming out of Crown Casino and its relationships with various arms of authority. What we've heard already is that we have high rollers coming in, fast-tracked through the visa process: you pick up a prostitute on the way, you go to the Casino, you have access to as many different drugs as you want, and now, if you pay extra, you get to go to a luxury hunting lodge in country Victoria to shoot wombats—to shoot wombats!
This is beyond bizarre. This is stranger than fiction.

Why on earth is this government doing absolutely nothing to really crack down on this hideous and obscene behaviour? Does the government really think that it is appropriate to fast-track Chinese gambling billionaires through our border protection processes, so that they can come to Australia and shoot our wildlife—to come to Australia to shoot wombats? No-one in their right mind would say this is appropriate. So what are you going to do about it? We have heard that there's been an inquiry set-up that will cover some aspects of this but is it going to protect the wombats? Is it going to look at the illegal activity at this luxury shooting and hunting lodge? No, it is not.

We know that the locals in this area are particularly worried, because the owner, of course, is a partner of Crown, Tom Zhou—he is a Chinese billionaire—and he is facilitating Chinese nationals to come into Australia to not just have a good old time at Crown, but then go out to the countryside, gun up and start shooting our wildlife. It is simply not appropriate. This is a fellow who has already been pinged for being pretty damn dodgy. He is a fugitive. He has a red notice on INTERPOL. He has been known to behave in pretty inappropriate ways. There is absolutely no reason why this fellow should be given an expansion of this property in Victoria or, indeed, for these activities to continue.

Just to be clear, the reports of these allegations say you don't even have to be a good shooter on this property. It says from the website:

> When we come to Australia, we should experience life that we can't experience in China. The first thing that should be felt in Australia is to be a wilderness hunter in the mountains of Australia.

That means shooting our wonderful wildlife, like wombats incidentally. It says, 'With professional guidance, you will be a great shooter.' They are effectively guaranteeing that you can knock off one of our furry friends. This is just obscene. It is weirder and weirder and it is about time this government did something about it.

It's one thing to have a cosy relationship to allow your rich mates to dodgy the visa process, but it's another thing to fast-track them through the border gates, get them in a limousine where they can ride around in country Victoria and gun up and shoot our wildlife. It is not on. It needs to be investigated and it should be stopped.

What is this government going to do to protect our wildlife from these trigger-happy thugs? What are you going to do about it? I don't want to hear another excuse for some closed shop inquiry where it is all hands off from the ministers. Why is it that the investigation, or the inquiry, that has been set-up won't look at the association's activities or decisions of any ministers, current or former? It is absolutely within your control to make sure this is cleaned up and cleaned up properly. But maybe it's because the government is more interested in running a protection racket for their mates at Crown. Is that what it is?

What is the opposition doing? They have mates at Crown too. Is that why they won't agree to an inquiry to ensure that we can get to the bottom of this? It is not just a protection racket for the ministers currently; it's a protection racket for both sides of politics. It stinks. Protect the wombats, get these thugs out of our country and clean up your act.

Question agreed to.

**NOTICES**

**Presentation**

**Senator SIEWERT** (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (15:39): I give notice that I will soon be delivering a motion on the Aboriginal flag.

**Presentation**

**Senator Payne** to move on the next day of sitting:

That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to amend the law relating to counter-terrorism, and for related purposes. *Counter-Terrorism Legislation Amendment (2019 Measures No. 1) Bill 2019.*

**Senator Roberts** to move on the next day of sitting:

That the following legislative instruments, made under the *Corporations Act 2001*, be disallowed:

(a) the ASIC Corporations (Banking Code of Practice - Revocation of 2018 Approval) Instrument 2019/662 [F2019L00877]; and

(b) the ASIC Corporations (Approval of Banking Code of Practice) Instrument 2019/663 [F2019L00878].

**Senators Urquhart, Brown and Bilyk** to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:
(i) Tasmania, and mainland Australia, stand to reap significant benefits from the Battery of the Nation and Marinus Link projects, including lower power prices, lower carbon emissions, additional income and new jobs,

(ii) the initial feasibility study into Marinus Link concludes that the Marinus Link and related Battery of the Nation projects are only economically viable in the 'High Emission Reduction Target' scenario, which includes a significant increase in renewable energy investment, over a business as usual scenario over the next decade,

(iii) according to the feasibility study, under a business as usual 'neutral' scenario, which corresponds to the Federal Government's approach to renewable energy investment, the Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation projects have a net cost of up to $730 million dollars, while under the High Emission Reduction Target scenario, the projects have a net benefit of up to $482 million,

(iv) the Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation projects will not go ahead unless they deliver net benefits to Tasmania and the nation,

(v) after announcing 14 energy policies, the Federal Government still refuses to introduce any policy to support renewable energy investment to replace the 2020 Renewable Energy Target, which will be fully acquitted next year, and

(vi) without consistent national energy policy that supports renewable energy investment, the Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation projects will not go ahead; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to introduce a consistent national energy policy that supports renewable energy investment through the 2020s and addresses carbon emissions as well as affordability and reliability in the electricity sector, to ensure the Marinus Link and Battery of the Nation projects go ahead.

Senator Kitching and Senator Patrick to move on the next day of sitting:

That the following matter be referred to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade References Committee for inquiry and report by the final sitting day of June 2020:

Australia's relations with the People's Republic of China, with particular reference to:

(a) the management of a mutually respectful and beneficial bilateral relationship between Australia and China;
(b) Australian and Chinese perspectives on, and interests in, regional and global security issues;
(c) trade, investment and infrastructure issues, including Australia's engagement with China's Belt and Road Initiative;
(d) educational and research cooperation;
(e) tourism, cultural exchanges and people-to-people ties;
(f) management of diplomatic and consular arrangements;
(g) dialogue on human rights issues;
(h) the roles of Australian institutions in Australia's relations with China, including: state and local governments, universities and other academic bodies, business, and non-government organisations; and
(i) any related matters.

Senator Brown to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Morrison Government plans to privatise Australia's visa processing system threatens 100 jobs in Tasmania,
(ii) under the Liberals' plan, private providers will be given licence to run Australia's visa system as a for-profit business,
(iii) the Liberals' unfair plan could also lead to the loss of around 2,000 jobs Australia-wide,
(iv) there could be increased visa fraud, cuts to services, and data security risks if the services are privatised,
(v) Australians don't want to see our visa system privatised, and they especially don't want to see people lose their jobs,
(vi) under the Liberals, there have been thousands of full time jobs lost across Tasmania in just the last year,
(vii) the Department of Home Affairs last year outsourced 250 departmental call centre jobs to the New Zealand company Datacom, while the Department of Human Services outsourced 250 Centrelink jobs to Serco,
(viii) visa processing times have blown out under the Abbott-Turnbull-Morrison Government,
(ix) partner visas are at record-high processing times of up to 28 months,
(x) the number of people on bridging visas in Australia – waiting for the Department of Home Affairs to process their applications – has blown out to over 229,000 people, and
(xi) the Home Affairs Minister, Mr Peter Dutton, and the Liberals, appear determined to outsource and sell off parts of Australia's immigration system to the highest possible bidder; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to protect the integrity of Australia's visa processing system, and stop its plan to privatise Australia's visa system.

Senator Waters to move on the next day of sitting:

(1) That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent this resolution having effect.
Senator Sterle to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) on 8 September 2017, the Australian Government announced the commencement of an independent inquiry into the effectiveness of the National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020 (NRSS),

(ii) on 12 September 2018, just over a year later, the NRSS inquiry panel, headed by Professor Jeremy Woolley and Dr John Crozier, presented its report to the Australian Government at Parliament House,

(iii) it has been almost 11 months since the Government received this report, and not enough has been done to address the 12 important recommendations within the report, and

(iv) a failure by the Government to act on these important recommendations will result in continued loss of life and injury through road trauma incidents; and

(b) calls on the Australian Government to:

(i) acknowledge that almost 90 per cent of the NRSS targets will not be met by 2020,

(ii) provide an update to the Senate on its plan to address the 12 recommendations from the inquiry into the NRSS, and

(iii) provide a guarantee that the NRSS is being monitored and that changes will be made to reach the agreed targets if they are not on track to be met.

Senator O'Neill to move on the next day of sitting:

That the following matter be referred to the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services for inquiry and report by 1 March 2020:

Regulation of auditing in Australia with particular reference to:

(a) the relationship between auditing and consulting services and potential conflicts of interests;

(b) other potential conflicts of interests;

(c) the level and effectiveness of competition in audit and related consulting services;

(d) audit quality, including valuations of intangible assets;

(e) matters arising from Australian and international reviews of auditing;

(f) changes in the role of audit and the scope of audit products;

(g) the role and effectiveness of audit in detecting and reporting fraud and misconduct;

(h) the effectiveness and appropriateness of legislation, regulation and licensing;

(i) the extent of regulatory relief provided by the Australian Securities and Investments Commission through instruments and waivers;

(j) the adequacy and performance of regulatory, standards, disciplinary and other bodies;

(k) the effectiveness of enforcement by regulators; and

(l) any related matter.

Senator Gallagher to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) survey, released on 30 July 2019, has confirmed that Australians are worse off since the election of the Coalition Government in 2013,

(ii) HILDA revealed real median household annual disposable income has declined from $80,208 in 2013 to $80,095 in 2017,

(iii) wages growth has stagnated under the Coalition Government's watch,

(iv) when asked why wage growth was stagnating under the Coalition Government, Finance Minister Mathias Cormann said – "This is a deliberated feature of our economic architecture ", and

(v) the Coalition Government supports continued cuts to the penalty rates of Australia's lowest paid workers; and

(b) expresses its disappointment in the Coalition Government's failure to pursue policies to increase household incomes in real terms, address growing congestion and combat increasing rates of poverty revealed by the HILDA survey.

Senator Gallagher to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:
(i) economic growth is fundamental to increasing living standards for Australian families, and allowing government to fund essential services,

(ii) the pursuit of continuous, sustainable economic growth should be a core objective of government,

(iii) in a services-based economy, strong, sustainable economic growth can support improved environmental outcomes, and

(iv) that the philosophy of stopping economic growth should be rejected as dangerously misguided; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to pursue policies that will lift Australia's economic growth rate and ensure that all Australians equally share in the benefits of this growth.

Senator McKim to move on the next day of sitting:

(1) That the Senate—

(a) notes with deep concern allegations that current members of Parliament, including ministers, pressured senior officers in the Department of Home Affairs to make it easier for certain people, including high-roller clients of Crown Resorts, to obtain visas and clear customs; and

(b) requires the Minister representing the Prime Minister Senator Cormann to attend the Senate immediately after motions to take note of answers on 1 August 2019, to make a statement of not more than 10 minutes detailing:

(i) whether the Prime Minister has investigated the claims made against ministers regarding Crown, which prima facie would breach the Ministerial Standards,

(ii) if the Prime Minister has not investigated these allegations, why he has not done so,

(iii) if the investigation is ongoing, what are the Terms of Reference and timelines for the investigation, and when will the findings be released, and

(iv) whether or not the Prime Minister considers that the Ministerial Standards have been breached.

(2) That at the conclusion of the Minister's explanation, any senator may, without notice, move a motion to take note of the Minister's explanation.

(3) That any motion under paragraph (2) may be debated for no longer than 1 hour, and have precedence over all business until determined, and senators may speak to the motion for not more than 10 minutes.

Senator Patrick to move on the next day of sitting:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that:

(i) most citizens pay little attention to matters relating to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal (AAT) until they are confronted with an administrative decision they feel is incorrect,

(ii) the AAT permits citizens to address wrongs in administrative decision-making through a process which is fair, just, economical, informal and quick, and

(iii) citizens must hold trust and confidence in the decision-making of the AAT; and

(b) notes that:

(i) most appointments to the AAT are Federal Court judges or experienced legal practitioners, however paragraph 7(3)(b) of the Administrative Appeals Tribunal Act 1975 provides for appointment of senior members and members that, in the opinion of the Governor-General, have special knowledge or skills relevant to the duties of a senior member or member,

(ii) there have been forceful allegations made in the media that a number of appointments made under this provision have been political, for example the appointment of former politicians and political staffers, which undermines public trust and confidence in the AAT, and

(iii) the Honourable Mr Ian Callinan AC QC, former High Court judge, conducted a review into the AAT and stated the repeal of paragraph 7(3)(b) of the Act is desirable; and

(c) calls on the Federal Government to urgently introduce a bill into the Parliament to repeal paragraph 7(3)(b) of the Act.

Senator Fierravanti-Wells to move on the next day of sitting:

That, in accordance with the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances in its report, Parliamentary scrutiny of delegated legislation—

(1) The standing orders be amended, with effect from 4 December 2019, as follows:

(a) omit standing order 23, substitute:

23 Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation

(1) A Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation shall be appointed at the commencement of each Parliament.
(2) All instruments made under the authority of Acts of the Parliament, which are subject to disallowance, disapproval or affirmative resolution by the Senate and which are of a legislative character, shall stand referred to the committee for consideration and, if necessary, report.

(3) The committee shall scrutinise each instrument as to whether:

(a) it is in accordance with its enabling Act and otherwise complies with all legislative requirements;
(b) it appears to be supported by a constitutional head of legislative power and is otherwise constitutionally valid;
(c) it makes rights, liberties, obligations or interests unduly dependent on insufficiently defined administrative powers;
(d) those likely to be affected by the instrument were adequately consulted in relation to it;
(e) its drafting is defective or unclear;
(f) it, and any document it incorporates, may be freely accessed and used;
(g) the accompanying explanatory material provides sufficient information to gain a clear understanding of the instrument;
(h) it trespasses unduly on personal rights and liberties;
(i) it unduly excludes, limits or fails to provide for independent review of decisions affecting rights, liberties, obligations or interests;
(j) it contains matters more appropriate for parliamentary enactment; and
(k) it complies with any other ground relating to the technical scrutiny of delegated legislation that the committee considers appropriate.

(4) The committee shall also scrutinise each instrument to determine whether the attention of the Senate should be drawn to the instrument on the ground that it raises significant issues, or otherwise gives rise to issues that are likely to be of interest to the Senate.

(5) The committee may, for the purpose of reporting on its terms of reference, consider any proposed or draft legislative instrument, including an exposure draft of such an instrument.

(6) (a) The committee shall consist of 6 senators, 3 being members of the government party nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, and 3 being senators who are not members of the government party, nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate or by any minority groups or independent senators.

(b) The nominations of the opposition or any minority groups or independent senators shall be determined by agreement between the opposition and the minority groups or independent senators, and, in the absence of agreement duly notified to the President, the question of the representation on the committee shall be determined by the Senate.

(7) The committee may appoint sub-committees consisting of 3 or more of its members, and refer to any such sub-committee any matters which the committee is empowered to consider.

(8) The committee shall elect as chair a member appointed to the committee on the nomination of the Leader of the Government in the Senate.

(9) The committee shall elect as deputy chair a member appointed to the committee on the nomination of the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate, and the member so elected shall act as chair of the committee when there is no chair or the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee.

(10) Where votes on a question before the committee are equally divided, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, shall have a casting vote.

(11) The committee and any sub-committee shall have power to send for persons and documents, to move from place to place, and to meet and transact business in public or private session and notwithstanding any prorogation of the Parliament or dissolution of the House of Representatives.

(12) The committee may inquire into and report on any matter related to the technical scrutiny of delegated legislation.

(13) The committee may appoint with the approval of the President a legal adviser to the committee.

(14) The committee shall be empowered to print from day to day any of its documents and evidence. A daily Hansard shall be published of public proceedings of the committee.

(15) The committee may report from time to time its proceedings and evidence and any recommendations, and shall make regular reports of the progress of the proceedings of the committee.
(2) The initial members of the Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation shall be the members of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances appointed at the commencement of this Parliament.

(3) The Standing Committee for the Scrutiny of Delegated Legislation have the power to consider and use the records of the Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances.

**Senator Faruqi** to move on the next day of sitting:
That the Senate—
(a) notes that:
   (i) 1 August, 2019, marks two years since the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) released the 'Change the Course: National report on sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities', which surveyed students on their experiences of sexual assault and sexual harassment at Australian universities,
   (ii) the AHRC report found that 21 percent of university students were sexually harassed and 1.6 percent were sexually assaulted in a university setting in 2016,
   (iii) sexual assault and harassment continue to be appalling issues at Australian universities, and survivors often struggle to access adequate support services, and
   (iv) on 20 August, 2019, students across Australia will be joining a National Day of Action in protest against universities, inaction on the prevalence of sexual violence in university settings; and
(b) calls on the Federal Government to commit to working with universities to ensure that:
   (i) university campuses are safe places free of sexual violence, and
   (ii) survivors of sexual assault and sexual harassment are given adequate support by their universities.

**Senators Siewert, Hanson-Young and Dodson** to move on the next day of sitting:
That the Senate—
(a) notes:
   (i) that, in 1995, the Aboriginal Flag was recognised as a 'flag of Australia' under the *Flags Act 1953*,
   (ii) that the designer of the Aboriginal flag owns the flag's copyright and has licensed the rights to use the flag on garments to a company which is now requiring people to ask for permission to use the emblem and pay a fee,
   (iii) that the licence has now been expanded to physical and digital media,
   (iv) that many First Nations communities feel they are now at the mercy of a company seeking to profit from their flag, and
   (v) the concerns in many First Nations communities that their flag is licensed to a company; and
(b) recognises that the Aboriginal flag is one of Australia's national symbols and a central part of First Nations people's identity and that the flag should be about people and pride, not profit; and
(c) calls on the Federal Government to do everything they can to ensure that all First Nations peoples and communities can use the flag whenever they want without cost or the need for consent.

**Senator Keneally** to move on the next day of sitting:
That the following matter be referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 18 September 2019:

The impact of changes to service delivery models on the administration and running of Government programs, with particular reference to:
(a) the privatisation of Australia's visa and citizenship program, including:
   (i) the integrity of Australia's visa and citizenship system,
   (ii) the commercial implications and increased costs to industry, with particular regard for the tourism and higher education sectors,
   (iii) the implications to national security, data security and privacy, and
   (iv) the risk to public sector employment – especially rural and regional employment – through service delivery model changes; and
(b) Centrelink's Robodebt compliance and outsourced debt collection program, including:
   (i) the integrity and impact of the automated debt collection processes,
   (ii) the limitations and impact of Robodebt collection methods,
   (iii) the identification of inaccurate debts – made without human oversight,
   (iv) the impact to public sector employment – especially on the capacity and adequacy of staffing level, and
   (v) the review and appeals process for debt notices; and
(c) and related matters.
Senator Whish-Wilson: To move on the next day of sitting—That the following matter be referred to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry and report by 11 November 2019:
(a) the body of science and research into the impacts of seismic testing;
(b) the regulation of seismic testing in both Commonwealth and state waters;
(c) the approach taken to seismic testing internationally; and
(d) any other related matters.

BUSINESS
Leave of Absence
Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:39): by leave—I move:
That Senator McCarthy be granted leave of absence for today, 31 July, for personal reasons.
Question agreed to.

NOTICES
Postponement
Senator KITCHING (Victoria) (15:40): I seek leave to postpone
General business notice of motion no. 72 standing in my name for today, proposing the establishment of a Select Committee into the Integrity of Government Administration, till the next day of sitting.
Leave granted.

BILLS
Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports Bill 2019
First Reading
Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:40): On behalf of Senator McKenzie, I move:
That the following bill be introduced: A Bill for an Act to provide for the appointment of an Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports, and for related purposes.
Question agreed to.
Senator DUNIAM: I present the bill and move:
That this bill may proceed without formalities and be now read a first time.
Question agreed to.
Bill read a first time.
Second Reading
Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:41): I table the explanatory memorandum relating to the bill and move:
That this bill be now read a second time.
I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.
Leave granted.
The speech read as follows—

INSPECTOR-GENERAL OF LIVE ANIMAL EXPORTS BILL 2019

A suitably empowered Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports will provide an additional, independent layer of accountability and assurance over the regulation of Australia’s livestock exports. The Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports Bill 2019 will provide greater assurance in the regulation of live animal exports and broader animal welfare issues. It will do this by providing the Inspector-General with the necessary independence from government and the powers to deliver a robust accountability and assurance function. An Inspector-General will promote continual improvements in the regulatory practice, performance and culture of the Department of Agriculture in its role as the regulator of Australia’s livestock exports.

The measures in this Bill will enable the Inspector-General to review the administration of provisions relating to the export of livestock under the current regulatory framework. The regulatory framework is established by the Export Control Act 1982 and the Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act 1997.

The measures in the Bill will enable the Inspector-General to oversee the Department of Agriculture in its role as the regulator of livestock exports.
By its nature, export of livestock presents a high risk to animal health and welfare. There have been failures to comply with animal welfare standards and concerns over the regulatory response. Australians were appalled in 2018 when they saw footage of sheep dying on voyages to the Middle East on the MV Awassi Express in 2017. Many were further angered by their assessment that the mortality incident reports did not match the footage.

The department's focus on trade facilitation means that it is balancing competing factors in its role as the regulator of live animal exports. Establishing an Inspector-General is part of a broader strategy to develop and maintain an effective regulatory culture. A culture that will deliver animal welfare outcomes consistent with the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock and the best available science.

In April 2018, governance expert Mr Philip Moss AM, was asked to conduct a Review of the Regulatory Capability and Culture of the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources in the Regulation of Live Animal Exports. The government accepted all recommendations from this review when it was delivered in October 2018. Mr Moss recommended that an independent external entity, known as the Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports, oversee the department in its role as the regulator of livestock exports. The independent oversight and evaluation provided by a statutory office is necessary to provide a further layer of assurance over Australia's livestock export management system.

In response to the Moss Review the department has formed an Animal Welfare Branch, appointed a Principal Regulatory Officer and is busy implementing the balance of the recommendations. The Animal Welfare Branch is driving a greater focus on animal welfare, including animal welfare indicators that are based on science and focused on the wellbeing of the animals, rather than mortality. The Principal Regulatory Officer is driving a culture of greater professionalism, improved cohesion and a contemporary regulatory approach as a priority.

In March this year the department appointed an interim Inspector-General of Live Animal Exports, to begin the important work we expect the statutory Inspector-General to undertake.

This Bill will enable the Minister for Agriculture to appoint the Inspector-General, make other arrangements in relation to this appointment and to terminate an appointment if necessary. It will also provide the minister with the power to make rules that set out detailed requirements relating to the role of the Inspector-General and the conduct of reviews. The Bill will empower the Inspector-General to review the performance and functions, or exercise of powers, by officials under the Export Control Act and the Australian Meat and Live-stock Industry Act. In addition the Bill will compel a person to answer questions, and give information or documents to the Inspector-General where the Inspector-General has reasonable grounds for making the request. A civil penalty may apply where a person fails to comply. The Bill will establish the basis for other matters such as information sharing, reporting and protection from civil liability.

Livestock exports are a legitimate business option for our farmers and were worth over $1.7 billion in 2017-18. The livelihoods of farmers and regional businesses across Australia, thousands of jobs, depend on the livestock trade. These are real people with real bills to pay. Any decisions regarding livestock exports must not be taken lightly—rather, decisions must be based on science and evidence.

The calls to ban livestock exports disregard the value of this trade to our farmers and others in rural and regional Australia. Banning, or even suspending, livestock exports would simply be a 'knee-jerk' reaction, and would be a poorly considered decision.

It's amazing how quickly we have forgotten the 2011 suspension of the live cattle trade to Indonesia and its impacts on farming families. These impacts were felt through the whole supply chain and included businesses that provide transport, mustering, feed and agistment services.

Following the revelation in April 2018 of conditions on the voyage of the Awassi Express to the Middle East in the 2017 northern summer, the government moved quickly to make changes to improve the welfare of our exported livestock. Independent observers were immediately placed on vessels carrying our livestock to the Middle East and information on what they found is now being published on the department's website. There was an increased focus on heat stress management. This included requiring more space for sheep travelling to the Middle East during the northern summer and independent audits of pen air turnover by qualified personnel. These changes align with the recommendations from the McCarthy Review of sheep exports to the Middle East during the northern summer, all of which the government accepted.

The review of the Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock is being undertaken in two parts: the final report on the sea transport component was released in March 2019 and recommendations from that tranche of work are being progressively implemented. A review air transport element is underway by an independent Technical Advisory Committee and it is anticipated that its report will be finalised in August 2019.

A review of the Heat Stress Risk Assessment model was undertaken by a Technical Reference Panel and completed in May 2019. The department will be consulting stakeholders on options for implementing the recommendations from that review.

Each of these measures is critical and we will do what is necessary to support our farmers and others involved in the trade and maintain our reputation as a world leader in good animal welfare practices.

This Bill is another important part of the government's plan to address animal welfare concerns with livestock exports. We need to ensure that there are appropriate arrangements to oversee the Department of Agriculture in its role as regulator of livestock exports.
The government supports the farmers who rely on livestock exports, and the exporters who do the right thing. The government is also committed to providing the standards of animal welfare Australians expect. We need this trade to be conducted properly and sustainably.

Our farmers, the Australian community more broadly, and our trading partners should have confidence in the livestock export industry. This Bill is a step in rebuilding that confidence.

Ordered that further consideration of the second reading of this bill be adjourned to the first sitting day of the next period of sittings, in accordance with standing order 111.

COMMITTEES

Public Works Committee

Reference

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:42): On behalf of Senator Seselja, I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report as soon as reasonably possible:

Australian Taxation Office proposed fit-out of leased premises in Moonee Ponds, Victoria.

I table a statement relating to the work.

Question agreed to.

Reference

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:42): On behalf of Senator Seselja, I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report as soon as reasonably possible:

National Museum of Australia Proposed Gallery Development Stage 1: Life in Australia

I table a statement relating to the work.

Question agreed to.

Reference

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:42): On behalf of Senator Seselja, I move:

That, in accordance with the provisions of the Public Works Committee Act 1969, the following proposed work be referred to the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works for consideration and report as soon as reasonably possible:

Department of Defence, Point Wilson Waterside Infrastructure Remediation Project, Point Wilson, Victoria.

I table a statement relating to the work.

Question agreed to.

MOTIONS

New South Wales: Hospitals

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (15:42): I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) there is a worsening crisis in New South Wales (NSW) public hospitals, with regard to the safety of patients and staff; last year alone there were 465 assaults in NSW hospitals, and

(ii) on 1 August 2019, 22,000 health workers will take industrial action as part of their campaign to improve safety and staffing conditions in NSW public hospitals;

(b) supports the Health Service Union in its endeavours for greater protection for patients and staff at NSW public hospitals; and

(c) calls on the NSW Government to work with health workers to deliver these requests.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:43): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The government shares the concerns about patient and staff safety in hospitals. All patients and staff have a fundamental right to feel safe when in a hospital. This motion effectively asks the government to condone industrial action where medical staff will be on strike. This will potentially put patients'
lives at risk. As such, the government cannot support this motion, and we are surprised that other elected representatives would choose to support action of this nature. The government supports the appointment of the Peter Anderson by the New South Wales government, who is currently undertaking a review into the safety of New South Wales hospitals.


The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator SHELDON: My notice of motion simply recognises the unsafe conditions of New South Wales public hospitals. Last year there were 465 assaults at New South Wales hospitals. These hospitals have never been more dangerous for both the staff and the community that rely upon them. I remind senators of the sorts of conditions health workers and patients face. Last night I spoke about paramedic Tess Oxley who had to reload a patient back into an ambulance because the hospital had become unsafe. She said:

We shouldn't have to be worried about having our back turned to somebody else - that we're going to get pushed, that we're going to get punched, that we're going to get spat on.

The motion condemns no-one. It calls on the Senate to recognise there is a crisis in safety in New South Wales hospitals and the New South Wales government should work with the political representatives of health services workers, the Health Services Union, to find a solution to ensure that patients and staff are safe.

Question agreed to.

BUSINESS

Consideration of Legislation

Senator WATERS (Queensland) (15:44): I move:

(1) That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent this resolution having effect.

(2) That the Landholders' Right to Refuse (Gas and Coal) Bill 2015 be restored to the Notice Paper and consideration of the bill resume at the stage reached in the 45th Parliament.

Question agreed to.

MOTIONS

Freedom Festival 2019

Senator URQUHART (Tasmania—Opposition Whip in the Senate) (15:45): On behalf of Senator McCarthy I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that 23 August 2019 marks 53 years since the Gurindji people, led by Mr Lingiari, walked off Wave Hill station in the Northern Territory to protest their work and living conditions;

(b) recognises that the actions of the Gurindji, which began as a fight for wage justice, led to the recognition of Indigenous land rights;

(c) acknowledges 23 August 2019 as a day of significance in modern Australian history; and

(d) extends best wishes for the Freedom Festival that will be held at Kalkaringi from 23–25 August 2019, to celebrate and remember the remarkable achievements of the Gurindji and their supporters.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Environment and Communications References Committee

Reference

Senator WHISH-WILSON (Tasmania) (15:46): I move:

That the following matter be referred to the Environment and Communications References Committee for inquiry and report by 11 November 2019:

The impact of seismic testing on fisheries and the marine environment, with particular reference to:

(a) recent scientific findings;

(b) the regulation of seismic testing in both Commonwealth and state waters;

(c) the approach taken to seismic testing internationally; and

(d) any other related matters.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:46): I seek leave to make a short statement.
The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: Seismic testing in Australian waters has been undertaken safely for decades. There are strict safety and environmental standards overseen by an independent expert regulator, the National Offshore Petroleum Safety and Environmental Management Authority. NOPSEMA takes into account publicly available research findings in its decisions. A large body of international and Australian scientific research shows that, when properly managed, seismic surveys can be conducted safely. A three-year research program is currently underway by the Australian Institute of Marine Science to further understand the impacts on fish, invertebrates and plankton. To provide additional assurance, an independent audit of NOPSEMA processes for proposed exploration in the Great Australian Bight is being undertaken by the Chief Scientist, Dr Alan Finkel, and he will report by the end of August.


The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator GALLAGHER: Labor will take a considered, consultative and pro-science approach to environmental matters. If the Greens really cared about this issue they would properly consult stakeholders, Labor and the environmental groups. They would test terms of reference to ensure that they adequately encapsulate the issues and have the potential to achieve an actual outcome for the environment and the sectors involved. Additionally, the Australian Institute of Marine Science is already conducting a three-year research program on this issue. Labor believes in taking a measured and consultative approach on these issues, engaging the sector on their concerns and allowing science to guide the decisions.


The PRESIDENT: Leave is not granted.

Senator Whish-Wilson interjecting—

The PRESIDENT: Pursuant to the rule adopted in the last parliament and this one, one can seek to suspend standing orders during formal business, but one does not get to debate it. So, it does not provide the opportunity for a speech. There is a contingent notice on the Notice Paper that suspension of standing orders can be moved to make a statement. That is what I have just been advised.

Senator Whish-Wilson: Having my leave denied, I seek to suspend standing orders so I can make a statement. I won't be gagged by this government.

The PRESIDENT: My first ruling was the correct one: that you suspend standing orders but you don't get to speak to that motion. If the motion is carried, you then get to speak. So, my first ruling was the correct one. Would you like me to put that to a vote, Senator Whish-Wilson?

Senator Whish-Wilson: Could you just clarify, Mr President?

The PRESIDENT: My first ruling was the correct one. You can move a suspension of standing orders to make a statement, but you do not get to speak to the debate on the suspension of standing orders; it just gets put straight to a vote of the chamber. If it is carried, you will get to speak.

Senator Whish-Wilson: In lieu of suspending standing orders, I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave not granted.

The PRESIDENT: I am now moving to put the vote.

Senator Whish-Wilson: This is outrageous.

The PRESIDENT: As I have made the point regularly, the proliferation of one-minute statements in this section undermines the very point of this section and provides limited opportunity for debate for some senators and not all.

Senator Whish-Wilson: On a point of order, both Labor and the Liberals have made a statement. Why aren't I entitled to make a statement as well?

The PRESIDENT: It's not a point of order, Senator Whish-Wilson. Leave is not a matter of order once it is denied.

The question is that business of the Senate motion No. 1 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [15:55]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .....................14
Noes ................. 43
Majority ............. 29

AYES

Di Natale, R
Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC
McKim, NJ
Rice, J
Siewert, R (teller)
Waters, LJ

Faruqi, M
Hanson, P
Lambie, J
Patrick, RL
Roberts, M
Steele-John, J
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Chandler, C
Ciccone, R
Cormann, M
Duniam, J
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Gallagher, KR
Hughes, H
Kitching, K
McGrath, J
O'Sullivan, MA
Pratt, LC
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Smith, DA
Stoker, AJ
Van, D
Watt, M

Antic, A
Ayers, T
Bilyk, CL
Brockman, S
Carr, KJ
Chisholm, A
Colbeck, R
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hume, J
McDonald, S
McMahon, S
Paterson, J
Rennick, G
Ryan, SM
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Walsh, J

Question negatived.

NOTICES
Withdrawal

Senator PATRICK (South Australia) (15:58): In light of the fact that our names will be added to Senator McKim's motion, I withdraw business of the Senate notice of motion No. 2, standing in my name and the name of Senator Lambie, today proposing a reference to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee.

COMMITTEES
Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee
Reference

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (15:58): Before asking that this motion be taken as formal, I wish to inform the chamber that Senators Patrick and Lambie will also sponsor this motion. I, and also on behalf of Senators Patrick and Lambie, move:

That the following matter be referred to the Legal and Constitutional Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by the third sitting day of October 2019:

Allegations regarding visa applications and other immigration matters, with particular reference to the following:

(a) allegations that current members of Parliament, including ministers, pressured senior officers in the Department of Home Affairs to make it easier for certain people, including high-roller clients of Crown Resorts, to pass customs;
(b) allegations that visa applications for certain people were fast-tracked by the Department of Home Affairs or the former Department of Immigration and Border Protection;
(c) any agreements between the Department of Home Affairs and Crown Resorts to fast-track visas for wealthy clients of Crown Resorts;
(d) the operation and effectiveness of Commonwealth legislation, administrative arrangements and law enforcement strategies in identifying, detecting, and disrupting any activity that weakens the functions and integrity of the Department of Home Affairs;

(e) Crown Resorts' alleged links to organised crime, money laundering, improper activity by consular officials, tampering with poker machines, and domestic violence and drug trafficking on Crown Resorts' property;

(f) the relationship between Crown Resorts and governments, including the role of former members of state and federal parliaments and the influence of political donations;

(g) the need for any legislative or administrative reform; and

(h) any related matters.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (15:59): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: On 30 July 2019, the Attorney-General referred this matter to the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, ACLEI. ACLEI is a more appropriate body than a Senate committee to consider these allegations as its investigatory powers and resources are considerably higher than those of a parliamentary committee. It would be detrimental to have parallel ACLEI and parliamentary inquiries running at the same time as it is likely that significant legal issues and risks could arise for any witnesses called before both hearings.


The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator GALLAGHER: Labor will not be supporting this motion. Yesterday Labor supported the government's decision to refer the serious allegations surrounding Crown Casino that are the subject of this motion to the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity. We believe this body, which has the powers of a royal commission, is the appropriate body to investigate these allegations. Labor—

Senator Di Natale interjecting—

Senator GALLAGHER: if you'd listen, Senator Di Natale—is prepared to consider further action if required, especially in regard to any allegations that fall outside the jurisdiction of the Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (16:00): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator ROBERTS: This is just an old story, and the media are trying to get some traction and make some money off it. Gamblers can come in, clearing hurdles along the way that are legally imposed, and the Greens complain. Yet refugees can come in here with various criminal records, and can enter based on a doctor's advice. This is ridiculous.

Senator PATRICK (South Australia) (16:00): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator PATRICK: Centre Alliance will be supporting this motion. I'd just draw people's attention to the fact that there have been allegations made in relation to ministers and members of parliament, and the jurisdiction of the act under which ACLEI conduct their investigations does not allow them to investigate those sorts of issues. So, in voting against this motion—again, it's a statement of fact that there are allegations—you are effectively removing the opportunity to investigate these serious allegations.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that business of the Senate motion No. 3 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:02]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ayes</th>
<th>12</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Noes</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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AYES

Di Natale, R
Griff, S
Lambie, J
Patrick, RL
Faruqi, M
Hanson-Young, SC
McKim, NJ
Rice, J

CHAMBER
A motion was moved by Senator Waters. It asked that general business notice of motion No. 69 standing in her name for today, relating to all Australian-based insurance companies no longer insuring new thermal coal projects, be taken as a formal motion.

The President: Senator Waters, I take this opportunity to remind senators to not editorialise in asking that motions be taken as formal. There has been a bit of that creeping in.

Senator Waters: Thank you, Mr President. I just wanted to make sure that everyone knew what the motion was about.

The President: Is there any objection to that motion being taken as formal? There being none, I call Senator Waters.

Senator Waters: I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the ability to secure finance and insurance is a crucial step in the development of large-scale resources projects, providing protection for developers, government and the community,

(ii) Suncorp last week announced that it would no longer invest in, finance or insure new thermal coal mines and power plants, and will not underwrite any existing thermal coal projects after 2025,

(iii) QBE Insurance announced in March that, from 1 July 2019, it would no longer directly invest in or insure new thermal coal projects and would stop underwriting existing operations from 2030,

(iv) all Australian-based insurance companies have now effectively committed to removing coal from their investment portfolios, and

(v) many major multi-national re-insurance providers, including Allianz, AXA, Swiss Re, Munich Re and Zurich, have also restricted investment in, and underwriting of, thermal coal projects; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to:

(i) pay attention to the financial signals and recognise that thermal coal projects are increasingly unviable, and

(ii) commit to action to progress a rapid and just transition to clean and renewable energy sources for a low-carbon economy.
Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:05): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The coal industry is far from unviable. Coal continues to be the mainstay of many regional economies and a major driver of exports and the Australian economy. Companies are continuing to invest in new coal projects, and coal was the largest total export earner in 2018, valued at $67 billion. The International Energy Agency's World energy outlook 2018 predicts that global coal demand will grow out to 2040 by 1.6 per cent and that Australia will have a growing share of that trade. The coal industry employed 53,300 Australians in 2017-18 and pays more than $5 billion annually in royalties.


The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator GALLAGHER: Labor won't be supporting this motion. It's premised on inaccurate economic assumptions. On that basis, we reject it. Labor appreciates that markets will continue to drive increased investment in renewable technologies.

Senator ROBERTS (Queensland) (16:06): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator ROBERTS: Companies are withdrawing because of aggressive campaigns to smear and vilify investors. They are based on lies—lies about the future prospects of the coal industry and about the future prospects of the intermittent industry, otherwise known as renewables. We also notice that subsidies are distorting the market and destroying the market for coal. We also know that operating rules supporting intermittents unfairly weigh the game to the intermittent energy industry. This is just the Greens' standard modus operandi for destroying a very healthy and essential industry.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion moved by Senator Waters be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:08]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ................. 11
Noes ................. 46
Majority ............. 35

AYES
Di Natale, R
Faruqi, M
Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Rice, J
Siewert, R (teller)
Steele-John, J
Waters, R
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES
Abetz, E
Antic, A
Askew, W
Ayres, T
Bernardi, C
Bilyk, CL
Bragg, A J
Brockman, S
Canavan, MJ
Carr, KJ
Chandler, C
Chisholm, A
Ciccone, R
Colbeck, R
Davey, P
Duniam, J
Fawcett, DJ
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Gallacher, AM
Gallagher, KR
Green, N
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
Hume, J
Kitching, K
Lambie, J
McAllister, J
McDonald, S
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
O'Sullivan, MA
Paterson, J
Pratt, LC
Rennick, G
Roberts, M
Ruston, A
Ryan, SM
Scarr, P
Sheldon, A
Smith, DA
Senator HANSON-YOUNG (South Australia) (16:11): I, and also on behalf of Senator Griff, move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission has released the final report in its Digital Platforms Inquiry, and

(ii) it has emphasised the importance of the public broadcasters and recommended stable and adequate funding "in recognition of their role in addressing the risk of under-provision of public interest journalism that generates broad benefits to society"; and

(b) calls on the Federal Government to:

(i) move from triennial to quinennial funding cycles for the public broadcasters,

(ii) fully restore the cuts to funding since 2014, and

(iii) guarantee a minimum level of funding across the quinennial cycles.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:12): I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave not granted.

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Shadow Minister for Finance, Shadow Minister for the Public Service and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (16:12): by leave—Labor will not be supporting this motion. We note the ACCC’s findings and recommendation in relation to stable and adequate funding for the ABC. We are proposing a range of proposals to strengthen the independence of the ABC, and we will settle our position in accordance with usual caucus processes.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that general business notice of motion No. 70 be agreed to.

[The Senate divided. [16:13]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ..................12
Noes ..................45
Majority .............33

AYES

Di Natale, R
Griff, S
Lambie, J
Patrick, RL
Siewert, R (teller)
Waters, LJ

NOES

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Chisholm, A
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Ferravanti-Wells, C
Gallagher, KR
Hanson, P
Hume, J
McAllister, J
McGrath, J

Faruqi, M
Hanson-Young, SC
McKim, NJ
Rice, J
Steele-John, J
Whish-Wilson, PS

Antic, A
Ayres, T
Bilyk, CL
Brockman, S
Chandler, C
Ciccone, R
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Gallagher, AM
Green, N
Hughes, H
Kitching, K
McDonald, S
McMahon, S

CHAMBER
Question negatived.

Education

Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (16:16): I wish to inform the chamber that Senator Keneally will also sponsor the motion. I seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 66, standing in my name and in the name of Senator Keneally for today, relating to public school funding before asking that it be taken as a formal motion.

Leave granted.

Senator FARUQI: I, and also on behalf of Senator Keneally, move the motion as amended:

Omit subparagraph (1) (a), substitute:

(a) new industries and employment opportunities that can be created in the regions;

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:17): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.

Senator DUNIAM: The Morrison coalition government is providing a record $310 billion of investment in schools, an increase of 62 per cent per student. The Australian government, as the predominate funder of non-government schools, is responsible for providing capital funding for the non-government schools sector. As the predominate funder of government schools, states and territories are responsible for providing capital funding to their schools.

Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (16:17): I seek leave to make a short statement.

Leave not granted.

The PRESIDENT: If I could assist senators, this is a matter that could be discussed offline. It was put to me by numerous people that movers of the motions shouldn't debate them. The question is that general business notice of motion No. 66 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:22]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .................32
Noes .................32
Majority.............0

AYES

Ayres, T
Bilyk, CL
Brown, CL
Carr, KJ
Chisholm, A
Ciccone, R
Di Natale, R
Dodson, P
Farrell, D
Faruqi, M
Gallacher, AM
Gallagher, KR
Green, N
Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC
Kitching, K
Lambie, J
Lines, S
McAllister, J
McKim, NJ
Patrick, RL
Pratt, LC
Rice, J
Sheldon, A
Siewert, R
Smith, M
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Walsh, J
Watt, M
Whish-Wilson, PS
Question negatived.

DOCUMENTS

Climate Change

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (16:24): I move:

That there be laid on the table by the Minister for Foreign Affairs, by no later than 9.30 am on 1 August 2019, all draft and final versions, produced since July 2018, of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's climate change action strategy for the foreign aid program.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the motion by Senator Faruqi be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:26]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes .................31
Noes .................32
Majority .............1

AYES

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Kitching, K
Lines, S
McKim, NJ
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES

Abetz, E
Antic, A
Question negatived.

COMMITTEES

Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas Committee

Appointment

Senator DI NATALE (Victoria—Leader of the Australian Greens) (16:29): I move:

(1) That a select committee, to be known as the Select Committee into Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas, be established to inquire and report on the following matters:

(a) new industries and employment opportunities that can be created in and around thermal coal mining communities and regions:
   (i) as automated mining and transport technologies replace jobs over coming years, and
   (ii) as domestic production and exports decline to keep global warming to levels safe for human life at or below 1.5 degrees;
(b) the number of existing jobs in regional areas in clean energy technology and ecological services and their future significance;
(c) lessons learned from structural adjustments in the automotive, manufacturing and forestry industries and energy privatisation and their impact on labour markets and local economies;
(d) the importance of long-term planning to support the diversification of supply chain industries and local economies;
(e) measures to guide the transition into new industries and employment, including:
   (i) community infrastructure to attract investment and job creation,
   (ii) the need for a public authority to manage the transition,
   (iii) meaningful community consultation to guide the transition, and
   (iv) the role of vocational education providers, including TAFE, in enabling reskilling and retraining;
(f) the use of renewable resources in Northern Australia to build a clean energy export industry to export into Asia; and
(g) any related matters.

(2) That the committee present its final report on or before 4 December 2019.

(3) That the committee consist of 5 senators as follows:

(a) 2 nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate;
(b) 2 nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate; and
(c) 1 nominated the Leader of the Australian Greens.

(4) That:

(a) participating members may be appointed to the committee on the nomination of the Leader of the Government in the Senate, the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate or any minority party or independent senator; and

(b)
(b) participating members may participate in hearings of evidence and deliberations of the committee, and have all the rights of members of the committee, but may not vote on any questions before the committee.

(5) If a member of the committee is unable to attend a meeting of the committee, that member may in writing to the chair of the committee appoint a participating member to act as a substitute member of the committee at that meeting, and if the member is incapacitated or unavailable, a letter to the chair of a committee appointing a participating member to act as a substitute member of the committee may be signed on behalf of the member by the leader or whip of the party or group on whose nomination the member was appointed to the committee.

(6) That the committee may proceed to the dispatch of business notwithstanding that not all members have been duly nominated and appointed and notwithstanding any vacancy.

(7) That the committee elect as chair the member nominated by the Leader of the Australian Greens and as deputy chair a member nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate.

(8) That the deputy chair shall act as chair when the chair is absent from a meeting of the committee or the position of chair is temporarily vacant.

(9) That the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, may appoint another member of the committee to act as chair during the temporary absence of both the chair and deputy chair at a meeting of the committee.

(10) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee.

(11) That, in the event of an equally divided vote, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.

(12) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members, and to refer to any such subcommittee any of the matters which the committee is empowered to examine.

(13) That the committee and any subcommittee have power to send for and examine persons and documents, to move from place to place, to sit in public or in private, notwithstanding any prorogation of the Parliament or dissolution of the House of Representatives, and have leave to report from time to time its proceedings, the evidence taken and such interim recommendations as it may deem fit.

(14) That the committee be provided with all necessary staff, facilities and resources and be empowered to appoint persons with specialist knowledge for the purposes of the committee with the approval of the President.

(15) That the committee be empowered to print from day to day such documents and evidence as may be ordered by it, and a daily Hansard be published of such proceedings as take place in public.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:29): by leave—I move:

Omit subparagraph (1) (a), substitute:

(a) new industries and employment opportunities that can be created in the regions;

The PRESIDENT: The question is that the amendment moved by Senator Duniam be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

The PRESIDENT: The question now is that the amended motion be agreed to.

Question agreed to.

MOTIONS

ParentsNext Program

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (16:30): by leave—I move:

That the Senate—

(a) notes that:

(i) the majority of ParentsNext participants are women,

(ii) the Australian Human Rights Commission has stated that ParentsNext is not compatible with human rights, and

(iii) despite recommendations in the report of the Community Affairs References Committee inquiry into ParentsNext (the Senate inquiry), some participants are still being misled into believing that privacy waivers are compulsory, and pressured into signing them or risk loss of their income;

(b) recognises that the overwhelming evidence presented to the Senate inquiry into the program recommended that ParentsNext not continue in its current form; and

(c) calls on the Federal Government to urgently sanction providers who are pressuring program participants into signing privacy waivers, and implement the recommendations of the Senate inquiry.

Senator DUNIAM (Tasmania—Assistant Minister for Forestry and Fisheries and Assistant Minister for Regional Tourism) (16:30): I seek leave to make a short statement.

The PRESIDENT: Leave is granted for one minute.
**Senator DUNIAM:** The ParentsNext program helps parents plan and prepare for employment before their youngest child starts school. The government is committed to this program. The national expansion of ParentsNext has helped more than 93,300 parents to plan and prepare for employment by the time their children turn six. Since then over 25,000 parents commenced education, 15,200 parents commenced employment and over 1,300 parents exited due to stable employment. The ParentsNext 2016-18 evaluation report showed that participating in the trial generally increased parents' attitude to work, wellbeing and their chances of being in study or finding work.

**The PRESIDENT:** The question is that general business notice of motion No. 74 be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:32]

(The President—Senator Ryan)

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<th>Ayes .....................33</th>
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<td>Noes .....................30</td>
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<td>Majority ................3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**AYES**

Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Hanson-Young, SC
Lines, S
McKim, NJ
Pratt, LC
Roberts, M
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS

Bilyk, CL
Chisholm, A
Dhill, Natale R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson, P
Kitching, K
McAllister, J
Patrick, RL
Rice, J
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Sterle, G
Walsh, J
Watt, M

**NOES**

Abetz, E
Askew, W
Birmingham, SJ
Brockman, S
Cash, MC
Colbeck, R
Duniam, J
Fifield, MP
Hume, J
McGrath, J
McMahon, S
Rennick, G
Ruston, A
Scarr, P
Stoker, AJ

Antic, A
Bernardi, C
Bragg, A J
Canavan, MJ
Chandler, C
Davey, P
Fawcett, DJ
Hughes, H
McDonald, S
McKenzie, B
Paterson, J
Reynolds, L
Ryan, SM
Smith, DA (teller)
Van, D

Question agreed to.

**Taxation**

**Senator HANSON** (Queensland) (16:34): I seek leave to amend general business notice of motion No. 71 standing in my name, relating to families and the tax system, relating to income splitting. Leave is granted.

**Senator HANSON:** I move the motion as amended:

That the Senate—

(a) acknowledges that:

(i) the family is the basis of society and, in most cases, the best place to raise children,

(ii) policies that encourage the formation of stable families should be supported,
(iii) the freedom to choose whether a parent can stay at home or pursue work is vital to the formation of stable families, and
(b) calls on the Senate to debate or have a senate inquiry into the benefits of giving married couples the option to prepare and file joint income returns and income splitting.

The PRESIDENT: The question is that general business notice of motion No. 71, as amended by Senator Hanson, be agreed to.

The Senate divided. [16:36]
(The President—Senator Ryan)

Ayes ......................32
Noes ......................32
Majority ...............0

AYES
Ayres, T
Brown, CL
Chisholm, A
Di Natale, R
Farrell, D
Gallacher, AM
Green, N
Hanson-Young, SC
Lambie, J
McAllister, J
Patrick, RL
Rice, J
Siewert, R
Steele-John, J
Walsh, J
Watt, M

Bilyk, CL
Carr, KJ
Ciccone, R
Dodson, P
Faruqi, M
Gallagher, KR
Griff, S
Kitching, K
Lines, S
McKim, NJ
Pratt, LC
Sheldon, A
Smith, M
Urquhart, AE (teller)
Waters, LJ
Whish-Wilson, PS

NOES
Abetz, E
Antic, A
Askew, W
Bernardi, C
Birmingham, SJ
Bragg, A J
Brockman, S
Canavan, MJ
Cash, MC
Chandler, C
Colbeck, R
Davey, P
Duniam, J
Fawcett, DJ
Fifield, MP
Hanson, P
Hughes, H
Hunt, J
McDonald, S
McGrath, J
McKenzie, B
McMahon, S
Paterson, J
Rennick, G
Reynolds, L
Roberts, M
Ruston, A
Ryan, SM
Scarr, P
Smith, DA (teller)
Stoker, AJ
Van, D

PAIRS
Keneally, KK
McCarthy, M
O'Neill, D
Polley, H
Sterle, G
Wong, P

Seselja, Z
Sinodinos, A
Fierravanti-Wells, C
Payne, MA
O'Sullivan, MA
Cormann, M

Question negatived.

COMMITTEES
Community Affairs References Committee

Reference
Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (16:41): I move:
That the following matter be referred to the Community Affairs References Committee for inquiry and report by 4 December 2019:

Centrelink's compliance program, with specific reference to:
(a) the ongoing impact of the Federal Government's automated debt collection processes upon current and past income support recipients;
(b) data-matching techniques used by Centrelink, including limitations and uncertainties of data-matching techniques and error-handling processes;
(c) the handling of under-payment errors, including the number of payments identified and made through data-matching following an under-payment error;
(d) the use of real-time wages data and other techniques to prevent overpayment;
(e) the capacity and adequacy of Centrelink and the Department of Human Services to deliver the program, including the use of contract staff and the impact of staff performance targets on the program;
(f) the error rates in the issuing of initial letters and debt notices, the causes of these errors and what steps are routinely taken when errors are identified;
(g) the procedures that have been put in place to prevent future errors;
(h) the number of initial letters and debt notices sent out and the number of debts that have been recovered;
(i) the review process and appeals process for debt notices, including the number of reviews and appeals undertaken;
(j) the use and legality of the debt collection processes used by Centrelink and the Department of Human Services;
(k) the use of debt collectors in the compliance program; and
(l) the cost of the compliance program to date, including the projected and actual amount raised from the program.

Question agreed to.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Newstart and Youth Allowance

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Carol Brown) (16:42): A letter has been received from Senator Siewert:

Pursuant to standing order 75, I propose that the following matter of public importance be submitted to the Senate for discussion:

That Newstart is no longer a transition payment and people receiving Newstart and Youth Allowance are living in poverty.

Is the proposal supported?

More than the number of senators required by the standing orders having risen in their places—

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (16:43): This motion is focused on the complete furphy that the government still runs about Newstart and Youth Allowance, and that is that they are transition payments, that people go on them and off them and then move into work. I wish life were, in fact, like that, like it was previously when people could easily find work and were only on unemployment benefits for a relatively short period of time—perhaps a matter of weeks; up to six weeks. That simply is not the fact in 2019. In fact, it wasn't the fact in 2012 or in the mid-noughties when the value of Newstart started decreasing compared to payments like the age pension and when people started getting stuck on Newstart for longer and longer and longer. Let's look at how long people stay on it. The latest information from the Department of Social Services shows that people spend, on average, 156 weeks on Newstart. That's right: three years. Some people are stuck on it for a lot longer, and I'll go into that detail very shortly.

It's clearly not a transition payment. It is clear that people are living in poverty when they're living on Newstart. The data shows us that, out of the 722,923 recipients of Newstart, 128,139 people were on Newstart for one to two years; 200,196 people were on Newstart for two to five years; 125,408 were on Newstart for between five and 10 years; and 27,756 people were on Newstart for over 10 years. It is very clear that Newstart is no longer a transition payment. For thousands of Australians, being on Newstart and youth allowance is unfortunately a lasting reality.

If only the argument that people should get a job were true. The latest statistics said there were only 159,000 jobs available compared to 722,923 people who are looking for work. There is clearly a great imbalance between the number of people looking for work and the actual jobs available. When you look at the evidence, you can see that poverty in and of itself is in fact a barrier to finding a job.

Our employment services are failing to assist people adequately. It's costing us, as in fact was mentioned by the government yesterday, nearly $7 billion. Those services are not doing the job properly, that was also established through the jobactive inquiry that reported late last year. It showed that the jobactive services were not doing the
job, that people are only getting parts of those services, that they're not getting adequate support and that they're not getting support that meets their needs. Thanks to the changes in the eligibility process, many of the people who are on Newstart have a partial disability. Through welfare to work, people were transferred off the disability support pension onto Newstart. Those people with the partial capacity to work (a) are not getting properly supported through the jobactive system and (b) are also getting stuck on Newstart for a long time.

Newstart can't be a transition payment when there aren't enough jobs. Many people are therefore condemned to long-term unemployment. Data released by Minister Cash shows that nearly four in five jobactive participants have had their payments suspended in the last 12 months. So people are not only on particularly poor payments but also now more at risk of losing those payments by having them suspended through the new targeted compliance program, or, in fact, having them cancelled.

Anybody who thinks that people are living on Newstart is so badly out of touch with reality because trying to live on just over $277 a week is no picnic—I believe you. Last night I read out the accounts of people stuck on the cashless debit card. On Monday night, I read out into the chamber the experiences that people had sent to me about life on Newstart. There was a gentleman, aged 59, living with his two dogs in a tent because that's all he could afford. The latest Anglicare survey of housing affordability showed no affordable housing—one—in any of our major cities around this country.

Can the government please stop running the argument that this is a transition payment and that people just want to be stuck on Newstart. They don't. I've never heard from one person on Newstart who thinks it's fantastic to be stuck on Newstart and they really want to stay there. What I have heard from people is that they are struggling to make ends meet, even to be able to buy second-hand clothes in order to be able to dress appropriately, for example, for an interview; and to be able to feed their kids.

The latest data, just the other day, from ACOS showed how many people are skipping food, skipping meals, and that parents in particular do that in order to feed their children, as of course you would. If you are low on resources and you have a choice between feeding your children and feeding yourself, of course you are going to feed your children—although children are also going without. I've had people send me accounts of their experiences, telling me about how they didn't send their child to school that day because they couldn't send them with lunch. People also send me accounts of how bad they feel when their child can't go to a birthday party because they can't afford a present for their child to take to the birthday party. And they don't have birthday parties for their children, because they simply can't afford it.

Yesterday, the latest Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey, commonly called the HILDA Survey, was released. The survey found that the proportion of people living below the poverty line increased from 9.6 per cent to 10.4 per cent in 2017. The poverty line in Australia is around $460 a week for a single person with no children. But Newstart is just $277.85 a week, which falls far—significantly so—below the poverty line.

In the minute and a half before I finish speaking, I'd also like to remind people that Newstart has not been increased—a real increase—for 25 years. It has simply not kept up properly with the cost of living, particularly the cost of living when you are on a low income, and the goods that you need to buy. If we look at the replacement rates for unemployment payments, Newstart is the second lowest unemployment payment in the OECD. The government also runs the argument, 'Oh, it's not so bad, because you get extra supplements.' I really hope that the people who are on Newstart who get an extra 65c a day under the energy supplement, which is the majority of the supplements that they receive, spend their 65c wisely! I don't think that even buys you a stamp in any form in this country anymore. As for the people who receive rent assistance—the majority of people on Newstart don't get rent assistance—remember that statistic I gave you about the lack of affordable housing? The money they get for rent assistance goes nowhere near what you need to find an affordable property and a place to live. Newstart is too low. It is a barrier to employment. It is unfair that this country is not raising Newstart. (Time expired)

Senator STOKER (Queensland) (16:53): I rise to speak on this matter of public importance. The theme is that 'Newstart is no longer a transition payment and so forth. But my first question is, through you, Madam Acting Deputy President Brown: when did the Greens give up on the idea that people should have a job? When did they say, 'It's too hard to find jobs for young people, people in remote communities and older people, so, instead of doing what we must to help you find a job, let's just bump up Newstart and stay on benefits indefinitely? And we the Greens will no longer have to worry about our job-destroying impact on the Australian economy and, in particular, the Queensland economy.' When did they decide it was no longer worth fighting for more jobs?

I was so interested in this that I did a little bit of googling, as people do. I was trying to find out if the Greens have ever had a single policy that encouraged job creation. Well, yes, they do. They've got a policy about jobs. It
may not be about job creation, but it is a policy about jobs, and it is this: to stop using coal for energy and to stop digging it out of the ground and to end all of the jobs associated with it.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Carol Brown): Senator Gallacher on a point of order?

Senator Gallacher: Senator Stoker is well aware of standing order 187 that senators should not read speeches in the chamber, and I ask her to conduct a bit of debate rather than reading a prepared ideological speech.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: As the Senate knows, many people use copious amounts of notes—

Senator Reynolds: Including Senator Gallacher!

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I don't need any help—when giving their contributions. I call on Senator Stoker.

Senator STOKER: Gosh, if that's his definition of reliance on notes, I'd hate to see what the alternative looks like.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Please resume, Senator Stoker.

Senator STOKER: But their jobs policy is to just end all jobs arising for the mining sector, and what a jobs policy that would be. They're also happy with massively subsidising—of course using taxpayers' money—everything to do with renewable energy, except of course wind farms, which they are no longer into; they've had a bit of a rethink on whether or not that's something they still value. Never mind that the long and the short of the Greens policy is the end of jobs for most Australians, and never mind that they have walked away from wind power and their enthusiasm for it, because it's pretty ugly and they're concerned it's a threat to birdlife. Maybe they're not so keen on renewables after all and so their only policy is a shutdown.

But, even if the Greens have given up on jobs, we have not. The Prime Minister has said—and I agree—that the very best form of welfare is a job. And that's not just because it provides a person with an income, although that is really important. It provides the individual with the dignity of self-sufficiency. It gives a person somewhere to go, a chance to do something—purpose and accomplishment. It gives them an ambition to achieve, to do their very best, and that's why I'm so very pleased to share some of the many things that the government is doing to ensure that everybody who wants a job can get one.

Let's start with school leavers. The Transition to Work support program is a great place to start. It supports people who are aged 15 to 21 to help them to enter the workforce or finish their education. They often receive pre-employment support to improve their work readiness, and that can include apprenticeships and traineeships or further education. The Youth Jobs PaTH Prepare Trial Hire program helps employers to find and recruit the young person that's right for their business

Senator O'Neill: It's a sign of exploitation and underpayment.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: Senator O'Neill.

Senator STOKER: And employers can receive a wage subsidy of up to $10,000, as a part of this scheme, to incentivise giving people who need a go that very first chance. Youth Jobs PaTH also prepares young people who are aged 15 to 24 with the right skills—the soft skills that are really important to getting a go at work. They can sometimes be simple but important things, like learning how to present yourself right, how to communicate properly in the workplace and how to work as a team. We can't always take for granted that those are things that people will come to adulthood knowing, and it's great that there are ways to make sure people have the skills they need to be work ready. And, recognising that there are some places where there are far too few jobs—for example in outback Queensland, where the youth unemployment rate is about 24 per cent—there is relocation assistance of about $9,000 to help people to move to where the work is. While I don't want to see people leave our regions, it is wonderful that there is facilitation of work for those who really want and need it.

I know that Work for the Dole isn't a favourite of the senators opposite, but it has a real purpose. All skills are good skills, and things like being on time, learning to work with other people and some job experience, even if it's not necessarily a person's first preference, are meaningful and can give the experience and confidence needed to be able to apply for a job and to offer oneself as a valuable employee to others.

There are the Harvest Labour Services and the National Harvest Labour Information Service to help connect workers with employers in harvesting areas across Australia. For years fruitgrowers have bemoaned the lack of workers and they've relied on backpackers to help in the picking seasons. But these are jobs that Australians can be doing. Indeed, when I talk to farmers across this country they would love to be able to hire young Australians to be able to take on these jobs. It would be a wonderful thing if more Australians were willing to come out to the regions and get into this important work.
The good thing about these schemes is that access isn't limited to people who are receiving income support payments, although it is wonderful that it is also available to them. The seasonal work incentives trial offers financial incentives to encourage jobseekers to take up short-term seasonal work opportunities in the horticultural industry by providing them with an opportunity to earn more income without necessarily affecting their income support payment.

Our $525 million Delivering Skills for Today and Tomorrow program will create up to 80,000 apprenticeships in areas of skills shortages. It forms a part of the $3 billion invested in the vocational education sector in the 2018-19 financial year.

Just this month, the additional identified skills shortage payment became available to eligible apprentices, and their employers, commencing in 10 occupations that are currently experiencing national skill shortages. This will help apprentices to get equipped for work.

The other hot point we face in employment is older workers. It's a little bit sad, really, because these people have so much input and guidance they're able to share with others. I really have valued the input and guidance I have received from other older workers throughout my career. They are the ones who often have the corporate knowledge and the 'been there, done that, got the T-shirt' kind of that attitude that can be of so much help to younger people in the workplace. They've often have made the mistakes and they know how to go about avoiding making them again in the future. It's often wise advice to take.

Employers who don't hire a person due to their age are, in my opinion, missing out on some of best workers there area in the market. You can teach anyone computer skills but you just can't substitute experience. That's why we created the restart wage subsidy, an incentive of up to $10,000 to employ eligible jobseekers who are over the age of 50. Then there's the Career Transition Assistance Program for people who are aged 45-plus. This is help for older people who still want to work to get their computer skills up to speed and to help them with their resumes and with applying for jobs.

There are wage subsidies to help encourage employers to hire eligible participants in ongoing jobs, by contributing to the initial cost of hiring a new employee. Wage subsidies can help to build a business and give employers great flexibility in their hiring options.

Up to $10,000 is available for new employees who are aged between 15 and 24 years who are Indigenous or who are over the age of 50. And up to $6,500 is available for new employees who are aged 25 to 29 who are parents or registered with an employment services provider for over 12 months.

You can see, I have not given up on jobs even if some in the Greens have. The coalition has created 1.3 million jobs in the private sector since coming to office in 2013 and it will not back off in creating more. Australia's welfare system is comprehensive and targeted. Newstart, as tough as it is, is a safety net. The government doesn't pay the welfare bill, the taxpayer does, but we are always on the side of Australian jobseekers.

Debate interrupted.

**FIRST SPEECH**

The PRESIDENT (17:03): Order! Before I call Senator Sheldon, I remind honourable senators that this is his first speech; therefore, I ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

Senator SHELDON (New South Wales) (17:03): I acknowledge the traditional owners of this place and pay my respects to elders, past, present and emerging. I'm so proud to be in the Ngunnawal country in the parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, a House for all people. And I pledge to progress the agenda of the Uluru Statement from the Heart, to recognise First Nations people in our Constitution.

I start by thanking those responsible for me being here—first and foremost, my family. My compassionate and progressive parents, Neil and Gwen. They were both born in marriages of mixed religion in the 1920s, quite the scandal of the day. They later raised my brothers and sisters in the Catholic faith, as I raised my own children, Liam and Lily—who are here today. All four generations have interpreted religion in their own way, and have their own relationship with faith, both religious and not. But our guiding principle was perhaps best expressed by the American Protestant, Charles Monroe Sheldon—would you believe, a great, great uncle of mine. In the book *In His Steps*, one of the most read books about faith in human history, he asked and answered the question: what would Jesus do? It's a simple question to get us all, regardless of our beliefs, thinking about the ethical and moral implications of what we do in life, and the consequences of those actions.

I reference this book because my parents shared this philosophy. They lived a life of service. They did this whilst raising six children, any of whom, not doubt—of course, not me!—caused them to question their faith from time to time. Dad was an industrial chemist, born in Lewisham, and mum was a nurse, born in Mudgee and trained at Bathurst Hospital. They were committed Labor people and fierce anticommunists, or 'groupers', as

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antireformists were called at that time. Yet they believed so deeply in democracy that they campaigned in the 1950s against outlawing the very communism they despised.

In 1972, Dad was asked by Senator Arthur Gietzelt, the legendary Labor Minister for Veterans' Affairs, to run as a Labor candidate for Cook, the seat now held by the Prime Minister. They are both Sharkies tragic, but I add that that's probably where the similarities stop. Dad declined the chance to be an MP, and it was a time when mum, as a woman, would have never even be considered, and that's a shame. What it did mean, however, was that the Sheldon household was one of fiery and spirited debate. Such was the vigour, Mr President, that we could have used your services and standing orders. On the winning side were my siblings, Cath, Diane, John, Lynne and Phil. On the other side was a young Tony. Standing here today, as a senator in the parliament of Australia, with my family in the gallery, the temptation to re-litigate those lost battles under the veil of parliamentary privilege is absolutely overwhelming, but I will resist. I am forever grateful to my parents and siblings. I thank them for their love, counsel and friendship.

I joined the ALP at the age of 14. The fact that one wasn't allowed to join until the age of 15 didn't seem especially important, particularly when your dad was a returning officer! From this day on, the ALP, and the trade union movement, would become a second family. In this extended family, I've met and worked with the very best. I speak of the National Secretary of the Transport Workers Union, the mighty Michael Kaine. Michael's a formidable leader and the best friend and best lieutenant a person could have. He has a stellar team, including: Nick McIntosh and Emily McMillan; New South Wales is led by Richard Olsen and his deputy Mick Pieri; and across the country there are John Berger, Tim Dawson, Ian Smith and Peter Biagini. They are able, committed and decent people, one and all.

I want to pay special tribute to a man who was a special friend and mentor, former senator Steve Hutchins. When ex-Labor parliamentarian Michael Lee gave the eulogy at Steve's funeral, he quoted from Kim Beazley: 'The industrial movement is critical for a democracy. Ordinary Australians can speak through it on the needs of everyday Australians in a debate dominated by privilege and elites. Grounded by this, Steve took the voices of working people into a parliamentary career of real substance and achievement.' I recall in 1994 Steve called me and my workmate Wayne Forno to his office. He was as fired up as you could be, rallying against the low wages of our members and the greed of some of the transport industry's major clients. He asked this question: 'What good are we if we allow this to continue?' He then told us that they needed a 15 per cent wage increase over two years. Privately, Wayne and I thought Steve was being a little bit optimistic. Truth be told, we may have used different and much more exotic language at the time, given the scale of the ask, but we fell in behind the leader, as loyal people do. What happened next?

This great man, with no hope of success, succeeded, bringing all the benefits it generated for hundreds of thousands of both union and non-union transport workers' families. Millions of dollars were then spent generating and sustaining thousands of jobs. If all of Steve's leadership could be condensed into a sentence, it would be this: never limit yourself beliefs, always upsize your dreams and then fight like hell to achieve them. Thank you, Steve. Rest well, comrade. I welcome to the Senate Natalie, Xavier and Linda, Steve's family, here today. My friends, your dad, brother and husband will always be one of the greats.

In the movement, of course, there are other greats as well. Wonderful men and women like Gerard Hayes, Graeme Kelly, Alex Glayson and Bob Nandar, Daniel Walton and Bernie Smith, Gerard Dwyer and Barbara Neebald, Michael Crosby—with a tie—Mich-Elle Myers, Arthur Roriss, Nadine Flood and Natalie Lang, Martin Cartwright and Steve Purvenus, David Smith, Robert Potter, Shane Murphy, Michael O'Connor and Paddy Crumlin, of course. I also offer a sincere thank you to the secretary of Unions NSW, Mark Morey. Mark is doing an outstanding job for all affiliates and their communities in New South Wales, aided by his deputies, Thomas and Vanessa.

To another outstanding union leader, Sally McManus, I say this: leadership is about having the courage of your convictions. By that definition, Sally McManus is pure leadership. Good on you, Sally and Michele and the team at the ACTU, including my good, thoughtful and determined friend Scott Connolly. I'm here with the intention to change the rules, as is our shared credo.

In New South Wales, I also thank and recognise Kaila Murnain, alongside her deputies Pat and George. Kaila has reformed the culture of New South Wales ALP head office in a way which was sorely needed. I thank Daniel Mookie, a true and loyal friend of great integrity, as well as Adam Searle and Mark Buttigieg, who fight every day in the New South Wales parliament for working people. Thank you for joining me today.

I thank former leader Bill Shorten, a man who has given his life to working people. Bill was right to call out the influence of Clive Palmer, a person who won't pay his workers' wages yet claims a right to the moral high ground. I also enthusiastically endorse the new leader of the parliamentary Labor Party, Anthony Albanese. There is no-
one more authentic than Albo. Someone remarked to me the other day that they were surprised to see the Leader of the Opposition on television wearing a Rabbitohs jersey. I responded by saying I'm truly surprised any time I see him in a suit and tie. I suspect Albo might say the same thing about me.

I also acknowledge all of my caucus colleagues, both in the House and in the Senate led by Penny Wong and Kristina Keneally. And I welcome my fellow new ALP senators, Tim Ayres, Marielle Smith, Raff Ciccone and Nita Green. I also acknowledge some splendid friends from the other side of politics: Duncan Gay, the former roads minister in New South Wales, and Mike Gallacher, the former minister for police in New South Wales. They are decent people who made negotiations and discussions robust but always rewarding.

On this note, again I reference Steve Hutchins's magnificent 15 per cent pay rise victory. I also recognise Lindsay Fox. Lindsay has always been direct, honest, frank and true to his word. With Lindsay it's always been an interest based negotiation to get a fair outcome for all parties. The sort of negotiations I have also enjoyed with the likes of the unique Michael Byrne from Toll—an old friend—Paul Ryan, Peter Anderson, Peter Fox and Hugh McMaster, Laurie de Peace, Maurice Boroni, John Begetti, and Terry and Arthur Tzaneros, two wonderful people, employers who also understand that honest and genuine disagreement can yield good results. These are the captains of industry who distinguish themselves from a small minority of others. I refer to the Leigh Cliffords of the world, people who are not in control of their ideology and who would and have grounded an airline for pride. Enough said about these types. I will have plenty of opportunities in the next six years.

I have entered parliament with 42 years in the workforce. Every battle scar and every victory are lessons I carry with me to this very moment. I've been a garbo and a bar attendant. My first job was as a 16-year-old amusement park worker at the Punchbowl fair. For the record and as a rejection of the claim of my children, I stress that I was not the amusement! I was the Ferris wheel operator, working unpaid for six weeks on the promise of more work, which never arrived—an early lesson never forgotten.

Later I stood with decent and hardworking brewery workers in the first-ever sit-in in Castlemaine brewery against unfair and uneven wage increases. I stood up against the likes the infamous Bellino brothers, of Fitzgerald inquiry fame, who ran illegal nightclubs in Brisbane, grossly underpaying their workforce. The inquiry was a response to a series of articles about high-level police corruption, reported by Phil Dickie and then immortalised in the Four Corners report by Chris Masters in 1987. I've led what the local paper called the 'petticoat picket' at Cedar Lake on the Gold Coast, against sexual harassment, discrimination, victimisation, underpayments and bullying, where men and women were sacked because, they were told, they were 'too old' to be a good image for the company.

I've taken calls from truck drivers who were being force-supplied by their employers with drugs to keep them awake in an effort to meet the cost demands of clients—drivers who were told that if they contacted the police or didn't take the drugs they would lose their jobs and worse. I've been to the funerals of those who have paid the ultimate price, comforting loved ones in the depths of unimaginable grief. That is why I vow that I will not rest until this parliament restores safe rates into this country.

I witnessed the collapse of the national airline under a narrow-minded government. I've stood with brave men and women, like Dave Lupton from Ansett—and Dave's with us today—for more than 100 days to win a government- guaranteed redundancy payment. Like many others, I've sat at the witness box at a royal commission, with no prima facie case to answer for anything. That trade union royal commission will be forever remembered as a wretched abuse of executive power, where the presumption of innocence became a presumption of guilt. And all the while the government of the day evaded, protected and denied the misdeeds of a banking sector which was institutionally, morally and culturally corrupt, demonstrating the real aim, which is this government's obsessive culture war on working people and their representatives. My four hours in the witness box—I won't go so far as to say that Justice Heydon and I became friends; that would obviously be a bit much—but by the end, the commission understood that the Transport Workers' Union was a collective of terrific people bonded by decency, integrity and a determination to support our members. I add that these were also the values missing in the executive ranks of the banking sector.

Friends, beyond our shores I've been honoured to lead negotiations for international safe rates agreements and road safety under the auspices of the International Labour Organization, including in the Mekong Delta and South Korea. I take this opportunity to advise the Senate that as of July this year South Korea has achieved safe rates.

I've observed with a quiet but growing rage as migrant workers without the rights of Australian citizens have their labour exploited. This undercuts the wages of local labour as well, a crazy double whammy benefitting very few.

I've watched with concern as both Labor and coalition parties tore down multiple prime ministers, with the unintended consequences of emptying the reservoir of goodwill that our people have towards their democracy.
I'm in this place to speak up for dignity, good work and rewarding jobs, for decent wages and safe conditions, for long-term employment that allows you to get a mortgage and provide for your family with certainty—the pathway to economic freedom. We must reject aggressive, value-neutral supply chains monopolising and using technology as a barbed wire chain around the throats of business and workers down the line.

I would also like to reference perhaps the greatest achievement of my life, solely because it was utterly unique in Australian political life. I have managed to receive a written apology from Senator Eric Abetz. Sure, Eric, the apology was in order to head off defamation proceedings. But, with Eric, one takes what one can get. I wish you could've gone to court, Senator. My mortgage could've used the relief. But, in fairness, I also appreciate the frank conversations I've had with Eric and other conservative workplace ministers over the years.

What all these experiences and observations mean is that I entered parliament with broad perspectives. In my inaugural address, I'd like to share three of these.

The first perspective is about what government's role should be in designing and regulating markets. Simply put, governments and parliaments must start leading with effective market design and regulation, rather than chasing with ineffective versions of neither. There are now modern, international goliaths in the information age, just as there were international behemoths in the first industrial and global trade ages. I speak of Uber, Amazon, Facebook, Google and their like—unaccountable titans who seek to have the market operate in their self-interest. The regulation of these global tech giants by democratically elected leaders is failing in our economy and our democracy. Governments need to catch up and get out in front of deregulating these disrupters, and my pledge in this place is that I will do everything in my power to thoughtfully and unapologetically disrupt the disrupters.

We must tackle the tax relationship. We need to hold these global companies economically accountable so they can contribute their fair share of tax, like France is doing with its new three per cent digital services tax on revenue generated in its territory. France, like India, has had the courage to implement this simple, transparent tax—one which tackles head on the scourge of multinational tax avoidance. The OECD and a number of European countries are looking at this and other tax models, and it's time for Australia to do the same. I say that, as responsible legislators, we cannot wait for other countries to act. We cannot stand by and watch while our tax base is eroded and, with it, our ability to provide health, education and other critical infrastructure for our citizens.

We must better define the regulatory relationship with these companies. We need real laws, not toothless voluntary codes, to ensure that all workers, consumers and small businesses have their rights, including data rights, protected and have a fair go in this emerging information economy. In saying this, I recognise all the good brought about by innovation, and I do welcome it. But regulating the transaction cost is our job, so let's get to it.

Second, I have a perspective about the question this Senate must consider if we are to avoid the future of work being less utopia and more dystopia. I have watched the transport industry become ground zero for the impacts of a changing global economy and the massive technology driven disruption of firms like Uber, Foodora and Deliveroo. Make no mistake, this disruption is coming to every corner of our economy. The basic rights of working people are under threat from the gig economy, tech platforms, artificial intelligence and worker surveillance systems. Don't believe the spin. This is not a sharing economy. It's an on-demand economy, and it's incumbent on us to enforce and create rights for these workers. That includes the right to fair pay and superannuation. While the coalition nurtures wreckers of Australian world-leading superannuation, I believe we should extend superannuation to every worker in Australia, including those in the emerging gig economy.

As the recent Select Committee on the Future of Work and Workers found, Australia has no coordinated approach to managing the future of work in Australia. I regard this fact alone as a very bright red-light risk for Australia. Ultimately, how can there be prosperity if we enter a world of permanently high unemployment and permanently higher underemployment?

I also have a perspective on the dangers our body politic faces if a lack of political engagement further deepens the trust deficit. Whether it be the banks, the Catholic church, the parliament or the tax office—indeed, even the national cricket team lost the faith of our people for a period of time. What I see is an alarming loss of trust in institutions, some fraying of our social cohesion, and a growing sense that many institutions are more self-serving than selfless. In 2019, the Lowy Institute Poll found that 30 per cent of 18- to 29-year-olds said that, in some circumstances, a non-democratic government can be preferable. That's one in three young people. Polling carried out by the Australian Museum of Democracy said that, if current trends continue, Australians' trust in their politicians and political institutions will drop to less than 10 per cent by 2025. Putting this in a commercial sense, a business with so little trust from consumers will simply go out of business. That cannot be the fate of our democracy.

Our parliamentarians generally have a lot of common ground, and it's a tragedy that the Australian public is not more aware of it. We need a parliamentary office to communicate the good bipartisan work that gets done here. I
believe in plain speaking; in evidence-based policy; in less politics and more policy; and in governments and parliaments who lead and not follow—all underpinned by a core belief in the very decency, fairness and compassion my parents taught their children. Whilst I look forward to the ferocious debate, I utterly reject the notion of winning at all costs, because I believe in my duty to the people of New South Wales and of Australia.

I wish to conclude with the final but most important acknowledgement: I want to thank all of the members of the Transport Workers’ Union and every working person who has supported me for so many years. I say to every transport worker in Australia: because you are the men and women who carry Australia, you deserve the respect of all Australians. Some of you are no doubt listening on parliamentary radio as you drive a long haul on the Pacific, Sturt, Bruce or Eyre highways; some working late shifts at the airport, or sitting in the tearoom; and others just getting home, exhausted, to their waiting families. I want to say to these great men and women: it has been my honour to serve you. I’m here because of you, and, now more than ever, in this place I am your servant. To those families who have lost loved ones on the altar of profit, driven by greed or misused technology, or allowed by failed regulation: I remember every single one of you.

I’m honoured to be in this wonderful chamber, and determined to do good and to grasp the moment with everything I have. Thank you, senators; thank you, friends; thank you, family; and thank you, good President.

FIRST SPEECH

The PRESIDENT (17:33): Order! Before I call Senator Green, I remind honourable senators that this is her first speech; therefore, I ask that the usual courtesies be extended to her.

Senator GREEN (Queensland) (17:33): The town of Yarrabah is a short drive from my home in Cairns. It is home to the Gunggandji people, a community of artists, activists, teachers and leaders. It is the place where elders, including Aunty Ruth and Uncle Alf, started to organise a campaign that built toward the 1967 referendum. They understood that the necessary ingredients for change were present in the Australian community and that they could, if they persisted, achieve reform and amend the constitution. In acknowledging the traditional owners of the land we meet on today and the traditional owners of the land I live on in Far North Queensland, I want to pay tribute to Yarrabah, its elders and the activists who refused to take no for an answer. They are ready to lead again and deliver a voice to parliament. I extend to them my support and solidarity.

Mr President, tonight I’m going talk to you about some of the incredible people who inspired me to become a Queensland senator. I was encouraged to run for public office by people who stand up for what they believe in, who speak up on behalf of others, those who encourage us to hope for the future and insist on making change. These are not the so-called quiet Australians. In fact, many of them are very noisy, and I truly believe that this is an important time to celebrate those in our community who don’t remain silent when they witness injustice.

Firstly, though, I want to say thank you to each and every Queenslander who I am very honoured to represent. After being elected I made this commitment to Queenslanders: in my role as a senator I will be, above all else, hardworking and incredibly grateful for the opportunity to serve my community. That work starts here and it starts now. I love Queensland and I love Queenslanders, so I feel incredibly lucky to be in this position at this time. I am even luckier to call Far North Queensland home.

Queensland is rich in resources and opportunities. Our vast state consists of many communities, all with their own unique identity. And nothing unites us more than our dislike of people down south trying to tell us what to do and how to live.

A government senator interjecting—

Senator GREEN: Exactly! Brisbane. When I leave this place I want to be able to say that Queensland has more apprentices and job opportunities for young people; has better schools, hospitals and aged-care facilities; has better roads, ports and major infrastructure; has a booming tourism industry; and is equipped to make the most out of the industries of the future.

I believe that these are things that we can all work on together. We know there needs to be more money spent on big infrastructure and shovels in the ground now, in order to grow regional Queensland. But right now all we’ve got is a lot of promises. Further, the loss of 12,000 apprentices in Queensland means we are facing a skills shortage, which this government wants to address by expanding the skilled visa program. We want these projects built now and we want them built by local workers. In order to grow regional Queensland we also need to have some hard debates. I am ready to take on these debates and win them for Queensland.

Job security for Queenslanders and the dangers of climate change are interlinked. Queenslanders want and deserve secure jobs. On this, let me be clear: whether it is a mine operator in Clermont, a tourism operator in Cairns, a farmer in Innisfail or a Torres Strait Islander on Boigu Island, I will work to ensure that every...
Queenslander has a genuine role in securing the future of the jobs that feed their families and help create the communities that they call home.

The only way to win an outcome that ensures a prosperous and healthy future for our state is to listen to Queenslanders, not talk at them or speak about them in abstract terms. Every regional Queenslander deserves to be treated with respect. Listening to and respecting Queenslanders is what I have been doing, and it is what I will continue to do as their elected representative in this Senate.

Our community is made up of many types of Australians. We've heard a great deal about quiet Australians of late—what they believe; what they want their government to do. We are told they are defined by what they are not. They're not noisy. They don't criticise. And we are told they don't really have time for politics, which I don't think is entirely true. It seems to me a false value is being placed on being not just quiet but passive or disinterested in politics. It's a view that dismisses Australians who are concerned with what goes on here, who are outspoken, who stand up and make change. History has shown us, time and time again, that we should encourage debate and dissent. In fact, it is dangerous not to. Despite the divisive politics around the world, you'll often hear young people talk about the importance of hope and change. During past times of upheaval and uncertainty, others have often spoken about these ideas.

In 1966 Robert F Kennedy spoke at the University of Cape Town to young South Africans hopeful of change. A fragment of that speech was later recited by Ted Kennedy during the eulogy that he delivered for his brother. With his voice breaking, and in spite of the uncertainty of the time, he chose the passages of Kennedy's speech about hope and the ability of one person, and particularly young people, to make great change. Kennedy said:

Few will have the greatness to bend history; but each of us can work to change a small portion of the events, and in the total of all these acts will be written the history of this generation.

It is from numberless diverse acts of courage such as these that the belief that human history is thus shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centers of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance.

When Ted Kennedy delivered those words he was the same age as I am right now. He stood in St Patrick's Cathedral, having just lost two of his brothers, and yet he spoke about hope and insisting on change. Yes, we should respect our quiet Australians, but there will always be a place for people who choose not to remain silent and instead stand up for an ideal to improve the lot of others or strike out against injustice. We also need vocal Australians to inspire us, to lead us and to prepare us for the changes ahead.

The advancement of women's equality and empowerment has been shaped by some very noisy women. I am here today because of the strong noisy women who fought for the right to vote, for equal pay, for equal work and for greater representation in parliament. This includes Senator Claire Moore, who worked tirelessly to give a voice to the voiceless. Now there is a new generation of strong women ready to demand more changes and greater equality. So thank you to all of the strong young women of the Labor Party who inspire me and give me so much strength, especially Jess, Laura, Jo and Alana. I also want to make special mention of two noisy women, Ellie Whitaker and Emily Brogan, who have supported me on every step in this journey.

My mum is also a strong woman, and without her I wouldn't be here today. Despite the disapproval of her parents, my mum married my dad who was 20 years her senior. Mum was a nurse in an operating theatre, and, like most nurses I meet, she is smart and tough and incredibly hard working. Her primary purpose and concern is always the welfare of others.

Dad was charming and intelligent. He worked hard on night shifts. He was a printer at Fairfax. I knew that he had an important job, because he got the news out. He was a big man, and as a kid you could bury your head into his shoulder and feel protected. I loved him very much. But he was also an alcoholic and he suffered from depression. He was cruel when he was sober and he was abusive when he was drunk. He was supposed to protect us, but no-one protected us from him.

When I was three or four years old, my mum left in the middle of the night—me walking along side my brother in a stroller and our bags on our backs. When I asked her why we were walking the long way around the block, she said, 'So daddy doesn't see us.' Leaving, finally, for good, almost 10 years later, was the best decision my mum ever made. We were homeless for the first few nights after we left, because the rental that mum paid for wasn't liveable. Tragically, domestic violence remains one of the biggest drivers of homelessness for Australian women. We finally settled in a small community of town houses occupied by families on minimum-wage jobs, single parents and new migrants. Mum packed shelves at night to make ends meet.
I have no doubt that it was hard for mum to leave. She shouldn’t have had to do it on her own, but, like so many women, she did. For all the struggle that life of a single mother would bring, every day I was so grateful to be safe. It made who I am today—tough, resilient and unwilling to accept that some Australians have to settle for less just because of where they were born or who their parents are.

One in five women in Australia has experienced family violence. Sadly, hospitalisation rates as a result of family violence are on the rise. Family violence is a health crisis and a cultural crisis, and it has to stop. We can't be hopeful or well-meaning anymore; we must demand that it changes.

Mum gave me many gifts throughout my life: a safe home, self-belief and the understanding that tough times don't last forever. She has three rules in life: you have to be home on Christmas Eve, never ride a motorcycle—she's a nurse—and never ever cross a picket line. So, on top of all of the other gifts she gave me, she made me a good trade unionist.

As a young person who always felt that a country as rich as Australia should look after our most vulnerable first, I was naturally drawn to the trade union movement. Being a union member is about making noise, because being in a union makes your voice much louder. The hopes, rights and voices of a single worker are amplified through our collectivism. Unionism is the personification of those tiny ripples of hope Robert F Kennedy spoke about. It is the coming together and the knocking down of the walls of oppression, injustice and greed.

The Queensland Trades and Labour Council worked alongside the elders in Yarrabah in the lead-up to the 1967 referendum because they saw injustice and oppression in the conditions and the discrimination faced by Indigenous communities. As a union lawyer, campaigner and industrial officer, I’ve met many Queenslanders who have been subjected to exploitation, wage theft and workplace safety breaches and have faced discrimination in the workplace. Without union representation and the support and solidarity of their workmates, these workers would have had little to no chance of achieving a fair and just outcome.

This week we have seen a worker killed and others seriously injured in two separate crane accidents in Far North Queensland. We need strong unions in this country because every Australian worker has the right to come home to their family at the end of the day. My union—the Australian Manufacturing Workers Union—has a proud tradition of standing up for what is right. The recent victory for workers at the long-running Esso Longford dispute highlights the strength, tenacity and commitment of the AMWU and its partner unions in fighting for a fair go for Australian workers. I applaud each and every delegate and official from the AMWU and other unions for their dedication to supporting workers. I thank especially Queensland State Secretary, Rohan Webb, and Ann-Marie Allan. I also thank Peter Koutsoukis and Rod Hodgson from Maurice Blackburn Lawyers, who gave me a chance and the opportunity to grow.

I note that Senator Sheldon has been in the party since he was 14 years old. When I was younger I didn’t plan to come to politics, but in 2011 at the national conference the Australian Labor Party inspired me to be part of change. I wasn't a member or a volunteer at the time, but I got to witness the robust debate on the Barr-Wong amendment that led to marriage equality becoming part of the party platform. In speaking to her amendment Senator Wong said something that resonates with me to this day. She said, 'Equality does not diminish the worth of your relationships; it simply recognises the worth of ours.' Meanwhile, the member for Sydney, Tanya Plibersek, reassured teenagers around the country that they were 'just fine'. The now Leader of the Opposition, Anthony Albanese, spoke of Labor's preparedness to examine itself and move forward. Albo articulated how Labor would take up the fight for the elimination of all discrimination—be it based on race, gender or class. When the vote was finalised, the then ALP national president, Senator McAllister, simply said the words, 'I declare the amendment carried.' From that moment onwards, I saw a place for me in the Labor Party because I also believed in fairness and equality. Labor, not only a party of government but in government, held the same view.

Seven years later, as a member of the Labor Party, I took all the hurt and fear that I felt about the same-sex marriage plebiscite and threw myself into campaigning for marriage equality. In my role organising volunteers in Brisbane and throughout Queensland, I had the chance to meet so many wonderful people. They were gay, straight, old and young and all they wanted to do was fight for change. They were the tiny little ripples that created a giant wave of support.

One of those volunteers stands out the most. A few days after voting closed, I organised an event to thank our volunteers. Amongst the rainbow flags and streamers, I spotted a man wearing a Transport Workers' Union t-shirt. I have to admit, he looked a little out of place! He came up to me and said, 'This campaign saved my life.' I knew from the way that he said it that he meant what he said. I hugged him, feeling proud of the work we'd done and relief that we had saved his life. But there was also white, hot anger—anger about the lives that we couldn't save; anger about the number of LGBTI people who commit suicide; anger about all of the people who were forced to live their lives like I did for a long time, unable to be fully and authentically themselves.
In the end, Queensland—my Queensland—voted 60.7 per cent for yes. From Coolangatta to the cape, Queensland said yes to equality and love. I want to acknowledge Rainbow Labor and my friends from the Equality Campaign. I am very proud to know you all. Thank you Joseph, Patrick, Georgia and the rest of the team. And thank you to George Simon, a good ally who told me that he would lie down on a road for any of those people, so I was completely nuts if I didn't take the chance to work with them. I'm so grateful I listened to his advice.

I am very thankful for the work that many in this place did to achieve marriage equality. I acknowledge Senator Dean Smith especially and Senator Wong, Senator Louise Pratt and Senator Janet Rice and the other champions and allies we have in this house. In the end, no single party or politician delivered marriage equality. The victory belonged to many Australians, and I want to acknowledge the LGBTI activists who worked for decades. They spoke out not only when it was unpopular but when it was unthinkable. I want to acknowledge all of the allies who had never fought before but marched with us. They wrapped their arms around us when we needed it the most. Australians showed that, collectively, they can be powerful and vocal and respectful and loving. We demanded change and we got it.

Before I finish, I want to say thank you to my friends and family who travelled here today. A special thank you to my oldest friends, the ones who knew me before politics and still put up with me afterwards, especially Jackie and Jess. Thank you, Ben, for your help, advice and chocolate runs. Thank you to my colleagues in this place new and old, and a special thanks to Senator Murray Watt, who I met at my first campaign meeting. Who would have thought we'd be here now? Thank you for your friendship, humour and advice. Thank you to my wife's family for making me feel so at home. Thank you Vicki and Warren, who couldn't be here tonight, but I know they send their love. Thank you to my mum and my brother, Rohan, for everything you have done for me.

During the recent election campaign, Mum would text me out of the blue and say something along the lines of: 'Are you on the bus today? How is Penny?' At the same time, I discovered I had a strange new Twitter follower. I put two and two together and discovered that my mum had created a Twitter account just to follow what I was doing on the campaign, which made me realise, of course, that I was being a very bad daughter. Mum, I promise to tweet a little less, to call a little more and to make you proud every day.

Finally, to my wife, Lacey: Lacey is funny, sweet and wise. She is the coolest person I know. She's a teacher, a designer and a very good cook. Life with Lacey is always an adventure: she's either taking you on or she is happy to come along on yours. Our lives have changed in so many ways since we met. I am proud of her, and she is proud of me. Thank you, honey, for your support today and every day and the huge sacrifices that you will make now and into the future. I love you very much.

The elders in Yarrabah, with all of the barriers that stood before them, refused to take no for an answer. The union movement in Cairns stood beside them and fought for change, as they have done now for over 200 years. Sometimes this parliament lags behind the momentum for change that builds in our community. It was true of marriage equality; it is true of constitutional recognition. That's why we need Australians who stand up and speak out. If you are a young Australian and you want to change our country and make it better, you can. Never give up,join your union and don't be afraid to make some noise. Thank you.

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE
Newstart and Youth Allowance

Consideration resumed.

Senator GALLACHER (South Australia) (18:00): I am very happy to continue on this very important matter of public importance. At the outset, I want to comment on the two proceeding contributions. As always, the contribution from Senator Stoker was as dry economically as you can get—there is nothing to see here; there are no problems here; it is all sweetness and roses. Nothing could be further from the truth. Senator Siewert, at least in the short time I've been here, has been consistent on this platform. She has been consistent on the social platform of equity and opportunity for people who find themselves unfortunate enough to be attracting either Newstart or the myriad of other social security payments. She has carried that challenge right throughout the several parliaments that I've been a part of. I don't want her to be on her own in this argument, and I don't think she is on her own in this argument.

When you look at the statistics, in South Australia, as you may well be aware, Mr Acting Deputy President Bernardi, the statistics are simple and clear. There are 65,558 South Australians on Newstart, and we can look at where those people are. We know that Spence has 11,687 people on Newstart, the second-highest number in Australia, with only Lingiari, an electorate I'm sure my colleague Senator Dodson is well familiar with, having a higher number of people on Newstart. If you look at the seat of Grey, 9,382 persons are on Newstart. You can start to dig into this detail, and I'll go through South Australia. In Barker there are 6,804. In Kingston there are
There isn’t a state or territory or, indeed, a federal electorate in Australia that doesn’t have a reasonably large component of people on the Newstart system. We heard from the Hon. Mathias Cormann that it’s a transition payment. But if you dig into that it is not true. There is a growing proportion of people who are on it for over 12 months. They’re on $555-odd a fortnight if they’re a single person. That is impossible. I don’t even think we should be asking ourselves whether you could survive on $40 a day, because clearly 98 per cent of the community would have no hope of meeting their obligations in respect to shelter, food, public transport and the wherewithal for their children at that level. It’s just impossible. In fact, the real question is: what level of support are people getting from family, friends and charities to allow them to subsist on that contribution? And how big is that growing proportion of people who are just falling out of shelter?

They’re living in cardboard boxes on Swanston Street. They’re sheltering in parks. I’m fond of a bit of exercise in the morning and it’s not unusual, when you walk through a park in any city in Australia in the morning, to see people sleeping in it because that is the only place they can go. It may be the only safe haven they’ve got because the value of Newstart will not allow them a roof or shelter. We are not doing enough in this space. I don’t know what the fiscal answer is or whether it’s the suggestion by Senator Siewert and others of a $75 increase. I’m not sure that would make a huge difference, but I am sure of this: the parliament should be looking at the fundamental aspects of this, the geographical spread of this.

Take Lingiari. If you’re at Docker River or Lajamanu or Peppimenarti or Yuendumu, no-one is going to start a business up there tomorrow and offer you a job. That ain’t going to happen. There is limited opportunity for employment; there is limited opportunity for training. These people are routinely thrown off Newstart because they didn’t go to a job interview. Well, you can’t go to a job interview that’s not there! I well remember an estimates hearing with the secretary of Human Services saying how they stop people’s payments and how they transacted this policy. I said, ‘What do you do?’ and they said, ‘We write them a letter to say they haven’t complied, and within 14 days their payment will be stopped.’ I said, ‘That’s fine. The only problem I have is that the last time I was at Yuendumu I never saw any letterboxes, so where do those letters actually go? Do you know that they actually get to a person who is able to read it, comprehend what’s going on and respond or are you just using some governance and due diligence process that turfs people off? Is it that, when they don’t have any money and they’ve starved for a couple of days, they’ll find someone who can interpret for them and you’ll probably get a reaction? Is that what you’re doing?’ The answer was, ‘No, Senator, we’re not doing that.’ The processes and the administration of the system for people who are so far behind the eight ball need to be looked at.

Senator Dodson is correct. We want to know who the beneficiaries are in this system. If an inordinate amount of tax dollars are spent in this area, how much is spent on governance, compliance and due diligence? Are people getting an income out of supplying the Indue card, or whatever the card or the flavour will be? Are people making money out of the administration of a deficient system? I have the very quaint view, I suppose, that perhaps government should look at private equity for some solutions. We can’t keep doing the wrong thing. We can’t keep money out of the administration of a deficient system? I have the very quaint view that that would make a huge difference, but I am sure of this: the parliament should be looking at the fundamental aspects of this, the geographical spread of this.

I am disturbed that, when you go a social worker in a Centrelink office, they will openly and honestly list the things that should be done to enable people to move to proper attendance at job interviews and have a chance of a successful interview. If their teeth are gone or their teeth are not repaired, they can’t open their mouth, they can’t smile or they can’t talk properly, you’re really asking a lot of someone to go to a number of job interviews. If they are suffering some psychosocial disability which is not being treated, it’s going to be very difficult to move those people forward.

A person sticks in my mind. He was on the phone for 40 minutes in the Centrelink office. He took the phone and started banging it on the counter until someone came and interacted with him. The interaction he needed was some assistance for a bus fare to travel to Melbourne for his grandfather’s funeral. The system we have is: ‘Do not speak to a real person. Go to a computer, go to a phone and wait and wait and wait.’ I think the transitional arrangements are such that a lot of people don’t wait; they go away, and they’re counted as victories. The issue still remains. We really do need to do a whole lot better in this space.

I return to South Australia. In the seat of Spence there are 11,687 people who are on Newstart and youth allowance. That is an absolute disaster. That’s almost 10 per cent of the federal electorate. If that’s not an issue that
should challenge every member of parliament, I don't know what is. And each one of those people would have friends and relatives—mothers, fathers, uncles and aunts—so there is a broad community knowledge of this. But the community is doing the right thing; otherwise we would see many more problems.

I think it is incumbent on this chamber and the other chamber to really lift our game in this space and to take a leaf out of some of our new senators' speeches. Why don't we work on what's possible across the chamber? Why are we engaged in political pointscoring on the most vulnerable in the community? I think it's a real tragedy and I'm deeply saddened by the fact that we do seem to pointscore over people who are in dire straits and need a leg-up, not a handout.

Senator FARUQI (New South Wales) (18:10): I rise to speak on the matter of public importance before us today. Newstart is no longer a transition payment, and people receiving Newstart and youth allowance are living in poverty. That is the reality today. We know that Newstart is no longer a transitional payment. We know that 44 per cent of people who are on it are on it for more than two years at a time.

I want to say how proud I am of my Greens colleague Senator Rachel Siewert for her persistent and passionate work to make life better for those who are doing it tough. We know that Newstart, youth allowance and other support allowances are not enough. The single rate of Newstart is a mere $40 a day. Insufficient doesn't even begin to describe it. After paying their rent, Newstart recipients are left with $17 per day. No-one can live on that. Maybe the government senators here can tell me what they should go without—food? Electricity? Medicine? A roof over their head? Maybe you have some brilliant, innovative ideas on how someone forced to live without basic necessities can choose one which is more important than the other.

Our safety net is consistently being eroded, and people on income support are a target for ideological attacks and so-called savings. This is a national shame. You have no right to say, 'The best form of welfare is a job.' This is a line I'm so sick and tired of hearing from the Liberals, and yet we heard it again and again today from Senator Cash and Senator Stoker. It is patronising in the extreme. It is also particularly dishonest, because you refuse to recognise that poverty is a massive barrier to employment. Until people can eat, pay their rent, afford transport and access communications services such as a phone and the internet, they will be extremely limited in their ability to build a life and find employment. Newstart is too low to give people the support they desperately need to get through tough times. And with your refusal to raise Newstart, you are condemning people to cycle upon cycle of poverty.

Instead of coming up with good, evidence-based public policy, this government has come up with ineffective and punitive programs like Work for the Dole, jobactive and ParentsNext, which actually demonise people. These programs force everyone who is struggling into a one-size-fits-all model. Evidence has repeatedly shown that these do not work and that they're causing serious harm. We need approaches that fit individual circumstances and respond to barriers people face, particularly for young people, older Australians, people with disability and First Nations people.

Instead of having compassion, the government is using some of the most vulnerable people in the country as political footballs. The Liberals have chosen to take an ideological approach to unemployment, framing it as a personal moral failing of individuals, rather than addressing the systemic issues such as poverty, intergenerational trauma and job-market conditions. Even 27 years ago, as a new migrant, when I relied on the dole to get by, it was hard to live on those support payments, and it is shocking that, despite the skyrocketing cost of living, the rate of Newstart has not risen in real terms in over two decades.

Senator Rachel Siewert has been sharing the experiences of people on Newstart in this chamber almost every week. So you really don't need much more evidence to know that people are really struggling. You don't even need to go very far to get this information.

The Prime Minister has taken to using abhorrent terms like 'unfunded empathy' when referring to an increase in Newstart. The Liberals certainly find the money when they need to subsidise fossil fuels and they can certainly find the money when they sign-off on massive tax cuts for big corporations, so how come there is no money for the most vulnerable people who need it?

The parliament has the chance to make a real, concrete difference to people's lives and ensure that no-one is forced to live in poverty in Australia.

The Greens have been calling on the government to raise Newstart for years. The Liberal government should know that there's a growing number of us in this place, and out there in the community, who will not stop until we make sure that every Australian can live a life of dignity.

Senator O’SULLIVAN (Western Australia) (18:15): No-one is saying that it’s easy to get by without a job, which is why the Morrison government is squarely focused on job creation to help working age Australians gain
financial independence. We're delivering results with more than 1.3 million jobs created since we were elected, which is about 240,000 a year—compared to just 155,000 a year, on average, under Labor.

Newstart is a taxpayer funded allowance that provides a safety net for people while they look for a job, and has already increased twice a year every year in line with CPI. The government's approach to assisting people on Newstart is focused on our success in getting people off welfare payments and into a job. Around two-thirds of those granted Newstart get off the payment within 12 months. Everyone who receives Newstart is eligible for some form of additional assistance from the welfare system. Ninety-nine per cent of Newstart allowance recipients receive an additional supplementary payment such as rental assistance, parenting payments or the energy supplement, which works out to an average extra $130 a fortnight on top of the $555 base rate.

Welfare cost more than $172 billion in 2018-19, representing more than $1 in $3, or 35 per cent of all spending by the government. It is the responsibility of government to ensure our social security and welfare systems are sustainable into the future, so that it continues to provide support for those most in need.

As the PM said last year, 'If the government had the money to raise Newstart I reckon I would be doing it for pensioners first.'

The Labor Party played a cruel joke in the lead-up to the election by claiming that they would review the rate of Newstart but did not budget for any of its increase.

Australia has a strong safety net for those that need it most. Few countries provide the strong safety net that we have in Australia. The welfare system is funded by taxpayers and needs to be managed responsibly. The responsibility extends to taxpayers who are paying for our welfare bill now and to the future generations who will have to meet the cost of the system in the decades to come. This means the system must be fair and sustainable.

The Morrison government recognises that there are times when people need a safety net to help them when they're down on their luck. In Australia, we have a very comprehensive and targeted welfare system that is there to assist those who are doing it tough. At the same time, we have to be fair to taxpayers, as well as to welfare recipients, because we have to understand that every dollar that is spent on welfare is a contribution from the taxpayer. There is no magic pudding. The money has to come from somewhere. We want a fair go for taxpayers. That's why our welfare system needs to be targeted to those who need it; not those who would like to have it. It needs to be targeted, sustainable and in line with community expectations.

In order to help people who are doing it tough in the future it's the responsibility of the government to ensure that the welfare system is sustainable. With the Morrison government's economic management it is important to ensure that we have a social safety net that we can rely on, so it continues to provide the support to those that need it the most and who will rely on into the future. The government wants a welfare system that supports our most vulnerable and encourages those who are capable of work or study to do so. Most importantly, it reduces intergenerational welfare dependency. We also need to ensure that the system is sustainable into the future. The wellbeing of vulnerable Australians remains a high priority for the Morrison government. Around $29 billion is invested each year to support families through family tax benefit, childcare payments and paid parental leave. Over $827 million is invested in the 2019-20 year through the Department of Social Services' Families and Communities Program to support vulnerable families, improve children's wellbeing, reduce the cost of family breakdown, improve financial capability and literacy, and build strong and resilient communities. The Department of Social Services provides around $2 billion to more than 8,000 organisations that are specifically set up to help our most vulnerable Australians.

The Morrison government's focus on a strong economy is working. We're delivering the job opportunities Australians need. This government has seen the largest increase in jobs since the global financial crisis, with more than 1.3 million jobs since we were elected. The proportion of Australians receiving working-age income support payments has fallen to its lowest level in 30 years, at 14.3 per cent. There were 230,000 fewer working-age recipients on income support payments in June 2018, compared to June 2014. More than 100,000 young Australians between the ages of 15 and 24 found jobs—that is the highest number in Australia's history. To put that into perspective, 52,000 jobs were lost in the same category between November 2007 and August 2013. This means tax relief for 10 million taxpayers.

Those opposite played a cruel joke on Australians in the lead-up to the election, claiming that they would review the rate of Newstart but doing nothing to budget for its increase. Labor voted in the Senate against the motion to increase the rate of Newstart as recently as 4 July 2019. Prior to the election, their policy was a review, and then a review, with no 'view' of lowering the rate. Labor have not been clear in what they offer to people trying to get off welfare and into work. When it comes to welfare spending, the difference between the coalition and Labor is that only the coalition is able to maintain the sustainability of the welfare system. When Labor were in office, the rate of increase in spending on welfare far outpaced the rate of growth in tax revenue. Labor's
position on this important welfare payment changes almost every day. This flip-flopping started in the lead-up to the election, when Labor claimed they would review the rate of Newstart, but, as I said, did nothing to budget for its increase.

No-one is saying that it would be easy to live on Newstart. The government understands this. It understands that Australians are doing it tough. Newstart is a safety net. It's not meant to be a replacement of salary. The focus of Newstart, combined with our government's additional supports and programs, is to help people who find themselves on hard times, to support them to get back into the workforce. Whether it's Work for the Dole or Youth Jobs PaTH—which is a fantastic program that all employers across Australia should think about getting on board with, because it's an opportunity for them to connect with young people that just want to have a crack and get entrance into the workplace. We're helping Australians to get a job so that they can earn a wage that creates a better future for them and their families. The Household Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia Survey shows little net change in income inequality between 2001 and 2017. Indeed, it has come down slightly under the coalition from 0.304 to 0.302, with a lower number indicating lower levels of inequality. The survey shows that the proportion of the population below the relative poverty line has fluctuated over time but the broad trend has been downwards.

In conclusion, as I said in my first speech last night, I've had a long experience working with some of Australia's most vulnerable people and helping them find work. I've never been unemployed for a great period of time, so it's true I haven't walked in the shoes myself, but I've walked alongside a lot of people who have. I'm really committed to improving the system that helps people get off welfare and into work. It's one of the things that I bring into this place, and I'll be looking forward to working with the government to ensure that we do what we can to get more people off welfare and into work.

Senator AYRES (New South Wales) (18:25): There is one thing and one thing alone that keeps the Newstart rate in Australia low, and that is the moral judgement of Prime Minister Scott Morrison. Every party in this chamber except the one that he leads and his supplicant party in the National Party supports a raise to Newstart. In fact, some of them have started to have the courage to speak out. I heard some pretty mealy-mouthed contributions in the Senate this afternoon on this subject and I imagine we're going to hear a few more this evening. There are even members of his own party who believe that we need to raise the rate of Newstart. Senator Sinodinos has had a bit to say on the subject. The bloke that they idolise, the former Prime Minister John Howard, whose opinion I imagine should be taken account of in the Liberal Party, has had a bit to say about the subject. Former leaders of the Liberal Party have been out in the community talking about the need to raise Newstart. But this show over here can't find it in its heart to raise the rate.

We could start that process immediately, not with resolutions in the Senate but with changes to regulation and legislation. But there is one man in the way, one man who refuses to admit that Newstart is too low. The words can't escape his mouth. There are formulations like, 'I know it would be difficult,' and, 'I can't imagine that it would be easy.' Those are the sorts of mealy-mouthed contributions. Prime Minister Scott Morrison is going to stand in the way of lifting the rate to Newstart until he's dragged kicking and screaming to the conclusion that the government can't do anything else.

We have to ask the question: why? What's stopping him? He has the numbers in this parliament. He has support within his own party. If he was concerned about the fiscal impacts of raising Newstart, why not commence a review? He hasn't hesitated before making other choices that have had an impact on the budget position of the Commonwealth—for example, stage 3 tax cuts. The Grattan Institute says that in 2025, towards the end of the 2020s, there will need to be expenditure cuts in the range of $40 billion per annum. There is no hesitation for tax cuts for high-income earners. There is no hesitation making the choice to drive the agenda for corporate tax cuts, which again would have had a significant impact upon the fiscal capacity of the Commonwealth.

This is the Prime Minister for a political stunt. He is prepared to cough up 1½ billion dollars of Commonwealth expenditure to reopen Christmas Island just for a press conference and to try to make a political point. He's all heart and all courage when it comes to his own interests but he's got no capacity for empathy with ordinary Australians who find themselves unemployed. It comes down to a question of moral judgement. He either believes that Newstart recipients deserve the indignity of living on $40 a day or he believes that he should ignore them. He thinks that he can ignore them because in Scott Morrison's Australia everybody is a winner. The government is on your side, apparently, but only if we ignore the people who don't matter to him. Because, in his Australia, nobody is poor, that he can see; nobody is unemployed; nobody is ever laid off; nobody is homeless; and nobody ever goes hungry. According to this lot over here, everything is going really well, and if these things do happen to people, well, they just don't matter. They have no place in his moral imagination. I had a few things to say about Scott Morrison and unfunded empathy last night, and I thank the chamber for being accommodating about it. I said that his remarks were grotesque, cowardly and dishonest—
The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Faruqi): A point of order has been called.

Senator O'Sullivan: Could you direct the speaker to address people in the other place in the correct manner.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT: I would ask the member to address people in the other House by their correct titles.

Senator Ayres: I'm very grateful for his intervention, because he is absolutely correct. What the Prime Minister said was grotesque, cowardly and dishonest and an insult to the one million Australians trapped in poverty and unemployment.

A first speech is an important occasion in the parliament. It's an opportunity to say what you really think, and it's an opportunity to say what is the right course is for the country. I think it's worth returning to the Prime Minister's first speech, which he gave to the House of Representatives on 14 February, 2008, following his election in Cook. Incidentally, that was the very moment that he switched his support from the Sydney Roosters to the Cronulla-Sutherland Sharks in another craven attempt to suck up to the people of Cook. Here is what he said:

From my faith I derive the values of loving-kindness, justice and righteousness, to act with compassion and kindness, acknowledging our common humanity and to consider the welfare of others...

He went on to quote Desmond Tutu, of all people. He said:

... we expect Christians ... to be those who stand up for the truth, to stand up for justice, to stand on the side of the poor and the hungry, the homeless and the naked, and when that happens, then Christians will be trustworthy believable witnesses.

He's happy to talk about compassion and welfare when it is easy, when it is rhetoric and when it doesn't mean anything to the one in 10 households that live in poverty, but, when it comes to the substantial business of taking care of the poor, he has only unfunded empathy. It’s an appearance. It’s a performance. It’s a line for the cameras and for the radio. The Prime Minister is a hollow man with hollow words.

The Newstart rate of $40 a day is not dignity. It's destitution. It's pushing people further into poverty. It's actively preventing them from getting work. Seven hundred and twenty thousand Australians and their families rely upon the Newstart rate. I've seen what this means for working people. Working people who've lost their jobs are on average on Newstart for three years. Workers that have been left behind by change in the economy deserve a bit of dignity.

Fifty thousand workers were left behind by the closure of the auto industry, as were thousands of workers in other manufacturing sectors. Of course, factory closures have been a feature of this government. The evidence shows that when a factory closes one-third of workers get another job, one-third of workers retire and one-third never work again. Twenty-five per cent of Newstart recipients are over 55—that's nearly 200,000 Australians.

The Newstart rate is too low to allow these workers to rebuild their lives. It's too hard. Social security should deliver a measure of dignity to people, and a capacity to rebuild their lives and get into work.

For Australians in tough positions, facing $40-a-day Newstart makes their lives worse. Single parents who have been shifted off the single-parent benefit—the result, I have to say, of a decision by a previous government—are in a terrible position. They face the declining ability to pay for household expenses; the prospect of homelessness; insecurity; big challenges like finding shoes to put on their children's feet and finding clothes for them to go to school—the terrible stress that presents to those families: no jobs, no support, $40 a day. It's a much tougher row to hoe for people in rural and regional Australia, who, apparently, some people on the other side still care about: $40 a day, no hope, no dignity, no job.

Senator Steele-John (Western Australia) (18:36): The eradication of poverty should be the highest moral imperative of all of us in this place. When people go hungry, when kids have no place to sleep at night, when folks are trapped under systems and processes which place them in danger, in fear, they should be able to look to this place and know that, while the lights are on in this building, there are people working to help. And yet, for 24 long years, on the issue of Newstart, the very opposite has been the case.

We have wasted decade after decade in this place ignoring the voices of folks living in poverty and ignoring the experts that work in the social policy space. In that time, we have allowed a great crisis to develop in Australia's communities: the crisis of entrenched intergenerational poverty, with folks trapped in a daily struggle that nobody in this place can picture or even imagine. It has been within our power all of these years to do something about it, and yet we have failed.
I want to talk a little bit tonight about what sits at the heart of that failure, because it's something that disabled people experience really acutely. What sits at the heart of this failure is a belief that, if you live in poverty, it is because of your own moral failing—that poverty is a result of your own failure to be a good person, your failure to 'have a go and get a go', as that sentient bag of flour in the other place so cruditely puts it. This ideology, this vicious belief that poverty is the result of a personal failing, is something which we disabled people suffer acutely. There are 200,000 of us that are living on Newstart right now, and we are first to suffer at the hands of this idea that says, 'Oh, you're just making it up.' We must be. We're faking a bad back, we're putting it on with a walking-stick, we're faking our mental ill-health because we want to be on social welfare! We want to be on the DSP! We want to be on Newstart! If only somebody took the rod out of the cupboard and were willing to give us a hard-enough kick, we'd be able to find ourselves a job somewhere! The result of that thought process is that 50 per cent of disabled people in Australia live below the poverty line. We live below the poverty line.

It is a national disgrace that inaction in the face of poverty has become government policy in this country. It is given moral and ethical sanction every day in this place by the repetition of those tired and empty slogans that we hear from the government in this place every single day. There will come a day when this chamber finally moves to act on this issue, to do the right thing and to ensure that no Australian is trapped within a system that is letting them down and driving them further into destitution and poverty. I thank the chamber for its time.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Faruqi): The time for the discussion has expired.

DOCUMENTS

The following documents were considered:

Documents tabled earlier today (see entry no. 2 in today's Journals) were considered as follows:

Motion to take note of documents nos 2 and 3 moved by Senator Urquhart. Consideration to resume on Thursday at general business.

COMMITTEES

Report

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:41): Pursuant to order and at the request of the chairs of the respective committees, I present reports on the examination of annual reports tabled by 30 April 2019.

Human Rights Committee

Report

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:41): On behalf of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights, I present the third report of 2019—Human rights scrutiny report. I seek leave to have the tabling statement incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The document read as follows—

I rise to speak to the tabling of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights' Human Rights Scrutiny Report 3 of 2019.

As this is the committee's first report of the new parliament, I would like to take the opportunity to remind the Senate of this committee's important role.

The committee is a technical scrutiny committee which examines and reports to the Parliament on the compatibility of bills and legislative instruments with Australia's international human rights obligations, in accordance with its legislative mandate under the Human Rights (Parliamentary Scrutiny) Act 2011.

As usual, this report contains a credible technical examination of legislation with Australia's obligations under international human rights law. Of the bills and instruments examined in this report, a number have been restored to the notice paper or reintroduced in relevantly substantially similar terms to those previously reported on. In these cases, the committee has taken the approach of reiterating its views as set out in its previous reports, including in relation to a number of bills scheduled for debate this week. Additionally, 61 bills have been assessed in this report as not raising human rights concerns.

As part of its role, the committee seeks to explore questions of human rights compatibility through dialogue with relevant ministers and officials to identify and explore questions of human rights compatibility. To this end, in this report the committee is seeking further information in relation to two new pieces of legislation, including the Fisheries Management Regulations 2019. By authorising the collection and disclosure of identifying personal information, these regulations engage a number of human rights, including the right to privacy. There is also a question whether the instrument may permit the
disclosure of information overseas, including to foreign governments in circumstances where there may be a risk that a person may be subject to the death penalty or to torture or cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. This risk was not addressed in the statement of compatibility. Accordingly, the committee has sought further advice from the minister as to the human rights compatibility of the regulations.

With these comments, I commend the committee's Report 3 of 2019 to the Senate.

Public Works Committee

Report

Senator BROCKMAN (Western Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (18:42): On behalf of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Public Works, I present the committee's 82nd annual report.

Regulations and Ordinances Committee

Delegated Legislation Monitor

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS (New South Wales) (18:42): On behalf of the Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances, I present a corrigendum to Delegated Legislation Monitor No. 3 of 2019.

Regulations and Ordinances Committee

Delegated Legislation Monitor

Senator FIERRAVANTI-WELLS (New South Wales) (18:42): On behalf of the Chair of the Senate Standing Committee on Regulations and Ordinances, I present Delegated Legislation Monitor No. 4 of 2019 and move:

That the Senate take note of the report.

Having reviewed its past practices, the committee has resolved to take a stronger, more targeted approach to its work, to ensure effective parliamentary oversight and control of delegated legislation. This includes using the disallowance process to highlight and prosecute the committee's more significant scrutiny concerns.

In the current monitor, the committee seeks to draw the Senate's particular attention to two instruments. The committee has sought advice from the relevant minister in relation to each of these instruments on two occasions. Despite the advice of the ministers, the committee continues to hold significant scrutiny concerns. The committee's views on these matters are supported by independent, expert legal advice.

The first instrument is the Immigration (Guardianship of Children) Regulations 2018. This instrument sets out principles which the minister must observe when deciding whether to direct that a non-citizen child is to become the minister's ward. It specifies, for example, that a direction must not be given unless it is necessary to protect the child from 'moral danger', to give the child the benefit of adequate direction and guidance, or for any other reasons that the minister, or their delegate, considers to be in the interests of the child.

The committee considers that these are significant matters with the potential to affect the personal rights and liberties of non-citizen children. Consequently, it is the committee's view that these matters should be included in an act of parliament, rather than left to delegated legislation or non-statutory policy guidelines.

The second instrument is the Water Amendment (Murray-Darling Basin Agreement—Basin Salinity Management) Regulations 2018. The instrument appears to incorporate external documents as in force from time to time, without the legal authority to incorporate documents in that manner. Consequently, the committee has serious scrutiny concerns that the instrument does not accord with the legal requirements for making delegated legislation. Once again, the committee's views are supported by independent, expert legal advice.

The committee has resolved to place notices of motions to disallow these instruments, to emphasise the committee's concerns and to give the Senate additional time to consider these matters.

With these comments, I commend the committee's Delegated Legislation Monitor 4 of 2019 to the Senate.

Question agreed to.

Scrutiny of Bills Committee

Scrutiny Digest

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE: ADDITIONAL ANSWERS
Australian Defence Force

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (18:46): I table a response to a question taken on notice during question time on 30 July 2019 asked by Senator Patrick relating to the Future Submarine program. I seek leave to have the document incorporated into Hansard.

Leave granted.

The answer read as follows—

Dear Mr President

I write with regard to a question I took on notice from Senator Patrick on Tuesday, 30 July 2019 on the matter of the Future Submarine Program.

I can confirm that the head of the Future Submarine Program wrote to the Naval Group nearly two years ago about how it should approach the question of designing its future submarine construction yard in Osborne to accommodate the most efficient construction of 12 Attack class submarines—a task that will require at its peak over 2000 workers directly involved in construction.

In that letter the head of the program confirmed two assumptions could be used to allow planning of the future yard to progress. These were planning assumptions, nothing more.

One of those assumptions was that land currently occupied by ASC Submarines would be made available to Naval Group following the 2024 Full Cycle Docking to allow for further development of the submarine construction yard, inclusive of access to Port Adelaide River.

This statement does not mean that the Full Cycle Docking will be moving interstate. It simply means that planning for how to develop the most efficient construction yard for the future submarines should not exclude the land currently used by ASC.

Design of the Submarine Construction Yard remains under development and yet to be accepted by Government. I can again confirm that no decision has been made on the matter of full cycle docking for the Collins Class Submarine. I can also confirm that ASC was not aware of Admiral Sammut's written advice to Naval Group. I have copied this letter to Senator Patrick.

DOCUMENTS

Department of the Environment and Energy
Home Affairs Portfolio

Order for the Production of Documents

Senator CANAVAN (Queensland—Minister for Resources and Northern Australia and Deputy Leader of The Nationals in the Senate) (18:46): I table documents relating to orders for the production of documents concerning files held by the Department of Environment and Energy and the strategic review of the Home Affairs portfolio.

Senator KENEALLY (New South Wales—Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate) (18:46): With regard to the statement given by the minister representing the Minister for Home Affairs, Senator Cash, I move:

That the Senate take note of the documents.

On 29 July, the Senate ordered Minister Dutton to provide this chamber with:

… the completed Strategic Review of the Home Affairs Portfolio as announced in the 2018-19 Budget.

The 'completed strategic review'—take note of those words. That strategic review was allocated $7 million in the budget and was designed to assist officials towards 'integrating capabilities, reducing duplication and maximising efficiencies'. It was earlier this month that we learnt that the Minister for Home Affairs had no intent of ever making that review public. And, rightly so, the Senate unanimously supported a motion on Monday to order Minister Dutton to provide us with a copy of the completed strategic review.

Tonight, the Senate and the Australian people have had that order thrown back in our faces. Despite the strategic review's final cost of nearly $5 million to the Australian taxpayer, the Senate has been given a single solitary page of information by Minister Dutton.

Senator Siewert: They're expensive!

Senator KENEALLY: This is expensive, Senator Siewert. This is a $5 million piece of paper. Either this is the single most expensive piece of paper in the history of this chamber or it is a blatant rejection of the will of the Senate by the Minister for Home Affairs.

Senator McKim: It's probably the latter.
Senator KENEALLY: Senator McKim says it's probably the latter; I'm inclined to agree. In fact, the release of this document states: 'There was no single consolidated report prepared as part of the strategic review process.' Well, what was produced by the strategic review then? What was $5 million of Australians' money spent on? Listen to this clanger of a sentence featured on this $5 million piece of paper: 'Collectively, the outputs of the strategic review provide the corpus of knowledge that the portfolio employs to establish, govern and prioritise its budget arrangements.' The 'corpus of knowledge'—that's what our $5 million paid for. That's $5 million worth of bureaucratic buzz words right there.

The community has a right to know how one of our largest government departments and one that is so fundamental to our national security is being administered. Luckily for the Australian people, Mr Dutton hasn't always been able to dodge the scrutiny as he's attempting to do today. Since the amalgamation of the home affairs department there have been a number of reports by the Australian National Audit Office on its operations and performance, and their findings can only be described as scathing. It seems that every single time someone gets a peek behind the curtain they don't like what they see going on in the Department of Home Affairs. This is a department riddled with inefficiencies, waste and maladministration, all at the hands of the Minister for Home Affairs.

Take the ANAO's June 2018 report into the initial merger of the Department of Immigration and Border Protection with the Australian Customs and Border Protection Service and the establishment of the Australian Border Force. This process was described by the former Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, as:

… the most significant reform of Australia's national intelligence and domestic security arrangements in more than 40 years

You would rightly imagine that overseeing this process would be a high priority for the minister who was ultimately in charge of it. Shockingly, the ANAO found that there was:

… no evidence identified to indicate that written briefings were provided to the minister on progress throughout the implementation process.

So, the minister didn't get any written briefings from the department on what Prime Minister Turnbull called the most significant reform of Australia's national and domestic security arrangements. No wonder we have only a single piece of paper and just a corpus of knowledge.

In December 2018 the ANAO reported on the department's Cape-class patrol boats, the front line of our border protection. They found that the boats had consistently fallen short of their patrol-days targets since 2014. This was before we learnt, in December 2018, that the department was forced to ration fuel and reduce patrols because of Minister Dutton's $300 million cut to the department's operating budget. The department doesn't have a good track record of responsible spending either. We know that the department spent over $450,000 on corporate hospitality and a further $100,000 on executive office upgrades in the 2017-18 financial year alone. We also know that they spent $132,000 on motivational speakers—obviously not motivating them enough to produce an actual report—and gave $9 million to Toll Group to build accommodation on Manus Island, a project that was abandoned and never completed but apparently still paid in full.

This all pales in comparison with the department's ongoing decision to use limited or closed tenders to procure services on Manus Island and Nauru. On at least six occasions the department gave a total of nearly $1.2 billion worth of contracts to companies without proper scrutiny. This includes the $423 million they gave to a company called Paladin, which was registered to a beach shack on Kangaroo Island and which the minister claimed he had 'no sight over'. In another report, from January this year, the ANAO found that the department's biometric identification services project was 'deficient in almost every respect' and that while the total expenditure on this project was $34 million, 'none of the project's milestones or deliverables were met'. No wonder they couldn't produce a report. It would be too embarrassing for them to produce it publicly.

Most recently, in February, we learnt just how poorly our citizenship process was being handled by the department. The ANAO found:

Processing times have increased and long delays are evident between applications being lodged and decisions being taken on whether or not to confer citizenship.

Significant periods of inactivity are evident for both complex and non-complex applications accepted by the department for processing.

And: 'The department is not checking the quality of the decisions taken.'

As of 30 June 2018, there were more than a quarter of a million applications for citizenship by conferral, by descent or through adoption that had not yet been processed by the department. At the end of September last year nearly 200,000 people in Australia were on bridging visas, over 85,000 more than when the Liberals and Nationals came to government in September 2013. The ANAO are currently in the process of completing three more reports—and, unlike the government, I bet they publish them—related to the department and have publicly
flagged a number of potential performance reports in the future. Minister Dutton has consistently met the ANAO's criticism with a combination of denial and apathy. It's no wonder the department is struggling when the minister in charge can't handle any degree of criticism or scrutiny. He shies away from transparency, because whenever someone shines a light on his department his incompetency and apathy are revealed for all to see.

Today's effort is this $5 million piece of paper—by the way, they didn't even manage to fill the whole page. They allocated $7 million to them in the budget. They didn't run out of money; they just ran out of words. They couldn't even fill a whole page. This piece of paper cost $5 million. This is just another example of the contempt that Minister Dutton shows anyone who attempts to hold him to the standards expected of a government minister.

When will Minister Dutton finally be held to account for his ongoing incompetence? Why would his own colleagues in this place, who voted for this order of production documents, accept this farcical response?

This was a multimillion dollar review, paid for by the Australian taxpayer, implemented to try and identify and fix the endemic issues inside one of the most significant and largest single government departments. This is vacuous, expensive and wasteful.

This report should have been voluntarily released by the minister to reassure the community that the department in charge of Australia's national security, border protection and immigration is capable of doing those things. The only reason he has to reject the will of the Senate, and particularly the will of his own colleagues who voted for this, is that he has something very significant to hide about the management of his department.

We will continue to hold the minister to account, to scrutinise his work, because it is what the Australian people deserve. We will call on Minister Dutton to release the completed version of the strategic review, the corpus of knowledge—whatever name he wants to put on it—and allow the public to see exactly how he is running his department.

Senator McKIM (Tasmania) (18:57): Senator Keneally and I have some disagreements on policy matters in the purview of the Department of Home Affairs, but I will place on the record that I agreed with every single word that she said in her recent contribution.

If this wasn't so serious it would be an absolute joke. The money that this department wastes beggars belief. This massive department—probably one of the biggest administrative consolidations of power in Australia's history—basically could not organise a beer in a brewery.

The Australian National Audit Office has regularly, consistently and significantly criticised this department for its incapacity to manage basic administrative functions. Whether you are talking about outrageous delays in visa processing, whether you are talking about its propensity to torture refuges on Manus Island and Nauru or its regular and consistent failures to adhere to government purchasing guidelines—all of which, I might add, have been the subject of significant criticism from independent statutory authorities ranging from the Australian National Audit Office through to the Human Rights Commission—this department has consistently failed to deliver value for money for the Australian people.

I wish I could say that I was surprised at the farce that this Senate has been presented with this evening, but I am anything but surprised. This is absolutely par for the course from the Department of Home Affairs.

This is a department that has a tame minister, who is predisposed to accede to all of this government's organisational desire to control and surveil every single aspect of the lives of Australian people. And the fact that they have this tame minister, and a tame Prime Minister—who used to be the minister responsible for various parts of what is now the Department of Home Affairs—is leading Australia down a very dangerous path. We have a secretary of the department who believes Australians are like innocent hobbits who need to be protected from the dark forces at work in the world, and who is not prepared to contemplate that actually some Australians, me included, value our freedoms more highly than we value the mirage of absolute safety that this minister, and this secretary, are attempting to sell us, the Australian people. They are marching us down the dark and dangerous road to a police state and a surveillance state, and they are doing so in the most inefficient and draconian way imaginable.

This farce that the Senate has been presented with stands as a symbol of the farce that this department has become. And the best stroke of an administrative pen that could be wielded in Australia today is to smash up this department—to de-consolidate the Department of Home Affairs, to spread the power out. Because power that is concentrated and power that is unaccountable—and both of those criticisms apply to the Department of Home Affairs—is the most dangerous kind of power that there is. The consolidation of power bringing, for example, ASIO into the home affairs department, was a sad day for this country. It was a sad day for democracy. And every time this department takes the next step down the road to a police state, every time this department continues to erode fundamental rights, freedoms, and liberties in this country—rights, freedoms and liberties that we used to send Australians overseas to fight wars to defend—and every time this department takes another step down that
road, it is the Australian people who are losing something precious. They are losing their freedoms. They are losing their privacy. They are losing their capacity to go about their day-to-day lives without the all-seeing eyes of the government spying on them. And I use that term advisedly: the government is spying on Australians with the draconian laws that this department continually recommends up to its minister, who continually takes them to cabinet, who continually brings them into this place.

It's not good enough. It needs to be called out, and I'll tell you why it needs to be called out, Acting Deputy President Faruqi: because if you want to fight something, you have to call it out. If you want to call something out, you've got to name it. So I'm going to continue to be a member of the very small and selective group of senators in this place who have used the F-word: fascism. I've used it repeatedly, and I will say it again today. Don't believe that the slow frogmarch to fascism cannot happen in Australia—anyone who believes that is not a student of human history. Fascist regimes rise because people do not fight for their rights. And I am here to fight for the rights of ordinary Australians, and to insist that we have an informed debate in this country about this erosion of rights and freedoms, and about how we balance the perfectly reasonable desire to be safe in this country with that erosion of rights and freedoms.

Australia remains the only liberal democracy in the world that does not have some form of charter or bill of rights to protect and enshrine our rights. And yet the Australian Greens are the only party in this parliament that has a policy that Australia should have a charter or a bill of rights. And the reason we need a charter or a bill of rights in this country is so that citizens have got the tools that they need to stand up against this march down the road to a police state. We will campaign through this parliament and, I predict, beyond—because we won't get a charter of rights in this parliament, because neither of the major parties support those protections.

We'll campaign in this parliament, we'll campaign in the next parliament and we'll keep campaigning until, finally, Australia loses that tag of the only liberal democracy in the world that doesn't have a charter or bill of rights, either legislatively enshrined or constitutionally embedded. It should be in the Constitution, in Australia, a charter of rights. I acknowledge constitutional change is very difficult in this country and basically relies on broad political agreement in this place and in the public debate to succeed. But there is no reason we should not have a legislated charter of rights, and that is what I commit the Australian Greens to continue fighting for.

We are presented with this farce today, a farce that has cost millions of taxpayer dollars. I think about this every time I hear a government minister stand up now and say, ‘Oh, no, we cannot increase the Newstart payment because we are making choices and we are setting budget priorities.’ This government that just smashed up the progressive tax system in Australia, to give away $158 billion in tax cuts, can't find within its collective heart the relatively miniscule amount of money it would take to deliver a $75 a week increase in Newstart. Those are your priorities, and you stand condemned for those priorities. Yes, budgets are all about priorities, but when you're throwing away millions of dollars in a completely useless review, you stand condemned for your warped priorities.

Question agreed to.

COMMITTEES

Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas Select Committee

Multi-Jurisdictional Management and Execution of the Murray-Darling Basin Plan Committee

Membership

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Faruqi) (19:07): The President has received letters from the Leader of the Government in the Senate and the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate nominating senators to be members of committees.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:07): I move:

That senators be appointed to committees, as set out in the document available in the chamber and listed on the Dynamic Red.

Jobs for the Future in Regional Areas—Select Committee—

Appointed—

Senator Di Natale

Participating members: Senators Faruqi, Hanson-Young, McKim, Rice, Siewert, Steele-John, Waters and Whish-Wilson

Multi-Jurisdictional Management and Execution of the Murray Darling Basin Plan—Select Committee—

Appointed—

Senators Gallacher and O'Neill

Question agreed to.

BILLS

**Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Amendment (Sunsetting of Special Powers Relating to Terrorism Offences) Bill 2019**

**Treasury Laws Amendment (Consumer Data Right) Bill 2019**

First Reading

Bills received from the House of Representatives.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:08): I indicate to the Senate that these bills are being introduced together. After debate on the motion for the second reading has been adjourned, I shall move a motion to have the bills listed separately on the Notice Paper. I move:

That these bills may proceed without formalities, may be taken together and be now read a first time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Senator RUSTON: by leave—I move:

That the provisions of paragraphs (5) to (8) of standing order 111 not apply to the bills, allowing them to be considered during this period of sittings.

I table statements of reasons justifying the need for these bills to be considered during these sittings and seek leave to have the statements incorporated into Hansard.

Leave is granted.

The statement read as follows—

**STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 WINTER/SPRING SITTINGS**

**AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION AMENDMENT (SUNSETTING OF SPECIAL POWERS RELATING TO TERRORISM OFFENCES) BILL**

Purpose of the Bill

The purpose of the Bill is to amend the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979 (the ASIO Act) to extend the sunsetting date for ASIO's questioning and detention powers under Division 3 of Part III of the ASIO Act for a further 12 months, from 7 September 2019 to 7 September 2020.

Reasons for Urgency

An extension of the sunsetting date will enable adequate time for complex reforms to these powers to be progressed in Parliament, while ensuring that the current powers do not lapse.

The Bill requires timely passage in order to ensure that the current powers do not lapse before the passage of more substantive reforms to the powers.

**STATEMENT OF REASONS FOR INTRODUCTION AND PASSAGE IN THE 2019 WINTER/SPRING SITTINGS**

**TREASURY LAWS AMENDMENT (CONSUMER DATA RIGHT) BILL**

Purpose of the Bill

The purpose of the bill is to enact a right for consumers to access their banking (and other designated sectors) data in a form that facilitates its transfer and use, and to instruct their banking (and other designated sector) providers to share their data with nominated third parties confidentially and securely.

Reasons for Urgency

Stakeholder implementation of the regime is already well progressed for a February 2020 launch for consumer data access. Delays would impose major costs on industry and agencies implementing the regime and delay implementation significantly.

Passage of the bill is required well in advance of the launch of consumer data access to provide industry with certainty for information technology builds, enable pre-launch processing of accreditation and give legislative support for information security and consumer testing while also providing the relevant agencies the powers to issue rules and standards for banking.

Question agreed to.

Second Reading

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:09): I move:
That these bills be now read a second time.
I seek leave to have the second reading speeches incorporated in Hansard.
Leave granted.
The speeches read as follows—

AUSTRALIAN SECURITY INTELLIGENCE ORGANISATION AMENDMENT (SUNSETTING OF SPECIAL POWERS RELATING TO TERRORISM OFFENCES) BILL 2019

The Australian government is committed to ensuring the safety and protection of the Australian community. Law enforcement and security agencies must have access to the tools and capabilities that they need to manage the ever-evolving terrorist threat.

To this end, this Bill ensures that the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation (ASIO) retains its strong counter-terrorism capabilities while the Government progresses more detailed reforms to ASIO's questioning and detention powers, following reviews of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security (PJCIS) and the Independent National Security Legislation Monitor (INSLM).

The Bill will extend the sunset date of the ASIO's questioning and detention powers in Division 3 of Part III of the Australian Security Intelligence Organisation Act 1979 for 12 months until 7 September 2020.

This will enable the government adequate time to progress legislative reforms to ASIO's questioning and detention framework in light of the PJCIS and INSLM reviews, while ensuring that ASIO will continue to have access to these important tools in its efforts to gather critical intelligence to enhance Australia's counter-terrorism efforts.

Importantly, the extended regime will continue to be subject to the extensive safeguards and oversight mechanisms that are appropriate.

Concluding remarks

By way of conclusion, I would note that this bill ensures security agencies continue to have the capabilities to deal with the changing national security and threat environment while also protecting individual rights, including through transparency and oversight measures.

The PJCIS and INSLM have comprehensively examined ASIO's compulsory questioning and detention powers and I acknowledge and appreciate the extensive and continuing work of the PJCIS and INSLM.

I also appreciate the ongoing partnership with states and territories in our joint effort to keep the Australian community safe.

To this end, this government is unwavering in its commitment to ensuring Australia's counter-terrorism and national security framework continues to be as robust and responsive as possible.

TREASURY LAWS AMENDMENT (CONSUMER DATA RIGHT) BILL 2019

This Bill will amend the Competition and Consumer Act 2010, the Privacy Act 1988, and the Australian Information Commissioner Act 2010 to introduce a Consumer Data Right and Open Banking.

Today is another major step in Australia's data revolution. With this Bill, Australia becomes a world leader in implementing an economy-wide right for consumers to access and use data that businesses hold about them.

This important reform will provide individuals and businesses with a right to access data relating to them; and to authorise secure access to their data by accredited data recipients.

It will also enable data about products on offer to be available in machine readable form.

The Consumer Data Right is a right for consumers to authorise data sharing and use. Consumers will determine which data is shared under the Right, on what terms and with whom.

The Consumer Data Right is a game changer for consumers and small businesses. It will enable consumers to better harness their data for their own benefit. The Consumer Data Right is a fundamental structural reform that will drive competition and improve the flow of information around the Australian economy.

And the Right will incentivise Australian entrepreneurs to develop new products and applications that reach more consumers and are better tailored to their needs.

For consumers, improved access to data will support better price comparison services, taking into account their unique circumstances, and promote more convenient switching between products and providers. It will also leverage new technology such as artificial intelligence and allow consumers to make more informed decisions on where they spend their money.

For small and medium businesses, it will allow for more effective budgeting tools that can deal with data in real time and help them manage their cash flow and working capital more effectively than they can do today.

Improved access to data will also enable the development of new, better and more convenient products and services, many customised to individuals' needs.

We live in a world of increasing complexity. Many consumers need assistance in understanding the choices open to them and how best to navigate the sheer volume of choices presented to them – choices that may not be presented in a way that allows them to make effective comparisons.
For example, the recent Productivity Commission review on *Competition in the Australian Financial System* reported that the average Australian household could be saving up to $1000 per year on their home loan if they switched to another lender – but many do not. With over 4,000 different residential property loans on offer, it is no wonder that customers struggle to determine which home loan is best for them.

The Consumer Data Right provides efficient and convenient access to accurate information and empowers third parties to develop tools that will allow consumers to make the most of the choices available to them.

These tools are likely to include comparison sites that take into account the actual ways the consumer uses the product; budgeting apps that analyse actual spending behaviours; and services that assess the expected return for a household that is considering the installation of roof-top solar panels taking into account their actual electricity usage.

By doing so, the Consumer Data Right will increase competition and drive consumer focussed innovation.

This Bill lays the tracks for Australia's future data economy.

The Consumer Data right will support data-driven innovation across the economy. New high value jobs will be created by positioning Australia at the global forefront of data access and innovation.

In introducing this Bill today, we are implementing commitments made by the Government in its response to its *Review into Open Banking in Australia* and to the *Productivity Commission's Data Availability and Use Inquiry*.

The Government has committed to applying the Consumer Data Right to banking – where it is referred to as Open Banking, then to the energy and telecommunications sectors, and in due course more widely across the economy.

This Bill establishes a broader framework that can apply across all sectors to ensure that the data can be transferred in a safe and secure way, while retaining the flexibility to recognise that data access arrangements must be able to adapt to different sectors, different data sets, different risks, different customers needs and changing technologies.

This Bill allows for the growth and evolution of the Consumer Data Right by allowing new data sets to be added over time.

When deciding whether to add new sectors or data sets as being subject to the Consumer Data Right, the Minister will be required to seek the public advice of both the ACCC and Information Commissioner. The Minister must consider a range of factors prior to adding a sector, including the impact on consumers, competition, data-driven innovation, privacy and confidentiality, and whether the data may contain intellectual property.

The Bill also creates a rules and technical standards framework that recognises the need to allow for flexibility in implementation over time as technology adapts, and between sectors that have different risks and differing levels of technological capability.

Nevertheless, implementation between sectors should be as consistent and interoperable as possible. Consistency and interoperability will facilitate the growth of a vibrant data ecosystem and ensure consumers are able to navigate easily the emerging data economy as active participants.

Strong privacy and information security provisions are a fundamental design feature of the Consumer Data Right. These protections include Privacy Safeguards and additional privacy protections through the consumer data rules. The Office of the Australian Information Commissioner will advise on and enforce privacy protections, and provide complaint handling for breaches of the Privacy Safeguards. Consumers will have a range of avenues to seek remedies for breaches of their privacy or confidentiality including access to internal and external dispute resolution and direct rights of action.

Only trusted and accredited third parties will be able to access data from data holders at the customer's direction. Accreditation can be considered to be a ‘data safety licence’. Accreditation will contribute to the justified confidence that consumers can have that the system supports safety and security for their data.

The ACCC will be responsible for advising what sectors should be added, writing rules, accrediting new participants, and enforcing serious and systemic breaches of consumers' rights.

Complementing the rules, technical standards turn what is a right in principle into real action. The Data Standards Chair, advised by the Data Standards Body, will be responsible for working with businesses, consumers, and innovators to ensure that the right is implemented in a way that promotes efficiency, convenience and safety. Consistent standards will support access to data that is usable and reduce the barriers to service providers offering new services to consumers.

The Bill also contains a statutory review provision, with a review to be completed by

1 July 2022. This review will provide an opportunity for the government to confirm that the system is operating as intended; and to consider the impacts of the system on consumers and industry.

I would like to thank the active and ongoing engagement by industry, consumer and privacy groups, and FinTechs in the development of this Bill. I also thank them for their ongoing engagement in the Productivity Commission’s inquiry and the Open Banking Review and in the development of rules by the ACCC and standards by Data61.

This Bill will provide all Australians with a new right to access their data and use it in a way that they have never been able to do before. We live at a time of unparalleled technological advances. The Consumer Data Right will allow Australia to fully leverage these advances.

Full details of the measure are contained in the Explanatory Memorandum.

Debate adjourned.

Ordered that the bills be listed on the *Notice Paper* as separate orders of the day.
Royal Commissions Amendment (Private Sessions) Bill 2019

First Reading

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:10): I move:

That this bill may proceed without formalities and be now read a first time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:11): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

The speech read as follows—

ROYAL COMMISSIONS AMENDMENT (PRIVATE SESSIONS) BILL 2019
SECOND READING SPEECH

The Royal Commissions Amendment (Private Sessions) Bill 2019 enables the private sessions regime in Part 4 of the Royal Commissions Act 1902 to be applied to other Royal Commissions. The private sessions regime was inserted into the Act in 2013 to support the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse.

Private sessions allowed that Commission to hear from survivors and victims about their experience of abuse in a private and supportive setting. Participation was voluntary. The Commission heard over 8,000 personal stories in private sessions.

The final Royal Commission report attests to the courage of survivors who came forward to share their experiences, and to the important contribution private sessions made to the Commission's inquiry.

For some survivors, telling their story in a private session was the first time in their life they had told someone about their abuse. For others, it was the first time they had been heard by someone in a position of authority.

One survivor told the Royal Commission: 'After 50 years I finally feel I've been heard. 'People have listened to me before, but no one has really heard me'.

The substantial work of that Commission is well documented. The Government is committed to ensuring it comprehensively and appropriately responds to that work. This includes the National Apology delivered by the Prime Minister in this Parliament, on behalf of all Australians, to the victims and survivors of institutional child sexual abuse.

The Chair of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, the Honourable Richard Tracey AM RFD QC, and the Chair of the Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, the Honourable Ronald Sackville AO QC, have told the Government that private sessions will assist their important inquiries.

These are challenging and confronting Royal Commissions. They are tasked with identifying what should be done to improve the quality and safety of aged care services in Australia, and what should be done to prevent violence and abuse against Australians with disability.

Subject to passage of this Bill, it is the Government's intention to recommend that both the Aged Care Royal Commission and the Disability Royal Commission are able to use private sessions.

Private sessions are just one way that Royal Commissions can gather sensitive and personal information from individuals. Their use can have implications for the constitution of a Royal Commission as well as funding implications.

For that reason, the Bill proposes that private sessions are enabled through a regulation. That mechanism will require a discrete decision on whether private sessions will be useful for a particular inquiry.

The Bill largely preserves the framework for private sessions used for the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission. However, some changes are proposed to supplement the way that a Commission gathers information and to give more flexibility to a Commission.

Limitations on the use and disclosure of information given at a private session will be retained. Sessions are conducted in private and are not open to the public. Private session information can only be used in a report if de-identified, or if the information is also given in evidence.

Others limitations include a secrecy offence and a provision that overrides other laws that compel production of records, for example subpoenas. Information can be disclosed with the consent of the individual who gave the information.
Private session records are also excluded from the operation of the Freedom of Information Act 1982, and are treated in the same way as census records under the Archives Act 1983. That means these records will not become publicly available until 99 years after the year the record was created. These limitations on use and disclosure are designed so that people are not discouraged from sharing their personal stories.

Importantly, as private session information is not given on oath or affirmation, these provisions also serve to protect the privacy and reputations of other individuals.

In practice, Commissioners and members of the staff of a Royal Commission need to engage with individuals before, and after, their private session. Before a private session, a Royal Commission may need to gather preliminary information about the individual's story, so that the attending Commissioners or Assistant Commissioners are familiar with the person's situation.

After a private session, it may be appropriate for a Royal Commission to contact the participant to discuss any concerns arising from the private session and to offer counselling or support.

To achieve consistent protections, it is proposed to apply existing limitations on use and disclosure of information obtained at a private session to this kind of information.

For some, attending a private session to talk about mistreatment or abuse they have experienced may be re-traumatising. It is proposed that the protections will apply whether or not the private session is ultimately held.

Under the model used by the Child Sexual Abuse Royal Commission, only a Commissioner could hold a private session. Under this Bill, private sessions must be held by a Commissioner unless the Chair, or sole Commissioner, considers there are circumstances that justify authorising Assistant Commissioners to hold private sessions.

Assistant Commissioners must be appropriately qualified and senior staff members to be authorised to hold private sessions. These individuals would be authorised by the Chair of a multi-member Commission, or if an inquiry is constituted by a single Commissioner, that Commissioner.

This provision is to give more flexibility to a Commission. It may enable more sessions to be held, particularly in the case of a Royal Commission that is constituted by one or two Commissioners.

Royal Commissions are the highest level of public inquiry and reserved for matters of significant public importance. The private session framework can be a very important format to supplement the way that a Commission gathers information to complete its reporting obligations.

Ordered that further consideration of the second reading of this bill be adjourned to the first sitting day of the next period of sittings, in accordance with standing order 111.

**Fair Work (Registered Organisations) Amendment (Ensuring Integrity) Bill 2019**

**First Reading**

Bill received from the House of Representatives.

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:12): I move:

That this bill may proceed without formalities and be now read a first time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a first time.

**Second Reading**

**Senator RUSTON** (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:12): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

I seek leave to have the second reading speech incorporated in Hansard.

Leave granted.

*The speech read as follows—*

**FAIR WORK (REGISTERED ORGANISATIONS) AMENDMENT (ENSURING INTEGRITY) BILL 2019**

**SECOND READING SPEECH**

(I move that this Bill now be read a second time)

This Bill delivers on the Government's commitment to ensure and in some cases restore, integrity to registered organisations and their officers to make sure that they work in their members' best interests.

Unions and employer associations hold a privileged position in the national industrial relations system and the economy more broadly. However, we have seen some organisations and their officers continuously abuse these privileges, engage in repeated unlawful behaviour, and fail to act in the best interests of their members.

As has been repeatedly observed by members of our nation's judiciary, some officers and organisations have proven wholly incapable of addressing their unlawful behaviour. They have nothing but contempt for the law, perversely treating court ordered penalties as the cost of doing business.
Aside from the obvious undesirability of repeated lawbreaking, this sort of conduct also manifests in costly delays to key infrastructure projects like schools, roads and hospitals. Frankly, taxpayers deserve better.

Sadly, since the Royal Commission, this sort of behaviour has not stopped. In the 2015 Trade Union Royal Commission heard countless examples of officers breaching their duties, engaging in blackmail, extortion, coercion and secondary boycott conduct, abusing their right of entry privileges, acting in contempt of court and failing to prevent their organisations from repeatedly breaking the law.

Some organisations, with the courts continuing to make numerous findings and levying countless penalties against organisations and their officers who continue to flout the rule of law.

In March of this year we saw the courts penalise the CFMMEU and its officers for pressuring a worker into joining the union and giving up their hard-earned wages in fees for an organisation they didn't want to join in the first place, effectively working for nothing. According to the CFMMEU, 'that's just the way it is'. It most certainly should not be.

As recently as last month the CFMMEU and its officers faced another fine of over $100,000 for unlawful entries and threats on construction sites. That decision saw them top $4 million worth of court ordered penalties for the 2018/19 financial year alone.

In fact the CFMMEU's behaviour has been so poor for so long, that in 2017, one Federal Court judge, described them as 'the most recidivist corporate offender in Australian history'. It seems like little has changed.

That is why the Government is committed to passing this vital legislation, which will take a significant step towards curtailing the behaviour we have seen threaten the rule of the law in Australian workplaces.

The Bill will strengthen the powers of the courts to disqualify officers of registered organisations from standing for or holding office where they flout the law.

The Bill will also make it an offence to act as an officer or shadow officer while disqualified. This is a sensible change consistent with the treatment of directors disqualified from running corporations.

Those individuals convicted of serious criminal offences such as blackmail, extortion, or threatening to cause serious harm to public officials should not hold office in a registered organisation. The Bill therefore includes serious criminal offences punishable by five or more years' imprisonment as a new category of prescribed offence, which leads to automatic disqualification of the officer. This reflects provisions in the Corporations Act which also provide for the automatic disqualification of company directors where they are convicted of certain serious forms of misconduct.

This Bill introduces new and streamlined cancellation grounds to deal with organisations or parts of organisations that do not comply with the law.

Where appropriate, these grounds reflect the powers in the Corporations Act for the court to wind up a business, including where its directors have acted in their own interests, or otherwise unfairly or unjustly towards members.

Where the unlawful behaviour is contained to one part of an organisation, instead of cancellation, the Court will be empowered to make alternative orders specific to that particular branch or division without affecting other parts of the organisation that are functioning effectively.

The Bill will also make it easier for the Court to appoint an administrator, where the organisation or a part of the organisation has ceased to function effectively, the officers of an organisation engage in financial misconduct, or the organisation fails to act in the best interests of its members. This is not unlike the administration powers that apply to a company that is dysfunctional or otherwise in financial difficulty.

This Bill also introduces a new public interest test that must be satisfied before registered organisations can merge. The Fair Work Commission will consider the likely impact of the merger and an organisation's record of compliance with the law as well as other matters of public interest. Parties with sufficient interest will also have the opportunity to voice their opinions about the proposed merger. Before corporations are able to merge, they must satisfy the regulator that the merger would not substantially lessen competition or is otherwise in the public interest. It is appropriate that registered organisations must do the same.

These reforms are critical to stop the law-breaking by some registered organisations and improve the ability of the Court to remove long-term repeat offenders from holding positions of office.

In re-introducing this Bill, the Government has listened to stakeholders to ensure that its provisions more closely align as far as practicable, the standards for registered organisations and their officers with those that apply to companies and their directors.

This Bill strikes the appropriate balance between ensuring that registered organisations and their officers act with integrity and obey the law, without affecting the vast majority of organisations and their officers that do the right thing and work hard to represent their members and act in their best interest.

All parties in this Parliament who believe in the rule of law should support these reforms.

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Faruqi): Debate adjourned.
Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (19:13): Can I ask a question in terms of the time lines and the need for timing the processes of both the wellbeing exemption and the exit application? In terms of time lines, how are you going to address the need for timely decisions?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:14): One of the things that is currently built into the wellbeing exemption process is that, for somebody who had made an application, we would seek to have had that successfully processed within six to eight weeks, and that would certainly be the kinds of criteria that we would be putting on the exemption process for the financial wellbeing criteria. As we discussed earlier this morning, there are times when the complication of the process will mean that they are not always going to be able to meet those time lines, but they're certainly the kinds of time lines we've been meeting in the past and we'll be seeking to meet in the future.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (19:15): In terms of both the wellbeing and exit provisions— they will be approximately the same time. Do I understand that correctly?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:15): Certainly that's our intention or our understanding. However, because it's potentially a simpler process for the financial aspects as opposed to the wellbeing, it may be possible for it to be shorter. I wouldn't want to give an undertaking to this chamber until we've gone through a few of the processes, but we certainly would be seeking for it to be no longer than the current wellbeing process.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (19:16): My last question on that: is the guide we were talking about this morning going to outline that expected time frame?

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:16): I can take on notice the intent of your question. One of the things that we would be seeking to do is, obviously, expedite the process in cases where it's very simple, so we wouldn't like to give the applicant the view that it's going to take six or eight weeks when in fact it may be a much shorter time frame. But I'll take on notice the intent of your question in relation to providing applicants with some sort of indicative idea of how long the process may be expected to take.

Senator SIEWERT (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (19:17): I now move amendment (1) on sheet 8734 as it relates to exit criteria:

(1) Schedule 1, item 9, page 5 (lines to 1 to 19), omit subsection 124PHB(3), substitute:
Secretary's decision on application

(3) The Secretary may determine that the person is not a trial participant if the Secretary is satisfied that:

(a) the person can demonstrate reasonable and responsible management of the person's financial affairs; and

(b) the person satisfies any requirements determined in an instrument under subsection (6),

As I articulated in my second reading contribution, the Greens are deeply concerned about the exit criteria. I appreciate the answers to my questions that I received from the minister. However, we still remain very concerned about the broadness of the criteria and the way they may be interpreted. We believe that the process should focus
on the participants' capacity to manage their finances, which is clearly something that is able to be documented, whereas many of those other criteria aren't. I commend the amendment to the Senate.

Question negatived.

Senator CAROL BROWN (Tasmania) (19:18): by leave—I move amendments (1) to (4) on sheet 8730 together:

(1) Schedule 1, item 9, page 5 (line 2 to 19), omit subsection 124PHB(3), substitute:

(3) The Secretary may determine that the person is not a trial participant if the Secretary is satisfied that the person can demonstrate reasonable and responsible management of the person's affairs (including financial affairs), taking into account all of the following:

(a) the interest of any children for whom the person is responsible;
(b) whether the person was convicted of an offence against a law of the Commonwealth, a State or a Territory, or was serving a sentence of imprisonment for such an offence, at any time in the last 12 months;
(c) risks of homelessness;
(d) the health and safety of the person and the community;
(e) the responsibilities and circumstances of the person;
(f) the person's engagement in the community, including the person's employment or efforts to obtain work.

(2) Schedule 1, item 9, page 5 (lines 27 and 28), omit subsection 124PHB(6), substitute:

(6) The Minister may, by legislative instrument, make guidelines setting out how reasonable and responsible management of a person's affairs can be demonstrated for the purposes of subsection (3).

(3) Schedule 1, item 9, page 5 (line 29), omit "a determination", substitute "guidelines".

(4) Schedule 1, item 9, page 6 (line 8), omit "paragraphs (3) (a) and (b)", substitute "subsection (3)".

These amendments would remove a provision that allows the minister to specify other requirements a person must meet before being permitted to leave the cashless debit card and replace it with a provision that allows the minister to specify more details about how exiting the requirements should be met. This is because Labor does not think the government should be able to make it harder for people to get off the card, particularly given the breadth of the existing requirements in relation to the management of financial affairs, the protection of children and unlawful behaviour.

Senator RUSTON (South Australia—Minister for Families and Social Services and Manager of Government Business in the Senate) (19:19): The reason for the provision that you're referring to in this amendment is, in the co-design with community leaders, we believe that it is appropriate as it currently exists so that we can be flexible and responsive to community concerns and respond to them in a timely way.

Progress reported.

ADJOURNMENT

The ACTING DEPUTY PRESIDENT (Senator Faruqi) (19:20): Order! I propose the question:

That the Senate do now adjourn.

Conservative Political Action Conference

Senator STOKER (Queensland) (19:20): I rise to speak on this adjournment debate to respond to some comments made about me in this chamber by Senator Keneally and others in the last day, which, if they were made outside of this chamber, would have been no less than defamatory. It was about my scheduled talk at the CPAC conference, which, if anyone is interested at all, is on the important theme of improving our economic productivity—hardly, I'd suggest, a topic that is about to stir race riots.

While I don't know all of the speakers who will be on at CPAC, I'm proud to be sharing the stage with some people of enormous calibre: former Prime Minister John Anderson, who I deeply respect; Jacinta Nampijinpa Price; and Janet Albrechtsen. They're just a few names in a long list of very credible people. It's action packed, and, I confess, I don't know everyone, but I look forward to meeting them.

Jacinta has advised me that her talk will centre around her experiences of being an Indigenous conservative in a politically correct world. Warren Mundine will be talking about reform in Indigenous affairs. Both Jacinta and Warren have valid viewpoints on their topics, and I respect them both deeply. But again, it's hardly the stuff of tear gas and rubber bullets.

I want to respond to the insinuation from Senator Keneally that I endorse the comments made by Raheem Kassam. They're not comments I'd ever make, and nor do I endorse them. They're crass, and they're stupid for a grown man to make, but, let's be clear, they're not dangerous. I'm told he has apologised for them. Regardless, they're wrong. Had Mr Kassam threatened the safety of someone, I might be as alarmed as Senator Keneally, but,
to call for him to be banned from this country for being an idiot—well, we'd never see an English football or cricket supporter ever enter this country again. Through you, Acting Deputy President Senator Faruqi, does Senator Keneally feel her opinions are so soft, her world view so fragile, that she could not withstand or argue against opinions with which she does not agree?

There's an elitist attitude that there is never any wrong in the Labor Party. We all know Senator Keneally started her career in New South Wales in the Labor Party prior to entering the Senate. Senator Keneally sat in the party room as Eddie Obeid and Ian Macdonald, both of whom we know went to prison for their corruption, and Joe Tripodi too. Indeed, she wouldn't have ever been a leader without her good old mate Eddie. She is a member of the branch of the Labor Party which produced Luke Foley. He lost the leadership over being a bit inappropriately handsy with an ABC journalist. Could the senator express her views on that particular incident? After all, she was Foley's boss for a while there. Senator Keneally also sat in the same party room as Mr Daley, who made remarks shortly before the NSW election this year which The Sydney Morning Herald labelled as racist. They said:

Let's not tiptoe—Daley's comment that "our young children" were being "replaced by young people from typically Asia with PhDs" was racist.

Does Senator Keneally now not attend functions when these people are present? Does she avoid Labor conferences when she knows they'll be there? Did Senator Keneally ever condemn the two local councils of Marrickville and Leichhardt for their anti-Semitic, anti-Israel stances? Did Senator Keneally ever ask Joe Tripodi about his treatment of women, in particular the one that accused him of sexually assaulting her in his office in the year 2000?

Did she ever apply the same standard to members of her own party, the people who endorsed her as a senator, that she is now applying to Raheem Kassam? Will she be delivering similarly impassioned, self-righteous speeches about them in the chamber? I won't hold my breath. Senator Keneally has had, in her career, many opportunities to hold her party to a higher standard, and she has failed time after time after time.

As for my attendance at CPAC, I won't be asking Senator Keneally for permission to attend this forum. If we're doing our job properly as politicians, we should be talking to people from all walks of life, every day, and of course we won't agree with them all the time. That's exactly how it should be. I'm sure Senator Keneally doesn't endorse what he said. I will give her the benefit of the doubt that she'd never give me. But to try and shame me into not attending a conference of many educated and thoughtful individuals— (Time expired)

Follett, Ms Rosemary, AO

Senator GALLAGHER (Australian Capital Territory—Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate) (19:25): I rise tonight to make a short contribution on an important anniversary, which is the 30-year anniversary of the first woman elected to lead a government in Australia, and that was Rosemary Follett, here in the ACT. She was elected the first Chief Minister of the ACT in 1989, at the beginning of ACT self-government.

Prior to being elected Chief Minister, Rosemary was the member for Fraser in the ACT House of Assembly, which preceded self-government, and she had also become the president of ACT Labor in 1987. It's hard for me, having been a chief minister following Rosemary, to understand or get my head around exactly how difficult being in that inaugural territory parliament, in the election in 1989, would have been. People who haven't followed territory politics closely might not be aware that self-government was rejected by the ACT community, the people of the ACT; they had wanted to remain under the administration of the Commonwealth. So there were a whole range of competing pressures. One was a community that didn't want self-government. Another was that significant cuts had to be made by the incoming ACT government to deal with cuts by the Commonwealth that had transferred with the election. Along with that, there were only five Labor members, I think, in the first parliament, and four Liberal members. There were a range of anti-self-government parties—in fact, there were representatives from the Abolish Self-Government Coalition and the No Self-Government Party. The ballot paper, the whole election, had been very, very difficult, I think.

Rosemary reflected, on the weekend when we had the anniversary celebration, that, walking into the chamber that first day, it wasn't clear to her if she was walking in to become Chief Minister, opposition leader or, indeed, a member of the crossbench, depending on how the vote flowed—because the assembly is the chamber that elects the Chief Minister after the election of the Speaker, and so it's done by secret ballot. To this day, she maintains she doesn't know how she got nine of the 17 votes. But she did become the first female head of government in Australia, the first Chief Minister of the ACT. There were a lot of firsts for Rosemary. She's very humble about the contribution she made to politics, but I know as someone who lived in the ACT who wasn't a member of the party, certainly, Rosemary being the first and being such a strong role model encouraged women like me to get involved in politics and to stay in politics.
Rosemary also had to deal with minority government, which isn't easy, in a very turbulent time. The Labor government she led was short-lived and was removed by a motion of no confidence by the ACT assembly, but she returned in 1991 and then led Labor to election victory in 1992. Labor lost the following election, but Rosemary remained in the assembly until 1996. There were many measures she put in place as Chief Minister—important changes in a very new ACT government, with an ACT public service that hadn't existed before. She had a very reluctant public service. Many of the people who came to the ACT public service were people forced to leave the Commonwealth Public Service, so they weren't happy to be there. There were no laws; the first parliament had to create the statute book.

The challenges before Rosemary were many, and she spoke about this at the 30th anniversary event. She spoke from the heart, I think, as she reflected on the words she used during that first election campaign, and when she was newly elected, and how she has remained true to those words. I think that's a very important lesson for all of us in politics, particularly those that stay around a long time: to stay true to the things that originally drove us. Rosemary led the way for many women, not just here in the ACT but across the country, and her public service continued after politics. I have to say, the second female Chief Minister, Kate Carnell, was very sharp, and offered Rosemary a job outside the parliament, which she took, and worked in the public service for the public, as she always has. We thank her very much for the work she did. To Rosemary: we thank you for your service.

**Conservative Political Action Conference**

**Hospitals**

**Senator AYRES** (New South Wales) (19:30): Following on from Senator Gallagher's contribution, I would like to pay tribute to Rosemary Follett and the contribution that she's made to politics, not just in the ACT but around the Commonwealth of Australia.

While I'm on my feet, I'd also like to reflect briefly on what was a weak and, essentially, incoherent defence of the indefensible from Senator Stoker. She said about the CPAC conference that she didn't know who was coming but she looked forward to meeting them. Well, we know quite a bit about who is coming, and I'm quite worried that Senator Stoker looks forward to meeting them. What they have to contribute to Australian conservative politics is beyond me. It's not crass; it's misogynistic and violent. One of them is a Holocaust denier. Obfuscation by weak comparisons is no defence, and I think that Senator Stoker should reflect overnight on whether or not she's defending the indefensible—and not get into the corner and try to fight her way out, but reflect on whether it's actually the right thing for the Australian people, to be encouraging racism and violence and ultra-right politics. There's a more colloquial expression that I won't use in this chamber, but I do think that you're judged by the company that you keep.

I rise this evening really to indicate my support for—and I think that the Senate should also support—the thousands of members of the Health Services Union of New South Wales who are going on strike tomorrow to attend a four-hour stop-work meeting, because of concerns about safety in public hospitals. It's not a wage dispute, although they've got every right to be angry about their wages. It's not a dispute about their hours or about staffing levels in public hospitals, although they've got every right to be angry about those issues. They are on strike because public hospitals in New South Wales have never been more dangerous: more dangerous for staff, and more dangerous for the community who use them. The HSU has had members stabbed and shot, and the safety of patients, staff and visitors is constantly put at risk. The response from the New South Wales government, of course, is to hold another review, after a previous review in 2016 that made no progress with the deep-seated safety issues that they face.

Public hospitals should be safe places—safe for staff and safe for patients. The HSU has a plan. It has a legitimate set of grievances. It is a tough thing to do. It is a brave thing to do, to go on strike to go to a stop-work meeting. It's something that the New South Wales government has been actively opposing. It is, I would add, something that in the Commonwealth public sector is not lawful, and I think that's a real problem with our democracy. But I want to congratulate those thousands of members of the Health Services Union who are taking a stand for public health, public hospitals and safety.

**Grandparents**

**Senator SIEWERT** (Western Australia—Australian Greens Whip) (19:34): I rise tonight to talk about a very important issue, and that is grandparent carers across Australia. Grandparent carers are those taking primary responsibility for raising their grandchildren. There are many reasons why children could be living with their grandparents, including the death of a parent, parental drug or alcohol abuse, mental health issues, incarceration and family violence. Very often children experience, in fact, an intersection of all of these issues.

I want to recognise the vital role that grandparents play in providing a safe and loving environment when raising their grandchildren. Without them, there would be thousands of children stuck in out-of-home care,
removed from links to their family. Grandparent care is the fastest growing form of out-of-home care for children in this country. As at January 2018, half of all children in relative or kinship placements were living with their grandparents. Recent research out of my home state of Western Australia shows that grandparent carers are predominantly single older women living on low incomes and raising, on average, three grandchildren.

Grandparent carers face unique challenges in their role as carers, and these challenges require a specialised approach. I have received many letters from grandparent carers living in Western Australia. Their letters describe the financial stress they experience, the lack of legal security, personal health issues and their difficulties meeting the complex care needs of often traumatised grandchildren. Several of my constituents spoke of the significant financial stress they faced caring for their grandchildren, especially whilst struggling to get by on income support payments.

We know from the emerging research that children have significantly better outcomes in kinship care compared to those in foster care. It is critical that we find ways to support grandparent carers to continue in their roles. One way that we could better support grandparent carers is by ensuring that they are exempt from participating in the activity requirements attached to Newstart and related payments. Regardless of whether they have a court order or not—and that's a significant problem for those who don't actually have a court order, despite caring for their grandchildren—grandparents are already going above and beyond to raise their grandchildren. They shouldn't be subject to harsh mutual obligations and threatened with having their income support payments cut.

Unfortunately, service providers and the broader social security system often don't acknowledge the role of grandparents. This is further complicated if there is an absence of any legal recognition of the caring arrangement, which often there is not. Grandparents usually don't have access to the same financial assistance and income support payments available to foster carers. It is critical that the government fixes this two-tier system to ensure that all grandparents raising their grandchildren are able to access adequate financial assistance and essential services, including Centrelink and Medicare. This is not just a state issue. Please, Commonwealth government, don't just fob it off to the states. The Commonwealth is responsible for some of the key issues, such as those around Centrelink and Medicare.

Grandparent carers understandably find it difficult to navigate service and payment systems. I strongly support a review into the number, geographical location and allocation of Centrelink grandparent advisers to ensure that needs are being met in high-demand service areas and in rural and regional Australia. Grandparent carers provide significant social and economic benefit to the wider community, often at the detriment of their own health, finances and relationships. We have recently formed, in this place, the Parliamentary Friends of Grandparents Raising Grandchildren. Through this group, I look forward to working with stakeholders and my parliamentary colleagues to work on and promote issues important to grandparent carers across this nation.

Senate adjourned at 19:38