



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS**  
**Australian Greens' Policy Costings**  
**SPEECH**

**Monday, 10 September 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Monday, 10 September 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Jones, Stephen, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr STEPHEN JONES** (Throsby) (21:14): I understand that last week in Perth the member for Wentworth gave an important speech, and in the course of that speech he cast some doubt upon the tactics of members of the coalition in question time and the issues they choose to focus on. I would hate to verbal the member for Wentworth, but I think the point he was making was that they had spent most of the last two years focusing on issues that really should not be in the in-tray of any serious government or any serious opposition. It would appear that it is not only question time in which those opposite indulge in their obfuscation tactics; it also happens during private members' business. To see the member for Mayo dawdle into this chamber and hear him criticise the Labor government for allegedly trying to withhold Treasury documents from release under FOI is breathtaking.

Let us leave aside for a moment the fact that under the Freedom of Information Act neither a minister nor the government decides what information departments release. Under this government at least, decisions are made independently by officials in each department and not by ministers themselves. Under the government's agreements with the Greens and the Independents they can ask us to cost policies and they can ask us to consider policies as part of the budget as well. Where policies are considered for funding, they are covered by the cabinet exemption—completely in keeping with normal practice under successive governments.

The member for Mayo and his Liberal Party mates are the only mob in this parliament who have form in trying to keep Treasury documents beyond the reach of the FOI Act. Let us not forget that when those opposite were in government the Liberal Party poster boy, Peter Costello, the former Treasurer, fought the media tooth and nail all the way to the High Court—the highest court in the land—to avoid giving out tax office documents about bracket creep and Treasury documents about the First Home Owners Scheme. This is the same mob who have come in here today saying there is something crook in the state of Denmark because documents are not being released under the freedom of information laws. Peter Costello was so desperate to conceal this information from scrutiny that he issued a conclusive certificate—a dodgy device designed to shut down debate about Mr Costello hiding those documents, destroying any chance that the media might have of getting a fair hearing on appeal.

I am proud to say that getting rid of these conclusive certificates was one of the first things the Labor Party did on achieving office in 2007—a stark contrast to the approach of the member for Mayo and his Liberal Party cronies. If the member for Mayo would like some clarification about the dodgy way that the Liberal Party and the former Treasurer handled documents under FOI, he might like to take his bluff and bluster down the hallway to the current member for Higgins and have a chat with her, because the member for Higgins used to work for Peter Costello as one of his FOI advisers. She probably remembers sitting around with him in the back of his office plotting with the former Treasurer, scheming up ways they could issue one of these conclusive certificates—they did not call him 'CC' for nothing—and could defeat the purpose of the FOI Act. I am very pleased to say that, in complete contrast to those opposite, we have presided over a regime where the presumption is to disclose, where the presumption is in favour of transparency.

So, given the Liberal Party's shady past, it is hypocritical of the member for Mayo to saunter into this chamber and criticise the Labor government for its record on handling Treasury documents under FOI. If he were in London at the moment he would be standing on the dais and they would be putting a gold medal around his neck—he would get a gold medal in the hypocrisy olympics. You have to wonder who is in charge of the opposition's tactics. The member for Wentworth really did nail it last week when he gave that speech in Perth saying that you have to scratch your head and you have to wonder about the tactics and the strategies and the issues that those opposite are focusing on at the moment. They are certainly not the big issues. (*Time expired*)