



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Budget

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Andrews, Kevin, MP

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Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (15:46): The reality is that Australian families are paying for the economic and fiscal incompetence of the Gillard-Rudd government. Not only is this an incompetent government—perhaps the most incompetent government that has ever graced the Treasury benches in this place—but it is also one that is fundamentally dishonest. From the very start, this has been a government that has been prepared to deceive the Australian people—"There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead." Prime Ministers are often remembered for a phrase or some words. John Howard's famous quip about 'deciding who would come to Australia' is remembered by Australians. Well, if there is one phrase that Australians will remember this Prime Minister by it will be: 'There will be no carbon tax under a government I lead.'

That promise that she made and then ripped up when it became politically convenient to ensure that she was able to sit in that chair and take her place in The Lodge set the tone for the Labor government that we have seen ever since. And the budget presented this week again shows the fundamental dishonesty of this government. We had it last year with the overblown spin and hype from the Treasurer, with words to the effect of: 'I'm announcing tonight four surpluses over the forward estimates into the future.' They were the words that the Treasurer started last year's budget speech with. Well, here we are just over 12 months later. What has happened to those four fabulous surpluses that the Treasurer promised the Australian people 12 months ago? You had to be listening hard to his budget speech this year to actually find what the deficit for this year is. That fabulous surplus turns into a \$19.4 billion deficit for this financial year.

But it is not just this year; next year there is an \$18 billion deficit and the following year an \$11 billion deficit. So four years of surplus suddenly turns into \$19 billion plus \$18 billion plus \$11 billion worth of deficits—all accumulating and adding to the total debt of the Commonwealth of Australia. Those on the other side pretend that the debt of the Commonwealth of Australia somehow does not matter. But the frank reality is that it is the debt of all of us. We are the Commonwealth of Australia. You are the stewards for the people of Australia. And how have you conducted your stewardship? With fundamental incompetence and dishonesty.

Those opposite cannot even be honest in the way they describe things. Listen to the conceptual language used by the Treasurer in question time today and on other occasions—the corruption of language which has occurred under this government. They talk about 'saves'. If you ask an ordinary Australian what a saving is they would say that a saving is that you do not spend what you might have otherwise spent—when you put the money in the bank, so to speak. That is what we understand a 'saving' to be. But we have got this new piece of political corruption of language going on in which the Treasurer and others opposite talk about 'saves'. What are those 'saves'? A large proportion of those 'saves' are actually tax increases. If you said to ordinary Australians, 'Saving money involves increasing the taxes on Australians,' do you think that people would believe that that is actually a saving? Of course not. That again goes to the fundamental dishonesty of this government—dishonesty in terms of the language that is being used in this place and elsewhere, where a 'save', connoting somehow that that is a saving in terms of expenditure, is actually an increase in taxes on ordinary Australians.

Let's go to the slogan that is being used about this budget. This is a budget, we are told, that is about growth and jobs. If somebody said positively that this is something about growth and jobs, what would your expectation be from the budget, from the government's program? The expectation would be that growth is going to increase and, equally, that jobs are going to increase. That is fair enough. That is what they are trying to pretend to the Australian people that this budget is about—growth and jobs. Well, lo and behold, look inside the budget papers themselves and see what they actually show. In terms of growth, the forecast from the Treasury is that growth is going to go down, not up. So it would be more accurate to say that this is about a lack of growth, about an absence of growth, about a decline in growth, than to somehow pretend, through their slogans and spin—their fundamental dishonesty with the Australian people—that this is somehow about growth.

And what about jobs? Again, look inside the budget papers. In those papers it shows the unemployment rate in Australia increasing, not decreasing. If we are talking about an increase in jobs then the corollary of that is

that the unemployment rate goes down. And yet the detail of these budget papers shows the employment rate going up to 5.75 per cent from 5.5 per cent where it is now. Even to use the expression that this is a budget about growth and jobs is a fundamental dishonesty. It is trying to pretend one thing to the Australian people when in fact the opposite is happening, and that is why I say this is not only the most incompetent government we have probably seen in the history of the federation of the Commonwealth of Australia, it is a fundamentally dishonest government as well. If you look at that in terms of what this means for ordinary Australians, it means that they are going to pay for it. Australian families are paying for this incompetence.

Consider the position of families in Australia under this government. In the cost-of-living increases since Labor came to power—the December quarter of 2007 through to the March quarter of 2013—nationally, across Australia, Australians are paying 93.8 per cent more for their electricity, almost a doubling in electricity prices under this government. Australians are paying 63.1 per cent more for their water and sewerage. For utilities, they are paying 79.2 per cent more—again, almost a doubling. Gas, up by 61.8 per cent. Even insurance has gone up under the duration of this government by 45.4 per cent. The government talks about schools—and I will come to that in a moment—education expenses and education costs have gone up by 38.7 per cent. Medical and hospital services—these are fundamental services that we are talking about—increased by 40.9 per cent. If you do not own your house and you are renting—many Australians are in that situation—30 per cent increase in rental prices in Australia. Of course, that has been compounded since the introduction of the carbon tax because, since the introduction of that, we have had electricity up by 18 per cent, and gas and other household fuels have increased by 14.1 per cent since the introduction on 1 July.

If you want to go to the dishonesty again in this government, I said that education prices have gone up by 38.7 per cent. Again, if you listen to this government, it says one of the lynchpins of this government is an increase in actual education reforms. Somehow, after the Gonski reforms we are going to be better off. A graph taken for the budget papers—it is not our graph, it is the budget papers' graph produced by the Treasurer—shows that over the next three years there are going to be more savings for the government from education reforms than there are from increased school expenditure. Once again, pretending one thing, spinning it one way, trying to convert the Australian people to believing that the government is doing the right thing. When you go to the detail in the budget papers themselves, what do we find? Totally the opposite.

So Australian families are paying for the incompetence of this government. Whether or not it is the changes to the family tax benefits, whether it is the slashing of the baby bonus—a measure put in place to try and do something to ensure that we maintain a replacement level, or near replacement level, of fertility rate in Australia, these changes and the other changes are being paid for by Australian families, and why? Because this government is incompetent, and now it is being dishonest about it. The combination of an incompetent and dishonest government is something which Australians have found out and they know about it, because as I go around this country—as all my colleagues do—wherever you go in this country, people will tell you straightaway, 'Why can't we have an election tomorrow?' They want to have an election tomorrow because they are sick and tired of the incompetence and now sick and tired of the dishonesty of this government.

The reality is that until we get a decent Treasurer—if somehow the Labor Party win the next election, you can be assured that Mr Swan will not be the Treasurer, his colleagues would make sure that—we are not going to have a decent command of the books in Australia, and Australia will not be prosperous as a result.