



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**GRIEVANCE DEBATE**

**Howard Government**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 17 September 2007**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Hayes, Chris, MP

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**Mr HAYES** (Werriwa) (4.21 pm)—In 1964 Donald Horne wrote *The Lucky Country*. The original passage from which the title came was an ironic reflection on the position of Australia at that time. For those who do not recall, the opening sentence of *The Lucky Country* is:

Australia is a lucky country, run by second-rate people who share its luck.

Donald Horne's argument was, in essence, that Australia had developed as a nation at a time when it could reap the benefits of technological, economic, social and political innovations that were being developed in other countries; however, rather than doing so, rather than being one of those clever countries, Australia had just been lucky.

The reason I hark back to those comments today is that the situation faced then almost parallels the situation now faced by Australians. There is no doubt that China's great booming economy and the rapidly emerging economy of India have had a significant influence on the prosperity of Australia—the prosperity we are currently experiencing. China has become the effective engine room of the Australian economy and a great many are sharing in the benefits, not to mention the current government, which is experiencing an unprecedented growth in tax revenues as a result.

Despite the years of growing tax receipts this government has systematically failed to invest in the renewal of our social and economic infrastructure. This government's neglect is felt more keenly in the outer metropolitan areas of Sydney, such as Liverpool and Campbelltown and the surrounding suburbs. For example, take the section of the Hume Highway between Ingleburn and Campbelltown. North of the Brooks Road overpass at Ingleburn, both sides are soon to be four lanes each way. South of Brooks Road, there are only two lanes each way. Needless to say, when you try to pack four lanes of traffic into two lanes you end up with what is known locally as the Brooks Road bottleneck. The bottleneck at Brooks Road has placed an artificial limit on potential economic development in the Macarthur region and has also not allowed the potential of the M7 to be fully realised. For the last couple of years I have raised this matter with the government. We all recognise the importance of the Hume Highway in Australia's land transport and trade networks, yet this government has resisted doing anything about unblocking this section of roadway. The government resisted taking this issue seriously until four days after the shadow minister for roads and I announced that a Rudd Labor government would widen this section of road. Years of resistance to the widening disappeared in four days of electoral desperation.

Local residents will not be fooled by desperate election promises by a desperate government. What is more, residents in other outer metropolitan areas throughout this country will not be fooled by last minute backflips on a range of issues. They will not be fooled by this government's attempts to gloss over decades of neglect on climate change. They will not be fooled by a government that continues to resist providing high-speed, high-quality broadband services to suburbs like Prestons, Horningsea Park, Hoxton Park, Austral and others, whose residents are being told that they should be satisfied with a second-rate wireless service and not the full fibre-to-node service that is now considered internationally as being the base level of service for most other advanced, developed countries. They will not be fooled by a government that promised to keep interest rates low and yet has presided over five consecutive interest rate rises since the last election, in 2004. They will not be fooled by the millions of dollars wasted on government advertising at the expense of investment in child care, health services and education.

Consider the litany of complaints and genuine grievances of the Australian public and the mood for change. You cannot help but turn your mind back a little to the time when there was a similar mood for change in this country. In November 1972, the then member for Werriwa said:

Will you believe with me that Australia can be changed, should be changed, must be changed, if we are to have for ourselves and our children a better Australia, with a better grip on the realities of living in the modern world, and in our region as it really is?

He went on to say:

And will you believe with me that a new government, a new program, a new team, is desperately needed to provide that change?

That must resonate, even with the member for Macarthur, who obviously did come out some four days after and try to match Labor's commitment to widen the F5, which he has not been able to do for the six years that he has been in office.

As men and women enter polling places in this coming election I dare say that they will be asking these very questions. At this election voters will be faced with a choice of either a forward-looking Labor Party with plans to restore fairness in the workplace and invest in the future of our nation or a coalition government who will say or do anything to get re-elected and, more importantly, to give the Prime Minister a final lap of honour at taxpayers' expense. This government has not detailed any plans. The last time that members opposite were similarly silent during an election campaign, what did we get? We got those extreme, unfair Work Choices laws that were brought in with no mandate. We ended up with workplace laws that mean that no matter how hard Australians work they can never be relaxed and comfortable in their workplaces; they can never go to work safe in the knowledge that they cannot be sacked without reason.

In the south-west of Sydney in electorates like Werriwa and Macarthur we have heard stories about unfair treatment in the workplace quite often, I have to say, as the member for Macarthur will attest. The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations recently visited the electorate of Macarthur and claimed that he did not hear any complaints about Work Choices. Maybe he should have spoken to employees when they were out of earshot of their employers. He should have spoken to the people at Esselte in Minto. He should have spoken to people like Reynaldo Cortez, or Reinaldo Martinez, or Errol Ogle or some of the many other people who have approached me but have been far too afraid of the ramifications to speak out publicly. They have all felt the sharp end of the Work Choices legislation.

The Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations has a way with words. Last week he described the Prime Minister as 'the Don Bradman of Australian politics'. I would like to remind the minister that, sadly, Don Bradman was bowled out for a duck in his very last innings, but surely the minister was not expressing doubts about the Prime Minister's ability to put in a good innings in what is now officially his last.

I ask members opposite to note the grievances of those Australians who have been overlooked, ignored, betrayed, disappointed, snubbed, ostracised, disenfranchised and angered by the inaction and neglect of this government on so many issues. Unlike this government, a Rudd Labor government will take on the difficult issues and address the legitimate concerns over the future resulting from more than a decade of neglect under the Howard government. Labor has announced plans to tackle climate change, to restore fairness to our industrial relations system, to invest in the infrastructure that our economy needs to compete with the world at the highest level, to invest in broadband and to set out on an education revolution to equip us for the future. That is the type of investment in our combined futures that the Australian public is expecting from its national government and it is national leadership that will only be delivered by a Rudd Labor government.