



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS

Centrelink

SPEECH

Wednesday, 8 February 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Ryan, Joanne, MP

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Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (10:18): I rise today to add my voice, again this week, to debate about the Centrelink debacle that this government has wrought upon the Australian public across the break period. It is cruel, and the system that they are using is inaccurate. It is inaccurate because they have removed the human oversight to the data matching system. It is a system that is now purported to have a 40 per cent failure rate. That is, it is identifying 40 per cent of people and telling them that they owe the government money.

I want those opposite to really think about this: imagine you are at home and you receive a letter or an email that says that you are being accused of the defrauding the Commonwealth. Let's get this in perspective: if you have not defrauded the Commonwealth you should not be accused of doing so, particularly when the evidence is so plainly available to the government.

I will take this case in point: a person in my electorate, who I sat with over the summer period while Minister Tudge was on leave and not available to come back and address the issue. Most of us in our electoral offices were dealing with the human face of this planned failure—a 40 per cent failure. I sat with a resident who had been told they had a \$5,000-plus debt. Their letters had not gone to her address—it is amazing how we can match data but we cannot find someone on the electric electoral roll and their accurate address—but they sent it to a relative's address. So there was time before this person saw the letter. They then saw this letter that said they owed \$5,000.

This person is working full time. This person had Centrelink support six years ago while they sought work as a teacher after re-educating themselves and getting new qualifications. So they got Centrelink support through that year while they applied for positions. At the end of that year, they celebrated long and hard because they secured themselves a full-time position for the following year. They rang Centrelink in January and said: 'I no longer need support. I have secured full-time employment.' This is a person this government should be celebrating—someone who has re-educated themselves, someone who has then sought and found full-time employment in our school system. But, no, she was spending her half-hour lunchbreak on the phone to Centrelink to tell them of their error.

This person has been proved to be absolutely innocent in this case. There is no waiving of a debt; there is no debt. This is just one story, of which there are many. This morning on Facebook, one of my locals quipped to me that it was time to rename Centrelink 'the missing link'. That is how people in my community feel about Centrelink and this government at the moment. (*Time expired*)