



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Asylum Seekers

SPEECH

Wednesday, 31 October 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

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Mr MORRISON (Cook) (15:16): The immigration minister has his hands in the pockets of Australian taxpayers again. I note that, once again, the minister is not in the chamber today to respond to this matter of public importance. Once again he has resumed his global search for Captain Emad out there beyond this place and he has sent his deputy the Minister for Home Affairs, my friend and colleague the member for Blaxland. I look forward to his contribution, but I would really like it if the minister for immigration would stand in this place for once and actually answer for the accountability of his public policy failings, because that is the subject of this matter of public importance debate today.

This minister has run out of money again. He came into this place yesterday and asked for another \$1.7 billion from Australian taxpayers when he presented an Orwellianly titled appropriation bill to fund the implementation of the Houston report. Of the \$1.7 billion in that appropriation bill, \$1.3 billion was for the increase in the number of arrivals this year in excess of the government's estimate back in May. That is a misrepresentation, I think, to the Australian people, as I referred to earlier today, about the purposes for which this minister is seeking more money. This minister has run out of money because he has failed on our borders like no immigration minister ever before. His record of failure is without peer when it comes to these matters.

The budget will be blown on boats alone when it comes to the surplus. If the government want to know where their surplus is, they will find it as it recedes into the night on the boats that come to this country on a more than daily basis. They will find that surplus frittered away in detention centres at Christmas Island, at Curtin near Derby, up near Weipa in North Queensland and on Nauru as well. That is where the surplus has gone. This surplus will disappear into the night simply on the issue of boat blow-outs on our border alone. This surplus will prove more elusive to the government than Captain Emad when it comes to accounting for the significant blow-outs in costs they have occurred as a result of their budget failures.

The blow-outs on our borders will blow out the budget to the tune of \$2.7 billion this year. That is a 2,000 per cent increase on what the government had put in its budget annually in 2009-10—a 2,000 per cent increase. Before MYEFO the blow-out was \$4.9 billion over three years; today that blow-out over four years is \$6.6 billion. That is the price of border failure in financial terms from this government.

But the government are still saying they are going to achieve a \$1.2 billion surplus. In this place yesterday we asked the Prime Minister, as we have asked the minister each day, to explain what the new figure in the budget is based on. How many people are they expecting to turn up this year? In the budget they said it would be 450 per month. That was based on the 30-month average, which is the standing policy of the department of immigration and the department of finance when estimating the number of arrivals they anticipate in a given year. The Prime Minister refused to answer the question. The minister has refused the opportunity to respond to this question every time he has stepped up to a microphone anywhere in this country.

But I am going to help the minister out. On the 30-month average that has been adopted by the department, the 30-month average to the end of September is 713 arrivals per month. If this budget is based on 713 arrivals per month, they are out by a country mile because we are averaging 2,075 per month every month this year. So go the boats, so goes the surplus, and the government will never deliver a surplus so long as they cannot control our border. If they cannot control the border, they cannot control the budget. We have seen the figures blow out month after month, year after year, totalling a massive \$6.6 billion over four years and out into the estimates. This is a history of failure that knows no peer.

That \$1.7 billion included \$268 million for the building of the Nauru and Manus Island facilities. I noted earlier today that, in January of this year, when the government said, 'We're opposed to building Nauru,' they said it would cost \$422,000 per bed. That is what they said in January, when they did not want to do it. Now they are doing it—guess what? It costs \$126,000 per bed. The thing I have learnt about the government is that they will demonise border policies that were successful under the coalition until the day they adopt them. That is what

has happened here. They have adopted the Nauru and Manus Island policies. It took them years and they had to be dragged kicking and screaming to the table. We welcome that, but they have a long, long way to go. That is why the boats keep coming—because the government refuse to restore the full measures that worked under the Howard government.

We also know that there was a bill introduced today which seeks to effectively excise the Australian mainland from the migration zone. It is the same bill that came into this place in 2006. The member for Berowra will remember that well and he will remember the debates, I am sure. In those debates, it was said that this measure was 'a stain on our national character' and that it offended decency, by our now minister for immigration; that it was shameful and xenophobic, by the former Leader of the Opposition, Mr Crean; and that it was lunacy, indecent, inhumane and gutless, by another current minister. Yet today they bring it into the House and vote for it.

You can be confident that those who sit on this side of the House will vote in a way that is consistent with the way they have voted before on these matters. On that side of the House, all you have is hypocrisy, and that hypocrisy is the stain that sits on this government when it comes to its failures on borders and the stain it has put on the budget with the blow-outs that know no peer. This is a government that continues to make it up as it goes along when it comes to our borders. This is a government that has failed in every respect to come to terms with the magnitude of the error of its decision to abolish the policies that worked.

The 'stain on our national character' today is not what the now minister for immigration said all those years ago in 2006—and, looking back on representations of ourselves six years ago, we have all weathered a bit since then. What is clear is that the real stain on the national character is the one that has been inflicted by the government in relation to our borders. The stain that marks every member that sits opposite is the stain of cost, chaos and tragedy when it comes to their failures on our borders. It is the stain of over 28,000 people turning up on over 480 vessels; the stain of those who have been lost at sea; the stain of denying protection visas to over 8,000 people in this country because of this government's policies—

Mr Danby interjecting—

Mr MORRISON: because they did not come on a boat.

Mr Danby interjecting—

Mr MORRISON: That is the stain that the member for Melbourne Ports will have to explain to his electorate.

Mr Danby: I'll explain it! You explain the stain of—

Mr MORRISON: That is the stain that he will be accountable for. That is the hypocrisy when he votes for the bill that he has supported when it comes into the House. That is the stain he is going to have to explain. The stain you will have to explain is your failure on our borders—

Mr Danby interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Melbourne Ports is warned!

Mr MORRISON: That is the stain that members opposite will have to live with. And it will not wash off. It will not wash off with political spin. It will not wash off with clever press conferences. It will not wash off with smoke and mirrors. It will not wash off with Angus Houston. It will only wash off when you acknowledge the fact that you got it wrong and you need to fix that error by restoring policies that work. This minister for immigration is the biggest spending immigration minister in our history. He has his hands so far into your pockets that those pockets stretch all the way down to your bootlaces. This is a minister—

The SPEAKER: The member for Cook should be very careful about the word 'you'.

Mr MORRISON: I will, Madam Speaker. This minister for immigration has dipped his hands into the pockets of Australian taxpayers like no other. The Australian people need deep pockets to pay for this government's failures, and not just on border protection. We know of the government's cost blow-outs right across the board. But, in particular, on border protection, we know that it is the Australian taxpayer who is going to have to pay for the blow-outs on our borders.

The baby bonus has been turned into a boat bonus for people smugglers, because that is how the government are going to pay for it. How are they going to pay for the blow-outs? We saw it in the MYEFO. There is the baby bonus reduction for second and subsequent children—\$505.9 million. In private health insurance, there is both the abolition of the rebate on premium increases above CPI and the removal of the rebate on Lifetime Health Cover; that is \$1 billion. There is the great super swipe, coming in and swiping your super after 12 months; that is \$800 million. Then there are the increases to government charges, with a levy on self-managed super—\$319 million. That is what is paying for the boat blow-out. That is what is paying for this government's inability to manage our borders, because when you cannot manage your borders you cannot manage the budget. That is what we are seeing as every financial update and budget is brought into this place. The graph only goes one way, just like the number of boats: up—and up and up.

Not content with levying taxpayers and families to make them pay for the blow-outs on our borders, the government have also decided to levy those who are coming to Australia through the front door. They have decided, with a \$500 million increase to visa charges, to say, 'You've got to pay,' to those who want to come to Australia the right way—that is, those coming the right way have to pay for those who are seeking to come the wrong way because the government cannot control our borders.

I am not surprised that migrant communities across Australia are outraged by this. They are sick and tired of seeing how this government has allowed the borders to be blown wide open—the unfairness and injustice of their having to work hard in the Australian community, being invested and involved in contributing to their community day after day.

They see the openness of this government on borders for those who would seek to illegally come to Australia and seek permanent residency in Australia by that method. It is just not fair, and they know it is not fair. That is why they are angry with this government for what it has done when it comes to its failures on our borders.

There is a way to end the chaos, the cost and the mess that this government has made of our borders and of our budget. The way to do that is to restore what this government has abolished. But that will not be enough, because we know that this government has so stained its credibility on our borders that it has lost the authority to be able to send the message to those who would seek to come and risk their lives in this way that this government will not be a soft touch. That is what it has proven to be. This government makes all sorts of bold claims and boasts but, when it comes to the policies, resolve and delivery on the ground and at sea, this government has simply not proved to have the mettle to do it. The costs will continue, the blow-outs will continue and the boats will continue so long as this government sits on those benches.

The only message that people smugglers will understand when it comes to stopping the boats coming to Australia is a change of government. This is what will be before the Australian people at the next election. At the next election, there is a chance to get this right again. There will be the opportunity to vote for policies that are proven, that worked and that will be backed up by the resolve of a government who believe in what they say, will do what they believe and will carry this through every single day until this madness, chaos and carnage on our borders is stopped.