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GOVERNOR GENERAL'S SPEECH

SPEECH

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Speaker Ryan, Joanne, MP

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Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (11:40): It is an absolute pleasure, it is humbling and it is an absolute privilege to be returned as the member for Lalor for my second term in this place. My electorate is on the front lines of the opportunities and challenges that our great country faces at this critical point in history. As an electorate, our median age is 32. Forty-nine per cent of the residents are paying off their mortgage. Thirty-six per cent of the people who live in the electorate of Lalor were born overseas. It is a young, diverse, aspirational community that needs its government to remove the barriers that stop people from realising their potential. I am proudly from a community made up of people that cannot afford to have their government believe that a person's opportunities should be determined by the lottery of their birth.

My community has the best of everything. It is a city. It has coast and country. It was once known as the country suburb. It began life as a small town, and in my lifetime it has grown to a thriving city of over 200,000 people. You could meet a stranger in the street, and there is a strong chance that either you are related or you are very close to someone they know. Now I go to the shopping centre, to a sporting ground to watch a football game, or to the rec centre or Eagle Stadium on a Saturday morning to watch the netball, and I often stand and am stunned by how much we have grown and by the diversity that has been drawn together in our very special part of the world.

I am glad to have been returned to this place as part of a Labor team and to welcome so many new Labor colleagues. I look to the member for Bruce, who has joined us in this term. I know that, when I talk to the other members on our side of the chamber about my electorate, they are all ears. They are open to listening. They are open to hearing about the people who live in my electorate, what their concerns are and what their needs are.

Like many residents of my electorate, I am outraged at the direction this government is heading in. The leadership of Malcolm Turnbull has been a disaster. Our Prime Minister is seriously letting down the people in my community. When the Prime Minister first came to power, many Australians, including some in my electorate, assumed that it meant a change in direction, an optimistic reboot of this failed conservative government at a time that demanded a decisive leader. The reality has been an incredible disappointment, and the emboldened right wing of the Liberal Party have put pressure on this Prime Minister and his increasingly diminished group of moderates, who seem unable to abandon their principles quickly enough.

They went to an election on a three-word slogan, 'jobs and growth', two of the most important things in my electorate. That is what they went to an election with. We went to an election with 100 positive policies, carefully crafted around the needs of people across this nation. And what have we seen since they have come into government? Anyone paying attention to politics in this country can tell that something has changed. Debates used to be about the best way to support Australians; now we are spending time arguing about issues settled years ago: climate change and whether or not we should support a multicultural Australia.

We need leadership right now, and this government is offering my community none. We have gone from the initial term of this government, with Joe Hockey starting off talking about lifters and leaners. Then we had the current Treasurer talking about the taxed and the taxed-nots. And who can forget Tony Abbott's mythical 'Team Australia— either you're on it or you're out of it'? In the world inhabited by members of the coalition, there exists a group of Australians—a mythical group of straw men they create for political gain and blame for all their failed policies.

Today, we are in a world where company profits are soaring and the government want to give large companies a \$50 billion tax cut. Conversely, we have wages growth at record lows and this government are cutting take-home pay packets. This is going to hurt people in my electorate. It is like a war being waged on low-income earners, a war being waged on families trying to pay their mortgages. This government still have, clearly, the same set of priorities that they had under the former Prime Minister, and they are continuing down this negative line for this country, and the impacts on my electorate are felt sorely. We have seen it this week with the return of the 2014 budget omnibus bill. The government have reintroduced the remainder of their cruel cuts from the 2014

budget: cuts to family tax benefits, cuts to paid parental leave, the scrapping of the energy supplement. This is a \$1 billion cut to pensioners, people with disability, carers and Newstart recipients. They have introduced a five-week wait for Newstart for young people. The many, many young people in my community looking for work really cannot afford that. There are further cuts affecting young people, with a transfer from Newstart to youth allowance that means a cut of around \$48 a week—that is, \$2,500 a year—which that means they will struggle to pay their rent. The implications throughout our local economy are plain for the world to see.

The government have done all this from a position where they claim to be good economic managers. They talked a lot about a budget emergency when they first came to office. In December 2013 their figures in the MYEFO had the deficit at \$17.7 billion. The deficit in May 2016 was \$37 billion. These good economic managers are talking about a budget emergency and doing nothing to deliver a positive outcome in that area.

I want to spend some time talking about what I believe the electorate of Lalor needs. It is a growth corridor. We have already seen it grow to a city of over 200,000, with no line of sight on when that will slow. This week the state government announced more housing will be coming to our area. We are accustomed to this work. We have a council that works tirelessly to ensure that we have the infrastructure that we need for this growing community: that we have community centres, that we have sporting fields, that we have the roads, the buses and the things that we need to make life productive for the people in my community.

It was a shock to hear that this government had cut this community, this city, out of the National Stronger Regions Fund in this round. This is a community that needs infrastructure desperately and cannot simply rely on local government and state government to deliver. This community is doing the heavy lifting in community development, the heavy lifting in creating harmonious communities, the heavy lifting in the housing sector. We need all the support we can get. Congestion is a major issue. We are spending hours a day in our cars. The people of Wyndham are what the shadow minister for infrastructure calls the 'drive-in, drive-out' community. They are travelling miles to go to work and they are often stuck in traffic for up to two hours one way. This is not good enough. The previous Labor government saw this issue and responded with the Regional Rail Link, the biggest rail infrastructure spend ever. It has made a difference, but this is a growth corridor; local and state government alone cannot keep up with the demands that are happening here. When the Tarneit and Wyndham Vale stations on the Regional Rail Link opened there were celebrations. Now the Tarneit station has the second highest number of passengers in Victoria, and it has only been open a short time. We need those new stations and we need them now.

When I was first elected, our Werribee South farmers came to see me about their irrigation issues. We have irrigation channels that are outdated, that are cracked, that are losing up to 40 per cent of the fresh flow water that is coming down that line. I went to work with those farmers to call attention to their needs and to ensure that they were getting the kind of support that they needed, and the state government immediately heard that call and made an \$11 million announcement to upgrade that irrigation. We now need this federal government, the Deputy Prime Minister, to make a commitment of another \$11 million to ensure our farmers get the infrastructure that they need into the future, so that they can continue to grow fresh vegetables and so that their business models are not undermined by failing infrastructure.

One of the other issues for my electorate—an acute issue in the electorate—is the casualisation of the workforce, the use of third-party labour hire companies in our local workforce. The impact that is having on families is devastating. People are sitting up till midnight to see if they are going to get a text message to say they have a shift in the morning. These are families who are trying to pay mortgages, trying to get kids to school. The uncertainty that has been created in this space needs careful, considered but urgent work, and this government needs to roll up its sleeves and get to work in this area. To think that this week we have had the penalty rate announcement from Fair Work Australia and that the Prime Minister has backed it in! This is a Prime Minister who thinks that a cut to people's penalty rates is an okay thing to deliver in my community. There are people who are now getting their calculators out, who are sitting around kitchen tables looking at their family budgets and wondering how they are going to meet that next mortgage payment.

I know this firsthand. As a brand new mum many, many years ago now—and I will say that again: many, many years ago now—my contribution while I took leave from teaching to have my three children was to work on Sundays at K-Mart, packing the shelves. That was my contribution to the family budget across that four-year period. I look back now and think: how would I feel if I woke up today to find that I could be getting a pay cut on that? The uncertainty that this government is creating for families in my electorate is very, very unfair.

We need support for our small businesses. We have thriving small businesses. We have a lot of people moving into the area. There are a lot of people for whom Wyndham is the first stop as they come in from overseas and they are starting small businesses. They need support around how they can grow those businesses, to reduce that 50 per cent fail rate. Not just do they need financial support; they need support in collaborating with one another to grow their businesses to medium-sized businesses and create employment for people living in our community.

I would bring to the House's attention a group in my electorate called BizBuddyHub. Their theme is 'live local, work local, shop local'. They are a collection of people running microbusinesses who together are planning this kind of collaboration. They have had meetings with me and meetings with state members. Ed Husic has been down to visit them. They are an exciting group. They have some really good ideas. Innovation is not all about IT; innovation can be about how those businesses work together to support one another to grow their businesses. This group of people are committed to that and are doing some fabulous work. They could certainly do with support from local, state and federal governments.

The other important work that is happening in my electorate is in organisations where government and business do not interact: the community organisations. Our fabulous community legal centre, WEstjustice, have a long history in the western suburbs of Melbourne and they do incredible work on the ground. This is yet another space where this government has cut funding that allows them to do important work—work in supporting people who are having tenancy issues, supporting people with toll fine issues, supporting people with domestic violence issues, and supporting people who are homeless. The work that they do in terms of advocacy and submission writing supports governments at all levels. They are there doing the hard work, the grind work and the research pulling together those submissions. They need support not just for case management but also to ensure that when we are looking at changes to legislation, whether it be at state or federal level, we have fine minds at the grassroots who can tell us about the impacts of our legislation and what might need to change to alleviate some of the heavy issues that face members in the community. We have fantastic people in the community sector working around homelessness and critical relief. There are terrific grassroots organisations that again have had their legs cut out from underneath them with the uncertainty that is being delivered by this government.

Housing affordability is a very important issue in my electorate. We are the affordable growth corridor. It is what attracts people to come to live in Wyndham. It is why we are so busy doing the community building that we are doing. We went to the last election with a negative gearing plan that was going to protect existing investors and make it easier for young people to get into the housing market. Nowhere is that more important than in the city of Wyndham and in the electorate of Lalor. Nowhere would that policy we took to the election have more impact. It would stimulate the housing industry locally because of course the negative gearing would still stay with new housing under our policy. It was an important policy and I would urge this government to look carefully at that as they prepare for this budget. Look carefully at negative gearing and at what changes there might deliver for an electorate like mine.

One of the first things I did when I was elected almost three years ago was to hold a homelessness forum. It was a problem back then but now it is a crisis. ABC's *Lateline* shone a light on some of those sleeping rough in my electorate. There are too many of these people under this government. Senator Doug Cameron, the shadow minister for housing and homelessness, visited the electorate since the election to hear directly from people who had fallen into this space and to listen to their caseworkers from across the sector. The sector in my community works really well to support people and to do their case management across various organisations. They came together. What struck me was how difficult it was listening to these people about how quickly you could fall into poverty and how difficult it is to climb out once you are there.

Every time we talk in this place about a cut to the vulnerable or a change to the social welfare net in this country I am taken back to those meetings with those people. I understand clearly how difficult some of the changes brought in by this government are making things for people in my electorate. I go back in my mind to those people who had become homeless. I go back in my mind particularly to a woman I met at Little River Primary School, where the out of school hours care was going to be cut in my first term. I go back to the conversation I had with her. She was a single mother who had re-engaged with education. Her children were at primary school and she had returned to university to get herself a degree to make sure that she was going to provide for her family and to live that Australian dream. Her kids were in out of school hours care. She had been hit from all directions and she had had her feet cut out from under her. She was going to have to pay for out of school hours care. She had lost an allowance that was allowing her to engage at university and upskill herself to provide for her family. Often in this place when we are debating those attacks on the vulnerable these are the people I go to.

There are images in my mind of that young mum and her kids at Little River Primary School saying to me: 'I don't understand, Joanne. I don't understand why they would want to target me.'

These are incredibly important issues. I have not spent any time today talking about education, which is a rarity, as everyone in the chamber will acknowledge. Deputy Speaker, in the last 47 seconds I will say: if you want to know what I think about education you can read most speeches that I have made in this place since I came here. With 47 seconds left to go, I will say: the schools in my electorate do incredibly powerful work. They need the support, not just the funding. They need everything directed towards outcomes for our kids to make sure that, in this growing community, our children are given the best opportunity they can have.

I met with young people from my community who are studying at the University of Melbourne or RMIT. I know what they need, because they tell me what they need. They need teachers that care and they need leadership in schools that is focused on continual improvement of those outcomes. It is a pleasure to be the member for Lalor. I look forward to the rest of the term.