



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Carbon Pricing

SPEECH

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Questioner
Speaker Perrett, Graham, MP

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Mr PERRETT (Moreton) (16:05): It pains me in a way to follow the member for Menzies, who I used to share a corridor with and had quite a bit of time for. I was pained because I thought he had actually stolen my speech. When he was talking about the rise in electricity prices of 61 per cent, of water and sewerage by 50 per cent, of gas over the last four years of 37 per cent, I thought he had stolen my speech. It is difficult for me to use exactly the same information in my speech, talking about why we need to provide some relief for families. It is important that we do that in the context of putting in a carbon price on 1 July, because as the member for Menzies—I was going to say passionately—so vociferously put it—

Mr Andrews: Eloquently.

Mr PERRETT: I won't take that interjection! There are a lot of families in my electorate and in the member for Menzies's electorate who are doing it tough. In fact, that is why we have been putting money into the member for Menzies's electorate. In Menzies 6,000 families have received extra money over the last few weeks—more than \$1 million for his families going into his communities that can then be spent as his electors see fit. There are 17,000 pensioners in Menzies who are receiving more than \$3½ million that will then circulate through those communities, through those community organisations, through those clubs, through the business, all because of the Gillard government's commitment to look after those people who are doing it a bit tough. So if the member for Menzies wants to tell his 6,000 families that he wants to vote no to that money, if he wants to tell those 17,000 pensioners in his own electorate that they do not deserve this extra support in that context of rising electricity prices, he will have some explaining to do. My understanding is that the Commonwealth government does not actually own any power stations and it does not actually deliver any power to people. That is the business of state governments and private enterprises. We do not own any gas-fired power stations delivering electricity, or even any water plants.

But I do understand that when I go around my electorate, when I doorknock, when I talk to people at community functions about the mining boom and how great things are, the people in my electorate say, 'There might be a mining boom on but I am not experiencing it. There might be a guy down the street who works in the mining industry who is getting a new back deck and a new car, but I am not experiencing that.' You talk to builders and they say, 'If you do renovations and you are not building for someone in the mining sector, you are not building.' It is as simple as that. The reality is that it is a two-speed economy. If you are working in the tourism sector in Queensland, you know how tough it is. You go to places like Cairns where there is unemployment north of 14 per cent and you understand that there are households throughout Australia particularly in the patchy parts that need support.

But let us go back a bit and put the overall context for Australia. Let us remember the underlying facts here. We have a triple-A rating from all ratings agencies for the first time in Australia's history. Forget the doom and gloom, the jeremiah ads and the Hanrahans opposite; the reality is that we have got a triple-A rating. The rest of the world, the IMF and the World Bank included, say, 'Australia you are doing great!' It is admitted by those opposite when they are overseas. When they are overseas they say, 'Yes, we have got serious bragging rights. We have got a healthy economy. Things are going well.'

Imagine that conversation with the Spaniards where they have got youth unemployment nudging 50 per cent. Our overall unemployment has got a four in front of it—4.9 per cent. Sure, our cash rate compared to the rest of the world is a little bit different—we have still got a lot of room to manoeuvre—but it is significantly better at 3.75 per cent now than the 6.75 per cent it was one we came to power. The average family with a mortgage is \$3,000 better off. The member for North Sydney, with his mortgage, a loan that he forgot to declare—and I think I have some information on his mortgage here; it was written up in the paper as \$710,000—is about \$7,000 better off per year, thanks to the policies of the Gillard Labor government.

We have got great investment pipelines of half a trillion dollars—and that is a term that you do not see used very often—of development and manufacturing and the like, particularly in mining, coming towards Australia. Retail sales figures came out today—and obviously things could be a bit better there. The balance of trade is the best it has ever been in the history of Australia. There is a bit more work to be done in productivity, but hopefully with some innovations and post the Queensland floods we will see productivity start to head in the right direction, particularly with the NBN. Obviously, that will be an advance in the future, with jobs of the future being via the NBN.

That puts the overall context of what Australia is like, but obviously we do need to do a lot to help households. So how are we doing it? For a start, we say yes to giving money to parents who have school kids, the 1.7 million Australians who have kids in school. There are people in the chamber who have children at school and they know how much this would be appreciated—not that they will be receiving this money. For primary school students it will be \$410 each and for secondary students it will be \$820 each. If you are a normal family with two or three kids, right now receiving that money will be of great benefit.

For families, if you are receiving family tax benefit part A, there will be \$110 extra per child. What did the Leader of the Opposition say? He said no. Families receiving family tax benefit part B get \$69 extra. What did the Leader of the Opposition say? No. The 3.2 million pensioners will receive upfront lump-sum payments—a lot of them right now and over the coming months in my electorate will receive the money. If they are singles, they will receive \$250; if they are couples, they will receive \$380 combined. Again, in March next year there will be a permanent boost to their pension payments. So, overall, the singles will receive \$338 extra a year, and couples \$510 extra a year. What did the Leader of the Opposition say? He said, 'We will claw that back. We will take that back.' He said no. So a single pensioner on the maximum rate is now \$4,000 better off because of this Labor government.

Let us not forget the workers, the seven million Australians who in 31 days time will receive a tax cut. Everyone earning less than \$80,000 will receive a tax cut. For most people it will be \$300 a year—not to be sneezed at—but, if you are one of the lower-paid people, we are going to triple the tax-free threshold. It is a great thing to do. I thought the party of Menzies and the like would be in favour of tax cuts, but instead the Leader of the Opposition said no.

As for part-time workers, if they are earning \$25,000, they will have an extra \$500 in their pocket every year, and they will have that in the first week or so of July. When they go to the shops they will have more money in their pocket, more money in their wallet, from the very first pay packet. And, remember, if they earn less than \$18,200, they will pay no tax at all.

Self-funded retirees—a very vocal group in my community who make sure that I know their concerns—who receive the Commonwealth Seniors Health Card, will also receive an upfront lump-sum payment in June to help over the coming time, because, as we do admit, the pricing signals associated with this pricing pollution will have an impact on people. We are trying to change behaviour. That is why there will be an impact. But they too will receive \$250 as part of the seniors supplement. Obviously, the low-income households on \$30,000 a year or a couple earning less than \$45,000 a year could be eligible for a yearly lump-sum payment of \$300.

In question time today, mention was made of an article in the *West Australian* by one of the Leader of the Opposition's colleagues, questioning his negativity, his ability to say no, no, no all the time. There was even a suggestion that some of his colleagues want to rehabilitate him in terms of his inclination to say no. Obviously that would be a very big project and obviously they have started that process. They tried to make him go to rehab but he said, 'No, no, no.' That is what he said. He was not even able to say yes to the pensioners in his electorate, yes to the families in his electorate, yes to the people in the low-income households in his electorate, or yes to the pensioners who need this \$250 to \$380 to help them with cost-of-living pressures. Instead, he relies on no.