



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Pensions and Benefits

SPEECH

Tuesday, 24 March 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Tuesday, 24 March 2015
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Questioner
Speaker Hayes, Chris, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr HAYES (Fowler—Chief Opposition Whip) (16:07): We are fast approaching the 2015 budget. We are going to come back in a month's time, and we will see what this government is going to do then. But just remember: it has not sold the 2014 budget yet. Today the Prime Minister in question time wanted to assure the House, 'I have done the right thing for pensioners.' Well, let's just look at the track record. This is the same Tony Abbott who went to the last election saying, 'No cuts to health, no cuts to education, no cuts to pensions, no cuts to the ABC or SBS.' Which one did not get cut? All of them did. This is a perfect track record. Anywhere else, you would actually call this lies, but I will not do that, because I do not want to offend the House. But to come out and say something, to use the word of my friend from Bass, mendacious! To come out and give a misleading statement to pensioners, of all people—the people least able to actually weather these cuts!

We know there is an \$80 billion cut to health and education. We know what occurred with ABC, so I do not need to go there. But what occurred with pensioners was a change to the indexation rate. It was actually designed to save money. The government say, 'We're going to adjust it twice annually,' but the Parliamentary Budget office belled the cat on this. It said that, between now and 2022, there will be a saving of \$23 billion. So let's not gloss over this: this is actually a budget saving. That is why they changed the indexation rate. They are also going to claw back the relativity between pensions and wages from 28 per cent to 16 per cent, and they are saying: 'This is no cut. Nothing to see here. Move on.' But if you are living on a fixed income—if you are a pensioner—you cannot decide, 'Well, I'm going to go and work an extra night's shiftwork,' or, 'I'm going to take some overtime tomorrow to make up this difference.' You are on a fixed income of not much more than \$20,000.

When you think about the government's intentions for health, we know what they want to do for health: they want to tax people every time they go to the GP. You do not have to be a rocket scientist to work out that it is going to be the aged pensioners who are going to disproportionately use the services of a general practitioner. They are the ones who are going to be sluggish with increased taxes out of that.

This mob opposite want to talk about doing the right thing for pensioners. I wonder when they are going to start. It did not start in the 2014 budget. I know that Tony Abbott says that the 2015 budget is going to be dull and boring, but what are they going to do about this budget? Who are they going to attack? They have their hearts set on attacking pensioners.

Mr Nikolic: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, could the honourable member refer to the Prime Minister by his title, not his name.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Vasta): That is correct. I will ask the honourable member for Fowler to please refer to the Prime Minister.

Mr HAYES: I refer to the Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, the person who has told those lies to pensioners—the person who actually got up there and promised before the last election—

Mr Nikolic: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, that is an unparliamentary term, and I ask the member to withdraw.

Mr HAYES: The Prime Minister, Tony Abbott, before the last election, went out and told pensioners there would be no cuts to pensions. If that is not a bald-faced lie, what is?

Mr Nikolic: Mr Deputy Speaker, he compounds his rookie error by repeating the term again.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: If it assists the House, would the member for Fowler please withdraw.

Mr HAYES: I will not call going out and telling pensioners before the last election, 'We are not going to touch pensions,' a lie. I withdraw that part. I know the truth hurts sometimes in this place, and sometimes you have to take some responsibility. He is going to actually stand up and deny the truth.

Mr Nikolic: Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order, I draw your attention to the fact that the honourable member, having withdrawn that claim, then said, 'The truth hurts,' which is a repetition of the same claim. I ask him to withdraw.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: On that point, there is no point of order.

Mr HAYES: Of course there is no point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. We will give him a copy of the standing orders later. It will improve his education.

I have actually looked at a number of our colleagues over here; you would not be surprised. I have seen nothing in any of the publications they put out within their electorates that takes responsibility for cutting pensions. They are ashamed of this.