



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

MOTIONS

Prime Minister

Censure

SPEECH

Thursday, 5 May 2016

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Questioner
Speaker Burke, Tony, MP

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Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:26): I was going to move an extension of time for the Prime Minister, but I thought his backbench would have killed me. They are back there, sitting there like house bricks—without the animation or the enthusiasm. The reason they are feeling that way over there is that they know full well that ultimately the Prime Minister has not been capable of providing the economic leadership our nation needs. That is exactly where we have ended up. There is no longer a point to this Prime Minister; there is no longer a point to this government. How out of touch would you have to be to think you could get away with this? You might think, 'There are some budget measures I will not be questioned on. There are some I might not need to know the cost of.' But it is a fair bet that you ought to know the centrepiece—a fair bet. Of all the measures for which you might think, 'Maybe there is a figure I should carry in my head,' surely the centrepiece of the budget is not a bad starting point.

I loved hearing the Treasurer complain today, 'Why aren't you directing more questions to me?' It is because yesterday every time we asked, 'What is the cost,' he would not say. We thought that maybe they had not modelled it. We thought maybe they had been so incompetent that they never even checked what the cost would be. Maybe they are so hopeless at their job that it never occurred to them, when they were giving money to the big end of town, to even bother to check a little detail like what the cost to the budget would be. But it turns out, from the answers the Prime Minister has given today, they did know. They knew full well. They know the answer to this question, and they think they can get through from today all the way to 2 July and keep it a secret from the Australian people.

They have made the choice to prioritise the big end of town over families, over schools and over the health system with Medicare. They think they can get away with costing their cuts over 10 years and with spending the beginning of this week talking relentlessly about 10-year projections; they reckon they can get all the way to 2 July and not touch at all—out of all their measures—their budget centrepiece. The problem is they do not want to talk about their budget centrepiece at all anymore. The amendment that was moved by the Prime Minister does not mention the budget centrepiece. It is as though it is gone. The amendment is to take all references to that tax cut out of the motion. That is what the Prime Minister has moved. Not only has he moved it in his own handwriting; he has then added that they will not just support it—he has written the little addition: 'and welcomes'. It is an emotional thankyou, as we get rid of any reference to the centrepiece of his own budget.

When the Prime Minister was describing the centrepiece of his own budget, he deliberately did not tell the full story not only of the cost but of the measure itself. He talked about small businesses growing. 'Here are the figures', he said, 'to \$10 million, to \$25 million, to \$50 million, to \$100 million' and then he stopped there. But the budget plan does not stop there at all. Sure, right now, and last year under the Abbott government, we had the establishment of a bipartisan basis of the small business tax rate. We have bipartisan agreement that the small business tax rate should be lowered, but what they want to do is change the definition of small business every year—and it does not stop where the Prime Minister stopped.

Over the next seven years, we end up with eligibility for the small business tax rate going to businesses worth \$1 billion. I have to say, in the history of this nation, there has only ever been one Prime Minister who would regard that as a small business! It has only ever happened once and it has happened here. The budget documents that we have been presented with this time around are extraordinary. My favourite is 'Making multinationals pay tax on what they earn in Australia' and it has a little picture of a map of Australia and a picture of an island tax haven. They have actually put it in their own budget documents. I do not know what that island might be. I do not know what is presented in there—and I expect a public servant will pay very dearly for the graphic design at some point in time.

Budgets are about choices and when they say, 'Why should we have to tell you what the 10-year projection is?' the answer is simple: they have told us what their 10-year cuts will be. They told us from the start what the 10-year cuts would be to hospitals and what the 10-year cuts would be to schools. We know what the 10-year

projections are on the cuts that they give to families. We know that this is in the context of a budget where they put off all their talk of child care. Remember at the hearing that workplace participation was going to be the key—all pushed off in this budget, all gone. That is gone because choices have been made. The choices that they have made are fundamentally different to the choices that a Labor government would make.

If it is as we were told, 'Well, maybe, it is \$55 billion'—as though it is small change between friends—if it is that, that is bigger than the entirety of the education cuts; in the order of the cuts to hospitals. The money we are talking about here is not like it is just a free kick in spare change to business. This government have decided who they will help and who they will hurt. While they wanted to say, 'It's some sort of class war,' it is not that. It simply runs against the grain of an old-fashioned concept of Australian fairness. That is it. It is not like the benefit is going to the top half of Australia versus the bottom half of Australia; it is going to about the top two per cent of Australia and the rest of Australia, at best, gets \$6 a week—and that is only if you are somebody who does not have a family.

Even at the top of that \$87,000 area, where they have a shift in the name of bracket creep, if you are a single parent on \$87,000 a year with two high school kids, even after you have had that tax benefit, you are still \$4½ thousand behind. That is the choice that has been made. I am sure they are out there thinking, 'But I've got my \$6 a week!' That is the choice that has been made. That is before they get to the reality of someone who brings in \$1 million in a year being \$17,000 better off.

The concept of saying, 'Would we like taxes to be lower?' does not answer the question when you also have to say, 'Is the price of that an attack on every family in Australia?' Is the price that you are going to gut what we were told before the election, which was a bipartisan approach on school funding? We were told before the election that pensions would not be changed and then we saw a government come in here, budget after budget, and try in every different way to cut the pension. That money that is being cut from them is the same money that will now go to billion dollar companies under their plan. That is exactly why they do not want to say the number out loud.

Well, it does not take much for people to be able to say that they know the priorities of those opposite. We know, and the Australian people know, that the government was given a choice, and they chose the top end of town over the vast majority of Australia. That is the choice they made. And the price of that is that if you are a pensioner you get cut; if you are a family you get cut; if you are sick, Medicare goes backwards, hospitals go backwards. If you believe in jobs and growth, no-one delivers jobs and growth by cutting education, cutting infrastructure and making the internet slower. No country in the world would try to do that. But that is the prescription that is offered by those opposite.

What we have today is not the opposition choosing some corner of the budget to debate. We have gone directly to the budget centrepiece, and the Prime Minister believes that he can get away—even though he knows how much it will cost—with not letting the rest of Australia know how much it will cost. They know the cost of the cuts. They know that the price of the cuts is this benefit to the big end of town, the redefinition of small business, all the way up to companies with a \$1 billion turnover. It is about choices, and the choices those opposite make are against the vast majority of Australians. Labor stands proudly against them.