



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**  
**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Paid Parental Leave**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 29 February 2012**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 29 February 2012  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Perrett, Graham, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton) (15:57): I rise to support this important motion on paid parental leave, put forward by the member for Robertson. Before I do, I want to pass a few comments on the contribution by the member for Indi. She certainly has a capacity to clear a room. I have never seen this chamber empty so quickly as when she rose to speak.

**Mr Ewen Jones interjecting—**

The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Ms AE Burke ): Order! The member for Herbert is not in his chair. I have already warned him.

**Mr PERRETT**: I want to go on the record as supporting the contribution of women in the workplace—just not the member for Indi.

**Mrs Mirabella**: How's your latest novel going?

**Mr PERRETT**: I will take that interjection. The next book is going well, actually. I will tell you about the first book. I remember the launch of the book at a book store in Sydney. Maxine McKew was speaking on the book, but the MC was a senator from New South Wales called Bill Heffernan. In her speech the member for Indi said there was no bipartisan approach to politics. I would like to go on the record and say—and I probably should not tell this to my Labor colleagues—that I had Senator Bill Heffernan come along and host my book launch. And he is a great guy. I know there are people who want to say bad things about him. He has certainly made the odd wrong call in the past, but he has then gone on the record and apologised to the people he made the wrong call about. I am sure that is the spirit that would pervade this chamber and most chambers: that if people say the wrong thing they then apologise. We certainly heard a litany of wrong things said by the member for Indi. She was talking about the stresses put on working families and especially people who are having children. I do remind people that we had 10 interest rate rises in a row under the Howard government. What has happened since the Rudd and Gillard governments came to power? Interest rates have gone down to the extent that, if working families have an average mortgage, they now have \$3,000 extra in their pocket. Also, the member for Indi made some contribution about jobs. I note that of the 700,000 jobs created under the Rudd and Gillard governments half of them have gone to women. That is a fair dinkum contribution to women. So, obviously, the contribution of the member for Robertson is important because we all know, especially if you have had children, how important it is to give them as much support as possible. I know the member for Indi has had children. It has certainly been noted in this chamber by other members that she has had children. But for her to stand here today and suggest that—

Opposition members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Ms AE Burke ): Order! The member for Indi might remember I was in the chair when that incident happened and she is not faultless.

**Mr PERRETT**: It is ridiculous for her to stand here today and suggest that the cleaners of Australia should pay for her parental leave—because that is what would be the case under opposition leader Tony Abbott's scheme—and that her parental leave pay, if she were having a child today, should also be paid for by the people out working on the roads. It is only appropriate that we should have some sort of indication, like we did with private health insurance and like we did with the baby bonus, of the income that people have when it comes to having children and when it comes to looking after medical expenses. I well remember when we voted on means testing the baby bonus. Do you know how I remember? Because my son was born on 19 January, less than nine months after we changed that in the budget. My wife was pregnant on budget night and we did not have a nine-month lead-in—which might have been a good idea, as I explained to my then pregnant wife.

**Ms Saffin**: Too much detail!

**Mr PERRETT:** I am telling you she reminds me of it every year. So I would suggest to the member for Indi, if, heaven forbid, they do bring in a change to the parental scheme, that they have more than a nine-month lead-in, which is a good suggestion. I was not sure of her vote at the 2010 election after we changed that. But, obviously, we should not be handing out money to federal politicians, which is effectively what the baby bonus used to do. Federal politicians should not be receiving money from cleaners, road workers and the like. That is inappropriate. We have seen the contribution from the member for Indi somehow trying to defend the opposition leader's \$3.2 billion scheme that she thinks is going to be funded like the magic pudding. But we all know about the opposition's tax on 3,000 companies, the 1.7 per cent tax or levy, or whatever you want to call it, will be passed straight on to the poorer people of Australia, the people that go to Woolies, Coles and the like. They will pay for that. We are trying to give tax breaks to companies and what does the opposition leader want to do? He wants to tax them more.

We heard the contribution about a price on carbon. They really need to wake up and realise that the world has changed. Sure, Kyoto to Copenhagen might not necessarily have been humanity's greatest hour but we are changing and from Durban and beyond humans are stepping up and realising that the world is a place that we need to look after.

Then we have heard their contributions on the NBN, which, as every economist will tell you, is our greatest hope for increasing productivity in this country. It is not just 'work harder and cut penalty rates'—that is the simplistic approach of those opposite. We know about increasing productivity. Productivity was at zero when the Rudd government took office. As every economist knows, that means there is something going wrong with the car's engine but they just said, 'Crank up the music and ignore it' when the reality is we have to do more—and the NBN is part of the way that we are going to address that problem.

The National Disability Insurance Scheme is something historic that is wanted by so many people in my electorate and throughout Australia. But those opposite want to take an axe to that. Then we have the most simplistic of ideas, the mining tax. Our minerals—not Clive's, not Gina's—are being dug out of the ground and once they are sold they are gone forever unless we distribute the profits that come from all that. That is the reality.

I come to the Leader of the Opposition's \$70 billion black hole. We have already heard a lot about that in question time today, about the reality that there are some serious problems going on on the other side of the House. I was interested to read an article by the former Treasurer, Peter Costello, in the *Age*. It was a strange contribution. Talk about people challenging. This is from the eternal bridesmaid. I have seen digital clocks with more ticker than Peter Costello—fair dinkum! But he did make a contribution where he was talking about what Australia needs to do. To his credit, Peter Costello—although there were rivers of gold flowing into the government coffers—did balance the books. I am not sure that he was the most energetic Treasurer in the world and I note that Paul Keating, who was once called the world's greatest Treasurer, said that he was the laziest Treasurer ever. Unfortunately, the Leader of the Opposition has broken that tradition, that Liberal commitment to actually being prepared to balance the books. That \$70 billion black hole is incredible. We hear reported today that his colleagues are telling him he must drop this ridiculous commitment, this paid parental leave scheme. The sort of money that he would be committing would go a long way in Queensland—and I see the member for Capricornia here and the member for Blair and the member for Petrie, who are all Queenslanders who supported doing something sensible. I see the member for Herbert. The member for Herbert unfortunately did not vote the right way when he came to the flood levy. He was one of the 21 Queenslanders who voted against it. Bob Katter, who is not a member of the government, voted, like a true Queensland, to pour some money into reconstruction.

**Ms Saffin:** Good on Bob!

**Mr PERRETT:** Yes. Instead, what do those opposite want to do? They want to line the pockets of wealthier families with up to \$75,000. That is not generous; that is actually irresponsible. So far we have seen 140,000 parents benefit from the Labor scheme. They just said, 'It's just a tick a box, it's nothing.' The reality is that it is 140,000 parents. I do not know how many kids that is. I am not sure what the percentage of twins or triplets is, but a lot of children have benefited already from our great scheme. (*Time expired*)