



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Border Protection

SPEECH

Tuesday, 14 May 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 14 May 2013
Page 3091
Questioner
Speaker Morrison, Scott, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Mr MORRISON (Cook) (15:12): The Treasurer will get to his feet tonight and engage in what can only be described as another act of fiscal fantasy. Such will be the fictional nature of what the Treasurer will say tonight that I suggest that he begins his budget speech with the phrase 'Once upon a time ...'. What will be true about tonight's revelations by the Treasurer is that while Labor's record failures on our borders mean that they have not been able to stop the boats those record failures under this Treasurer have, however, ensured that they have been able to stop a surplus.

Labor's record border failures have no peer. That is why they are records. This afternoon there is an opportunity to go through in some detail the nature of those border failures, which are entirely an act of this government's own making. What is important is to understand the impacts and consequences of this record level of failure.

Under this government, what we have seen occur in the short space of time of just five years is an average of two people illegally entering Australia by boat every month in 2007-08 expanded this financial year to an average of over 2,000 per month. From two per month to over 2,000 per month: that is an extraordinary act of growth on this government in terms of the border failures that we have seen—it is absolutely extraordinary. It is important to note that, over this period of time, what we have seen is a constancy in the level of pressures that have been brought to bear. As we all know, push factors are, sadly, a tragedy that is always present. What changes is government policy that enables the border failures to present as they have under this government. So we have gone from an average of two per month to over 2,000 per month. And just this year we have set two monthly records. In March we had a record of over 2,500. In April we had a record of over 3,300. And in May, in just less than 10 days, we have had over 1,500 people arrive in this manner. We had a record last financial year, 2011-12, of 8,300 people arrive, and more; but this financial year we have had a record of 20,861 people arrive in this manner—and we are not even at the end of the year yet.

What we also note is one of the other records this government achieved in 2011-12—the 2012-13 figures will be released at some time. I will refer here to the Parliamentary Library publication which refers to IMA refugee status determination requests received—that is, those who have arrived by boat. In 2011-12 the figure for those who came by boat was 7,379. For those who came by air, it was 7,036. For the first time, in 2011-12, more people came by boat than came by air, according to the Parliamentary Library and the Department of Immigration and Citizenship. That was at a time when the arrivals for that year were 8,300. This year they are almost 21,000, and we are not even at the end of the year, so one can only imagine the disparity between the figures.

That is the record, but what has been the impact? This government, while in government and in opposition, always took the opportunity to lecture the coalition side of politics on the morality of their policies. One area in particular where it was particularly keen to talk about the impact of the Howard government's policies was the impact on children. But this government's record, because of these record arrivals, is that more children are turning up on boats than at any other time in our nation's history. In this financial year alone, more than 3,000 children have come on the boats. That is up on around 2,000 in the year before that and around 1,000 the year before that. It is estimated that around 40 per cent of those coming on boats now are in family groups. In addition, we have more than 2,000 children who are in the detention network as we speak and over 1,000 of those are in formal detention itself. The previous peak was back in 2000-01, which was under the Howard government, and it was 1,344.

The government have set the record for children coming on boats, flowing as a consequence from their failed policies. So their lecturing and their hectoring of the Howard government over our border policies and their impact on children is dumbfounded by their own record. They should be ashamed of themselves, with their grand acts of pretence to compassion. Their policies have put those children on boats for years, and now in record numbers. They should be aware of their own record of failures and of the impact: when you fail on the borders, children and families get on boats. That has occurred in record numbers under the government.

It was the Prime Minister herself in 2010 and the former minister, Minister Bowen, who said they were going to remove children out of formal detention. There were about 750 in detention at that time. Today there are more than a thousand. She said:

We did not believe that children should be held ... in high-security detention ... And so, we have worked to have more appropriate accommodation for family groups and for children.

What that turns out to be is more children now in formal detention and, if that is not enough, they have just announced they are going to build more facilities at Curtin and at Wickham Point to take more children into formal detention and, as the minister himself has said, for a period of around 120 days. That is the consequence, the implications and the impact of the government's failed border policies. The hypocrisy is breathtaking. If they are going to make those accusations and criticisms of the Howard government policy then it is time to look in the mirror of their own policy record and policy failings.

The record detention population today is a result of the record level of arrivals. We had four people in immigration detention who had arrived illegally by boat in November 2007. Today? I should say at the end of February, because the government have not released the figures since the end of February, but there were 7,528 at the end of February and another 10,000 on top of that who are on bridging visas.

Government members interjecting—

Mr MORRISON: No amount of shouting from those opposite will change that fact. It will not change the fact that 17,528 people, at least at the end of February, had arrived illegally by boat and were in detention. Since the end of February there have been over 7,500 more who have turned up. So on top of these record figures even more have arrived. And if we go to just in May, we know that there were 2,962 people on Christmas Island. I do not need to remind the government, I suppose, that when they burnt down, and the Australian Federal Police had to retake by force, the facility on Christmas Island there were roughly 2,500 in the facility at that time.

The compounding border failures of this government continue to compound the problems and the impacts that flow from that, which are children getting on boats, children going into detention, and detention centres overcrowding and overloading. The riots and various other things that we have seen that flow as a consequence of those things stem from one key problem: a failure to be able to deliver on the responsibility of a government to protect our borders and ensure proper border security.

Labor is putting the consequences of their failed policies off to the other side of the election, and they did this before at the last election as well. Before the last election, Senator Evans was the minister who failed to act on recommendations and reports, which were coming through his department at the time, that said that more detention capacity needed to be created, and he sat on his hands. It was only after the election that the incoming minister, who was given that hospital pass by Senator Evans, went and, I admit, expanded that network—and we commended him at the time—but it was all too late. The consequences of that stalling before the last election were already set in train, and nothing the government could even do at that stage would be able to take them off the fast train they were on to the crisis that we saw in the immigration detention network, which literally exploded in February, March and April of the following year.

We are seeing the same thing happen again today, because there are currently around 18,255 people who have turned up on boats since 14 August last year and what we do know is the government have not been processing the people that have turned up since that time. So what we have now is a detention population, and a population within the system more broadly, that is growing by the thousands and currently sits around an estimated level of 18,000 to 20,000. I am happy for the government to confirm the numbers and give me a fresh number if they have got one, but by the time we get to an election that number could well be over 30,000 of a backlog in the system, pushing the consequences and responsibilities for dealing with this issue until after an election.

All of this comes at a record cost, and the record cost of this government is spectacular. Since the last election alone, the blow-out in the government's budget—actual figures from the government's budget based on the estimates released in February this year—is \$5.2 billion. They said it would cost something just over \$1 billion, and it ended up costing, based on the estimates we have at the end of February, \$6 billion plus—a \$5.2 billion blow-out since the last election. So tonight the Treasurer has the opportunity to be honest in the budget and tell us what the real costs over the next few years will be. If you simply just put into the budget for the next three years what the estimated cost for this year is then the Treasurer has a \$5 billion hole in the budget as we speak

today. The Treasurer will need to detail tonight whether he is going to budget on this issue on the basis of the coalition's policies that will stop the boats or he is going to budget on the policies of his own government that have failed to stop the boats. If that budget tonight does not come up with at least the \$5 billion that is missing currently in the estimates, then he must be budgeting for a change of government, because that is the only way we are going to see a change in those figures.

The budget blow-outs are extraordinary and they are costing Australians every single day. They have led to record chaos more broadly in the immigration department and they have led to the chaos we have seen not just in immigration detention but also in the bridging visa program in the community. We have now seen the government not engage in a policy of community release; we have seen the government engage in a policy of community dumping. This is a government that is dumping people into the community with no care and no responsibility—out of sight, out of mind. It is putting more and more pressure on the charitable organisations that are out there and other service providers who have to step into the gap created by this government.

Do not kid yourself that this government has somehow embarked on this policy of bridging visas out of a sense of compassion. They have embarked on this policy because they cannot cope with the level of arrivals. Not only did the detention network get overrun—they had to let single males out on bridging visas—but now the community detention facilities have been overrun and they are now going to dump families into the same situation we have seen single adult males in over the last 18 months. So it is not surprising that the Salvation Army's Major Paul Moulds has said:

We are stepping into a gap created by the federal government. ... These emergency relief services are usually for people who desperately need help here, but what else are we meant to do? What else do you do when a hungry child turns up at your door?

Anthony Thornton, the national president of the St Vincent de Paul Society said:

It is a matter of great sadness for the St Vincent de Paul Society that the federal government is abandoning asylum-seekers to fend for themselves in the community with minimal, or even no, support and no right to work.

They are the comments of the St Vincent de Paul Society.

These are the policies and the consequences that have come as a result of the government's border policy failures. The coalition's alternative has always been there for this government to adopt, and they have used excuse after excuse not to embrace that and they still continue to do that today. That will not change between now and the election, and so the opportunity at the election is to change the government and change the outcome by changing the policy. That is what the Australian people will have the opportunity to do on 14 September.