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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Economy

SPEECH

Tuesday, 18 June 2013

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Abbott, Tony, MP

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Mr ABBOTT (Warringah—Leader of the Opposition) (15:16): With the standing of the government and respect for this parliament at near record lows I regret to say that this parliament, the parliament now drawing to its close, has been a low and dishonourable one.

At the beginning of the life of the current government, the Prime Minister stood and said to the Australian public that she would be:

... faithful to the trust that has been extended to us.

In 88 days time the public will finally have their chance to pass judgement on just how the Prime Minister has been faithful to the trust that was placed in her. I suspect that that will be a critical judgement because, wherever you look, this is a parliament which has let down the Australian people and a government which has betrayed the trust that the people extended to it—only just, nevertheless, they did extend to it—at the last election.

There is the carbon tax that was never going to happen, which did happen. There was the surplus—the 'no ifs, no buts surplus'—that would happen come hell or high water and that has never happened. Instead, we have a debt that is now racing towards \$340 billion. There is the mining tax, which has achieved the extraordinary outcome of damaging investment, damaging confidence and employment, without actually raising any revenue.

There was the live cattle ban, in panic at a television program—perhaps the most disastrous decision ever taken towards one of our near and important neighbours in our country's history. There was the political execution of an excellent Speaker because it suited the political convenience of the Prime Minister. We have had three leadership challenges in three years. We have had the protection racket that has been extended towards the member for Dobell by a Prime Minister only too familiar with the operation of union slush funds—

Ms Roxon: Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You have ruled before that that language is not appropriate to be used with regard to the conduct of the Prime Minister in relation to the member for Dobell. I ask that the member withdraw.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition has the call but I will advise that, as the member for Gellibrand rightly points out, the language has been asked to be withdrawn. I am not going to do it on this occasion, but I will be mindful of other words in the member's statement.

Mr ABBOTT: I appreciate your forbearance, Madam Speaker. There was the Australia Day riot, which turned out to have been orchestrated out of the Prime Minister's office. But, above all else, there was the failure that will haunt the memory of this parliament and this government: the ongoing disaster on our borders, a disaster that the Prime Minister promised to fix on 24 June 2010.

We have had almost 45,000 illegal arrivals by boat—more than the population of Gladstone, more than the population of Coffs Harbour, more than the population of Shepparton and more than the population of Mount Gambier. No-one wants to see any Australian government fail. No-one wants to see any Australian government give up on governing but that, I regret to say, is what this government has done.

We have 88 days until the election. The people will then have their chance to pass judgement on this government. They will have a choice between an incompetent and untrustworthy government and a coalition that will stop the boats, that will repeal the carbon tax and that will get the budget back into the black. That is the pledge that we make to the Australian people and that is a pledge that we will honour.

As things stand, the Australian people are frustrated and angry. They are frustrated and angry with a government that has let them down and a government that has repeatedly betrayed them. Indeed, Labor people—decent, honourable Labor people—are embarrassed and even ashamed at the performance of this government. I am

pleased that the member for Hotham has stayed in the House to listen to this MPI, because the member for Hotham called it for Australia. That is what he did: he called it for Australia when he said he could no longer serve on this Prime Minister's frontbench. I regret to say that this particular government is now beyond cure. This particular government is now past the point of no return. The poison is so deep, the division and dysfunction so deep that there is nothing that can save the contemporary Labor Party except time out to decide what it actually stands for and what it now believes.

The Australian people are an optimistic people. We know that better times can come. We know that better times are ahead of us but what we need is a government that you can trust and a government that is competent to deliver effective administration. I want to say to the Australian people: I am proud of the team that I lead. I am proud of the fact that the team I lead is representative of the breadth and depth of the Australian people. I am confident that there would actually be more former tradesmen on this side of the parliament these days than on that side of the parliament. I am proud of the fact that the first Indigenous member of the House of Representatives is sitting on this side of the parliament for the Liberal Party. I am proud of the fact that, if every coalition candidate in this election were to come to this parliament, the most common name in the Liberal Party party room would be Nguyen. It is a sign of just how much the modern Liberal Party is standing foursquare with the decent people of our country.

I know that our team is ready to form a stable and competent government. My team does not need to learn on the job, because my team has done the job before. Sixteen members of the shadow cabinet were ministers in a government that did stop the boats, that did bring the budget back into the black, that did get taxes down, that did abolish unnecessary taxes. We have done it before and we will do it again. We understand in the marrow of our bones that you cannot have a strong society, you cannot have strong communities without a strong economy to sustain them, and a strong economy pivotally depends upon profitable private businesses. We understand this. We get this. We know that it is not government that creates wealth; it is business that creates wealth. No government has ever taxed a country into prosperity. Plenty of governments have taxed a country into the ground. Not one has ever taxed a country into prosperity.

So our economic plan starts with abolishing the carbon tax and the mining tax. We will cut red tape. We will boost productivity so that the creative businesspeople of this country can get a fair go to survive and prosper, and so the workers of Australia can get a fair go to keep their jobs and to prosper. A strong and prosperous economy for a safe and secure Australia—that is how this coalition will deliver hope, reward and opportunity should we be entrusted with the government of this country in 88 days time. We will relieve the pressure on families. We will relieve the pressure that we know the families and households of Australia are under. Under us they will keep the tax cuts and pension and benefit rises, but they will most assuredly lose the carbon tax.

This is not just about creating a richer country; it is about creating a better country too. What I want to achieve—what my team wants to achieve—is giving the Australian people confidence that we can come closer to being our best selves. We are all conservationists now. That is why I want direct action to improve our environment, not a great big new tax that will clobber the economy without actually reducing our emissions. As well as an emissions reduction fund for more trees, better soils and smarter technology, there will be a green army 15,000 strong marching to the help of our degraded land and waterways. Anyone who looks at our country knows that land care needs more than the largely volunteer efforts of farmers and of understaffed local councils. We will give our country the workforce it needs if our remnant bushland is to survive and if our creeks are to run clean. We will give idealistic young people and older people a way to turn their environmental commitment into practical action so that our gift to the future will be a country in better shape than that which we inherited.

Should the coalition win the election, I will continue my practice of spending a week a year as a volunteer in a remote Indigenous community. If people are expected to live there, a Prime Minister should be prepared to stay there and senior public servants should be prepared to stay there too. Nothing would focus people's minds more on the issues of remote Australia than conducting the government from there even if it is only for a week. I do not underestimate the challenges of crafting an Indigenous recognition amendment that will be an advance for Aboriginal people without creating two classes of Australian. No, I do not underestimate the difficulty of this challenge; but, should there be a change of government on 14 September, we will persevere and get this right. In so doing, this nation of ours—this great nation—will finally be made whole.

Everyone knows that I am a late convert to the cause of a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme. I am a late convert, but I tell you I have a convert's zeal. Why should people get their full pay while on holiday and on

sick leave and just a welfare wage while on parental leave? If blokes had babies, this never would have been tolerated. I did not always understand this, but I do now. A fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme is an important economic reform. It is good for population, it is good for productivity, it is good for participation—in fact, all three of the Ps which economic strength requires. Most of all, a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme is an issue of justice—justice for the women of our country that will finally be delivered under a coalition government.

I know I surprised people three years ago with this commitment to a fair dinkum paid parental leave scheme, but serious people do have the capacity to grow and I am pleased to say that I understand this issue much better now than I did a decade ago. I have learnt from watching the example of good leaders—people like Bob Hawke as well as John Howard, who made the transition from tribal chief to national leader. I understand that a Prime Minister should never set out to deliberately divide one Australian from another, as we have seen in this current parliament. A Prime Minister should never think that he or she is somehow bigger than the party or the country. Prime ministers must always be the servants of their party and, above all else, the servants of their country.

Finally, should there be a change of government on 14 September, this parliament must be a better place. There has been too much venom and too many baseless accusations of bad faith—and I suspect we might even have a few in a few moments. We are better than that, and I hope to have a chance to demonstrate that we are better than that. After 14 September I am confident that the people of Australia will be able to have more pride in their parliament. *(Time expired)*