



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**Federation Chamber**

**CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

**Richmond Electorate: Employment**

**SPEECH**

**Monday, 22 September 2014**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Elliot, Justine, MP

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

**Mrs ELLIOT** (Richmond) (10:36): People on the New South Wales North Coast have many concerns with the actions of this cruel Liberal-National Party government. They have concerns about the doctor tax and the petrol tax. As well as the impact of the unfair budget, another major issue is this government's attack upon workers, its attack on penalty rates and also its unfair moves towards outsourcing, which threatens jobs, particularly in regional areas.

We have a situation where Liberal-National Party backbenchers are regularly in the media calling for penalty rates to be reviewed, which of course means slashed. That is their ultimate goal. Make no mistake about it: this would result in a return to the days of Work Choices. So many people in my electorate remember how devastating Work Choices was upon their working conditions. There are at least 10 coalition members who have publicly said penalty rates need to be reviewed. When a Liberal-National Party MP says 'reviewed', we know that is code for 'cut'.

The impact of cutting penalty rates in electorates like Richmond would be devastating. This was confirmed in the recent study by the McKell Institute titled *The economic impact of penalty rate cuts on rural New South Wales*. The report examined the effects of cuts to penalty rates for those working in regional electorates in the retail industry, an industry which relies heavily on penalty rates. The study found that the economic impact of penalty rate cuts would result in a loss of income of \$22.6 million a year collectively for the 6,700 retail workers in my electorate of Richmond. These cuts to penalty rates represent a 16.6 per cent loss in take-home pay for the average worker in Richmond. The study also highlighted that cutting penalty rates for retail workers would mean a loss of \$6.5 million to local businesses—a huge amount.

At the last election I had National Party members in my area publicly running around saying they wanted to see penalty rates slashed, and they continue to do that. Labor will fight these unfair plans they have to cut the pay of local workers. We will also fight to protect working conditions and against the very unfair moves we see by this government in terms of outsourcing.

We saw the government announce last week that it will outsource Centrelink and Medicare call centre work to Telstra. This action threatens jobs, privacy and service standards. The Department of Human Services employs nearly 7,000 workers in its Medicare and Centrelink call centres, many of them in regional and outer suburban areas. In fact, this action could have a major impact in my electorate, as there is a very large Centrelink call centre in Tweed Heads. These employees deliver very, very high standards in often extremely difficult circumstances as well.

At this stage, the terms of the contract that the government is proposing to enter into with Telstra are not clear, and there are still many unanswered questions. People in my electorate want to know how many local jobs will be cut as a result of these decisions. Also, will Telstra be able to use third-party call centre operators, as it does with its own call centre network? Will call centre work be sent offshore, where Telstra operates call centres? And it is not exactly clear how the privacy of Medicare and Centrelink confidential records will in fact be protected. All of these unanswered questions need to be answered by the Abbott government.

This decision by the Abbott government is yet another attack on the good staff of the Department of Human Services. These actions, along with their constant threat to cut penalty rates as well, are another cruel act by a very cruel government. We see their attacks on workers when it comes to penalty rates, and now we see these threats in terms of outsourcing these very important roles. There are many people in my electorate who are very concerned and many at the Centrelink call centre who are very worried about the future of their jobs.