



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Federation Chamber

BILLS

**Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2016-2017,
Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2016-2017**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Tuesday, 28 March 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

Date Tuesday, 28 March 2017
Page 3522
Questioner
Speaker Ryan, Joanne, MP

Source House
Proof No
Responder
Question No.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (17:58): I welcome the opportunity to speak on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2016-17 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2016-17 this evening, and I am honoured to follow the member for Macquarie, who so beautifully demonstrated exactly the difference between us on the Labor side of the parliament and those opposite. Our priorities on this side of the House are about ensuring equality in our society, looking after the most vulnerable in our communities and giving people a hand up, while those opposite are intent on making sure that the big end of town receives the largess that they seem to think they desperately need or desperately deserve. The member for Macquarie has given us a framework around homelessness and the priorities of this government as we think about their economic credentials and their economic record to date. The homelessness statistics reflected in my electorate of Lalor are similar to those in Macquarie. Those stories are what I think about before I fall asleep at night—the stories of what is happening to the most vulnerable in our suburbs across this country. That is also why I welcome the opportunity to speak on these bills.

Of course, Labor will support this package of bills in order to ensure the ordinary functions of government continue for the remainder of the 2016-17 financial year. We cannot, on this side, miss an opportunity to stand and ensure that everyone across this country understands the actual economic space that this country finds itself in now. It has been so few years since the global financial crisis, where we received that AAA credit rating—where we were hailed around the world as a country to look to for economic management—and, of course, it was a Labor government that led us through that crisis. Now, in 2017, we find ourselves having a 75-year high for inequality in this country.

It is an absolute indictment on this government that this is something that they refuse to acknowledge and refuse to address. This 75-year high in inequality is no surprise when you break those statistics down. We have wages growth at record lows and we have business profits at record highs. This government seems completely oblivious to those facts as it continues with its commitment to \$50 billion worth of tax cuts to the largest companies. Much of those tax cuts would go to the big four banks or to offshore companies. This week, the government persisted with the suggestion that it will scrap the deficit levy that was imposed when the deficit was a third of what it is now. On 1 July, millionaires will find themselves \$16,400 better off, while the most vulnerable in our communities will bear the brunt of the priorities that this government refuses to let go and continues to try to push through this parliament.

Labor always have been and always will be committed to budget repair that is, first and foremost, fair. We will support sensible measures and oppose measures that attack the most vulnerable, which this government keep dishing up. We also have a series of alternative saving measures that are clearly on the record and that we took to the last election. We encourage this government to consider them as they prepare for the 2017 budget. The Treasurer really needs to take some time out over the next six weeks to think about the priorities of this government and what their continuation of looking after the big end of town will actually mean down the track in suburbs like mine in the electorate of Lalor.

Some of the ideas that we took to the last election included measures that would address the housing affordability crisis that is happening across a lot of our country, particularly in Sydney and Melbourne. In Melbourne, young people in my electorate are now being locked out of the dream of owning their own home. We took a capital gains tax discount and our proposed reforms to negative gearing, which would result in an additional \$32 billion in savings over the next 10 years and would go a long way to budget repair. But this government obstinately refuse to look at those options because they are somebody else's ideas. We are able to demonstrate the way we are prepared to work constructively to improve the budget by working with the government. We secured \$6.3 billion in budget savings—more savings than the government initially put forward in its first omnibus bill. We were able to do so while protecting vulnerable people targeted by cuts and saving the Australian Renewable Energy Agency. In doing so, we demonstrated that there are ways to improve the budget bottom line without attacking the most vulnerable in our society.

While those opposite love to pretend that they have superior economic credentials, the reality is that their record is abysmal. If we take a quick look at some of the government's failed economic policies, the fact of the matter is that the budget is in a worse position than it was when the Liberals declared their budget emergency. We all remember that—most of us were here—and since then they have tripled the deficit. The 2013-14 budget predicted the deficit for 2016-17 to be at \$10.6 billion. Now, they say that it will rise to \$36.5 billion this year. Net debt is up over \$100 billion since the 2013 election. The 2013 Pre-election Economic and Fiscal Outlook confirmed the net debt was \$184 billion. The MYEFO for 2016 shows it has now blown out to \$317 billion this year, and this, of course, puts the AAA credit rating at risk. We need to look at that through the frame of the fact that we have 1.1 million underemployed Australians and over 700,000 unemployed Australians—that is 1.8 million under- or unemployed Australians, yet this government insist that they have the policies and the plans to drive this country and to create jobs and growth.

To implement their policies they are insisting on going after the most vulnerable—they are attacking students, pensioners and, in general, people receiving any payment from Centrelink. They refuse to lower the deeming rates for our pensioners, they refuse to adequately fund our schools and they will not do a thing about the glacial rollout of the NBN. We saw their desire to drain middle- and working-class Australians manifested in their manufactured debt recovery debacle. This goes to the core of demonstrating their priorities. In chasing the dollar, they are prepared to put people through the wringer. They are prepared to have Australians receive a debt notice from Centrelink six years after they were receiving support.

I have previously spoken about a constituent of mine, and I will do so again this evening, because her story is representative of the type of person this government has deemed appropriate to attack in order to get out of the hole that they have dug for themselves. I sat with this person over the summer period while Minister Tudge was on leave and not available to come back and address this issue when it broke across this country—when people went to their letterboxes and found that thousands of them a week were receiving debt notices. Many of them later found that they had no debt at all.

Most of us in our electorate offices were dealing with the human face of this planned failure—a reported 40 per cent failure. I sat with this resident who had been told that she owed the Commonwealth more than \$5,000. She is now working full-time, so the debt was supposedly related to a period six years earlier. She had had Centrelink support six years ago while she was seeking work as a teacher after retraining, while she was applying for jobs. She says the second call she made after getting a job, after being successful in an application process to a school, was to Centrelink. The first call was to her mother, to share the celebration, and the second call she made was to Centrelink to say: 'I no longer need support. I have secured full-time employment.' It was a day of celebration for her.

This is a person this government should be celebrating—someone who was retrained and then sought and found full-time employment. But, instead of being left alone in peace, she was spending her half-hour lunch break on the phone to Centrelink. This was a person who, after gaining full-time employment and working for six years, had bought her house, had got herself into the housing market and had a mortgage—and she was now being told that she had a debt of over \$5,000.

After speaking to and getting support from my office, she was then told that she did not have a debt of that size; she had a debt of \$100. After one more phone call it was reduced to zero. There was never a debt—there was never a debt. This robo-matching had thrown up a supposed debt, when one check of her Centrelink file would have shown them the date she made the call and the date she started work, which, of course, was when the school year began. It was clear that one human being involved in that process would have avoided this person being put through this situation. Her Christmas was ruined; her summer was ruined and her emotional wellbeing was destroyed while she thought that she may have been guilty of defrauding the Commonwealth in some way. This story typifies this government's priorities. Their priorities are to chase people down rabbit holes for whimsical notions of a debt rather than dealing with their own issues, which is that their priorities are wrong and that they refuse to take on sensible measures to fix their mess in the budget.

Housing affordability is a really important issue in my electorate. Lalor sits in the growth corridor of the outer west of Melbourne and in the city of Wyndham 5,000 houses a year are built and thousands of residents are added every year. People come to Wyndham because the housing is affordable. Well, that is now a joke because it is no longer affordable. Even on the outer fringes of Melbourne, it is not affordable for young people to break into this market. Addressing housing affordability will help to alleviate some of the pressures that force people into

homelessness, as the member for Macquarie was talking about. This government really do not think there is an issue with housing affordability and this is shown by the distinct lack of policy on the issue. They are calling for the states to take action when we all know in this place that unless we pull those federal levers, the states will continue to release land and continue to use the things that they can use at their disposal. But the federal levers are the ones that are really going to make a difference in housing affordability, and we really need to address this issue. Labor have the answers on the table around housing affordability. We have put those to the government and there has been a flat refusal to take up those measures and build them into their platform. Hopefully in this budget, they might see sense and adopt those sensible measures from Labor.

We stand in this House day after day and we hear about the measures that they think will help to solve what they claimed was a budget crisis back in 2014. I do not know what words they use for it now since it has clearly spiralled out of their control. We stand here in this framework of a 70-year high of inequality. I know from my experience that one of the answers to address that inequality is to address housing affordability. It is about job creation. It is about reducing the 1.8 million Australians who are either underemployed or unemployed. It is about turning back the tide on the casualisation of the workforce to give people certainty about their futures. It is about education. It is about early childhood education. It is about school education. It is about tertiary education. It is about VET and TAFE education. Yet, this government continue to cut in all of those spaces, or fail to take seriously the issues it needs to address.

We saw that this week with what the government calls their 'childcare package', which I refuse to call such and will call 'child care and early education package', which will see the most vulnerable children limited in their ability to access early education. In my electorate, 30 per cent of four-year-olds do not attend kindergarten and this government have put no answers on the table to support those families. They continue to attack families using family tax benefit A and B, and we saw that again this week with their freeze. This government offer no modelling around its penalty rates. It needs to take a good hard look at itself across the next six weeks and come up with a budget that addresses some of the issues confronting this country.