



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Abbott Government

SPEECH

Wednesday, 25 February 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Questioner
Speaker Plibersek, Tanya, MP

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Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (15:29): The reason we have this matter of public importance before us today is that this government is failing to provide stable and competent government at a time when Australian families are really struggling.

I travel around Australia a lot in my role and I can tell you: I have spoken to nobody in the last 17 months who says that after 17 months of Liberal-National government they feel better off. They feel under pressure, they feel cost-of-living pressures, but they also fear the future because of the measures in the last budget in May that the Treasurer still has not managed to get through the parliament—measures like a GP tax, the petrol tax, \$100,000 university degrees and cuts to pensions. There are cuts to pensions of \$23 billion, which will add up to about \$80 a week off the average pension after a few years. There are family support cuts and \$80 billion in cuts to schools and hospitals. People are worried about the billion dollars cut from child care and what that will mean for the availability and the affordability of child care, particularly in the area of family day care. They know that, under this government, the average family who are on around \$60,000 a year will be \$6,000 a year worse off. So they certainly feel the pressures right now, and they fear the pressure of the future when costs like these \$100,000 university degrees are added in.

What is the government's response to these kitchen table issues that are concerning the families of Australia? What is their response to the worries that are keeping parents awake at night—worries such as: how do I find child care for my children? How do I afford it? What is going to happen to school education funding in the future? How am I going to afford university for my one, two or three children? What is the government's response? A knighthood for Prince Philip. If you are talking about an illustration of a government profoundly and deeply out of touch, you do not have to look any further than the response of this government to those cost-of-living pressures that Australian families are concerned about.

We have some of the highest rates of unemployment in 12 years. Unemployment in Australia today is higher than it was during the height of the global financial crisis. How can it be that, having survived the global financial crisis, unemployment today is actually higher? One hundred thousand people have joined the unemployment queue. In fact, it is the highest rate since the Prime Minister was the employment minister back in the day.

What do we hear from this government in response? I heard one of the worst interviews I have heard in a long time when I heard the Treasurer talking to Linda Mottram on ABC Radio; I think it was Friday of the last sitting week that we were here. The interviewer put to the Treasurer, 'Treasurer, you are talking about unemployment. What about the Youth Connections program that you have cut in this budget?' Under the Youth Connections program 93.4 per cent of those who received help were still in education or employment after six months. It has been fantastically successful. I certainly know the Youth Connections program in my electorate. I have met Youth Connections providers around the country, including some in very disadvantaged areas who are helping kids who are homeless or who are from very difficult family backgrounds. They are helping them to get and stay employed, and what was the Treasurer's response? Not even, 'Tough time, had to make a tough cut.' He said, 'I've never heard of that program. I don't know what that program does. I can't be expected to know every program the government runs.' He should not have cut it if he did not know what it was.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK: We have the government making excuses. Do you know Youth Connections in your electorate? Yes, you do.

Mr McCormack interjecting—

Ms PLIBERSEK: No—he does not know Youth Connections in his electorate. Here we have a situation where a Treasurer is so out of touch that he would rather smoke cigars than actually read his own budget papers and work out the programs that he is cutting. What impact will this have on Australian families? This is what we

see today: a government that is out of touch, chaotic and unable to govern because they are preoccupied with their own leadership contest. (*Time expired*)