



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**  
**REMUNERATION TRIBUNAL**  
**DETERMINATION**

**Motion for Disallowance**

**SPEECH**

**Thursday, 14 May 2009**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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## SPEECH

**Date** Thursday, 14 May 2009  
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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Fielding, Sen Steve

**Source** Senate  
**Proof** No  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Senator FIELDING** (Victoria—Leader of the Family First Party) (10.13 am)—Family First support this motion to disapprove part 3 of the Remuneration Tribunal's determination 2009/04. At the heart of this is that we have the Rudd government telling us that we need to tighten our belts and that everybody has got to do their bit. We heard that same mantra being espoused in the budget that has recently come through. But how does having an increase to the electoral allowance mean that polities are tightening their belts? How does that go hand in hand? How could anyone in this chamber not support this motion? We are calling on Australians to do their bit, to pull in their belts a bit, and telling them we are all going to do our bit and do our part, but here we have polities doing the reverse. They are expanding their benefits. This is sending all of the wrong signals to the Australian public. At a time when times are tough, increasing the electoral allowance does not make sense.

The Remuneration Tribunal has a job—it makes recommendations for parliamentarians to approve or disapprove—so let us not hide behind the fact that it is an independent body. It is, and it has done what we have asked it to do—that is, to make a recommendation. But it is up to the politicians in this chamber today to use their conscience, to look the Australian public in the eye and honestly ask themselves if they can sleep at night knowing that if they do not support this disallowance motion today then they are telling the Australian public that it is okay for us to spend more. We are asking the community to do their bit, but politicians are exempt.

If you look at the budget that was put forward on Tuesday night, the only people the budget did not have an impact on were polities. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet has 60 more staff, \$13 million more a year, but the poor couple pensioners are doing it tough. I appeal to both sides of the chamber to think about this. Should politicians expand their electoral allowances at this point in time? We would not hide behind the argument that it has not increased for many years. That argument can be put aside given that we are asking Australians to pull their belts in and do their bit while politicians get away with nearly murder in this regard. You cannot, if you are genuine, allow this increase to go through. I appeal to both sides of the chamber today to rethink what they are going to do on this vote. This is a very important vote. This is a telling time as to whether polities are going to pull their own belts in and not have them expand.

The electoral allowance is all well and good, and the argument that it has not been increased for a number of years is a decent argument. But these are tough times, and as Kevin Rudd pulls the lever of the GFC—it reminds me of a bucket of KFC; every time you have a problem, it is the GFC. And here is an example: the global financial crisis means you should not be making an increase to the electoral allowance and today you should ensure that increase is not taken by politicians. I appeal to both sides of the chamber to support this motion here before us.