THE SENATE

MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

Closing the Gap

SPEECH

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BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE
Closing the Gap is the marketing term used by politicians and bureaucrats so they can feel good about themselves and get in front of TV cameras and pretend they're doing something to lift remote First Nations people out of their self-perpetuating hell holes. Most Australians know that tens of billions of dollars are spent each year to help alter the standard of living between those in remote Aboriginal communities and even those living in our developed parts of Australia. When you spend billions of dollars a year on any group of people you expect outcomes. Sadly, those billions have gone to the non-productive, unrepentant Aboriginal industry, not to where it should go, the grassroots Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is an industry that has achieved no notable benefits in pulling our First Nations people out of squalor, domestic violence and poverty.

When I speak here today I represent the quiet Australians, those Australians who have had a gutful of the billion-dollar handouts with very little to show for them. Far too many Aboriginal kids in remote communities at this very moment are starving. They're that hungry they're breaking in to homes not to steal DVD players but to steal food. Far too many Aboriginal kids are fearful of their alcoholic parents and family members, who prey on their vulnerability. Those Aboriginal children in my home state of Queensland, in towns like Doomadgee, Woorabinda, Aurukun and Yarrabah, remain vulnerable to sexual assault and a life of petrol and paint sniffing under the current weak plans by our federal and state governments.

On the other hand, I need to commend the hard work of the NPA Regional Council, led by Mayor Eddie Newman and by Councillor Michael Bond from New Mapoon, who took the time to meet with me last year to genuinely speak about bridging the gap. Together with their council colleagues in Umagico, Seisia, Bamaga and Injinoo, they have demonstrated that we can close the gap with work programs and opportunities for our Queensland Indigenous people—and so too with the mayor of the Torres Strait Islander Council, Fred Gela, and the Torres Shire Council mayor, Vonda Malone. What people need to understand about me and One Nation is that we will always give credit to those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups who are actively striving to better outcomes for their people, but I'll also call out those dysfunctional communities.

I spoke about this issue 24 years ago when I was first elected to the House of Representatives. It wasn't called Closing the Gap back then, but again we threw countless billions at the very same problems we're talking about today. What's changed since I first raised those issues? Nothing. We still have Aboriginal kids not going to school. The wonderful air-conditioned school in Doomadgee has around 400 students enrolled, but they're barely able to roll-call 50 per cent of students on any given day. They've got just one child in the whole school with a 100 per cent attendance record. Whose fault is that? Lazy parents. You can't blame the whites when it's your own negligence. We can throw all the money in the world at building these schools, with three meals a day for $2 to make sure Aboriginal kids are given a wholesome meal while they're at school, but, if they don't turn up, how do they get ahead in life? We're also bribing parents with payments to send their kids to school, but even that's not working.

Never before have Aboriginal people been given greater opportunity to get a job. I see it frequently advertised: 'Only Aboriginals need apply.' I had a letter sent to my office last year that confessed to applying for one of these jobs, even though the writer knew he wasn't Aboriginal and in fact he wasn't even Australian; he was a Pacific islander. When he was quizzed about his heritage, he made up a story, saying he was a part of the stolen generation and had no proper knowledge of his background. What type of mockery does this create?
Many Australians feel we have widened the gap as a result of Federal Court and High Court decisions. Only yesterday, we undermined our border security and immigration laws with the decision by our High Court. We widen the gap by dropping Australia's national anthem at football games but are expected to stand and conduct a welcome to country.

You will never close the gap while this parliament continues to hand native title land claims back to land councils. The tensions this creates among tribes or mobs is feeding the division in many of these remote communities. I hear frequently from Aboriginals who have serious concerns with the behaviour of Noel Pearson and Jason Yanner, alias Little Boy Murrandoo Yanner. These people aren't helping close the gap; they're simply riding the gravy train.

Incarceration rates of Aboriginals remain alarmingly high, even with the reluctance from the courts to jail them. The simple truth is: if you do the crime, you do the time. We expect it of every other Australian or person who comes to this country. If you want to close the gap, start taking some responsibility for your own people. As the old saying goes, you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. We've provided the schools, it's now up to you to send your own kids to school. We've provided the jobs, but it's up to you to turn up when you're rostered on, not when it suits. It's up to the Aboriginals to stay off the grog and the drugs.

I will leave you with my final thoughts. Closing the gap should be about treating all Australians equally and on an individual needs basis, not one based on race. These government policies that are based on race are themselves discriminatory and racist. Stop feeding the resentment in this country and you'll naturally close the gap. And stop playing the victim if we are to move forward as a united country. Resentment, hatred and blaming have to stop. We owe this to all future generations, regardless of race or colour.