



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**THE SENATE**

**BUDGET**

**Statement and Documents**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 4 May 2016**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

---

## SPEECH

**Date** Wednesday, 4 May 2016  
**Page** 3646  
**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Lambie, Sen Jacqui

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

**Senator LAMBIE** (Tasmania) (20:30): I rise on behalf of Tasmanians to participate in the 2016-17 Senate budget debate. I would love to be able to say that it looks like there are exciting times ahead, but that is certainly not the case. If you are a banker or a politician, this budget will put a smile on your face, because you are going to receive a number of tax cuts and benefits. However, if you are an age pensioner, after the delivery of this budget, it is official: the Liberals and the Nationals just hate you. If you are an age pensioner who is sick and needs a doctor, the measures in this Liberal budget regarding health and Medicare show that they really, really hate you. If this tricky budget, with \$13 billion of Tony Abbot's cuts to family welfare still embedded, is allowed to pass this parliament after a double dissolution election, 2.5 million Australian pensioners will be severely financially disadvantaged and out of pocket. What is that going to do to economic growth and job creation for Australia, with all those broke pensioners living below the poverty line?

Malcolm Turnbull's Treasurer talked about a 10-year plan to help the people who donate large sums of money to the Liberal Party in order to justify the Liberal's tax cuts, which will advantage the companies and people who have a long track record of failing to pay their fair share of tax and donating millions of dollars to the Liberal Party. Malcolm Turnbull's Treasurer quoted statistics from the OECD. That was just the first of a number of serious mistakes he made in his underwhelming, tricky and fundamentally heartless budget presentation. Instead of quoting OECD statistics on company tax rates, he should have quoted the OECD report that found that more than one-third of Australian pensioners are living below the poverty line. The OECD report indicated that our government is, firstly, among the worst performers in the world for the financial security of older people and contributes less to old-age benefits than other OECD countries; secondly, ranked second lowest on social equity, with 36 per cent of pensioners living below the poverty line; and, thirdly, spends 3.5 per cent of our GDP on the pension, below the OECD average of 7.9 per cent.

The average single Tasmanian age pensioner receives \$873.90 per fortnight while an age pensioner couple receives \$1,317.40 per fortnight. The Australian government must find ways of boosting age pensioner incomes and cash flows and exempting or limiting price rises for the basics in life. At the very least, we must help our age pensioners live above the poverty line. This budget does the opposite.

Prime Minister Turnbull's Treasurer said that these are extraordinary times. So let's take extraordinary measures. My plan is simply to redirect half the \$50 billion foreign aid budget—that being \$25 billion—into age pensions. That would provide a boost to the age pension of approximately 5.8 per cent. It is a start, and it is \$25 billion more than any other political party is advocating for the people who made our nation great. It will mean the average single Tasmanian age pensioner payment will increase by \$50.69 and an age pensioner couple will receive an increase of approximately \$76.41.

Tony Abbott's government tried to manipulate the political electoral cycle three years ago with a horror budget—which was about as subtle as an ice pick to the head. The fact that there is still \$13 billion of Tony Abbott's cuts to families, pensioners and veterans' entitlements buried in this budget is proof that this Liberal government has not really changed, and the ice pick has not been removed; it is just covered up with some political window-dressing. The rich vested interests are still calling the shots in the Liberal Party; the puppets have simply changed.

The Liberals are still dishonest, arrogant, tricky and mean, and they are just waiting for an opportunity to increase the GST to 15 per cent. And I guarantee you that, should they control the lower and upper houses of the parliament after a double-D election, they will raise the GST by another five per cent—a \$35 billion tax which will target the poor. Indeed, the dark secret of the Liberal's 10-year plan is that it relies on a 15 per cent GST rate to save Australia from a downgrade in our credit ratings. This budget, with its unrealistic growth predictions, its failure to properly tax the super-rich and its overreliance on trade with an aggressive, corrupt and faltering China, is built on shifting sands and has set up Australia for recession and fiscal failure.

The government have not abandoned university deregulation; they have just delayed it, while announcing \$2.5 billion of cuts to universities just for the entree. The Liberals are just dying to change the laws to give their corporate mates and political donors access for the first time in Australian history to the billions of dollars of university funding. That way they can turn a blind eye—as they did with the state VET systems—and let their generous corporate friends rort and rip off billions from our students, our universities and our taxpayers. I also note that the Liberal government refused to deal with childcare and paid parental leave before the election—and I will leave you to draw your own conclusions as to what that will mean.

Extending the pause on the Medicare Benefits Schedule fees for all services provided by health practitioners, as proposed in the Turnbull-Morrison budget, will cut \$1 billion over two years from Medicare. That is just another step towards privatising Medicare, which we know is on the conservative government's agenda. What does this cut mean, though? This measure will not change the way people qualify for treatment, but rather the amount of out-of-pocket costs they may experience for these services. When the government pauses indexation on the MBS fees and pulls \$1 billion worth of income from the health professionals, these health professionals will, as we know, pass that cost onto the consumer. Patients can expect higher out-of-pocket costs for health services. And this is on top of the \$650 million cuts to the bulk-billing incentive the government refuses to drop. The Liberals have essentially ripped \$1.5 billion out of Medicare in their move to privatise it. If the Liberals are allowed to govern there will be no way to stop the complete privatisation of Medicare and cuts to bulk-billing.

What is also concerning is the fact that the government announced the \$650 million in cuts to Medicare last December. At about the same time, their mid-year economic report set aside nearly \$650 million to resettle Syrian refugees over the next four years. When I reminded the government of this in parliament during a question in the Senate in February, the minister responsible for rural health refused to answer directly whether the cuts to Medicare and women's cancer tests were agreed to so that Australian could afford to resettle Syrian refugees. Women do not know how they will be able to afford to participate in regular Pap smears, diabetics will not be able to properly monitor and keep on top of their disease and you can forget early intervention for cancers—she is 'all over red rover'.

I recently spoke to Richard Hanlon, Manager of Sonic Health Care—one of Tasmania's largest pathology companies—and a medical scientist. He says that after the Liberal government's cuts, women's cancer tests and Pap smears could cost \$30 up-front, because of the removal of the bulk-billing incentive payment for all pathology. What about the extra load that will be placed on our hospitals, our doctors and nurses and public health systems in the future, because the government, for short-term financial gain, took the focus away from our primary and preventive health care?

Gold cards for our veterans: an unprecedented veterans' suicide and homelessness crisis grips Australia today. The crisis was created because of poor management of Australia's military resources and Defence personnel. Governments compounded their error by attempting to cover up the true nature and scale of our veterans' suicide and of our homelessness crisis. Yet the Turnbull-Morrison 2016-17 budget does not offer any measures that come close to being as effective as my automatic gold card would. My automatic gold card would ensure all veterans, including peacemakers, peacekeepers or former members of Australia's Defence Force and the Australian Federal Police who have served in war or war-like operations and for related purposes are provided medical and psychological treatment free of charge as a right of their service; the best medical treatment Australia has to offer—that is, through gold card health benefits.

A major cause of Australia's obscene veterans' suicide rate, apart from systematic underresourcing and an overcommitment to international operations, is that they do not receive medical care in a timely manner and by the unnecessary psychological damage caused during our veterans' bureaucratic fight for gold card-guaranteed medical treatment. When the issue of cost is raised, the saying that comes immediately to mind is that if we cannot afford to properly care for our wounded veterans when they come back from war or war-like service, then we should not send them there in the first place.

China's growing influence: over the course of my time as a senator, I have warned the government of the dangers of putting all our eggs in China's basket. Media investigations have backed up my calls for greater scrutiny of Chinese political donations and investment in Australia. When accused of discriminating against China, my response is, 'Yes, I am guilty of discrimination.' I proudly discriminate on the basis of whether you support democratic values and our rule of law or not. I will discriminate against any company who comes from a country that is not democratic. It is wrong for this Liberal government and the Foreign Investment Review Board to

treat companies from New Zealand, Japan or South Korea in the same way as companies from China. Higher standards and more questions have to be asked by our government of Chinese companies, and the release of the Panama Papers is quite clearly proof of that.

The Foreign Investment Review Board needs to be given greater powers to scrutinise such investment from China. Yet I did not see any evidence of this in the budget papers last night. China's corrupt money is artificially inflating the Australian property market and buying up prime agricultural land. Yet the Foreign Investment Review Board has come out and said the dirty money is beyond their scope. The dirty money is beyond their scope! Well, who is responsible for the dirty money that is beyond the FIRB's scope? Unfortunately for Australia's future generations our food, water and energy and national and workers' security has been undermined by the lack of political will. The Liberal and National parties have to fix this problem of corrupt Chinese government funds purchasing Australian property or Australian political party favours.

Jobs and youth training: the Liberal government has proposed a \$450 million spend on defence, but, yet again, there is no mention of Tasmania. Tasmania's businesses have been ignored for two decades when it comes to the fair awarding of Defence contracts, and this budget is no different. Tasmania has the skills, equipment and experience necessary to take on more Defence procurement. Tasmania also has the economic need for major projects like Defence procurement. With Tasmanian manufacturing companies promising to boost apprentices and trainees, Defence procurement could and would turn Tasmania's economic future around. When the US is choosing to buy Tasmanian-made equipment and vehicles it causes me to wonder why Australia will not.

Tasmanian businessman Michael Grainger of Liferaft Systems Australia said recently:

It is ironic that we are dealing with the major defence forces around the world but not our own country.

When it comes to the fair awarding of Defence contracts, Tasmanian Liberals have been weak in their representation for 20 years. As a result, Tasmania has been taken for granted, guaranteeing that Tasmanian businesses, including those associated with the LAND 400, will continue to be ignored for another 20 years.

The Liberal government's preference for all things overseas is also clear in the 457 visa scam, where Australian workers' jobs are being taken by cheaper foreign labour that is not held to the same standard as Australian labour. After talking to maritime workers who are about to lose their jobs to foreign workers—more of them—it is time that all Australians stood up and said no. It is time to say no to the conservative government's 457 visa scam and start looking after Australian workers first. The 457 visas are only supposed to be used when there are no skilled Australians to do the job. It is quite clear that there are plenty of skilled Australian professionals who can service and run refuelling vessels.

The Liberal government also needs to look after our youth. Already the Liberals' Youth Jobs PaTH program has been targeted as slave labour. It is not that much different to Work for the Dole, a program that clearly does not work—I do not know how many times this has been tried over the last decade. The youth program supposedly prepares youth and allows them to trial a workplace with the final step being 'to hire', where the government provides employers with a sum of money for employing the youth in the program. The JLN, however, proposes that youth earn, learn or serve before they become eligible for welfare payments.

The JLN supports voluntary national service trainee and apprenticeship schemes which allow our youth to build vital workplace skills and experience, providing the necessary foundation to participate in the workforce long term and contribute back to society.

The ice response. The Turnbull-Morrison budget is missing a response to the growing use of ice in Australia. Despite the government's line that there is no ice epidemic, the drug is cheap, easily accessible and highly, highly addictive. The government is underestimating its impact. Ice is a completely different beast to other illicit drugs and needs to be dealt with accordingly. There is no room for experimentation with this drug: one hit can hook; one pill can kill. We need zero tolerance, early intervention and involuntary detox of our children. Australian parents need to be educated about their lack of rights under Australian law to protect their children from themselves. All governments must work closely together and provide properly resourced and staffed detox facilities if we are to save generations from this misery. Emergency departments, paramedics and police need to be trained on how to deal with the violence that often comes with an ice high, because our frontline staff are being violently abused and injured with no recourse.

This is a national crisis that has been ignored in the budget. There is no funding for extra resources for rehabilitation centres, police or emergency departments. There is no funding for early intervention and prevention strategies, and I am damned if I know what is happening with the \$300 million that was promised months ago—I still have 10- and 11-year-olds running around with ice pipes in their mouth! When is that money going to be delivered?

**Senator Nash:** 1 July.

**Senator LAMBIE:** Six months later—great!

While the Liberal government is being tricky with its higher education policy, the budget papers clearly state that \$100,000 degrees are not being abolished but merely delayed. This is just another attack on a fundamental Australian social right—namely, an attack on access to free public education. It goes hand-in-hand with the ideological and political attack the Liberals have carried out on universal access to public health care and access that young people have to higher education. If the JLN holds the balance of power after the 2 July election, I will fight for every Australian to have a free first degree and I would push to uncap the number of two-year associate degrees in this country. I would also guarantee one per cent of GDP expenditure on education. If the coalition is re-elected, I guarantee they will bring back those \$100,000 degrees—dragging Australia back into the past and undoing decades of hard work by those fighting for equality.

National security. It is clear that many Islamic people can peacefully practice their religion without supporting and advocating for sharia or terrorist law. I support and praise those peaceful Islamic people, and I call on all Australian Islamic leaders and leaders of other religions to condemn those who do support sharia law, because it shows: firstly, a clear sign of extreme radicalisation; secondly, a split or divided loyalty to Australia and proof of allegiance to hostile foreign powers; thirdly, an attack on democratic principles found in Australia's Constitution; and, fourthly, discrimination against women and gay people. I am strongly opposed to sharia law being imposed in Australia either formally or informally. If the JLN have the balance of power, we will promote a policy of undivided loyalty to the Australian Constitution and its people. Support for sharia law—given that its law, culture and way of life are supported by Islamic State terrorists—is therefore also a clear sign of seditious or treasonous behaviour worthy of investigation and possible charges.

It is an indisputable fact, backed up by many daily gruesome and brutal examples, that states, countries and communities that support and enforce sharia law allow: the death penalty by beheading or stoning to be imposed from a religious court on those found guilty of being homosexual, adulterous or who choose to become atheists; governments to torture, mutilate and remove the limbs of those, including children, found guilty by a religious court of property offences, including theft; governments to strip women of basic rights; discrimination against women by making it illegal for them to attend sporting fixtures, drive, drink alcohol, smoke, have sex before marriage, appear in public without a male chaperone and be educated; governments to encourage, tolerate or turn a blind eye to female genital mutilation and forced marriages; and allow governments to encourage, sanction, tolerate or turn a blind eye to the re-introduction of human trafficking and slavery.

Both sides of politics are too soft on Australian terrorist supporters. The chief of ASIO told me during Senate estimates questioning that they are officially watching 190 Australian citizens who are actively recruiting and providing support for Islamic State enemies. This stunned me because if our government authorities have proof of Australian citizens supporting our enemies, why haven't those 190 traitors been arrested and charged with serious crimes? Why has the government let these known Islamic State supporters remain in our communities where they can—and have—caused harm to innocents? The last time that happened, we ended up with the Sydney cafe siege and the unnecessary deaths of innocent Australians.

Local government federal assistance grants. A freeze placed on federal assistance grants has caused Tasmanian local governments to suffer at the hands of the Liberal government since its placement in the 2014-15 budget. This freeze has cut \$925.2 million out of local government budgets for four years. Tasmanian local governments alone will lose \$18 million in that time as a result of this pause to the indexation of the local government financial assistance program. Our ratepayers have already lost \$1.9 million; they will lose \$3.9 million worth of local government services this year and \$5.9 million in the next financial year. Finally, they will lose \$6.1 million in 2017-18. These figures are a disgrace for the Liberal members of this parliament from Tasmania; indeed, they are a disgrace for all the Liberal and National members of this parliament from every Australian state and territory. The fallout can only mean a higher cost of living and a greater number of Tasmanians leaving the state.

Tax the rich. Again the Liberal government has bowed down to their rich mates and political donors and delivered a budget that takes from the poor and gives to the rich. At least you are consistent in one area! This budget also busts the myth that the Liberal Party are good managers of public funds, which I would like to question by stating some facts. The Howard Liberal government made a grand total of \$59.8 billion from public asset sales: \$4.4 billion from airports, \$48.6 billion from Telstra and \$6.8 billion from the Commonwealth Bank. The Liberals under Mr Howard and Mr Abbott sold \$59.8 billion of public assets and paid back \$57 billion of Labor debt, leaving us with \$108 billion of outstanding bonds and unfunded public service super.

How much revenue would have been raised to date had we not sold those public assets? In the last six months, the Turnbull Liberal government has failed to present a viable tax plan to the Australian people. Turnbull's suggestions to increase the GST to 15 per cent and to double tax Australians by giving the states the power to impose income tax were quickly retracted, and that failure has added to the chaos and confusion that the Abbott Liberal government first created for this parliament.

I am not in the pocket of Australia's rich so I am not afraid to stand up for the everyday Australian who is struggling to make ends meet. I have identified an extra \$94 billion over 10 years for our budget, if only the government had the courage to tax their super-rich mates. Australia could have a super-rich death tax, remove the capital gains tax exemptions for properties worth more than \$2 million and have a financial transactions tax. Just those three new taxes would raise an extra \$94 billion over the next decade, and those figures have been independently costed and proven. We could collect \$94 billion without putting an additional tax burden on the majority of Australia's population.

In regard to buying local, Australia must look after its own backyard and implement a 'buy Australian' policy to protect our manufacturing industries, such as steel and paper. New South Wales South Coast Labor Council Secretary Arthur Rorris spoke to me after he gave evidence to a Senate committee in Wollongong about a scam that was being carried out in the steel industry. Mr Rorris indicated that overseas countries come to Australia, take our iron ore and coal, effectively sell the product to themselves overseas at a loss and avoid paying their fair share of tax in Australia. Those countries then use our iron ore and coal to make steel overseas and then dump that steel at unfair, subsidised, below-cost prices back in Australia. Those actions alone have caused the closure of Australian steel manufacturing and threatened the loss of more Australian jobs and manufacturing know-how. Australian federal governments have made the situation worse because a previous Senate committee hearing informed me that we do not have in place a national policy to buy local steel or any other manufactured products. When it comes to our \$50 billion infrastructure budget, why won't this government buy local?

What about the fast cat? I do not want to talk down Tasmania. We live in paradise. However, if you want a future where our children and grandchildren are able to easily find a career and employment at home, then it is time for some strait talk—and when I say 'strait talk' of course I am talking about the Bass Strait. This unique body of water and our government's management of transport across it are the reasons why Tasmania has become economically disadvantaged and why our children, when compared with those from mainland states, do not have the same job and career opportunities. The problem with Bass Strait is that it costs so much to travel or ship goods across it. Those extra costs of quickly connecting to other Australian states have acted like a handbrake on our economy and have held back job creation and business growth in Tasmania for decades.

There are simple solutions to this freight problem which will better connect Tasmania to the economy, wealth and jobs of Victoria and other states. Lindsay Fox is one of Australia's most respected and successful businesspeople. He established one of Australia's biggest transport companies and he, like me, wants to establish a fast cat ferry service to connect north Tasmania with the international freight airport at Avalon. This Victorian city is about a 50-minute drive west of Melbourne—or a 10-minute chopper flight if you are a Liberal politician. Lindsay Fox's proposed Bass Strait fast cat freight and passenger service would be far superior and more efficient than any existing Tasmanian monohull service that we currently have. Sleek, new, 21st century, multihull vessels powered by jet turbines, using LNG as fuel and travelling at over 50 knots per hour would slash the current 12-hour Bass Strait trip by nearly a third—that is two to five hours turnover time.

One of the most respected and admired builders of these 21st century jet-powered ships is Incat, a Tasmanian business. Why aren't we supporting our own shipbuilders while investing in a Bass Strait sea transport system designed to enhance our children's future? If the 21st century multihull vessels built in Tasmania are good enough for the US military, Denmark, London, Japan, Sydney and Argentina, then why aren't they good enough for the Tasmanian Liberal government? Bill Shorten, to his credit, has said that if he wins the next election he will have

no problem investing money in a feasibility study for the fast cat, and I thank him dearly for that. Tasmanians deserve better—more than any other Australians—because we live in an island state of an island nation. We know how important it is to have a modern, efficient, affordable and reliable shipping industry.

Debate adjourned.