HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Coalition Government

SPEECH

Thursday, 13 February 2020

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
Dr ALLEN (Higgins) (16:19): I rise to reject the premise of the Leader of the Opposition's statement. The measure of the success of a government is to keep the country safe and the economy strong, through the good times and the bad, and to be able to provide rapid and immediate support during these bad times. Australia has had a bad start to the year. The devastating bushfires throughout parts of Victoria and New South Wales will have long and lasting effects. Tragically, 33 people have lost their lives, including six brave firefighters; 2,900 homes have been confirmed lost, and more than 10 million hectares has been burnt out.

Due to the strength of the Australian economy and the good fiscal management of the Morrison government, when times got tough the government was in a position to step up and give assistance to those who needed it most. The message from our Prime Minister was strong: we will do whatever it takes to support those communities and businesses hit by these fires, and, if we need to do more, we will.

The bushfire period has been unprecedented. While we are prepared, well organised and well resourced, the Morrison government can be proud of the immediate relief provided to residents, businesses and organisations in bushfire affected communities. Immediate financial assistance was available in a matter of days, with a disaster recovery payment of $1,000 per eligible adult and $800 per eligible child. So far over $105 million has been paid through the disaster recovery payment, and an additional $15 million has been paid in child payments. That is about a government that is listening to the needs of Australians. We are a government that is focused on delivering. We listen. We care. We deliver.

But we're not just there for firefighters, for the bushfires, for immediate disaster recovery. We're also there and prepared for other things that have happened more recently this year, including the coronavirus outbreak. Australia is an island. Throughout our history the tyranny of distance has actually provided us with a safe harbour from diseases, pests and threats from other parts of the world that have had to deal with these. But, in an increasingly globalised world, with affordable air travel and Australians' penchant for overseas travel, it's becoming harder to stave off a public health emergency such as the novel coronavirus. But, due to good practices and a responsive government, Australia is ready.

We've been ready to protect our citizens and provide support to our international neighbours. The Australian government has worked with departments and agencies to implement measures to manage the risk of coronavirus. Containment is key—and we have achieved that—but so is problem-solving. With strong borders and a strong understanding of population health, we can combat and work to minimise the impact of global health outbreaks such as coronavirus. I'm proud that our Australian government has invested in medical research, resulting in world-class institutes like the Peter Doherty Institute for Infection and Immunity. We should all be proud, as Australians, that the Doherty institute was the first lab outside of China to sequence the coronavirus. The Morrison government is working on minimising the effects of the virus, which will ultimately benefit Australians from both a health point of view and an economic point of view.

When health emergencies hit we have to be ready. Australia was ready, responsive and receptive as a result of being continually focused on the needs of Australians. We listen, we care, we deliver for Australia. I completely reject the proposition of the opposition.