



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Economy**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 27 October 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Rishworth, Amanda, MP

**Source** House  
**Proof** Yes  
**Responder**  
**Question No.**

**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (4.35 pm)—I am very pleased today to speak on this MPI proposed by the member for North Sydney because the member for North Sydney has been having a bad week. His bluster here in the chamber today certainly showed that he has no plan to ease cost-of-living pressures.

The member for North Sydney hung his hat on what he saw to be the major achievements of the Howard government. The two examples he gave were Work Choices and the privatisation of Telstra. Work Choices was something that I am sure the member for North Sydney did pursue; however it is certainly not something he should hang his hat on. Work Choices ripped away basic conditions and pay from ordinary Australians. I am not entirely sure how that would have eased the cost-of-living pressures on working families. It did nothing to improve productivity. Instead, it reduced the take-home pay of many ordinary Australians.

The second thing he hung his hat on was the Telstra privatisation. He failed to demonstrate exactly how the privatisation of Telstra reduced cost-of-living pressures on ordinary families. The feedback that I get from my electorate is that Telstra continually hampers price competition in my local area. It does not provide connections for many people to ADSL2 and it really has not been able to provide basic competition with the other telcos.

The other telcos often lament the fact that without a separation between the wholesale and the retail parts of the network they have not been able to adequately achieve decent competition in telecommunications and it has been up to this government, with the bill before the parliament at the moment, to fix this monumental error made by the previous government. They were the two examples on which the member for North Sydney hung his hat, saying that they were great and difficult reforms made by the previous government, but neither of those reforms led to any improvement of cost-of-living pressures for ordinary Australians. In fact, I would argue that they increased cost-of-living pressures on ordinary working families.

During the election we heard a lot from the member for Riverina and a lot from the other members who spoke in this debate about the big national debt that Labor is accumulating. Might I remind members on the other side that the big spenders at the last election—the

huge proposals, throwing money at everyone—were indeed the Liberal and National parties. They outspent the government significantly. While we were not out there trying to buy votes, the Liberal and National parties were out there spending spending, spending. They tried to hide this from the Australian people but unfortunately their \$11 million black hole was exposed after the election. If we want to talk about restraint, member for Riverina and members on the other side, maybe you should sit down and look at your policies.

The other big policy taken to the last election was indeed the Liberal Party's great big new tax. We hear a lot about great big new taxes from the Liberal Party. Certainly increasing company tax would have been a great big new tax which would have significantly impacted on cost-of-living pressures. This government have been showing restraint. We have been very clear that we intend to return the budget to surplus. Senator Penny Wong has made it clear that she will do that and the government have been very certain about that.

On the other side of the House there have been no plans, apart from the member for North Sydney's plan to nationalise the banks. The member for Ryan seemed in her contribution to support nationalisation of the banks, which is not good economic reform. The member for North Sydney reminds me of the attempt to nationalise the banks. On our side of the House we are doing a lot. We have done a lot and we will continue to do a lot to address cost-of-living pressures. In the global financial crisis this government made sure that people had a job. If you do not have a job, it is very difficult to pay bills. This government stepped in and ensured that we protected jobs.

In addition, as soon as we were elected to government we addressed child care costs, increasing the child care rebate from 30 per cent to 50 per cent of out-of-pocket expenses. We introduced the education tax refund—something the Liberal Party did not propose at the 2007 election. This was an initiative of the Labor Party and, once elected, we introduced it. Now families are claiming up to 50 per cent of the cost of school fees for both primary and secondary school children. At the last election we made a commitment to build on that to ensure that school uniforms were part of it.

This government implemented tax cuts very quickly. That means, for example, that someone on \$50,000

is paying \$1,750 less tax than when the Liberal Party was in government. This was another significant reform. Something that the coalition could not bring themselves to do in the whole time they were in government was to address cost-of-living issues for pensioners. Pensioners in my electorate told me how difficult it was and how important the increase was. The coalition could never ever commit to it. Instead, they allowed the pension to be eroded so that many people had much difficulty in just living. It was this government that moved to increase the pension and reduce cost-of-living pressures.

We also moved on housing—something the coalition completely ignored while in government. Housing was a significant problem and we have moved on social housing and also on the Rental Affordability Scheme. This scheme has led to approximately 50,000 properties which will come on line to provide affordable rental accommodation. This is part of our housing policy and will have a big impact on families looking for affordable housing—and it is something that those on the other side have never done.

At the beginning of this debate we saw the member for North Sydney beating his chest about his great economic credentials. I guess he has to do it because no-one else is doing it for him. This government will not be distracted by some of the slogans from the other side. This government is going to get down to business and do something about productivity. This government will build the National Broadband Network.

Those on the other side regularly talk about how they are the party of small business. Small business nominate that not having access to broadband is the No. 1 impediment to their economic growth. That is something they see as of critical importance to ensure that they are able to grow their business, to employ people and to do those things which we want small businesses in our country to do. For those on the other side to say that they want productivity advice—you need to invest. We need productivity growth in this country to ensure that our country continues to improve and that those working Australians get a better slice of the pie. I would urge those on the other side to ensure that they do support the National Broadband Network because it will help our economic growth not only in the medium term but also in the long term, certainly in my local electorate.

On this issue, the government is doing a significant amount on cost-of-living issues, much more than was ever done under the previous government and much more than the current Liberal-National coalition plans to do. I will continue working with the government to ensure that we are looking at this very important issue and I will let those on the other side use their slogans and glib phrases to try to con the Australian people.