



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

BILLS

**Social Services and Other Legislation
Amendment (2014 Budget Measures
No. 1) Bill 2014, Social Services and
Other Legislation Amendment (2014
Budget Measures No. 2) Bill 2014**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 1 October 2014

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Speaker Lambie, Sen Jacqui	Question No.

Senator LAMBIE (Tasmania—Deputy Leader and Deputy Whip of the Palmer United Party in the Senate) (10:29): I rise to speak on the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (2014 Budget Measures No. 1) Bill 2014 and the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (2014 Budget Measures No. 2) Bill 2014.

When you calculate the financial impact of this legislation, an estimate will show that over the forward estimates the Liberal government has planned to target seniors, clean-energy users, families, parents, disabled people, students, unemployed and our veterans, and will take \$13.4 billion, or \$3.4 billion a year, from them. I was not elected to this chamber to take money and resources away from Tasmanian seniors, clean-energy users, families, parents, disabled people, students, unemployed and certainly not my Tasmanian veterans. I was not elected to take \$3.4 billion a year away from Australia's and Tasmania's poor and disadvantaged.

Tasmania faces big economic challenges that other states do not have to face. It has the lowest building approvals and the highest rate of unemployment, at 7.1 per cent. And that is only using an unemployment figure calculated by saying that if you work one hour a week then you are employed. What a load of rubbish! Imagine if the official unemployment figures were calculated using figures which took into account those who officially worked only 14 hours a week. Then we would have an idea of the amount of misery and despair in our state is caused by underemployment.

We are a rich country. According to a briefing given to me by the Treasury officials—I thank Treasurer Hockey—we do not have a budget emergency. That Liberal myth has been busted and the science is now settled. I understand that as a nation with unemployment at 6.1 per cent we need to be careful and not waste money. However, we are a nation with between three and four per cent growth, according to IMF global growth forecasts, real GDP growth of 3.1 per cent, business confidence above the 10-year average and real GDP growth above the 20-year average. These figures are reason for optimism. We can afford to let our seniors, clean-energy users, families, parents, disabled people, students, unemployed and of course our veterans keep their entitlements, keep food on their table, keep paying their bills, keep their rooms warm on cold nights and, more importantly, keep their dignity.

The reason I say that is that we have other budget measures which could be reformed to provide a saving of more than \$13 billion over the forward estimates. This government has stated that, over the forward estimates, it will spend over approximately \$30 billion in foreign aid. That means about \$5 to \$6 billion a year for the next four or five years will be sent to overseas countries. Despite the foreign minister's smoke-and-mirrors trick over budget time saying that billions had been taken out of the budget, the fact remains that \$30 billion over the next five years is a record amount of Australian taxpayers' money that this government has earmarked for foreign people. Never before in the history of Australian politics have the Liberal, Labor and Greens parties agreed to send \$30 billion to overseas countries. This generosity by the Liberal politicians to foreign people comes at the same time that the acting Assistant Treasurer makes speech after speech in this chamber complaining about the amount of money we have to pay to service Labor debt. Perhaps he has a point, we all know that Labor and the Green coalition recklessly spent public funds and we have to be mindful of the amount of money that we put on the nation's credit card and the total amount of those repayments. However the Assistant Treasurer's argument about debt repayment loses credibility when you consider the fact that he is quite happy to send \$30 billion over the forward estimates to overseas countries. Why should we give \$30 billion to overseas countries while at exactly the same time we take away over \$13 billion from Australia's seniors, clean-energy users, families, parents, disabled people, students, unemployed and our veterans?

The unfair, heartless Liberal budget 'savings' measures outlined in the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (2014 Budget Measures No. 1) Bill 2014 and the Social Services and Other Legislation Amendment (2014 Budget Measures No. 2) Bill 2014 are not needed. With the stroke of a pen the Prime Minister could halve Australia's record foreign aid budget from \$30 billion to \$15 billion and still allow our seniors, clean-energy users, families, parents, disabled people, students, unemployed and veterans to keep their entitlements. We could

do that tomorrow. Actually, we could do that this afternoon! The government could put this legislation which contains so much heartache for ordinary Australians in the rubbish bin where it belongs. If we are going to be charitable with \$30 billion of Australian taxpayers' funds let us be charitable at home, in our own country, rather than in foreign countries. We should look after our own backyard first.

Another area of the budget where savings measures could be applied to instead of taking entitlements away from our sick, elderly and young is the Liberal and National parties' infrastructure budget. According to Treasury briefings, over the next two years, 2015-16 and 2016-17, this government plans to spend approximately \$7 billion on top of the just over \$6 billion that is spent annually on infrastructure. The majority of this money will be spent on mainland capital cities roads—especially in Sydney and Melbourne. This government has made plans to spend billions of extra dollars on infrastructure in Sydney and Melbourne in the lead up to the next federal general election. The infrastructure budget graphs supplied by Treasury do not lie. They show that while Mr Abbott and Mr Hockey are telling Tasmanians to tighten their belts the residents of western Sydney and Melbourne are enjoying a huge boost to the amount of federal funds which are being showered on them. If regional Australia and ordinary Tasmanians are to tighten their belts then why can't the belt tightening be carried out by the people of Sydney and Melbourne as well? For example, why has the Liberal government promised to provide \$20 million over three years to the Lebanese Muslim Association and other Arabic-speaking people to build residential aged-care services that will provide 'culturally appropriate aged care in Western Sydney' when the budget shows that over the forward estimates savings of \$12.7 million and \$38.8 million respectively, \$51.76 million in total, will be achieved by targeting our very own veterans who receive incapacity payments and disability pensions? I have never worked out how any government can describe as budget savings taking money and entitlements away from those citizens—our Defence Force veterans—who were prepared to lay their lives on the line.

Clearly, this Abbott government has been caught out taking away entitlements from seniors, clean energy users, families, parents, disabled people, students, unemployed and veterans in order to build up a Liberal slush fund—whose sole purpose is to pork-barrel Melbourne and infrastructure during an election year. What a disgrace! Liberal governments in Australia historically have tunnel vision when it comes to fixing budgets. They only seem to have two tools in their tool bags, and I suggest they need sharpening. These are: sell off government assets and slug the most vulnerable in our community. This government, like every Liberal government before it is doing the same old stuff and re-using the same old, worn-out political tools to do it—selling off government assets and ripping off the sick, the disabled, our veterans, our pensioners, our unemployed, hardworking families struggling to make ends meet. At the same time they are creating an economy where costs of living are continue to climb out of control and there are not enough jobs for those who want them. When you look at these bills and many others that this government is trying to pass, it leaves you scratching your head.

Under these bills the government wants to raise the retirement age. They want to push disabled people back into the workforce. Australian Bureau of Statistics figures show there are not enough jobs available now for our unemployed. Wouldn't it be smarter to create more jobs before forcing more people into the workforce for longer? Retiring at an older age might work well for a politician or a public servant who has not done physical labour all their life, but what happens to those honest Aussie workers who build our homes, fix our cars, nurse our ill and nurse our aged? Their bodies will not allow them to continue to working until 70. What happens to those people? Like many things this government is doing, it makes no sense at all. None! It is just plain, cold, heartless and senseless.

Under these bills the government wants to rip off \$7.3 billion from hardworking families. As I have said before, that is about the same amount of money this government will be spending on roads, pork-barrelling marginal seats where it is trying to win future votes in future elections. We are right on your tail. These bills are not a response to an economy or budget in crisis; these bills are an expression of a nasty, born-to-rule political ideology that the government has decided to force once again on this nation of ours. If we allow these bills to pass it will be a step toward a future that will end our fair-go Australian way of life. We are a wealthy nation, but the Liberal Party and some of the National Party have decided for the Australian public that we will no longer care for our most vulnerable. As that famous Indian pacifist Gandhi said:

The true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members.

How would our society measure up, should these measures pass?

One of the budget measures under these bills is to force anyone under 30 years of age to wait six months before they can get paid a benefit. The unemployed are expected somehow—somehow!— to live for six months without housing, without food, without any money at all for transport. I would like to put every politician to that test. How will they look for work? They can't; they won't. They will be forced onto the streets and many could be forced to turn to crime just to feed themselves. How does this government expect they will be able to look for work when they have no means to eat, let alone get transport to job interviews?

This government does nothing to create jobs in high unemployment areas like Tasmania. Its only response is to propose budget measures that will make the poor poorer under harsh and cruel measures that will see them homeless and desperate. This government went to the election promising pensioners they would not lose a cent, but now it has put in measures that would see pensioners lose money, perhaps not right now but certainly into the future. Do you think pensioners would have supported this government if you had told them the truth? I very much doubt it. Do you think you would have been supported by the wider community if Australians knew what the coalition was really planning to do? I doubt it. This government lacks legitimacy. It is illegitimate because it misled the voters of Australia and lied its way to an election victory—it lied its way all the way.

These bills before the Senate today are evidence of this government's stinking deception and it has gotten away with this great deception and taken the keys to the Treasury benches. Does this Liberal government now expects us to endorse and approve of its bad behaviour by voting for its legislation? To rub salt into the wound, this government has presented before this chamber plans to rip money off our veterans by freezing their entitlement indexations. Even our disabled veterans will lose money because this government intends to rip as much as 12 weeks' pay off them. Shame on you! That sound you hear, Mr Acting Deputy President, is the earth moving as those who have died defending and in the service of our nation have rolled in their graves. Shame on this government and shame on those opposite who propose to vote for these cruel mean measures!

It is time that politicians, who like to make grand stirring speeches on Anzac Day and pose for photo opportunities with members of the Army, Navy and Air Force, live up to the Anzac legend and not off it. The Palmer United Party fully opposes this Liberal government's legislation.