



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Taxation**

**SPEECH**

**Wednesday, 3 February 2010**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Questioner**  
**Speaker** Emerson, Craig, MP

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**Question No.**

**Dr EMERSON** (Rankin—Minister for Small Business, Independent Contractors and the Service Economy, Minister Assisting the Finance Minister on Deregulation and Minister for Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs) (4.55 pm)—In an otherwise unenlightening speech, the shadow Treasurer did make one enlightening statement, and it was along these lines: in the last 12 months, the Prime Minister and the Treasurer have been under no pressure. What that means is that the shadow Treasurer is dumping on his former leader, the member for Wentworth, alleging that he put no pressure on the Prime Minister and the Treasurer, but I ask rhetorically: who was the shadow Treasurer over the last 12 months? By my count, it was the member for North Sydney, the speaker at the dispatch box, who came into this parliament and confessed that he put no pressure on the Prime Minister or the Treasurer in the last 12 months. That is a pretty stark and honest confession that he has been completely ineffectual in discharging the responsibilities of a shadow Treasurer and an opposition in this parliament. It also reveals that the leadership splits that have riven the coalition in the last two years have only been papered over. I think it is in poor taste to come in here and dump on the former Leader of the Opposition in the way that he did.

This matter of public importance is ostensibly about climate change policy and any impacts that it might have on living costs. But I do not recall the shadow Treasurer mentioning the words ‘climate change’. He might have squeaked them in once, maybe twice, but certainly there was no sustained reference to the issue of climate change, and we need to ask why. They released a policy yesterday, and already it is passe, it is in the past, because it is such an embarrassing con job. The reason that the shadow Treasurer did not mention climate change is because his new leader regards climate change as ‘absolute crap’. Indeed, we had Senator Minchin, the numbers man in the coalition, saying that a majority of the coalition party room believe that climate change is not real—that it is crap. They have described it as a communist conspiracy.

Some of the observations of coalition members about climate change have to be seen to be believed. The member for Hughes described carbon in these terms: ‘Carbon is not a pollutant. It is a potent fertiliser and up until now a free fertiliser at that.’ So the member for Hughes would like lots more carbon in the

atmosphere, because it is a free fertiliser. Then we have Senator Eric Abetz, one of the coalition heavyweights in the Senate, who has said that there is no doubt that weeds pose a challenge that is much greater, more present and possibly more serious than climate change. So what we really need is a global agreement on weed control. That is what Senator Abetz is going on about. We have the space cadet of the House of Representatives, and that is the member for Tangney, who says this about global warming in a dissenting parliamentary report:

Another problem with the view that it is anthropogenic greenhouse gases that have caused warming is that warming has also been observed on Mars, Jupiter, Triton, Pluto, Neptune and others.

In other words, he was saying, ‘Why would you worry about climate change on planet Earth when we know that there is climate change on Mars and there is some climate change going on on Jupiter and on Triton, Pluto and Neptune?’ It is hard to believe. And, you know, he was in there in that very leadership tussle undermining the member for Wentworth in support of the now Leader of the Opposition, who was also undermining the member for Wentworth, and then he got all sooky because he did not get a frontbench position. This guy is a space cadet. He says: ‘Where is my frontbench position? I made the very clever observation that climate change is occurring on Triton, Pluto and Neptune and therefore we do not need to worry about it on Earth.’

Then we have the member for McEwen, who has a wonderful solution to the problem of climate change and its impact on the Great Barrier Reef—that is, to support shadecloth over the Great Barrier Reef. That is the debate we are experiencing here in this country with an opposition who, one day after releasing its con job, which ostensibly is supposed to do with climate change, has abandoned it. Why? Because they believe climate change is crap and can be dealt with by putting shadecloth on the Great Barrier Reef.

This policy that was released yesterday is a climate con job. There is no cap on emissions and it slugs taxpayers rather than the big polluters. I think most Australians understand the notion of the polluter pays principle—the polluter should pay. But, no, not according to the opposition. It is ordinary taxpayers who should pay for their policy—their \$10 billion

policy. And how is that going to be funded? We found out last night. We found out last night because Senator Barnaby Joyce, in yet another moment of candour, on *Lateline*, was asked this very question. He referred to the Henry tax review and said, 'That is the whole mechanism of where we get the money from.' That is, he is saying the Henry tax review is where they are getting the money from. By definition, the Henry tax review is about tax. Senator Joyce, the shadow finance minister, has said, 'We are going for \$10 billion to fund our climate change con, from taxpayers.'

On the weekend, the opposition leader was asked about this when there was speculation that the opposition might fund its \$10 billion policy out of increased cigarette taxes and he said, 'No, that is not going to happen; there will be no new tax increases, no new taxes to fund this policy.' But the shadow finance minister in his moment of honesty on *Lateline* last night said that was the whole mechanism of where they would get the money from—that is, taxing ordinary Australians. So when the opposition feigns concern about the living standards of ordinary Australians out of one side of their mouth, out of the other side of their mouth they are saying they will fund their great climate change con job by increasing taxes on ordinary Australians. Indeed, no doubt they would have rung him last night and said, 'Barnaby, Barnaby, you have done it again, mate—we have to clean up the mess.' But, no, Barnaby stood his ground. On the *AM* program he was asked to rule out tax increases to fund the climate change con job. They asked whether there would be any tax increase, and he said:

It's a very hard question to ... answer ...

In other words, he is saying, 'I am not going to do what the opposition leader's office wants me to do and clean up my mess; I am going to be honest and I will not rule out increases in taxes or new taxes to fund this \$10 million climate con job.'

We heard before the beginning of this MPI debate the Leader of the Opposition pouring scorn and derision on the economic stimulus plan, 70 percent of which is investment in the infrastructure of this country. You would think in a debate about living standards there would be some consideration for the two million small businesses and tradies who are benefiting from the economic stimulus package, which, in respect of the Building the Education Revolution, has been described by the Leader of the Opposition as 'a very low-grade spend.' So we know now exactly what they would do if they were to win the election this year—that is, they would abandon the economic stimulus spending upon which they poured scorn and derision today. That would be the end of the school modernisation program. They feign concern for small business but they would

ensure that small businesses and tradies would lose their jobs—those tradies who are engaged in the greatest school modernisation program in Australia's history. How can you say that you are concerned with the living standards of average Australians when you are prepared to cut the throats of up to two million small business men and women in this country by abandoning the economic stimulus, by scrapping the school modernisation program that is employing productively so many of our tradespeople and small businesses in this country? Indeed, the Leader of the Opposition absolutely confirmed in his contribution today that that is what he would do. He said, 'It is not the stimulus that has saved us.' They have done nothing but criticise it, they have voted against it and it is absolutely as plain as day that if they were to win the election out would go the entire school modernisation program and they would betray those small business owners and those independent contractors that they arrogantly claim as their own, as a part of their natural constituency. Small businessmen and independent contractors understand that it is a Labor government that is supporting them and that the opposition would just throw them out of work like the 200,000 jobs that would have been lost if not for the stimulus package. That is the estimate of the Treasury, and the opposition leader says, no, it is not the stimulus package. He said:

The crisis is over but the spending is continuing.

That is another clear signal that if they were elected the spending would stop, there would be no further investment in nation-building infrastructure, in our schools, in our local council works. The fact of the matter is this: there is an agenda on the part of the coalition. There is a new opposition leader and he holds extreme views. His first extreme view is the one that I have repeated here today—that is, he says climate change is absolute crap. His second extreme view is in relation to Work Choices. Make no mistake: if the coalition were elected, they would bring back Work Choices. They are rebuilding Work Choices brick by brick. In the first interview of the opposition leader after he was elected as opposition leader he was asked, 'But is Work Choices dead?' He said:

The phrase 'Work Choices' is dead. No-one will ever mention it again.

What he is saying is that they are going to bring back Work Choices; it is only the phrase that has gone. They will have another name for it. And we have got the architects in the parliament. We have got the member for Mayo. He has been promoted and they love him over there because he is an architect of Work Choices. We have got the member for Menzies back on the front bench, an architect of Work Choices. Of course he would be on the front bench; of course he would be

elevated under the Leader of the Opposition. I will tell you why. It is because the now opposition leader said in parliament on 13 August last year:

Let me begin my contribution to this debate by reminding members that workplace reform was one of the greatest achievements of the Howard government.

In the contribution that he made today in responding to the Prime Minister's first anniversary remarks on the stimulus plan, he said, 'And the government is winding back the reforms of the Howard government.' What he means is that the government is winding back Work Choices. In fact, we have killed it. If this government is re-elected, Work Choices remains dead and buried. But I can tell you that if the opposition leader were to be elected Prime Minister of this country, Work Choices would be revived, and right now they are rebuilding it brick by brick.

The fact is that this opposition leader holds extreme views and he is a very big risk. He is a very big risk because he has already been shown up in an area of great importance to Australians, to living standards of Australians, and I refer to health care. What did he do? As the health minister he ripped \$1 billion out of public hospitals. So when he is looking around for money to fund his great carbon con job, watch out if you have got any interest in public hospitals. They are going to increase taxes. He has already ripped \$1 billion out of public hospitals because he does not believe in the public hospital system. He opposes the stimulus; he would bring back Work Choices. The fact of the matter is that if you want a political party in government that supports average Australians, the jobs of Australians, supports the living standards of Australians and the small businesspeople and the tradies of this country, you can go no further than the Australian Labor Party, because we will stand behind them every step of the way. *(Time expired)*