



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Abbott Government

SPEECH

Tuesday, 8 September 2015

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

SPEECH

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Senator FAWCETT (South Australia—Deputy Government Whip in the Senate) (16:48): I am grateful for the opportunity to rise directly after Senator Bilyk because her contribution highlighted the very political nature of this MPI and the fact that so many things in Australia that are important, whether that be health, defence or other things, are completely reduced to slogans by the opposition with, importantly, a complete lack of facts.

Let me take a couple of things that were just mentioned. There was a claim that the Abbott government had done all it could to drive shipbuilding offshore. The Australian people known by now, because it has been in the media so much, that the reason we are facing the valley of death is that the Labor Party in six years of government signed no contracts to start building ships.

Senator Gallacher interjecting—

Senator FAWCETT: Senator Gallacher, a colleague from South Australia who I have great respect for, sighs at that, but he needs to own up to the fact that his side of politics made no commitments for new shipbuilding jobs. They have even come out with the farcical excuse that the reason they did not need to sign any contracts was that shipyards were working at capacity under Labor. Well, guess who commissioned those projects? They were commissioned by the Howard government. Defence has consistently said that, to avoid the valley of death, decisions would have had to have been made in the 2011-12 time frame. That was under the Labor government. Since it is only a month since this government made an announcement of \$89 billion for naval shipbuilding programs—including bringing forward the offshore patrol vessels and future frigates to have a continuous build, which is something that people have been calling for in this country for well over a decade—you can see that those claims are purely political and not based on any fact.

The second claim that was made just then in that contribution was that the Abbott government cut funding to health. That has been a line that has been run by the Labor Party ever since the election. But, if you look at the facts—and I bring here facts from South Australia, which is my state—you will see that in 2013-14 hospital services funding was \$983.3 million and public health funding was \$23.1 million. So there was a total of just over \$1 billion coming from the federal government. In the 2014-15 budget there was \$1.053 billion for hospital services and \$24.3 million for public health—so a total of \$1.07 billion. The figure for 2017-18 in the forward estimates is \$2.188 billion. So the facts completely undermine the political argument the ALP are running with these claims that they are making.

The Australian public know that a number of the promises made by this government have been delivered and delivered effectively. We need look no further than to things such as abolishing the carbon tax. Not only did we say that we would abolish the carbon tax, but we said we would have a scheme to reduce emissions that would be more effective. When we look at the first of the emissions reduction fund auctions, we see that 47 million tonnes of abatement were achieved at an average price of around \$13.95. Let's compare that with the carbon tax: at most, modelling shows it helped reduce emissions by less than 12 million tonnes, but it cost \$15.4 billion. That means it is around \$1300 per tonne in effect—some 93 times more expensive. It also had an impact not only on households—calculated at just over \$550 on average per household—but also, and importantly, on the viability of our manufacturing industry, which goes to the heart of job opportunities for young Australians, and particularly those in a state like South Australia. Not only has this government followed through with its promise to get rid of the carbon tax, but it has made good on its commitment to put in place a scheme that will provide more emissions abatement at a better price without those negative impacts on the economy.

We have also seen the promise of getting control over our borders. That has had the benefits of stopping the people smuggling business and of preventing people drowning at sea. Yes, there are the cost savings, but there is also the human element. One of the things that people constantly talk to me about when it comes to border protection is: 'We don't like the thought of children being in detention.' Can I tell you that, when the Howard government left office, there were no children in detention, but under the policies of the ALP, which threw open

our borders, there were over 1900 children in detention in July 2013. Within a year and a half of this government coming to office and putting in place our border protection policies, not only have we regained control of the borders and broken the people smuggling model, but we have reduced the number of children in detention down to the low hundreds. That is a fantastic outcome from a humanitarian perspective.

For those people who say that this government has made promises and has been chaotic, I ask them to look at some of the signature policies. The last area I will talk about is Defence. The Secretary of Defence made the comment that under the last government, not only did the goal posts move, but they were torn down and burnt—used for firewood—because of the budgetary damage done to the Defence department. This government has put us back on a track to achieving two per cent over the decade. We have started to stabilise the management of Defence with the First Principles Review; we have made the commitment I talked about before for sustainable shipbuilding. On those issues that are important to Australians—the economy, national defence and things like the environment—this government has followed through with its promises and good management to achieve real outcomes that impact Australians.