



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

**National Disability Insurance Scheme
Savings Fund Special Account Bill 2016**

Second Reading

SPEECH

Wednesday, 15 February 2017

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SPEECH

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Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (18:29): When the coalition came to office in 2013, the bequest from Labor was \$274 billion of gross debt on a trajectory to \$667 billion, by 2030, after Labor had inherited themselves a \$20 billion surplus and another \$45 billion in the bank. Labor's bitter bequest to every man, woman and child in the country after six years of waste and mismanagement also included \$240 billion in consecutive big budget deficits—first \$27 billion, followed by \$54 billion, followed by \$47 billion, then \$43 billion, then \$18 billion and finishing with yet another \$48 billion. When you add it up, that is about \$240 billion in deficits.

That was the dismal case, even though, according to the member for Lilley, at some stage of the projection process every Labor budget was miraculously going to be in surplus. But when you are letting spending grow at an average of 4.5 per cent a year with revenues nowhere near that, Labor's claims to be perennially on the verge of surplus were always deliberate Medicare-scale and style nonsense. This was the worst inheritance for any incoming Australian government in our history, even by the famously weak economic standards of the Labor Party which, sadly, Australians are now very used to.

Labor always spends us into trouble, and the coalition always comes in and has to sort out the mess. That has been the pattern practically since Federation, and that is what this bill, the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund Special Account Bill, is all about. Labor announced the NDIS in the same way it announced the also-hugely expensive Gonski education plan—with absolutely no idea about where the money was going to come from—which was the height of irresponsibility, and so typically the way of Labor governments, especially from 2007 right through to 2013, across all policy areas.

Both ideas—Gonski and the NDIS, and especially the NDIS, I have to say—were morally sound. The case for a greater level of care for the almost one in five Australians with a disability and their carers is indisputable, just as was the conclusion that, as a country, we desperately need to do something about the tragic decline in the quality of education, especially for children. To Labor, as always, the solution was just more dollars, but they did not have the dollars and they had no real prospect of getting the dollars. They uttered vague, rhetorical ideas about where the dollars might come from, and when they did try to give some undertakings they were vague and, ultimately, I believe, misleading. Moneys they implied were tied to the NDIS were not. Billions in alleged NDIS funding were double-counted—a standard Labor trick. Labor was effectively just like Micawber, one of Charles Dickens' fictional characters, who always assumed that something would just turn up to solve a problem in due course and in the fullness of time, maybe on a time horizon so far into the future that it is just not really worth worrying about today.

Sadly, that is the attitude Labor has taken on funding for the NDIS but, as we all know, nothing just turns up. Funding a program like the NDIS requires a lot of hard work and a lot of decisions of the sort put forward in this very bill. I have no doubt that the speaker who spoke before me, the member for Longman, is right in claiming that every stakeholder she speaks to wills the NDIS to succeed—they want it to succeed. I think she is probably right. However, wishing for something is not the same as planning for something. Wishing for something is no substitute for planning for it, and this is where Labor always goes so fundamentally wrong.

Once again, therefore, it is left to the coalition to do the heavy lifting, to do the hard work, to clean up the mess and to plan ahead. Labor's funding gap for the NDIS in 2019-20, when it becomes fully operational as a program, is \$4.1 billion, growing to \$6 billion a year soon after. It was, and it is, a ridiculous and totally irresponsible black hole. The staggering \$32 billion that the scheme is expected to cost within a decade of becoming fully operational was never on the Labor radar, but it is on our radar, and that is what the establishment of the National Disability Insurance Scheme Savings Fund Special Account is indeed all about. This is the fund that will become the Fort Knox for the NDIS. It will start with a contribution of \$2.1 billion from reforms to the disability support pension and other changes to the welfare system that aim to make it fairer, more finely targeted and, more importantly, accountable to the taxpayer.

It will be augmented over the years by a new spending regime and savings from across government, including \$3 billion via measures being put forward to this parliament in associated bills—that is money that will both take care of the short-term funding shortfall and set in train a process for guaranteeing funding into the future, when the scheme will be exponentially more expensive. Again, the previous speaker, the member for Longman, talked about the importance of certainty. It does not matter if you are running a profitable commercial business or a not-for-profit organisation or a charity; certainty is key, and there is no greater certainty that you can provide a player in any sector that is reliant on government funding than the certainty of funding. But the black hole created by Labor is the very thing that undermines confidence, and we cannot have this sector continuing to lack confidence because of a funding black hole.

So here we are, yet again, in this 45th Parliament with all eyes on Labor and their allies, the Greens and the crossbenchers in the Senate. All eyes are on them yet again to see if maybe—just maybe—this time they will do the right thing and work with us to protect the NDIS by supporting this bill and other associated measures. I commend the bill to the House.