



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

**PROOF**

**MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE**

**Cost of Living**

**SPEECH**

**Tuesday, 25 March 2025**

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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## SPEECH

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**Mr TED O'BRIEN** (Fairfax) (15:32): Let me start with some truisms: (1) Australia is the greatest country in the world; (2) the Albanese government is the worst government in Australian history; and (3) only a Dutton led coalition government can get Australia back on track. As we come to this next federal election, there is only one key question that Australians really need to ask themselves: do they feel better today than they did three years ago? Even in this chamber, the echo is no. When the Australian people do answer that question and say, 'No, we don't feel better,' they know that the last thing they should do in the ballot box is vote for a Labor candidate. But there is one thing worse than another term of the Albanese Labor government, and that is a term of a Labor-Green-Teal minority government.

Australians already know, after just one term of this government, that their standard of living has dropped more than in any other developed nation in the world, bar none. Australians are copping it. Their standard of living has dropped woefully. There is not a developed nation in the world where residents are feeling a drop in their way of life worse than Australians are. That is a direct consequence of this Labor government. If you look at the skyrocketing prices for food, education, health, housing, rent, insurance, electricity and gas, all of these have had at least double-digit rises in prices. In some cases there have been rises of over 20 per cent. In other cases, such as insurance, gas and electricity, it has been over 30 per cent. Prices have gone up. How's that for a track record for just one term in government? Can you imagine the damage they will wreak on the Australian economy and the Australian people if they're given yet another three years, let alone with the Greens and the teals as part of a minority government?

I think the issue here is that the Labor Party does not understand the importance of the economy, nor do they understand how to manage the economy. They have, indeed, never worked in the economy. In fact, what you have is the Attorney-General giggling as he leaves in shame because he doesn't have real-world experience. Indeed, what you see—he's coming back now, the Attorney-General—is that he is like the rest of the front bench. They're nothing more than a sales and marketing department for the CFMEU—

**Mr Dreyfus:** What a farce!

**Mr TED O'BRIEN:** and what you are is their chief marketer.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER ( Ms Claydon ):** Order! Enough!

**Mr TED O'BRIEN:** You and the rest of the front bench of the Labor Party are nothing more than sales and marketing for the union movement.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Fairfax! Before I give you the call, Member for Deakin, I have a few comments to make myself. That was completely out-of-order behaviour. Member for Page, you were also part of the out-of-order behaviour. Let's not add to the slanging match that just took place. You can make your strong, robust arguments without descent into that. I'm going to give you the call again, Member for Fairfax. I'd like the member for Isaacs, the Attorney-General, to either remain and be orderly or leave the chamber. Is there anything further that the Manager of Opposition Business had to add?

**Mr Sukkar:** No, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was going to raise the point that the minister was finding it difficult to control himself, but I think your remarks have dealt with that.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: I think the entire House had a little challenge in that regard. So let's try again. We are in an MPI, and I do give you latitude for debate.

Mr Hamilton interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Member for Groom, do you want to join in the Speaker's discussion here or what? Let's try and stick to the topic. I give you the call, Member for Fairfax.

**Mr TED O'BRIEN:** As I was saying, this Labor government does not understand how to manage the economy. They do not understand the importance of the economy.

In the coalition, on the other hand, we understand that the economy is not an end unto itself but, rather, that a strong economy is the means by which you underpin a strong standard of living. A strong economy is the means by which you can guarantee Australians' way of life. A strong economy is the means by which Australians can pursue whatever it is they wish to pursue. A strong economy is what allows people to buy houses, to afford the rent, to afford to educate the children and to pay for their health care. A strong economy is what allows our broader nation to be strong within a volatile Indo-Pacific.

But this Labor government does not understand the importance of a strong economy. Labor sees an economy as nothing more than an ability to take money from taxpayers and play with it with whatever their latest ideological proclivity might be. We know that right now Australians are actually paying the highest level of income tax that they ever have. Up to 26.1 per cent of people's income, by average, is being paid in tax. That has grown enormously under this government—by around about three per cent. They want to continue to take people's money. This means that the average Australian ends up being out of pocket by about \$3½ thousand because of this government's tax take. For a couple, two income makers in one house, that's \$7,000. The thing is that, with the money they have left after they've given another \$7,000 to the Labor Party government, they can buy less anyway because everything has gone up because of this government's homegrown inflation.

Of course, we know that Labor is very proud of the fact that they have already announced a \$150 energy relief package as part of the budget they'll announce tonight, something the coalition will not stand in the way of, because we know that, under their policies, Australian families are on their knees, hurting. We know that Australian businesses are closing at a rapid rate. Some 29,000 businesses have gone insolvent, in large part due to the failed energy policies of this government, so we will not stand in the way, but let's not kid ourselves as to the business model of the government.

Really, the energy relief payments by this government, which now add up to somewhere around about \$6.8 billion, are nothing but mopping up a failure in energy policy, and yet the Treasurer sells it as a virtue of how wonderful the Labor Party is. Seriously? He is a modern-day Fagin taken out of a Charles Dickens novel—teaching the caucus of the Labor Party how to play with their constituents' money. You see, what you do is you sneak up behind them, you take \$150 out of their back pocket and then you run in front of them and go, 'Aha! Here is \$150,' and you put it in their front pocket. Then you say, 'Aren't we great? We're fixing the energy problems.' This is their business model. They have no solutions to deal with the problem.

Of course, we're talking about Australians paying \$3,500 more in tax on average under this government, so it is only 150 bucks they are going to get back in the front pocket. Everything else goes to the ideological dreams of the Labor Party, and nobody steals more than the Minister for Climate Change and Energy—just as an aside. We are talking about tens of billions of dollars on his 'all eggs in one basket' renewables-only program—a program that is already driving Australian businesses to the wall. We are seeing industries close, we are seeing regional Australian economies hauling out, and we are seeing manufacturers closing the doors and relocating to Asia as a direct consequence of these policies.

Those opposite want to close down baseload power stations. They would suffocate gas. Their renewables program is running at half the pace that they promised it would, so Australians are now paying among the highest prices for electricity in the world. This is a direct consequence of this Labor government. This is cost-of-living pain directly caused by this Labor government. Their only solutions to energy are (1) to keep going for an 82 per cent renewable energy grid, (2) that they want green hydrogen—it was in the paper today—which will require a doubling of the grid to deliver on that dream, and (3) that they want to import natural gas. This is their solution. It is a disgrace and all of you— (*Time expired*)