



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

PROOF

MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

Inequality

SPEECH

Thursday, 10 November 2016

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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Date Thursday, 10 November 2016	Source House
Page 67	Proof Yes
Questioner	Responder
Speaker O'Brien, Ted, MP	Question No.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (16:13): I have to say how saddened I am, too, that this week closes with an MPI opened by the opposition leader. The opposition leader framed today's debate around an implied threat that Australia might be going down the path of the United States. To anybody who might be listening to this chamber today, I say, as a humble new backbencher to this House: despite the opposition leader's previous words about the President-elect and his words in this House today denigrating the United States, we the Australian people in fact hold our relationship with the United States very dearly. We have an enormous amount of respect for what is ultimately our most important strategic alliance.

I think all members of this chamber should be made aware, if they do not already know, that Australia is a medium-sized liberal democracy living within a very volatile, uncertain global environment. It is so important that we work closely and collaboratively with our allies, and there is no greater ally to this country than the United States. So despite the opposition leader's words, despite what he previously called the now President-elect of the United States and despite his insinuation today in the MPI wording that any increase in inequality and divisiveness in Australia would lead us down the path of the United States, I for one reject that notion. I for one am proud of our relationship with the United States, and I am absolutely appalled that on this last day of this sitting, the day after we hear about President Trump being elected, we have the opposition leader taking such a stance.

Let me now move on to the question at hand, which is all about the need for the government to address rising inequality and division in Australia. If there is an inequality right now for which we should all hold responsibility for fixing, it is generational inequality. Generational inequality comes about if we do not take action to arrest the debt. That is precisely, unfortunately, what the Labor Party would have us not do—they do not want to arrest the debt. Despite the fact that we are carrying a deficit due to the overhang of responsibility from the former Labor government, their proposals put us \$16½ billion behind in debt—\$16½ billion that their policies would add to the deficit and we would have to borrow. And who pays back that debt? We do, and our kids do. Will our generation be able to pay back the debt? I am a dad; I am a father—do I leave it to my four-year-old little girl and her peers to pay back this debt because the opposition refuses to take economic responsibility? Inequality starts with the economy, and the economy needs to be fixed. If we do not fix it, we create generational inequality.

My colleagues in this debate have already pointed to the backpacker tax and the need for us to ensure that Australian workers are not disadvantaged compared to foreign workers—something the opposition will not accept. We actually do have policies that are creating opportunities for growth and jobs—half a million jobs are being created by this government. We have another year of economic growth in this country.

Social disparity is another area of inequality. One of the big social issues we have debated in recent months has been the proposed plebiscite on the issue of same-sex marriage. The opposition will not have every Australian's vote equally considered. They do not want the Australian people to have a vote, because they think their conscience is more important than that of the Australian people. Is that equality? No, it is not. There is hypocrisy at the heart of the MPI that has been proposed today, and that is why I am very happy to be speaking against it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Coulton): The discussion is concluded.