

APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 1) 2008-2009 - APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 2) 2008-2009 - APPROPRIATION (PARLIAMENTARY DEPARTMENTS) BILL (NO. 1) 2008-2009 - APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 5) 2007-2008 - APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 6) 2007-2008 – 4th June 2008

Mrs VALE (Hughes) (11:42 AM) —I welcome the opportunity to speak on [Appropriation Bill \(No. 1\) 2008-2009](#) and the related bills. The Rudd Labor government's first budget has been found to be lacking in several areas over the past few weeks. I wish to look at a few of the areas of concern that are of interest to me and my constituents. They include petrol prices and grocery prices, which were also of concern to the Prime Minister after the last election but are particularly of concern to carers and pensioners. I also want to speak about the Northern Territory intervention.

Firstly, I would like to put on record for my constituents that I do not support Fuelwatch. The planned Fuelwatch price monitoring system will fail all families and crush many a small business. You need look no further than the letter from the Minister for Resources and Energy to his colleagues in which he said:

The biggest losers ... would again be working families in places like western Sydney.

I represent a part of south-western Sydney and I am very pleased to have the opportunity to stand up for people in that area, because this government will not. This is a government that took only six months to lose touch with ordinary Australian families. The honeymoon is over, and the division within is becoming public. The Prime Minister has even given up, as we heard from his Adelaide declaration:

We have done as much as we physically can to provide additional help to the family budget ...

Well, Prime Minister, there is a chance that Fuelwatch will even increase the cost of petrol. The advice from the Prime Minister's own department was made public last week. It said:

Econometric modelling undertaken by the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission ... is somewhat inconclusive with respect to the overall pump price, but indicates that a small overall price increase cannot be ruled out.

The proposed scheme will also result in an increase in the compliance burden in the economy, with treasury estimates indicating that the proposed scheme will result in ongoing increased operating costs of around \$4000 per annum to affected small businesses.

This is a real concern to the many small businesses that make up the electorate of Hughes. But the Prime Minister's department is not the only one against this proposed system. As well as the Minister for Resources and Energy and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, there were others who were against the scheme. These include the Department of Finance and Deregulation, which said:

Finance considers that the introduction of a price commitment rule may result in higher average petrol prices over time ...

Again, the Department of Resources, Energy and Tourism said:

The scheme will reduce competition and market flexibility, increase compliance costs, and has more potential to increase prices.

Another important, key department, the Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research, said that it is concerned about the anticompetitive effects of the proposed Fuelwatch scheme. Other bodies and organisations also listed their concerns regarding petrol prices, which are of main concern to ordinary working Australian families. The RACV said in March this year that it believed that the introduction of a 24-hour rule for petrol pricing, as used by the Western Australian government's FuelWatch scheme, would be detrimental for motorists and would create higher fuel prices. The RACQ said in April that the government needed independent expert evidence that a Western Australian style FuelWatch scheme would really deliver low prices. Later it said:

The Federal Government's desire to get fuel prices off the newspapers' front pages at any cost could be at the expense of most motorists ...

The RAA of South Australia said that most of the experts pushing for the Fuelwatch scheme seemed to be poorly informed.

Looking at some of the recent media reports, I note that it does not get much better for the government. Some of the headlines included: 'Rudd begs for time as petrol makes us fume', 'Fuelwatch to hurt Western Sydney', 'Leaky vessel will sail on with Fuelwatch', 'Fuel leaks could explode Rudd's petrol policy', 'Cabinet leak leaves Rudd petrol strategy in tatters', 'Under the pump', and 'Petrol leak rocks Rudd'.

But seriously, looking at the future, economists are telling us that the cost of oil is going to continue to rise. Therefore, more effort needs to be put into finding alternatives. Oil is a precious resource and it is used in the manufacture of polymers and chemicals, yet we burn it for energy. Alternatives at the moment include LPG and hybrid cars. There are also some promising technologies on the horizon with the much hyped Chevy Volt plug-in vehicle. General Motors is set to get the Volt into production by 2010. Looking long term with hydrogen fuel-cell vehicles, there is a lot more work to be done, especially with regard to infrastructure. I cannot help thinking that a lot of the great fuel companies have helped to actually engender this scarcity. In the past, where initiatives have been brought to them for biodiesel fuels or other alternatives, many large fuel companies have been known to buy up those copyrights and virtually just sit on them.

Another of Kevin O7's favourites was grocery prices, but the Prime Minister seems to have gone missing on this issue now that he is in government. We are hearing reports that food prices could double within a few years on the back of global shortages and soaring fuel prices. The drought, a shortage of water in agricultural land, unstable demand from China and India and a lack of investment in research have combined with higher oil prices to create a grim future for Australians and, indeed, members of Third World countries. Australia has had its worst rice crop in more than 80 years, and rice, wheat and corn prices have more than doubled in the past two years.

One of the biggest disappointments in this budget was the treatment of carers and pensioners. Before the budget, the Prime Minister was making comments such as:

There is no way on God's earth that I will leave pensioners in the lurch.

Also, when on his visit to Honiara, he said:

They are at the forefront of our attention and that will be the case as we frame this budget, and that will be seen on Budget night as well.

Unfortunately, the Prime Minister did not deliver. This budget does not include anything at all for carers, especially when it comes to people who require supported accommodation for their adult children with a disability—except, perhaps, to promise yet another review.

In my speech on the budget I would like to raise the matter of the Northern Territory intervention. For several years I have been privileged to be a member of the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs and I got to visit and meet many of the people of our remote Indigenous Australia. In my speech on 7 June 2000 on the budget, which was eight years ago, I raised the issue of the abuse of women and children in remote Indigenous communities. It would seem that there are some issues that are a little bit like weeds in the garden—you can spray them with weedicide or even dig them out but they keep coming back—as with the issue of the abuse of women and children in remote Indigenous communities. That was the subject of my speech back in the year 2000 and I also spoke of the impact of the harm that is caused by pornography.

Eight years ago I said that there was a war zone in Australia, that it was more dangerous than any battlefield, and it existed in many of our Indigenous remote communities, particularly in the rural regions of Queensland, the Northern Territory, Western Australia and South Australia. But of course it was not exclusive to those communities. I was actually referring to the findings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence, which was commissioned by the Queensland government and reported back to the Queensland parliament in the previous December, in 1999. That report was led by Professor Bonnie Robertson of Griffith University, and she was supported by several Indigenous women elders who were then, and are, congratulated for their courage in speaking out about the scourge in their communities—against, I might say, threats and intimidation by many of the male elders.

One of the reasons that I sat up and took notice of the report at that time was that it contained the views of ordinary women and children and even aged Indigenous Australians in those remote communities—people you never hear on television or on the radio and who never write articles. It came from their real-life experiences, and it was undistorted by ideology or political correctness. They spoke about the abuse and the violence perpetrated on innocent Indigenous women, children and older members of their communities. And, as bad as the abuse against the adults was, the worse abuse was the sexual abuse of little children.

Eight years ago it was clear that the type of sexual abuse had become worse because of the widespread introduction and availability of pornographic videos. Indeed, one of the recommendations of Professor Robertson and the Indigenous women elders was that pornographic videos be banned from the remote communities. The task force reported that the incidence of sexual violence was rising and was in direct relationship to the negative and deformed male socialisation that is associated with alcohol and other drug misuse and the prevalence of pornographic videos in many of these remote communities. About six years later, the *Little children are sacred* report said that pornography, including pay TV porn, was readily available to children and parents in these remote communities and that exposure to pornography played an important role in what is known as grooming children for sexual abuse.

This report, with its identification and condemnation of pornography, was one of the triggers for the Howard government's intervention in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory in the second half of 2007. Mr Deputy Speaker, as you would be well aware, the federal government was in no position and had no authority to actually intervene in Queensland or any of the other state jurisdictions that reported similar abuse. But the Commonwealth government certainly had jurisdiction to intervene in the Northern Territory—and it did. This was, I believe, one of the most significant achievements of the Howard government, and I am pleased to have been a member of the parliament and of the government that lifted what the task force described as the 'veil of silence' and did something resolute about this epidemic. Most importantly, as I think Indigenous people are aware, the intervention had the support and goodwill of many ordinary Australian families. Many ordinary Australian families in mainstream Australia are very concerned about the abuse of women and children.

I take this opportunity to honour the work that was done in this regard by the previous Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the Hon. Mal Brough, and I acknowledge and salute the support that he had from many of the women and children in many of those remote communities that he visited. To its credit, the succeeding Rudd government has continued with the policy of prohibiting the possession, control and supply of pornographic material in prescribed communities, and I thank the opposite side of the House for doing that. But I am concerned that it has gone a little weak in the knees in overturning the Howard government's restriction on pay TV pornography, which has been masked by an R-rating classification.

This is of real concern to the many disempowered women and children in remote communities, because I understand that the minister responsible has said that he will leave it to those communities to ask for pay TV pornography to be prohibited on an individual community basis. This does not provide for the women in these communities who have been traditionally and historically excluded from such decision-making processes. Just about all the reports that have been handed in on this very sad and tragic issue have identified the prevalence of pornography and its combination with drugs and alcohol as one of the causes of abuse of women and children. I feel it is up to us as a parliament to take that step. Perhaps, if it is felt that the communities themselves should have that choice, the women should also be asked to contribute their point of view and it should be done in a situation where they are not victimised or harassed by the male members of their society. I ask the government to consider that move out of fairness.

I understand that, since the introduction of the 2007 legislation, a large quantity of pornographic material has been collected by police in the Northern Territory. I do not know whether it was collected by the Northern Territory Police or the Australian Federal Police. I understand that only about a dozen members of the AFP have been assigned to the Northern Territory intervention, and it is not widely understood what roles the police forces carry out in relation to each other. My concern is that in the past there have been reports, in the long history of prosecution against illicit drugs, that some of the drugs that were seized by police and other authorities have subsequently disappeared. I am concerned that this could also occur with the seized pornographic materials. I urge the government to ensure that the banned material collected by the police and the authorities has been properly registered and that audited destruction procedures are in place to avoid mishandling and, most particularly, to protect the integrity of the police. It would be a scandal if

the pornographic material collected ended up being recycled back into the communities, into either prescribed areas or non-prescribed areas.

I would like to urge the government to introduce and promote in Indigenous communities a voluntary hand-back scheme whereby responsible members of the community could easily dispose of pornographic material in the sure knowledge that it will be destroyed and not be recycled again, endangering the little children of those communities. In fact, this is a scheme that could well be extended to the rest of the Australian community, because we know that the poisonous effect that pornographic material has in the socialisation of males in the Indigenous community is repeated in the deforming effect it has on the wider Australian community. It is well documented that pornographic material is corrosive to all relationships. Similarly, pornographic material has been used to groom Indigenous and non-Indigenous children for premature sexualisation. We have actually seen many reports on that in the newspapers. In the words of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence in Queensland, 'Silence is the language of complicity,' so let us speak up against the harm that pornography is known to cause and take further, resolute action to protect all Australian children from this corrosive influence.

Before I leave this matter, I would like to appeal to the creative arts industry to take a good, hard look at itself and what it produces in the name of art. I refer particularly to the Bill Henson images of very young children that received such media attention in the past fortnight. I do agree with the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition. I acknowledge their point of view and the honesty with which they spoke out about the position they took, and I utterly and totally encourage them to maintain that position. There is something strange about a society where art is pursued at the expense of the most vulnerable, through their exploitation. There is something terribly sick in our society if we have people amongst us who say it is okay to exploit a fellow human being. As if that were not bad enough, we have here the exploitation of children who are not in a position to give consent themselves. There are some who have said, 'Their parents gave consent.' Well, parents cannot give consent for the abuse and exploitation of their children. Indeed, not only is that not an understanding amongst ordinary, well-reasoned Australians but there is also case law on the matter: no parent can give consent to the abuse and exploitation of their child.

I often wonder if the question here is whether such exploitation even constitutes art. It is exploitation and abuse of the most vulnerable in our society. When our society turns on its most vulnerable members and pretends to call this 'art', we clearly know that the people who actually posture in this regard are speaking like the emperor dressed totally in his new clothes, because that is exactly what they are trying to purvey. This particular situation is abhorrent to a civilised society. I applaud the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition for their statements, and I join them and add mine.

In conclusion, this is a budget from a shaky Treasurer in which Labor goes out of its way to play a class war. We have seen it before from some sections of Labor with education and health. We on this side strongly support choice, but this government seems to want Australians to have it where there is no other way, whether they can pay for it or not. It is the government that would actually implement issues on health and education, not those Australians who would prefer to have the choice and pay for it themselves. We do need leadership. We do not need spin. The Prime Minister said the buck would stop with him. He will find that, in the future, most Australians will take him at his word and will hold him to it. Having said that, I do otherwise support the appropriation bills and thank the House for the opportunity to address them.