

Doorstop with the Treasurer, the Hon. Scott Morrison MP, Minister for Social Services, the Hon. Christian Porter MP and Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services, the Hon. Jane Prentice MP and John Della Bosca

PRIME MINISTER:

Good afternoon.

I'm here with the Treasurer, the Minister for Social Services and the Assistant Minister for Disabilities, to talk about the NDIS. We're joined by John Della Bosca and other advocates for disabilities, who have come to Parliament today to ask every member of the House and the Senate to support the increase in the Medicare levy, 0.5 per cent. That will ensure this great national enterprise – this great national enterprise of practical love, of compassion, of community solidarity, of supporting each other and as we have just discussed, with the mothers there with their children, an important exercise in productivity – this deserves to be fully funded.

John and his colleagues have been leading a campaign for years, demanding that the NDIS be fully funded. This budget delivers that. Increasing the Medicare levy by 0.5 per cent from 2019 will ensure that the Commonwealth share of the NDIS is fully funded. It will mean those two little boys will know, when they need the NDIS in the future, it will be paid for. Their mothers will know that. Their parents will know that. Their grandparents will know that. That is the commitment that we make. It is the least we can do.

We speak a lot about compassion, we speak a lot about love and empathy and community in this place, but we have to make sure we can pay for it. So John, thank you for coming here and using your great skills as an advocate, as a political advocate, to get the support we need to ensure this great reform, fully funding the NDIS, is delivered. John, I'd ask you to say a few words?

JOHN DELLA BOSCA:

Thank you very much Prime Minister and thank you for coming this afternoon. Put simply, what we've been doing today, what we intend to do this afternoon and what we will be doing over the next days and weeks and even if it takes months, is to make sure that everybody in this Parliament understands, regardless of the party or faction they're in, that the NDIS, to be successful – and it is already a great success story in terms of the things

that the Prime Minister canvassed. To be completely successful, it needs to be truly intergenerational. We need to lock in the funding for the NDIS into the future. We can't leave it to the whim of one Parliament or another, one budget or another. No disrespect intended – one Treasurer or another. It needs to be something that one government, this Government, has said they're prepared to. They've got in the budget to lock in the funding increase and keep it there so that no future government can change those priorities and harm the NDIA's mission.

It happens to be, by the way of course, that if you go back to the Productivity Commission's original numbers, this proposal matches very nearly exactly the kind of growth that is needed to fund the NDIA into the future. So it would be remiss of us as people who have been campaigning, as every Australian that counts has, for the National Disability Insurance Scheme, to be the best possible scheme it can be. For seven, eight, nine, some of us for ten years, if we didn't take this opportunity to advocate to every Member of Parliament here, senator, Member of Parliament here, that the Medicare levy adjustment, the increase to the Medicare levy must happen, in order to secure a consistent, sustainable funding stream for the NDIS. That's what we're telling everybody. That's what we'll keep telling everybody until we get a result.

Thank you.

TREASURER:

PM, can I will bring this around here, because this is important. This is something that John sent to me not long after I became Treasurer. The answer of the Turnbull Government is yes, this is exactly what we're going to do, John. We are going to fully fund the NDIS. To do that, you need to understand two things. First, you've got to understand that there is a funding gap in the NDIS. Minister Porter has been making that point I think, very well. There is a funding gap. It does have to be filled. If it's not filled families who deal with disabilities will not have the certainty they need.

You have got to have a fair way of filling that gap which is what we've done with the Medicare levy. That's the fair way to do it. Because as Julia Gillard said, everybody puts in because everybody takes out. That is a real fundamental principle of how the Medicare levy works. That's how it should continue to work for the NDIS.

So, we're not playing games with this. It was a pretty simple ask from John; fund the NDIS. That's what we're doing. That's what the budget has achieved and I'm pleased we've been able to answer your question, John, in this way.

We ask the Parliament to say yes, as well, rather than say no.

MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES:

I won't add too much more. It was lovely meeting the delegation here. Young Nathan's mum commented that his chances to have a productive life as an Australian citizen, where life is made meaningful through community

engagement and through work, will depend on the NDIS and the intergenerational way in which the NDIS can improve individual lives through the packages focusing on engagement with the community and empowering individuals.

John, thanks for being here today. One thing I would say is that when we came to look at this 0.5 per cent increase in the Medicare levy, understanding what the gap was and where it started in the year 2020, just over \$4 billion and how it grew to a cumulative \$55 billion. The fit between a 0.5% increase in the Medicare levy and the gap was so near to being exact, it was almost like it was meant to happen. John, I don't know whether you know, but my suspicion is that when the original 0.5% Medicare levy was policy of the Labor Party, they'd always meant to go to 1%. The sense I have got is that they'd always meant to go to 1% but at the last minute they balked because they misunderstood the generosity of the Australian people and misunderstood how the Australian people understand that this is a scheme which if everyone can put in according to their ability to put in, everyone benefits for generations to come in Australia. I don't know, maybe John knows, but that's my suspicion.

ASSISTANT MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES AND DISABILITY SERVICES:

Thank you, Prime Minister. Look, we've been talking about Nicholas and Nathan and the future generations that are going to benefit, but we also met today the mothers who have children in their 30s and 40s, who are now going to be out-living them. Changes have come with medical advances. Those parents – and there's a large cohort out there – are really anxious about what is going to happen to their children, when they die. So the NDIS is life-changing for them and gives them so much comfort in their older age that their children will be looked after if we can properly fund NDIS.

PRIME MINISTER:

Thank you Jane.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, what talks have you held with Mr Shorten on the NDIS? Do you plan to hold any further talks in coming weeks to get this across the line?

PRIME MINISTER:

We have certainly sought, as you know, we sought the support of the Labor Party to this.

What's so disappointing is that all of the logic that stood behind Bill Shorten's advocacy for a 0.5 per cent increase in the NDIS back in 2012, stands today. I mean, it is utterly consistent and I think the point that Christian made about the perfect fit that the extra 0.5 per cent makes to fill the gap, is very well made.

This is very, very clear. The logic that Julia Gillard and Bill Shorten applied those years ago, they should apply today. We know that a majority of

his shadow cabinet support it. He should, too.

I think that the case that's being made by John Della Bosca and Ara and Katherine and Kirsten and the other advocates here today is a very powerful one.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister given the tax increase isn't scheduled to start until July 1, 2019, are you quite happy to take this to the next election? Fight this tax increase at the next election?

PRIME MINISTER:

We're focused on getting it approved by the Parliament now. That's our commitment. We're seeking support for it right now. We are very committed to this. We are committed to fully fund the NDIS.

This is the fair response. It is absolutely consistent with what the Labor Party did in 2012. There is no rational or logical basis for opposing this.

TREASURER:

It is cruel to let this linger. The reason we put it in the budget is because we need the certainty now. Those parents, particularly those older parents, they need the certainty now. They need to know that the levy will be there in 19/20. It's all accounted for, the funds established and they can have that certainty.

So what we want to legislate for now, is certainty. The funds will follow when the bills turn up. It means that we can now focus, Christian and everyone can focus, on delivering the NDIS. That's what we should be focusing on and settling the funding question.

JOURNALIST:

Treasurer, if you were to take up the Labor Party's proposal and only allow the tax increase to hit when you are earning over \$87,000 a year, how much of the \$8 billion in revenue would you lose?

TREASURER:

Well there's two points here Sam. One is that they are not increasing the Medicare levy to fund the NDIS. Chris Bowen has made that crystal clear. He has no intention of sending one cent of their increase in the Medicare levy to fund the NDIS. So the answer to your question is, is there's a \$55.7 billion hole because they're not even interested in acknowledging there is a funding hole.

JOURNALIST:

But what would be revenue impact?

TREASURER:

It doesn't cover it. It misses it by the tens of billions of dollars.

JOURNALIST:

Do you know how much it would be?

TREASURER:

I do – it's \$15 billion over ten years, they're out. It doesn't cover it. But what is more important is, they are not going to send a cent of the increase in the Medicare levy to fund the NDIS. Not one cent.

It's not going to go to the special account. It's not going to go to support one disabled Australian. It's just a tax increase.

JOURNALIST:

The Productivity Commission has a report out on the NDIS. It said that there is a higher than expected number of children in the scheme, in particular with autism. What will you do to manage that?

PRIME MINISTER:

The Productivity Commission has noted the extraordinary commitment that has been put into the scheme. They've noted the importance of it as this great, great national enterprise, as I said. But I'll ask the Minister to say more about the PC report, or paper I should say.

MINISTER FOR SOCIAL SERVICES:

The first several recommendations deal with the global issue, is it on track? The Productivity Commission say two things. Essentially, it is on track and it is on budget. They note that inside the budget that there are upward pressures. One of those is more children than expected are presenting as applicants for the NDIS. They also note that there are a range of downward pressures at the same time. But at the moment we are tracking on budget.

The way in which we've been dealing with the greater than expected number of children presenting is through the early childhood gateway and essentially that is an assessment prior to the age of 6, and the delivery of supports outside but allied and parallel to the NDIS, to try and make sure that as much improvement in every individual child presenting is made, so that the numbers that actually enter at the point at which entry occurs, is lower and more in line with expectations.

But we will find throughout this process, that some actuals will be above and some will be below estimates.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister, given the feedback you were getting yesterday from the Party

Room, can you save the Finkel plan?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well we had a very good discussion in the Party Room yesterday. The Finkel plan, the Chief Scientist's independent report, which was commissioned by the Council of Australian Governments is a report. Not a report by government, it's a report to governments. In fact it's a report to every government, state, territory and federal. We received it on Friday. We are in a process of considering it.

A very good exposition of it was given to the Party Room by Josh Frydenberg, the Energy Minister. Then we had a question and answer session later in the day, in a very valuable discussion. I can say that there is absolutely broad agreement and consensus that business as usual is not an option.

Of course, we have demonstrated that. We are already taking action. I mean let's not mince words here, we are taking the most decisive action in the gas market by any government. We are literally taking steps to limit exports to ensure that there will be sufficient gas in the domestic market.

Now, it gave me no pleasure to do that, but the alternative was seeing gas prices continue to rise which put pressure, not just on electricity prices, but on households and on industry, and putting tens of thousands of jobs at risk. We are taking steps to ensure that we have a massive increase in hydro generation baseload power, storage power, with Snowy Hydro 2.0, which will add at least 2,000 megawatts to the national grid.

So these are very important steps we're taking so far and we are in the process as, indeed, are the other eight governments involved, we are considering the Chief Scientist's report.

JOURNALIST:

What's your time frame for landing a policy and landing legislation? What are we looking at?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well, we will be giving it due consideration. We will obviously be working as quickly as we can, but I just want to –

JOURNALIST:

But what about the timeframe? Don't industry and investors really want some certainty in what it's all about?

PRIME MINISTER:

The answer is yes, industry does need certainty. There's been too much politics, too much ideology, not enough economics, not enough engineering.

Our energy policy and my commitment is to ensure that Australians have

affordable, reliable energy, and that we meet our commitments, our international commitments to cut our emissions.

It is a very complex area and it involves every other government. So it has to go through COAG.

JOURNALIST:

But surely you have an aim and a timetable?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well the aim is to get it right. The aim is to get it right. Let me tell you, glib answers and one-liners have been of no assistance in keeping Australian's energy secure and affordable.

What Australians need is wise leadership, not glib leadership. What Australians need is economics and engineering, not ideology and politics. They've had too much of that. All that has done is drive electricity prices up and put reliability at risk.

You know, you heard it before but the example of South Australia is probably the worst, where you have a massive commitment to renewable energy, wind power, with not a thought in the world to how it would be backed-up. Not a thought in the world, to how you would have storage. Nobody was thinking about that. I don't think they were thinking at all. They were thinking about headlines and ideology. Enough is enough.

We need a clear, national plan founded on economics and engineering and we're doing the work to deliver it.

JOURNALIST:

Prime Minister can you describe for us what might happen this time if you miss the opportunity again, because either on the left or on the right, no compromise is possible. What will happen to the energy system, the electricity system? What will happen to the economy?

PRIME MINISTER:

Well look, Chris, I'm not interested in speculating about lack of success. Our job as a government is to deliver and to lead.

I have provided decisive leadership on energy. I refer you to the speech I gave at the Press Club at the beginning of the year when I talked about the importance of providing storage. I talked about the importance of maintaining coal in the system. I talked about the importance of high efficiency, low-emission coal. I talked about the importance of having an energy solution that is all of the above, that is technology agnostic, that delivers affordable power, secure power and meets our emission reduction commitments.

Now this is complex work, it is a work that needs to be driven and informed by economics and engineering. But Australian families and Australian

businesses will know when we have succeeded because they will see downward pressure on electricity and gas prices.

We are already seeing downward pressure on gas prices, thanks to my Government's intervention. And they will see reliable, secure electricity so they won't be seeing the blackouts. It has taken quite a while of politics and ideology from the Labor side of politics, I regret to say, in a partisan note, but it's an objective one. We've seen its taken quite a while to get us to this point where energy is less affordable and less secure than it should be.

We will deal with it, we are dealing with it and we're giving it the due consideration it deserves. As I said, this is a complex task, it's a hard task.

Glibness is not going to keep the lights on. Glibness is not going to pay the electricity bills.

Thank you all very much.

[ENDS]

[Creating a stable government](#)

The current position in the Commons should allow a stable government to be formed. There are 650 MPs. If you take out the 7 Sinn Fein MPS who do not attend, and the Speaker and three Deputies who do not vote, there are 639 voting MPs. 320 is a majority. The Conservatives have 316 (and 2 Deputy Speakers). There are 10 DUP members, and one independent Unionist who are likely to vote with the Conservatives. That gives the government a majority.

In the last Parliament we regularly won votes by 40 to 50, well ahead of the nominal majority. It is difficult for the Opposition to get all its parties to the same view and then to get them all to turn up to vote. As the main Bill to be in the Queens Speech this time is likely to be the Repeal of the 1972 Act and continuity of EU regulations in UK law, there will be some Labour Brexiteers who will vote with the government whatever contortions Labour is going through. Labour fought the election on a Manifesto pledging Brexit, and agreeing this meant leaving the single market. They are keen to see employment laws from the EU transferred into UK law. On these bases they need to vote for the government Bill.

If they do as they promised the Brexit bill will sail through. If they play politics and find ways to oppose, the government looks as if it has enough votes. There is no need for the government to propose lots of contentious legislation to make life more difficult.

The arrangement with the DUP will not be a formal coalition, and will not entail Conservatives changing their views on moral and religious matters. They will want to be more involved in UK politics and have a strong dislike of Mr Corbyn for his past views on Irish matters.

[Guangdong signs 3 agreements with University of Birmingham](#)

South China's Guangdong Province signed three agreements with the University of Birmingham recently in the UK.

Hu Chunhua, Secretary of the Communist Party of China (CPC) Guangdong Provincial Committee, and Wen Guohui, Mayor of Guangzhou City, joined China's UK Ambassador Liu Xiaoming to lead the 20-strong delegation.

The leaders and their fellow delegates attended a special ceremony hosted by Birmingham City Council, where the University of Birmingham Provost Professor Tim Jones signed agreements with three partners from Guangzhou to further strengthen the university's research and teaching presence in the province.

Professor Jones signed an agreement with senior leaders from Sun Yat-Sen University (SYSU) to establish a primary care training centre at the First Affiliated Hospital of SYSU that will help to boost the numbers of Chinese doctors in general practice. The University of Birmingham will help to provide high-quality training, education and academic projects.

He joined academics from the Guangdong Academy of Sciences (GDAS) to launch a partnership that will see Chinese research students joining their Birmingham counterparts to explore a range of areas in metallurgy and materials, as well as mechanical engineering.

The Provost also formalized a new partnership with Jinan University that will allow students to study in China and receive degrees from each university. Students will be able to take dual degrees in economics, information computer science, pure mathematics, and statistics – taught by both Jinan and Birmingham academics on site.

Professor Jones said: "I am delighted to meet the delegation from Guangdong, the region in which the University of Birmingham has particularly strong links with China.

"Today marks another milestone of the university's development in Guangzhou, as we are signing three major projects with our partners, which allow us to bring both our research and teaching excellence into Guangzhou.

"Through these projects, we are pleased to contribute to Guangdong's regional

social and economic development by nurturing talent for the big data economy, upgrading manufacturing technologies, and enhancing innovation for health.

“The University of Birmingham is playing a pivotal role in helping to deliver China’s £85 billion health reform investment, which is focused on developing primary care and training an extra 300,000 GPs by 2020.”

Under the leadership of Professor KK Cheng, Director of the Institute of Applied Health Research, the University of Birmingham has delivered training programmes, both locally and in the UK, to some 500 senior managers, over 4,000 doctors and 1,000 GP trainers.

It has also jointly established six “China-UK Collaborating Centres for General Practice Training” in Guangzhou, three of which are officially listed among the “Best 100 Community Health Centres” in China.

The university has been participating in joint research programmes with GDAS since 2013, especially in the fields of new materials, advanced manufacturing, and hydrogen storage.

GDAS is the largest research-focused academy in Guangdong province, with six major institutes. Its main research areas include: resources and environment, materials and chemical industries, advanced manufacturing, electronics and IT, biotechnology and health, and industrial services.

The launch of dual degrees with the Jinan University further expands the University of Birmingham’s global teaching offer, with academic partnerships already well established with institutions in China and Singapore. Birmingham has also recently unveiled plans to develop a branch campus in Dubai.

Birmingham City Council Leader, Councillor John Clancy, said: “We’ve forged many links between Birmingham and Guangdong province over the last decade, working together in the world of business, local government, culture and, of course, education. So I’m delighted to welcome such a high profile delegation to the city.

“The three agreements with the University of Birmingham further cement those strong ties and I have no doubt that this special relationship will continue to deliver for both Birmingham and Guangdong province.”

Professor Jon Frampton, Director of the university’s China Institute and Deputy Pro-Vice-Chancellor (China), said: “The University of Birmingham has achieved a great deal since opening our Guangzhou office in 2011. We’ve launched 28 joint research projects with our Guangzhou partners and established collaborations with all major education institutions in Guangdong.

“We look forward to bringing our collaboration with Guangzhou to a new level in research, education and public health, as well as expanding our impact wider in the Guangdong region thanks to the continued support of the Guangzhou and Guangdong governments.”

Facial recognition helps rule traffic



A smart traffic system launches at a crossroad in Shenzhen, Guangdong on April 17, 2017. [File Photo]

The installment of facial recognition facilities at busy crossroads in some Chinese cities has substantially reduced the chaos caused by crowds of jaywalkers and unruly cyclists.

Cameras take four snapshots of pedestrians or cyclists ignoring traffic lights and make a screenshot from a simultaneous video lasting for 15 seconds.

In Jinan, capital of East China's Shandong Province, any violators caught by the system either face a fine of 20 yuan (US\$3) or are required to don a yellow costume to act temporarily as auxiliary traffic police for a specified time.

"The firsthand experience of being an auxiliary police officer can be a vital lesson for those who challenge traffic rules," said Wang Rilei, based with the Lixia Division of the Jinan Traffic Police Squad.

The facial recognition system has spotted 6,200 non-vehicle traffic violations in the city since its launch last month.

"Traffic order at crossroads has been obviously improved in only one month and an increasing number of pedestrians start to obey traffic signals and use pedestrian crossings [rather than simply dashing across the road anywhere as

in the past],” said Duan Fuyong, deputy team leader of the Jinan Traffic Police Squad.

However, the penalties of jaywalkers don’t simply end with fines or education. The information is passed on to employers or the local community, seeking to add an element of shame.

However, the punishment has led many to question its legitimacy in terms of protecting personal privacy.

People who oppose the facial recognition application say the police are not supposed to reveal personal information as a means of imposing a civil penalty.

However, Liu Xiaojing, an officer from the Publicity Office of Jinan Traffic Police Squad, argued while exposing the facial image of the rule breakers, traffic authorities would not reveal their complete personal information such as ID number, addresses and employers to the public.

Wang Zongyu, vice professor of the law school of the Renmin University of China, observed that it was encouraging to see law enforcement divisions seeking new approaches to keep cities running in an orderly way, but the critical point is whether the actions pass a bottom line.

According to Wang, law enforcement divisions should not reveal personal information unless they are empowered to do so according to law. In this case, the laws do not stipulate whether the violators’ information should be publicized, meaning traffic authorities do not have the legal ground for doing so.

The facial recognition system has also been adopted by Chongqing Municipality and Fuzhou, Fujian Province.

[China to ‘plant’ potatoes on the moon](#)



Chinese scientists conduct experiments on the cultivation of potato seeds.
[File photo/163.com]

Scientists in China have unveiled multiple tasks they plan to carry out as part of the lunar exploration program at the just-concluded Global Space Exploration Conference (GLEX 2017) in Beijing.

Among them, the creation of a “mini ecosystem on the moon’s surface” is due to be led by researchers with Chongqing University, reports the Chongqing Morning Post.

The “mini ecosystem” will actually be contained in an 18X16cm cylinder.

It’s due to be put on the moon’s surface as part the Chang’e-4 mission in 2018, according to Professor Xie Gengxin, head designer of the project.

Potato seeds and the larvae of insects, including the silkworm, will be inside the cylinder.

The goal is to determine whether the potatoes can grow on the moon, and whether the insects can survive.

If they can, this will be major step toward ultimately putting a fully-

functioning human colony on Mars.

The project stood out from the 257 experimental ideas put forward to China's lunar exploration program.

Scientists and researchers from 28 different universities in China are now working on designing the hardware needed to carry out the various tests.