



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



THE SENATE

PROOF

**QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE:
TAKE NOTE OF ANSWERS**

Gillard Government, Small Business

SPEECH

Tuesday, 28 February 2012

BY AUTHORITY OF THE SENATE

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Questioner
Speaker Urquhart, Sen Anne

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Senator URQUHART (Tasmania) (15:18): I rise to take note of answers to questions given by Ministers Evans and Arbib, and in doing so I want to highlight and talk about some of this Labor government's many achievements. It is a government that is delivering and is getting on with the business of reform. This Gillard Labor government has implemented many reforms to assist working Australians to harness the opportunities of our time right across our great country.

We are doing this through pricing carbon and using all the money that is raised to support households, to support jobs in trade-exposed industries and to invest in clean energy programs—this against a rabid opposition who want to scrap the cheapest way to combat carbon emissions, to take money from health and education and to give subsidies to big polluters. We are introducing the mining resources rent tax, which will give all Australians a fair share of the mining boom—a tax which industry is prepared to pay, a tax that those opposite want to send back to those making superprofits instead of providing better infrastructure for all Australians, increased superannuation for working Australians and a lower company tax rate to businesses who are not in the fast lane of the mining boom.

Just today Labor delivered again, with the ACCC giving the final seal on the National Broadband Network. With ACCC approval of the structural separation of Telstra, for the first time in Australia's history telco providers will compete on a level playing field, and, from that, consumers will benefit. They will benefit from the competition as service providers compete fiercely to give customers the best and most innovative services at the best price. Telstra was structured and sold by the Howard government in a way that was bad for consumers, bad for competition and bad for the economy. They did not sell Telstra for the benefit of Australians; they did it for ideological reasons. Today the ACCC has ticked off on this Labor government righting another one of those wrongs of the Howard government. It means that we are well on the way to delivering the National Broadband Network, giving all Australians access to high-speed, high-quality telecommunications at uniform prices regardless of where they live.

Connection to the National Broadband Network means our children will have better access to the very best

education services and those who are ill will have access from their living rooms to the best specialists. It means that local businesses will have greater opportunities to reach new customers anywhere in the world, and in an instant. Businesses with offices across the country and the world will have better access to videoconferencing and private networks, saving time and boosting productivity. Across Tasmania, people in Smithton, Scottsdale and Midway Point are connecting to the NBN and people in another dozen locations will have access in the coming months.

Part of being a responsible government is recognising that some communities are doing it tough because of the structural changes that our economy is going through. Senator McKenzie just asked what the Labor government is doing. Labor is helping Tasmanian communities diversify their economic base, helping regions that were hit hard by the global financial crisis and are now being hit by the downturn in the forestry industry. Earlier this month Labor announced funding for the \$1.5 million Harcus River Road infrastructure project and the \$4.25 million AgriTas Trade College in the Circular Head region of Tasmania, an area that has been hit hard by the downturn in some of the industries in that area. The Harcus River Road project will allow for the conversion of up to 27 farms from lower value beef production to higher value dairy production. This will immediately provide construction work for the many displaced forest workers and has the potential to create 135 new on-farm jobs once these upgrades are completed. As skills development is so crucial to our agricultural industry, the AgriTas college will deliver 200 full qualifications and 400 short course places per year. This will equip Tasmanians with the skills they need to work in and benefit from the jobs available from growth in the dairy sector and agriculture more broadly. It will also provide a boost to the local economy as people relocate for a period of time while studying.

We are tackling the reform of disability services in this country. Many have felt that the situation had been impossible before, but Labor can and will deliver on it. Already, thousands of Australian families have benefited from Labor's Paid Parental Leave scheme, which helps families look after their newborn babies. Labor is getting on and making the tough choices to keep the economy strong. *(Time expired)*